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**Food sovereignty and *campesino*
moral economies:**

**Market embeddedness, autonomy and solidarity
in the Matagalpa Highlands of Nicaragua**

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Submitted for Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology

December 2015

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been, and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signature

UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

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PHD IN ANTHROPOLOGY

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY AND *CAMPESINO* MORAL ECONOMIES: MARKET EMBEDDEDNESS, AUTONOMY AND SOLIDARITY IN THE MATAGALPA HIGHLANDS OF NICARAGUA

SUMMARY

In the past two decades, social movements advocating for food sovereignty, the most visible being *Via Campesina* (the peasant's way), have successfully articulated an alternative paradigm to the dominant models of industrial food production and free trade. Food sovereignty is constructed upon particular conceptions of the moral economies of peasants and assumptions about how peasants deploy moral values and economic practices to resist commoditisation.

This ethnography establishes how peasants relate to the commoditisation of grain, land and labour in their everyday lives, and in turn reflects on what a food sovereignty rooted in *campesino* moral economies would look like. To do this, I conducted fieldwork in a village in the Matagalpa Highlands of Nicaragua, documenting *campesinos'* everyday practices, moral ideologies and social norms regarding the production, transfer and exchange of food, land and labour.

This research breaks down the idea that market exchanges are only profit-seeking and gift-giving is solely the product of mutuality. I argue that *campesino* households and communities engage partially with capitalist markets whilst pursuing autonomy from them. This is achieved through resisting commoditisation to different degrees for different commodities, with moral norms allowing certain things to fall in and out of commodity status. Moral norms allow for grain and labour to be sold as a commodity in particular circumstances whereas fully resist the sale of land. Autonomy from the market is underpinned by ideologies of solidarity, shaped by the social embeddedness of exchanges determined by relations of kinship, affiliation and locality. Whilst these ideologies succeed in stalling capitalist accumulation, they can reproduce conservative notions of the family and disguise intra-community class inequalities. I show how market exchanges are frequently used to deliver solidarity and that family networks can also be used to extract profit: exchanges have become a contested battlefield, where exploiters can portray themselves as helpers.

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Chapter 1. The rise of food sovereignty and the moral economy of the Nicaraguan peasant

Section 1. Food sovereignty, commoditisation and the everyday lives of Nicaraguan *campesinos*

At the 1996 World Food Summit in Rome, a consensus was reached among mainstream development actors¹ on how to frame the problem of hunger and malnutrition: food security became the focus of international efforts (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 1996). The apparent consensus, however, disguised differences: agrarian social movements from the South found the concept did not address the *social control* of the food system. Countries had agreed on a common goal- but not *how* to get there. Some argued that, by adhering to a de-politicized paradigm, these countries endorsed the dominant models of industrial food production and neoliberal free trade (Patel, 2009).

The international agrarian movement Via Campesina, responded with an alternative concept that was actively critical of neoliberal policies: *food sovereignty*. Under food sovereignty the focus would no longer be the ‘food insecure’, but the ‘peasant’ or ‘food producer’. Desired social change should come as a product of food producers’ own agency. Under this paradigm, the realm of the ‘economic’ should not be understood as something separate from values. Putting food on people’s plates is not enough: this should be achieved fairly and sustainably and through a process led by peasants themselves. According to lead advocates of food sovereignty, the shape of this alternative food system – a system based on agroecological small-scale farming rooted in locally-controlled economies- would be a product of peasants’ sense of ‘belonging to the land’ and their moral understanding of the economy.

The representation or attribution of a ‘peasant’ identity in the concept of food sovereignty is in itself seen as a source of power. ‘Peasants’ or ‘people of the land’ (broad and possibly problematic categories that include small-scale farmers, rural workers, fisherfolk and pastoralists) are used in food sovereignty to build a common front between the rural labourer and the small-holder farmer within agrarian movements, and to affirm their dignity, agency and relevance (Nash, 2005). Local farmer knowledge is prioritized over that of the development professional. The

¹ Signatories included over 180 Heads of State or government and all UN Agencies, as well as hundreds of inter-governmental and non-governmental organisations as observers.

industrial and corporate-led model of agriculture and free trade is rejected and agroecology and local food systems are proposed as alternatives (Desmarais, 2007, Via Campesina, 2010d, Windfuhr and Jonsén, 2005, Pimbert, 2008). Whilst the discipline of peasant studies has existed for well over a century, there is something qualitatively different about ‘the peasant’ in food sovereignty. Rather than ‘the peasant’ being the object of analysis, the category has been reclaimed by food producers to highlight their role as *subjects* of social change (Desmarais, 2008).

The visibility and strength of Via Campesina and affiliated agrarian movements in the last decade has caught the interest of food and agriculture policy makers across the aid industry and ministries of developing countries. Some States in the Global South have introduced the concept of food sovereignty into their legislation, led by the Latin-American “pink tide” of left-wing populist governments: Venezuela, Nicaragua, Bolivia and Ecuador, amongst others. However, rather than taking on the challenge of breaking with the neoliberal order, these governments have re-positioned themselves within it, aiming to increase public regulation to create room for manoeuvre when relating to the global economy and protecting the most vulnerable populations from the impact of globalisation (McKay et al., 2014, Enríquez, 2013). In parallel, numerous international and local NGOs are also championing food sovereignty, or particular elements of the paradigm such as agro-ecology. State and civil society actors in these “pink tide” countries are thus rolling out social protection programmes for the poor, increasing the availability of credit and inputs to producers, and GM crops have been banned in Venezuela and Ecuador (Beauregard, 2009).

The discursive field of food sovereignty is very diverse, but central to all these different understandings of food sovereignty is that, firstly, agricultural change is seen as a political process rather than a technical one, and secondly, there is a need to enable transitions into new food system economies based on food producers’ moral values i.e. their moral economy. However, what exactly this entails in practice is contested.

For example, what happens when small-scale farmers themselves choose development pathways that are not those deemed as ecologically sustainable or building local economies (e.g. cash crop export agriculture, non-agroecological techniques)? Or, does mobilising around the concept of the peasant family farm as the subject of agricultural development cloud inequities that may occur within the household (gender, age, and so

on)? Can we conflate all rural folk into one category -the 'peasant'- in the struggle against the neoliberal world order, or do the strategic interests of different *kinds* of peasants differ according to their position in rural society—landless worker or smallholder farmer, indigenous or not, landowner or tenant, employer or employee, and so on? Is there a *cultural* as well as an *economic* difference of peasant social organisation that values things (and people's labour) differently to their market value? Do peasants have a culture of community and solidarity that they use to protect themselves from capitalist markets or is this culture itself shaped by capitalism?

The objective of this PHD thesis is therefore to appraise what food sovereignty would look like in peasants' everyday lives when it is rooted on their moral understandings of the economy of which they are part. To unpack and expand on the concept of moral economy for this purpose, I explore three fundamental themes: Firstly, how *campesinos* relate to commodities, and in what ways their social relations shape the production and exchange of food, land and labour i.e. their 'embeddedness' (Polanyi, 2001). Secondly, I examine the concept of peasant autonomy; how peasants organise themselves socially and economically to protect themselves from capitalist markets yet simultaneously to make the most of their interaction with these markets. This autonomy can occur at three different levels: in terms of how the peasant household organises itself in particular ways to survive in adverse market environments, how peasants resist the commoditisation of certain key resources to ensure that survival, and the degree in which people have control over the things that affect them, including natural resources. Lastly, this thesis explores the notion of peasant solidarity: how people's sense of fairness and reciprocity shapes their interpersonal relationships, including their market interactions.

In order to study the moral economic foundations of food sovereignty one must problematise the categories of 'the peasant', the 'peasant family farm' and the 'peasant community'. Social movements rely on strategic essentialism (concept originally coined by Spivak (Spivak, 1988)) to mobilise membership and represent themselves to others (Nash, 2005). Yet diverse social groups (in terms of gender, age, class and so on) who find themselves within these 'strategically essentialising categories' might have different priorities and different understandings of what makes them food sovereign. This research thus explores diversity within rural populations and investigates how this

diversity is managed (and disciplined) through discourses and practices at different levels: within the household, within the village and beyond.

Nicaragua was one of the first countries of the “pink tide” to integrate food sovereignty into national legislation. In July 2009, the Sandinista government passed the Law of Food Sovereignty and Food Security (Asamblea Nacional de Nicaragua, 2009). Nicaragua also has a long-standing agrarian movement that argues strongly for agrarian reform and has recently started advocating food sovereignty. It is increasingly collaborating with the agro-ecological movement (Holt-Gimenez, 2006).

In Nicaragua the mobilisation around the peasant (*campesino*) identity has also had a significant role in countering modernising narratives that came about during the Sandinista government in the 1980s and in subsequent neo-liberal governments. Despite being ideologically different, both the revolutionary and neo-liberal governments saw no place for the small-scale farmer. The Ministry of Agriculture in the 1980s prioritised the development of State farms, and in the neo-liberal era (from 1990 onwards) large-scale agro-export farms (Kaimowitz, 1986). However, the agro-ecological movement, led by the Programa *Campesino a Campesino* (PCAC-Farmer to farmer programme) promoted the importance of *campesino* identity and knowledge in these adverse times, and has become increasingly influential in the design of government and international development policy.

In spite of this, the return of the Sandinistas to power in 2006 did not question the neoliberal agro-export model or re-open debates on land tenure, although it has rolled out credit schemes and in-kind grant programmes to *campesino* communities. Nicaragua is thus an interesting case study of a country that has taken some steps towards food sovereignty in legislation, with an important population of small scale farmers who produce their own food and identify themselves as peasants (*campesinos*), and a strong NGO platform that promotes food sovereignty and agroecology.

Thus the research questions I wish to answer in this doctoral research are:

- What does food sovereignty in everyday life look like?
- What is peasants’ material and moral relationship to commoditisation and in what ways are peasant economies socially embedded?

- How do peasant moral ideologies of autonomy and solidarity play out when engaging with capitalist markets in their everyday lives?

My ethnographic research in the Matagalpa highlands of Nicaragua sheds light on these questions on food sovereignty, exploring how *campesinos* –the Nicaraguan equivalent of peasants- relate morally and economically in their everyday lives to their households and communities, and how their values shape their relative autonomy vis-à-vis the market. An anthropology of peasant moral economy and social embeddedness requires a deep understanding of both the material elements of everyday economic life (production, exchange, consumption) and the contested meanings and moral values that emerge from (and shape) these economic practices.

My fieldwork involved ethnographic research in La Estrella, a small village deep in the mountain range east of the town of Matagalpa, located in the Centre-North of Nicaragua. The village is populated mostly by *basic grain* producers (*granobasiqueros*), small-scale farmers who self-define as *campesinos*, who farm primarily beans and corn for their own-consumption and who commercialise the surplus. Hence the people in La Estrella would fall under the category of ‘peasant’ articulated by advocates of food sovereignty like Via Campesina. La Estrella has also been targeted by public and non-governmental organisations that promote food sovereignty and agroecological production. From January to December 2012, I lived in the village during which time I conducted a household survey, carried out participant observation, and conducted in-depth interviews and life stories in the village: documenting *campesinos*’ everyday moral and economic lives. I also captured their everyday relationships with other relevant actors - market, State officers and NGOs- which shape both their economic practices as well as impose particular discourses and understandings of who *campesinos* are and what their priorities might be. A detailed account of the research strategies and process can be found in Chapter 2.

The ethnography of peasant moral economies is by no means new. The interfaces between peasant values and norms and economic transactions have been described in very different historical and geographical settings. However this research uses the ethnography of moral economy to build an anthropology of food sovereignty: to describe food sovereignty in everyday life, and to construct a food sovereignty grounded on local meanings, aspirations and everyday practices. This thesis also

develops and expands the concept of *campesino* autonomy, a concept that is often mentioned in food sovereignty literature, but often undertheorised. By exploring different facets – production, the household and the community, the commodity and market exchange- I offer a broad and empirically grounded account of what *campesino* autonomy is. In turn, I also ascertain how autonomy shapes different kinds of *campesinos*' behaviour vis-à-vis economic policy, NGO interventions and markets. I show how the political economy affects *campesinos*' autonomy and ability to attain food sovereignty. Finally, this thesis contributes to the breaking down of the false duality 'market=profit; non-market=solidarity'² by discerning the role that markets play in mutuality between *campesinos*, and the role of self-interest in non-market transactions. I explore how this coexistence between the realms of solidarity and the market in everyday lives impacts food sovereignty. My contribution is seeing the coexistence of these realms as a space for contested meanings: what is 'help' and what is 'profit' is constantly negotiated in a *campesino* community. Therefore food sovereignty is shaped by the battle of ideologies of solidarity and exploitation that takes place in economic exchange.

In the rest of this introduction I develop the problematic from a theoretical point of view. In section 2, I explore the history of the discursive field of food sovereignty and the ways it portrays the subject of agrarian change, the peasant. In Section 3 I also present the current debates in the discursive field of food sovereignty, around gender, rural class politics, and farmers' relationship with capitalist markets (local and global). In the subsequent section, I explore the idea of moral economy and its uses to describe *campesino* livelihoods. I explore how advocates of food sovereignty use moral economy to portray peasants as resisting commodity relations. Peasant economies are described as socially embedded, ruled by cultural norms of mutuality and reciprocity, rooted in social relations determined by kin, affiliation and 'community'. Lastly, I explore notions of the search for autonomy from the market (autonomy of the family farm, of the community) and the nurturing of solidarity. In the concluding section I detail the research questions and the structure of the thesis.

² See Hart 2007; Trentmann 2007; Ferguson 2014

Section 2. The rise of food sovereignty

In 1996 the World Food Summit brought together high-level representatives from all over the world to discuss the capacity of the global food system to respond to the needs of its population in the future (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 1996). One of the outcomes of this summit was an agreement on the definition of the concept of food security, a definition that has become mainstream in development practice ever since.

Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 1996).

However, the apparent consensus hailed by heads of state and representatives gathered in the Food and Agriculture Organisation headquarters was illusory. A different concept was being launched in a parallel forum organised by NGOs and Civil Society Organisations: *food sovereignty*. Via Campesina (the peasant's way), a transnational social movement that included "peasants, small farmers, indigenous peoples and farm workers from the Americas, Asia, Europe and Africa" (Via Campesina, 2015) used this concept to highlight how food security could only be achieved by taking into account the people who produce. What was being conveyed through the parallel sessions and the Rome Declaration of Food Sovereignty (Via Campesina, 1996b) was that free trade agreements and structural adjustment programmes were having a devastating effect on peasant livelihoods. In the eyes of its supporters, countries were progressively losing the capacity to control their own economies or to support their agrarian sectors through the activities of the WTO and the pressures of financial development organisations such as the World Bank and the IMF (Wittman, 2011).

Food sovereignty can be understood as a concept deployed to oppose the concept of food security (Windfuhr and Jonsén, 2005, Wittman, 2011, Rosset, 2003). However, in 1996, the problem was not food security itself, but how it had been de-politicised and thus could be used to endorse the dominant models of industrial food production and free trade (Patel, 2009: 665). Food security was not dismissed by Via Campesina, but subsumed under the concept of food sovereignty: "food sovereignty is a precondition to food security" (Via Campesina, 1996a). Countries had agreed on a common goal- but not *how* to get there (Martínez-Torres and Rosset, 2010). Food security was a

‘technical’ concept but did not address the *social control* of the food system, whilst food sovereignty was a political concept that did (Windfuhr and Jonsén, 2005).

As will be shown below, the concept of food sovereignty has shifted, but in the particular context of 1996, it was flagged as a rights-based demand for a devolution to national sovereignty: a call for countries to be able to protect their agriculture from the vagaries of global markets.

Food is a basic human right. This right can only be realized in a system where food sovereignty is guaranteed. Food sovereignty is the right of each nation to maintain and develop its own capacity to produce its basic foods respecting cultural and productive diversity. We have the right to produce our own food in our own territory (Via Campesina, 1996a).

One of the great successes of Via Campesina has been to successfully integrate very different constituencies into one transnational social movement advocating for fair food systems, and as part of the discursive mobilisation the concept ‘peasant’ has been re-written and appropriated to build a common front between the rural labourer and the small-holder farmer within the new agrarian movements, and to affirm their dignity, agency and relevance (Nash, 2005).

As Edelman’s genealogy of the concept of food sovereignty indicates (Edelman, 2014), food sovereignty and food security have often overlapped; some of earlier definitions of food security have had similar components of autonomy and self-reliance—without implying autarky- and reduced vulnerability to the vagaries of global markets (Edelman, 2014: 966-7). Edelman traces the concept of food sovereignty back to Mexican food policies of the early 1980s, which then circulated amongst Central American activists many of whom joined Via Campesina in 1993.

The demands made in Rome in 1996 included 7 points: 1) to treat food as a right, 2) Agrarian land reform and State support to producers, 3) Environmentally sustainable food systems and rejection of patenting of genetic resources 4) Regulation of trade to avoid displacement of local producers 5) regulation of transnational corporations, 6) the right to freedom from violence and 7) the right of producers to have a say in national and international agricultural policy, including trade agreements (Via Campesina, 1996a).

From 1996 onwards, Via Campesina positioned itself as the most influential advocate for food sovereignty. It has achieved a discursive hegemonic position within

transnational agrarian movements, becoming the “main voice of organised sectors of marginalised rural people’s” (Borras, 2008: 260). With more than 150 member organisations in 70 countries in Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas, it is the largest agrarian social movement globally. It includes well known organisations such as Confederation Paysanne (France), Bharatiya Kisan Union (India), Landless Workers' Movement (Brazil), National Family Farm Coalition (USA) and the Landless, Peoples' Movement (South Africa). Its legitimacy comes not solely from its size and affiliation base but also from the leadership role it has taken in the anti-globalisation movement (Wittman, 2009), as an interlocutor for small-scale farmers with UN Agencies such as the FAO and UNHCR (Rosset, 2005), and most importantly, for launching a series of participatory processes to develop the concept of food sovereignty and its policy implications, such as the World Forum on Food Sovereignty 2007 where the Nyeleni declaration was produced.

Section 3. Food sovereignty today

The legitimacy achieved through these inclusive ‘from-below’ participatory processes thus positioned Via Campesina and its networks as the agrarian social movement that ‘frames’ what food sovereignty is (Fairbairn, 2010). This ‘framing’ position of Via Campesina shapes how NGOs, civil society organisations and academics relate to these concepts, either directly circulating them and enhancing them, or *responding* to them. Praised or criticised- the definitions of food sovereignty that friends or critics respond to are those generated by Via Campesina and the inclusive participatory processes that it initiated.

The Nyeleni World Forum on Food Sovereignty in 2007 was a landmark meeting for food sovereignty. Out of its discussions emerged the Nyeleni declaration that set out in further detail what food sovereignty was and what principles guided it. It enabled the social movement to have a framework out of which to develop further policy demands. The new definition that emerged was:

Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations. It defends the interests and inclusion of the next generation. It offers a strategy to resist and dismantle the current corporate trade and food regime and directions for food, farming, pastoral and fisheries systems determined by local producers. Food sovereignty prioritises local and national

economies and markets and empowers peasant and family farmer-driven agriculture, artisanal fishing, pastoralist led grazing, and food production, distribution and consumption based on environmental, social and economic sustainability. Food sovereignty promotes transparent trade that guarantees just income to all peoples and the rights of consumers to control their food and nutrition. It ensures that the rights to use and manage our lands, territories, waters, seeds, livestock and biodiversity are in the hands of those of us who produce food. Food sovereignty implies new social relations free of oppression and inequality between men and women, peoples, racial groups, social classes and generations. (Via Campesina, 2007)

As compared to the original 1996 declaration, the definition has changed: from food sovereignty being the right of *nations* to decide their own agricultural policy, to broader notions of the *right of peoples* to decide to what degree they want to be self-reliant. This shift highlights the ambivalent relationship between the social movement and the State: whilst there is a need for a State to regulate in order to protect local food economies, there is also an association between food sovereignty as community control and a certain degree of autonomy from the state (Borras et al., 2008), and a recognition that sometimes nation states have themselves been willingly facilitating neoliberal policies (Schiavoni, 2015: 467).

Another important shift is that originally producers were at the centre of the paradigm, whereas the Nyeleni declaration puts “those who produce, distribute and consume at the heart”, which can mean almost anyone (Patel, 2009). Patel explains how these changes are a product of the new alliances that have occurred within the food sovereignty movement. In what he calls ‘big tent politics’, he describes how in order to include the voice of disparate groups one might run into contradictions (Patel, 2009). This expansion along the whole food chain was introduced to incorporate the views of those groups who advocate for ethical consumption and who aim to reshape relationships between producers and consumers (through schemes like community supported agriculture, food banks and so on). The inclusive and additive nature of a flexible concept is also the secret of its success (Fairbairn, 2010), thus enabling Via Campesina to garner support from the beginning from other movements such the environmentalist, indigenous and alter-globalisation movements (Wittman, 2009).

Lastly, the model of production shifted as well, from ideas of protecting the environment through “healthy soils and reduced use of agro-chemicals” (Via Campesina, 1996a: 2) to the adoption of agroecology in 2007. This focus on

Agroecology was confirmed in 2015 in the International Forum for Agroecology hosted by Via Campesina in Mali. This change towards agroecology has also created important synergies between the science of agroecology, the environmentalist movement and the emerging rural social movements advocating for food sovereignty (Martínez-Torres and Rosset, 2010). The main agent of development according to via Campesina is the peasant or the small-scale farmer, producing on a small-scale and using inputs produced on-farm, expanding soil fertility and promoting biodiversity (Via Campesina, 2010b).

The Nyeleni forum also allowed participants to agree on six principles or pillars of Food Sovereignty. Some call this a “Food Sovereignty Policy Framework” to highlight the theoretical depth achieved in its development (Rosset, 2005, Pimbert, 2008). The table below summarizes the framework.

Table 1. Abridged version of the six pillars of food sovereignty (Mulvany, 2007)

Six Pillars of Food Sovereignty
Focuses on Food for People , putting the right to food at the centre of food, agriculture, livestock and fisheries policies; and rejects the proposition that food is just another commodity or component for international agri-business.
Values Food Providers and respects their rights; <i>and rejects</i> those policies, actions and programmes that undervalue them, threaten their livelihoods and eliminate them.
Localises Food Systems , bringing food providers and consumers closer together; and rejects governance structures, agreements and practices that depend on and promote unsustainable and inequitable international trade and give power to remote and unaccountable corporations.
Puts Control Locally over territory, land, grazing, water, seeds, livestock and fish populations; <i>and rejects</i> the privatisation of natural resources through laws, commercial contracts and intellectual property rights regimes.
Builds Knowledge and Skills that conserve, develop and manage localised food production and harvesting systems; <i>and rejects</i> technologies that undermine, threaten or contaminate these, e.g. genetic engineering.
Works with Nature in diverse, agroecological production and harvesting methods that maximise ecosystem functions and improve resilience and adaptation, especially in the face of climate change; <i>and rejects</i> energy-intensive industrialised methods which damage the environment and contribute to global warming.

Working within this framework, Via Campesina has mobilised around key themes that are obstacles to the achievement of food sovereignty: opposing free trade agreements (from WTO and NAFTA to the most recent EU-USA agreement and recent reforms of the European Common Agricultural Policy), calling for a peasant response to climate change (one of Via Campesina's most influential reports is 'Small scale sustainable farmers are cooling down the earth' (Via Campesina, 2009)), the banning of agro-fuels and the patenting of genetic resources, and campaigning for land reform and against market-based land reform.

Whilst most of the Global North has maintained neoliberal economic policy as a guiding principle for agriculture (Patel, 2009), some States in the Global South have been keen to introduce the concept of food sovereignty into their legislation. As noted above, the first countries to capture this concept are what has been called the "pink tide" of left-wing populist governments in Latin America: Venezuela, Nicaragua, Bolivia and Ecuador among others. A few other countries like Mali, Senegal and Nepal followed suit. These governments took power from the end of the 90s onwards, articulating rights' discourses and demands for greater State sovereignty to protect their most vulnerable constituencies from the consequences of neoliberal globalisation (Enríquez, 2013). Rather than being anti-capitalist, these governments have rather aimed for more room for manoeuvre through increased public regulation in their relationship with the global economy (McKay et al., 2014). The introduction of food sovereignty into legislation has often come as an incorporation of food sovereignty into the new National Constitutions – Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Nepal- or through the creation of a specific law on food sovereignty- Nicaragua, Senegal, Mali. Via Campesina has always praised these reforms and in the case of Venezuela, it has also performed a direct advisory role (Wilpert, 2006). The impact of these reforms depends firstly on the timely implementation of the laws and if they translate into specific programmes. These food sovereignty programmes in Latin America have generally included social protection programmes for the poor, public distribution systems that purchase food from farmers and then this food is sold in subsidised markets for the urban poor, increased availability of credit and inputs to producers, and in some cases such as Venezuela and Ecuador, GM crops have been banned (Beauregard, 2009).

The impact of these legal shifts in delivering food sovereignty depends in what degree structures of power are challenged. According to McKay, only Venezuela has worked

effectively in this direction by implementing redistributive land reform and increased local and community participation through communal councils (McKay et al., 2014). However, this is nuanced by others that see that food import-substitution efforts in Venezuela have been captured by large-scale State supported farms which implement industrial agriculture (Kappeler, 2013, Cockburn, 2013). Schiavoni highlights the importance of a fruitful relationship between State and civil society to ensure avenues for re-shaping the food system are kept open (2013).

Whilst the alter-globalisation movement has adopted food sovereignty as a guiding principle in the realm of claims around food and agriculture and a small group of countries have incorporated the concept into their legislation, the impact on development agencies has been small. Rural social movements have been met with silence rather than confrontation. This is particularly true in the case of large players such as the IMF, World Bank and WTO, for whom food security is the term in use and no mention is made of food sovereignty in their documents. This is understandable since the main tenets of free trade and structural adjustment are central to their policies and food security in its current definition does not challenge this (Lee, 2007). There are small victories however, for example Via Campesina achieved putting land reform on the agenda, as well as challenged market-based mechanisms for land redistribution promoted by the World Bank (Borras, 2008). Some UN Agencies such as the FAO have chosen to interact more closely with the social movement. For example, the UN World Committee on Food Security was reformed by FAO under pressure from Via Campesina as an alternative international forum to debate issues around food and agriculture with peasant representation and not tied to neoliberal market ideologies (Brem- Wilson, 2013: 1). Another major impact has been the acknowledgement and discussion of food sovereignty within the UN Commission for Human Rights, where food sovereignty is situated theoretically vis-a-vis the right to food, the organising concept for this UN Agency. Most importantly, the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Olivier de Schutter has been an advocate for food sovereignty as a way to achieve the right to food in several high-level meetings, including WTO summits (de Schutter, 2010a). However, despite this increased presence in international fora, financial institutions and the WTO see the proposals put forward by Via Campesina as a backward imposition of barriers to international trade and foreign investment, and see small-scale production for local markets as low value production that will not generate

growth nor will it be able to feed a world population of 9 billion (Lamy, 2009, Berthelot, 2005).

International donor agencies at headquarters levels have not adopted the framework³ and keep using the idea of food security. However, many of these donor agencies have funded International NGOs that do include food sovereignty in their aims. To cite a few examples in Latin America: EuropeAid and Swissaid have funded NGOs that emphasise the need for incomes generated in local markets, reduced dependence on commercial inputs, and promote the use of ecological practices; and many of them framing their agricultural programmes in terms of food sovereignty or agroecology (Jimenez Puente, 2007). Other donors, however, in line with neoliberal discourse, emphasise linking with value chains either to supermarkets or export markets. An important example is USAID, who has been building capacity of farmers to link to supermarket chains (Balsevich et al., 2006b) and promoting an entrepreneurial ethos rather than a peasant identity.

Desmarrais, a farmer and social researcher from inside of the food sovereignty movement, has told the story of Via Campesina to an academic audience using the voices of producers. She depicts a movement that has organised itself differently: constructing a collective identity to open new political spaces, but also an internal politics of participation and inclusion (Desmarrais, 2007). This is what Paul Nicholson (coordinator of Via Campesina) called “Unity in Diversity” (Martínez-Torres and Rosset, 2010). Desmarrais emphasises the “significance of being a peasant”, and sees the re-claiming of the peasant category as one of Via Campesina’s greatest successes. She sees the concept of peasant as capturing a particular relationship with the land that goes beyond farming:

It reflects people who share a deep commitment to place, who are deeply attached to a particular piece of land, who are all part of a particular rural community, whose mode of existence is under threat. This place-bound identity, that of “people of the land”, reflects the belief that they have the right to be on the land. They have the right and obligation to produce food. They have the right to be seen as fulfilling an important function in society at large. They have the right to live in viable communities and obligation to build community. All of these factors form essential parts of their distinct identity as peasants; in today’s politicised globalisation, articulating identity across borders and based on locality and tradition is a deep political act. (Desmarrais, 2007: 196-7)

³ with the exception of the Spanish government and other Spanish decentralised regional offices, yet these policies were scrapped once right-wing governments were elected in 2011 and 2012.

Rosset, often in collaboration with Martinez-Torres has been one of the most prolific academics advocating for food sovereignty. His most influential work has been developing the trade and agricultural policies that would bring about food sovereignty, something particularly relevant after the food price crisis of 2007-08. He highlights the importance of protecting domestic food market from dumping⁴ and speculation, and the need to manage supply both at country and international level (through commodity agreements). He encourages direct support to producers through the introduction of floor prices, marketing boards, public sector spending in farming and agrarian reform, a public control over food stocks, and eliminating corporate control of food. Further he advocates for control against hoarding and export of food needed inside the country, the need for a moratorium on agrofuel production, and the transformation of food systems into agroecological systems (Rosset, 2008: 462).

Rosset, Martinez-Torres and Holt-Gimenez have worked in collaboration with Altieri to integrate agroecology and food sovereignty approaches (Holt-Gimenez and Altieri 2013). The approach has been able to incorporate farmer-to-farmer knowledge exchange mechanisms into sustainable production. Diversification, soil conservation and experimentation by peasants and small-scale farmers are the key to sustainability, but only if the political and economic environment is adequate. In order to be able to scale-up agroecology, there is a need for public policy to enable it. Added to the trade policies mentioned above, the scaling-up of agroecology would involve replacing public support to industrial and corporations to support to small-scale farmers, the development of horizontal relationships between universities, producers and NGOs in agricultural innovation, ensuring secure land access, guaranteeing markets, fair prices and closer producer-consumer relations (Altieri, 2009). The rise of agroecological production in Cuba after the fall of the Soviet block is used as an example of policy fostering food sovereignty (Rosset et al., 2011).

Following on these notions of farmer-to-farmer knowledge exchanges, Michel Pimbert states that in order to achieve food sovereignty, we also need to transform our ways of knowing. We need to transform the nature of research because mainstream science ultimately only serves the interest of mainstream neoliberalism. He calls for the

⁴ Dumping occurs when products are exported under their real price, often due to export or production subsidies. Dumping of crops at lower prices than production costs represent a threat to the domestic industry.

democratisation of science and technology research –through opening the research process to stakeholders, citizen juries and other forms of participation, ensuring access to knowledge is guaranteed as a right- and changing institutionalised research into autonomous action learning processes led by networks of peasants and social movements (Pimbert, 2008, Pimbert, 2007).

McMichael's theoretical work on 'international food regimes' has been central for food sovereignty advocates to theoretically situate their emerging paradigm within the ideological and material history of food and agriculture (McMichael, 2005, McMichael, 2009, McMichael, 2014, Fairbairn, 2010). Exploring the history of capitalism, McMichael describes our contemporary global political economy as the 'corporate food regime': ruled by corporations, where the nation state is diminished, guided by neoliberal ideologies, with industrial agriculture and free global markets (McMichael, 2005). As a form of resistance to the deepening of the commoditisation of food, agrarian social movements respond as a counter-movement offering food sovereignty as an alternative paradigm (McMichael, 2009).

If McMichael has been the theorist of the macroeconomics of food sovereignty, Van der Ploeg has brought the microeconomic aspect into the analysis. Based on Chayanov's and Shanin's analyses of 'family farming', Van der Ploeg has succeeded in providing a robust explanation for the persistence of the peasantry long after the expansion of capitalism, showing how, under the right circumstances, peasant economies can be the basis for food sovereignty, because 'family farms' can generate growth, be resilient, be innovative, contribute to overall society and enrich the environment (Ploeg, 2009, Ploeg, 2013). Van der Ploeg describes peasant families' struggles for autonomy as part of the peasant condition, and this striving for autonomy is materialised by creating and expanding a self-controlled resource base –of land and living nature (crops, animals, sunlight water), but also of social resources (local knowledge, social networks, institutions). Unlike in the capitalist farm, the objective is not profit, but survival.

Academic critiques of food sovereignty have often come from those who are friendly to the politics behind the concept. An important critique has been in terms of questioning 'who is the sovereign?' (Patel, 2009) Raj Patel (2009) highlights the contradictions that might occur due to a broad definition of who is the subject of food sovereignty. Is it the country, is it the community of peoples, is it the family farm, is it the individual?

Diversity within sovereignty, differences (in regions, identities, gender and so on) and the tension between individual and group rights necessarily needs food sovereignty to be a transformatory enterprise, a process of generating new rights, Arendt's 'right to have rights' (Patel, 2009).

Agarwal (2014) similarly points out that the food sovereignty paradigm includes the centrality of peasant and small-scale farmers' choice as well as a series of ideas of how the rural world should look. Yet what food sovereignty doesn't account for is that these two elements may clash on occasions. Following on the critique of 'who is the sovereign?' she critiques the use of the 'family farm' as an organising concept in food sovereignty that may mask gender inequalities within the household (Agarwal, 2014). Mi-Young Park et al (2015) also call for the incorporation of difference –class, gender and ethnicity- into food sovereignty (Mi-Young Park et al., 2013: 584). Patel highlighted that food sovereignty should take into account gendered access to both corporate capitalist and subsistence markets, unpicking the gendered impacts (Patel, 2012). This thesis will explore in detail these gendered impacts of different economies and market channels. Women have succeeded in finding a policy space for them and the 'fight against patriarchy' in Via Campesina, ensuring representation in the movement, the valuing of women's labour in agriculture and the need to ensure women have access to resources, and are not subject to domestic violence (Desmarais, 2003). However there is much work to be done to transversalize gender in key policy areas such as agricultural technology, trade regimes and dumping, and attitudes towards cash crops and international markets, issues that can have, as this thesis will unveil, important gendered impacts.

Agarwal points out that farmers (be they men or women) may not want to remain in agriculture and may choose to migrate to the cities. Farmers may choose not to plant food crops, or they may choose to use chemicals. What is to be done in this situation? (Agarwal, 2014) A similar critique was made by Tania Li who witnessed how traditional small-scale subsistence farmers had turned to cash crops without external coercion (Li, 2015). Burnett's and Murphy's critique of food sovereignty is also based on the priority given to local markets and the production of food rather than other crops. They highlight the high number of small-scale producers that generate incomes through the production and marketing of commodities such as cocoa and coffee, and how these may choose to sell commodity crops rather than be food self-sufficient (Burnett and Murphy, 2014).

Edelman challenges food sovereignty in terms of trade and firm-size. He mentions that the policies necessary to regulate firm size and trade could go against the interests of the farmers themselves (who might want to expand in size or export when they are doing well), and would entail ‘draconian state control’ (Edelman, 2014: 970). He encourages food sovereignty advocates to learn from the failures of the centrally planned economies to micromanage consumer goods. Food sovereignty would entail a complete reversal of tastes, where consumers would need to do without products such as coffee, chocolate, fruits and vegetables all-year-round, a measure that would be resisted by many (2014: 973).

Beuchelt and Virchow (2012) also highlight the potential resistance of consumers to changes in their diets due to ‘localisation’ of food markets. They raise concerns with regards to the central role that rural livelihoods have in the paradigm, whilst up to 40% of the world’s population live in cities. They also raise doubts about whether small-scale agriculture will ultimately be able to feed the world’s population- with the constraints of population growth and climate change, they see a role in the ‘surpluses of industrial agriculture’ (Beuchelt and Virchow, 2012:264-5). Beuchelt and Virchow conclude that the right to food framework will have more impact on global hunger than food sovereignty, because it incorporates the rights of urban populations and because it is based on human rights legislation already signed by most countries and the incorporation into national instruments would be very swift (2012: 270). Haugen considers that the right to food is more likely to find its way into policy discussions, such as those like the WTO, because food sovereignty is assumed to be ‘protectionist’, and thus the right to food will have more impact. The issue of who is the sovereign is raised by Haugen as well: in food sovereignty it is not clear who exactly is the target group – individuals, communities, peoples or nation- nor who is responsible to fulfil their rights. He also critiques the mixing of two kinds of rights in food sovereignty – rights as entitlements and rights as political ambitions- that generate confusion (Haugen, 2009).

Borras has researched Via Campesina’s campaigns for agrarian reform. He believes that food sovereignty policies can be the support needed to make agrarian reform successful. Land distribution must be complemented with “support service packages and favourable rural development policies” (Borras and Franco, 2010: 114). He points out that diversity of land ownership within the social movement should be taken into account. Agrarian

reform must be based on a class analysis that often does not occur within food sovereignty: “calls for food sovereignty that do not take into serious consideration the distinct class interests of the rural labourers are bound to be fundamentally flawed” (2010: 116). Borras reported a conflict within Via Campesina along class lines -between landlords and peasant in the movement- when deciding if a Global Campaign for Agrarian Reform was necessary (Borras, 2008).

The silencing of class conflict within the category of the ‘peasant community’ has been critiqued by Bernstein, who sees class conflict (as well as age and gender inequalities) playing out within communities (Bernstein, 2014). These doubts are raised also by Cousins and Scoones (Cousins and Scoones, 2010). Countering van der Ploeg, Bernstein states that farmers have not become autonomous from capitalist markets, but instead have *internalised* them. Bernstein asserts that peasants as such have indeed disappeared, and what remains are petty commodity producers, carrying out marginal food production for the markets, yet relying mainly on salaried work for survival. Thus if commodity relations are central to rural communities, if there is ‘a relentless micro-capitalism’ in place (Bernstein, 2014: 1044), then there is a need to take class into account when discussing food sovereignty. Bernstein also casts doubt on the capacity of small-scale farming to feed a world population of 9 billion (Bernstein, 2014: 1052).

In this section I have summarised the discursive field of food sovereignty, and the main policy objectives that advocates such as Via Campesina have put forward. I also highlighted the different critiques that have emerged to the paradigm of food sovereignty and the assumptions it carries. In the following section I explore the concepts of ‘moral economy’ and ‘social embeddedness’ and how food sovereignty discourses builds on them.

Section 4. The moral economy of the peasant: reactions against commoditisation

In order to understand peasants as simultaneously economic actors and moral agents, the term ‘moral economy’ can be useful. It was originally coined by Thompson, who explained the riots of the English working class against the hoarding of grain and the corresponding price hikes. He put forward the idea that these “grievances” were grounded in “traditional views of social norms and obligations, of the proper economic functions of several parties within the community” (Thompson, 1971a: 188). This is

what he called the ‘moral economy of the poor’. Shared values of the community thus are seen to shape the conditions of economic exchange, yet also the economy re-shapes our morality: it is a two-way relationship. In Sayer’s words:

Economic activities of all kinds are influenced, structured and legitimized by moral sentiments, values and norms, and [...] in turn those are reinforced, compromised, or overridden by political economic pressures. (Sayer, 2000)

From this follows the notion that economies –regardless if these are market economies or not- are always mediated by moral values. This does not mean that self-interest does not play a role in people’s lives. Rather it implies that self-interest rational calculation *coexists* with moral norms, and what is interesting is the interplay between them (Sayer, 2004).

James Scott found culturally-specific notions of ‘justice’ within peasant communities, a set of norms and moral boundaries for economic behaviour in the market place. Scott showed that the vulnerability of subsistence farming –to economic and natural disasters- was met by social insurance mechanisms deployed by peasant communities (Scott, 1976). This “moral economy” or “subsistence ethic” is based on solidarity and exchange between members of communities not on the basis of self-maximisation but on “peasant conceptions of social justice, of rights and obligations” (Scott, 1976: vii).

The social arrangements within communities include “forced generosity, communal land, and work-sharing” to ensure families do not fall under subsistence levels (Scott, 1976: 3), and also establishing normative limits to exploitation and exchange. According to Scott, economic social arrangements are not necessarily egalitarian. Status and autonomy, and their flip-sides gossip and envy, ensure better-off villagers ensure minimal subsistence (understood as a right) for all members of the community. Differences of income and status and the creation of unequal reciprocal relationships are acceptable within these communities because arrangements will be considered of a lesser exploitative nature if predictability and sustainability of income is guaranteed (Scott, 1976).

Advocates for food sovereignty have tapped into these discourses of moral economy. This is particularly so because food sovereignty is often depicted as morally loaded, as a “moral enterprise, that stands in contrast to the economic processes of market-driven globalization” (Dreyfus, 2009: 114), “a civilisational movement” (McMichael, 2014:

938) and “a grounded localised and yet international humanism around the food system” (Patel, 2005: 81). As Rosset described in his evaluation of Via Campesina, the objective is to “occupy and defend political space”, thus swiftly moving the debate “out of the merely ‘technical’ realm and onto a moral terrain of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’” (Rosset, 2005: 13).

Commoditisation and re-embedding the economy

A central element to understand peasants’ material and moral engagement with capitalist markets is their reaction to the processes of commoditisation that occur in capitalist market expansion. When commoditisation occurs, the ‘market economy’ takes a central role in society, which means (i) exchange conditions and price are increasingly determined by “impersonal supply and demand forces”; (ii) the relationship between people – and their rules of mutuality, reciprocity and obligation- no longer influences the conditions of the exchange, and (ii) the exchange value of things -as opposed to their use value- takes prominence.

Commoditisation is a socially dislocating process as it breaks into the cycle of peasant household reproduction. In commoditisation:

each household is severed from direct reciprocal ties, both horizontal and vertical, for renewal of means of production and subsistence, and comes to depend increasingly on commodity relations for reproduction. (Friedmann, 1980: 162-3).

Watts sees commoditisation as “the process by which (...) moral economy is undercut by the commodity economy”, particularly when the transition to a market economy has happened abruptly (Watts, 2005: 410). Scott similarly described the expansion of capitalism as “forces [that] cut through the integument of subsistence customs and traditional social relations to replace them with contracts, the market, and uniform laws” (Scott, 1976:189).

Yet this unidirectional notion of moral economy as a precapitalist institution that is broken down by capitalism is contested. Wilson shows that the social valuation of things is constantly renegotiated even in a market economy (Wilson, 2013). Narotzky further shows that this moral economy, this embeddedness, is shaped by its interaction with capitalism:

‘Moral’ ideas about the economy were being formed as relations of production were transformed and both ‘moral’ and ‘commodified’ meanings of work were

shaping the path of capitalist transformation. (...) The forms of embeddedness (...) are not the same, long-lasting, residual relations from a past mode of life, but different, specifically capitalist forms of embeddedness, which are, moreover, extremely sensitive to *locality*. (Narotzky, 1997: 96-97)

Thus we must see moral economies as shifting- as a continuous dialectic between values and exchange. What can be sold –food, land, labour- will be determined by this emergent moral economy, and particular moral ideologies will shape behaviour, and aim to counter processes of commodification.

Such an upheaval of peasant society through commoditisation is met with resistance. In his ‘Great Transformation’, Polanyi described a resistance to commoditisation rooted in the social ‘embeddedness’ of things: the exchange of material goods and services cannot operate independently of social relations (Polanyi, 2001). Polanyi saw land, labour and money as fictitious commodities because they could not be commoditised without social and environmental destruction, and established that valuing through market mechanisms was counter to the principle of humans and nature having a sacred dimension (Block, 2001, Luetchford, 2008). Polanyi spoke of a ‘double movement’, where the expansion of market economies and the ideological drive to commoditise is met with counter-movements of resistance to prevent the social dislocation that comes with disembedding (Polanyi, 2001: 130).

Resistance to these forces of commoditisation can take the forms of revolutionary actions but also can play out through moral norms and everyday practices within peasant communities (Scott, 1976, Scott, 1993). Friedman also saw that peasant reproduction could resist commoditisation “if access to land, labour, credit, and product markets is mediated through direct, non-monetary ties to other household or other classes” (Friedmann, 1980: 163).

Food sovereignty advocates see “re-embedding” of the economy as central to achieving fair food systems (McMichael, 2005: 290), to “reconnect food, nature and community” (Wittman et al 2010). This is based on an understanding that peasants naturally resist the commodity form, valuing use-values over exchange value. Peasants understand “food is not just another merchandise and that the food system cannot be viewed solely according to market logic” (Via Campesina, 2001: 2). Marc Edelman explains the success of ‘transnational peasant activism’ i.e. Via Campesina, as resistance to the expansion of neoliberal capitalism. What he points out is that this activism draws on a

“deep historical reservoir of moral economic sensibilities” facing new threats of commoditisation (Edelman, 2005: 341). “Discourses about just prices, access to land, unfair markets and the greed of the powerful” underpin today’s protests, but geared towards contemporary threats such as trade liberalisation, patenting of genes, market-based agrarian reform, and so on (ibid).

For the purpose of this research I will focus on the moral economy of commoditisation in the realms of production (focusing on food and grain markets), land and labour. I focus on the commoditisation of food for two reasons: because of the centrality of food production and exchange in the discursive field of food sovereignty, and also because in processes of commoditisation, market prices increasingly “influence production decisions and therefore the allocation of resources, including labour, into different kinds of production” (Bohannon and Dalton, 1965: 152). Hence by analysing investment choices of crops, technologies and marketing channels, it is possible to have insight into what degree these have been commodified or remain socially embedded. I chose land because the food sovereignty movement is a movement advocating for land reform and protection against land grabs. In terms of commoditisation, land enclosures are described as the enablers of the genesis of capitalism (Cotula, 2013), and capitalism’s reach is deepened through land sales, leading peasants to depend increasingly on wages for social reproduction (Meiksins Wood, 2009: 38). Consequently the third and last commodity I explore is labour: commoditisation makes wage labour through cash payments the only possible form of subsistence, whereas food sovereignty is based on people ‘living off the land’ (Pimbert, 2008).

The commoditisation of food, land and labour is not a smooth process, but one that encounters resistance that persists, as mentioned above, even in market economies. In the Global South, among other historical factors, the social embeddedness of markets has created a “sluggish pace of capitalist accumulation in agriculture” (Araghi, 2009: 117), in which capitalist relations in agriculture have “not yet rooted and destroyed (...) non-capitalist relations.” (Byres, 1991: 7). This resistance to commoditisation is achieved through peasants articulating certain ethical imperatives that highlight (i) the importance of the use value of things as opposed to their exchange value; (ii) what commodities can be sold (or not); and (iii), in those cases in which the commodity is indeed sold in the market, what constitutes a fair price; and lastly (iv) the face to face connection between consumers and producers. I explore these below.

When dealing with commodities, “use value repeatedly takes precedence over-exchange value in the peasant’s consideration” (Shanin, 1973: 70), and despite market pressures, peasants choose crops and practices *for their own sake* that enhance their survival, rather than generate profit. This is illustrated by Isakson’s description of the livelihoods of subsistence maize growers in Guatemala, who engage with the markets in calculated ways to preserve their livelihood:

Guatemalan peasants cultivate *milpa* as an expression of cultural identity, as a medium for fortifying social bonds, as a form of food provisioning that offsets the vagaries and uncertainty of the market, and as a rejection of the complete commodification of food. Even as they participate in various realms of the market economy, Guatemalan peasants strive for autonomy in the provisioning of maize and other staple crops and demonstrate the viability of non-capitalist alternatives (Isakson, 2009: 755).

Peasants consciously oppose use values to exchange values through their moral ideologies. Taussig established this working with peasant workers in sugar plantations in Mexico. The satisfaction of needs is perceived to be morally different to the search for profits and capital accumulation. He saw that stories that circulated in the haciendas on devil pacts to enhance productivity were people’s way to deal with the moral contradictions that emerged when traditional codes of mutuality and satisfaction of needs coexisted with the possibility (and necessity) of working for cash in commercial agriculture or mining (Taussig, 2010). He saw that there is a ‘pre-capitalist fetishism’ through which things come alive due to their capacity to “embody interpersonal relationships and hence produce and reproduce the social fabric” (Narotzky, 1997: 68), as opposed to a ‘capitalist fetishism’ in which things are alienated from nature and the social relations in which they are produced and exchanged (Taussig, 2010).

Food sovereignty movements are countering commoditisation through “cultural practices” that ensure a valuation of food and agriculture that transcends the price form. By doing so, peasants prioritise an ‘incommensurable’ (non-measurable, non-comparable, non-reducible) valuation of things. This valuation prioritises use values over exchange values as a form of resistance to capitalist expansion (McMichael, 2009), and is able to value things difficult to quantify or monetize such as culture, biodiversity and traditional knowledge (Fairbairn, 2010: 27).

In practice, this suggests that there is an *a priori* peasant moral economy that determines what can be considered a commodity and what can’t; and the conditions and prices

under which these commodities are then marketed. What goods are not ‘for sale’ is a customary norm, and when this norm is broken, peasants resist. Examples of contested resources are seeds (genetic resources) and land (Shiva, 2000). Resistance had come in the form of peasant wars in the twentieth century (Wolf, 1999), and today it can come in the form of social mobilisation, or otherwise through cultural norms. In terms of mobilisation, two of the most important Via Campesina campaigns have been against market-based land reforms promoted by the World Bank (Borras, 2008), and the ‘Seed campaign’, promoting the rescue of seeds and fighting against the privatisation of genetic resources (Via Campesina, 2013). Everyday peasant cultural norms can also resist considering land as something which can be sold freely in the market. For example in Watt’s fieldsite in Nigeria, the sale of land was seen as “anti-social” and “cultural and spiritual meanings” attached to land made its sale uncommon (Watts, 2005: 410). Gudeman shows how there are “moral orders” which prevent the sale of land (Gudeman, 2008b: 55-56) using Shipton’s example of “bitter money” obtained from selling lineage land against customary practice amongst the Luo in Africa. Brides and cattle purchased with this money would die due to the persecution of ancestral spirits (Shipton, 1989).

I have covered the moral ideologies that determine what can be marketed and what can’t, as well as the property regime. In the everyday lives of peasants today, many items are already commodities and are readily bought and sold in the marketplace, yet there is still a moral understanding on what the ‘right price’ is and the conditions of sale. For example, in Thompson’s English case, explained above, what was put in question by the ethics of the working class was not if bread should be a marketable commodity, but how it was marketed: the trigger of riots were “soaring prices, by malpractices of dealers or by hunger”, but the legitimacy of these grievances was a “popular consensus as to what were legitimate and what were illegitimate practices in marketing, milling, baking, etc.” (Thompson, 1971b: 79). The concept of moral economy highlights the contradiction between market prices and ‘fair prices’. The customary language of ‘fair prices’ will depend on the particular historical and local social dynamics (Trentmann, 2007), yet some authors claim there can be a universal notion that prices have to allow for subsistence. Prices should then uphold “the right to live over the flows of supply and demand” (Fridell, 2003: 4). A combination of “laws and norms” would limit “competition and price flexibility” (Sayer, 2000: 87). Similarly

peasants would have a moral economy that assesses prices within a holistic view of people who are simultaneously producers (who would expect to recover their investment in inputs and labour) and consumers (who should be able to afford what they need to subsist) (Ellis, 1993:105-106).

Markets bring together producers and consumers. The conditions of exchange will be determined by the affective relationships between them. A moral economy approach sees market relations as social relations: before the advent of capitalist markets economic actors exchanged locally, and knew most of the people with whom they exchanged, and thus were bound by the social relations (of kin, of affiliation) that united them (Sayer, 2000: 87). The incorporation into long-distance globalised capitalist markets meant exchange would occur in circumstances in which “producers and consumers are distant and anonymous” and could not know much of the circumstances of those on whom they depend (Hinrichs, 2000: 295). In local markets, however, relationships are “immediate and personal” (ibid) and thus producers and consumers are connected and interdependent, their relationships based on established networks, personal trust and reliability, and negotiated loyalties” (Lyson and Green, 1999:139). Local markets are often represented as forms of mutuality, trust and social solidarity, as face-to-face personal relationships ensure that the exchanges support the overall welfare of the community. In this light, face-to-face interaction makes market exchange a reciprocal one rather than a commodity exchange. This linkage of social embeddedness with locality, uniting consumers and producers through a shared space is the logic behind alternative food systems (Community supported agriculture, farmers markets, etc.) (Hinrichs, 2000). It is also the reason why fair trade – being a long-distance market relationship- uses images and connections replicating this sense of locality and embeddedness to appeal consumers in the North (Goodman, 2004, Luetchford, 2008). Yet, these connections, be they of farmers’ markets or fair trade, are often fragile: there are “tensions between what producers and consumers think (...) their shared community and mutual obligations [are]” (Trentmann, 2007:1095).

Somewhat paradoxically, the drive to unite peasants politically across the world comes in parallel to a discourse of ‘localising markets’. A priority of “local production for local markets” is considered to be the way to guarantee food sovereignty (Via Campesina, 2007: 26), because local markets are more socially embedded, imbued in a “logic of reciprocity and production for subsistence” (Martínez-Torres and Rosset,

2010: 154) and “principles of reciprocity and solidarity” (Pimbert, 2009: 4). Whilst Via Campesina is not against trade per se, it values markets that are:

In the hands of producers and consumers, that are transparent at all steps in the food chain, and where priority is given to local production for local markets (...) We will strengthen local, formal and informal markets and direct links between consumers and food providers by promoting community supported agriculture and fisheries that builds the necessary trust. (Via Campesina, 2007: 27)

But is it market=profit and gift=mutuality?

I have described above how authors and practitioners understand in different ways how morality relates to markets upon the encroachment of capitalism. These discussions assume an opposition between market and mutuality, in which market transactions are ruled by a pursuit of profit and gift-giving outside the market is a form of reciprocity. Sayer (2000) sees profit-seeking and individualism in market societies replacing mutuality and solidarity:

the sphere of action which is influenced by moral considerations has shrunk with the rise of capitalism, pushed back by the expansion of markets and other processes of individualization which free people from particular attachments even as they become ever-more dependent on others. (Sayer, 2000: 89)

However, authors reading Marcel Mauss put forward the idea that gift economies can still allow for self-interest (Hart, 2007, Ferguson, 2014) and for market cash economies to be vehicles of solidarity (Pottier, 1999, Ferguson, 2014). This is also the case in peasant economies today:

Peasants (...) have been characterised as “both moral economizers and rational maximisers” (Greenough, 1983: 833). Community can be restricting and customary traditions can be short on reciprocity and caring (...) Caring relations involve conflict. Economic sociologists, meanwhile, have reminded us that cash and caring exist in a symbiotic relationship in many aspects of modern life, such as child care and parenting (Zelizer, 2005). Markets do not automatically erase moral notions from private and public life (Trentmann, 2007:1095).

Gudeman established that it is not an ‘either- or’ debate but rather that in peasant lives, two opposing realms coexist: the *house* and the *market*, where the ‘house’ includes the valuation of things and relationships *for their own sake*, and the ‘market’ is where commodity exchange and profit-seeking occur (Gudeman, 2008a, Gudeman and Rivera, 1990). The same people can articulate different “moral reasonings” at different times, communistic behaviour following the maxim ‘to each according to their

needs...' as well as calculated rational exchange (Graeber, 2010). Which one is prioritised will depend on the specific set of norms and values that mediate each transaction.

Allowing for the coexistence of solidarity mechanisms through the market and profit-seeking through gift-giving delivers to us a much more nuanced social landscape. Traditionally, networks of kin and affiliation were defined as horizontal – imbued with solidarity and social obligation- whereas class relationships, based on the extraction of the value of labour, were defined as vertical (Eriksen, 2001). Thus horizontal networks of social support were clearly demarcated and separate from vertical relationships of extraction. However, the borders are diffuse and we could potentially find class exploitation through kinship mechanisms or solidarity through market mechanisms (Pottier, 1999).

In this section I have described the literature on moral economies and how they describe peasants resisting the commoditisation of their markets by emphasising the social embeddedness of their exchanges. Cultural values, social norms and social connections shape what is considered a commodity and what isn't, as well as the prices and conditions of exchange. I showed above how many academics working on food sovereignty see movements like Via Campesina rooted in the morality of peasants' resistance to commoditisation, and their role in "re-embedding the economy". In the following section I will explore two key concepts used in the field of food sovereignty that further explain how those moral economies enable peasants to survive in capitalist markets. These concepts are 'autonomy' and 'solidarity'.

Section 5. Re-embedding the market: autonomy and solidarity in the face of capitalism

The food sovereignty movement is portrayed as a "resistance movement dedicated to the social re-embedding of markets" where "food sovereignty posits an alternative global moral economy". (McMichael, 2005: 290). However, to truly posit themselves as an alternative, these advocates of food sovereignty have had to forward an economic model based on the moral economic values described above. Under this model 'the peasantry' has the capacity to resist commoditisation and survive (and thrive, if their demands are met) in a socially embedded market economy. To do so, it is argued that peasants have *particular* social organisation and economic practices rooted in their

ethos that makes them more resilient to capitalist markets. These particular features of the peasant economy are captured in two terms that mirror the two main spheres they ascribe to it, the ‘family farm’ and the ‘community’: these terms are autonomy and solidarity respectively. I explore these below.

According to Via Campesina, “people of the land” share a common feature; they have a special connection to nature and their local community. For example, see below the proposed definition of peasant put forward by Via Campesina in collaboration with FIAN International to the UN Human Rights council advocating for the creation of a declaration of the rights of peasants:

A peasant is a man or woman of the land, who has a direct and special relationship with the land and nature through the production of food and/or other agricultural products. Peasants work the land themselves, rely[ing] above all on family labour and other small- scale forms of organizing labour. Peasants are traditionally embedded in their local communities and they take care of local landscapes and of agro-ecological systems. (Edelman, 2013:10)

Similarly Martinez and Rosset, use Varese’s (Varese, 1996: 62) notion of “the ecological cosmology of rural communities” in which indigenous and peasant farmers are stewards of nature rather than their owners, and while they may “participate in capitalist relations that are external to their communities, they maintain and reproduce non-capitalist relations on the inside (Martínez-Torres and Rosset, 2010: 154). Without the constraints imposed by neoliberal globalisation, the economic and ethical nature of peasants and small scale farmers would transform the world into a place where food is produced socially, economically and environmentally sustainably (Desmarais, 2007).

This ideal notion of the peasant in harmony with nature is often expressed as a reality of peasants lives (Via Campesina, 2010b, Martínez-Torres and Rosset, 2010, Holt-Gimenez, 2010), yet other authors see peasants as agents regrettably forced by poverty and neoliberal market expansion to behave unsustainably (Edelman, 2005: 336). My case study in Nicaragua is such a case, in which *campesinos* produce mainly corn and beans using agrochemicals integrated into traditional cultivation systems. The explanation Levins gives is that poverty has undermined the traditional long-term vision of the peasant, by “shortening the time horizon of understanding and aspiration, forcing people to act in destructive ways in order to survive” (Levins, 2006: 44). What these authors imply is that removing the structural barriers imposed by neoliberalism, with fairer markets and with public support, the ‘natural’ trend would be towards sustainable

production, to a deeper sense of belonging within their families, communities and nature.

I have shown above how Edelman used the concept of moral economy to counterpose the expansion of capitalism with peasant livelihoods. He portrays capitalism as a force that breaks traditional social relations and replaces them with impersonal contracts (Edelman, 2005), as a force that disembeds markets. The current struggle is a fight between peasants and their “vision of autonomy, diversity and cooperation” versus the dependence, standardisation and competition imposed on farming by the forces of capital and the market (Bello and Baviera, 2011: 74). ‘Autonomy’ from the market is explored in food sovereignty literature as two key aspects: 1) autonomy at the level of the household—understood as internal organisation mechanisms to protect the ‘family farm’ from the vagaries of the market, and 2) at the level of the community in the form of solidarity- according to which, kin, affiliation and face-to-face connection nurture cooperation and mutuality rather than competition.

Autonomy of the family farm

Via Campesina sees peasant family farm-based agriculture as the model for food sovereignty and a key aspect is to produce:

as independent from as autonomous as possible and independent from external inputs (fertilizers, pesticides, capital, hybrid seeds....) however acknowledging the role of government to support peasant based agriculture. It therefore maintains and takes care of natural assets that are used in production (land, seeds, soil, biodiversity, water, diverse human knowledge, etc.). Key is the reproduction of seeds on the farm and the rejection of patented and hybrid seeds. (Via Campesina, 2008: 83)

Food sovereignty, according to Philip McMichael goes beyond the right of States to determine food policy to assert the “right of small-scale producers to productive autonomy” (McMichael, 2015: 434). Jan Van der Ploeg describes how peasant families respond to the encroachment of markets through fostering this autonomy, through their ‘distantiation’ from the commodity market (Ploeg, 2009: 49). Van der Ploeg affirms that in order to achieve food sovereignty, growth has to come from peasant agriculture, and the peasantry can deliver due to its capacity to use land and labour in particular and innovative ways to enhance land productivity (Ploeg, 2013).

Similarly, Holt-Gimenez depicts peasants as nurturing their autonomy, through their everyday farming practices, but also through social mobilisation, from the market and

the State. The ‘peasant family farm’, would aim to feed itself and having some extra production for the market. Small-scale farmers, using agroecological methods, improve their natural resources and enhance productivity. Importantly their main aim is to stabilise consumption, reduce dependence on external inputs, and reduce vulnerability. In this view, family farm practices are directed to reduce the risk involved with “the vicissitudes of a hollowed State and the skewed global market” (Holt-Gimenez, 2006: 177).

These material arrangements of labour and resources are governed through “cultural repertoires (consisting of values, norms, shared beliefs and experiences, collective memory, rules of thumb, etc.) that specify recommended responses to different situations”, they are “judgements based in the moral economy. Moral economy is not external to the economic machine, it is essential to make the machine perform” (Ploeg, 2013: 13).

Jan Van der Ploeg considers moral ideologies as the motor of the ‘family farm’ machine yet he also acknowledges that some gender or age dynamics can on occasions be detrimental to the family farm, in the case of oppressive gender or age relations. He hints to the potential disparity that can occur between household members’ individual priorities and the priorities of the ‘peasant family farm’, and that the autonomy of the family farm will depend on the material and moral negotiations that occur within the household (Ploeg, 2009: 27). Mi-Young Park et al (2013) encourage us to look into dynamics of gender, age and class in the fight for food sovereignty, showing that “women are not all the same”:

that “women are not all the same” to begin with, in terms of endowments, position within the household and community, needs and aspirations, but also in relation to what they may want and expect for themselves and their families by engaging or not in corporate agriculture. (...) Issues around gender inequalities, patriarchal relations and class-based differences still need to be fully addressed recognizing and taking into account the diverse positions and roles of different groups (and women in different positions within those groups). (Mi-Young Park et al., 2013: 17)

Thus it is interesting to understand the moral dynamics that enable the peasant household to reproduce (or not) as a product of moral disciplining and negotiation of interests between the different members of the household.

According to this account, resistance to commoditisation is not only a moral principle that peasants espouse, but also a strategic move by ‘family farms’ to protect themselves from capitalist markets. Part of the ‘competitive edge’ of peasant farms that Van der Ploeg identifies is how cultural norms within the household determine what things are considered commodities and what aren’t, and how things can shift from commodities to non-commodities and vice versa (Appadurai, 1997). Part of these cultural repertoires are a valorisation of the ‘self-controlled’ labour process, its related social relations and its products; praising hard work, dedication, artisanship, thrift and holding on to assets, such as land and cattle (Ploeg, 2009). Some farm factors and inputs are kept outside the markets, and maintained for the reproduction of the household, thus maintaining their use value throughout the life cycle of the farm. This is what Schejtman calls the ‘partial commodification of peasant production’ (Schejtman, 1980). For example food may be produced for own consumption rather than sold on the market. Or assets (particularly land) are maintained for future generations. What Van der Ploeg points out is that conversion from use-value to exchange-value in a peasant farm is regulated by social and institutional norms, unlike in an entrepreneurial farm, where capital is converted into profits and profits reinvested into capital (Ploeg, 2009).

Community and market solidarity

Under this paradigm, autonomy of the peasant household cannot be achieved without cooperation with other households in the ‘community’. According to Via Campesina achieving fairness and “community survival” in food systems is built on peasants’ “interdependence” and “networks of solidarity” (Via Campesina, 2007). It is the sense of identity shaped by place and belonging as ‘people of the land’, that enables the “right to live in viable communities and the obligation to build community” (Desmarais, 2008: 140). Solidarity and mutuality between peasants is central to the discourse of food sovereignty. Martinez-Torres and Rosset speak of a particular rural moral economy, where “community economic relations are based on the logic of reciprocity and production for subsistence” (Martínez-Torres and Rosset, 2010: 154), calling on Scott’s notion of moral economy as an example of peasant’s mutual support.

Often what these networks of mutuality and support consist of in practice is not described in detail in the literature; there is only a handful of case studies that describe

the ‘cultural repertoires and gender relations’ that mediate the material and social lives of peasants that Van der Ploeg refers to (Ploeg, 2009: 27). What one can find is general notions of sharing of food, a shared understanding of resources such as land as common, and labour pooling.

In his work in Guatemala (2009), Isakson recorded the common practice of peasants to “give excess maize production to the elderly, sick and other community members who are in need”, as well as “providing seed to neighbours who have lost their own seed stock to rodents, pest or decay” (Isakson, 2009:751). The existence of “communal safety nets” as a “social insurance” was linked to maize production itself, because it is the act of growing maize that generates membership in the community, because it implies you can participate in these mutual exchanges and thus entitles you to them in times of need (2009:751). Muller found similar entitlements to *ayuda mutua* (mutual help) in Nicaragua which uphold “the moral right to receive help (ayuda) in order to survive” (Muller, 2010: 269). Levins (2006) sees mutual aid in communities as central to equilibrium between the social and the natural, as a self-regulatory mechanism that is endangered by capitalism.

Mutual aid in a farming community is a very common practice. Farmers lend draught animals and tools, exchange seeds and labour and information, and may lend each other money. As long as this is mutual, it is part of the dynamics of cohesion in the community. But if these exchanges become asymmetric, with some the lenders and others always the borrowers, we are on the road to class differentiation and the disruption of community coherence (Levins, 2006).

Traditional forms of social regulation include indigenous traditions such as the ‘*usos y costumbres*’ of the Mixtec communities in Mexico. These traditions enforce these processes of mutuality, in which the wellbeing of the ‘community’ prevails over the individual desires: accumulation of wealth is then redistributed to the community through expenditures in the village patronal feast (Dahl-Bredine, 2006:65).

Community solidarity can occur through a shared understanding of a common ownership and right to use of resources such as land or water. Trawick sees traditional communal management of resources as a moral “basis of solidarity and cooperation” that ensures a material symmetry and proportionality. He postulates that ancient traditional customs are adapted to the environment and deliver scarce resources

equitably. It is the feeling of belonging and interdependence that gives raise to this “moral economy of water” (Trawick, 2001: 361).

The way of life in the village is distinct, different from life in the First World or the West, because it is based on a common attachment to the soil, to the water, and to agricultural work. More precisely, it is based on an attachment to a specific, historically created place or landscape (...) Central to the tradition are the ideas that people are responsible for doing most of their own work and that everyone, all members of society, has the right to a share of the basic resources necessary for subsistence and survival. That right is contingent on certain duties to the communities that must be fulfilled. (Trawick, 2001: 373).

This notion of a shared ownership of resources such as land is expressed frequently in food sovereignty discourse as “the commons”, as the idea of communal ownership of resources, whilst simultaneously “enact[ing] the guiding principles of democracy, ecology, and equality” (Roman Alcala, 2013: 10). For example, actors such as the European Food Sovereignty movement simultaneously establish that there are certain resources that should be owned and controlled by the community and not by individuals or corporations, and are thus not to be commodities, and that community control, due to its proximity, will manage resources sustainably.

We oppose and struggle against the commodification, financialisation and patenting of our commons, such as: land; farmers’ traditional and reproducible seeds; livestock breeds and fish stocks; trees and forests; water; the atmosphere; and knowledge. Access to these should not be determined by markets and money. In using common resources, we must ensure the realisation of human rights and gender equality, and that society as a whole benefits. We also acknowledge our responsibility to use our Commons sustainably, while respecting the rights of mother earth. Our Commons should be managed through collective, democratic and community control (Via Campesina, 2007).

The pooling of labour as a customary practice is also a powerful symbol of solidarity necessary to achieve food sovereignty. For example, Dahl-Bredine speaks of the traditional Mixtec *Tequios*, communal work projects in which all the village participates (Dahl-Bredine, 2006: 65), *mano vuelta* labour exchanges in Latin America (Leiva Morales and Diaz Leiva, 2013) and labour pooling in Zimbabwe (Shava et al., 2009: 45) and Peru (Enelow, 2015). The autonomous family farm models I described above espoused by Van der Ploeg and based on Chayanovian analyses assume the reliance on unpaid labour within the household, as well as the reliance on other farmers’ help (close kin, friends and neighbours), what he calls “social resources” (Ploeg, 2013: 11), “socially regulated exchange patterns”, enabled by “institutions that order and regulate

cooperation” (Ploeg, 2009: 34). This reliance on your family and neighbours’ labour is what Via Campesina describes as the basis of peasant family farming “small farms managed by peasant farmers and their communities” (Via Campesina, 2010b: 2).

In all these instances of mutuality and cooperation there is the assumption (explicit or not) that these solidarity mechanisms occur independently or against the market and that they are based on principles of equality. It is assumed that peasants have a preference for “where possible reciprocity and socially regulated exchange (...) over market transactions for obtaining and mobilising resources” (Ploeg, 2009). However there is little said about how mechanisms of solidarity relate to market exchanges. As I flagged in the moral economy section, there is a temptation to establish the duality of non-market exchanges=solidarity and market exchanges=profit motive. Those who advocate food sovereignty seem to uphold this duality. There is thus a need for a deeper understanding of economic exchanges, both market and non-market, within and outside the household. Further it is necessary to establish if and how solidarity mediates market relationships and how self-interest can guide (or not) non-market arrangements. This thesis will contribute to this understanding.

Another important critique of these notions of ‘community solidarity’ is that the concept of ‘community’ remains under-theorised. As discussed above, the silencing of class difference within communities has been a central criticism of definitions of food sovereignty as understood by Via Campesina. Bernstein refers to Brass’s critique of agrarian populism, considering that using concepts like ‘peasants’ or ‘peasant communities’ reifies the people they claim to represent and hides the power inequalities that occur between them (Bernstein, 2013: 12). Brass highlighted the importance of vertical relationships within communities (between rich and poor, land owners and workers) and looking out within communities for processes of concentration of the means of production and degrees of proletarianisation (Brass, 2003). An ethnography that explores moral economies of peasant ‘communities’ would need to, as James Scott did in *Sedaka*, in Malaysia (Scott, 1993), see the role of ideologies and everyday moral discourses in communities reinforcing or resisting class difference, and thus seeing how material outcomes are also a product of the contention of moral politics.

It is also important to note that the notion of community in food sovereignty can go beyond the idea of place, a particular group of people in a limited space, but also include the idea of community as an ethos, as a moral practice. Thus concepts like Wittman's agrarian citizenship (Wittman, 2009) and De Schutter's food democracy (de Schutter, 2010a) highlight the need to integrate farming communities and nature into broader social economic and political processes. In these cases food sovereignty doesn't talk solely of physical communities, but also of a transnational community sustained by trust and solidarity relations. Thus Via Campesina wishes to expand the notion of moral economy from the community into a "global moral economy" (Via Campesina, 2007). It is interesting how activists and authors highlight the role of the *mística*, rituals and ceremonies that include song, poetry and dance emphasising the connections of peasants to nature (Edelman, 2012: 437,442), and working as a vehicle to build "cross-cultural peasant solidarity" (Rosset, 2005: 10).

Conclusion

Food sovereignty literature has effectively used moral economy theories and notions to describe contemporary circumstances that affect peasants. Both activists and academics have successfully described the interfaces between peasant values and norms and economic transactions. Grounded in the moral economy literature, they have described a landscape of resistance to commoditisation through emphasising the social embeddedness of peasant economies. In this picture, the connection to land, nature and to each other, added to a common ethos has allowed peasants to resist the expansion of capitalism, even under the duress of corporate neoliberalism. This resilience is rooted not only in their morality, but also in a socio-economic organisation *particular* to peasants, ruled by a prioritisation of household autonomy from the market, and mutuality and interdependence. However, there are some elements of peasant moral economy today that are missing in the literature. Firstly, there is an under-analysis of diversity in food sovereignty. The 'family farm' and the 'community' are constructs that may serve the purposes of a social movements' 'strategic essentialism' (concept coined by Spivak in 1988), but they may mask difference and power inequalities within them. For instance, gender and age dynamics within the household should be part of a moral economy analysis within food sovereignty. Similarly, within the community, there can be competition as much as cooperation, for example along the lines of wealth and

landownership. My thesis will explore this diversity when exploring peasants' moral economy.

Secondly, one finds references to moral imperatives for peasants to support their household, fostering the continuity and competitiveness of the 'family farm', and to support their neighbour, through solidarity mechanisms. But there are few empirical examples of how these notions of autonomy and solidarity play out in the everyday lives of peasants. This research will explore the material and moral-ideological mechanisms that mediate them. I will also problematise the duality 'market=profit/ non-market=solidarity', discerning the role that markets play in mutuality, and the role of self-interest in non-market transactions.

Thirdly, as seen above, there are differences of opinion regarding how peasants relate to local markets and the social attachment that exists between peasants and consumers locally, nationally and beyond. This thesis explores peasant understandings of the market in terms of scale and their affective relationship with consumers and traders. Lastly, a central argument used in food sovereignty is the 'resistance to commoditisation', yet there are few empirical case studies of how values and practices resist (or not) the commodity form within capitalist markets. The thesis will explore, in the case of food, land, and labour how commoditisation is 'talked about' and how these moralities shape exchange in a capitalist market.

Therefore the research questions that have guided the research on which this thesis is based are:

- What does food sovereignty in everyday life look like?
- What is peasants' material and moral relationship to commoditisation and in what ways are the markets of food, land and labour socially embedded?
- How do peasant moral ideologies of autonomy and solidarity play out when engaging with capitalist markets in their everyday lives?

In the next chapter (Chapter 2) I describe the relationships of Nicaraguan *campesinos* with markets and show how an analysis of their everyday life can contribute to answer the research questions above. I will offer a short history of peasantry and the expansion of capitalist markets in Nicaragua, and a snapshot of peasant economic life today in Ortega's Sandinista Nicaragua, and their legislation on Food Security and Food

Sovereignty. I will introduce my fieldsite, the village of La Estrella in Matagalpa, and I will describe in detail the research strategies I followed, and how the research process unfolded.

The rest of the thesis is structured as follows. In Chapter 3 I explore the agricultural economy of la Estrella. I give a snapshot of the village and of the institutions that are present. I describe the production and market practices, exploring the choice of crops and production techniques, the gender distribution of labour, the production technologies that are used and in what degree people engage in food markets. I do this analysis seeking to highlight different kinds of *campesinos*, in terms of financial capacity, self-sufficiency, land ownership and labour relations, an analysis that will be a stepping stone to appraise intra-community class dynamics in the rest of the thesis.

In Chapter 4 I explore the moral economy of food exchanges, focusing particularly in La Estrella's two main 'basic grains', corn and beans. This chapter takes the descriptive analysis from the previous one and offers an explanation of production, storage and marketing choices in La Estrella, exploring the coexistence of two realms of economic rationalities, subsistence and profit-oriented. I also explore the social embeddedness of grain exchanges, showing how social relationships of kinship, affiliation and locality shape the price and conditions of exchange. I also show the importance of moral ideologies in shaping the behaviour and practices of different market agents in La Estrella and beyond, as well as local ideas about the scope and reach of markets.

In the following chapter, I show how land transfers – exchanges of land such as sale, loan or rental- are shaped by *campesinos*' moral economy of the commodity. I describe the meanings *campesinos* in La Estrella assign to land and landownership, cultural portrayals of landlessness and the moral expectations of landowners and tenants. I will show how these social dynamics shape the degree of commoditisation of land in La Estrella.

In Chapter 6, I carry out a similar moral economy analysis of labour exchanges in the village. I describe how labour is prioritised, allocated, valued and priced in the village. Given the centrality of labour organisation in discourses around peasant autonomy, I explore how households organise labour and in what degree social relationships in the community such as kinship, affiliation or locality channel workers towards reciprocal exchanges and away from commodity exchanges. I explore the moral ideologies that

shape this social organisation of labour in the village and how workers are disciplined into meeting their moral expectations.

I conclude in Chapter 7, exploring what these moral economic analyses of food, land and labour can contribute to construct a food sovereignty of peasant everyday life. I explore the role of moral ideologies of commoditisation and how these shape the resilience of farmers, identifying the ways in which autonomy plays out in peasant communities. I explore the implications of market-based mechanisms of solidarity and the moral ideologies that shape them, and how they link to processes of capitalist accumulation at a local and global level. To finish, I attempt to outline what food sovereignty would look like if it were rooted in *campesinos*' everyday moral economies.

Chapter 2. Nicaraguan *campesinos*, food sovereignty and commoditisation: Context and Research Strategies

Nicaragua is one of the ‘pink tide’ of left-wing governments in Latin America that have integrated food sovereignty into their legislation. It is therefore a fascinating location in which to explore the questions identified in the previous chapter. The National Assembly passed a Law on Food Security and Sovereignty in 2007, and during the time of my fieldwork in 2012 the bureaucratic structures for this were still being put into place at the municipal level. Civil society organisations and national and international NGOs, particularly those agricultural NGOs that had previously worked in sustainable agriculture since the 1990s, have adopted key elements of food sovereignty (agrarian reform, local seeds, agroecological production, and so on).

Nicaragua is also an interesting case study because it is portrayed by food sovereignty advocates like Rosset and Holt-Gimenez to be one of the sites where peasants have asserted their autonomy, both from the expansion of markets as well as from ‘modernising’ rural policy by the revolutionary and the neoliberal States (Rosset et al., 2006, Holt-Gimenez, 2006). Nicaragua is still a mainly rural economy where agro-exports of cash crops (sugar, coffee) coexist with subsistence peasant farming, in which farmers produce food for consumption and commercialise the surplus. Farmer-centred agricultural development schemes such as the *Campesino a Campesino* programme – a model highlighted by Via Campesina as the way to achieve food sovereignty- can be seen in action in Nicaragua, rooted in ideas of self-sufficiency and autonomy from the markets, as well as cooperation and solidarity.

These moral economies can be assessed in parallel to market pressures encouraging an intensification of agriculture and capital concentration. Focusing on a *campesino* community, we can gauge if and in what degree there is a ‘relentless microcapitalism’ occurring at the local level (Bernstein, 2013: 15) breaking down social ties amongst *campesinos* and replacing them for commodity relations. In legal terms, in Nicaragua grain, land and labour can be sold freely in the market (although as I will show in the following chapter and in Chapter 5 there are some particular nuances in the case of indigenous land). Hence, the Nicaraguan *campesino* economy is one that is exposed to processes of commoditisation, and it will be possible to see to what degree and in what

ways *campesino* market economies are embedded and how different moral economies resist (or not) these processes of commoditisation in capitalist markets.

In this chapter I will introduce a short economic history of peasants in Nicaragua and their relationship to markets, a history of small-scale farming in Nicaragua and an introduction to debates and policy changes around food sovereignty in the country. I introduce my fieldsite, La Estrella, a village in the Yuloli Valley in the Matagalpa highlands, and I give a detailed account of my research strategies and how the research process rolled out.

Section 1. Nicaraguan *campesinos* and their relationship to capitalist markets: a brief history

In this section I include a short history of peasants in Nicaragua and their relationship to capitalist markets and the role of State economic policy in mediating this relationship. A fundamental part of this thesis is to understand how *campesinos* understand, behave and moralise about their economic behaviour, hence I here describe the market environment they are living in. Similarly, this introduction allows me to highlight the diversity of social groups and the origin of inequalities within the rural folk.

The Spanish word for peasant -‘*campesino*’- is a malleable term. Etymologically *campesino* is a ‘person from the land’ and it is often used to categorise broadly those people who live in rural areas. Gudeman and Rivera used it broadly to mean *rural folk*, and in Nicaragua this all-inclusive term is also used both by the State and by Nicaraguan country folk themselves to speak of those making a living in the rural areas (Gudeman and Rivera, 1990). Yet on other occasions the concept ‘*campesino*’ is used in Nicaragua to describe the middle-peasant: rural people with access to small pieces of land who use primarily unpaid family labour and depend on their own resources for survival (Baumeister, 2010). They engage in subsistence production, producing for their own consumption and marketing the surplus (Fundacion Luciernaga and SIMAS, 2010). Often these farmers are also described as *campesinos-finqueros* (landed *campesinos*) or *agricultores familiares* (family farmers). This ‘*campesino*’ concept is deployed in opposition to landless labourers on the one hand, and in opposition to ‘agricultural entrepreneurs’ or ‘agri-business’ on the other. These agribusinesses are capitalised and use hired labour. On other occasions the word *campesino* is equated simply with ‘food producer’, acknowledging that landless people often farm through rental or

sharecropping arrangements. Hence in this case, the *campesino* is opposed to the landless labourer who does not invest in production (Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET), 2007).

Landed *campesinos* have been a central feature of the Nicaraguan countryside since colonial times, where people in the Interior of the country had had food security – described as a situation in which a wide variety of foods were available and no-one was hungry- through the practice of subsistence agriculture and local markets unaffected by the global economy until well into the 19th century (Burns, 1991). Until then, only the Pacific region had been linked to export markets (ibid: 64). In the 19th century the export-oriented economy was forced upon the Central highlands through the capture of land by coffee planters and cattle ranchers. The State had allocated ‘unused lands’ (*tierras baldias*), which were in fact indigenous communal farming lands, to these entrepreneurs, with the double objective of supporting the development of capitalist enterprise in the country and creating a new demographic of landless labourers. This scheme was only partially successful, mainly due to the large land availability that existed in the Nicaraguan interior, and as a result large haciendas and cattle ranches ended up coexisting with medium and small scale farming families who adopted coffee farming, or focused on ‘basic grains’ (corn, beans, millet), whilst seasonally selling their labour in the coffee plantations (Baumeister, 2009). This process of breaking-down communal property of land was accompanied by acculturation, and indigenous people in the Pacific and Central Nicaragua were incorporated into the mainstream *mestizo*⁵ culture and self-defined as *campesinos* (Dore, 2006a).

Landed *campesinos* in Nicaragua have been sidelined by the Sandinistas during the revolution (1979-1990) and the Liberals (1990-2006) alike. The revolutionary State’s policies were directed at improving working conditions under State plantations, and the creation of large State-led cooperatives with common land ownership in which *campesinos* would become active members. Those who didn’t fall within the category of State farm worker or cooperative members did not have access to credit and inputs distributed by the State. The State controlled markets: basic grains were forcibly sold to

⁵ As part of the national project of post-independence Nicaragua, the idea of all Nicaraguan being a mix between Spanish and Indigenous – *mestizos*- was made. For a historical discussion on the cultural politics of mestizaje, see Erick Blandon’s postcolonial research in Nicaragua (Blandon, 2003, Blandon, 2011), and Jeffrey Gould’s and Elizabeth Dore’s an anthropological history of modernization and identity in Nicaragua (Dore, 2003, Dore, 2006b, Gould, 1993, Gould, 1998).

the State agency ENABAS at fixed prices, and consumption items had been rationed due to the war effort against the Contra. The life of small-scale farmers became more precarious (Delgado Aburto, 2014: 50). Many workers and cooperative members protested and occupied land demanding individual land distributions. In 1986 the Ministry for Land Reform conceded to pressures from the National Farmers Union (UNAG) and dismantled the State farms and cooperatives and started distributing land to individual owners. A large class of small proprietors emerged (Dore and Weeks, 1992). The class of small-scale proprietors shifted from occupying 18 per cent of the nation's arable land to more than half of the land (1992: 21). Between 1979 and 1988 sixty-two per cent of the population acquired land or received titles to the land they already worked (Sola Montserrat, 2007: 70-71).

When the 1990 elections were held, newly-landed *campesinos* were divided between a moral debt to a Sandinista government who had kept elites in check and given them land, and Liberal party promises to fulfil their land titles granted by the revolution (Dore and Weeks, 1992: 29). *Campesino* allegiance to the FSLN was lost to the lure of "bourgeois rhetoric and symbolism of the UNO⁶ [that] tended to appeal to the class interests of small rural proprietors" (Dore and Weeks, 1992: 29). Other contributory factors that led to the demise of the Sandinista revolution were the guarantee that the opposition UNO victory would bring peace (a blackmail staged by the US- who financially supported and effectively controlled the Contra army (Chomsky, 1991)), the resistance to draft recruitment for the war, the opposition to market controls, and a perception of a lack of State support to producers working independently (Horton, 1998). In Dore's and Weeks' words:

On the one hand the Sandinista government gave land; on the other hand, that government pursued interventionist policies that seemed to restrict the ability of smallholders to take advantage of land they received (Dore and Weeks, 1992: 30).

The liberal years (1990- 2006) did indeed fulfil their promise to give titles⁷ to the beneficiaries of the Sandinista land reform. However, State policy reverted to openness to trade and flow of credit solely to large export farms. Markets were deregulated, imported grains flooded the countryside, rural development banks were privatised and credit to small and medium producers disappeared (Rueda Estrada, 2013). Service to

⁶ UNO was the umbrella coalition that called for a dismantling of the revolutionary state, led mostly by the Liberal party.

⁷ The legal process of land titling was kick-started in the 1990 transition and it is still ongoing today.

campesinos including the provision of inputs and extension services were severely reduced. The aim was to keep only the “efficient” producers in the market, assuming cheap labour would move to resource extraction, tourism or export processing zones (*maquilas*) (Holt-Gimenez, 2006).

In other Central American countries, the decade of the ‘90s had been a transition into higher-value horticultural products like fruit and vegetables that could be marketed in global markets, as well as a development of the food processing industry. Baumeister considers that the Liberal state failed to invest in the countryside, providing no infrastructure, technical support or affordable credit (Baumeister, 2009: 411), and continued the focus on traditional products like coffee, basic grains (corn, beans, sorghum) and cattle. The lack of technical and financial support made producers unable to increase their productivity and compete in an open market global economy (Rueda Estrada, 2013: 183). Since 1990 Nicaragua has increasingly been importing more of these products and has been unable to produce consumption goods that come cheaply from other Central American countries, Mexico and the US, largely through the emergence of transnational agro-export companies.

Section 2. The New Sandinistas and the ‘Law of Food and Nutrition Sovereignty and Security’.

The return to power of the FSLN in 2006 has done little to reverse the processes initiated by the structural adjustment: Nicaragua is still tied to free-trade agreements and remains an agricultural commodity export-led economy. However the new FSLN government has reversed the dismantling of the State, and public support to the countryside, both to landless and landed *campesinos*, has been increasing since 2007. The economic policies devised by Ortega’s new Sandinista party are similar to what other social-democrat governments of the “pink tide” (Brazil, Venezuela, Ecuador, and so on) have articulated. Unregulated markets, free trade policies and IMF-approved macroeconomic policies are combined with the expansion of safety nets and other social protection schemes to reduce poverty.

Three years into Ortega’s presidency the “Law of food security and food sovereignty” was passed in parliament. This law has been hailed as a step forward in the incorporation of food sovereignty into legislation (De Schutter, 2010b). The law was originally drafted by a civil society platform – what Wendy Godek called a ‘Nicaraguan

Food Sovereignty movement’ (Godek, 2014)- including trade unions, NGOs and other organisations that worked on nutrition and seed saving projects, political advocacy organisations and universities. The liberal party and the private sector resisted the law, and when it was finally passed in 2009, its contents (or rather the lack of them) attest the lack of agreement in a divided parliament. The law built a bureaucratic structure (the system for food security sovereignty and nutrition-SISSAN) and a vague commitment to increasing national production and support to small and medium scale farmers. The law claimed to:

promote substantial changes in the ways and means of production of the food system, in harmony with the environment, prioritising small and medium-scale production, to increase productivity and diversification within the frame of an inclusive and fair market, aimed at achieving national food autonomy based on a National Food Culture (Asamblea Nacional de Nicaragua, 2009: Art 31).

Despite the claim to focus primarily on ‘small and medium-scale production’ enshrined in the law, the main economic policy associated to the law, the ‘Public Policy for Food and Nutrition Security and Sovereignty) caters simultaneously for “poor and decapitalised small farmers and small landowners”, a category which would include landed *campesinos*, as well as “agro-industry”, hence covering the whole spectrum of agricultural production (Ministerio de Agricultura Pecuaria y Forestal (MAGFOR), 2009, Government of Nicaragua, 2009: 24)

The Ortega administration has increased availability of credit to small and medium-scale farmers through the creation of rural banks and microcredit institutions. Since the notion is that landed *campesinos* are ‘decapitalised’, the Sandinistas have aimed to transfer assets to farmers. The flagship programme has been the *bono productivo*, the Nicaraguan zero hunger programme, which has consisted on the donation of cattle and small farm animals to poor women with land, or the donation of packages of seeds and fertiliser to producers. Without infringing on free trade agreements, the Ortega government has imposed spot trade controls for particular basic products (e.g. frijol beans), although these controls tend to be biased towards the urban constituency to keep food prices down. Unlike in the revolutionary era, there is no price control of inputs, grains or consumption goods, and these are traded freely. The Sandinistas have set up a public company (ENABAS) to purchase basic grains (beans, corn, sorghum, etc.) from

small-scale and medium farmers⁸ and sell it to poorer consumers in urban areas. This guarantees stable prices to those who do sell to ENABAS, and affordable food for the poor. However due to the small size of its operations, ENABAS has not achieved its key objective, which is to moderate price fluctuation and disincentivise hoarding (De Schutter, 2010b: 14). As will be shown in Chapter 3, grain markets fluctuate heavily both seasonally and yearly and intermediaries both capture a high value of the produce and contribute to the price spikes through hoarding practices.

I mentioned before that the legislative process was initiated by a civil society platform, a food security movement. Yet through the legislative process significant elements the movement was advocating for were left out of the original proposal. Issues around free-trade regimes and dumping⁹, land reform, GM crops and corporate control of markets, were left out of the final text (Godek, 2014).

Since the opening of Nicaragua to global markets in 1990 and particularly since the CAFTA free trade agreement was signed, imports are flooding the countryside. After the FSLN was elected in 2006, it continued its commitment to CAFTA and the WTO. Nicaragua's balance of trade shows a constant increase in food imports (World Bank, 2011). Nicaragua's reliance on the export of basic global commodities can be risky. The free trade environment has created some opportunities, such as an increase of exports of beans to the Central American market, but also vulnerability to international market shocks. A striking example was the impact of the global coffee crisis of 1999. Due to the entry of Vietnam and other low-cost producers to the global market, prices plummeted below production costs: coffee revenue halved, Nicaragua's balance of payments deficit increased to 38 per cent, and half of permanent workers in coffee lost their jobs, and seasonal employment (coffee picking mainly) dropped 21 per cent (World Bank, 2003: 27). The crisis caused a major upheaval in the countryside, with demonstrations of destitute landless rural workers advocating for food, health and land distribution. It was in this social movement of 'Las Tunas' where ideas of national food

⁸ Most poor campesinos specialise in the production of 'basic grains' (corn, beans, rice and millet): 77 percent of small-scale farms (1 to 10 MZ) planted basic grains, mostly corn and beans (CENAGRO 2012). In this research, when I speak of 'grains' I will be speaking in particular of corn and beans, because they are the most widely produced in my fieldsite. When I speak of other grains, or differences between corn and beans, I will indicate this explicitly.

⁹ *Dumping* is the export of goods to another country with prices under the cost of production-and often dumping also entails that these prices are artificially low because production is subsidised in the country of origin. An example of this would be the entry of US subsidised rice into the Nicaraguan market (Oxfam International/ CRECE, 2013).

sovereignty were forged in Nicaragua (Godek, 2014). The movement forced the Liberal party to promise land taken from foreclosed coffee haciendas for 2500 families, but despite the signature of the Las Tunas Accords in 2002 a majority of signatory families are still waiting for their land today (Wilson, 2015). The new FSLN government honoured the agreements and was still in 2012 purchasing land for Las Tunas beneficiaries. As I will show in Chapter 5, La Estrella was one of the sites chosen by the State to distribute land to around 140 families. In short, the story of coffee and grains show that incorporation into larger markets (Central American in the case of grains and global in the case of coffee) entails particular risks: some Nicaraguan farmers can benefit from higher prices, but all of them are exposed to fluctuations in the global markets.

Three quarters of the frijol produced in Nicaragua is consumed in the national market, and the rest is mainly exported to Central American countries. Farmers receive none of the price mark-up that is obtained in the export market; it is all captured by intermediaries (García-Jiménez and Gandlgruber, 2014). International food price hikes, such as the one that occurred in 2007-08, have an unequal impact on their livelihoods, since most of the price increase was captured by intermediaries and transnational grain traders (Tijerino Verdugo et al., 2008). Prices fluctuate heavily in the year, with a peak hungry season in June and July, just before the first harvest when grain prices increase substantially (Bacon et al., 2014). On occasions the poorest farmers need to sell their harvest in advance (*vender adelantado*) to obtain cash during the hungry season. In the particular case of basic grains, a high price environment only benefits those *campesinos* who are net producers, whereas those who are net consumers of grains will suffer from those high prices in the hungry season.

With regards to the problem of access to land, the Sandinista government has not taken any steps towards further land reform. 57% of Nicaragua's land is in the hands of 7% of the population¹⁰, according to the 2011 agricultural census (CENAGRO IV, 2011). It is continuing the land titling scheme, to ensure that all landowners have the right documentation in order to avoid disputes. Yet there have been no major land redistributions, except a handful of market-based distributions to former combatants in the Contra war.

¹⁰ In 2001, it was in the hands of 10 percent of the population (CENAGRO III 2001).

Ortega's Sandinista party has not taken a position against the presence and activities of agro-corporations. Incoming foreign direct investment flows have tripled in the period 2006 to 2012 (UNCTAD database¹¹). The participation of the transnational corporation Cargill in the grain trade market has created "asymmetries in price transmission" (McLaren, 2010: 19): producers receive lower prices when international prices are low, but they don't receive the higher prices in proportion when international prices are high. Cargill has also purchased Tip-top and other Nicaraguan poultry production and retail companies, owning 60% of the chicken market in the country (Central American Data Business Information, 2011).

Advances in terms of the goals of the civil society platform have, however, been made in terms of GM crops. A law on bio-safety was approved in 2010 and a law on biodiversity in 2012. These regulate the production and commercialisation of GM crops. The goal of these laws is to avoid negative impacts on human health, the environment, agricultural production or biological diversity. These laws have not meant an outright rejection of GM crops, but a temporary ban on them. There is an exception, however, for GM crops for animal consumption, which are still allowed. GM yellow grain is still being imported for animal consumption (Álvarez-Guevara et al., 2012: 70-71). Several municipalities in the country, including San Ramon, have approved municipal laws banning the production of GM crops. These have come as a product of *campesino* advocacy campaigns at a municipal level (Iran-Vasquez, 2010).

Due to the pressures of a precarious government and alliances with the country's economic elites, Ortega's rural policy has been extremely cautious in the reversal of neoliberal reforms. Ortega's presidency has however managed to navigate successfully between the demands of its poorer rural constituencies (achieving an electoral victory in 2011) and those of its business alliances and US pressures (Spalding, 2013: 40).

In this section we have seen the history of *campesinos* in Nicaragua, and a short introduction to how the agrarian structure has changed, highlighting the role of different kinds of rural people that exist within the category '*campesino*'. Historical economic differences emerge in terms of ownership of land (landless or landed); capitalised or not, net food producers or net food consumers, subsistence-oriented or agro-industrial. I have also given a brief introduction to the political economy in which *campesinos*

¹¹ <http://unctad.org/en/Pages/Statistics.aspx>

operate: an export-led, agricultural commodity-based, free-trade economy open to foreign direct investment and imports, yet under a Neo-Sandinista State implementing policies aiming to protect their most vulnerable constituencies from the impact of neoliberal markets (Enriquez 2013).

Section 3. La Estrella, a *campesino* village in the Matagalpa Highlands

In this doctoral research I aim to analyse Nicaraguan *campesinos*' moral economies and to what degree and in what circumstances they resist commoditisation when faced with capitalist markets. Appraising the moral ideologies and practices that shape the degree of market embeddedness in a *campesino* economy would in turn help understand what a food sovereignty of everyday life would entail.

To address this, my fieldwork involved ethnographic research in La Estrella, a small village deep in the mountain range of the Matagalpa Highlands in the municipality of San Ramon, East to the provincial town of Matagalpa, located in the Centre-North of Nicaragua (see figure 1 below). The *comunidad* (the administrative term for a village in Nicaragua) of La Estrella consists of 114 households: around 700 inhabitants. The village spreads East from the road that links San Ramon to Matiguas following the dirt road to the Hacienda Santa Marta on the west bank of the Yulolí River (see village map in Appendix 1).

In the Matagalpa Highlands, often high altitude is used for coffee cultivation and the valleys for corn and bean cultivation or alternatively for pasture. The whole of the Centre-North of the country is dominated by these basic grain producers: small-scale farmers who self-define as *campesinos* who farm primarily beans and corn for own-consumption and who commercialise the surplus in the national and Central American market.



Figure 1. Map of Nicaragua and Municipalities in the *departamento* of Matagalpa (Source: INIDE)

Matagalpa is in the ‘dry corridor’ (*corredor seco*) of Central America. Compared to the Pacific region, the Central Highlands are relatively less fertile, yet ideal for the production of coffee and grains. Coffee grows at higher altitude, so the hilltops are green with coffee groves and woodland. It is in the valleys where basic grains (corn and beans) thrive. Because La Estrella is situated in the Yulolí Valley at relatively low altitude (under 700 metres), and the optimum altitude for coffee growth starts at 700 metres over sea level, the great majority of land is destined to *granos basicos* (basic grains- corn and beans) and pasture.

It is called the dry corridor because these areas have a likelihood of droughts, although the name is misleading since this area is also prone to flash floods. There are two planting seasons for corn and beans in this area; *primera* (‘the first one’), a sowing season which comes with the first rains around May. This is a riskier planting because of the potential of heavy rains. Harvest comes three months later, and in September, *postrera* (the following one) is the second sowing time, and harvest occurs in December, at the end of the rainy season. Normally the land stays fallow for the summer months, as only 1.5 percent of the arable area of Matagalpa is irrigated (CENAGRO IV 2011, 2012). In high altitude humid areas with enough rainfall, there

can be a third sowing season: *Apante*. Some farmers (those who can afford it) travel eastward in the summer months to those humid microclimatic regions in the high altitude mountains: ‘la montaña’ (Loma-Ossorio Friend et al., 2014).

A significant number of basic grain farmers also engage with seasonal farm work in the coffee farms. 23 per cent of producers have another source of income other than farming (CENAGRO IV 2011, 2012). According to Baumeister 68.9 of the revenue of small-scale *campesino* farms (understood as *campesinos* as opposed to entrepreneurs) comes from their own production, whilst 8.7 per cent comes from off-farm agricultural employment and 12.1 from off-farm non-agricultural employment and 10.3 per cent on off-farm independent non-agricultural income (Baumeister, 2010: 23).

La Estrella is a particularly relevant research site for this doctoral research for several reasons. Firstly, people in La Estrella would fall under the category of ‘peasant’ articulated by advocates of food sovereignty like Via Campesina. Farmers in this region self-identify as *campesinos*, and their history and livelihoods have been used to illustrate elements of food sovereignty, such *campesinos*’ striving to gain autonomy from the market and solidarity (Altieri, 2009, Holt-Gimenez, 2006, Holt-Gimenez, 2010). Secondly, the basic grain economy in the region is integrated in international grain commodity markets; legislation is in place so land can be purchased and sold freely (with certain nuances I will explore in Chapter 6); and similarly options exist for people in La Estrella to get paid work both in subsistence and cash crop agriculture (mainly coffee), as well as the option to migrate abroad. Hence there is a process of commoditisation in place, which allowed me to assess how moral norms shaped the social embeddedness of food, land and labour markets. Thirdly, Nicaragua’s State and certain segments of civil society are articulating both discourses of food sovereignty or ideas that are part of that discourse e.g. agroecology or self-sufficiency. For example, as I will show in Chapter 3, three agricultural NGOs are trying to shape *campesinos*’ farming choices. This allows us to see potential tensions that may occur between different articulations of food sovereignty discourse and the everyday lives of *campesinos*. Lastly, La Estrella is a fairly small *comunidad* of *campesinos*, and this small size allows for face-to-face interaction, whilst at the same time it is connected to national and international markets as well as migration networks. This situation enabled me to gauge if ideas of autonomy of households and of ‘communities’, as well as community solidarity, do indeed persist when faced with encroaching capitalist markets.

In the following section I describe the research methods I used during my year-long ethnographic fieldwork in La Estrella.

Section 4. Researching *campesino* moral economies: methods

On access and positionality

I achieved ethnographic access to *La Estrella* through the ‘Programa *Campesino* a *Campesino* of the Nicaraguan Farmers Union (PCAC- Farmer to Farmer Programme), one of the agricultural NGOs sympathetic to food sovereignty ideas I mentioned above. In order to prepare for my fieldwork which spanned the year 2012, I visited the country a few months beforehand. Through the technical advisor in Managua, I was put in touch with Matilde, the PCAC coordinator in the Municipality of San Ramon. This PCAC group had been recommended to me especially due to its active network of *promotores* (volunteer extension workers), a long history of work promoting agroecological techniques spanning three decades and the management of several community seed banks. Matilde, in turn, put me in touch with one of *promotores* in La Estrella and manager of a community seed bank, Mirna, who was also actively involved as one of the elected village leaders. I decided to stay after a brief visit to the village, and returned in January 2012.

Mirna, the *promotora*, set me up in a small empty concrete house belonging to the village adjacent to the seed bank, just across from the primary school. The understanding was that the building would be used for village meetings and events, dance classes or workshops, but I would have a small room to sleep in. I was fed at Mirna’s parents’ home, which presented a dilemma in terms of access. I had to weigh the benefits of seeing firsthand how ‘development’ unfolds and is translated at a local level, with the potential access problems that might arise from being identified with one of the village leaders. However, these problems did not arise, and I was able to build rapport with *campesinos* across the ideological or religious lines, as well as with different access to resources, wealthier or poorer, landed or not, employers and labourers. Further, mealtimes in my host home proved to be very useful for my fieldwork. Through conversations around the fire in the kitchen, family members would catch up on their daily lives, gossip and lecture each other. This gave me privileged insight to the intimate moral relationships that take place within the home.

My presence was by no means exceptional in the region or La Estrella. People were accustomed to short visits by foreigners: NGO volunteers and *brigadistas* (international solidarity volunteers) had been doing immersion programmes in the communities in rural Nicaragua since the revolution in 1979. Thus my main initial difficulty for access was people's conviction, because I was a *chele* (a white guy, a rich foreigner), that I was an aid worker of sorts and that I must be bringing in a project. It took several weeks for participants in La Estrella to realise I was just there to carry out research. To mitigate the bias of people portraying themselves as potential beneficiaries for 'development', it was particularly important to triangulate information. Ethnography's key advantage of maintaining a long term presence enabled me to see differences between what people say they do and what they do; and between reported and actually-owned assets and income sources.

Another limitation in access was due to my positionality. I am a middle-aged man, and this did partly shape whom I was able to spend time with and who I could interview. I easily befriended old and young *campesino* couples and families and was able to interview adult men and women separately following them in their everyday lives. I also was able to explore in-depth the lives of female-headed households and single mothers in two-generation households. Yet the challenge came to gather the life stories of young single men and women. I had many more chances to share the everyday life of young men, whereas in the case of young women it was more difficult to find spaces to interview them and share time with them that were deemed socially appropriate in la Estrella. This was also affected by the fact that most women in La Estrella leave their homes at a young age, around 18, whereas young men can stay single up to their late 20s. Despite this I did manage to get good ethnographic material of some young single women, those of my house, and those who were kind enough to allow me to interview them for my life stories. Yet my research does have more ethnographic depth in the case of young single men compared to those of young single women.

Research strategies for appraising *campesino* moral economies 1. Mapping the economy of la Estrella

In order to answer the research questions established in Chapter 1, my research methods required a two-pronged approach: firstly, a mapping of economic relations of La Estrella and, secondly, an analysis of the moral ideologies that shape (and are shaped

by) those economic exchanges. In order to ‘map’ the economy of La Estrella a descriptive analysis was necessary to know what economic processes were taking place, including production, consumption, exchange; and livelihood assets and strategies.

Since the key lens for my analysis of the moral economy was *campesino* market embeddedness: (i) I needed to know what people owned, including their capacity to work, and how much they produced; and in turn, (ii) how much of that agricultural produce, assets and labour power were kept within the household, transferred to others, or exchanged for cash (and how much cash), and lastly; (iii) who was the recipient of those free transfers or cash exchanges, and what was the social relationship that connected them. I explore these elements for the three commodities of food, land and labour below.

In the case of food production (see Chapters 3 and 4), I needed to find out what crops *campesino* households in La Estrella produced and what farming techniques they used; how much grain they produced, how much they stored, gave away or marketed; and who they transferred this grain to in terms of their social relationship (e.g. family members, traders, and so on); and lastly, how these grain transfers were priced (or not).

When researching land (Chapter 5), I needed to understand land ownership, control and use in the village, and to assess to what degree people in La Estrella owned land or not, and if those with land held on to it and used it themselves, or alternatively if they either lent it, rented it or sharecropped it. Further, I would need to know who were the recipients of those land transfers (temporary in the case of lending or rental or permanent in the case of sale) in terms of their social relationships and how these were priced (either land or rental prices).

Lastly, to understand the embeddedness of labour exchanges (Chapter 6), I needed to know the role of labour in agricultural production, and how labour was allocated, either to production for the home (as family labour), to sharecropping, as salaried labour in the village or outside the village (e.g. in coffee haciendas) or abroad as migrants. As in the previous two ‘commodities’ I explore what the social relationships were and how labour was remunerated (e.g. salary rates).

In order to gather these descriptive data on food, land and labour, I relied on the quantitative data generated by a household survey I carried out in the initial phase of my

research. As I will show below, the survey covered all 114 households of La Estrella, and the questionnaire included a whole range of demographic and economic indicators, amongst which I included many of these required economic indicators to gauge commoditisation.

Yet all the indicators above were not covered entirely by the survey. The survey results were triangulated with the information I obtained through participant observation and interviews, and through these I also gathered information that was not included in the questionnaire, or to add depth in the analysis. For example, in the case of grain, I used these qualitative methods to understand the practice and the economics of farming choices and production, getting a deeper insight into the production costs (which were not included in the survey) and how these relate to different farming techniques.

Further, a majority of the data that linked the allocation of grain to different people (in terms of their social relations) and at different prices in La Estrella came through my participant observation, as these exchanges emerged through my fieldwork. Much of the land rental and sharecropping information did emerge from the survey, but sale of land was not captured in it, since land is sold much less frequently (and the survey was a one-year recall) and, as will become clear in Chapter 6, the sale of land in La Estrella is morally discouraged and thus is underreported. Hence much of the descriptive information around land prices and land sales are a product of fieldwork notes of my informal interviews and triangulation between different respondents. When researching the allocation of labour, the survey captured most of the descriptive data necessary: use of family labour, participation in different labour markets (including sharecropping arrangements) and remuneration. The qualitative methods contributed mostly to my analysis of labour relations in terms of identifying with much more definition how labourers would prioritise their labour between employers (e.g. family before a neighbour), what social relationship existed between employees and employers and what price they would expect for that labour.

A related research question that I set myself to answer in this thesis is to understand the role of autonomy and solidarity in *campesinos'* relationship to markets. As discussed in the previous chapter, this is closely linked to the task of gauging commoditisation processes in the village. Autonomy and solidarity are, in many food sovereignty

discourses, used to define specific economic behaviours that protect peasants ‘families’ and ‘communities’ in their relationship to capitalist markets.

In terms of autonomy at the household level, I assessed if the resources above are indeed allocated and priced in different ways when in the household domain. In terms of grain, I gathered information on how food was produced in the household, what different roles household members played in agricultural production (e.g. gender and age distribution of labour), how much food was stored and consumed and how much was sold in the market. I also recorded how land was allocated within the household, and the use of family labour for planting, as well as understanding in what circumstances members of the household sought employment outside the home (e.g. in the local market, in haciendas or abroad). The goal was to see if there was a different economic pattern within the *campesino* household that is qualitatively different and that mitigates the impact of the exposure to capitalist markets. To analyse these patterns, I used participant observation in my host home and throughout my fieldwork, enquiring about household economies. Further, I relied heavily on the use of ten household case studies (see below). These case studies were ten families in which I interviewed several household members, generating information on resource allocation and distribution of labour through the recording of life stories.

Secondly, I appraised the existence of ‘community solidarity’, assessing if economic exchanges between members of La Estrella differ from economic exchanges outside the *comunidad*. Thus here I needed to see if food and resources were exchanged or shared in a preferential manner between people living in La Estrella as opposed to markets outside the village. I compared the allocation and pricing of food, land and labour in La Estrella as opposed to outside buyers and sellers, and I also accounted for the existence of safety nets for destitute people and how people reacted in times of emergency. Many of the indicators required were covered by the survey. However, in many cases, it was the emergence of events that gave me interesting insights in this, captured through my participant observation. People fell into destitution during my fieldwork and I was able to see the response of the *comunidad*. I also witnessed many exchanges (gifts, sales, loans, rentals and so on) during my fieldwork and in doing so I recorded through participant observation in what degree ‘the community’ was treated differently.

Finally in terms of this first task of descriptive analysis of the *campesino* economy, I explored three different aspects of food sovereignty, namely agroecological production, food self-reliance and market reach. As indicated in the previous chapter, most food sovereignty advocates, including Via Campesina, emphasise the use of agroecological methods, the participation in food economies to achieve food self-reliance (rather than participating in cash crop economies) and ‘localising’ markets. Through participant observation and interviews I enquired about the implementation of agroecological techniques, as well as analysing the investment in resources and labour required. Through the household survey and participant observation, I recorded how much household economies relied on food produced by the household itself, their dependency on their own land and on their family labour. Lastly, I also recorded how much of produce was marketed in the village, through local traders and beyond.

Research strategies for *campesino* moral economies 2. Recording the moral ideologies of economic exchange

The second element of my research strategy was ascertaining the moral ideologies that shape these economic exchanges. For this research I relied mostly on the qualitative methods I have already introduced: participant observation, interviews and household case studies. Whilst the ‘mapping’ of the *campesino* economy described above is a descriptive analysis of the economic relations that exist in La Estrella, I also explored the discursive side of the economy, the different moral norms and ethical imperatives articulated by *campesinos* in La Estrella. The purpose was to understand which exchanges are allowed and which ones are not, and the moral and world-view underpinnings of these norms and expectations. Different kinds of producers can articulate competing moral discourses, depending on their different status within the village e.g. as landed or landless, as employer or employee, and so on. I also explored the different mechanisms in which these ethical imperatives circulated through the village e.g. through face-to-face interaction, gossip, etc.

For this purpose, I tracked exchanges of agricultural produce between households, but also between communities and their material and symbolic importance. I recorded negotiations for price for market exchanges –with different *campesinos* and traders, and the arguments and narratives used to determine ‘fair’ prices. I inquired about the importance of kinship and affiliation bonds and how they play out in the daily life: how

participants engage in gift-giving, preferential exchanges, expressions of loyalty, etc. and what meanings they attach to these exchanges. In terms of commoditisation, I sought for moral norms that might determine the allocation of grain and the price that was expected. For example, would family members receive food at a different price than traders? Lastly, I asked *campesinos* their views on the different reach of markets and the role of the State in regulating them, as well as their views on the actions and entitlements of other market actors like consumers or traders.

In the case of land, through participant observation and interviews, I recorded the meanings *campesinos* assigned to it and the obligations landowners were perceived to have because they owned land. I explored discourses around land tenure: how landed and landless *campesinos* perceive and portray each other. I also enquired about land sales, and people's ethical stance on selling land, seeing if land is treated by *campesinos* as a commodity to be sold freely in the market or something different. In terms of rental and sharecropping, I recorded ideas of 'fair prices', as well as expectations on the behaviour of both tenants and renters.

In terms of labour, I determined to what degree social expectations channelled labour away from cash crop labour markets and towards the home, the family or the community. Making use of the household life stories contained in the ten household case studies, including that of my host family, I recorded the 'moral economy of the household' (Kea, 2013), the gendered and age moral discourses that shape the distribution of labour in the household and the unequal access to resources and decision-making. I explored discourses that channelled resources (food, land and labour) towards 'the home' (Shanin, 1986). Through interviews and participant observation, I also explored how employers and employees portray their relationship. This included their discourses on work ethics and the provision of help through employment, and debates around what adequate salaries or piece rates are. When enquiring about labour and its remuneration, I compare the gendered elements of it, asking men and women about the benefits of participation in the subsistence economy vis-à-vis the coffee economy. This analysis allows comparing the relationship with cash crop markets in terms of gender.

I documented farmers' understandings of social justice, for example determining whether there are support networks in the village for those who fall into deprivation and the mechanisms to make it work. During my fieldwork in La Estrella I had the chance to

see how the community reacted to both chronic poverty and acute economic shocks (such as the death of the breadwinner in the family) and the mechanisms that were used. I explored both the use of market and non-market mechanisms to enact solidarity with other members of the *comunidad*.

Through interviews and everyday exchanges, I appraised the role agricultural production has in *campesinos* identities and sense of connection: how production can be an economic choice and a statement of identity (Isakson, 2009). I documented how participant *campesinos* portrayed their way of life and models of production, to themselves, to their families, to other *campesinos* and development actors (NGOs, leaders and so on). During my time in La Estrella I also aimed to see what philosophies grounded these moralities that guides people's economic life: conceptions of nature, and religious understandings of land, community and so on.

The research process

As I mentioned above, I conducted a household census survey, covering the 114 households in the village. The household survey played a double role in my ethnographic research: firstly, obtaining information, and secondly, generating ethnographic access through establishing rapport with participants. During the initial three weeks, while I was settling in, I gauged what economic indicators, and hence what questions would be relevant to ask in a household survey, in La Estrella. I did this through participant observation and informal interviews (see below). I also carried out a focus group discussion with the elected village leaders to appraise what in their view were the main indicators and the main factors determining poverty and food security outcomes. Adding these indicators to those that emerged from the fieldnotes of the first few weeks of participant observation, I designed a household questionnaire covering essential economic and social indicators, both qualitative and quantitative, including questions about household structure, land tenure, land use, assets, agricultural production, income sources, employment, migration, credit, transfers and remittances, access to development programmes, and education (see questionnaire in Appendix 2).

The original list of homes was based on the census that had been carried out in the village (as part of the national census) the previous year. The limitation of the household survey, based on a national census survey, was that the unit of analysis is the residence, and thus ignores diversity within the household and connections between

households. I addressed this through the use of qualitative methods such as participant observation, interviews and life stories (see below).

Surveys as part of ethnographic research also surface interesting data that one does not normally take into account in ordinary surveys. It allows one to test the veracity of answers. Since ethnography involves long-term presence in an area, it also allows the researcher to contrast the answers given with what can be triangulated and seen for oneself. This sheds light on the positionality of the interviewer. An example was Dora, an elderly woman who reported in the survey that she was landless and had no male sons living with her. It turns out she did. I learnt this because I ended up being good friends with her and her husband after a few months. What is interesting here is that she assumed I worked for a development organisation and thus 'hid' two elements that she perceived to be factors of wealth, and hence would make her family less likely to be included in a project: land and working-age male labour. Potential contradictions between the survey and ethnographic data can be attributed to many other factors, for example the difficulty to assign one answer to a reality that is changeable and complex (cattle can be sold and bought, household members come and go, and so on) or even 'wishful thinking' (e.g. highlighting perceived 'positive' behaviours that they have used sporadically or as a one-off as the norm).

To carry out the survey I had the help of two research assistants, Elena and Rosa, who were part of the extended family that fed me. Their help was instrumental in covering the whole village (I did half of the houses and they interviewed the other half) and also in uncovering some of the village politics. They identified certain households that they themselves could not interview, because of enmities in terms of family feuds, personal vendettas or party politics, giving me precious insight into village social dynamics.

During the time of the survey (a process which lasted about 3 months), and until the end of my fieldwork, I also undertook participant observation and informal interviews, aiming to achieve a deep understanding on what people did, and how they talked about it. This involved conducting informal interviews, semi-structured interviews and participant observation. I understand participant observation to be long-term fully-engaged presence that immerses the researcher in participants' culture and 'webs of meanings' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995, Geertz, 2000). The 'insider' view that ethnographic research generates allows for the detailed analysis of discursive processes

around the *campesino* economy, exploring the contested moral ideologies of economic practice, as well as the material exchanges and practices themselves (i.e. how *campesinos* enact or contest in practice those ideologies).

I worked on farms in La Estrella at different times of the year, participating in different tasks, in order to understand and learn-by-doing the different activities that are involved in ‘basic grain’ production. Working with different producers, both men and women, also gave me precious access to people’s time. I was able to chat about a myriad of things whilst carrying out tasks like sowing or harvesting, and even during those tasks that were more physically demanding, like cutting brush, conversations would arise naturally in the frequent breaks that were taken. I got to know different planting areas in the village, and was able to record *what* people planted, *how* they planted it and *why* they planted it. This gave me insights into what shaped choice in technologies of production, which proved very useful to understand the obstacles to shifts to agroecological production (see chapter 3). Through my exchanges with different family members I also explored the relative importance of own-production for household food consumption vis-a-vis commercialisation. I observed in local shops (*pulperias*) and interviewed local shopkeepers and I enquired about transfer, barter and monetary purchase of things locally. I “followed” farmers when they went to other markets to sell, importantly, Matagalpa Guanuca market, and I enquired and interviewed them about their relationship with traders, whom I also interviewed.

Through my interviews and participant observation, I mapped who sold (or rented) what to whom, and under what conditions and what kind of moral justification underpinned those conditions. In this thesis, I explore the importance of kinship, friendship and community to shape market exchange and how moral-economic arguments are used to mediate those exchanges.

The survey had highlighted the importance of income obtained outside one’s own farm, so I inquired about farmers’ income-generating activities outside agriculture: petty trading, salaried work (in other farms, in other sectors) and assessed their importance in people’s lives. I also explored the relevance of remittances, enquired about migrant family members, and interviewed them in their visits or when they returned for good. I recorded the ideologies around the obligations of the migrant vis-a-vis their families and their expected behaviour during their time abroad. Through my interviews I enquired

about credit and debt, the relative importance in incomes, who awards it, under what conditions (future harvest, labour, etc.) and so on. I witnessed when those demands for credit were made and under what ‘logic’ of reciprocity. I also inquired about the relative importance of institutional loans (from banks, rural financial institutions, and microcredit) and how the quantities related to people’s livelihoods, relative wealth and farming choices. I explored if and how these debt relations could be part of patron-client relations. I also ‘followed’ a landless *campesino* to where he or she found work and recorded the relationships/exchanges between them and landowners, businessmen, etc.

As part of my fieldwork I also conducted key informant interviews in the development sector, namely to highlight how people who worked within it perceived and portrayed *campesinos*’ lifestyles, to understand their engagement with *campesinos* (the projects or programmes they were running), and to see how they articulate ideas incorporated in the field of food sovereignty.

Several months into my fieldwork, I had robust evidence for the economy of household units, and the relationship between households in the village. Yet what had emerged from my fieldnotes was that understanding the household as one economy disguised major differences *within* households. I had already seen that the lives of people of different gender and age were significantly different, and their personal relationships to the household, community and the market differed according to these identities. If I was to really explore ideas about food sovereignty I would need to understand a little more about intra household dynamics. For this purpose I decided to do the life stories of 10 different families I had already befriended during my first months in La Estrella. The result would be in-depth qualitative accounts of each member of each homestead, their household relations (division of labour, access to resources and decision-making), and their economic relations beyond their home (kinship and affiliation relations, employment and market exchanges). The process often involved an open ended biographical story-telling, followed by some questions regarding their moral-economic life.

I chose the 10 family case studies to highlight the great diversity that is captured within the concept *campesino*: I included large and small families, landed and landless, wealthier and poorer, connected and not connected to development networks, different kinds of households (female-headed, bi-parental, 3 generation, and so on), different

forms of land use (labourer, sharecropper, renter, own-production) and different forms of employment (salaried worker, producer, trader). One of the case studies was my host home, in which I carried out participant observation in the home to understand the gender relations within the household and to ascertain how assets, cash and food are controlled and distributed. Unfortunately I was only able to do intra-household participant observation in my own host home, the rest of the case studies rely on the veracity of people's accounts and the triangulation I could carry out with other people from La Estrella (for example, a family member reported not to have received land from the State, yet several neighbours confirmed the opposite).

In these life-story interviews I spoke to each household and family member (whenever possible). Whilst these interviews were unstructured to let the participants construct their life stories and the history of La Estrella, I would also steer the conversation to (i) explore gender and age inequalities in the household, in terms of decision-making, responsibilities and control of resources; (ii) explore individuals household members' relations and obligations to other households and (iii) appraise the circumstances of market exchanges with other actors such as family members, neighbours, traders and so on.

These case studies, together with a few other participants who I got to know equally well through my ethnographic research (even if I didn't include them explicitly in my case studies) helped illustrate the everyday workings of moral economies in a *campesino* community, from the household member to the community and beyond. These interviews allowed me to gather the depth of qualitative data to allow me use the richness, diversity and complexity of people's lives in La Estrella to inform debates that are ongoing in the discursive field of food sovereignty – agroecology, gender and other intra-household dynamics, class diversity and other differences *within campesino* communities, and community solidarity and the market.

Conclusion

Peasantry in Nicaragua has experienced a history in which they have been sidelined both by the Sandinista revolution and the liberal regime that followed it. The FSLN prioritised State farms and cooperatives and was biased against those who did not fall under the categories of landless labourer or cooperative member. The liberalisation that followed took away the restraints for farmers to commercialise, but also left the

Nicaraguan economy unprotected against unfettered trade. What both the Sandinistas and Liberals achieved was to initiate and consolidate a land reform whose impact is still felt in the Nicaraguan countryside. In 1986, the FSLN distributed State and cooperative land to a large new class of small-scale landed *campesinos*. The liberals did not reverse this redistribution and allowed for individual farmers to obtain property titles. As I will show in this thesis, the impact on labour scarcity and land availability for planting (compounded by the expansion of the agricultural frontier) is a major factor shaping land and labour relations in the Central Highlands. Yet even though many farmers accessed land, farming it was not supported by the State. Since 1990, there has been little or no support to *campesino* farming, and they have had to survive in an unfettered trade environment with virtually no extension services, finance or infrastructure, locking them into low value commodities (as opposed to other Central American countries that diversified to other high value horticultural crops).

Ortega's new FSLN has not changed the rules of engagement with markets, and liberal and free trade policies continue unabated. A law on food security and food sovereignty has been passed, and some policies have started to support rural constituents through safety-net policies, such as cash and cattle transfers to poor landed farmers, the purchase of grain at subsidised price through the State company ENABAS, or the availability of microcredit for agricultural investment. This may help *campesinos* keep afloat, but it is not transformatory. Despite the use of food sovereignty in the legislation, the policies in food and agriculture do not address the concerns that food sovereignty advocates in Nicaragua have put forward: a need to expand land reform, to stop the takeover of transnational corporations, and to protect national food producers from cheap imports.

I introduced my field site, the village of La Estrella, and how it has the characteristics to bring light to the discussion on food sovereignty and moral economy that I described in Chapter 1. La Estrella is a *comunidad* of 'basic grain' corn and bean producers, two commodities that are well integrated into Central American markets, that self-identify as *campesinos*, and who have been exposed to capitalist markets, in which grain, land and labour are in legal terms are free to be bought and sold, since 1990. Lastly, la Estrella is under the influence of agricultural NGOs promoting either food sovereignty, or elements of it such as agroecological production.

I have also detailed what research strategies I chose to be able to address the research questions I set myself, showing what steps were necessary to map the economy of La Estrella and explore the moral ideologies that shape it (and are shaped by it). I showed what strategies are appropriate to understand *campesinos* understanding of the commodity and what market embeddedness means in everyday life, and how it shapes economic exchanges. I also highlighted the meanings, moral imperatives and practices of food, grain and labour, that can root a local everyday notion of food sovereignty.

In order to start understanding the moral economy of food production and marketing, and to what degree this is shaped by market and social relations, in the following chapter I offer a detailed description of the agricultural economy of La Estrella. I give a snapshot of the different institutions that are at play in the village, and I describe *campesinos*' livelihoods: what crops are produced and by whom, what other off-farm income opportunities are available, the farming techniques utilised, the production and storage of grain, and the marketing of those food products. This descriptive information will then be brought forward in the following chapter to ask questions about why those farming practices are chosen and how this relates to my questions on commoditisation and embeddedness.

Chapter 3: La Estrella, the ‘basic grain’ economy and farming choices

Introduction

In the previous chapter I gave a brief overview of *campesinos*’ relationship to State and markets in Nicaragua as well as the development initiatives related to food sovereignty in the country. I also located the village in La Estrella and its relevance for this thesis, as well as the research methods I used to answer the research questions I set in Chapter 1. In order to begin to answer these questions I start by describing the different aspects of the *campesino* food production economy in La Estrella. As I mentioned above, La Estrella is a ‘basic grain’ economy, where a majority of farmers produce corn and beans, and on occasions diversify into other crops. I here begin to enquire about the existence (or not) of local understandings of food sovereignty by describing choices in crops and production methods, and how *campesinos* engage with food markets. In order to better understand these production and market practices, I also introduce a small description of La Estrella in terms of the different institutions that have a presence in the village and shape those practices. The objective of this chapter is to give a detailed understanding of the different kinds of food producers that exist in La Estrella and how that farming happens, and in turn how production is also shaped by grain markets. In my description of the agricultural economy in La Estrella, I break down the category ‘*campesinos*’ in La Estrella into different kinds of producers depending on their access to land, their labour relations, their financial capacity, their level of investment and ultimately, their self-reliance on grain. By doing this I lay the ground for the analysis into the livelihood diversity *within* a *campesino* community, which can highlight social differences (e.g. such as class or gender) that may occur in relation to capitalist markets, something that I do throughout this thesis.

This descriptive chapter is linked to the following chapter that will complement the analysis with an appraisal of the moral ideologies that shape both grain production and *campesinos*’ relationship with markets. A majority of the quantitative data used in this chapter is a product of the household survey I described in the previous chapter.

In section 1 I describe a transect walk of La Estrella, aiming to give a feel for the landscape of the village. In the following section I describe the different institutions present in La Estrella that shape *campesinos*’ livelihoods, including State and NGO

presence in the area, public services, religion and other social institutions. In Section 3 I describe the different crops that *campesinos* in La Estrella choose to farm and the factors that determine production, such as land, labour or credit and I describe the different agricultural techniques implemented. In Section 4, I describe grain market dynamics and how they may impact food production choices in La Estrella.

Section 1. A transect walk of Estrella

In the middle of September, the Indian summer (*la canícula*) is bringing a small respite from the winter rains. The village sprawls around the dirt road that heads to the Hacienda Santa Marta, and eastwards towards the Yulolí Valley. The road branches North-Eastwards from the road that links San Ramon to Matiguas. It is in this corner where the recycled American school buses repainted in bright colours stop and where the transect walk begins.

The sides of the road are shaded by tall elephant grass, the landscape darkened into a dense green coffee grove, or sunlit by open spaces of pasture. The houses at the entrance of the village are deceiving of the wealth of the *comunidad*, since they are home to some of the relatively wealthier families in el La Estrella. These houses are built in red bricks and their front room has a concrete floor. Like the great majority of houses in the village, the roofs are zinc sheets. Further down the track, there are people sitting on their plastic chairs in their front porches, women peeling corn from the cob, men in wellington boots staring out into the road, or whole families gathered around a metre-square sieve selecting the bad beans from the good beans.

At the school, the road broadens into almost a square, and a plaza opens to a small field to the right where little children play baseball in the summer with a ball made out of socks and a handmade bat; to the left, the school is painted in the national colours of white and blue and beautiful murals by a local artist depicting an idyllic pre-Columbian landscape. A concrete building across from the school is the community seed bank, painted bright orange and brown. To the front and left of the square, a small trail leads up a steep hill where the Catholic church stands, overlooking the whole village.

One comes across several men on their horses or on foot, either carrying fabric sacks over their shoulders, filled with the days' worth of seeds to sow, or carrying blue backpack sprayers towards their plots of land. They are all dressed for the part: black

wellies and jeans, t-shirt for the younger ones and shirts for the oldest, and a baseball cap.

Further down the road, the houses are now built of wood (those wealthier will have rectangular planks, whereas the poorer will close their walls with irregular planks with the shape of the original tree trunk) with compacted mud floors, and their courtyards are smaller with some banana trees. This central area of La Estrella is what people call '*el caserio*', a triangle of land in a ravine occupied by a concentration of the poorest families. The poorest houses are made of mud, held together by thin wooden rods. Towards the bottom end of the road to the left, there is a large red brick building, with mesh windows and concrete floors, immersed in a barrage of weeds. This is the *Casa Comunal*- a building used for adult education and community meetings (and the gossip is that youngsters use it to smoke cannabis in the evenings). A fork in the road shows a narrow track heading southward towards the cattle ranch El Buen Perdon. A hundred metres down the main road, on the right hand side there is a concrete building in which the Evangelical service is held. The dirt road now turns Eastward towards the Yulolí River.

Past this spot shaded by teak trees and a row of bamboo trees, the houses become more dispersed, and the plots wider, and the road meanders through the village that looks now more like a hamlet, with small wooden houses upon the hills or facing the road, with large plots of beans and corn. The Indian summer is a harvest season *and* the sowing for the next planting. On some plots, women, men and children with cotton scarves around their head and necks are bending down over the thigh-high green brush and pulling the bean plants from the ground, carrying in their hands bunches, with dozens of colourful pods dangling.

Walking further, under the shade of the teak trees and on the side of the road there is a large corn field. Two young men are slowly zig-zagging down the slope amongst the corn, plugging out holes on the ground with their *espeques* (a metre long wooden spear with a small metal point) and shooting red bean seeds into them, whilst listening to *reaggeton* music blasting out of a mobile phone.

Abruptly the road steepens, and at this point the countryside overtakes the landscape, and one can see the entire valley of the Yulolí River. There is pasture land with dark skinny cows with angular bones, with their ears and tails twitching, fenced off bean and

corn plots and oak woodland, surrounded by the buzzing of the insects and the chatter and whistle of the birds. From then onwards, the farmland is divided in bigger plots belonging to people in La Estrella, and the pasture extensions are vast. The only houses near the river valley are those of the wealthier cattle owners like the Montoros, who have converted the land closest to the water into pasture, and their family ranches with their rudimentary milk parlours stand along the river. Cows graze quietly in the fields, or lie under the shade of trees.

Section 2. Institutions in La Estrella

In order to understand in what institutional environment food production takes place in La Estrella, I here give a very short introduction to different key market, State, development and social institutions present in the village, and in what ways these institutions may impact agricultural production. The analysis of these institutions will be further developed in subsequent chapters, in terms of how they shape -and are shaped by- the moral economies of grain production, land and labour.

State and development institutions

The structures of representation of the Central State for the 114 households in La Estrella are the leaders of the *Comites de Poder Ciudadano* (CPCs- Committees of Citizen Power), which are elected by the community of La Estrella. There are officially 10 people appointed to different subject areas, but in practice, only around 6 representatives are active in their roles. These village leaders act as intermediaries between the State and municipality and the people living in the *comunidad*, aiding public institutions to target beneficiaries for their projects, as well as transmitting grievances or concerns of the population to the town hall or relevant institution in either San Ramon or Matagalpa. The CPC organises monthly community meetings, with minimal but loyal attendance.

The Nicaraguan government, as part of its strategy to combat poverty, has implemented the *bono productivo* project, benefiting ten families in the village with a milking cow, fruit tree seedlings and seeds. The purported objective of the scheme is to ‘capitalise’ the household and in addition diversify the family diet with milk products (Ministerio de Agricultura Pecuaria y Forestal (MAGFOR), 2008). In parallel, the municipal

government has implemented a EuropeAid project called the ‘municipal agro-food project’ informally called the *minibono*, which involved the distribution of pregnant sows and fruit tree seedlings to six families in the village. This is exceptional since traditionally San Ramon municipality has focused mostly on refurbishing rural roads, like the one that crosses the village, and building urban infrastructure. Whilst these livestock interventions are perceived in a positive light both by beneficiaries and neighbours, their impact is marginal in comparison to the impact of State interference (or non-interference, as I mentioned in the previous Chapter) in agricultural markets (Baumeister, 2009, Holt-Gimenez, 2006), since the majority of food intake and household incomes come from basic grains. I explore this below and in Chapter 4. The State agricultural extension service (INTA) is severely underfunded, and hence there was no presence of it in La Estrella in the entire duration of my fieldwork.

Several NGOs have implemented projects in the village, mostly focusing on education, health and water and sanitation. Frequently World Vision conducted ‘*capacitaciones*’ (trainings and workshops) on the rights of children and health, and channelled donations for primary school students, mostly clothes and educational material. Cieets (Centro Intereclesial de Estudios Teologicos y Sociales), a Lutheran development association had built and refurbished latrines and water tanks for household use¹², and gave a short seminar in the primary school on personal hygiene. Several small health NGOs from San Ramon also offer micro-credits to contribute to planting or small expenditures.

There are three main active agricultural NGOs in the village. Two of them are focused on agroecological rural development and are close to the paradigm of production articulated by food sovereignty movements. One is the Farmer to Farmer programme (Programa *Campesino a Campesino* –PCAC- in Spanish) which is a part of the National Farmers Union of Nicaragua. It is a longstanding organisation since the beginning of the 90s. The farmer to farmer programme is composed mainly of small to medium scale producers, and its activities aim to foster autonomy from markets and to promote socially and environmentally sustainable production. The PCAC, working through volunteer extension workers called *promotores* (promoters) advocates for farmers to reduce dependency on industrial inputs, to enrich soils through the re-use of organic matter within the farm, and for the diversification of production to enhance incomes and

¹² As opposed to irrigation.

ensure consumption. Similarly the PCAC has been involved in developing communal seed banks to rescue and protect native seeds. La Estrella hosted one of those seed banks. PCAC had been funded by Swissaid and Spanish regional aid agencies. The Foundation Denis Ernesto Gonzalez Lopez (FUNDEGL) has an identical remit and activities, yet it is a much younger organisation, currently funded by Swissaid. On the other hand, the Association for Diversification and Community Agricultural Development (Asociacion para la Diversificacion y el Desarrollo Agricola Comunal-ADDAC) is somewhat different. On top of implementing projects that emphasise sustainable agricultural production, they also have supported in the last five years the creation of a cooperative in the valley, called *cooperativa Virgen del Carmen*. This is a cooperative of services in which producers farm individually, but can market their grain wholesale through the cooperative if they wish to do so: the service of *acopio* (storage and wholesale) I explore in the following chapter. Members also have access to soft loans for agriculture through the organisation.

Small-scale conflicts or legal issues are solved by mediation in the community. The municipal court at San Ramon has appointed two village mediators to solve minor squabbles between neighbours, such as access problems to farm plots, harvest damaged by loose cattle and so on. Those cases that require legal action are taken to the court in San Ramon, and if necessary, to Matagalpa. There is no police presence in the village, and during my fieldwork they only came into the village three times, twice to stop the illegal sale of alcohol and once in response to the murder of Humberto Rodriguez (see next Chapter).

The *comunidad indigena* (indigenous community) of Matagalpa is the official organisation of the Matagalpa indigenous people, responsible of upholding traditions and customs, as well as overseeing the use of indigenous land. La Estrella's agricultural land falls under indigenous community land. This means that ownership is ultimately indigenous, and those who have ownership papers are *de jure* leasing it from the *comunidad indigena*. As I will show in Chapter 5, land is bought and sold *as if* this institutional arrangement did not exist, and most farmers do not pay the lease (in Spanish *canon*). Their service at the level of the *comunidad* is to give land titles to people demarcating their property which would serve as evidence in court. The leader of the *comunidad* recognises that very few people self-identify as indigenous in the province of Matagalpa due to the historical cultural portrayal of the '*indio*' as backward

or ignorant, and highlights the role of the organisation in promoting that identity as positive and empowering. In La Estrella, only some leaders, who in turn have been influenced by the *comunidad indigena*, self-identify as indigenous. The majority self-identify as *campesinos*, which in rural Nicaragua does not have as negative connotations as its English equivalent peasant has. For example, Carlos, a landless producer who rented land to produce corn and beans told me:

“Yes, we are *campesinos*, we work the land, no-one is ashamed of being called *campesino*, that’s who we are (...) we can also be called *productores* and *agricultores*, but you can call us *campesinos*”

Even in terms of indigenous identity, the *comunidad indigena* sees no contradiction between the categories *indigena* and *campesino*. One of the indigenous elders from a nearby village, told me: “indigenous people are *campesinos*, we live from the land, planting our beans, our corn.”

In the everyday life of people in la Estrella, there is no influence of ideas of indigeneity in the allocation of resources. When ideas of indigeneity are articulated by teachers or leaders, it is in speeches or lectures that aim to convey a common identity and proud heritage of the whole region of Matagalpa.

Social institutions

There are two Evangelical temples and one Catholic Church in the village. The attendance is small except for particular religious occasions such as Easter Saturday, and unlike in other regions of the country (and other times in Nicaraguan history), these Churches do not get involved in redistributing resources within the community. Despite scant attendance at services, there is a sense of religiosity. Debates between Catholics and Evangelicals in the village often concern the use of religious images and the transformative power of the church against drunkenness or womanising. Often religious debate is circumscribed to the morality of personal behaviour. In terms of moral economy, however, there seems to be little ideological difference between these two camps, and religious arguments are seldom used to support certain moral economic practices over others. Exceptions to this are two religious elements that are indeed articulated in La Estrella: ideas of service to others as a service to God, and ideas of God being the ultimate giver of life and nature, including resources such as land. I

explore these in Chapters 5 and 6. Otherwise, religious affiliation does not determine bias in access to resources or marketing networks.

The institution of '*la familia*' (the family) is central to social organisation in La Estrella. People speak of three different social spheres: the person, the family, and the *comunidad*. Whilst I will explore the nuances throughout this thesis, I will explain here what *campesinos* mean by *familia* and *comunidad*. 'La familia' as it is commonly used in the village refers to the family living under the same roof and who eats from the same pot (the strict definition of a 'residential family' in the national census), and it often refers to the nuclear family, either parents and children, or in the case of older households, grandparents, sons and daughters and grandchildren. With regards to agricultural production, '*la familia*' is a unit of *campesino* production, survival and social reproduction (Lanza-Valdivia and Rojas-Meza, 2010, Deve, 2005), what also farmers in la Estrella call to 'work individually' (*trabajar individual*). Whilst 'la familia' is most often used to describe the household, it also is used to describe ties beyond it in terms of extended family. When asked to specify, these are defined as *familia de segundo grado* (second degree family). As we will see in Chapter 6 the moral obligations vary depending if family members are part of the nuclear or extended family networks. It is important to note here that the nuclear family structure (father, mother and their children) is not the only type of household in La Estrella: they represent solely 57 percent of households. For example, 18 percent are female-headed households, another 18 percent are three-generation households; the rest involve an array of different living arrangements, including two men living on their own, an elderly lady also living alone, brothers and sisters living together, couples living with siblings, families with adopted children, and so on. Religious or civil marriage is rare in the village, and thus the majority of families are *ajuntadas* (partnership without marriage). Perhaps because of the partial separation of the population from formal religious ceremonies¹³ (see above), *compadrazgo* (godparenthood) relations are rare and of little economic importance in La Estrella: as opposed to the central role Lancaster assigned to them in the cementing of patron-client relationships in the city of Managua in the early 1990s (Lancaster, 1992: 52-68). Whilst patron-client relations do indeed persist, there are other mechanisms at work to nurture them (see Chapter 6).

¹³ The opposite of what occurs in the national public arena, in which Ortega's FSLN has allied itself with the higher echelons of the Catholic Church and Evangelical Congregations (Gooren 2010).

In turn, the word '*la comunidad*' is also used by *campesinos* in La Estrella as an administrative term: the *comunidad* as a village with a boundary and a particular population, but also articulated (as it is in the English language) as an imagined community of mutual inter-dependence. I will explore this further in Chapter 6.

There is a gender and age division of labour within '*la familia*' which generates inequalities in terms of access to resources and reaping the benefits of both the basic grain economy and the coffee economy:

“Traditionally the division of labour (and decision-making) is almost always: the great fields of grains and the cattle for men, and the small animals and homegardens for women (...).(Fundacion Luciernaga and SIMAS, 2010:98)

Further to these, women's traditional roles in La Estrella include housework and childcare, as well as unpaid labour in the harvest period. On the other hand, they are able to obtain cash incomes through the coffee economy. The gendered differences in the relationship with capitalist markets and their implications for thinking about food sovereignty are explored further below and in Chapter 5.

Market institutions

As I will explore in detail in Section 4 and Chapter 4, the main market channels for sale of food are informal exchanges between households in the *comunidades*, selling it in the village shops to local traders or, alternatively, to a wholesale buyer at the Guanuca market in Matagalpa. There are four main shops, *pulperias*, in the village. These shops are owned by major landowners and producers in the area, who (with one exception) are also grain traders. These *pulperias* sell essentials like sugar, rice, salt, soap and some clothes, as well as vegetables, light bulbs, drinks and snacks. The two largest ones also sell agro-chemicals. These local traders, only ones who own pick-up trucks in the village, purchase grain locally and sell it in the Guanuca market of Matagalpa. These grain traders offer both grain and cash loans to farmers in the hungry season, to be paid back in grain when the harvest arrives: the service of *adelantado*. Because Matagalpa is relatively close to La Estrella (1.5 hours by bus) half the farmers in the *comunidad* are willing to skip the middleman and pay the transport costs to sell their produce directly in Guanuca market. In the following chapter I will explore the role of local and wholesale traders in the moral economies of La Estrella.

These are the main political, social and market institutions in La Estrella, and how they may relate to agricultural production in La Estrella. In the following section I will describe in detail what factors shape choices in production and how food is produced in the village.

Section 3. Agricultural production in La Estrella.

Tradition amongst Nicaraguan *campesinos* is that the winter –the rainy season- starts with a blast. In the beginning of April the *jocotero* rains fall, shrouding the village in thunder and lightning for three consecutive days. The rains can be so heavy that they feel like *jocotes* (a small and rock hard fruit) on your head. These storms are followed by a few weeks of summer, in which farmers prepare the land for the sowing in May. La Estrella, a village that had been quiet in the dry season (el *verano*- the summer), buzzed back to life, with family members returning from the coffee haciendas or their short-term jobs in the towns to clear the land and sow corn and frijoles.

In La Estrella most households are directly involved in planting. According to my household survey, of the 114 households in the village, only 5 had *not* planted crops the previous year. Amongst these exceptions, two of them were physically unable to plant (an elderly woman who lived on her own and received food donated by kin and neighbours and a wealthy octogenarian couple whose income came solely from cattle, although they had planted corn and beans when they were able-bodied), and three households who had intended to plant but had not succeeded in securing land for rent nor other sharecropping arrangements. Even those permanent workers in La Estrella who work for the nearby haciendas or cattle ranches in the area are allocated by the landowners a piece of land to sow corn and beans in exchange for a small rent.

In the Section below I will describe briefly what resources and labour arrangements are mobilised for agricultural production, and the different kinds of crops planted and agricultural techniques employed. For the purpose of this chapter, I consider households as a producing unit. However, in Chapter 6 I explore the complexity of the household, and see how there are different units of production *within* the household shaped by gender and age dynamics. Please note that most of the quantitative data on livelihoods and agricultural production in La Estrella included in this chapter are taken from the household survey I undertook in the beginning of 2012. If the data comes from a different source, I will indicate this in the text.

Farmland use in La Estrella

La Estrella's farmland sprawls eastward towards the River Yulolí and some farmers also farm South of the main road to San Ramon. However, despite the vast majority of households being involved in agricultural production in La Estrella, less than half (43 per cent) own land¹⁴. There is great diversity in land ownership as well: there is a majority of small holders in La Estrella with small plots of land: 56 per cent of landed households own less than 5 manzanas (MZ)¹⁵ of land; and a small number of large landowners own large swathes of land: only 5 people own 52 per cent of the land in La Estrella. Therefore in La Estrella we see the coexistence of small plots with large haciendas and cattle ranches. The reason for this is historical: a legacy of the agrarian reform in the 80s and 90s. I introduced these historical factors in Chapter 2. See Figure 2 below depicting the distribution of land in La Estrella, and in Figure two a Lorenz curve of land ownership depicting the concentration of land in the village. Figure 2 highlights the high level of landlessness in the village, and the coexistence of small plots with large extensions of land. Figure 3 confirms this concentration of land amongst landowners. As the reader may be aware, the degree of convexity of the Lorenz curve (and how it diverges from the straight line that would be complete land equality) indicates how unequal the distribution is, and the bias of the curve to the right shows that a low number of the population (y axis) owns a large area of land.

¹⁴ All data on land tenure in La Estrella comes from the household survey I conducted (see chapter 2 for a description of research methods)

¹⁵ A manzana of land (MZ) is equivalent to 0.7 hectares, or 1.74 acres.

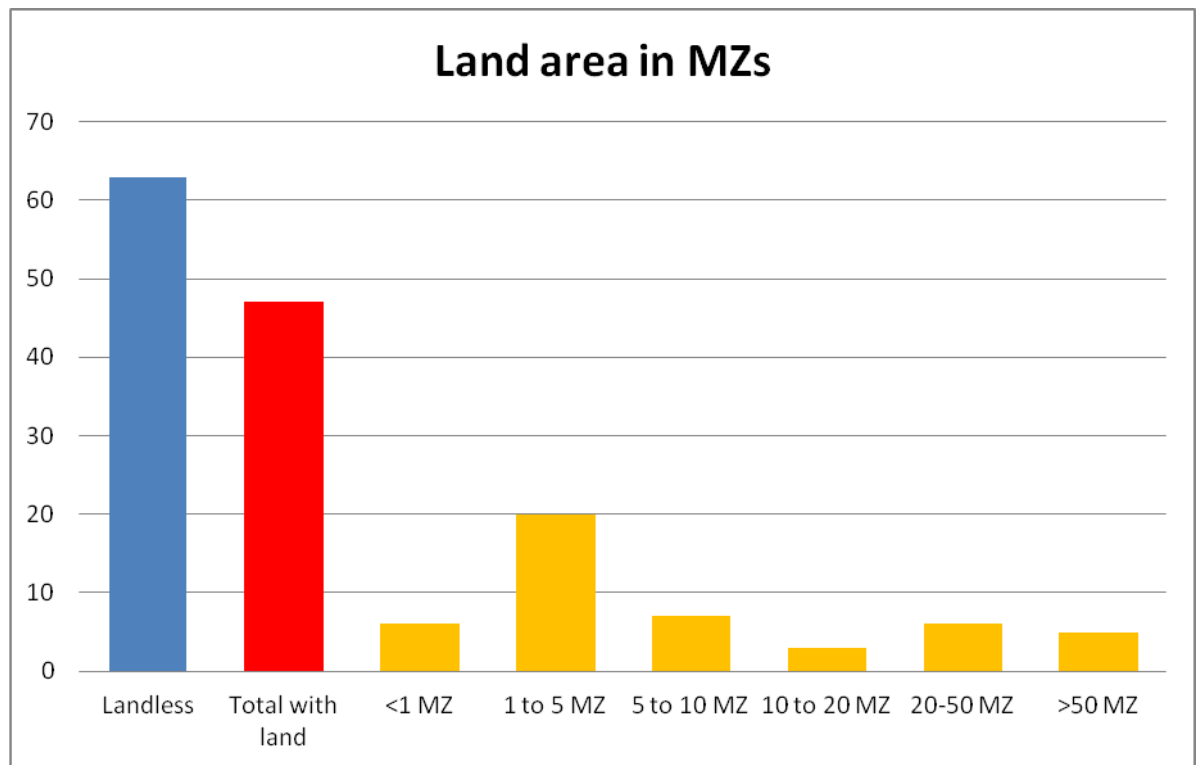


Figure 2. Land tenure in La Estrella (source: own survey)

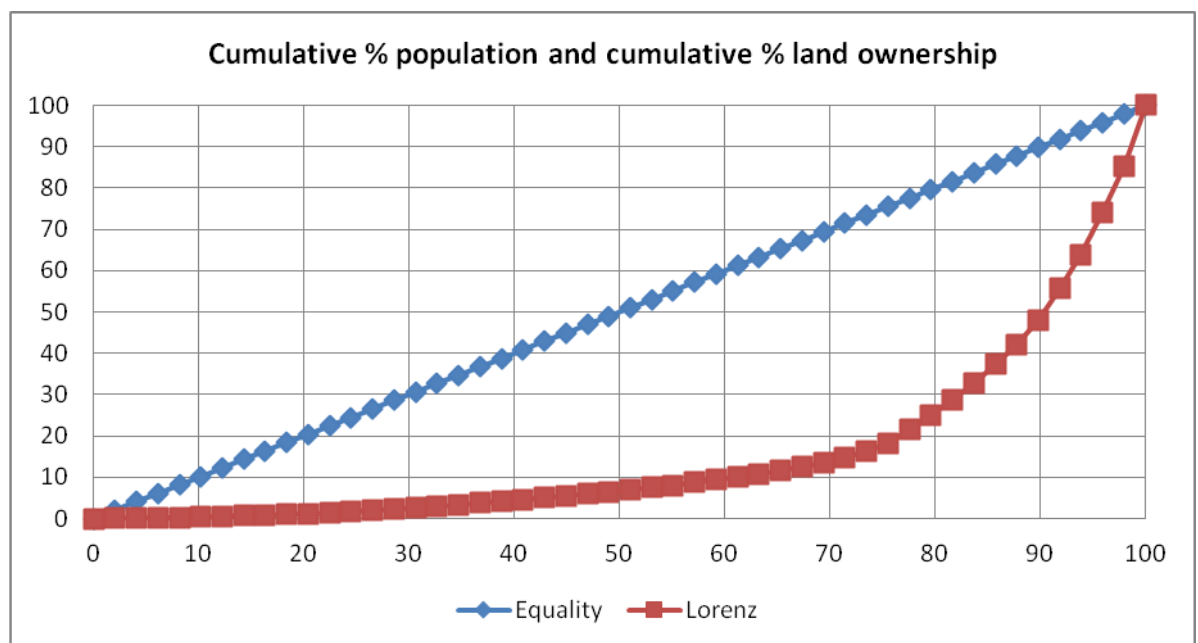


Figure 3. Lorenz curve land ownership in La Estrella (source: own survey)

Since over half of food producers in La Estrella are landless, they have to secure land through arrangements such as land rental and sharecropping. Further, some families who own land may wish to rent or sharecrop as well to meet their land needs. As shown in Table 2 below, around two-thirds of households rent land, and half of them sharecrop. The fact that a lot of production in La Estrella occurs on land owned by others has an important effect both in choice of crops and techniques (see below) as well as in social relations within the village (see Chapter 5).

Table 2. Farmland tenure and use in La Estrella (source: own survey)

	Own land	Rent land	Sharecrop
Number of households	49	73	59
% of total households	42.98	64.04	51.75

To farm, *campesinos* often rent land from hacienda owners and large landowners in the area, paying in cash before each planting season. Sharecropping, on the other hand, is a partnership agreement in which two parties agree to share the responsibility of planting (in terms of inputs and labour) and share 50 percent of the harvest. Hence the relationship is called to work or plant ‘*a medias*’ (halves). There are two main kinds of sharecropping in La Estrella. The first one I call ‘vertical sharecropping’, in which a relatively richer landowner supplies the land and the inputs, and the poorer *campesino* (often landless) supplies the labour. The second one is ‘horizontal or capitalist sharecropping’ in which a wealthy landowner contributes with the land and a wealthy entrepreneur manages the planting and they share the input costs, including the cost of hiring labour. This horizontal sharecropping arrangement requires more liquidity in cash to pay the salaried workers as well as the inputs. I explore these labour and land arrangements in detail in Chapter 6.

How is the planting financed?

Planting requires an important cash investment by *campesinos*. Payments for land rental are most often made in advance of the sowing. Agrochemicals have to be purchased in advance, and seeds can be purchased commercially, bought from neighbours or taken on loan. If workers are hired, these need to be paid in cash¹⁶. For these expenditures, either

¹⁶ The remuneration of workers is of particular importance in this thesis: I explore this in detail in Chapter 6.

farmers use their own savings, sell assets (such as animals) or they borrow money from an institution or exceptionally a wealthy individual.

Credit is available, although it is severely skewed against small-scale producers. This is not only in terms of poorer *campesinos* being able to get credit, but the amounts that they receive tend to be significantly smaller for small-scale basic grain producers (Boucher et al., 2005: 123)¹⁷. In La Estrella, the quantities that were being granted through the national programme CARUNA were on average 3,000 cordobas¹⁸, a quantity that would merely be a small support in liquidity for the purchase of inputs before the season, rather than encouraging a significant change in production (e.g. by purchasing machinery or equipment) that would substantially change their incomes. Even loans granted with a land title through the State-owned FDL for *campesinos* were often only around 7,500 cordobas. Wealthier farmers, however, were able to command bigger loans, reaching over 30,000 cordobas for the wealthiest grain traders and large-scale producers. In La Estrella, 42 per cent of farmers took loans to invest in planting. Such loans were relatively small when compared to costs of production (see costs below). As will be shown below, investment can also originate from savings, sales of assets (such as animals) and incomes obtained from coffee picking or remittances.

What do people plant?

Campesinos in La Estrella are *granobasiqueros*, basic grain producers, specialised in the production of corn and beans. So pervasive is the choice of corn and beans as staple crops that the expression *sembrar* (to sow, or to plant) used on its own, in practice means ‘to plant corn and beans’. Otherwise, when people are referring to other crops, they specify which ones. Of all the households in the village that farm, all but two planted corn and beans. These two households decided *only* to sow red beans, rather than corn *and* beans. Both these households who only produce beans are two wealthy households that have the finances and the ability to plant grains, but choose only to plant those that they perceive as profitable, and they don’t perceive corn to be

¹⁷ A multitude of small NGOs award microcredit which are often used for purchase of inputs for the subsequent planting season. These are often very small amounts and whilst they cover an immediate need for liquidity, they are too small to promote any long-term change in the food security status of the household (Bastiansen and Marchetti 2011).

¹⁸ The cordoba is the Nicaraguan national currency. In 2012, when I conducted my fieldwork, one dollar was equivalent to 24 cordobas.

profitable. See below in Section 3 for discussion on the moral economies of corn and bean production.

Whilst corn and beans are the most pervasive crops in La Estrella, a small number of families have diversified their production. 10 families in La Estrella have also diversified the land around the homestead with different kinds of fruit trees and tubers. In these cases, the lands around the house have mangoes, banana trees, wood trees (such as *teca*), citrus and other fruit trees, yucca and cassava. Once planted, these trees and root crops do not require much labour, and can grow and bear fruit without the use of agrochemicals. The market for these crops is undeveloped in comparison to corn, beans and coffee and horticultural products. Fruits and roots are often used for own consumption, or sold on the road to passersby. On occasion, fruits are given to friends and family as gifts. Often fruits like mangoes or guayabas are left to rot or are picked by children. The main traders in the village prefer to trade in basic grains which do not spoil and are easily stored (so they can hold off sales until prices are high); and occupy low volume in relation to their value. This applies to corn, beans and coffee. Three households had small backyard coffee groves, from a few bushes to one MZ. The case of horticultural products is different to that of fruits and roots. Products such as potatoes, peppers and tomatoes can attain a good price in the market in Matagalpa. Three households in La Estrella were currently planting either tomatoes or peppers. Yet these also require a greater investment in agrochemicals and are a riskier venture (see below).

Thirty households in La Estrella own cattle, but only five cattle farming families in La Estrella own 60 per cent of the cattle in the village; they also own fifty per cent of the land. These wealthy cattle ranchers make most of their income through the sale of milk, cheese and calves. Extensive livestock rearing¹⁹ is the main mechanism for small and medium sized producers to “accumulate capital and savings” (Mordt, 2002: 55-56) and it requires low investment in labour time and is a fairly safe investment, although it involves a significant initial cash to purchase the animal and the availability of land to graze. Those families that have a small number of cattle keep them as a form of backyard farming to improve diets and diversify income. These families are able to

¹⁹ Cattle are kept outdoors on an average land area of 1 MZ per cow, and fed solely with pasture. Wealthier cattle owners with over 20-30 heads also use specialised pasture herbicides to enhance growth of edible pasture species.

consume *cuajada* cheese and milk, obtain a small amount of cash income by selling milk locally, and the animals are a form of ‘storage’ for their savings. Income from selling milk also comes in daily rather than in one-go (as is the case with crops, for which you need to wait for the harvest). The State sponsored programme ‘*bono productivo*’ had given six poor families a pregnant cow each.

Levels of technological intensification and relative risk in agricultural production in La Estrella

What farming techniques are used? Matagalpan highland *campesinos* (big and small) depend on a production system that includes elements of conventional agriculture and agroecological production. Whilst at an academic or campaigning level, making the distinction between ‘industrial agriculture’ and ‘agroecology’ is useful (Rosset and Altieri, 1997), in practice *campesinos* practice *hybrid* forms of production in order to react to their circumstances. In terms of conventional agriculture, the use of commercial herbicides, pesticides and fertilisers (the latter particularly in the case of corn) is pervasive. With the exception of two farms in the village, there are no agro-ecological soil conservation techniques (such as live and dead barriers) in place. On the other hand, there are methods used by *campesinos* in La Estrella that work *with* nature rather than oppose it: beans are used for fertilising the soil, and are often intercropped with corn. Own-grown, native and domesticated²⁰ seed varieties are selected and used to adapt to different weather events or pests. Whilst they use herbicides, the majority practice *espeque* (one point) planting, that doesn’t turn over the soil, hence there is no tillage and the soil erosion is less.

I here describe in detail the techniques used for corn and bean planting, to illustrate the different levels of investment necessary and the risks of different forms of production. In short, we have (i) corn production with use of fertiliser, (ii) bean production without fertiliser, and (iii) bean production with ploughing and fertiliser. Risk to crop losses when planting beans and corn are low for corn in *primera* (it is only planted in *primera*) and beans in *postrera*, then risk is higher for beans in *primera*, and even higher in *apante*, due to heavy or unpredictable rainfall. Please see the seasonal calendar in the figure 4 below.

²⁰ Domesticated seeds are the product of crossing high yielding hybrid varieties with native varieties for several generations.

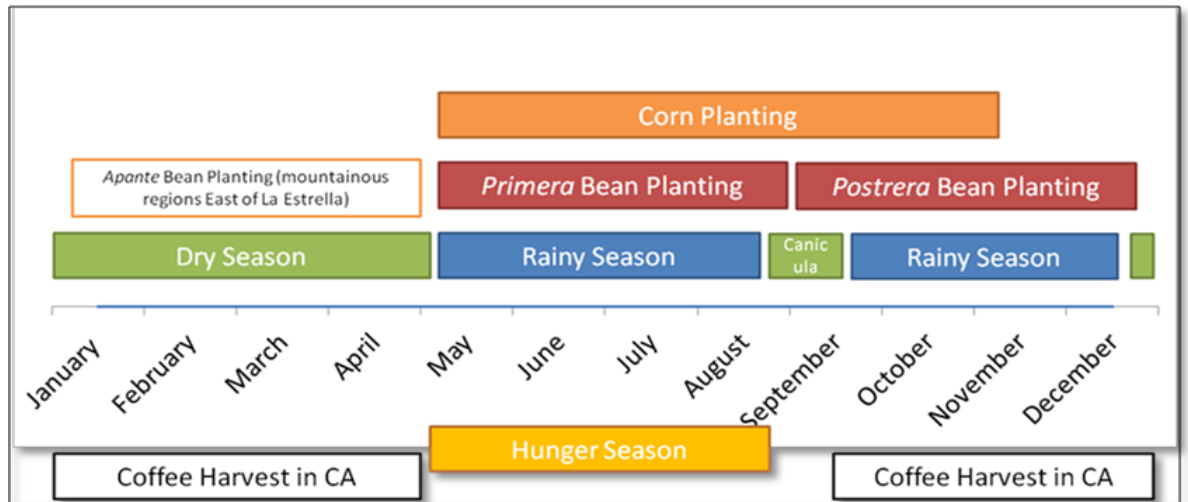


Figure 4. Seasonal calendar of La Estrella

When the April rains break, signalling the beginning of winter, farmers start preparing the land for the *primera* planting. The preparation consists in cutting the brush knee-high with a machete. Once the brush is cut, it is either ‘combed’ to the side with a makeshift rake, left to rot on the field, or most commonly burnt with fire to clear the soil. The objective of burning or combing is to expose the weeds as much as possible so as to make the application of herbicide as effective as possible. The herbicide used varies, Gramoxone, Glyphosate, 2-4-D, and so on. They are all *liquidos* (liquids) or *venenos* (poisons) used to slow down the weeds and stop them interfering with the growth of the grain sprouts²¹. This practice is what is called in La Estrella *quemar* (to burn) and it is carried out a few days before the sowing with a backpack pump sprayer. Due to the particular meteorological constraints marked by the cycle of summer-winter-*canícula* (Indian summer) -winter-summer (see timeline above), the window of opportunity for sowing is only around two weeks, particularly in the case of beans. Sowing too early increases the risk of plagues, whereas sowing late will mean that flowering will occur at too high temperatures in the *canícula* and the harvest under rains, spoiling the grains.

Corn is planted using the *espeque*, a metre-long wooden spear with a metal point to burrow small holes for the seeds. Beans are sown at the same time, either intercropped with corn or on their own. In the case of beans, these can be sown with *espeque*, or for the few who can afford the initial investment, with an ox-plough. The ox-plough turns

²¹ Another reason given for ‘burning with *quimicos*’ is to kill the brush that might be home for mice, who then eat the seedlings.

over the soil and improves the plants' use of soil nutrients, and it allows for fertiliser to be applied simultaneously under the soil with the seeds, making it more effective. The downside of ploughing is the price and the exposure of the soil to the elements. As will be shown below, only those who plant beans for commercial purposes apply plough and fertiliser.

In the case of corn, all farmers use commercial fertiliser, since it is perceived that the soil fertility in the area is so low that corn production without fertiliser is impossible, unless the planting area had been claimed recently from the forest²². Unless the fertiliser has been included directly with the seed, it will be placed at the bottom of the plant 4-6 weeks after sowing when seedlings have produced leaves. Fertiliser would then be reapplied a month later.

In both beans and corn, once the plant has matured and before flowering, these can be *foliadas* (sprayed on the leaves): farmers judge if the plant is growing adequately and if it has any disease or pest, and if necessary they apply foliar fertiliser and pesticide with a pump.

By the end of July, bean plants have already produced pods, and the grains are engorged within them. Fresh bean grains, *camagües*, are much appreciated, and a small portion of them are harvested by hand whilst the majority of the plants are left for dry grain. At around the same time, the female flowers of corn (*chilotes*-what is called baby corn in Asian cuisine) are harvested.

The *canícula* (Indian summer) kicks in the end of August, and the high temperatures start to dry the grains and the pods on the plants. To aid in the drying process, farmers 'pull out' the bean plants of the ground (la *arranca*), and lay them on the ground in bunches. After a few days when the pods are dry and brittle and the grains are hard, the bunches are dragged on a plastic sheet. With the aid of two short sticks, the farmer 'beats' the grains out of the pods, hence it is called *la aporrea* (beating with a stick). The frijol beans are collected and put out to the sun to dry.

Immediately after the *primera* beans have been harvested, the fields are cleared for the *postrera* harvest. The beans are planted by the time the *canícula* ends and the winter

²² A farmer reported that it takes 10 years for a reclaimed piece of land to 'grow tired' i.e. to lose its fertility, after continued use for corn and bean production.

rains restart, now much steadier and softer –and hence risk of damage of seedlings is decreased. The overlap between harvest and sowing means this is a particularly busy time in La Estrella.

August is also the time for celebrating the corn harvest. The first fresh corn cobs (*elote*) are available and with it the myriad of dishes that can be made with it (boiled *elotes*, *guirilas*, *tamales dulces*, *atol*, etc.). Whilst a portion of the harvest is consumed fresh, the majority of the corn is left to dry on the plant. By the end of October the grains are dry, and the cobs can be harvested. If there is intercropping with beans, farmers need to be careful not to damage the bean pods while breaking off the cobs with the inside layer of husk, what is called the *tapisca*. Dry corn cobs can stay on the plant for weeks, which gives farmers flexibility in deciding when to harvest.

By the end of November, the winter is dying out and the days are hotter and drier. The *postrera* bean harvest begins, and farmers go through the same motions of *arranca* and *aporrea*. The beans are dried on plastic sheets in the sun, in front of people's houses, and then stored either in household silos, or in sacks. In the case of corn, families store it on the cob with the protective husk or de-grain the cobs and put the grains into household silos. If de-graining, farmers beat the corn cobs on a large table (a *toldo*) surrounded by plastic and of which the top is a sieve-like panel that allows the free grains to fall on a plastic sheet on the ground. To beat the grain out of the cob, farmers use heavy 1-metre long stick. This de-graining process is called the *aporrea*.

These are the main farming techniques that are used in La Estrella for corn and bean production (see summary in Table 3). I will refer to the gendered and age nature of these activities further below). For the purpose of this chapter, please note in the case of beans there are two levels of intensification, depending on the use of fertiliser and the use of ox-plough. The low input-low productivity model uses the beans own-capacity to fertilise the soil, whereas the higher input-higher productivity model uses commercial fertiliser and ploughing to increase yield.

Primera and *postrera* are the two planting seasons that occur in La Estrella's land, but some farmers invest in a third planting called *Apante*. In 2011, 19 households (16 per cent of households in La Estrella) had invested in *Apante*. For this purpose, *campesinos* travel a hundred miles east towards a high mountainous areas in the humid regions of Matagalpa (an area people in La Estrella call *la montaña*) where it rains during the

summer months. *Campesinos* sow the beans in November and harvest in January. However farmers consider the *Apante* planting a risky venture due to the risk of unexpected rains in the harvest period. The summer, *el verano*, in La Estrella is the dry season from December to May. This period coincides with the coffee harvests in the whole Central American isthmus, which span from mid-September to April. As shown below, many corn and bean producers migrate internally or abroad to pick coffee.

Table 3. Agricultural tasks in Corn and Bean Production in La Estrella

	Corn	Work days per MZ	Beans	Work days per MZ
April	Clearing the Land Combing/burning/leaving to rot	5 1	<u><i>Primera Planting:</i></u> Clearing the Land Combing/burning /leaving to rot	5 1
May	Herbicide application- <i>quema</i> Sowing with <i>espeque</i>	2 4	Herbicide application- <i>quema</i> Sowing (with <i>espeque</i> or plough+fertiliser)	2 Espeque- 8 Plough- 2
June	Application of fertiliser	1	Clearing weeds	2
July	Application of fertiliser Clearing weeds	1 1	Foliar fertiliser and pesticide (if necessary)	3
August	Harvest of <i>chilotes</i> (female flowers) Harvest of fresh corn (<i>elotes</i>) Application of foliar fertiliser and pesticide (if necessary)	Short time throughout several days 2	Harvest camagues (fresh beans)	Short time throughout several days
September	Harvest of fresh corn cobs (<i>elotes</i>) Cutting of extra foliage	Short time throughout several days 1	Harvest grains- Arranca y aporrea <u><i>Postrera planting:</i></u> Clearing the Land Combing/burning /leaving to rot <i>Quemar-</i> application	8 5 1 2

			of herbicides Sowing (with espeque or plough)	Espeque-8 Plough- 2
October	Harvest of dry corn- Tapisca and aporrea	4	Foliar fertiliser and pesticide (if necessary) Clearing weeds	3 2
November	Harvest of dry corn- Tapisca and aporrea (continued)		Harvest camagues (fresh beans)	Short time throughout several days
December			Harvest grains- arranca y aporrea	8

Farming in the Matagalpa highlands is inherently a risky venture. Factors such as too much or too little rain; pests such as mice, insects or lizards; fungus, virus or bacteria, strong side-winds and many other hazards put crop production at risk. Reliability of rainfall is of particular importance, since it can affect the crops mainly in two phases: in the sowing and harvest. In the case of sowing, a too heavy rainfall floods sowing points and the seed rots, or seedlings are damaged by the rain. Drought conditions may hamper the growth of seedlings and will bring pests such as mice and lizards to the crops. Beans and corn require dry weather conditions in order for grains to dry up on the plant; these conditions are achieved in the Indian summer (beans) and at the end of the winter (beans and corn). This prevents undesired sprouting or fungus growth that impedes storage. In 2011, farmers had had important losses in the *Apante* planting due to too much rain in the harvest. The Indian summer of 2012, the year I did my fieldwork, was too wet, and some harvest was lost to premature sprouting. Corn, on the other hand, is relatively hardier than beans in terms of rainfall. It can therefore resist high temperatures and short periods of low rainfall.

During my fieldwork, three households had engaged in horticultural production, mainly tomato and pepper production. Due to space constraints, I will not explore in detail the farming activities involved in the farming of these products but I offer here a small

summary of these high value crops²³. It is important to highlight how these two crops are farmed in La Estrella through the use of agrochemicals in relatively small plots, between $\frac{1}{4}$ and $\frac{1}{2}$ MZ. Horticultural products require plenty of water, hence tomatoes and peppers are planted in plots next to the rivers and farmers require some kind of irrigation system, the most basic one being a motor-pump and a hose.

The growing method in La Estrella is open-air and requires using a battery of commercial agrochemicals to clear the land, to feed the tomato plants and to prevent and treat diseases, which are relatively frequent (Ministerio de Fomento, 2007). Seeds are relatively expensive, and land rental for tomatoes doubles that of land dedicated to beans or corn²⁴. Seeds are planted in August in small nursery plots which are watered daily and fed with liquid fertiliser. A month afterwards, when young plants reach around 10 cm, these are transplanted to their final plot of land. Young tomato and pepper plants require physical support, and farmers need to invest in canes and cordons to steady the plant. Fertiliser is applied to the soil and insecticides and fungicides are applied to prevent diseases. Tomato planting requires close supervision to react quickly to diseases and pests and watering, hence it is relatively time intensive. As will be shown below, tomato and pepper production is a risky venture and it requires a relatively high investment in inputs. The upside is high production of a product highly valued in the marketplace *if there is no oversupply*.

Labour arrangements

Who carries out the farming activities detailed above? Whilst I will cover labour arrangements in more detail in Chapter 6, I offer here a summary of the labour arrangements necessary to carry out these activities. The sowing and harvest seasons are the most labour intensive: particularly in September, when the *primera* harvest and the *postrera* sowing overlap. As part of my household survey I enquired about the use of salaried labour in support of planting: 50 per cent reported using solely family labour, and the rest reported having hired day labourers at some point. There is great diversity amongst those who do require day workers, including families owning land, renters and

²³ As mentioned in Chapter 2, other Central American countries have diversified their agriculture production into high-value horticultural production, yet Nicaragua has focused mainly on grain commodities and cattle (Baumeister 2009).

²⁴ Landowners consider that different crops represent different degrees of strain on the land, and hence price them accordingly. I explore this and other issues around land rental in the following chapter.

sharecroppers. There are two important factors to understand in the allocation of labour in La Estrella: the bias towards labour productivity and labour scarcity.

In terms of how farmers prioritise how they use their time and their money, *campesinos* in La Estrella prioritise labour productivity. As will be shown below, labour-saving techniques are chosen over labour-intensive ones (e.g. herbicide use over manual weeding) or livelihood strategies are chosen that are highly paid per day (e.g. coffee picking in the summer) over less productive ones. Labour intensive technologies are considered “expensive in work” (*caro en trabajo*) and use the expression ‘quicker’ or ‘easier’ (*mas rapido* or *mas facil*) to illustrate their understanding of prioritising labour productivity.

Paid employment in agricultural production in La Estrella occurs in two forms: as contract work, paying a fixed amount for an agreed task such as to sow a particular quantity of seeds, to clear or harvest an established area of land; or as day work, paying for each day of work. In La Estrella, workers are neighbouring farmers hired locally, thus most workers are simultaneously also producers. This translates into an important labour scarcity in peak sowing and harvest times of the year. I will explore in Chapter 6 how economic incentives, social norms and moral judgements shape the allocation of labour in La Estrella. Labour scarcity has implications in terms of the leverage that day labourers have in terms of negotiating salaries, fees for contract work, and working conditions. In terms of working conditions, and particularly important for the discussion in this chapter, there are some common understandings on what is a ‘normal’ agricultural task and how it should be remunerated. This has implications in those cases in which technologies diverge from the norm (such as the case of agroecological techniques), which may be resisted by salaried workers or these may require a higher salary.

Until now I have spoken of how ‘*campesinos*’ or ‘*campesino*’ households carry out agricultural tasks or invest their labour. Yet there is also a gender and age distribution of labour in the household. So what is expected of household members? In terms of farming, men do a majority of the tasks, and unpaid housework and childcare are predominantly female. For the purpose of conciseness see Table 4 below for the typical gender and age division of labour in La Estrella’s households. However, I encourage the reader not to see it as reified or static. Firstly, whilst agricultural work is dominated

by men, in the first years of a new household in which children are small- and hence can't help in chores- women participate much more in the planting. When male children grow up, they replace their mother in many tasks, and women and girls then only participate in the harvest. Secondly, expectations vary in terms of more or less patriarchal families. In less patriarchal families, men will be encouraged to help in the housework, or women will feel more capable of undertaking agricultural activities such as sowing. Thirdly, necessity undermines this division of labour: for example mothers in female headed households in La Estrella were likely to get involved directly in planting, either investing in it (e.g. managing 1 MZ of beans or corn), or as salaried workers for other farmers. According to my interviews and life-stories, in the majority of households in La Estrella decision-making about agricultural investment, sales and management of household finances is carried out by men. However, a few household wives and a significant number of female-headed households²⁵ highlighted having their own separate finances and reported feeling more economically independent because of it. The predominance of men in reaping the cash benefits of agricultural investment in basic grains in agriculture is particularly relevant in the discussion on gendered access to markets which I pursue in Chapters 6 and 7. Because of the gendered bias in accessing the benefits of the subsistence economy, how to judge food vs. cash crops like coffee will inevitably be a discussion on gender equality.

²⁵ Not all of them, since in some female-headed households with grown young men, it is the oldest son who takes over agricultural investment.

Table 4. Gender and age distribution of labour in La Estrella

Men of working age ²⁶	Women of working age	Girls	Boys
Clear the land	Cleaning	Harvest	Planting (play to full-time work)
Sowing	Cooking		
Care of crops	Childcare	Studying ²⁷	
Harvesting		Housework (play to full-time work)	Picking coffee with parent(s)
Caring for cattle	Feeding backyard animals		
Agricultural day labour in the <i>comunidad</i>	Gathering firewood	Picking coffee with parent(s)	
	Harvesting		
Picking coffee	Picking coffee		
Construction work (in the city)			
	Babysitting in the city		
Farmwork (abroad)	Cleaning in the city		

Please note the important difference between men and women in terms of selling their manual labour locally. Whilst working age men often work for extended family and neighbours as agricultural labour (e.g. sowing or clearing the land) for their bean and corn production and get paid in cash for doing so, it is very uncommon for women to engage in this kind of practice. In La Estrella, I solely witnessed two female heads of household who were earning cash by harvesting beans for a neighbour. Women are less

²⁶ Children are introduced to their household and agricultural tasks through play when they are around 10 years old, and are then expected to work as much as an adult when they are in their mid-teens.

²⁷ You may have noticed that I only have put studying for girls rather than boys. In the interviews I conducted, parents would feel studying was a worthwhile endeavour in general, but particularly so for girls.

likely to participate in the corn and bean economy, and if they do, they are often unpaid. This has implications when comparing the gendered aspects of the subsistence (corn and beans) and cash crop (coffee) economies (see Chapters 6 and 7).

Taking into account the differences in finance, land and labour arrangements, together with the farming techniques employed I have explained above, I have categorised farming households in La Estrella into the following:

- Cattle ranchers and hacienda owners that produce a small quantity of corn and beans for consumption, often sharecropping with their permanent workers. Low input-low production (no fertilizer on beans, no horticultural products).
- Cash strapped (although high value in assets) cattle ranchers and hacienda owners who engage with entrepreneurial sharecroppers to carry out ‘horizontal sharecropping’ for commercialisation. High input-high productivity planting (fertilizer on beans)
- Entrepreneurial sharecroppers who have cash but not land, and hence either rent the land, or participate in ‘horizontal sharecropping’, and hire labour. High input-high productivity planting (fertilizer on beans and horticultural products)
- Landed *campesinos* that commercialise surplus, using own labour, arrange vertical sharecropping or hire labour occasionally. If finances are high enough- high input- high productivity planting and horticultural products, but most often low input-low productivity.
- Landless peasants who have the finances to rent land and commercialise surplus. Low input-low production (no fertilizer on beans, no horticultural products).
- *Campesinos* with low finances who have small plots of land and do not produce surplus for commercialization
- Landless *campesinos* with low finances who rent land and do not produce surplus for commercialisation

- Subordinate vertical sharecroppers who only have their labour and arrange to produce ‘*a medias*’.
- Those who have not succeeded in finding land or could not afford the rental prices, and who did not engage in sharecropping activities, and depend on off-farm activities such as salaried labour.

Agroecological production in La Estrella

I include this reflection because of the importance of agroecology in small scale food production within food sovereignty discourse (see Chapter 1), rather than because it is a common practice in La Estrella. As described above, all beans and corn in La Estrella are produced through a hybrid form of production that uses agrochemicals yet uses native seeds and intercrops beans and corn. But how do farmers view agroecology?

In La Estrella, with the exception of a handful of *campesinos* connected to agricultural NGOs, farmers did not use the Spanish equivalent “*agroecológico*”, but rather spoke of these alternative forms of production as ‘organic’ (*organico*) or ‘without chemicals’ (*sin químicos*). They counterpose these concepts to how their own form of production is commonly described in La Estrella: ‘with chemicals’ (*con químicos*). This form of production *con químicos* would not be considered agroecology according to all the definitions that circulate in global fora. Agrochemicals were introduced into La Estrella by the support packages to cooperatives in the 1980s, and since then they have become pervasive in agriculture. So pervasive and longstanding is this hybrid production with agrochemicals that some farmers would speak of conventional forms of production as ‘traditional’.

When asked to reflect on different forms of production, the oldest *campesinos* recalled the old technologies used previous to the introduction of modern forms of agriculture. In the beginning of the 20th century La Estrella was a sparsely populated village, and land was relatively abundant. *Campesinos* moved from one plot to another every year, and a piece of land was left fallow for a few years before being reused. When it was reused, the brush was burnt with fire and then cleared with a machete at ground level. This clearing was very labour intensive, and each MZ would require 16 days of work²⁸.

²⁸ Hence the expression *tarea* –task- to define a 1/16 of MZ. This would be the land area assigned to a day labourer clearing the brush.

Corn and beans would be planted with *espeque*, and the weeds would be cut down often around the plants with a machete at ground level, keeping unwanted competition to crops at bay. Harvests could treble current ones. This traditional form of production was transformed by the arrival of herbicides, which could clear a MZ with just one day of spraying. Further, La Estrella's population increased, and land became increasingly scarce, with plots no longer being left fallow.

I gave a short introduction to the work of agricultural development NGOs such as PCAC, ADDAC and FUNDEGL, in La Estrella in Section 2. Through activities such as farmers' exchanges, training in agroecological techniques, pilot plots and input delivery, these projects have aimed to support small-scale landed²⁹ farming households by transforming their livelihoods by promoting three main changes: (i) crop diversification, (ii) soil conservation technologies to enhance fertility, and a (iii) substitution of commercial-chemical inputs for organic ones.

In La Estrella, 11 households have participated as volunteer extension workers for these programmes. These *promotores* received training and material benefits such as tools, saplings, seeds and equipment to make organic fertiliser. These *promotores* were then expected to transmit that knowledge to other farmers in their communities. Out of these 11 households, seven have implemented some sort of crop diversification, other than corn and beans: fruit trees, coffee plants or roots. However these projects are not the only factor that determines diversification, since there are 8 households who are *not* project beneficiaries and also have planted other crops. As shown above, a fruit orchard or coffee grove requires a significant initial investment (procuring the saplings) and time investments to tend the young plants in the beginning, but once bushes and trees are established they require little time and these trees are relatively resistant to pests and hence require no chemicals.

In La Estrella there are two farmers who have carried out soil conservation techniques, who are also beneficiaries of FUNDEGL. These consist in building barriers along contour lines to avoid the top soil being washed by the rain. Dead barriers are stone walls, ditches and wooden fences. Live barriers are lines of crops such as green manure

²⁹These organisations target households who have small plots of land (<5 MZ), although exceptionally farmers with larger plots are included in some of their schemes, such as the microcredit scheme.

legumes (tree-like species like velvet beans³⁰) or sugar cane. The purpose of these barriers is avoiding the top-soil being washed away by the rains, by slowing down the water running down the slopes. This impedes soil erosion and enhances fertility. Constructing these barriers represents an important initial labour investment, which will vary according to the topography of the farmland. This initial investment requires not only time, but in the case of dead barriers, they also involve backbreaking work. To give the reader an idea, Andres (see below) and his son took 40 days to build an 8 metre wall made out of large rocks that crosses his plot. Yet once the investment is done, maintenance requirements are relatively low: maintaining the depth of ditches and replacing live barrier plants when they die out.

Farming '*organico*' or '*sin quimicos*' only applies to fruit orchards in La Estrella. *Campesinos* produce corn and beans always with commercial herbicides, pesticides and fertilisers. Several farmers told me they knew how to make organic fertiliser, but did not make it for their crops. There is a partial exception. Andres is one of the two farmers I mentioned who had implemented these soil conservation technologies. He has been a beneficiary of both ADDAC and FUNDEGL agricultural projects. His *parcela*³¹ (3 MZ) is highly diversified, including orchards of fruit trees, a small pond, a small pasture enclosure for a cow, and a small vegetable garden. He has built live and dead barriers in his plot, which he uses to capture topsoil for composting his *parcela*. He also manages a small pilot plot (1/4 MZ) for experimentation with organic bean production encouraged by the organisation. As one of FUNDEGL's volunteer extension workers, he is responsible of reproducing seeds organically for the seed bank, and the plot is a model for other farmers on organic bean farming. In terms of farming activities, this small plot of organic land is cleared using a machete, and then the weeds are cleared with fire from a gas canister before sowing. Andres makes his own organic fertiliser mixing manure, topsoil from his dead barrier and other farm inputs. However, the bulk of his frijol and corn production are produced through conventional agriculture. He rents 3 MZ and sharecrops 1 MZ with one of the wealthy commercial grain producers in La Estrella. 'Those are pure *quimicos*' he said when I enquired about how he produces on those plots.

³⁰ These green manure legumes are also useful in terms of capturing nitrogen into the soil, they suppress weed around them and the leaves make a good mulch.

³¹ *Parcela* can be translated as 'land plot' or loosely as 'farm', because it implies not only the land itself, but also what has been cultivated on it. In Chapter 5 I show how land itself and its use are strongly bound by a particular ethics of land tenure.

Despite depending on ‘*con químicos*’ production, farmers in La Estrella are deeply aware of the ecological challenges that they are facing. *Campesinos* reported a significant loss of soil fertility in the valley, using the expression ‘the lands are tired’ (*‘las tierras estan cansadas’*). The notion of tiredness was linked to overuse and failure to let the land ‘rest’ (*descansar*) through fallow periods every three years as was done in the past. Population growth and increased demand for land for cultivation and cattle grazing means that farmland is reused every year.

The continuous loss of soil fertility in the past decades is connected to decreasing production. Farmers reported that corn in the 1980 could be expected to produce up to 140 quintales³² per MZ, whilst now at most it produces 40 with fertiliser. In the case of frijol beans, people reported up to 100 quintales per MZ in the 80s, whilst today at most 35 with fertiliser. This decrease in total production has meant a demand for a larger land area per family to attain the same quantity of produce and an increased dependence on commercial fertiliser, especially in the case of corn³³. The poorest families in La Estrella who could not afford enough fertiliser have to accept significantly lower corn yields. Farmers attributed fertility decreases also to the farming methods that they used, particularly the use of agrochemicals that ‘make the land ill’ (*enferman la tierra*).

Corn and bean production in La Estrella

How much farmers harvested in 2011 varied significantly between households. Similarly to what happens in the inequalities in land access and finance, total grain production is skewed towards a small number of producers. As can be seen in Table 5 below, there is a small minority of farmers who harvested a lot of quintales in 2011: 6-7 per cent of households have a high production (over 100 quintales of corn or beans), whilst a majority of farmers 59-60 per cent have a relatively small harvest of less than 30 quintales.

³² A *quintal* is a colonial Castillian measure for weight that equals 46 kg, or 101.4 pounds.

³³ As the reader is already aware, legumes like beans capture nitrogen from the atmosphere and incorporate it into the soil, thus playing a role in fertilising the land. Corn, on the other hand, does not have this capacity.

Table 5. La Estrella: total production of corn and beans in Q (source: own survey)

	Number of HH 0- 30 Q	Number of HH 30- 50 Q	Number of HH 50-100 Q	Number of HH More than 100 Q	T o t a l
Corn	55	16	15	7	93
Corn (%)	59%	17%	16%	8%	100%
Beans	50	17	10	6	83
Beans (%)	60%	20%	12%	7%	100%

The level of productivity per MZ varies significantly in La Estrella. See the distribution of productivity in La Estrella in figure 5 below. Note that in comparison to beans, corn is more productive in volume (in quintales) harvested per MZ. Secondly note that the range of productivity varies significantly between households, from under 10 Quintales of corn up to over 50 quintales, and an average of 15 quintales. In the case of beans there is a similar variability, ranging from under 5 to over 30 quintales per MZ, and an average of 12 Quintales. Figure 5 below shows how there are two areas of concentration in the beans curve that reflect the different intensification of agricultural practices mentioned above, an area around the 10 quintales mark and an area around the 20 quintales which reflect the two forms of bean production above, the low input-low production and the high-input high productivity one. There are other sources of variability in productivity, such as the recent reclaiming of forested land (which would give high results due to high soil fertility) and crop losses (which would shed low results).

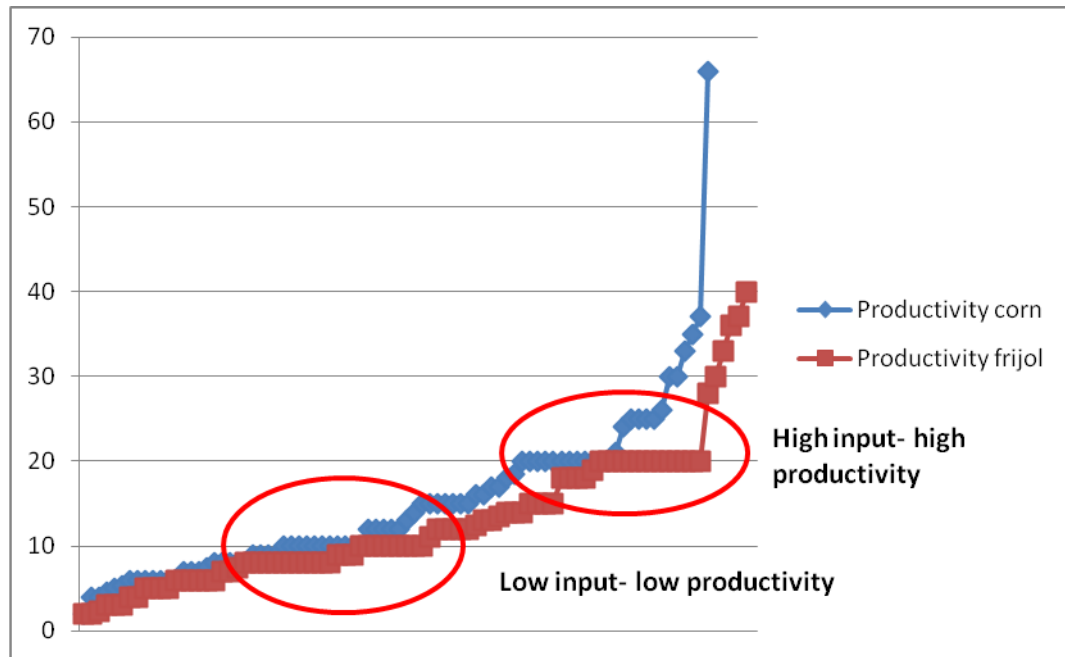


Figure 5. Distribution of corn and bean production in quintales per manzana (own survey)

In this section I have shown the different kinds of agricultural production that exist in La Estrella and I introduced the different kinds of households, depending on their endowments in land, finance and labour, and their capacity to invest in different crops and different levels of intensification. In section 2 I will show how these choices are also shaped by *campesinos'* relationship with markets.

Section 4. *Campesino* engagement with food markets

Normally, the majority of farmers in La Estrella keep their corn and beans for their own consumption during the year, and commercialize the surplus. I explore this practice and its moral underpinnings in the following chapter. However, only almost half of *campesinos* achieve grain self-sufficiency: 51 per cent of grain producers do not manage to cover their corn and bean requirements (what is called '*ajustar*', to equate or break even) and have to purchase these in the market. The moment in which *campesino* families need to start buying their grain in the market will determine how affected they will be by market prices. In La Estrella, farmers who didn't manage to '*ajustar*', had to purchase food as early as January-February in the worse cases, and almost half had to purchase food between May and June. This time right before the *primera* harvest coincides with high grain prices. This hunger season hits the poor and landless hardest. Jaime is a landless producer and day labourer and he describes the cycle:

The worse times of the year are April-May-June-July, but the hardest are June and July. By that time you don't have any money left, there is no work available and the food is running low. Only in August one starts gathering the *tiernos* (green beans), then the *camagiües* (fresh bean grains), and soon after the *chilotes* (female flowers- baby corn), the frijol beans and the corn on the cob. That's when life begins.

Even those who don't produce enough to cover their own-consumption for the whole year need to sell some reserves to purchase essentials which most *campesinos* identify as soap, sugar, rice, cooking oil and clothes. Yet the majority did not sell any of their corn reserves (66 percent) and those who did sell corn, sold on average 2.2 Q of corn in the market. On the other hand, these *campesinos* sold more beans (on average 5.8 Q). This marks the difference between corn and beans in *campesinos*' eyes, in which beans are seen more as a commodity to get cash into the household, whereas they prefer to hang on to the corn which they value fundamentally for its use. As will be shown in the following chapter, the fluctuation of prices and a particular ethic encourages farmers to store enough grains to ensure they avoid the hunger season of high prices.

Those who did succeed in *ajustar*, were able to sell their crops in the market, and most importantly, the more surplus they had, the more able they would be to choose when to sell the grain to obtain a higher price. Even amongst these net food producers in La Estrella, there is a tendency to keep the corn for consumption and use beans to generate cash: half of these households kept the totality of their corn and the rest sold on average 12.2 quintales, whereas in the case of beans, only a quarter of households kept the totality of their beans and sold on average 22.2 quintales of beans.

For the purpose of this chapter I simplify by saying 'selling in the market'. This is consistent with *campesinos* in La Estrella speaking of the market in two aspects, as we would do in the UK today: in an abstract form, where '*el mercado* sets the price', and in a specific form, in which the market exchange takes place as a social exchange. I use the abstract form for the analysis I carry out in this chapter, and in Chapter 4 I will unravel what 'the market' is in reality, and explore what market channels farmers choose, and for what reasons, and the role of mutuality and solidarity in shaping these market relations as personal relations.

Please note that grain and beans are fairly undifferentiated commodities in Nicaraguan Highlands' markets. As long as they meet basic standards, same variety in the same sack, low humidity and no dust or bits mixed in with the grain, they attain the same

price. The way grains are produced makes no difference to the price. There is no differentiated market for organic beans or corn in Nicaragua, hence the agroecological production of beans does not receive a price premium.

Some vegetables like tomato and pepper can attain a good price, but if the harvest in the area of the Yulolí River is good, the market easily floods with produce. This market glut is referred to as ‘the square fills up’ (*‘se llena la plaza’*). If this happens, the prices don’t even compensate the cost of harvesting the produce.

On the other hand, corn and bean markets are better integrated into Central American and international markets (Ministerio de Fomento, 2012), which has positive and negative effects. In a high local production scenario, there would still be a demand for corn and beans, albeit at low prices because it would be channelled to the Central American market³⁴. The consequence is local grain markets are thus impacted by fluctuations at a global level. For example the increase in grain prices during the international grain price hike of 2008-09 were felt by Nicaraguan *campesinos*, both in positive and negative ways depending on the grain self-sufficiency of the household. It is important to see basic grain producers as both producers *and* consumers of grain to see how different *campesinos* are impacted by their relationship to a fluctuating market. Around half of households in La Estrella have to purchase grain in the market at some point in the year, and all producers sell surplus grain produce to obtain cash (even if it is to buy essentials such as soap, rice or clothes). High grain prices of recent years are a mixed blessing for *campesinos*, depending if they are net-food producers or net-food consumers. High grain prices are a problem for landless workers who do not plant. Similarly poorer *campesinos* who do produce grains will need to purchase corn and beans in the hungry season, because they would have eaten or sold their last year’s harvest (to return loans, purchase basic items for planting or for consumption) before the *primera* harvest arrives. Poorer and landless *campesinos* are more likely to be negatively affected by high grain prices; hence in this case the broad category ‘*campesino*’ hides important economic differences between those who are net food producers and net food consumers (Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), 2008).

In the last decades farmers have encountered increasing input prices (mainly herbicides and pesticides) whilst obtaining decreasing farm gate prices. This decreasing trend

³⁴ Nicaragua is a net exporter of frijol beans to the Central American market.

reversed in the beginning of 2000, and grain prices have increased yet are highly volatile (Paz Mena et al., 2007: 9). Price volatility occurs seasonally during the year – with an established hunger season in the months preceding the *primera* harvest in July-August where prices are high, and in harvest times the prices fall significantly (see figure 6 for price trends from January to December 2012- source UPANIC).

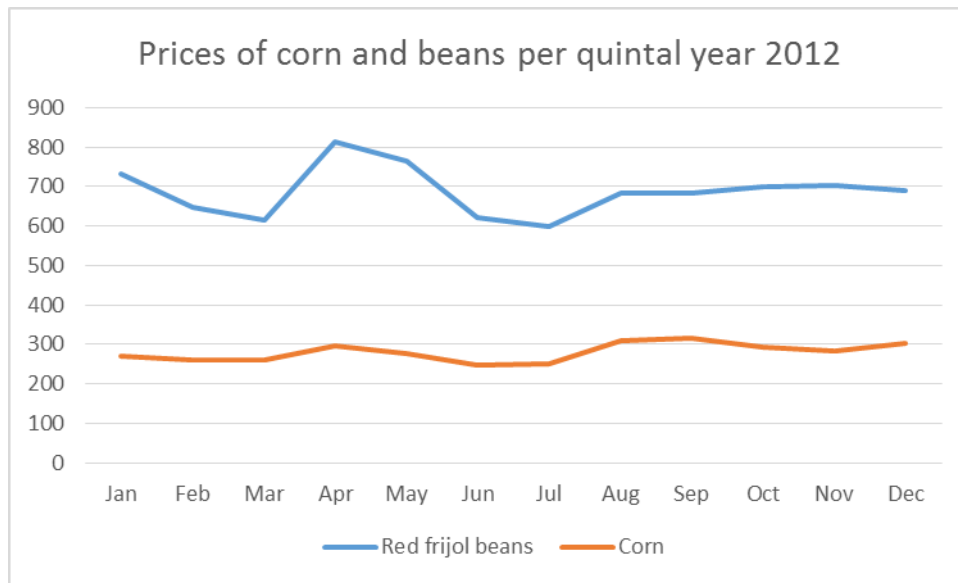


Figure 6. Farmgate prices of corn and beans per quintal in Nicaragua (Source: UPANIC)

Prices also fluctuate heavily (more in the case of frijol beans than corn) in different years (see figure 7). The graph shows that prices have increased significantly since 2005, and the spikes (more evident in beans) are indicative of price fluctuations, which make long-term strategizing complicated for farmers.

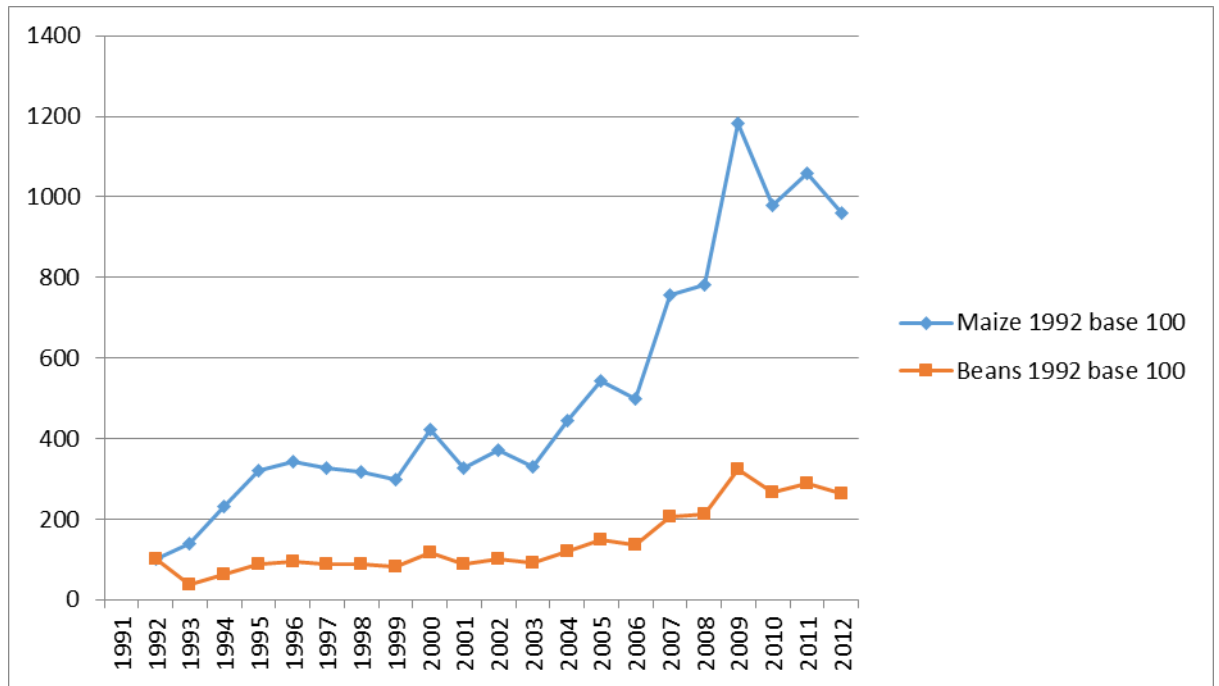


Figure 7. Prices per quintal of corn and beans (Source: FAOSTAT)

Between producers and consumers there is a long chain of traders (*'intermediarios'*) that capture a significant portion of the value of the produce. Local traders and intermediaries at a national and international level capture the majority of the value of these fluctuations: of the final market price, bean producers get 40 per cent, whilst corn gets 53 per cent (Tijerino Verdugo et al., 2008: 89,99). As I will explore in detail in Chapter 4, where I describe market relations as social relations, village traders play an important role (amongst others) in providing inputs, food items or cash on loan to the poorest producers in the lean months, and often these poorer farmers sell portions of their harvest 'in advance' to the local trader, what is called in Nicaragua *vender adelantado*. The price they would get is around 50 per cent of the price that would be attained in the harvest. Chente, the municipal staff member responsible for agricultural livelihoods, highlights how traders take advantage of *campesinos*.

"For example with the bean harvest, the *'intermediarios'* (the traders) buy in advance at rock bottom prices (*'a guatemojado'*), and in the end the producers are producing at a price below their costs of production. In the end the producers will stop producing, and we will need to bring the products from outside."

A discussion on returns to investment

This fear, of *campesinos* stopping farming altogether, has not materialised, but the quote above sheds doubts on the market profitability of grain in La Estrella. I discuss here what farmers reflect on as '*rentabilidad*' ('profitability' or 'returns to investment'), comparing their costs of production with the price they would get for the produce in the market. Concerns about market profitability were often articulated in La Estrella when discussing the prices of products.

In Table 6 below, I offer a comparison of the returns to investment in corn and beans. I use here the most common ways of producing these crops: corn production (always with fertiliser), beans with no fertiliser (low input-low productivity), beans with fertiliser planted with a plough (high input-high productivity), and an estimate on the returns of implementing agroecological techniques in beans.

Table 6. Cost and return to investment comparison of different forms of corn and bean planting practised in La Estrella

Corn sown with espeque and with fertiliser					Beans sown with <i>espeque</i> and no fertiliser (Low-input, low-productivity)					Beans sown with oxplough and fertiliser (High-input, high-productivity)					Agroecological beans with no external inputs				
Task	days/person/MZ	cost type	Unit price	sub total	Task	days/person/MZ	cost type	Unit price	sub total	Task	days/person/MZ	cost type	Unit price	sub total	Task	days/person/MZ	cost type	Unit price	sub total
Land rental		Input	1500	1500	Land rental		Input	1500	1500	Land rental		Input	1500	1500	Land rental		Input	1500	1500
Clearing the land (chapodar) (contract)	5 to 6	Labour	600	800	Clearing the land (chapodar) (contract)	6	Labour	800	800	Clearing the land (chapodar) (contract)	(5-6)	Labour	800	800	Clearing the land (chapodar) at ankle height (15-16 days)	16	Labour	80	1280
Seed purchase		Input	60	60	Seed purchase		Input	120	120	Seed purchase		Input	120	120	Seed purchase		Input	120	120
Herbicide purchase		Input	1200	1200	Herbicide purchase		Input	1200	1200	Herbicide purchase		Input	1200	1200	Burning weeds with	2	Labour	80	160
Herbicide application	1	Labour	80	80	Herbicide application	2	Labour	80	160	Herbicide application	2	Labour	80	160	Sowing seeds	8	Labour	80	640
Sowing seeds	4	Labour	80	320	Sowing seeds	8	Labour	80	640	Plough rental (2 days)- includes sowing and fertilising	2	Labour	250	500	Preparation organic	2	Labour	80	160
Purchase fertiliser		Input	1200	1200	Leaf fertiliser (foleo) (if necessary)		Input	130	130	Sowing and fertiliser behi	2	Labour	80	160	Application organic	2	Labour	80	160
Fertilisation	2	Labour	80	160	Fumigation	3	Labour	80	240	Purchase fertiliser		Input	1200	1200	Fumigation (bio)	3	Labour	80	240
Leaf fertiliser (foleo)		Input	130	130	Clearing weeds	2	Labour	80	160	Leaf fertiliser (foleo)		Input	130	130	Clearing weeds	4	Labour	80	320
Fumigation	2	Labour	80	160	Harvest- Arranca	4	Labour	80	320	Fumigation	3	Labour	80	240	Harvest- Arranca	4	Labour	80	320
Clearing weeds	2	Labour	80	160	Harvest- Aporrea	4	Labour	80	320	Clearing weeds	2	Labour	80	160	Harvest- Aporrea	4	Labour	80	320
Harvest	4	Labour	80	320						Harvest- Arranca	4	Labour	80	320				TOTAL	5220
										Harvest- Aporrea	4	Labour	80	320	Initial investment soil conservation				
															Building dead barrier Labour	40		80	3200
															Sowing live barriers Labour	1		80	80
			TOTAL	6090				TOTAL	5590				TOTAL	6810				TOTAL	8500
Average yearly price of corn	Average bean production /MZ La Estrella	Returns (Sales - costs)			Average yearly price of beans	Average bean production /MZ La Estrella	Returns (Sales - costs)			Average yearly price of beans	Average bean production /MZ La Estrella	Returns (Sales - costs)			Average yearly price of beans	Average bean production /MZ La Estrella	Returns (Sales - costs)		
Returns to investment in corn production	280	15	4200	-1890	Returns to investment in bean production	687	12.8	8793.6	3203.6	Returns to investment	687	20	13740	6930	Returns to investment (without initial investment)	687	12.8	8793.6	3573.6
Required production to break even	Returns/price=609 0/280	21.75			Required production to break even	Returns/price=55 90/687	8.14			Required production to break even	Costs/price=6810/ 687	9.91			Required production to break even	Returns/price=5220 /687	7.60		
Percentage of campesinos who cover production costs	Producers with over 21 quintales 13/82*100	15.85			Percentage of campesinos who cover production costs	Producers with over 8 quintales 66/87*100	75.86			Percentage of campesinos who cover production costs	Producers with over 10 quintales 51/87*100	58.62			Percentage of campesinos who cover production costs	Producers with over 8 quintales 66/87*100	75.86		
Percentage of campesinos who produced at a loss	69/82*100	84.15			Percentage of campesinos who produced at a loss	21/87*100	24.14			Percentage of campesinos who produced at a loss	36/87*100	41.38			Percentage of campesinos who produced at a loss	21/87*100	24.14		

From this comparative exercise above in Table 6, we take away the following: (i) market returns of investment to corn are significantly lower than those of frijoles, and a majority of farmers are producing corn at a loss, (ii) a majority of farmers do cover their investment costs when producing beans, (iii) when farmers intensify bean production with the use of fertiliser and plough the land (what I call high-input, high-productivity), the total investment increases substantially, but so does their profit per MZ, and (iv) agroecological production of beans does not reduce costs substantially vis-à-vis conventional bean production due to higher labour costs, and requires relatively high start-up costs in soil conservation practices³⁵.

However, as will be shown in the section below, market profitability is only half the story. *Campesinos* continue to plant corn and beans regardless of their market profitability. The economic logic of *campesinos* in La Estrella is different: they have particular moralities of agricultural markets. I will explore this moral economy of production in Chapter 4.

Other sources of income and livelihood diversification

Grain market prices create risks and opportunities for farmers in La Estrella. Engaging in grain farming and marketing production creates a vulnerability due to fluctuations in production and fluctuation in market prices that is often mitigated by the possibility of salaried labour in coffee haciendas in the dry season. Between the months of January to May, haciendas across Nicaragua and other Central American countries hire thousands of workers to harvest the coffee.

All corn and beans are rainfed in La Estrella (and across the region of Matagalpa only 2 per cent of basic grain land is irrigated), therefore the ‘quiet times’ for basic grain production (the dry season) coincide with the peak demands for picking coffee (January to April). This is what is called ‘*el corte*’ or ‘*ir a cortar cafe*’ (literally ‘the cutting’ or ‘to go and cut coffee’). Since many families retain most of their produce of grain and

³⁵ For the purpose of this exercise I have included in this table the going market price for labour (80 cordobas/day) in La Estrella, but as I will explore in Chapter 6, the prices and conditions of labour vary enormously depending on the social relationship between employer and the employee and these variations are crucial for discussions on moral economy. For the purpose of looking at the market profitability of different kinds of crops I will consider them constant. I use for the comparison the average production in the village of 12.8 quintales of beans per MZ and 15 quintales of corn per MZ (according to the household survey I conducted). Whilst I have included the cost of beans in the cost analysis, it is important to note that many farmers reuse their own seed (and therefore do not need to pay for it), or purchase it in the *comunidad* at lower prices than they would find in Matagalpa.

corn for own consumption rather than selling it outright, often families are cash-strapped. Coffee wages represent a timely injection of cash into the household in a time when cash payments (for inputs, for land) need to be made for the following harvest.

Of all the farmers I interviewed, the majority of poorest families (particularly those landless and with a shortfall in food production) relied on their coffee salaries: 35 per cent of households in La Estrella reported relying on temporary work in the haciendas. Even in wealthier families that produced a surplus of grain, the younger members would go off to earn some extra cash³⁶.

In La Estrella coffee-picking is not only a necessity for the poorest families, but is also an insurance mechanism for those landed peasants who produce grains. Participating in the coffee economy, through diversifying income, is building *campesinos'* risk management. For example, Teodoro's family, a farmer who owned 4 MZ of land and regularly was able to make a living out of selling his surplus of grain had to resort to coffee picking because their *Apante* harvest had failed³⁷ and they had had to return a large loan in his wife's name. Picking coffee is back-breaking work, but coffee wages can be very attractive. A person picking for a month can make 4,000 to 7,000 cordobas, which is over double the salary that can be obtained as a cleaner in the city or working as a permanent hacienda labourer in low-season. Many *campesino* farmers in La Estrella told me that work in the coffee haciendas was available particularly during the coffee harvest season, and thus this source of income would be readily available for those who needed it.

Despite the role of coffee as a livelihood buffer for basic grain farmers, the Nicaraguan coffee economy is itself vulnerable to shocks in global markets (See Chapter 2). The coffee crisis in 1999 resulted in plummeting international coffee prices and bankrupt haciendas. This left many labourers without the possibility of additional picking incomes for over a year. Coffee wages are also vulnerable to crop risks. For example in the 2013 harvest, the production dropped due to a coffee rust epidemic throughout

³⁶As I will explore in Chapter 6, the coffee economy enables young men and women to have some economic independence whilst still forming part of their parents' household.

³⁷ Losses were due to unexpected rains during the *Apante* harvest season of 2012. *Apante* is traditionally a risky planting season due to the risk of too much rain during the harvest. Increasingly in the Matagalpa Highlands weather patterns have become more unpredictable (such as the beginning of the rainy season) and rains are increasingly making an appearance during the dry season and in the Indian summer (*canícula*), putting harvests at risk, since dryness is necessary to dry the beans in their pods. Some respondents, particularly those most linked to development circles attribute these changes to climate change.

Central America, thus decreasing the labour demand for the harvest period (International Coffee Organization, 2013). Therefore, relative dependence on coffee salaries does not reduce livelihood risk to zero, but rather changes the nature of that risk.

There is another source of income which is of importance for livelihoods of a small number of households in La Estrella. This is remittances from family members who live abroad. In La Estrella, 28 per cent of households have family members living abroad, and half of these report having received remittances from them. It is often those who are economically better off who can make the investment to migrate to Spain or the US and send remittances. Poorer family members emigrate locally or temporarily to nearby Central American countries. The remittances vary in quantity, from around 3,000 cordobas as one-off payments in the year up to 36,000 cordobas a year paid in monthly instalments. When these remittances are not used to return loans, these payments are a top-up for investing in basic-grain production, and the highest quantities could be used to invest in high profitability crops such as horticultural products.

There are no permanent salaried workers in La Estrella, with the exception of two teachers who teach and live in schools outside the village (the teachers in the village school are not local and commute from San Ramon town every day), and three pre-school teachers who work in La Estrella. Teachers are relatively well paid, have a secure income (although it is at the discretion of the education authorities in what village they will teach), and since the victory of the FSLN, their salaries (as is the case of the rest of civil servants) are complemented with one-off “solidarity bonus” of several hundred cordobas³⁸. Pre-school teachers have all the perks of civil service, with the exception of the high earning salary: they get around ¼ of what teachers earn. Teaching in Nicaragua is a predominantly female profession and in the case of La Estrella all teachers are female.

Other less lucrative activities include working as labour on neighbours’ farms, cottage production and sales, and work in construction or cleaning and childcaring in Matagalpa. I will explore salaried labour in La Estrella Chapter 6. Cottage productions

³⁸ The *bono solidario* is a cash transfer scheme that instead of targeting the most vulnerable, it targets those who, as civil servants, are already better off by earning a steady income. The *bono solidario* elicits allegiance to the FSLN party, and the teachers in La Estrella who received this bono felt they had to campaign in favour of the party in return.

of bread, sweets or snacks are sold door to door. These ventures are limited by the low purchasing power of consumers in the village, but represent a steady but small cash income (1,000 cordobas a month) with relatively low risk. Six households reported having female members working temporarily as cleaners or babysitters in the city. These are either young unmarried women, or mothers who leave their children with their grandmothers, who move as in-house staff, and earn up to 3,000 cordobas a month. As we shall see in Chapter 6, these women send a substantial part of their salaries home to La Estrella.

Two households in La Estrella are large-scale producers and also local grain traders (*intermediarios*), shopkeepers and money-lenders. I explore their relationship with other *campesinos* in Chapter 4. Grain trading at a large scale is a highly profitable venture. At a smaller scale when practiced by middle producers with cash, it becomes riskier since it will depend on the financial capacity of the household to hold onto the stored grains until the price is ‘right’ and be able to take the losses if the market prices stay low.

In this section I have described the market environment in which Nicaraguan *campesinos* live, and how it adds particular vulnerabilities to the environmental risks inherent in agriculture. Yet I also show that there are different levels of risk and profitability in different kinds of crops and the farming technologies employed. *Campesinos* in La Estrella engage only partially with markets through aiming for self-sufficiency and storage, and I show the paradoxical situation in which many farmers produce corn at a loss. I also show that *campesino* families mitigate risk (farming and market-related) through relative reliance on other sources of income. In the following chapter I will explain those paradoxes and different economic behaviours as products of a particular *campesino* moral economy.

Conclusion

Taken from a strict view of returns to their investment, agricultural practices by *campesinos* in La Estrella may seem paradoxical. A majority of them produce corn at a loss and some of them also produce beans at a loss. I will explain this paradox in the following chapter, showing that the neoclassical maximising logic is only one way of understanding production, and *campesinos* in La Estrella have a particular moral economy of grain that determines how finances and time are allocated to different crops

and activities. As a first step into the enquiry into what food sovereignty in everyday life would look like, *campesinos* in La Estrella show both a tendency towards self-reliance in food production and most often store their grain and aim to '*ajustar*' (to have enough in store so as not to have to purchase anything in the market). However, at the same time, there is also a reliance on the coffee economy in the harvest period, indicating that the subsistence food production economy is only part of the picture. I will explore the entangled relationship between the corn and bean economy and the coffee economy throughout the thesis. This is particularly relevant in terms of debates around food sovereignty and its bias towards food production vis-à-vis cash crops (such as coffee). Hence discussion of the role of cash crop economies in sustaining food crop economies is crucial. I explore this further in Chapter 5.

By describing the different kinds of producers that exist in La Estrella and by outlining the relationships between them I have begun to show the diversity that exists within a *campesino* village in Nicaragua. *Campesino* households farming choices are shaped by their differential access to land, finance and labourers. In turn these inequalities generate particular social relationships that, as I will show in subsequent practices, have implications for discussions on food sovereignty. The existence of unequal relationships between landed and landless; net food producers or net food consumers; wealthier and poorer; and employer and employee (or sharecropper to sharecropper) highlights the need to see the *comunidad* as a socially diverse landscape which may entail different moral views towards food, land and labour, and in what degree to treat these as commodities.

I have included in this chapter the analysis of agroecological practices in La Estrella in spite of their marginal use due to the importance of agroecology in food sovereignty discourse, particularly after the Nyeleni declaration in 2007 and further confirmed in the declaration of the agroecology in 2015 (see Chapter 1), both hosted by Via Campesina. The use of hybrid techniques, including the use of agrochemicals, shows that equating small-scale farming with sustainable practices is inadequate without looking at the factors that enable or constrain farming practices. Through understanding the moral economy of basic grain production in the following chapter, and in what conditions and in what degree is grain considered a commodity, I will give insight into what constrains the use of these practices.

Chapter 4. Moral economies of *campesino* agricultural production

Introduction

In the previous chapter I described the different forms of food production that exist in La Estrella, exploring why different crops are chosen and how they are produced. I highlighted the economic factors, *interalia* land, labour and financial endowments - that determine the production of these crops and the farming technologies that are implemented. I also introduced the market environment that producers are in and how they engage with markets in particular ways. In doing so I highlighted a seemingly paradoxical situation in which a majority of *campesinos* invest in low return food crops such as beans and corn (and do not invest in high value horticultural crops), and in many occasions at a loss. In this chapter I will explain this paradox and the rationales behind these practices by describing the moral economies of food production in La Estrella. My research shows how a profit-maximisation rationale coexists with a risk-managing subsistence ethic whose objective is household survival rather than returns to investment. This coexistence gives us insight into what food sovereignty would need to look like to incorporate these different economic logics of the moral economy of grain.

I show below how *campesinos* deploy particular agricultural and market practices as well as particular moral ideologies around food production to engage with capitalist markets to their maximum advantage, whilst simultaneously protecting their households from the worse impacts of this engagement. I thus explore ideas and practices of self-reliance in grain production, storage and trade, enquiring about the pursuit of autonomy that Jan Van der Ploeg attributes to the peasant household making it the best vehicle for food sovereignty (Ploeg, 2009), and if indeed the *campesino* moral economy has particular characteristics that enhance livelihood resilience.

To further understand grain in the spectrum of commoditisation, I also explore the social exchanges that take place when grain is transferred in different contexts: the kind of social bonds that tie the buyer and the seller (or the donor and the recipient), and in what ways these ties shape the allocation of grain, the determination of prices and the conditions of payment. I thus show the degree to which grain market relations are 'embedded', and allowing for the flexibility to see how food may fall in and out of

commodity status in different circumstances (Appadurai, 1997:15). Further, through this analysis I begin to explore if and how in everyday practices *campesinos* are resisting commoditisation and ‘re-embedding’ the food systems economy as food sovereignty advocates suggest. Through looking at the moral economy of grain exchanges as social relationships as well as market relationships I also explore the relevance of solidarity as a driving force in *campesinos*’ everyday lives, and the role it has in shaping both resilience of households and “communities” in the face of capitalist markets (Pimbert 2009). Market actors involved in grain trading are themselves embedded in these social norms, and to a degree their behaviour can be shaped by notions of fairness. In parallel, I explore the economic diversity *between* households in terms of grain, highlighting possible class differences that may be hidden in the broad concepts of ‘*campesino* community’ (Borras, 2008). I also problematise the bias towards local markets in some food sovereignty literature by enquiring if international trade can be positive for *campesinos* in La Estrella and if mutual relations can persist without face-to-face interaction between consumers and producers (Hinrichs, 2000, Raynolds, 2000).

This chapter will show how *campesinos* deploy particular agricultural and market practices as well as particular moral norms around food production, self-reliance, fairness, and solidarity to engage with capitalist markets to their maximum advantage, whilst simultaneously protecting their households and vulnerable people in the *comunidad* from the worst impacts of this engagement. I will show how understanding market relations as social relations gives us insight on the way *campesino* ethics shape economic practices, as well as loyalties to and expectations of, other market and State actors.

In Section 1 I explore the moral economy of agricultural production explaining the apparent paradox by highlighting the moral norms that govern production, storage and trade of grain. In Section 2 I show the importance of understanding market relations as social relations, exploring how allocation of grain, determination of price, and conditions of payment are shaped (or not) by the moral ideologies that mediate the exchange. In the last Section I explore the possibility and conditions in which mutual obligations can extend beyond the *comunidad* and how *campesinos* in La Estrella perceive the fairness of international trade and the role of the State in ensuring ‘just prices’.

Section 1. Moral economies of agricultural production and marketing choices

In this section I explain the paradox of many farmers in La Estrella producing at a loss, and choosing crops and methods that do not maximise the returns to their investment. What I explain below is that this neoclassical notion of rational-economic choice is only one of the economic logics at play in La Estrella. Because many *campesinos* in la Estrella are treading the subsistence line (i.e. a relatively small livelihood shock can lead to destitution), there are other objectives and concerns that affect the allocation of time and resources into different kinds of crops and techniques. I show below how these different ways of understanding the grain economy are upheld by strong moral discourses of self-reliance and risk-management.

In La Estrella, the biggest livelihood shocks would be the death or illness of a family member or substantial crop losses. Two bad harvests could leave a *campesino* household destitute. An example is what happened to Miki and his family, a landless family who farmed but also had a small *pulperia* shop and carried out the local animal slaughtering. Their small shop selling small items such as rice, sugar and candy in the village had run out of stock for several weeks because they couldn't afford to replace it. This was because Miki's family had particularly struggled with the unexpected rains in the late summer in August and had had to prematurely harvest the beans to avoid all of them sprouting. His neighbour Roberto and his daughter used Miki's family's experience as an example of the risk involved in farming:

“Ah, Santiago, you've seen these days that planting frijoles is hard”, says Roberto. “You have to put in the labour and the inputs and it adds up to a lot.” Elena speaks about how corn is much more productive than frijol (even a bad harvest you get 40 quintales), and how people always forget about all the work they have to put into it. They get impressed by the prices of fertilizer, but in fact the prices of labour to sow the seeds are important as well.” “And it is risky” adds Roberto. “You can sink (*irse a pique*), like Miki there, you can have two bad harvests and then you have nothing. He's now lost everything, he's in poverty”.

Miki's family didn't end up destitute, but Miki ended up having problems with repaying his loans, and had to sell his stock of beans which he would have otherwise kept for the rest of the year.

When treading the subsistence line, farmers have marked priorities about what to put their money and effort into. Feeding the family, buying basic items such as rice, soap and clothing, paying back loans and purchasing inputs for the following harvest take

precedence. Ultimately, the issue is that harvest losses can have a livelihood impact that is deemed unacceptable for families. The danger of not having enough to eat, regardless of its probability, makes certain risky practices (or risky transitions in the case of agroecology) unfeasible. This risk management to avoid the danger of destitution in a peasant economy is what Ellis described as the ‘safety first’ principle (Ellis, 1993). Scott used this concept to show the social and economic discourses and behaviours that upheld that principle: the peasant moral economy (Scott, 1976). In La Estrella, *campesinos* show a particular production and commercialization ethics whose objective is the survival of the household and maintaining the family free from hunger. This logic that departs from a neoclassic market rationality is what has been categorized in other contexts as the ‘*milpa* logic’ or ‘the peasant logic’. The ‘*milpa*³⁹ logic’ was coined by Anis in 1987 to show Guatemalan indigenous peoples’ production rooted in “self-consumption, not for profit or marketing” (Cohen, 2002: 186) as a form of resistance to the colonial State. Yet this logic does not mean disconnecting completely from markets, but rather engaging with them to generate incomes whilst simultaneously instituting “practices that protect their subsistence-oriented practices from the potentially destabilising effects of the market.” (Isakson, 2009:726). *Campesinos* engage in capitalist markets, commodity markets, wage labour or migration, yet they also institute “protections that enable their continued production of *milpa*” (ibid: 754).

Self-sufficiency and profitability

In the context of la Estrella, *campesinos* highlight the importance of ‘own food production’ (*sembrar lo propio*), so as to avoid buying it in an unreliable market. Rafael, a landless producer explained to me why people planted corn and frijol instead of other crops:

“Corn and frijol are a necessity, no matter how much it costs to produce one needs to grow them because we live off it (*de eso vive uno*). The plantain one sows is an extra. My daughter also plants yucca, cocoa and coffee. We plant corn and frijol to ensure the food (*abasto*) of the family, so as not to buy it. (...) It’s not profitable. One grows them to obtain the food”.

Or in the words of Emiliano, a landed *campesino* who grew both basic grains and coffee:

³⁹ The *milpa* is the Mesoamerican traditional form of intercropping maize with legumes, squash, and other plants.

“Frijol beans and corn require a lot of work and investment, and the price is too low and it doesn’t cover the costs... but one needs it to eat, one has to make it happen (*ingeniarselas*)”

The extent of production for own consumption i.e. if they ‘*ajustan*’ and how much grain surplus they achieve will determine if families have a degree of relative autonomy from the vagaries of food markets, offering an initial buffer to changes in prices; at the very least, in the worst case scenario, they’ll be able to use corn and beans for nourishment. Farmers thus aim to combine the advantages of a lower cost of own-produced food vis-à-vis purchased food, and minimise the danger of going hungry if cash becomes short. An illustrative remark came from Nestor Ruiz, a landowner and sharecropper who was complaining that the price of corn and beans was no longer profitable (*rentable*), and I asked why people and himself produced it anyway. His answer was:

“People, with or without money, plant to eat. Because food is expensive. And when one doesn’t grow food, if you run out of cash, you don’t eat!”

The practice of storage for own-consumption as a way of protecting the household against market fluctuations is often taken as a given because the practice is so pervasive, yet there are also strong moral underpinnings to this practice. These norms are highlighted in the cases when they are broken. For example Yasmina criticised her friend Marisa’s sons for selling their grain upfront:

‘Your kids produce, but then they sell it and they end up without food anyways! (...) What they should do is to see how much they need and not sell more than that!’

To plant frijol beans and corn is strongly linked to tradition in La Estrella, these being the main food staples in the Northern Highlands since pre-colonial times, and it is also linked to a notion of identity as producers. Food production remains an imperative even if you can afford to purchase your own food in the market. ‘We plant because this is our tradition’ was a message repeated by people of different wealth and assets. Some farmers, rich and poor, toyed with the idea of not producing grains and buying them in the market instead, but at the end of the day, always sought to sow at least a MZ of corn and beans. Food production remains an imperative even if you can afford to purchase your own food in the market. Basic grain production is carried out by even the wealthiest farmers, and even if their primary income source lies in other activities, such as livestock or grain trading. As mentioned above, only two wealthy landowners had overcome this tradition, and only planted beans as a form of commercial investment,

and thought they were better off buying the corn directly from the market. Producing basic grains is also fundamentally a risk management strategy. Poor farmers plant corn and beans with agrochemicals *because they are poor*. Poverty drives farmers to hedge their bets, and their safest one is basic grains.

Producing ‘for eating’ and producing ‘for commercialisation’

Campesinos’ aim towards self-sufficiency, engage partially with markets and manage risks, but that does not mean that they cannot take risks or invest commercially. One central protection mechanism of the ‘peasant logic’ mentioned above is the separation between two distinct economic spheres in peasant livelihoods with two different rationales. *Campesinos* in La Estrella distinguish two separate realms of production: producing ‘for eating’ (*para el consumo*’ or *para comer*’) and producing for commercialisation (*para negociar*’). By separating a realm of ‘use value’ to one of ‘exchange value’, this allows for certain kinds of production to be maintained even if they are not ‘rentables’ (profitable). Yet it also allows for other income-generating activities that do pursue the maximisation of returns to investment. Therefore in La Estrella *campesinos* articulated two coexisting and different logics of production: a subsistence logic and a commercial logic. These two coexisting spheres of economic behaviour resemble Gudeman’s notions of the ‘house’ and ‘the market’ (Gudeman, 2008b, Gudeman and Rivera, 1990). ‘Producing for food’ (*para comer*’ or *para el consumo*’) has the objective of household survival, ensuring food provision even if it does not cover the investment costs. This realm will emphasise the use value of food crops rather than its exchange value. Often unpaid family labour is not factored into the calculations. The objective of the investment is not to maximise profits, but to ensure the needs of the household are met. Often these needs are covered with 1 or 2 MZs, depending of the size of the family. Because the price of not succeeding to produce is too high to pay -the family going hungry-, farmers aim to minimise risk.

For those who have enough resources (land, labour) or a financial buffer (savings and/or access to substantial loans) that can hedge the risk involved in changes in production, the realm of ‘producing for commercialisation’ (*para negociar*’) opens up. In this case, the emphasis is on the exchange value of the crop. In these cases these wealthier farmers can diversify into vegetables (tomato, pepper, cabbage) or plant over 5 MZ of corn or frijoles. Calculations of costs of production include the costs of hiring labourers. The

objective is to maximise the returns to investment. *Campesinos* understand that in order to make larger profit margins, diversifying into high input- high productivity crops is a risk they would need to take. In my interviews, several *campesinos* attributed large successes (and failures) to investing in tomatoes or peppers. Assets such as house construction or the paid education of children were attributed to them. Please find a summary of these two different logics of production in the summary table 7 below.

Table 7. Two moral economic logics for agricultural production in La Estrella

'Producing for consumption' or 'for eating'	Subsistence logic	Use value, ' <i>para el consumo</i> ' (for consumption)	Mitigates risk	Non-economic calculation. Survival rather than profit	Corn (with fertiliser), Beans (without fertiliser)
'Producing for the market' or 'for business'	Commercial logic	Exchange value, ' <i>rentabilidad</i> ' (returns to investment)	Takes risks	Rational-economic calculation, aim for returns to investment	Fertiliser in beans, horticultural crops

What is important to note here in terms of food sovereignty is that self-provisioning is *not* understood by *campesinos* as farm autarky or complete food self-sufficiency⁴⁰, rather they pursue a balance between food kept outside the market and availability of cash incomes. For example, *campesinos* in La Estrella have the skills and the experience to produce rice, a staple grain in their diet that they consume every day. Yet they choose not to plant it and are happy to purchase it in the local shops⁴¹. What is placed as important by people in La Estrella is to prevent the danger of the family going hungry, and this is achieved with corn and beans, the key ingredients of the Nicaraguan diet. Corn is high in carbohydrates, and compared to other staple grains it is high in protein. Beans are legumes and are rich in protein. If these are combined with purchased oil for frying, some vegetables and egg (from own backyard production or purchased) a complete nutritional diet is achieved. *Campesinos* in the Matagalpa Highlands have been able to uphold autonomy from the market through own provision because their food crops are *also* commodities, enabling them to engage with markets with some degree of protection.

⁴⁰ Nor national autarky, as I will explore in Chapter 5, *campesinos* state they rely on the exports to Central American countries to keep their prices high.

⁴¹ Rice is also a staple crop that grows better in the plains west of the highlands and in other parts of the country, and it is a crop that lends itself to large-scale irrigation and mechanisation. It is important to note that whilst granobasiquero farmers may be satisfied to have relinquished rice farming, it is not a generalisation- rice farmers in other regions in Nicaragua have rallied against the CAFTA and the impact of American subsidised rice flooding the market (Oxfam International/ CRECE, 2013).

The two *campesino* logics of production and agricultural choices

We have seen above the two economic logics that coexist in a *campesino* economy, a subsistence one and a commercial one. Like Gudeman's 'house' and the 'market', they have a dialectical relationship (Gudeman, 2008b), because "mutuality and the market are deeply intertwined, they both 'oppose and overlap'" (Gudeman, 2008a: 14, Zerbe, 2014). The result of the 'tension' between the two different logics and the emphasis farmers are able put on one or the other will determine the choices in agricultural production (Gudeman, 2008b). This is particularly relevant for the discussion on commoditisation, because when an agricultural market is fully commoditised, market prices force upon peasants their choices in production- what to grow and how to grow it (Meiksins Wood, 2009: 38). Whereas when commoditisation is partial, as we have seen to be the case in La Estrella, there are factors, other than prices and returns to investment, that determine what is grown and how.

Individuals are trapped in the tension and contradiction of these two logics of subsistence and commercialisation, and these unresolved contradictions are an integral part of everyday life. Even within the same conversation, *campesinos* can steer from speculating about purchasing their own corn from the market to emphasising the importance of growing your own corn and beans. For example I spent a day helping Jeremias clear a piece of land for pasture in the hilltop overlooking the valley, as part of his day work for the rich cattle owner Raul Montoro. In the same day he speculated on purchasing food due to their low prices:

"Now it is cheaper to buy food (in the market). If you plant, the inputs are very expensive and you can have a bad harvest."

But soon afterwards, when we were taking a break overlooking the Yulolí Valley, he reflected that even if he succeeded in his plans to purchase a coffee grove, which would give him enough cash to purchase the corn and beans he needed in the market, he would still plant.

"It's always good to work a little, it's good to plant (your own food) because that way you buy less, that way you don't have to buy everything you eat, as long as you have a good harvest."

Despite this speculation on purchasing their grain in the market, *campesinos* in La Estrella ended up sowing basic grains if they had the chance. Yet this shows that in the tension between the two economic logics of producing to eat and producing to

commercialise, *campesinos* are “pulled in both directions, which they modulate, hide, disguise, and veil in practices and discourse” (Gudeman, 2008b: 5).

In the rest of this section, I will describe agricultural choices as shaped by the tension between these two *campesino* economic logics below, describing the moral economy of production of grains, horticultural production and organic production.

Under the current constraints of life treading the subsistence line, chemically- produced corn and beans are the safest bet. Pest appearance is reduced by the use of pesticides, reducing the risk of significant crop losses. According to respondents in La Estrella, herbicide use reduces drastically the labour investments in clearing and weeding (16:1) at a relatively low price (1/3 cheaper), and less drudgery. Compared to vegetables, corn and beans are relatively hardy in terms of drought or erratic rainfall. Corn and beans are food crops *and* commodities, which allows farmers to obtain cash to purchase other essentials (rice, sugar, soap, and so on) that they don’t produce themselves. And unlike other crops such as tomato and pepper (see below), despite fluctuating prices the harvest can always be marketed due to the integration of grain markets. Corn and beans can be dried and stored easily: drying can be done on plastic sheets under the sun, and storage can occur as cheaply as keeping it as corn on the cob in sacks, or keeping beans with the debris of the harvest in sacks. This keeps its commercial value for the whole year.

There is a moral economic distinction between corn and beans resulting from the tension between the subsistence and commercial logic. Both corn and beans are relatively hardier plants and hence better adapted to the environmental conditions in La Estrella. Whilst they do require agrochemicals to some degree, they are less vulnerable to pests (García Mendoza, 2009). Farmers report they use frijol beans because they do not require fertilizer and because they understand their role in building soil nutrition. As shown above, frijoles are indeed more profitable than corn (in term of costs of production and potential prices), but they are second to corn in *campesinos*’ eyes. Mirna, a single mother who planted corn and beans with her two sons, replied after I had pointed out that the relative costs of bean production were significantly lower to those of corn:

“This is true, but on the other hand, the maize gives more volume of production (*‘da más cosecha’*). Also, corn is more resistant, for example if there is a drought of 15 days the frijol loses all its nutrients. Although there are resistant varieties. In the kitchen one uses more corn than frijol, and, for people ‘corn comes first’. One can

eat tortillas with egg, with cheese, even tortillas with grated mango and salt⁴²! You can eat corn with anything, with frijol it isn't the case."

There are different attitudes to corn and beans that derive from the different meaning and function that corn and beans have for *campesinos* in La Estrella. Whilst both are food crops which are readily marketable, different farmers in La Estrella treat corn and beans differently. Farmers close to the subsistence line emphasise the use value of corn: it produces more volume per MZ, it is consumed in more quantity, and it satisfies a diversity of culinary and cultural needs. In the case of beans, *campesinos* emphasise both the use value *and* the exchange value. In other words, *campesinos* grow corn mostly to consume it, whereas they grow beans for consumption *and* to sell it in the market. As shown in the cost discussion above, corn is comparatively less *rentable* (profitable) in terms of returns to investment, but its use value as nourishment and as a versatile ingredient makes it a crop of choice for a majority of *campesinos* in La Estrella. Thus farmers are willing to invest at a loss on corn production, even if it requires the application of expensive fertiliser.

These moral economies of grain achieve one important goal, which is to make explicit the use value of food as opposed to the exchange value of food. In this chapter I have detailed the particular economic and environmental circumstances that *campesinos* face, and in order to survive, they need to engage with capitalist market only partially and shaping the moral norms that mediate their market interactions. *Campesinos* juggle between these different valuations of food, and particularly so when they are close to the subsistence line. The moral economy of agricultural production determines what is considered a commodity and under what circumstances. I will explore this element of the moral economy as resistance to commodification further in the case of land in Chapter 5.

Since every inhabitant in La Estrella depends directly or indirectly on agricultural production, harvest losses are a significant livelihood shock. Yet, as explained above, certain types of farming are riskier than others. When prices are good, growing vegetables such as tomato or peppers can lead to substantial increases in income. Yet these crops are less hardy in terms of range of rainfall and are more likely to succumb to

⁴² *Tortillas* with salt is portrayed as a hunger meal- what the poorest of the poor would have to eat. No one in La Estrella had reached that point, although some did talk of a time when they were forced to survive on tortillas with salt and atol (a cornflour drink). An example of destitution was the case of Luisa and her brother Juan, who were no longer able to afford cooking oil.

pests. If farmers grow these, they do so using specific agrochemicals, which are substantially more expensive than those used for corn and beans. Thus vegetable production is a high input- high productivity option for wealthier farmers (or those who have accrued enough savings to make that investment) in La Estrella. On the other hand, corn and beans are hardier. Whilst they do require agrochemicals to some degree, they are less vulnerable to pests (García Mendoza, 2009).

When asked about the priorities of which crops to plant, farmers made a clear distinction between the cash investment and risks involved in corn and bean production and those involved in horticultural production. For example, I asked Gustavo, a farmer who owns four MZ of land and dedicates it all to corn and bean production, why he didn't produce other crops. He answered:

“Well, if I had money, I could plant tomatoes or other vegetables, but these crops need liquids that are expensive and they can have diseases (*plagas*). And who knows what you will get in the market! (*A ver cómo está la plaza!*). With frijol and corn, it is much safer! There are no diseases, and you use less agrochemicals”.

The Dorados are a relatively wealthy entrepreneurial family who rented land to produce grains for the market. They had produced tomatoes and cabbage in the past, and emphasised the problems that they faced:

“It was a *pozeria* (a money pit), you invest a lot in vegetables, they are very *plagosas* (prone to plagues), you have illnesses coming up, and since you start them in the nursery you have to keep giving it expensive treatments, and make sure it doesn't ‘burn’ (fungus infection).”

While horticultural production requires an important initial investment and a risk of crop losses due to pests, if the harvest is good and the market is right, the potential benefits are considerable: it's the way to make good money. Mirna spent her youth picking tomatoes for her step-father Roberto, and spoke of how ‘tomatoes built our house’. The profits allowed her family to purchase all the bricks to build the walls and concrete for the floors, a sign of relative wealth in the village. Similarly, Diego is a renter and sharecropper who was helping Jose Maria in his pepper venture. He plants corn and beans commercially and has had experience planting tomatoes and peppers in the past, and highlighted how tomatoes ‘gave good results’ provided that you had the knowledge and the finances to treat pests. He reports he tripled his investment using only half a MZ of crops. Roberto, another grain farmer who plants tomatoes on the side, backed these claims, indicating that you can make 4 times as much money with the

same land area if you plant tomatoes rather than grains. Please see in Table 8 a comparison between costs and *rentabilidad* of basic grains at different levels of intensification and horticultural products. Note that compared to basic grains, horticultural products like tomato and pepper require a much higher initial investment but yield significantly higher returns, provided there is no local oversupply.

Table 8. Cost and return to investment comparison of corn, beans, tomato and pepper farming in La Estrella

	Production costs in cordobas	Production per MZ (Q, boxes and sacks)	Average Price	Sales	Returns to investment
Corn	5,890	15	280	4200	-1,690
Beans (extensive)	6,090	12.8	687	8793.6	2,704
Beans (intensive)	6,810	20	687	13,740	6,930
Beans (agroecological - estimate)	5,220	12.8	687	8793.6	3,574
Tomato	80,000	800 boxes	250 (per box)	200,000	120,000
Pepper	120,000	480 sacks	350 per sack	168,000	48,000

The downside is that local markets for horticultural products, unlike grains, are not integrated into broader international markets, and cycles of over-supply can make the prices plummet (Nunez Soto, 2012). This is what in La Estrella (and the whole of Nicaragua) people call '*llenarse la plaza*' (literally the 'square fills up', metaphorically speaking of the market square). Prices to producers can reach such low levels, that fruits are left to rot on the plants. This happened to Jose Maria and Diego during my fieldwork, and I witnessed their investment in pepper go to waste. The market had been flooded with peppers by the time they harvested their crop.

"It's been a complete failure (...) *se lleno la plaza* because everyone produced pepper. The price didn't even cover the cutting (the harvest). We've lost 30,000 cordobas, and the NGOs [who lent us the money] are going to claim their money back. (...) I now depend on my red beans to make some money. The advantage of corn and beans is that you can store them. You dry them and you store them, whereas with peppers you can't do that"

Similarly, even if you do invest in the battery of agrochemicals that horticultural products require, you might still lose your crops to pests. This is what happened to Marisa's eldest sons, who had planted pepper and tomatoes and lost them to *requema* (fungus infection). By the time I left Nicaragua, Roberto was the last man standing with his ¼ MZ of tomatoes. I got the chance to speak to them the following spring and they had succeeded in their crop and in getting a good price. Roberto's wife Yasmina didn't want to say how much they made, but pointed out '*sacamos un piquito*' (we made a little bit of money).

The way farmers speak of horticulture is that of a high risk, high profit venture: a high-stakes gamble. Tomato and peppers are described as ‘delicate’, and their production as ‘capricious’. Farmers use metaphors of gambling when talking about horticulture. For example Jose Maria, a farmer who has had experience planting both basic grains and horticulture:

“I’m scared of planting tomatoes: the prices, the plagues... it’s like playing the lottery. Corn and frijol beans are better”.

Hence for those who cannot meet those high stakes, basic grains are the cheapest form of production with comparatively less environmental or market risks. Roberto, who I described above as producing both basic grains and tomatoes, said:

“Yes, tomato production is risky, you need a lot of fungicide, to prevent ‘*requemo*’ (leaves looking burnt). If you don’t invest a lot of money, you can’t produce tomato, fumigating is expensive. You will lose them if you don’t have the cash in hand (...). Vegetables require more investment, and it gives more production. (...) People grown corn and frijol because of lack of money. And poor people don’t have cash.”

***Campesino* moral economies and agroecology**

Where does agroecology fit into this tension between ‘producing for food’ and ‘producing for commercialisation’? Under the current environmental and market constraints that exist in the Matagalpa highlands today, agroecological production does not meet the objectives of either logic. When articulating a subsistence logic, *campesinos* see agroecological production as a risky venture, which could mean a possibility of lower yields or harvest losses, whilst not generating more cash income, because there is no market for organic grains in Nicaragua: jeopardizing the survival needs of the family. Isaias, a young farmer in his twenties who still lived in his mother’s house, summarises much of what other farmers felt when discussing the possibility of agroecological production:

“people feel like organic does indeed have benefits for health and the environment, but they also had to think about how the production would fall and the work and time would increase, and people need also some incomes, some cash to send your children to school, or to buy medicine in case of illness. And the problem is that those healthier products do not receive a better price in the market. So who is going to pay for the costs of agroecological production, of those healthier products? Perhaps the consumers, because they are getting a healthier product, or who else?”

Further, those who are treading the subsistence line cannot afford the initial investments in labour ('it is 'expensive in labour') nor can they afford to wait for the long term rewards in enhanced soil fertility to play out. Andres, who I described above as having successfully diversified his plot into an orchard and used soil conservation techniques, said:

"the things we saw [the barriers], many people don't want to do it, they don't like it. It requires time and money, especially in labour time (*mano de obra*) [...] To do it you need money... and food, because those works will not pay back for several years, so you need to feed yourself in the meantime. [...] The problem is that when you are poor, you can't stretch yourself (*estirar*), you can't do these works, these works require time"

To add to these limitations there is the fact that often planting happens in land owned by someone else (it is commonly rented or sharecropped), and hence the incentive to implement soil conservation techniques in those plots is minimal. Further, there are commonly understood expectations on what wage work looks like, hence different technological changes that increase drudgery (sowing in contour lines, cutting the brush at ankle-high level rather than knee-high level) for day workers will be resisted or charged at a higher price. Isaias (above) mentioned:

"It's also difficult because people hire '*tareyeros*' (contract workers) to sow seeds. You give them a fixed amount of seed, and this person is going to want to finish the task of the day as fast as they can. If they have to curve their path following the contour line they might think it is slowing them down, and they will either refuse or ask you to pay them extra."

Those who do have the relative wealth to use a 'produce to commercialise' logic and are those who can risk changes in production (for example towards agro-ecological production), but it is precisely them who are looking to maximise their investment. Thus changes into a form of production that will increase short-term labour costs and without a market for organic produce, the change to agroecological production is disincentivised. When farmers see their incomes increase they will 'save' in the relative security of cattle, or they will 'play the lottery' of horticultural production, but it is unlikely that they will invest in agroecological production.

Section 2. Grain market relations as social relations

In Section 1 I have considered people's attitudes towards 'grain markets' as an abstract entity. *Campesinos* do indeed use this abstract notion of '*el comercio*' or '*el mercado*' to discuss their relationship with markets in terms of input prices and the price that

people get for their produce. However, in parallel to these narratives of ‘the market’ as a discrete entity, *campesinos* in La Estrella could also reflect on the actual people with whom they traded their corn and beans, and the relationships that shaped that exchange. These relations, in turn, shape the price and conditions of transfers or sale of grain, and in what degree corn or beans are treated as a commodity. The main grain sales occur amongst kinship and affiliation networks within the *comunidad*; through local traders in the village; and through traders in the Guanuca market in Matagalpa.

Kinship and affiliation networks

Since most households in La Estrella are food producers, it is common practice to purchase grain from a family member or neighbour once you have depleted your own store of grain. This purchase occurs often at a discount price (what I call preferential prices) in normal times. Family and neighbours in the community sell each other grain cheaper than what they could sell to the local trader or in the market in Matagalpa. Rafael, a landless bean and corn producer who has a small grain surplus to sell after the harvest sells his grain at a lower price for his family than to the traders:

“I sell a quintal of corn or frijol to my family for 50 cordobas, less than the price I would give to someone like Cornelio [the wealthiest trader in the area], who is going to sell it (*negociar*) in the market. Because when I sell it I know it is for planting or eating, and it is not trading (*no es comercio*) to help each other”.

Rafael is here emphasising the importance of separating the use value of grain, for eating and sowing, to the exchange value of grain, when sold in the market, and giving a different monetary value to grain depending on its future use. This coincides with the different economic logics of grain production I described above. If grain is purchased for subsistence (*para comer*) it should be made more affordable by the seller than if it is purchased for commercialisation. These moral norms which ensure prices of grain intended for consumption are more affordable extend to the *comunidad* as a whole. Roberto, a landed farmer who produces to commercialise, highlights this notion of ‘fair prices’ for consumers and how these are linked to the costs of production. He did so when critiquing a neighbour for selling at market prices:

“The producer has to bear the consumer in mind. The price has to be fair. The producer has to be fair (*justo*) with the consumer. I mean here in the countryside, in the *comunidad*, not to the ‘*intermediario*’ (trader). (...) If it [the product] is for consumption, and not for re-sale, one has to give that person a fair price; if it’s for resale, then one gives that person the price of the market. (...) Producers have to give a consumers [in the *comunidad*] an adequate price, not an ‘exploitative price’,

depending on their costs of production. (...) . If someone asks me for a cuartillo⁴³ of frijol, I know it is for eating, and I sell it to him at a fair price. But if I go with a *quintal* to the market, I ask what the market price is and then sell it at that price.”

The notion of ‘just prices’ determined by both by the costs of production and the user needs of the consumers is central to *campesino* notions of moral economy in Central America (Edelman, 2005: 332), articulating both the perceived right of *campesinos* to continue producing and to meet their consumption needs. This solidarity with the consumer in the *comunidad* as opposed to the trader (the *intermediario*) can extend beyond the village, as I will show in the following section.

I wrote earlier about how these preferential prices within the *comunidad* were set in normal times or circumstances. In normal times, households fend for themselves in terms of ensuring self-reliance in grain, and only support other households through preferential prices. Exceptional circumstances of destitution or livelihood shocks like death or illness may warrant a free gift of grain. When family members are struggling to make ends meet, their immediate family, even if they live in a different household, often gives them corn or beans to eat until they get back on track. For example, Brenda, a female household head, received grain from her brother and mother when her husband abandoned her with 2 young children, until she decided to migrate to Salvador for a few years (leaving her eldest behind with the grandmother). This support can occur also at the community level, in cases of dire necessity. In the mid-nineties there was a harvest failure in the area due to strong winds that killed the corn, and, in the case of Sofia, it coincided also with the arrival of twins and her spouse abandoning her. She was assisted with some corn by her own nuclear family, but since they were barely making ends meet themselves, neighbours across the road would give her tortillas or *atol* (a corn drink) to feed the twins through that difficult year. During my fieldwork I also witnessed another form of grain transfer. An old lady who lived on her own in the *comunidad* often depended on charity to eat, and another lady from a different village would call upon the same houses periodically to ask for food.

Please note that food transfers are only one means to support family or other networks in the *comunidad*. The importance of hiring family members as a form of kinship and community solidarity will be explored in detail in Chapter 6.

⁴³ A cuartillo is an eighth of a quintal.

Another good example of community solidarity through food transfers in exceptional circumstances occurred after the murder of Humberto Rodriguez which occurred during my fieldwork. He was the only breadwinner of his household, and his death at the hands of a deranged neighbour left his family on the verge of destitution. The community rallied, and the leaders collected all the food and coffee necessary for the wake and the burial in a matter of hours, something that would represent a large one-off expenditure for the family, and was money that they did not have. The better-off members of the *comunidad*, mostly the shopowners and wealthier *campesinos*, but other households as well, contributed with cash or bread, corn, sugar, coffee and other foodstuffs, and other households gave corn or cash. A local NGO and the school also contributed with small amounts of grain and cash. The municipal government purchased and transported a coffin for the deceased. Due to this pooling of resources, the wake and burial took place smoothly, and a few days later the leaders gave the widow the cash. This allowed the extended family to step in and support the family through the crisis until they got on their feet, a support granted through labour transfers (see Chapter 6). Teodoro, one of the most active village leaders was filled with pride about the community solidarity towards Humberto's family:

“I like the solidarity of *la comunidad*, they perked up. The community threw themselves in (*la comunidad se volco*). It is our duty: they are too poor! But it is also our will (*voluntad*). We've done it without anyone telling us: 'do it!'”

I have described grain transfers as a form of social insurance for those at risk of destitution and the elderly, responding to an emerging need. Grain is very rarely used as a gift as a gesture of goodwill or social lubricant to nurture relationships (Lancaster, 1992). Such function is much more likely to be assigned to fruits such as bananas, avocados, oranges, etc. When friends or family pay a home visit, they are often given a few pieces of fruit on their way out.

Traders

Grain traders are ambivalent figures in the *comunidad*. They are members of the community, but, as mentioned above, they have a different status due to their profit motive (*para negociar*) when trading. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, there are three main shops (*pulperias*) in La Estrella that trade in grain. Together with their grain silos, these businesses also have shops attached that sell basic products like rice, sugar,

oil, vegetables, meat, agricultural inputs and tools. Grain traders buy cheap in the harvest and sell dear in the hunger season⁴⁴.

Some people in La Estrella may speculate with grain as a one-off venture, mostly with beans, whose prices most fluctuate and hence can give higher return, but the volume they purchase from neighbours is small since they have no storage or transportation available and their financial capacity to withstand adverse prices for prolonged periods is much less than in the case of established traders.

Farmers feel like they are in a subordinate position to traders. Jose Maria, a landed grain and maracuya producer said:

“The problem is that we the producers always lose. We go to the trader and it’s a stick-up. You arrive with all your produce, and then they give you a very low price, and you have to accept it. You can’t take it back and you need the money, so you just sell it for a low price.”

The notion across the *comunidad* is that economic success in grain trading can only be achieved through extracting the value of the grain from their neighbours. To illustrate this negative view of grain trading, I here offer you a short discussion that followed when Sander, a young man who lived with his parents and studied at university considered the option of getting a loan to invest in grain trading.

“Coffee, frijol and maize increase in price from the time when one buys it, to when one sells it. You make a really big profit buying from the *campesinos* and then selling it off. To make money you have to exploit others (*para hacer reales hay que explotar*). (...) It is the only way to better yourself and make money.”

Yet his parents reined him in, challenging the morality of the practice, confirming its exploitative nature, but at the same time not contradicting the statement that it is the only way to make a lot of money. His mother Yasmina said to her son: “It is not right, they take advantage of the poorest *campesino*”, and his father Roberto highlighted how the practice benefited the rich:

“[To trade in grain] One needs investment, and only the rich have money to invest. In the end it is ‘the fattest who gets to eat most *pinol*’⁴⁵

⁴⁴The price differential –between purchase and sale by traders- can be up to 50 per cent. For example, Jeremias, a landless sharecropper said “What I own has no value to them. They buy it cheap and they sell it expensive. For example they buy at 4 cordobas per libra, and they sell it to you at 7 cordobas. (...) I guess that’s the habit (costumbre) of the traders. The traders buy a quintal of corn for 200 cordobas, and they sell it for 280-300.”

⁴⁵ *Pinol* is a sweet drink made out of corn. The saying in Spanish is ‘*Es el gordo es el que come mas pinol*’.

Despite these criticisms, only half of *campesinos* in La Estrella bypass local traders to sell their produce in Matagalpa. According to the survey I conducted, 48 per cent of households sell part or all their produce through local traders in La Estrella. On the other hand 40 percent sell their produce solely in the Guanuca market in Matagalpa.

This reliance on local traders – particularly by the poorest families- occurs despite the existence of alternative commercial channels that have arisen through State and development programmes. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the Sandinista party has revamped the ENABAS programme to purchase grain over market price and resell to vulnerable populations in cities at a subsidised price. Similarly, the NGO-promoted *Virgen del Carmen* cooperative in La Estrella has a service of *acopio* (storage and sale) by which they sell in bulk and hence achieve better prices. However, neither programme has been particularly successful in replacing the local traders with fairer commercial channels. This is because the State company ENABAS requires the set-up of groups of 10 producers, expecting high volumes of grain and high expectations on grain quality. It is the wealthiest grain producing households like the Dorados who are able to join these groups. Similarly in the case of service cooperatives, the lack of flexibility and the inability to produce cash outright do not serve the short-term interest of those who are at subsistence levels (Ministerio de Fomento, 2012: 51). Don Emiliano, a member of the local cooperative, is dismissive of the value of the *acopio* service:

“This *acopio* is not useful (...). In order to really help the members it is necessary that the leaders of the cooperative have cash in hand, or if I ask for money and I say I have 10 Quintales of frijoles please buy them from me now, Dona Juliana [a cooperative leader] is going to say that she does not have it and she will go somewhere else to see if they would buy them from us. That is time that is lost and perhaps I have a need to cover [immediately]”

In addition, to transport the grain to Guanuca market instead of to next door to the local trader is costly and it adds another set of risks. Rafael, who I described earlier, sells his few surplus quintales of beans to family members or to the local trader.

“Taking it [the grain] to Matagalpa is not worth it. The transport is expensive and you risk being robbed by gangs (*pandilleros*). The local market gives you more security.”

Further, local traders provide services other than a particular price. They are less demanding in terms of quality (if the colour is not right, or grain is dusty) and ‘give the money without questions’, but since several of them also own shops, they can also give food or other shop items on loan, as well as give cash on loan. The practice of

purchasing *adelantado* (in advance), giving cash on loan in exchange for future harvest, is particularly contested in the moral economy of La Estrella. It also shows the power of subordinate moral discourses in shaping the behaviour of the wealthier members of the *comunidad*.

A trader sets a price of a future quintal of grain with a debtor in the hungry period (around April to July), and gives him or her the cash *adelantado*. According to farmers who have at times relied on selling *adelantado*, the price is around half the price of what the future harvest would get. These prices are perceived as exploitative amongst *campesinos* in La Estrella, who avoid using the service if they can. Jaime Manzano, a poor producer and day labourer, said:

“They’re not buying grain from people; they’re just reaching into their pockets! (...) Luis Camino [a local trader] just takes everything from you, and so does Bernardo Montoro [another trader]. Because people are poor, they sell a quintal [of beans] to Luis for 600 cordobas, and then they see that the quintal in the harvest is being sold over a 1000 cordobas!”

Several people in La Estrella criticised the unfair nature of the *adelantado* deal, which would give *campesinos* a cheap price for grain regardless of how high the prices were once the harvest arrived and they had to deliver the bags of frijol to the trader. Luis Camino, a medium sized trader (400 Q of corn and 100Q of frijol in 2011), was subject to the gossip and judgement in the village, and was described as ruthless and cold-hearted. What is interesting here is that such pressures have contributed to Don Luis changing his trading practices in recent times. When I enquired about his business practices, he described the *adelantado* deals he provided:

“Corn in the harvest is priced at 400 cordobas, and I have perhaps bought it from them *adelantado* for 200 cordobas, but in cases that the prices of corn rise, I give them a readjustment trying to make it so that they don’t lose out too much”

Luis’ clients now obtain a small mark-up if the harvest prices are higher than expected. Whilst this gesture makes little economic impact and the trader appropriates most of the added value, it is a symbolic nod to the moral economic expectations of the *comunidad*. Further, because the mechanisms of ‘*ayuda*’ (help) within kinship and community networks that I described earlier depend on market exchanges, Luis Camino can portray his purchases and services as ‘*ayuda*’. For example, after the *primera* bean harvest in September, I saw him doing the rounds with his pick-up truck, a young helper and scales, claiming his *adelantado* and purchasing grain door to door:

“I’m paying 600 cordobas [per quintal of beans]. (...) It’s good, [today] I’m paying Matagalpa price, one has to help people, so I give them a good price”

I will show in the following chapters, this portrayal of businesses practices as ‘ayuda’, blur the difference between profit and solidarity in the everyday discursive exchanges in La Estrella. In parallel to this practice, Don Luis also articulated counter-narratives of how his economic success was a product of his work ethic and sacrifice rather than profiteering. In this narrative, Luis, rather than ‘consuming’ or ‘eating’ his earnings, reinvested them in his business. This work ethic discourse mirrors the one used by landowners and employers to explain and justify class differences in La Estrella. I explore these work ethic discourses in more detail in Chapters 5 and 6.

Traders in Matagalpa

As mentioned above, up to half of producers in La Estrella report that they market their surplus produce in the Guanuca market in Matagalpa. This could lead the reader to think that these *campesinos* had decided to treat their grain as a commodity and pursue the best price once they got there. However, a great majority of those who sold their grain in Matagalpa sold it to the same dealer, Fernando Toledo. Fernando Toledo was perceived to be honest (*legal*) and would not try to trick them. To minimise the risk of that transaction, farmers trade with a wholesaler whom they trust. This trust originated in the fact that the trader grew up in the countryside nearby La Estrella and had been a producer himself, and in a notion of Fernando being ‘one of us’. Fernando emphasised this himself: “I haven’t changed (...) I am a *campesino* indian of the countryside (‘*soy indio campesino del campo*’). The price attained in the Guanuca market is higher than that offered by the village traders (around 10 per cent more), but unlike local traders (*comerciantes*) there are no *adelantado* services, loans or mark-ups. *Campesinos* from la Estrella are price-takers in Matagalpa, regardless of where they go, but they choose to trade with those *comerciantes* that successfully mimic the reciprocity that occurs in the *comunidad*, catering for *campesinos*’ drive to manage risk, as I described in Section 1. This shows that even those exchanges that can be portrayed as ‘impersonal’ market exchanges are based on “connections and sentiments of kinship” that allow for capitalism to evolve (Ho, 2009: 13, Yanagisako, 2002).

In this section I have shown how social relationships between buyers and sellers of grain determine to what degree grain is treated as a commodity, and how moral

ideologies about how trading should occur are articulated by traders and their clients in La Estrella. I have shown that the most pervasive form of family and community solidarity is based on preferential pricing and that pricing is determined by a perception of the sellers or buyers' consumption needs, rather than the maximisation of profit. This is more so in cases where people are at risk of destitution, either through old age, infirmity or death of a breadwinner. In these cases grain can be transferred for free. Grain sold to local traders is treated more like a commodity, and prices are determined more by the fluctuations of supply and demand. However, local traders' behaviour, by virtue of living in the *comunidad* can be shaped by people's notions of fairness or exploitation. However, since purchasing grain from a neighbour can be portrayed as a way of '*ayuda*' (help), traders often portray their purchasing behaviour as a service to the community, rather than profiteering. Thus what is considered help or exploitation is morally contested in everyday exchanges. Similarly, even in situations in which grain is almost treated completely as a commodity, social relationships that build trust and a sense of common identity remain important.

Section 3. Solidarity to consumers, market reach and expectations on the State

I have shown above how *campesinos* in La Estrella distinguish two realms of the grain economy with different objectives, a bottom-line realm that manages risk to ensure household consumption (and hence survival) and one that takes calculated risks in the markets to maximise profit. These two different economic logics shape in what circumstances grain is treated as a commodity or not. Moral discourses in the *comunidad* on family or community solidarity may mean food is allocated or sold below market prices to meet the survival needs of the community, taking into account the production costs of the producer and that of the consumer. In this section I describe how this solidarity with the consumer occurs even beyond the *comunidad*, and what are the expectations on the State with regards of the interference in grain markets. In doing so I also show people's attitudes to different reach of markets, which may clash with the ideological weight that is granted to local markets in food sovereignty discourses.

I mentioned in the section above how *campesinos* in Latin America articulate a notion of 'just price' (*precio justo*) that is part of *campesinos*' ethos towards their community members. This fair price requires meeting the needs of the producer by covering the production costs and hence ensuring the capacity to continue producing in the future,

and meeting the needs of the consumer in the community by being affordable and hence being able to meet their consumption needs. This moral determination that prices should balance the needs of producers *and* consumers also applies to consumers in towns or beyond. Andres, whom I have described as a producer who carries out some soil conservation techniques and produces corn and beans for own consumption and markets the surplus, perceives the prices of grain to be too low:

“Who wins [when the prices are too low]? The consumer, but the producer loses, because how are we going to pay our costs? But the consumer, he just buys the pound [of grain] and takes it home, but not us. (...) And this is for conventional agriculture, with organic it’s even worse. (...) [On the other hand] if the bean prices go up, then the consumer can’t afford it. [What is needed] is to level things, to equalize them, I think, between consumers and producers. We’re all consumers and we all want to eat. Not because I harvest it want 3,000 pesos, what about the other person? We’re all human, we should be able to level it, so both the consumer and the producer are better off.”

The blame for unfair prices towards both consumers and producers goes to the chain of *intermediarios* (intermediaries) that not only appropriate added value of grain, but also hoard it to see the prices go up artificially. When I enquired why grain prices were low, Roberto, whom I have described as a landed producer who is able to sell surplus production, said:

“Traders are thieves, the grain stores are full. The fertiliser has increased in price a lot last year whereas the prices [of grain] have decreased. It is the agriculturalist [agricultor] who sustains this country and he is treated as if he were worthless, they don’t protect the agriculturalist. What we need is a protest [huelga⁴⁶] by producers. The government should buy at a certain price and then give a reasonable price to the consumer”

These *huelgas* were indeed rife in 2012 (the year of my fieldwork) in the Central North of the country where basic grains are central to *campesinos*’ livelihoods (Mora, 2012, Lorio, 2012). The traffic was stopped along the Pan-American highway and demonstrations took place. *Campesinos* across the ideological spectrum in La Estrella see a role for the State in ensuring ‘fair prices’ are met. This State intervention is envisaged in two ways, through the opening of borders of grain exports, and in managing prices. I explore these issues below.

Campesinos in La Estrella speak of grain prices and supply and demand dynamics in the country using metaphors of ‘waterlogging’ or ‘excess circulation inside the country’.

⁴⁶ People in La Estrella use the word *huelga* (strike) to describe direct action instead of withholding labour. These actions can include storming government buildings, cutting the traffic on main roads, and so on.

Sandinistas or Liberals, *campesinos* perceived in 2012 that the FSLN was impeding exports to other Central American countries. This, in turn, meant that grain ‘circulated too long’ in Nicaragua and the prices artificially dropped. The government had thus to ‘open the gates’ to let the grain flow to Salvador and Honduras. These criticisms matched nation-wide controversy in which the Liberal party media accused the FSLN of using phytosanitary controls to stop trucks at customs at the border (Baca Castellón, 2012, Alvarez Hidalgo, 2012).

Another role that is envisaged for the State is to establish price controls to ensure costs of production are covered, either through ensuring these prices are high enough or alternatively that the prices of agricultural inputs are reduced. For example, I showed above how Roberto advocated for a scheme that is in fact already in place, the ENABAS sourcing of grain. However, as I mentioned in Chapter 3, the small volume of grain that it mobilises makes ENABAS unable to contain the fluctuation of grain prices (Lara Benavides and Arceda Ruiz, 2014). Other *campesinos* in La Estrella advocated for more direct price interventions, particularly those Sandinista voters who recalled the price control policies of the ‘80s as positive. For example, Nestor Ruiz, a landed *campesino* who produced mainly for consumption and self-educated in current affairs said:

“What we need is a price policy: the government should calculate how much it costs to produce a MZ of corn or beans and establish the price accordingly. It’s not fair that I am working hard to produce and the prices are so low. (...). That [price control] policy [of the revolution] was good. Of course there were a few people that complained, but this way people received the right price.”

Yet as Nestor points out, there are indeed critics of these policies in La Estrella, many amongst the Liberals, but also amongst Sandinistas. Whilst they recognised that a bottom-line was indeed guaranteed, the State, through the original and much more powerful ENABAS company, was the only grain purchaser allowed. This was enforced by roadblocks and truck inspections on the main crossroads. Many *campesinos* resented having no freedom to sell through other channels, and whilst satisfied to have a price floor when these plummeted, they would be frustrated in not reaping the benefits when the market prices were high. This example, together with the *adelantado* example above, illustrates the tension that exists between the two economic logics I explored in Section 1. The *campesino* moral economy advocates for prices that create a safety net –

the subsistence ethic- but also demands the freedom to invest freely and obtain a fair share of the profits when their grain is commercialised –the commercialisation logic.

I have shown above how *campesinos* in La Estrella value the demand of beans and corn from Central American markets, as they see exports as a force that increases the prices they eventually receive. Note though that the market for red beans is quite special. Nicaraguan farmers produce red beans, and Nicaraguan consumers preference for red bean is stark, and they will reject black beans that come from neighbouring countries. On the other hand, other Central American countries accept Nicaraguan red beans with much less difficulty. This culinary peculiarity makes Nicaraguan producers the main bean growers for the national market as well as enabling them to seek markets abroad. The reliance on international markets in La Estrella problematises the bias that exists towards local markets in food sovereignty discourse. Burnett and Murphy have shown in their research that small and medium scale producers in particular contexts and with particular crops (cocoa, coffee) do depend on international markets to subsist (Burnett and Murphy, 2013). My research supports this in the case of basic grain producers in Nicaragua. I must emphasise here that other kinds of food producers in Nicaragua can see the export market as a threat, particularly those *campesinos* which are at threat from dumping practices. Amongst others, these include producers of rice, chicken and milk (Oxfam International/ CRECE, 2013, Raminen, 2007). I do not want to make here a blanket statement on international trade, but rather imply that its impact on *campesino* economies can be positive with particular food crops in particular circumstances.

However, in turn, *campesinos* whom I invited to reflect on the scale of markets do not advocate for unfettered trade, but understand the national economy in the same terms they understand the *campesino* household economy. For example I asked Nestor what he thought of the reach of markets:

“A modern country needs to look for markets beyond its borders. Each country needs something it is missing, and they can find it in the international market. (...) What I want is what we had when we participated in the Central American market, we imported what we needed and we didn’t let in those products we produced in Nicaragua.”

Nestor Ruiz was one of the few *campesinos* in La Estrella who had heard of the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), and he perceived that it had undermined his understanding of a fair international market by bringing in things that are already produced in Nicaragua. The few who had heard of CAFTA, whilst they did not feel

directly impacted by it, did identify it with cheap imports undermining local production. Rafael, who had attended a retreat with FUNDEGL, one of the agricultural NGOs present in La Estrella that advocates for food sovereignty, also considered that CAFTA allowed GM and diseased products into the country.

I have detailed above how under normal circumstances, the subsistence ethics of *campesinos* in La Estrella extends to consumers in cities or beyond. The consumer is described in personal terms, as an equal who has needs to be fulfilled as well. Yet as Trentmann indicated this mutual responsibility between producers and consumers is fraught with tensions (Trentmann, 2007). This solidarity with the consumer is jeopardised when the survival of the *campesino* household is at risk. A good example of this reversal of loyalties occurred during my fieldwork when the Indian summer was much wetter than it should have been. This means that the beans of the *primera* harvest for those who had sown early were at risk of sprouting. When beans sprout they cannot be stored to be eaten later in the year and they lose their commercial value, hence the impact can be catastrophic. Some farmers resorted to drying the pods with Gramoxone, a cheap and powerful herbicide. Gramoxone can artificially dry up the beans and allow them to be commercialised. There is common agreement amongst farmers, including by those who do resort to it, that the practice is bad for the health of the consumer; although not lethal, since they ingest those beans themselves if they have to. The practice is portrayed as a product of desperation. Gustavo, a farmer who trod the subsistence line, spoke with regret on the use of the herbicide, indicating “I couldn’t afford to lose my harvest”, and telling me that his family would have to eat it. What I find relevant here is the change of language, from the personal to the impersonal to describe the end user of those contaminated beans. For example Roberto and two of his sons, facing another day of rains, were speculating on the need for applying it themselves. Wilmer pointed to the different burnt patches in the horizon indicating that it had been used by many in that year.

“One year my father burnt with Gramoxone half of the crop and kept the other half without it. The one with Gramoxone went to ‘*el comercio*’ (the market) and the one without we used for food. This way the Gramoxone ‘*fue para afuera*’ (went outside/abroad); we Nicaraguans are like that!”

Hence ‘*el consumidor*’ in times of crisis becomes impersonalized, and trading grain is spoken in abstract forms such as ‘*el comercio*’ (the market), or ‘*para afuera*’ (outside or abroad). This tension between producers and consumers’ interests (Trentmann, 2007) is

thus very much shaped by a similar tension than occurs between the subsistence and the commercialization logic. The ethics of care and mutuality beyond the community can be achieved provided that the subsistence of the *campesino* household is guaranteed.

In this section I have shown that under normal circumstances *campesinos* in La Estrella take into account the consumers subsistence needs when thinking about fair food prices, emphasizing their common humanity, even if these consumers are far from the *comunidad*. This identification with consumers' needs is however fraught with tension, and is undermined when producers' subsistence is at risk. *Campesinos* make the state responsible of the establishment of 'just prices', by ensuring export of grain to other Central American countries and by managing prices at home. *Campesinos* see exports as a crucial instrument to increase prices, and hence value international trade, but perceive it in the same terms as they do their household economy: useful only to purchase what they cannot produce themselves.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined a key driver of *campesino* market behaviour and moral discourses in terms of food production and food markets (I will explore other aspects in the following chapters). The *campesino* moral economy of production is the result of two coexisting logics, a subsistence and a commercial one, that shape the priorities of different kinds of producers. 'Producing for consumption' with the objective of household survival trumps 'producing for commercialisation', particularly in the cases where *campesinos* are treading the subsistence line, aiming to minimise the danger of going hungry. Farmers choose crops and forms of production that minimise risk, and aim to spread their livelihood risk by also engaging in off-farm employment and remittances. When doing so, these payments are reinvested into the planting to continue with the drive towards *lo propio* (self-reliance). When farmers have land access, financial security, and are able to make the necessary labour arrangements, they may follow a 'produce to commercialise' logic and take risks, diversifying into high value crops and intensifying their production. *Campesinos* thus aim to engage only partially and on their own terms with markets, aiming to retain a degree of autonomy from them: "working the system to their maximum advantage" (Colburn, 1989: x).

We begin to see what elements a food sovereignty grounded in everyday *campesino* lives would look like in the realm of food production. These include the freedom from

hunger, and the economic conditions to ensure household survival and the capacity to continue self-subsistence practices, regardless of their market profitability. Yet these subsistence practices need to be made possible through an interaction with commercial markets that *also* allows for stable cash incomes. Farmers would benefit from systems that insure them against agricultural/environmental risks as well as livelihood risks, so as to be able to take investment risks that can be profitable enough to lift them out of poverty; for example, through diversifying to other high value crops. Similarly, if farmers deem agroecology to be the desirable form of production, there is a need for markets and public support to adequately incentivise these sustainable forms of production. ‘*Sin químicos*’ organic production and soil conservation are valued by farmers, but in order for these techniques to be implemented, issues around risk management and support during the transition until benefits (in reduced costs, in higher soil fertility and yields) are tangible, premium prices, certainty of sales, and drudgery would need to be addressed. These issues are what Holt-Gimenez called ‘the political economy of agriculture’: the things that constrain or incentivise different kinds of production beyond the farming techniques themselves (Holt-Gimenez, 2006: 172).

Finally, in this chapter we start to detect differences *within campesino* communities that may undermine the ‘common front’ approach used by Food Sovereignty movements that rally around an all-inclusive *campesino* identity. Depending on the endowments, in land and in finances, that farmers have (and ultimately in their status as net food producers or net food consumers), they are impacted differently by markets and benefit in different ways from the discourses of subsistence ethics. We will see in the following chapters how moral economies are also discursive battlefields between those who have different interests and hence want to see different economic behaviours (including self-interest and profit) as justified and appropriate.

In the following chapter I will explore further the moral economy of *campesinos* in La Estrella by looking further at moral discourses and practices that emphasise a separating the ‘use value’ and the ‘exchange value’ of a crucial commodity: land; and how these moral discourses have important implications for labour relations in peasant communities.

Chapter 5. ‘Loving the land’: the moral economies of land transfers

Introduction

In the previous chapter I described *campesinos*’ different moral economies of food production. I showed how processes of production and exchange were mediated by moral ideologies around the engagement with markets. I also showed how food sovereignty in Highland *campesinos*’ eyes necessarily comes through partial engagement with markets, highlighting the importance of own-food production as a form of mitigating risk and ensuring survival. To further inquire about the moral economy of *campesinos* in La Estrella, in this chapter I will explore people’s moral understanding of land and the way moral ideologies shape both land sales and land rental markets. As we saw in Chapter 1, land, and peasants’ special connection to the land, are central in the concept of food sovereignty.

Land is central because it achieves at a material level the possibility of agricultural production as a way to survive and to thrive, but also because living off the land creates powerful connections with the land and with other peasants. Under this light, the social role of land, both in nurturing the economy and enhancing welfare in communities, is under threat by land concentration through capitalist market concentration and wholesale ‘land grabs’ with the assistance of Southern governments. Hence food sovereignty movements like Via Campesina emphasise the importance of distributive land reform and to support farmers to have viable livelihoods on the land they receive, and spearhead resistance to global land grabs (Via Campesina, 2010c). The problem is framed by Via Campesina as an opposition between “land as commodity versus land as a common community resource” (Borras, 2008: 270). Whilst government land grabs are not an issue in Nicaragua, there is a potential for global processes, such as the increase in meat or biofuel demand, to impact land markets locally in the future (Baumeister, 2013).

Moral economists frame this special connection of peasants to the land as mediated by broader “cultural and spiritual meanings” (Watts, 2005: 410). When this is the case, even in a legislative environment in which land can be bought and sold freely, there is a “moral code” that may curtail sales of land (Gudeman, 2008a: 410). This in turn shapes if land is considered a commodity, and the degree in which those moral codes

successfully prevent or curtail sales will determine how much they succeed in resisting the expansion of capitalist markets. Karl Polanyi saw the commoditisation of land as a source of social dislocation because its allocation by market forces to its most profitable use could potentially jeopardise the role of land in providing food and shelter for the population (Garcia Fernandez and Wjuniski, 2011). People have so much to lose from their disconnection from the land that the commoditisation of land is eventually opposed, hence he writes of a ‘double-movement’. The global response against land grabs is framed in Polanyian terms as a countermovement against further commoditisation of land and new forms of land enclosure (Cotula, 2013).

In this chapter I appraise these notions of connection with the land and to other *campesinos* to see how this shapes their relationship with capitalist markets. Through this we continue to answer the research question “What is peasants’ material and moral relationship to commoditisation and in what ways are the markets of food, land and labour socially embedded?” in terms of land.

The analysis of land also helps us to understand the relevance of the concepts of autonomy and solidarity, in the face of capitalist markets, articulated within food sovereignty, the third research question of this thesis. How are moral obligations and practices of land tenure and land transfers (by which I include sales, loans, and rental) contributing to the resilience of the *comunidad*? I enquire if landed *campesinos* have particular obligations towards the community to promote their subsistence. I will describe how in the case of land rental, if there are notions of ‘fair prices’ (Edelman, 2005), and on what these notions of fairness are based.

In Section 1, I outline the history of land tenure in La Estrella, and the different land transfers that exist in the village, comparing them in terms of the degree of market involvement. I show the relative importance of kinship and affiliation networks (including friendship relationships) as well as patron-client relationships in determining the conditions under which land transfers occur. In the subsequent section, I explore the moral economy of land sales, and how different portrayals of a *campesino* ethics and connection to the land are deployed by landless and landed farmers in La Estrella. Lastly in section 3 I explore the moral ideologies that shape the obligations and responsibilities of land owners, including making land productive and renting it to other

campesinos. I here explore the discourses that shape the conditions under which land is rented, drawing on discourses of solidarity and ‘fair prices’.

This chapter will show how moral economies of land in La Estrella curtail the sale of land as a commodity in the market, and how, because of the meanings assigned to land, landowners have a responsibility to produce or to rent their land out to neighbour. I will describe how land rental prices are also shaped by networks of kinship, affiliation and locality as much as by forces of demand and supply, and how there are strong discourses of fairness as people’s entitlement to subsist, to make a living. I will also show how this moral code comes with a price: negative cultural portrayals of the landless in the *comunidad*.

Section 1. Land transfers in La Estrella

A Short History

In Chapter 3 we saw that in La Estrella over half of food producers are landless, and for those who do have land, there is a coexistence between many small plots with large haciendas. This coexistence has origins in the history of the area. Land in La Estrella was either indigenous communal land or hacienda land until the 1930s⁴⁷, when all land was officially divided into individual plots with individual land titles that could be bought and sold freely. Until this period farming families⁴⁸ would access communal land freely and at every season they would choose a plot and clear it for planting. By virtue of planting on that plot, families declared temporary ownership over it. After the harvest, the families would move on to another site and the land would remain fallow for at least three years. Families working permanently in the haciendas were allocated a piece of land in the estate in which to grow subsistence crops.

This system in which haciendas coexisted with small-scale subsistence family farming continued until 1979. The Sandinista revolutionary State then only expropriated haciendas and ranches that belonged to Somoza and his allies to transform them into State farms. In the case of La Estrella, the nearby haciendas of Los Angeles and El Pinar

⁴⁷ The newly Independent State of Nicaragua in the second half of the 19th century allocated communal indigenous land to international coffee investors and cattle ranchers in the Central Highlands of Nicaragua (see Chapter 2 for more details).

⁴⁸ Under the communal indigenous farming system, communities owned the land, but families were the production units (Ibarra Rojas, 2001)

North and Northeast of the valley were expropriated, and so was the cattle ranch of El Buen Perdón. Landowners unrelated to Somoza were unaffected by the reform. These State farms continued producing cattle and coffee, yet giving better conditions to workers. In parallel, at the onset of the revolution, the Sandinistas gave large plots of land to farmers in La Estrella who had been considered *colaboradores*⁴⁹ to the revolution in the fight against Somoza, regardless of how much land they had in the first place. For example two of the largest landowners in La Estrella had received vast tracts of land due to their involvement in the revolution.

By the second half of the 1980s, the Contra war diminished the State's capacity to invest in State farms. Landless *campesinos* in the region were also demanding individual plots of land, and large portions of State farm land was divided amongst workers, giving each family plots of land of around 10 MZ. Land titles were given in the man's name, as the *cabeza de familia* (head of the family), hence land titles are still predominantly in men's names. As part of the peace agreements in the 90s, the State distributed the downsized remaining haciendas and cattle ranches to commanders of both the Sandinistas and the Contras. Since then, the population of La Estrella has been increasing steadily, and *campesinos* reported that there have been sales of lands to richer *campesinos* and hacienda owners. I will explore how these reports of land sales are conveyed in particular ways and upholding particular moral ideologies of the use and sale of land in Section 2.

The new Sandinista party elected in 2006 has vowed not to expropriate any land in order to distribute it. However, the demand for land is still high on the policy agenda. Land occupations and squatting have occurred in the region, a few hours east of the village. In La Estrella specifically, several men have pursued a legal path and joined associations of ex-combatants in the Contra war who are demanding compensatory land.

Land transfers and the market

In the previous chapters I explored the moral economy of production, exploring land use. In this chapter I explore 'land transfers'. I use this term to include both the temporary cession of control of land, through loaning or rental, or the transfer of

⁴⁹ *Colaboradores* –collaborators- included combatants in the Sandinista revolutionary forces or those who had given them refuge against the Somoza guard.

ownership – through sales or inheritance⁵⁰. I explore here the way certain land transfers are mediated by markets.

Throughout my fieldwork landless *campesinos* reported a decrease in the availability and access to farmland. I sat in on three ‘problem analysis’ processes in La Estrella: a wealth ranking exercise with leaders in the village, a participatory municipal budget workshop and an appraisal on climate change resilience. In all three, land scarcity was highlighted as a key problem. La Estrella has changed in half a century from a hamlet of a dozen houses surrounded by forest to a village of over 100 households. An ex-combatant and landless *campesino* said:

“The problem is the reduction of land, people are growing in numbers, they are multiplying. The manzanas [per person] have been reducing. Young people don’t have anywhere to work, they end up depending on helping their parents plant a ¼ of a MZ of land.”

In addition to population pressures, farmers perceived that there is also an increase in the allocation of land for cattle production, hence reducing the area of land available for basic grains. Three families had been unable to secure land for farming during my fieldwork, and they attributed this partly to the expansion of cattle production. Olivia was a landless *campesina* who lived with her elderly mother and her two adult sons and had missed the chance to plant in the *primera* planting. She said “those who are rich, who have their own cattle and horses, they don’t rent anymore. This is why we don’t manage to plant”. In parallel, during my fieldwork I saw that some of the beneficiaries of the *bono productivo* – the State programme that distributed 1 cow to poor households with land- had traded 1 MZ of their land destined to corn and beans for growing pasture for cattle, and another family had decided to use all their land for pasture and rent the land to plant beans and corn.

Demand for land has pushed rental prices up, and this has been compounded by the impact of the price hike of 2007 caused by global food price inflation. Before that, rental was paid in kind (1-2 quintales of grain) after the harvest, whereas now prices are paid in advance in cash and vary from 1,000 to 4,000 cordobas. Grain prices have dropped since 2008, but land rental prices have ‘stuck’. As detailed in Chapter 3 land

⁵⁰ Please note that I do not include sharecropping here as it is not a ‘land transfer’ proper, since the control of the land (at least half of that control) still remains in the hands of the landowner who is still invested in it and influences how the land is going to be managed.

rental, even at 1,000 cordobas, represents one-seventh of the production cost of beans. Jaime, a landless farmer whose income came mainly from salaried work, and who had not succeeded in finding affordable land to rent said:

“This rise in [land rental] prices has happened since 7 years ago. Before, for example I used to rent land from Lute [the hacienda owner of San Cristobal]. He used to charge me 2 quintales of corn per MZ or 1 of beans. There was a moment when they all decided to put the prices up, and now only those who have money can afford [to plant]. But the poor people, what are we supposed to do? Even those who had money and happily paid when the prices went up, they are now struggling. Even Lute suddenly started wanting to charge money in advance.”

This experience of land prices ‘sticking’ due to global grain price spikes shows how the integration in international grain markets is both an opportunity in terms of potential higher prices for produce and an added market risk.

Land transfers can occur either outside the market, through the market but at *favourable* (preferential) prices or through the market. I describe these transfers below, and table 9 provides a summary.

Table 9. Types of land transfers in La Estrella

No payment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Giving land’ to nuclear family members- inheritance in life (frequent) • Temporary exchange of land (exceptional) • Land on loan for charity (exceptional) • Land on loan to hacienda workers (exceptional)
Preferential prices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sale or rental of land to family members at below market rate (frequent) • Rental to poorer neighbours for charity (frequent) • Rental to hacienda workers (frequent)
Market prices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land purchased or rented at going market prices (frequent) • Land sold or rented by association of recipients of land reform (exceptional)

The most common land transfer outside the market is the customary practice of landowners ‘giving’ land to family members to plant. The common expression is ‘*me ha dado tierra*’. This practice is a form of inheritance in life. There is no charge or payment of any kind: “You can’t charge the family!” said Teresa, a woman who had ‘given’ land

to both her daughter (a single mother living with her) and eldest son (who had moved to his own house with his wife and child). Under inheritance in life, portions of land (of 1-2 MZ) are 'given' to their adult children, and this plot remains under their control even after they leave home and raise their own family. This concession of land can also be awarded to the spouse. This is an informal arrangement, and no new land titles are created, hence the ultimate power over the land is kept by the parent, who retains the right to withdraw the land if there is a disagreement. As we will see in the following chapter, retaining ownership gives parents leverage over the next generation's behaviour, including the use of their labour. The downside is that the lack of formal clarity, with a scarcity of land titles in the first place (only 50% according to my survey), the great majority of land conflicts that have occurred in La Estrella are conflicts between brothers fighting over their parents' land after their death.

This customary practice of 'giving land' is common amongst landowners in La Estrella, although there are variations depending on the type of household. Some landowners, in which decision-making revolves around the father, prefer to always work as a family unit, (regardless of the age of their children) mobilising *all* the family labour for all the land. These families would only 'give land' to their children once they move out of the house. Others, on the other hand, assign pieces of land from the moment young household members demand it. This is particularly relevant because young men tend to stay at home until their mid to late 20s, whereas young women tend to move out before their 20th birthday. This 'giving land' to young men whilst still living at home gives them a degree of economic autonomy, yet binding them to their household responsibilities. We will see how relevant this is in the mobilisation of labour of *campesino* households in the following chapter.

This customary practice of 'giving land' has important gender and age dimensions. When women marry or elope, they carry with them their 'given land' which gives them a degree of economic independence in their new status. Similarly, having 'given land' means recipients have a source of income independent of the father or spouse, giving them access to cash and a degree of autonomy within the household. Young adult men who lived at home in those patriarchal households and who didn't have land *dada* ('given land') complained on occasions that they depended on their parents to purchase essentials such as clothes.

Another example of land on loan is the temporary exchange of land between two households. Two landed families decided to exchange the use of 1 MZ of land. This exchange made sense because one family had land deep in the Yulolí Valley, very humid and better for corn, and the other had land closer to the road in a drier area, better for beans because there is less growth of weeds. Lastly, lending land without charge to non-family members was considered exceptional, and only occurred in one case in the village. Roberto, who owned over 10 MZs of farmland, lent 'a small strip of land' (under ½ MZ) to Jaime (mentioned above) over 2 years without charge. Jaime said: "I have to be thankful to Roberto who has been *dejandome* (lending me) land for the past two years without charging me".

Whilst hacienda and cattle farm workers in La Estrella have to pay rent for the land within the estate they use for basic grains (see below), there are some exceptions. Two of the households I interviewed had received land for free from their hacienda patrons. For example Rafael's family is allocated a plot of land by the hacienda Los Angeles because his daughter is the cook, and Vera Perez's family had been lent two MZs during the time her husband had been working in the hacienda San Cristobal. I will explore such patron-client relationships in the following chapter when I consider the moral economy of labour.

The transfers of land described above were free of charge. Yet a majority of land transfers are carried out with some form of charge either in cash (most frequently) or in kind. The conditions in which land transfer occurs vary depending on the kinship/social arrangements or patron-client relationships rather than market prices determined by demand and supply. What I call preferential prices are often described as *ayuda* (help) or *favorable* (favourable or discount prices). With these prices, the land is purchased or rented intentionally under the going market rate. For example, when renting or selling land to extended family or friends people would receive a *favourable* price. For example, Carlos is a newcomer who rents 2 MZ from his father-in-law: "He gives it to us *favorable*. We pay 800 cordobas, and in quintales of beans after the harvest." Another form of preferential prices are those offered as a form of charity. For example, despite high demand for land, the landowner Fabian Diaz offers land to his poorest neighbours at a discounted price. Similarly, Dona Sofia's family often rents 1-2 MZ from him. She says "because we are poor, he charges only 1000 cordobas per MZ". Don Fabian charges others a higher rate of 1500.

Lastly there are the rental or sales of land at ‘going market prices’, prices that are determined *to a certain degree* by forces of supply and demand. These prices vary depending on how remote the lands are, the kind of *mejoras* (improvements): what kinds of permanent crops have been grown on them (coffee, fruit trees) that increase the value of the land (1MZ of coffee grove would cost 3,000 dollars, triple the price of a piece of land used for corn, 1,000 dollars). In the case of rental, the price demanded will be higher depending on the crops it will use, as it is perceived the land will lose more or less fertility in the process. One MZ of corn costs 1500 cordobas per planting, One MZ of corn *and* beans 3,000, and if you plant tomatoes, it goes up to 4,000 cordobas.

In some cases, the price and conditions of both rental and sales can be also shaped by coercion. I witnessed during my fieldwork the sale of two land plots owned by a brother and his sister, Gustavo and Lupe to a wealthy coffee grower and cattle rancher from Matagalpa. This ‘millionaire’ from Matagalpa had been buying land all around the San Ramon area, and had recently bought plots from several families in La Estrella⁵¹. The *campesinos* who sold during my fieldwork were in part coerced to sell because their land had been ‘trapped’ between other plots already purchased by the coffee grower, and he had blocked the *pasada* (right of way). The affected *campesinos* were unwilling to initiate a legal process and they perceived themselves to be in a vulnerable position because they had no official land title, so they sold at a lower price. I also heard reports of cattle herders letting their cows feed on bean fields to coerce the owner to sell them their land.

An exceptional situation arose in La Estrella when I was doing my fieldwork. Pablo Montoro, a large cattle owner, had accumulated 70 MZs by purchasing land from neighbours since the 1990s, including 50 MZ which he received as a *colaborador* for the revolution from the FSLN. In 2011, a year before my arrival, he had sold his land to the State, who was going to use it to distribute it to landless *campesinos* who had participated in Las Tunas agreements (see Chapter 2), none of which were people from La Estrella or the region. Beneficiaries had not arrived to occupy their plots as yet, and in the meantime the association of Las Tunas beneficiaries managed rentals for local

⁵¹ Baumeister (2013) shows that due to its low production costs and a Central American market demanding meat and milk, land destined to cattle farming has expanded. This happens at the level of La Estrella, with wealthier farmers from outside the region investing in land for extensive cattle rearing. These ‘land grabs’ accentuate the scarcity of land, at a local level. The impact in Nicaragua of land grabs for large scale investment has been mitigated by the expansion of the agricultural frontier to the east of the country.

tenants in La Estrella. Some people reported that the association had offered some plots for sale, but none were sold during my fieldwork⁵². This shows that dynamics of land tenure in Nicaragua are always in flux, and that processes of land concentration cannot be understood as unidirectional linear processes, because re-distribution can occur if political or economic circumstances change.

To finish the typology of land transfers, land rental for planting often also occurs at market prices to a certain degree. I will show in the following sections how *campesino* moral ideologies aim to control prices through moral arguments about fairness and the nature of property, yet as shown above there has been an inflation of rental prices due to an increase in demand. Moral pressures are serving to mitigate rather than contain price inflation.

The allocation of land transfers and the prices sought for them are shaped by kinship and affiliation, ideas of *ayuda* (help), patron-client relationships (which I will explore further in the following chapter), as well as the market forces of demand and supply. I did not find disparities or biases in the allocation of land in terms of political affiliation or religious practices during my fieldwork. As we saw with food, who people vote for or what church they go to will not shape access to land. That said, the existing land ownership disparities are directly related to those who were close and active members of the Sandinista movement in the 1970s: several of the wealthiest landowners in La Estrella were *colaboradores* who received large portions of land. Similarly, the ranch El Buen Perdon was given by the State to a Contra commander as part of the peace accords in 1990. Yet today, political or religious rivalry does not interfere in agricultural production in La Estrella.

In this section, I have shown the kinds of land transfers, both temporary and permanent, that occur in la Estrella. Land transfers occur mostly outside the market or in particular ways in which social relations determine prices, either due to kinship and affiliation ties or through patron-client relationships between hacienda owners and landless *campesinos*. The degree of market engagement (how much prices reflect supply and demand) depends on the degree of closeness between buyer and seller of land (or landowners and tenant), on a continuum from the nuclear family and nuclear family

⁵² This has implications on market land reforms and the importance of convenience. Land plots are not distributed in the places of residence of beneficiaries, but in other sites that might be far away. This lack of convenience might motivate sales.

outside the household, friends and extended family, and other community members. We will see in the following chapter how hacienda owners and entrepreneurs need to engage in patron-client relationships (which include preferential prices in the allocation of land) to mimic and compete with these social relationships. In the following section I explore the moral ideologies that are articulated by different kinds of *campesinos* in La Estrella with regards to land transfers.

Section 2. Values of land and the power of shame in regulating land sales

In La Estrella, as in the rest of Nicaragua, land can be sold freely. Legally, if a *campesino* is the individual owner of a plot he or she is entitled to sell it in the market. As mentioned above, the land in La Estrella is ‘indigenous land’ and technically what is being sold is the lease of that plot from the indigenous community, but in practice people have full control over the land, and the only obligation they have is to pay a small tax contribution to the *comunidad indigena* of Matagalpa, the body that manages the affairs of the indigenous community of Matagalpa. The power of the *comunidad indigena* is very limited and they target mostly the large landowners in the region to demand their tax contributions. Small and medium-scale landowners do not pay it.

I will show below that despite land being legally considered a commodity since 1990, *campesino* moral economy discourses in La Estrella resist the characterisation of land as something that can be exchanged freely in the market. People do not refuse the individual ownership of land. In fact, this was central to *campesino* mobilisation against communal ownership of State farms and cooperative land in the 1980s (Dore and Weeks, 1992). What *campesinos* oppose is treating land as something that can be readily exchanged for cash and to value it as a product of supply and demand forces rather than its intrinsic value. As we saw in Chapter 4, *campesinos* highlight both the use value of food in opposition to its exchange value. In the case of the valuation of land, the emphasis on use value is even greater.

Campesinos convey the direct relationship that exists between land and food. Roberto mentioned “I don’t want to sell my land. It is my food”. Land is transferred to family members or to neighbours *para comer* or *para la alimentacion* (to eat). As mentioned in the previous chapter, producers make a strong emphasis on the need for land to work it, to plant, and thus have a degree of freedom from hunger. Rafael, whom I introduced

above, speaks about this importance of access to land to decrease risk, and how own-food production is a safer livelihood strategy than salaried work:

“Rental prices have been increasing a lot, and it is risky. If one doesn’t manage to get land for planting, then one is much worse off (*se va para abajo*), one has to look for a job, and work stuck to the yoke to get one’s bread”

Land is described as a *riqueza* (wealth) but also as livelihood security. Saul, a landless farmer who had acquired a plot of land two years ago said: “we now have another North, a stability, it is a secure plot with its land title.”

Lastly, the importance of legacy is also highlighted by landowners: the importance of leaving land to your children after you die. Nestor Ruiz owned 8 MZ he had received in the second land reform of the Sandinistas. He said:

“I don’t sell my land, I need it to work it, to eat... and it is also sad to work as a *mozo* (day labourer). And, land lives on! My children will have it, then my grandchildren... Imagine how many generations have lived in this country since the Spanish arrived, and the land is still here!

Note that both Nestor (a landed farmer) and Rafael (a landless farmer) see the importance of land as a way of producing one’s own food, in opposition to the risk (and the drudgery) of earning a living as a full-time day labourer. I will explore issues around labour partially below and in Chapter 6.

As part of my fieldwork I also visited the nearby area of San Dionisio, linking with UCOSD (the union of organised *campesinos* of San Dionisio), an organisation similar to the PCAC who had been involved in a land distribution scheme called Programa Tierra (Programme Land). I spoke to some of their *campesino* representatives, and they emphasised the importance of land as central to *campesino* identity located in longstanding struggles for land tenure since the 1980s. In the words of Raul, a UCOSD representative and beneficiary of the Programa Tierra:

“Having land one vindicates oneself as a *campesino*, land is life, the life of the family. Land is not a commodity, it is not a business.”

Despite these discourses emphasising the importance of land for its use value, some people have indeed sold their land, including some who have been beneficiaries of NGO or State land distribution programmes. The response on the part of those who have succeeded in keeping the land towards these *campesinos* who sell is that of shaming them. All across la Estrella there was a strong criticism of those who had sold

their land, attributing those sales to a ‘lack of love’ of their land. Landowners articulated that what separated them from landless farmers was their special connection to the land, their capacity to ‘*estimar la tierra*’ (appreciate or love the land). For example, Yasmina criticised her neighbour for selling the hacienda the Sandinistas had granted to her family.

“His family was given the Hacienda ‘El Rompido’ (...) After two years they sold it, and divided the cash between all the sons. How dare he ask for land? (...) One day I got into a fight with Fausto, and told him, *compadre*, I’m Sandinista for the rest of my life, and I can’t accept you claiming that the President hasn’t given you anything, you were given land already!’ Who knows where the money went, probably to buy alcohol! And now they are trying to make people sorry for them”

I interviewed several of the farmers who had sold their land⁵³. All of them were not inclined to forward this information. For example, Rafael, whom I mentioned above, had sold his allocated plot from the agrarian reform. He concealed this, perhaps out of shame, but also because he perceived that this could undermine his possibilities of getting land in the future, as he was part of the movement of ex-combatants. He articulates the same mainstream discourse of the landed *campesinos* who frowned upon sales of land in La Estrella- which is in line with the economic realm of ‘*producir para comer*’ that we explored in the previous chapter:

“I didn’t receive land in the land reform. (...) It is important to keep one’s land, a fertile land. We plant our tree spinach (*chaya*), our bananas, so sometimes we don’t need to buy them.”

The underlying discourse that landed people in La Estrella articulate is that the sale of land is unjustified, and hence those who sell land are people who do not have the capacity or the will to retain it. People who keep their land despite being broke (as is the case of Nestor above) or their land being isolated or unproductive are viewed as good examples in the village. When the household is under financial pressure, they are expected to ‘*rebuscarselas*’ or ‘*ingeniarselas*’: to make ends meet through a combination of thrift, sacrifice, inventiveness and creativity. Johan Pottier highlighted that peasants do indeed have this capacity to make ends meet when exploring the capacity of Rwandan women to ‘*se débrouiller*’ (make ends meet) by drawing simultaneously from a wide range of resources and opportunities (Pottier, 1999). In La Estrella, however, *se débrouiller* was also deployed as a class marker: attributing

⁵³ To be sure this was the case I triangulated with several respondents enquiring about who had sold their land in the recent years.

peoples' landlessness or poverty to their own incapacity or unwillingness to make ends meet rather than other historical or structural factors that might explain their social position.

In a similar vein, landlessness and land sales are portrayed as a consequence of not upholding traditional *campesino* values of thrift and hard work, and falling into consumerism. For example, Jose Maria, who owned several manzanas in an isolated area of La Estrella beyond the Yulolí River said:

“Some sell because they don't want to work, and other people just like cash (*les gusta el billete*), and others like drinking. (...) Why do you get angry now if you sold your land? Because you needed to (*por necesidad*)? No, no, if you plant beans and some maracuya you don't need to sell. It is one's fault if one likes partying.”

Further, cash *per se* is perceived to lend itself to frivolous consumption, and hence it can be much more easily 'eaten' or 'drunk'. Roberto, the landed *campesino* described above stated that he always reinvested in *cosas* (things, expressed as assets) and held on to them rather than sell them, and more so in the case of land.

“Money in hand is worthless, that's why I have my things. Cash is nothing, you take it and you finish it. It's better to have your own land to sow your seeds, if not....”

Even Gustavo, the farmer who had sold his plot of land to the wealthy man from Matagalpa, despite his wife's resistance, described how 'money is devalued', and that 'it is better to work the land'. Unlike other sellers who ended up landless, Gustavo and his family still had another plot of farmland on the other side of the road to San Ramon, and were in the process of moving there during my fieldwork.

Landless labourers are portrayed by landed *campesinos* in the Highlands of Nicaragua as culturally different kind of people than landed *campesinos*, and they are accused of being unable of holding on to land, and to prefer to work for a *patron*. Landless labourers are accused of 'liking' or having a 'tendency' or 'culture' to work in the haciendas. Landed farmers have traditionally distanced themselves from full-time wage labourers, claiming to have a different culture and ethics. This has occurred since the 19th century, when indigenous *campesinos* opposed their lives to those of peons (day labourers) who were being accused of being vagrants by the State (Wolfe, 2004). Similarly, the failure of cooperatives was attributed by liberals to the inappropriate culture of landless labourers (Roux, 2013: 14) Even today, landed *campesinos* often

justify their existence in opposition to the agricultural labourer. Daisy, one of the PCAC volunteer extensionists from a nearby village said in a meeting with farmers from another organisation, using the definition of '*campesino*' as a landed peasant with a strong connection to the land:

“When you have a fourth or half a manzanas, it requires work, and love of the land and of nature. An *obrero agrícola* (agricultural labourer) is unlikely to have this. It is the *campesino* who can.”

These same negative portrayals on the landless *campesinos* and their lack of work ethics can be found at higher levels in development. For example, a project officer from a small NGO in San Ramon:

“There is a need to gather the actors; he knows who is a hard worker and who isn't. We will never change the “poor of mind” (*al pobre de mente*). [...] Maybe we are better off supporting a medium or small producer, and for him to hire manual labour.”

As I described in the historical introduction, these negative portrayals of the landless *campesino* as lacking the work ethics of the landed *campesino* are longstanding in Nicaragua (Roux, 2013). I will explore ideologies of work ethics further when I explore discourses of vagrancy in Chapter 6. In the village, people's poverty is attributed to this same lack of will-power or capacity to work. Gustavo, who I have referred to as selling part of his land, is criticised for doing so by Roberto, who sees it as a failure of character:

“He is always wandering. His father never prospered because his sons were thieves, and the sons are always roaming. I would have found a way of how to pick myself up (*como levantarme*). They have always lived from the haciendas.”

The worst examples in this interpretation are those who are occupying lands in demand for land distribution, called '*tomatierras*' (land grabbers). Unlike in other countries or historical periods, such as in the early 80s in which land occupations were deemed as legitimate and justified, (Dore and Weeks, 1992), in these contemporary times in Nicaragua they are seen as reckless. Many asserted that that land occupiers had already been beneficiaries of land reform in the past, had sold their plots and then demanded more land from Daniel Ortega's government. Land grabbing has become 'a business', something certain landless people do frequently as a lifestyle.

Landless producers and labourers, on the other hand, feel unfairly treated by these generalised discourses on land ownership and ethics. They counter-argue that, had they

received land, they would have valued it and not sold it. The arguments they use to oppose the negative stereotypical portrayal by landowners remain within the ‘use value’ sphere of the economy. To justify their entitlement to land, *campesinos* speak of how they would ‘*estimar la tierra*’ (love their land) and not sell it, and would highlight the need to produce food and to work the land as the guarantee of their love to it. Jeremias, for instance, did not have land and worked both as a sharecropper and as a daily labourer, and emphasised the importance of land to survive:

“What we need is to be able to work- that they help us with land to have our own production (*para tener lo propio*). Here everything grows, one could live with 4-5 MZ (...). It’s not all of us who sell. Some people have been giving the rest of us a bad name. There are people who spend it to buy *guaro* (alcohol).”

Seldom would respondents suggest alternative explanations for why people would sell land that were not lack of capacity or will-power. Thus the most dominant were the de-historicized or depoliticised (in terms of ignoring structural constraints) mainstream discourses of landed *campesino* ethics I have mentioned above, that shamed both those who had sold their land and by extension those who didn’t have land in the first place. However, I did succeed in finding alternative explanations when I enquired about the agrarian reform process and how it was experienced locally. I found that many sales of land occurred in the transition right after the end of the revolution in the early 1990s. Those were times of tenure insecurity, and the liberals had both promised the restitution of expropriated lands to landowners in Somoza times and securing the individual land plots that the Sandinistas had distributed at the end of the decade. The fear of losing their plot to expropriation made many small-scale farmers sell their land in La Estrella. Similarly, Nestor, himself a beneficiary of the Sandinista land reform and who obtained a land title by the new liberal regime, highlighted that the liberals did give the land titles in the end, but stopped giving any material, extension or financial support to farmers or cooperatives. Under these new circumstances, to ‘*salir adelante*’ (to get by, to survive) some farmers sold their plots cheaply to neighbours who were willing to take the risk.

Very rarely in La Estrella is there an acknowledgement that economic necessity is the reason for sales. According to Ruben and Masset, this is in fact one of the most common cause for sales in Nicaragua, due to illnesses or death in the family (Ruben and Masset, 2003). Social pressures make the sale of land or other assets as a coping strategy a measure of last resort (if at all). Yasmina (see above), for example, when

made to consider a scenario in which someone would in fact need to sell, partially conceded:

“if there is a *really* pressing need, of course you may have to sell. But not if you sell ‘*por capricho*’ (on a whim)”.

In this section we have seen the moral economies of land sales. Whilst in the previous chapter we saw how grain markets are a result of a tension between the ‘use value’ and the ‘exchange value of food, between producing for food and producing for business. In the case of land, the moral ideologies that *campesinos* in La Estrella articulate are a form of de-commodification: land cannot be considered as a business, as a way of obtaining cash under any circumstance with the exception of dire necessity. *Campesinos* in La Estrella as a whole see land tenure, a key tenet of food sovereignty, as a guarantor of freedom from hunger, livelihood security and a sense of identity. However, the same dominant ideologies that praise people holding on to their land, based on traditional ideas of thrift, work ethics and *campesino* creativity, are constructed *in opposition* to the landless *campesino* and through negative portrayals of those who sell land and by extension to those who are landless. This is important in terms of the objectives and assumptions of food sovereignty, which aim to build on moral economies of the peasant and his or her connection to land and each other. Yet what this research highlights is that whilst moral codes do indeed curtail the sale of land as if it were any other commodity and thus represent a counter-movement to commoditisation, on the other hand these are based on negative cultural portrayals of the landless. This in turn, somewhat undermines the ‘Unity in Diversity’ all-inclusive politics of Via Campesina, which will need to face cultural differences between landed and landless as much as their material differences when mobilising for land reform and other policies.

In the following section I will explore land rental dynamics and the degree in which these rental markets are socially embedded, highlighting the responsibilities of landowners towards the *comunidad*, and how rental practices are disciplined by cultural norms about fairness and landowner responsibility.

Section 3. Obligations of land ownership: production and fair rental prices

We have seen above how moral norms in La Estrella discipline landowners into holding on to their land. However, holding on to your land does not keep you fully in the clear;

there are also some expectations on what you do or do not do with your land. In what follows, I will discuss how land ownership brings with it obligations on land use and will explore the moral economies of land rental, and ultimately how the particular meanings of land brings with it responsibilities towards other *campesinos* in La Estrella. In La Estrella people perceive that land should not be kept idle. Combining aspects of a strong work ethic and valuing the land, *campesinos* in La Estrella judge that land has to be either farmed or rented out to others. What is judged in everyday life in La Estrella is not the inequality of land distribution, but rather the use of that land: if it is productive or not and if that wealth is shared with others.

Landed farmers speak about how certain '*parcelas*' are '*bonitas*' (pretty), when there has been investment not only in basic grains, but also in fruit trees, coffee groves and animals. I discussed above how Nestor Ruiz's hanging on to his land despite economic difficulty was perceived as positive. Yet, on the other hand, Nestor is still found lacking in neighbours' eyes, because he is not using it to plant. His friend, Yasmina, criticised him directly:

"He has 10 MZ, but he doesn't use them, he has a river and two springs in his land, but he doesn't use them for irrigation. '*Haragán* (lazy man), you're drowning in water!' I tell him. (...) He should make use of the land and plant other crops, such as coffee, banana or tree spinach 'You don't plant anything!' I tell him. What people need to do is work in their *parcelas* and plant fruit trees, vegetables... 'I work my own [land], one needs to '*levantar la finca*' (improve the farm). People who love their *parcela* are better off."

The moral norm thus goes that if you have land, you have to plant on it. Andres, who I have introduced above as a landed *campesino* who has carried out some diversification in his plot, spoke about the responsibilities of those who receive land:

"if I receive a piece of land and I don't work it (*no la trabajo*), they might as well not give it to me. If they give me 2-3 MZ and they tell me 'work it', I say of course, I'm going to do it. But if it's to sell it or to have it sit idly, I might as well do nothing."

Planting and improving your land also enhances the legitimacy of ownership. As mentioned in the historical introduction, the act of planting itself is traditionally seen as an act of ownership claims (even if temporarily). Plots that are in dispute are more likely to be planted. Similarly, the *tomatierras*, squatters protesting for land from the government, quickly sow their occupied plots to give weight to their demands. This is based on notions that land ownership is more legitimate in the hands of those who need it and work on it to feed themselves, in line with the '*producir para comer*' paradigm

we saw in the previous chapter. For example, Olivia, an elderly landless *campesina* whose family depended on renting land, speaks of how it is their '*necesidad*' (their need) that would entitle them to land:

“If they had given us land, my sons would be working there, because they like working in the land. People sold because they didn't have the need: if they had given the land to us, we would be there now”.

Those who have land, also have a responsibility towards the community to share the wealth, by renting the land to others. In practice, many large-scale farmers and landowners do engage in land rental. There are several explanations for this: firstly as a form of social obligation (see below), secondly as a form of building patron-client relationships (see next chapter) and lastly, as a way of obtaining cash with no need for investment. In the latter case, as we saw in the previous chapters, even the simplest form of production of beans requires 4,000 cordobas in investment and, if nothing goes wrong, 4,500 net profit on average (see Chapter 4). The cheapest land rental is 1,000 cordobas, so by renting land they would make 20% of that by doing nothing. Land rental is often an option for those who cannot command the labour or the financial resources necessary, as well as the initiative to engage in those forms of production.

As mentioned above, the prices of land rental vary according to the social proximity of the landowner and tenant. The closer they are, the greater the degree of familiarity, the more the rental price diverges from the market price (the product of demand and supply) and it is treated less like a commodity. Hence, family members in landed households get 'given land' (*land dada*) for free, extended family members and friends get land at discounted prices and the rest of the community get lands at market prices. However, similarly to what I explored with regard to the price of food, there is a strong moral discourse of 'fair rental prices', based on an idea that these should allow for renters to be able to make a living and their families survive. The landless producers I interviewed are strong critics of renters putting the price up and asking for cash in advance. Landless producers make a distinction between landowners and renters and feel like there are some bottom line rules that are being breached: fair prices would need to acknowledge that producers also need to spend money on inputs, and make enough money to make ends meet. Jaime, a poor waged worker who had rented land in the past to produce but could no longer afford it, said:

What we need is some kind of organisation, of a strike, a petition to bring back down the rental prices and that these are paid with harvest produce. If there were low prices, everyone would be able to eat, but now we're all starving to death. They always take advantage of the poor *campesino*, every time you raise your head, they hit you back down. It is unacceptable that one has to pay such high prices for a land that then is 'tired' and doesn't produce much. The prices are so high and variable, because they are the ones in charge! (*son ellos los que mandan*)”.

Landless producers in La Estrella also consider that at the very least poor people should help each other, and hence consider that those who are landed *and* poor should feel connected to other poor people and help them '*salir adelante*' (get by). There is a responsibility towards the community as solidarity amongst the poor. As described above, Fabian Diaz was praised for giving affordable rents to his family and neighbours, and his help to other poor people should, in the eyes of poor landless households, be common practice. For example Olivia, said:

“Amongst poor people we take each other into account (*'lo consideran a uno'*), but those who have more land then, they increase their prices, because they are now *finqueros* (large scale landowners).”

This notion of a commonly understood 'fair price' and the need for solidarity amongst the poor people in La Estrella is understood also by some landed farmers, who partake in the notion of land rental being an affordable investment for producers. This is rooted in a particular religious understanding of the nature of land articulated by both landed and landless producers in La Estrella. As I mentioned in Chapter 2, *campesinos* in La Estrella see land and nature as a gift from God. People may own land, but the ultimate owner of that land is God, and hence landowners have a responsibility to share the benefits of it. For example, Federico, the leader of the liberal party in the village, a landed producer and a senior member of the cooperative *Virgen del Carmen*, stated in a conversation with other members (all landed producers):

“I don't like that people are asking for 3,000-4,000 per MZ to rent the land. They are overdoing it. 1,000 cordobas is manageable, not more than that. It is a problem that has been happening, people are asking for almost the whole harvest in payment! And these are *bandidos* (thieves) who do not produce, they have land '*de balde*' (unused). (...) God gave the land to all of us. One should not use it to '*reventar*' (exploit) the smallest producer, the poor producer, it shouldn't be like that. It is too much”.

Due to the special status of land as a gift of God, tenure carries with it particular obligations to the community. This was also articulated by landless *campesinos* such as Jaime, who was outraged at the rental prices:

“Down there, there was land available, but for 3000! How am I going to make ends meet? (...) They are fucking shameless, the land is not theirs, it is God’s! By God they are charging so much. He who is poor might as well die of hunger.”

As I discussed in the previous chapter, *ayuda* (help) and *explotacion* (exploitation) is a contested moral battlefield. This applies also to rental prices, in which a price can be understood and portrayed by different people as favourable and supportive to the renter’s family, because it is perceived to be a discount of the market price, or as exploitation. This is most clear in the land agreements between hacienda owners and cattle ranchers with their permanent staff. As mentioned in the historical introduction, traditionally land was assigned to workers free of charge. Today, the haciendas charge their own workers at a ‘discount’ price (often 1,000). Jaime (see above), had once been a permanent worker in the cattle ranch of El Buen Perdón, and said:

“They are paying 2,000 cordobas [a year] at the same time that they are working for them [the hacienda owners]. They are working for them and giving them rent, that’s not right!”

These social norms that emphasise ‘fair prices’ are coherent with the ‘producing for food or for consumption’ economic realm I described in Chapter 4. ‘Fair prices’ are measured against the priority of household survival and solidarity amongst farmers, as opposed to ‘producing for business’. However, the desire for fair rental prices does not preclude landless *campesinos*’ aspirations towards individual ownership of land, which is reported as the ideal form of land tenure. *Campesinos* in La Estrella valued individual ownership over rental, and rental over sharecropping. This ranking is explained by a preference for control and decision-making over one’s work, a degree of autonomy in production, and secondly, to reap the full benefits of one’s labour. Emiliano, a landed producer who sold some of the surplus, told me about the importance of producing your own food (*lo propio*) in your own land, as opposed to salaried work in State farms or cooperatives:

“When people demanded land [during the revolution], it was because they saw that it wasn’t good to be working for the State, always earning as a salaried worker, like in the times of the first rich people, because the same thing happened, when you are in a cooperative you are not the owner (no es dueño), he is only gaining from a service, he doesn’t get the share of his work. That’s why many demanded land so they could work on their own. Some did well and some had to sell due to necessity, because in order to work your *finca* you need money and credit if you want to improve it: if not you stay just as you were”

What Emiliano is highlighting as well, is that land distribution is only one element in a successful land reform. If land donations are not coupled with cash and credit, as

Emiliano indicated, as well as with State support in the forms of capacity building, opening marketing channels and infrastructure (Baumeister, 2009), the transformatory power of land reform is dampened, because it is less likely that beneficiaries will be able to make a living out of their land (Borras, 2007). This is what happened in Nicaragua, when the incumbent Liberal party in 1990 did not reverse the land reform, but did retrieve all public support to the new land reform beneficiaries (Rueda Estrada, 2013).

The landless producers I interviewed intended to save some money to purchase land, although they perceived the local prices were unaffordable. Two of them speculated about moving east into the agricultural frontier, where land was more abundant and prices lower. The landless *campesinos* I interviewed did not advocate for radical agrarian reform or for total equality in land distribution, but for the distribution of plots of adequate size to all families to meet their subsistence needs. Some farmers would be willing to participate in land banks (purchase of land from the State or an NGO at subsidised cost) provided the payments were affordable.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the different moral economies of land that exist in La Estrella. In the previous chapter I identified that there were two co-existing economic realms that highlighted both the ‘use value’ and the ‘exchange value’ of food. These were part of a system of moral ideologies that shape when and under what conditions food can be sold, and in doing so, secure the survival of families but also allowing for a partial (and less risky) engagement with markets. In the case of land, people’s discourses and practices are biased towards ‘producing for food’ rather than ‘producing for business’. Land is considered central for food sovereignty and household survival, and the exchange of land for cash is discouraged by moral ideologies. Land rental, on the other hand, is advocated for in its value of allowing landless people to produce but also *campesinos* articulate strong notions of ‘fair prices’ (as was the case with grain) to keep rental prices down.

The transfers of land in La Estrella are socially embedded to a high degree: heavily determined by *campesinos*’ social relations, both in terms of kinship and affiliation networks, networks of solidarity and social insurance and patron-client relationships. As was the case with grain, the degree of familiarity determines how much land is treated

as a commodity. However, although the moral economy of grain allows for the treatment of grains as commodities under certain circumstances, in land the balance tilts mainly towards the use value of land, rather than its exchange value. The existing moral norms do not consider the exchange of land for cash as legitimate. I have shown how land ownership in La Estrella is based on religious notions of the nature of ownership, work ethic and community responsibility. Landowners have a responsibility to produce and to rent out land at fair prices. They are responsible for sharing the wealth of the land, since ultimately it is God's property. As I explored in Chapter 1 these norms of social obligation and solidarity act as form of everyday resistance to the commoditisation of land. These "cultural and spiritual meanings" (Watts, 2005), make sales of land in the market as a response to price more difficult, hence stalling a process of land concentration at the micro-level. Because of this resistance to sales, potential buyers resort to coercion (such as cutting off access) to force landowners to sell. This reaction against the sale of land is what Polanyi identified as a counter-movement to the expansion of capitalism (Cotula, 2013), albeit at a local level.

People in La Estrella value land primarily for its use value: land is food, land is livelihood security, land is a source of *campesino* identity. This fits with notions articulated by food sovereignty advocates. Landed *campesinos* also articulate strong discourses against the sale of land. Those who sell are shamed, portrayed as people who are unable or incapable of upholding *campesino* ideas of thrift, sacrifice, resilience and most importantly, 'love of the land'. These discourses of loving the land resonate with those within food sovereignty that highlight the special connection of peasants to the land. What food sovereignty advocates miss out, however, is that these positive moral ideologies of *campesino* love for the land are constructed by landed *campesinos* in opposition to, and through negative portrayals of, landless producers and landless wage workers. This situation can undermine the notion of a common front between landed and landless producers in food sovereignty movements, since their differences are not only in terms of material differences, but also in ideological terms.

Food sovereignty advocates such as Via Campesina call for land reform, and this resonates with landless *campesinos*' desire for land in La Estrella. Whilst *campesinos* advocate for the need for better working conditions in haciendas (see next chapter) or for fairer rental prices as an immediate need, ultimately *campesinos*' best case scenario in their mind is to be able to work in their own plot. Land reform is not envisaged by

campesinos as a need for land equality, but rather the right for household survival. Land belongs mostly in the economic realm of ‘producir para comer’, in which the aim is to have the resources necessary to *salir adelante* (to get by). When discussing land reform in a capitalist environment, the Nicaraguan case highlights the importance of agrarian reform as an umbrella of policies of which land distribution is only one of the necessary conditions: as we saw in the previous chapter on grain, land is not enough: financial and knowledge resources, market access and fair prices should be an integral part of land reform.

Taking into account these moral economies of land, we see that people’s attachment to land and a strong moral understanding that land should be valued for its use (for providing food and livelihood security), should be central to concepts of food sovereignty grounded on *campesino* moral economy. This is supported by the role of solidarity and a sense of ‘fairness’ for household survival. The case study of La Estrella shows that *campesinos* don’t pursue complete equality, but rather their “rightful share” of a wealth that is product of a “common inheritance” (Ferguson 2015), in a way that ensures people in the *comunidad* make a living, through fair arrangements in land transfers and land distribution. In the following chapter I will explore the moral economies of labour and the importance of particular labour arrangements vis-a-vis labour markets for *campesino* household and community survival. The ‘special’ labour arrangements of peasant communities are central to the discourse of food sovereignty advocates. I will discuss the practices and moral ideologies of labour markets deployed by different kinds of *campesinos*, and see how these inform a food sovereignty grounded on *campesinos*’ everyday lives.

Chapter 6. ‘Making the house better off’ and ‘helping ourselves amongst the poor people’: the moral economy of labour in La Estrella

Introduction

I have shown in previous chapters how local notions of food sovereignty are rooted in partial engagement with markets, with a central role of own food production as a form of risk management and household survival, combined with an openness to sell produce in the market. Household and *comunidad* sustainability and profit-seeking are coexisting economic logics that ensure a safety net for the poorest *campesinos* and for livelihood shocks, and simultaneously allow for engaging with markets in particular circumstances. Different moral ideologies shape under which circumstances food or land can be traded or sold, and in what ways they are defined by their use value or by their exchange value. Moral norms articulated by different groups of *campesinos* resist the commoditisation of things in particular circumstances to their own advantage. In the case of land, ideologies of shame and work ethics undermine its sale as a commodity, and the side-effect of this articulation is a deepening chasm between landed and landless *campesinos*. In the case of food, use value and exchange value have to coexist with moral norms simultaneously encouraging self-sufficiency and social solidarity, but also an engagement with grain markets that ensures reinvestment in agriculture is possible and opens the possibility of improving one’s situation.

In Chapter 1 I outlined the centrality of the ‘peasant’ or ‘family farm’ in food sovereignty discourses, such as the widely shared Via Campesina’s manifesto ‘Peasant and Family Farm-based Agriculture Can Feed the World’ (Via Campesina, 2010a). Van der Ploeg is the academic voice amongst food sovereignty advocates behind this notion. His work is a development of Chayanov’s analysis of peasant livelihoods, in which he argues that peasant family farms organise themselves differently, in their values, priorities and the organisation of their resources, including family labour and community solidarity (Ploeg, 2009, Chayanov, 1986). They hence manage to survive in capitalist markets because they are relatively autonomous from them; they ‘distantiate’ themselves from them (Ploeg, 2009: 49) .

In this chapter I will explore how labour is allocated in La Estrella: in the household, through kinship and affiliation networks, within the village and beyond. In particular, I

consider how it is valued, priced and prioritised and the role of moral ideologies in determining the degree of commoditisation of labour. This analysis sheds light on important questions about autonomy mentioned above, since it enquires if the *campesino* family farm aims to be autonomous in terms of how it relates to capitalist labour markets. It also shows how there is a moral economy that resists *campesinos* searching the highest salaries, and channels labour towards family and solidarity networks in the village. Hence labour arrangements are a form of community autonomy from the market through solidarity mechanisms that do not follow rules of profit maximisation. Polanyi established how these social institutions outside the market were necessary to impede “severing the links between labour and their social and biological substance” (Paton, 2010: 83). Commoditisation treats labour power as if it were able “to sit on a shelf waiting for demand for it to surge” (2010: 82), but in reality the labouring body needs to survive and reproduce in order to do so. Hence the need for these social institutions outside the realm of the commodity to guarantee social reproduction and mitigate the impact of capitalist expansion (Polanyi, 2001: 79).

Unlike in Chapter 3, in which I used the household as the lowest unit of analysis, in this chapter I show how moral ideologies of labour mediate the conflict that arises *amongst* household members with individual needs and aspirations and the priorities of the ‘home’ (Shanin, 1986: 5). Agrawal highlighted in 2014 the need for research on food sovereignty to consider inequalities within the household (e.g. in terms of gender or age) but also how the relationship with capitalist markets is gendered (Agarwal, 2014, Deere, 1995). Via Campesina articulates two important discourses that may be contradictory: the centrality of the family farm and its opposition to capitalist markets, and the advancement of women’s rights (Mi-Young Park et al., 2013). However, as we shall see below, the moral economies that make family farms coalesce may be conservative forces that reinforce traditional gender and age norms. At the same time, there are gendered differences in the relationship to capitalist markets, in particular to the access to labour markets in globalised cash crops; whilst cash crops are often the target of the attacks of Via Campesina and other food sovereignty advocates (Via Campesina, 2010b), as opposed to a preference for local food markets, women and men reap different benefits and face different obstacles when they participate as labour in subsistence farming or as cash crop labourers (Deere, 1995).

Chapter 1 detailed how food sovereignty discourses view the autonomy of the family farm vis-à-vis capitalist markets as achieved not only through labour arrangements *within* the household but also across households within the community as a form of solidarity. Under this analysis, solidarity occurs in what Eriksen calls horizontal relationships of kinship and local social networks where labour is valued as a gift, and vertical relationships in terms of for-profit relations in which labour is treated as a commodity (Eriksen, 2001: 184-5). In this chapter I will enquire if in La Estrella there is in fact a different valuation of labour in terms of kinship and other social relations including the notion of help within the *comunidad*, as opposed to other forms of labour market relations. I also explore the moral discourses of solidarity and exploitation that are articulated by different *campesinos*: what amounts to help and what amounts to exploitation is subject to interpretation and thus to contestation. In analysing these labour relationships I test if the dichotomy sociality/gift vs. market/commodity is really useful in understanding everyday market relations in a *campesino* economy like la Estrella's.

The chapter is structured as follows: Section 1 describes the different ways in which labour is valued, priced and prioritised depending on the social relationships that exist between employer and employee, ranging from nuclear family labour to day work in nearby haciendas. In the following section I explore the organisation of labour within the home, and the household moral economy that generates both cohesion and inequality amongst household members. In Section 3 I explore the phenomenon of 'helping the neighbour' through preferential labour arrangements in the *comunidad*, and the moral ideologies that shape them. Lastly in Section 4 I explore so-called vertical relationships and how these are viewed by different groups, highlighting the possible class differences in La Estrella, in terms of land ownership or capacity of investment.

Section 1. Labour prices and social relationships in La Estrella

In Chapter 3 I used a fixed labour cost (80 cordobas/day) to calculate the returns to investment of different crops in La Estrella. For this purpose I used what was reported as the going rate in the *comunidad* to calculate the costs of agricultural labour. Yet, as with land rental prices, labour prices are highly variable depending on the social relationship that exists between employer and employee. In this section I will explore the different kinds of employment that exist in La Estrella, focusing particularly on the mobilisation of agricultural labour and the types of remuneration that these entail.

Depending on the type of social relationship, mediated by kinship and affiliation ties, patron-client relationships, or as a business transaction, labour is progressively treated as a commodity.

In chapter 3 I detailed the different kinds of labour that exist in La Estrella. With a few exceptions the forms of employment available in La Estrella are temporary agricultural jobs. In terms of agricultural labour, it is important to remember that labour is relatively scarce in La Estrella, as is the case generally in Nicaragua (Rueda Estrada, 2013, Baumeister, 2009). Compared to other Central American countries, *relative* land abundance and land reform has meant many can produce food as well as sell their labour, hence the labour pool is smaller and shaped by the priorities of subsistence planting (Baumeister, 2010).

In La Estrella, agricultural labour is hired on a daily basis, hence the common term to work as a '*jornalero*' (day worker). The other term commonly used is to work as a '*mozo*', and a more politically correct, but seldom used, way to address day workers is '*trabajador*' (worker) or '*temporal*' (temporary). Day work is also called '*el pegue*' (the hit). Employment agreements are verbal and informal, and often people are hired for one or up to 15 days at a time, either in the sowing season or in the planting season. People can be hired in terms of time (for a day's work) or contract (for a task). Contract labour (called *hacer contrato* or *ajuste*) is arranged for easily measurable tasks such as the clearing or harvesting of particular area of land, or the sowing of a particular quantity of seeds and employees are given a piece rate. During the sowing and harvest season the demand for labour is very high whereas the crops need much less tending to when the crops are growing and developing. In these quiet times, demand for labour is very low. Omar, a young man who worked for neighbours in their planting after he had sown his mother's land, said to me: "Now there is nothing, nothing until the bean harvest. There is no *pegue* now, everyone has sown their seeds, it doesn't make any sense looking for work at this time".

The valuing and remuneration of agricultural labour varies depending on the relationship that exists between employee and employer: nuclear family (e.g. mother and son), family within the household (e.g. grandparent and grandson), extended family outside the household (uncle and nephew living in different houses), with neighbours in the *comunidad*, with commercial grain producers and cattle ranchers in the village and

with haciendas outside the village (see summary in table 10 below). The conditions of the allocation of labour also vary depending if the exchange occurs in normal times or in an emergency.

In La Estrella, over half of households depend solely on unpaid family labour to farm. According to the survey I conducted, 54 per cent of households reported not hiring workers, and the rest rely both on both family labour and the hiring of workers in peak times. Even the relatively wealthy cattle ranchers and large scale bean and corn producers in the village use their own manual labour and their families' to bring down their production costs. These households who do not hire labour depend on the labour of household members and of their older sons and daughters who have moved out and started their own home. Nuclear family labour is unpaid, yet its mobilisation and appropriation entails an array of responsibilities, obligations and negotiations within the household as I explore in Section 2. Please note that when I say *nuclear* family labour is unpaid, it means that typically only spouses, sons and daughters give away their labour for free, whereas second-degree of family (grandsons, nephews, and so on) will charge for their labour, even if they live in the same house.

As I mentioned in Chapter 3 most households grow their own crops, so day workers are also grain producers from the same village. The only exception is Periquito, a farmer who had been unable to afford to rent land to plant in the past three years and whose income depended fully on the proceeds of his *jornalero* work. Farmers in La Estrella call this form of day work within the village '*trabajar al vecino*' (work for the neighbour). It is seen as a complement to their own planting and a way of getting cash. Roberto, a farmer who hired labour occasionally and engaged in sharecropping explained that it is "common to do your own work and then work for your neighbour (...). They call their neighbour their *patron* (boss): he is the owner of the work they are working at."

The fact that workers are simultaneously producers compounds labour scarcity on a seasonal basis, since *jornaleros* have to tend to their own crops as well. Availability of labour is as important as its price. Roberto highlighted this:

"One can have the money in one's hand, but you can't find anyone to help you. Look at what happened when Nestor turned down the job, I struggled to find someone to sow the land."

What I will show below is how social norms regulate the allocation of labour in these peaks of labour scarcity, in terms of price and in terms of prioritisation: who you will help plant first, and at what price will be crucial for your survival. *Jornalero* work is typically carried out by men in La Estrella. Whilst women do carry out agricultural work such as harvesting, they do so as unpaid family labour, and they very rarely sell their labour to neighbours (see chapter 3 on the gender and age division of labour). Since traditional female roles such as housework and childcare are also unpaid, this often means that women are relatively more cash-strapped than men in La Estrella. The exception to this rule are a few female headed households with young children that depend on women carrying out agricultural tasks, such as pulling out beans for neighbours in La Estrella, or working at nearby coffee haciendas outside the picking season⁵⁴.

The price tag on ‘working for your neighbour’ is different depending if your employer is extended family or not. In La Estrella it is common for *campesinos* to ‘ayudar’ (help) their family members in their planting once they have finished with theirs. As mentioned above, nuclear family members (i.e. sons and daughters) will work for free even if they are living outside the home, but second-grade family members (brothers outside the house, nephews, and so on) will charge a cash payment for their day work and would expect to be fed. Yet when hiring extended family, prices are preferential, the day being sold up to a 25 per cent cheaper than the going rate (50-60 cordobas for family members vs. 80 for people in the community). This is the common arrangement in normal times, but in cases of emergency, such as in the case of the death of a family member, extended family can provide free labour. I will explore labour relationships with extended family further in Section 3.

Whilst infrequent, there are some instances of agricultural labour exchanges in which there is no exchange of cash. This is what is called ‘*mano vuelta*’ (returned hand). Originally this term was coined to describe labour-pooling by indigenous communities in Central America. In La Estrella, *mano vuelta* is now reduced to work-day exchanges between *close* family members, often between parents and children living outside the house or grandparents and grandchildren. Days of work are exchange on a 1 to 1 ratio to avoid the use of cash.

⁵⁴ As mentioned in Chapter 3, men, women and children all participate in the coffee harvest.

Other forms of paid agricultural employment include working '*permanentes*' (permanent), as full-time hacienda or cattle-ranch work. In La Estrella, two families work for El Buen Perdon cattle ranch (the one that was given to a Contra commander in the 1990s), and men in those families take care of the cattle, manage the pastures, farm the elephant grass for animal feed, repair the fencing and other odd jobs. These families earn 70 cordobas per day and get housing, and preferential land rental prices to plant their subsistence crops (see Chapter 5). Similarly, those who work in coffee haciendas nearby such as Santa Marta in the low season can earn up to 85 cordobas a day, and if they work in more remote haciendas, they can earn up to 120 cordobas a day. In both cattle ranches and haciendas, there is little job security: if there is no work to do, they can be immediately fired and evicted. In small haciendas and cattle ranches there are no paid holidays or the 'seventh day' (a paid rest day in the week). In the case of large haciendas, labour legislation is applied, including holiday and rest days and sick leave. This is due to the renewed emphasis of the FSLN on policing haciendas. Despite the relatively higher wages and job availability for day workers in haciendas, *campesinos* in La Estrella rarely take these jobs and predominantly 'work for the neighbours'. I will explore in Section 4 the reasons for this paradoxical behaviour.

The wages in the coffee-picking time rocket due to the high demand of labour. Men, women and children travel to coffee haciendas during the months of December to April to harvest coffee in the haciendas. *Campesinos* are paid a piece rate depending on how much they pick (the normal unit is a '*lata*' (can) of coffee grains). This piece rate varies widely depending on how remote the hacienda is, and the total volume picked. The total cash the farmer takes home will also depend on the harvest period (in early days most grains will be green and in late days they will be few to pick). People in La Estrella can go to a nearby hacienda such as Santa Marta, but earn significantly less money and do not get accommodation or food, or they can go further afield and the wages increase. Picking proceeds also increase when people go to other Central American countries like Honduras, and more so if they go to Costa Rica. Unlike in the previous cases in which social relations determined who you worked for, in the case of haciendas it is a competitive labour market: people go where the piece rate is higher and living conditions are better. However, there is a strong gender and age element to this. Women with young children are often reliant on going to nearby haciendas and earn as little as 70 cordobas a day, since they need to return home to their children. Women are also

traditionally in charge of guarding the house, hence often some adult women stay home with small children, while men and children go to pick. Young men are the ones who go further away and to the most remote places, and hence pocket the highest wages, reaching over 300 cordobas a day. In the following section we will see how the labour power and cash obtained by household members is returned back into the household through a particular household moral economy.

We have seen above forms of unpaid labour and labour paid *in cash*. Vertical sharecropping is a special case of labour exchange in which labour is paid with half the harvest. As I detailed in Chapter 3, vertical sharecropping is an arrangement between a relatively wealthy landed person and landless *campesino* to farm a particular plot of land (often 1 MZ). In exchange for his labour, the landless *campesino* gets half of the harvest. The landed sharecropper provides the land and the inputs, and gets half the harvest. Vertical sharecropping is less profitable for the landed farmer than hiring labourers to do the job (see box below), but it allows for planting without having to exchange cash. It also means a lesser degree of supervision, since the worker is invested in the result of the planting. Sharecropping can also occur within a family: grandparents sharecropping with their grandsons, uncles with nephews, and so on, even if they live in the same household.

Jornalero payment: 29 days of labour, at 80 cordobas/day is 2,320 cordobas

Sharecrop payment: 600 cordobas per Q (min price in 2012); 13 Qs average production equals 7,800 cordobas. Half of which was 3400 cordobas.

On some occasions households donate their labour for community projects, what is called ‘volunteer work’. A common practice by development NGOs in Nicaragua is to demand local labour as the beneficiaries’ contribution to the project, the agency thus only providing the inputs. The donation of labour time can go from a few hours (e.g. clearing the road of rubbish) to several days at a time (e.g. repairing the playground tarmac in the school).

In this section I have shown the different types of valuation of labour in La Estrella. Please find a summary of these in Table 10. Despite much labour exchange being valued in monetary terms, social relationships shape the price of these exchanges, and in particular cases, labour provision is unpaid. What is interesting here is that market

prices only partially drive labour allocation, because people are bound by the relationships in which they are embedded. *Campesinos* prioritise their own nuclear and extended family before the rest of the community, and give each other discount prices. Similarly, people prioritise working in La Estrella despite the pay being lower than they can earn in haciendas. In the following sections I will explore the moral underpinnings of this prioritisation of labour time by *campesinos* in La Estrella and provide an explanation of why labour is only partially determined by forces of supply and demand i.e. why it is treated as a commodity only in particular circumstances.

Table 10. Types of labour remuneration in La Estrella

Unpaid labour	Housework Childcare <i>Nuclear</i> family agricultural labour Community work Emergency assistance	Unpaid
Labour exchanges	<i>Mano vuelta</i> - with nuclear family	No cash exchange
Preferential prices	Extended family agricultural labour Assistance to destitute community members	50-60 cordobas with food
'Market' prices in the <i>comunidad</i>	Agricultural labour 'for the neighbours' Permanent cattle ranching work	80 cordobas with food 70 cordobas with housing
Payment in grain	Vertical sharecropping	½ harvest and no food
Market prices outside the <i>comunidad</i>	Nearby hacienda work (off season) Remote hacienda work (off season) Hacienda work (picking season)	85 cordobas with food 120 cordobas with food and housing 120-300 cordobas a day with food and communal housing

Campesinos choose to earn no money at all when helping their family plant, yet they could earn significantly more if they worked in the haciendas, where work is readily

available even outside the harvest season. Yet corn and bean farming depends on the unpaid labour of household members for survival, since a majority of household economies could not foot the bill if they had to pay for their labour costs. In the following section I explore the importance of family labour in food sovereignty discourse, and the importance of the moral ideologies of the family in pooling labour and resources in the household.

Section 2. The moral economy of the household

In Chapter 1 I highlighted how the ‘peasant family farm’ is the key subject of social change for advocates of food sovereignty. This centrality of the family farm is rooted in a Chayanovian notion of the family farm as an economic unit of a different nature than any other food business. This distinct social organisation of the family farm involves, amongst other things, a particular valuation and organisation of labour, and a distinct objective of the exercise of that labour, household survival, as much as making a profit (Ploeg, 2009, McMichael, 2009). I have shown in Chapters 3 and 4 how low-income households in La Estrella do indeed engage in risk-mitigating economic practices that ensure household survival at the expense of maximising their investment (*‘producir para comer’*), yet also would articulate a maximising logic (*‘producir para negociar’*) when their survival was ensured. In this section I will explore the allocation of labour in households in La Estrella and the moral ideologies that enable and enforce a relative degree of cohesion of the household, the “cultural repertoires and gender relations”, the moral norms that ensure “social and material resources represent an organic unity” (Ploeg, 2009: 13).

In Section 1 above I showed how individual members of the household of working age have access to paid labour (more so in the case of young men, who are the main providers of *jornalero* labour), yet they prioritise the family when allocating it: firstly in terms of price, providing it free for their nuclear family, and at a discounted rate for their extended family; and secondly in terms of priority: first you help your nuclear family, then your extended family, and only then do you engage in selling your labour at a market price. There is a difference in the payment of labour between three and two-generation houses. In houses where grandparents, daughters⁵⁵ and grandchildren are all

⁵⁵ I here use daughters because most frequently three-generation households are a consequence of single mothers moving back in with their parents, and their children subsequently growing up to a working age, and thus having to help both their mother’s farming as well as their grandparents’.

of working age, the grandchildren receive a cash payment, although at preferential prices. In two-generation households, where only the nuclear family lives, labour is not paid. It is the *nuclear family* that is completely out of the paid labour market, rather than the household. Unpaid family labour is crucial for the survival of households in La Estrella. For example, Don Emiliano, a landed farmer with grown sons and daughters stressed how important the support of his children was, both in terms of material help but also reducing the risk of spending money on workers:

“My two boys who have been working with me: I thank God that they don’t leave me. One is thirty and the other one is almost 40. They are the ones who support me here, I almost never hire *mozo* (a day labourer); we do the work as a family. If I wanted to look for a *mozo*, I’d need to loan money and we’d end up in debt, and if we were to have a bad harvest like we’ve had this year, we would’ve ended in debt...but thank God we don’t have any credits to pay back.”

Household heads in La Estrella have to balance two competing elements: they need family labour to reduce the costs of production, and simultaneously they also need household members to engage in paid employment outside the household and re-channel a part of those earnings into the household. When young men and women work outside La Estrella (picking coffee or as nannies) they save a significant portion of their proceeds and they give it to their parents. These cash transfers are very important for household incomes, as they ensure grain does not need to be sold to produce cash. For example Mariluz, a widow with two young boys in their 20s, speaks about the importance of her working age children going to pick coffee after they have finished the harvest: “They have to go and pick coffee: if they were to stay, the grain in the house runs out. They have to leave for the grain to *rendir* (to yield).” The objective is to ensure the family has enough to eat. In the words of Encarnacion, an 18 year-old woman who lives with her parents and every now and then works as a nanny in Matagalpa, “It is necessary to help mothers, you need to give them in order to buy beans and corn”. Sometimes the transfers are done directly in kind, highlighting the nature of these transfers as a way of fulfilling household needs.

Part of the money that young men and women earn is also used for inputs for the following planting. Sara, a single woman in her thirties who lived with her nephews and taught pre-school, highlighted the importance of coffee picking for the farming economy.

“Coffee picking is good, because you make a lot of money. It is important, because when people get back from picking, they use the money to rent the land and buy the

poisons (the agrochemicals). If there were no coffee it would make it very difficult for people to plant”

Similarly, coffee salaries earned by young men and women are used to pay back a part of a loan that the parent had taken out. For example, Teodoro would speak of his 20 year old Manolo, saying that he was “*muy obligado*” (literally much obliged, meant in terms of being a good son responsible to his family) who had gone to pick coffee as “being on a mission to help his mother pay back a loan” from a local microcredit institution.

To give an example of the proportions re-channeled to the household: Encarnacion worked as a nanny in Matagalpa for a month, she earned 2,800 cordobas, and gave her mother 1,000. Similarly, Wilmer, Mirna’s son, is in his twenties, and has picked coffee on his own since he was 14. Before that he used to pick with his mother and sisters, and hence the money made was pocketed by his mother. In his latest coffee picking trip to Jinotega he saved up 8,000 cordobas, and gave his mother 4,000. Whilst the majority of savings made from labour outside the home are rechanneled to the household, in the case of *jornalero* work within the village, there is more variation. Once young men have finished helping their nuclear family and extended family, their proceeds of *jornalero* work are either kept entirely for themselves, or they give a portion of it (up to 50%) to one of their parents.

These transfers of portions of salaries to their families that I have described above occur when young men and women travel outside the village to work, yet despite the distance, they carry with them a commitment to the needs of the home. Thus “family farms (...) give priority to ‘home’”, when making decisions about “family members departure to work elsewhere or to return” (Shanin, 1986: 5). Yet it is not ‘the family’ as a unit that chooses, as Shanin indicated: this prioritisation occurs because there is a moral ideology of the family and the household that reconciles the needs and aspirations of the individual members and those needs of the household. Moral ideologies that rein that labour and resources into the household, are fundamental in promoting that ‘organic unity’ (Ploeg, 2009: 13). There are particular ‘ethical codes’ that underpin intra-household relations (Wike, 1997: 197). In the words of Honesto, a landless ex-combatant in his fifties, who emphasised the importance of children for the family economy:

“Children are good, when they don’t deviate the family nucleus. The family represents a support, it’s an economy. Yet it is important to understand each other, so everyone is on the same page”.

So what are the moral ideologies of the *campesino* household that make everyone ‘be on the same page’, as Honesto put it? In La Estrella, there are three positive forces for cohesion: ideas and feelings of ‘*lo propio*’ (one’s own), reciprocal obligations that push to ‘help the parents’, and notions of a ‘shared burden’. In parallel, there are two disciplining practices that restrain selfish behaviour: land inheritance in life, and the shame of being tagged a *vago*. I will explore these moral ideologies below.

A fundamental norm in the allocation of labour is the concept of ‘*Lo Propio*’ (one’s own) as an opposition to ‘*Lo Ajeno*’ (other people’s). ‘*Lo propio*’ is used by *campesinos* in la Estrella in terms of self-reliance: in terms of the nuclear family relying on its own material resources such as land, finances and labour. The more these resources are one’s own, the more you will be able to be ‘*en lo propio*’. ‘*Lo propio*’ is used to describe not only farming occurring in one’s own land, but also rented land. The notion is that in all these forms of enterprise to which *campesinos* invest their labour, they are also owners of the fruits of it⁵⁶. ‘*Lo propio*’ is a local understanding of autonomy in La Estrella, either as an aspiration of those who do not have the resources of land, finances or labour, or as a reality; and in the case of La Estrella, it is constructed around the nuclear family. As we shall see in the following section, autonomy is not autarky, and ‘*lo propio*’ relies as well on kinship and social networks to thrive.

This ‘*lo propio*’ is counterposed to the concept of ‘*Lo ajeno*’, which is used to describe work done for others in the community, and with particular negative connotations as counterposed to work carried out in the haciendas. As I indicated in Chapter 5, selling one’s labour in the haciendas is viewed as lack of work ethic, rather than a product of necessity or as a valid economic choice. Nestor Ruiz was criticised for owning land and leaving it idle whilst going to the haciendas as a *jornalero* in planting time. Yasmina, who I described above, said:

⁵⁶ Vertical sharecropping is a grey area in terms of understandings of *lo propio*. Whilst all my respondents considered renting as a preferable alternative to sharecropping, there were differences of opinion between how much sharecropping was an enterprise of one’s own, depending if they viewed their relationship with the wealthier sharecropper as a positive collaboration or one fraught with conflict. I show the importance of these relationships in Section 3 below.

“There are people who like working in *lo ajeno* (...) despite having land, he has been working in Santa Marta for two years. Being able to plant... and the one who is making the money is the owner of the hacienda!”

‘*Lo propio*’ is not only an economic status, but also a feeling that grows in the *campesino* as he or she comes of age. Roberto spoke to me about how children in La Estrella slack work and don’t value planting, yet once they reach 16 “they start working as they have to, they sow because they feel it is their own”. This feeling of ownership transpires in the decisions that young people make. For example, Wilmer, a young man in his twenties who plants corn and beans for his mother, when he was asked if he was able to help a neighbour from the *comunidad* in her planting, he replied in an outraged tone implying it was a ridiculous suggestion: “how am I going to go when we’re working *en lo propio*?” As long as his families’ plot is not cleared and sowed, Wilmer will not pursue paid work.

There is a tension, however, between ‘*lo propio*’, as a practice that emphasizes the allocation of labour to own food production, and the need for cash. Wilmer, who I described turning down a job opportunity for the sake of ‘*lo propio*’ described this tension:

“There is no work here. One can work *en lo propio* but one needs the cash (...). People don’t have a single cordoba. The people in the community to have money in cash they need to go out. One can wait for the corn and the beans, but one feels sad to sell it”.

Another important ‘ethical imperative’ of the household (Wike, 1997: 197), that ensures that the labour and wages of the younger generations are channelled to the home are understandings of mutuality as a permanent debt that young children have accrued to their parents and which they need to constantly pay back. This obligation is framed in what Graeber called everyday communist exchange, often articulated vaguely as ‘helping’ someone as an exchange based on the principle “from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs.” (Graeber, 2010: 4), and framed in La Estrella as ‘helping’ either or both parents. The meeting by parents of emotional and material needs of children creates an obligation for children to provide ‘help’ to their parents. “They were there for me” is often articulated by people as the main reason they help their parents. Elena, for example, speaks of her obligation towards her parents (after she has met her own household needs), which translates into giving them her free labour

at times of harvest, and during the two years she was in Costa Rica, she sent them remittances.

“I sent what I’ve earned to my father and mother, I’m always supportive of them, because all of the time they have sacrificed themselves for us, and with whatever I’m left with I help them out”

Children and young men and women are often reminded in everyday exchanges of their obligations towards their parents. Through recommendations, advice, nagging and sermons, the younger generations are taught what work they should be carrying out, reminded of what work they haven’t done or if they haven’t done it well enough, and told of the reciprocal obligation they have towards their parents. For example Sofia would openly compare between the behaviour of her two eldest sons, both in their twenties, who were still living with her. Unlike Roger, Tomi was not meeting his side of the bargain.

“Tomi is very *desordenado* (disordered- irresponsible) and not loving, he only thinks about food for himself, and not about his mother; because he still has the obligation to help me, to say ‘look mum, here are five pounds of rice for you, take these two pounds of sugar to help us all out’...but no, he only thinks about eating and about himself, and he doesn’t think that we need to buy soap, sugar, salt [...] I tell him he should learn to appreciate the most important person in his life, his mother. Because his mother is always there for him.”

Parents on the other hand, also have a duty towards their children to meet their material needs whilst they are living in the same house⁵⁷ if they are to use their labour: providing clothes, and in more recent times, providing them with the time and resources to study if they wish to do so.

Ideas of a common shared burden are also articulated to shape household members’ labour allocation. The argument goes that if one stops doing their part, the rest suffer. This discourse also plays a role in reproducing ‘typical’ gender and age roles. For example, Roberto highlighted how his grandchildren slacking in their responsibilities was shifting the burden on those who did meet them:

“This is why there have been some clashes between me and my stepdaughter. Her two older boys don’t work, so Mirna is ‘over-burdened’ (*recargada*). She has to take care of her children on her own. The boys should be working to help their mother economically. Chema, he doesn’t help his mother, he just wanders from here to there to see what he can get. At least Wilmer is around, helping his mother plant and works in the field. Chema is making Wilmer ‘over-burdened’. So why

⁵⁷ I mentioned in Chapter 3, it is more common for men to stay with their parents until their mid to late twenties, whereas women tend to leave the home in their late teens.

should you care for maintaining a child that doesn't help you? And her daughter Hilda, she's always going here and there and she doesn't wash a single dish. And then it is Yasmina who is over-burdened"

These notions of shared burden depend on and reproduce pre-determined and traditional roles and responsibilities in the household (see gender division of labour in chapter 3), with men and boys expected to work the land and women and girls carrying out housework and childcare. Under these shared obligations, household members are expected to substitute their labour power when they decide to go abroad in planting time. If a young man decides to leave the village for paid work (e.g. migrating abroad), he would be expected to send at least the money necessary for the payment of a paid worker (the *jornalero*) to carry out his agricultural tasks.

The arguments described above are all positive moral ideologies of reciprocity and obligation: '*lo propio*', 'helping the parents' and 'sharing the family burden' give positive incentives for household members to prioritise their labour to the household rather than sell their labour in the market. However the moral economy of the household also has two key disciplining forces to undermine behaviours considered selfish. These two forces are the 'inheritance in life' and the village-wide articulation of the 'vagos' discourse, which I describe below.

In Chapter 5, I described the common practice of 'giving land' as an inheritance in life for those whose parents or spouses owned land. This 'giving of land' was a permanent transfer of the control of a piece of land, but not the ownership. This customary practice is done verbally and, often against the wishes of the older sons and daughters, the legal inheritance does not crystallise until the landowner dies and leaves them their piece of land as part of his will⁵⁸. This system allows landowners to discipline other household members to allocate their labour to them, in the words of Silvio, a man in his thirties who was caring for his elderly parents and had already taken over the responsibilities of planting:

"Taking care of one's parents guarantees you an inheritance if the father writes a will, because the parent will reward the person who stayed in the house helping the parents and will give nothing to the child who left them."

There is another strong disciplining discourse that takes a negative form; it makes people reflect on who they *don't* want to be, and thus shapes their behaviour to benefit

⁵⁸ If the landowner dies without writing a will, the property is divided equally between the inheritors, regardless of whatever verbal agreement was made in life.

the home. A constant criticism of people in La Estrella was to shame them by calling them *vagos* (vagrant, wanderer⁵⁹). *Vago* could be used to criticise a broad range of people in different circumstances: from children not doing their homework, to wives spending time outside the house or youngsters bordering on delinquent behaviour. It also describes young people drinking, taking drugs and sleeping around. It is interesting that a 19th century elite discourse to coerce *campesino* labour –vagrancy laws forced people to work in the haciendas from the end of the 19th century to the 1930s- has been appropriated by *campesinos* themselves to discipline labour in the household.

The *vago* discourse draws on ideas of the work ethic and expectations that people should use their time productively (see Chapter 5). This discourse circulates through gossip in the community and also within the household. It aims to rein the household members back to prioritise the household needs. See for example Yasmina criticising her eldest grandson while her other grandson Wilmer was having lunch in the kitchen.

“Going abroad to work is fine... but they have to bring something back, to do something with the money, like build a house. But what is not acceptable is people going there, making money and then spending it all ‘*de balde*’ (without any purpose). Chema for example is a *vago*, he works aside (*por un lado*), and he doesn’t mind coming back with or without money (...). The majority of young people, when they go to pick coffee, they don’t do it out of love of working, of making the house better off (*no es por amor de superar la casa*). For them it is a fun thing, to go somewhere in a group, it is not out of love to the house and to bring money back home. “

What is interesting is that it is precisely those who are criticized most as *vagos*, as is the case with Wilmer, are still granted a lot of responsibilities and carry them out effectively. Moral disciplining through the discourse of *vagos* is directed not at those who have disengaged from the household, but those who are indeed meeting their responsibilities, but are considered to be at risk. The power of the *vagos* discourse is that *vagos* can straighten their path –what people call ‘*componerse*’ (to get yourself together). There is space for redemption, and it is a moral discourse that young people have internalised themselves, by speaking of having been *vagos*.

Young people have to juggle the real needs that they have with the expectations that are placed on them. There is a particular tension when these young people are out picking coffee. This is an income that is crucial for the household and the articulation of the

⁵⁹ *Vago* in Nicaragua is not –unlike in other Spanish-speaking countries-used in terms of lazy. The local word to describe someone who is lazy is *haragan*.

discourse of *vagos* aims to bring back to the household as many resources as possible. Young people recognise that there is a tension between their own needs and those of the household. Whilst they don't counter the mainstream narrative of the ethics of household allegiance, they point out some mitigating circumstances that prevent them from meeting fully their expectations, explaining why they had to keep a higher proportion of their savings to themselves. Wilmer explains:

“TV does affect the way we behave. For example before we could've worn any old clothes, but now with what we see on TV, we have to worry about what we wear: the right trousers, the earrings, the t-shirts... (...) I've picked coffee in Jinotega, in La Escocia. It's fun. In big haciendas you make good money, but the food sometimes is very little and one has to buy to eat.”

In this section I have shown the labour dimension of the moral economy of the household. I have highlighted the moral ideologies that allocate and prioritise labour in La Estrella's homes, a context in which household members are expected to participate both as unpaid family labour *and* as paid labour in the commodity economy. In the latter case, these ethical imperatives bring back to the *campesino* household also a portion of the wages they obtain, remittances that are essential for many households. Allegiance to the family farm is achieved through positive ideologies of identity and autonomy, reciprocity and visions of a shared burden, as well as disciplining discourses and practices, such as withholding land inheritance or the shame of deviance through the articulation of the *vagos* discourse. Household economies in La Estrella are not cut-off from each other, and very often require not only family labour to survive, but also the 'help' of extended family and neighbour. Yet in these cases, cash exchanges are expected, labour is increasingly treated as a commodity and the moral norms that shape these exchanges are different. I explore this in the following section.

Section 3. 'Helping the neighbour': kinship and community solidarity

In terms of labour, the boundaries between households are diffuse. Household labour arrangements are connected to each other in mutual and market relations. When labour exchanges occur in La Estrella, social relationships determine the type and conditions of that labour arrangement. I have shown in Section 2 how nuclear family farming (*'lo propio'*) is deemed to be the first priority. Yet also family members 'help each other' through work, and they 'help the neighbours' when working in the community. In this section I will explore the moral economy of these labour exchanges and highlight how 'help' and 'exploitation' are a matter of contention in La Estrella.

When people reach a certain age and their life circumstances change, most frequently when they find a partner, or in the case of single mothers, when their children are old enough to work, they move *aparte* (building a separate homestead). At this stage the people in the household are responsible and expected to provide for themselves. The obligations towards parents become less stringent, yet the reciprocal debt remains. Similarly, parents can ‘help’ their children through the provision of childcare. This is of particular importance in the case of female-headed households. Mothers who can rely on their own mothers and other family members to take care of their children are able to take agricultural work and childcare work in the cities (or even in some cases abroad).

There is a labour arrangement that on occasion occurs either within the household (when household members are in charge of different plots) or between households that are part of the same nuclear family. This is called *mano vuelta*, and it consists in helping someone close in the family in the planting (e.g. sowing), and soon after they will help you out in yours, and no money is exchanged.

Because the sowing and harvest seasons represent such a high demand for labour, households rely on the ‘help’ of extended family as well. People still speak of ‘*la familia*’ but when asked to specify, there is a difference between ‘*familia de primer grado*’ (the nuclear family) and ‘*familia de segundo grado*’ (sons-in-law, uncles, cousins, grandchildren and so on). These family members are called upon to help with the planting, and are paid at a discounted rate. Often the family members that ‘help’ tend to be the same ones every season, giving both the employer and employees a sense of security. For example Mirna often relies on her nephew Donald’s help for the sowing and the harvest, to complement the work of her two young sons:

“We often pay him 60 cordobas. Normally workers charge 70, but Donald charges us 60 because he is family. I always call on him when we need some help”

Extended family is expected to ‘help’, in the act of recruiting or selling their labour. For families who were landless and poor, it was expected that other family members would help them by hiring them instead of hiring other people in the *comunidad*. This norm was made clear when Humberto Rodriguez’s family was criticised for not having supported him before his death (see Chapter 4). Family is expected to take priority when hiring workers.

However, whilst the act of hiring family labour is a form of reciprocity, it is not a fully redistributive or equalising force: there are great income and wealth disparities *within* extended families in La Estrella. For example the Dorados, the wealthiest basic grain producers in the village who trade significant grain surplus and are able to purchase land and cattle, have extended family who are landless, who produce for subsistence and are unable to purchase cattle.

I have described agricultural labour within the community, described as ‘working for the neighbour’, and very frequently articulated in terms of ‘*ayuda*’ (help), as a form of community solidarity, based on the understanding that everyone is in a similar position, poor and producing food. Olivia describes it in this way:

“We work as *jornaleros*, one day here and one day there, helping us amongst poor people. The haciendas, after the picking season is finished, they only use those people who are in the haciendas, so we have to work for others”

Often relatively long-term relationships are established, and workers tend to repeat after each season with the same employers. Building positive labour relationships with particular neighbours is a way of ensuring you will be hired in the future. For example Tomi, who is 18 years old, has worked ‘*al pegue*’ (daily work) for the next door neighbour Miki since he was 14. Since then he has needed to show that he is ‘*pilas puestas*’ (batteries on: proactive) and hardworking, and when someone who isn’t family asks him to ‘help’ them in the planting season, Tomi checks with Miki to make sure that it doesn’t overlap with his work. However, there is no binding verbal or written agreement beyond each season, just a mutual understanding, and the need for labour depends on many emergent factors: the land area decided to plant, how much family labour is available and how much cash is available to hire *mozos*, so it can often occur that both employees and employers need to ask around in the village. “In the end we all know who is offering work and who is looking for work” said Roberto.

Families, ‘*la familia*’ generally understood as the nuclear family living under the same roof, fend for themselves, but they are “embedded in larger relations of reciprocity” (Kolm, 2006: 378) within the *comunidad*, and work may be used as a form of solidarity. Isaias, a young *campesino* in his twenties who lived with his mother and had taught himself English, was quite reflective about social relations in the village. When I inquired about examples of solidarity in the village, he spoke of the use of wage levels, what I called preferential prices, as a form of help.

“Sometimes people work for others at a lower price, in order to help them. For example last year I helped Wilmer planting, and he paid me 60 cordobas. I accepted it because I had the will to help (*tenía la voluntad de apoyar*) [...]. Another way to support is by working more than what you’re being paid for. For example I was helping Wilmer in sowing, but he had cleared the brush, but hadn’t had the chance to sweep. So in the end we had to sweep and sow at the same time, but I didn’t charge him more.”

Yet, as we saw in the case of grain in Chapter 4 preferential pricing as ‘help’ could also hide the wealthier part taking advantage of the need of the employee. Isaias continued reflecting on these ‘solidarity’ labour relations:

“Although sometimes the salaries are too low, but you’re forced to take them. You end up saying to yourself: ‘60 (cordobas) is better than nothing!’”

Roberto highlighted a similar contradiction “Or perhaps they [the day workers] are in need, and they give them a low price!” As we will see in the following section, this grey area between help and exploitation makes the moral economy of labour a contested territory. What is considered solidarity and what is considered exploitation is a matter of debate. This is particularly important in the case of unequal labour relationships in which a landed wealthier part is able to portray vertical labour relations as horizontal through the articulation of the ‘*ayuda*’ discourse. Vertical sharecropping is an important example of this contested grey area of help and exploitation, as I will explore this in the following section.

I have shown that in labour relations individual and families share their labour with other families, in the forms of “one to one reciprocity or rotating” labour arrangements (Holt-Gimenez, 2006: 97): in the forms of ‘*mano vuelta*’ or preferential labour arrangements. Whilst Eric Holt-Gimenez refers to “mutual aid parties” (ibid), these forms of collective labour pooling rarely occur in La Estrella. Collective labour pooling in normal times only occurs in the case of voluntary work for development schemes, in which families contribute to the construction of particular infrastructures or the maintenance of ditches, roads or buildings. However, labour pooling in La Estrella does not occur to support the planting of individual farmers.

I have spoken earlier of ‘normal times’, since, as I indicated in the case of food transfers in Chapter 4, labour exchanges are different when there is a case of destitution or livelihood shocks in the village. Despite criticisms, the Rodriguez’s extended family did pull together in the end to aid his widow and family: Humberto’s brothers finalised the *postrera* sowing that Humberto had left unfinished and took care of the harvest,

helping the family survive until they adapted to the new situation. Humberto's nephew was sent by his father to the city to work immediately after the incident, and had sent back 100 cordobas to feed the family in the aftermath. The *comunidad* also stepped in to help with the funeral arrangements. Dozens of young men contributed to digging the grave, and several women donated and prepared food for the wake. Hence in normal times labour can be sold at preferential prices, when it is still sold partially as a commodity, but in situations of risk of destitution or shocks, family members and the *comunidad* step in with free labour. Free labour was also provided to help destitute elderly women in the village, such as Raquelita who lived on her own and depended on charity for survival. She received food donations by neighbours periodically and, in terms of labour donations, her house was reconstructed by a neighbour only at the cost of the wood. Yasmina criticised her family (who lived in a different village) because they had not helped her and highlighted the role of the community to step in: "if the family abandons a person, it is the *comunidad* that has to give them something".

As I described in Chapter 2, the notion of *comunidad* in Nicaragua is both a term to describe a geographical place (a village) but also a community of mutual obligation and reciprocity. However, this solidarity of the *comunidad* is not a redistributive or equalising dynamic, it is a social safety net to prevent destitution in case of shocks. Roberto spoke of how in normal times families prioritise their own needs, and only support others in times of need, but only as one-off transfers to put them back on their feet and not beyond that.

"not really, this type of support [that may happen elsewhere] in which when I help another farmer in his work and then that farmer helps me and so on for all the other farmers, that doesn't exist here. We don't cooperate, we work separately, we do our own work, and if you manage to get things done, great and if not, that's it. [...] One has to serve [others], but only to help people out temporarily, when they are in trouble, but one can't be '*manteniendo*' (maintaining) people. Because some people think that your service is an obligation, a right, and it isn't. It is just a service I'm doing to those who are poorer than I am to help them out with a problem."

In this section I have shown the different kinds of labour arrangements that exist between households in La Estrella. The valuations of these exchanges vary depending on the 'closeness' that exists between the employer and employee, in terms of kinship and affiliation, and the situation, between normal and exceptional times of need. The closer the kinship and affiliation ties, the less commodified labour will be, both in terms of price, but also in terms of prioritisation, a factor that is crucial in the sowing and

harvesting seasons when there is labour scarcity. Preferential prices will be granted to family members and those who people purport to ‘help’. Yet what is important here is that in these cases, the tools of solidarity (paid employment) are the same tools as those of capitalist employment, hence what is a fair wage is contested, what one portrays as ‘help’ can be equally portrayed by another as exploitation. Family farming in la Estrella depend mainly on their own labour, but they depend partially on the networks of mutuality beyond the household in terms of extended family members and community, to bring labour costs down (and to reduce the need to produce cash in order to pay for it). Whilst during normal times families work autonomously and the poorest families remain unaided unless through preferential prices, in case of livelihood shocks (such as death or illness), or destitution in the case of abandoned elderly people, there is a form of ‘social insurance’ (Scott, 1976) through the emergency provision of labour (as well as material transfers such as food or clothes) both from the family and the *comunidad*.

Whilst family and ‘working with the neighbour’ are important sources of employment, I have established the importance of vertical forms of employment, both within the *comunidad*, in terms of wealthier landowners and entrepreneurs mobilising labour, and the entanglement of the subsistence economy with the coffee economy. I explore the moral economy of these labour arrangements in the following section.

Section 4. Working for haciendas and patron client relations, mimicking and substituting kinship and affiliation

Since the moral economy of labour channels workdays towards kinship and friendship networks, what does this entail for those wealthier basic grain farmers who produce surplus ‘*para negociar*’ (for commercialisation) and the haciendas? How do they mobilise labour? And in terms of moral economy, what moral ideologies do *patrones* and employees deploy to shape the price and conditions of the sale of labour?

The larger the scale of production of basic grains, the larger the labour requirement, despite the labour-saving techniques I explored in Chapter 3 such as herbicide use or ploughing. There are two different challenges: firstly, the challenge of producing cash to pay for the workers; and secondly, to ensure that they are available when they are needed in times of acute labour scarcity. If planting for commercialisation, the way of obtaining most profit is by hiring labour (on top of your family labour) rather than other forms of labour mobilisation such as sharecropping. In the words of Nicolas Dorado, the

wealthiest basic grain producer in La Estrella, who planted 20 MZ of corn and beans, and would end up mobilising 11 people (plus 3 members of the household) for the sowing:

“It is better [to plant] only with *mozos* (workers); when you sharecrop you end up with nothing left over, you need to plant a lot more in order to get something.”

However, vertical sharecropping is arranged in those cases in which landed farmers engage in a scale of production is ‘*para negociar*’, but their capacity to produce enough initial financial investment is insufficient. In this case, as explained above, the wealthiest part foregoes half of the harvest, but does not have to advance wages in cash, only the farming inputs. The worker part of the agreement does the planting and maintenance of the crops. The worker in sharecropping benefits from the potential benefits of planting yet not having to invest in the inputs. Jeremias, who is landless and a recent father, has had experience renting land, sharecropping and working as a day labourer. He highlights the risk-mitigating nature of sharecropping for the worker:

“The advantage with sharecropping is that if the harvest hasn’t been good, you’ve only lost your labour, and the other sharecropper the inputs.”

However in some cases the wealthier partner asks the worker to participate with some inputs, which, as I indicate below, is met with resistance. In most cases the worker in a sharecropping agreement is relatively poor: often people are the worker partner in vertical sharecropping because either they couldn’t afford to rent land for all they want to produce (as we saw in Chapter 5, land rental is considered as a preferable arrangement to sharecropping), or if they did have land they didn’t have enough cash to buy inputs. Andres, for example, has an orchard that occupies the 3 MZ he owns, so he has to plant in someone else’s land: “We rent from those who have lands, and if we don’t manage to get any, we sharecrop”.

Yet sharecropping can also be a source of conflict; the wealthier landowner often complains of having to be ‘*detras de ellos*’ (on top of them), and can complain about their lack of surveillance of the crops, about the bad timing of sowing and fertilising, the lack of weeding or of sharecroppers eating part of the seeds. The worker sharecropper on the other hand complains about the timeliness of inputs, and the exploitative nature of the agreement. For example Jaime refused to sharecrop and preferred to rent or work as a *mozo*:

“I’ve learned my lesson, in the end [when I sharecrop] I work double and I end up with nothing, at least when one rents, it is *propio* (one’s own), in sharecropping you only have fights (...) One puts all the work, and they just sit back and wait for the harvest to come. Also, they have to provide all the inputs, and sometimes, in the middle of a harvest, when you are in need of a *foleo* (foliar fertiliser) or something like that, they put their hands in their pockets and say “I’m out of money” (...) Often the landowners blame the worker for bad harvests. Sometimes it is true that one hasn’t got enough time to do all the clearing that should be done, but I am just one person.”

Even Jeremias, who had had only positive experiences sharecropping, had a clear opinion on what made a good and bad sharecropper in terms of the ready provision of inputs and the worker only contributing with work. In his eyes, a good sharecropper is “someone who covers all the expenses, even the seeds”.

Poor people are the most likely to participate as the worker in sharecropping, and often (as I showed in chapter 3) workers of cattle ranches or haciendas sharecrop with their *patrones*. In this case, this arrangement is often portrayed by the wealthier part as *ayuda*. For example, Carlos, a member of the Montoro family, who are cattle ranchers, sharecropped with a family member and his worker. He frames this arrangement as a form of help:

“I sharecrop with some poor people who own nothing, and doing this I help them a little.”

However, as I will show below, by doing this, cattle ranchers and hacienda owners ensure that those workers are available to work for them.

Roberto also frames his sharecropping as a form of ‘serving the other’, and highlights the difference between his sharecropping arrangements as a form of poor-to-poor solidarity rather than exploitation.

“Serving the other coming within me, it is my conscience; it is born from my heart. Amongst the poor there are different degrees of this conscience. But rich people don’t have conscience, if not, they would become poor again (*se irian abajo*). (...) If Santiago [referring to me] becomes rich, perhaps he will stop serving others, because he fears not being rich anymore, and takes advantage of the poor. This is why, when I start ‘*yendo para arriba*’ (being better off), I have to give more to others, I have to serve more, I have to help the poor.”

Hence there is this notion that wealth accumulation risks being built on the exploitation of the poor. I showed in Chapter 5 how Olivia spoke of the new wealthy landowners as “forgetting about the poor” when they became rich, or in Chapter 4 the prevailing notion that wealth can only be accumulated through the dispossession of others, such as

through trading grain. These moral ideologies of wealth make economic success a morally ambivalent situation. If a farmer manages to accumulate enough wealth, he or she is judged in terms of having forgotten the practice Olivia termed as ‘helping ourselves amongst the poor people’. Yet, as we saw in the case of traders, because the instruments of exploitation (trading or employment relations) are often the same instruments used to support the poor, the wealthiest *campesinos* in La Estrella are able to articulate a discourse of “help”: by providing a channel to their grain, by employing them, and so on.

I have described vertical sharecropping arrangements. The relationships differ in the case of the wealthiest grain traders like the Dorados, who hire workers to carry out most of their work. Occasionally they rely on vertical sharecropping, but they do as a way to ensure their workers are available, to bind them to their work rather than this being a preference (see above). Like cattle ranchers in La Estrella, they face an important challenge ensuring they have workers available in peak times, when the prevailing moral economy of labour channels them towards their kinship and affiliation networks. Nicolas Dorado, a large scale grain producer, explains how this is solved through debt:

“You can find [workers], if you pay them beforehand. People in La Estrella don’t have any cash. They say ‘Don Nicolas, lend me 500 cordobas and I will help you, as an advance’ or ‘Don Nicolas, do you have corn, give me a quintal’. ‘Here you are’ I say, ‘but you’ll need to pay it back’.(...) [When the planting comes] I say ‘come on boys let’s go to work’ and they can’t go anywhere else, I’ve already got a grip on them (*les tengo agarrados*)”

Alternatively, as I mentioned above, workers can be bonded through the promise of sharecropping, or land rental at preferential prices. Andres, for example, talks about how he helps Leonidas Dorado for a few days at a lower rate in exchange for sharecropping:

“He says sometimes, ‘help me out for a week’, and he pays very little (...), these are jobs that aren’t profitable (*no dan resultado*), but I do them with Leonidas because then he helps me get land to sharecrop. (...) If I don’t have corn, I ask him to give some to me on loan, and that’s how the negotiation goes”

Thus it is important not to consider a patron-client relationship between two people strictly as a rental, sharecropping or day worker relationship. These are in fact very fluid, and with the same landowner different arrangements can be made in different seasons. This is why it can be useful for someone to nurture a particular patron-client relationship by working as a day worker, because it might give them access to land to

plant *'lo propio'* in the future. Killick warns against the bias of seeing debt labour relationships as always exploitative, because, as in the case of the *Ashéninka* in Peru, workers can voluntarily engage in seemingly exploitative relations to “connect” and “bond” with wealthier employers and outside traders, building the “foundation of a long-term relationship”. This relationship, in turn creates obligations for the employer (Killick, 2011: 355). The active seeking of these patron-client relationships is an important livelihood strategy also in Nicaragua (Fisher, 2012). This was the case of Andres above, and Jeremias also consciously nurtured this patron-client relationship with the cattle rancher Raul Montoro. Viewing his situation as a fairly vulnerable one (a young couple with 2 dependent children and one just about to be born), the security and access to credit that this working relationship provided was worthwhile to them.

“Any need you have, he helps you (*le sirve a uno*- he serves you); he’s been helping me a lot recently with my daughters’ illness, sometimes he gives me one or two thousand cordobas and then I return it in work, I help him, and I sharecrop with him, because of the trust we share, I’ve been with him for around a year. I sharecropped with Fernando Toledo before [but I changed to Raul Montoro] because it is more secure (*es mas seguro*) with the cash.”

Hence within the priorities of whom to sell your labour to, the notion of risk management for household sustainability, the ‘use value- *producir para comer*’ economic logic, is of importance. Another important factor that relates to the discussion above of the grey area between help and exploitation is for these patron-client relationships occurring in La Estrella to succeed, they require, on top of the benefits of material exchange, a mimicry of the horizontal relations described as ‘helping ourselves between the poor’. This is achieved through discourses of ‘help’ and ‘serving the other’, but also through sharing food and drink as equals. When speaking about bad employers, Jeremias highlighted the difference in work hours and the drudgery of the tasks relative to the wages, but interestingly he highlighted the importance of a level of equality in terms of their consumption:

“The Montoro’s have ‘*buen porte*’ (are good natured), they are good people. Unlike Abigail Sereno who gives just beans and rice, at Raul’s I eat what they eat, often they get cheese, and if they’re eating chicken you get chicken.”

Roberto, who I have quoted above reporting he didn’t have enough cash to engage in these debt relationships with his workers, talks of how these relationships imitate familiarity. He speaks of the Dorados having:

“a ‘convinced’ (*concientizado*) group [of workers] on their side, they are like

a father and a mother, I give you and you give me. [...] They get drunk with them, they ‘convince’ them.”

Until now we have seen labour relationships in La Estrella, which could be dubbed as horizontal in the case of kinship and community, and vertical in the case of patron-client relationships with wealthy cattle ranchers and commercial grain producers in La Estrella. Yet, the distinction between vertical and horizontal is a discursive one rather than a real one, since I have established that there can be labour exploitation in ‘horizontal’ relationships with family and amongst neighbours, and even vertical relations require some degree of ‘horizontality’ to be successful (particularly in a scenario with high labour scarcity).

The case of coffee haciendas outside the village are considered as a different employer altogether. In Section 1 above I showed that haciendas outside La Estrella offer relatively higher salaries that can range from 20-50% more what people can make per day in the village. Since the return of the FSLN to power in Nicaragua, working conditions have improved, with workers having housing, work contracts and a guaranteed *septimo dia* (1 paid rest day a week), medical and accident insurance⁶⁰. Work is available in haciendas outside harvest time (sowing coffee, weeding), and many offer transportation to and from the hacienda. Sometimes pick-up trucks with large speakers come through the main road advertising offers for day workers in the haciendas. Yet these higher prices do not succeed in bringing workers from La Estrella out to those haciendas, even when *campesinos* fulfil their responsibilities to their house, family and neighbours. The reasons people give are fundamentally related to the harshness of working conditions. Carlos, summarises it as:

“the problem is that the work is hard, they don’t treat you well and the food is bad (...), people just prefer to work around La Estrella and see what they can get.”

Working in a hacienda, compared to working ‘*en lo propio*’ represents a riskier venture. If you cannot work, you lose both your income and housing immediately. Yet others explained the fact that people remained in the village as a cultural preference. Dona Luisa, who hadn’t succeeded in finding land during my fieldwork and depended on her brother’s income as a day worker to survive, stated that her brother, like others, “prefers to stay in La Estrella. It’s better to stay in one’s own place, one is already used to the place.” Jaime Manzano, one of the poorest *campesinos* in La Estrella, who made much

⁶⁰ These measures have only been successfully implemented in larger haciendas which can be monitored, smaller haciendas and cattle ranches do not fulfil many of these workers’ entitlements.

of his cash working as a *mozo*, had a similar preference to stay home and an aversion to the food in haciendas.

“Yes, there is work, but it is really nasty there. The food is horrible, it makes you ill, and you end up spending more money going to the doctor than what you make in the hacienda. I’d rather die of hunger here in my own house than eat in one of those haciendas.”

Life in haciendas is hard, and several landless households in La Estrella had worked *permanentes* in coffee haciendas in the past before saving enough money to buy a plot to build themselves a house. Their aspiration was to settle down working in ‘*lo propio*’. Remedios is a landless woman who worked 9 years in a hacienda before moving with her husband and children to La Estrella:

“I lived working like a man would in a *hacienda*; I lived with a salary of a patron in La Florida. I was fed up of working: I had no strength left in me and I was feeling tired, I worked 9 years to bring up my children [...] we moved here to see if we would be better off, because we couldn’t bear working in the haciendas anymore. We’ve done well here because now only he works and I don’t; now I just stay at home taking care of my grandchildren. My youngest is now twelve, my children are all grown-up, thanks to God and the effort that we made to work and sustain them with the little money we made.”

To add to these factors, and as I mentioned in Chapter 5, there are strong class-based discourses that discourage working in the haciendas outside the harvest time. Under these moral ideologies, those who work in the haciendas as day workers do so ‘because they like’ to work in the haciendas, and they are poor because of their lack of work ethic and consumerism. However there is a significant gender difference in this relationship to permanent work in the haciendas. In spite of these discourses, the availability of *permanente* work in the haciendas has been crucial for the survival of many female headed households in La Estrella in the aftermath of being abandoned by their partners. In these cases women are hired as either cooks or as agricultural labour. This was the case of Silvia, who works *permanente* in a hacienda in Jinotega, and whose daughters have remained in La Estrella, the eldest (who is already married) taking care of the youngest girls. On top of her work in the hacienda, she works her piece of land *dada* by her father remotely, sharecropping with her son-in-law.

“It’s now been 5 years since he [my ex-partner] never returned. I’ve had to work hard for my daughters in the fields, picking coffee, fertilising... [in the hacienda]. We make 1200 cordobas every fortnight, and with this I pay my daughters’ studies and the food, since [my ex-partner] doesn’t meet his obligations.”

The moral discourses against working in the coffee haciendas or cattle ranches as day

workers or *permanentes* does not apply for work in harvest season (*la corta del café*). Rich or poor, landed or not, it is considered normal and desirable to go to the haciendas to pick coffee. Yasmina, whom I have shown being very critical of those working in haciendas instead of planting '*lo propio*', makes that important difference between working in haciendas all year and in the harvest:

“no-one in this house has ever worked in '*lo ajeno*' (someone else's). It is only in the times of picking coffee that we go to the haciendas”

Only the wealthiest households and oldest members stay at home, as well as someone in charge of the very young children. In Nicaragua, the higher the income of the household, the less likely it is to seek off-farm work such as coffee-picking. Women, men and children able to pick go for 15 days at a time. Even those who are bound by patron-client relations such as the 'convinced' *mozos* of the Dorado family go to pick coffee. Since the coffee picking season doesn't overlap significantly with the planting of rainfed corn and beans, the salaries triple what could be made in the low season. A biological phenomenon, a significant difference in fruiting periods of corn and beans vis-à-vis coffee beans, has allowed for the 'entanglement' of the coffee economy and the subsistence economy: the labour needs of the subsistence economy⁶¹ do not clash significantly with the labour demands of the coffee economy in the harvest season. Coffee picking labour is in the extreme of commoditisation compared to the other forms of labour in La Estrella. People's labour allocation follows the laws of supply and demand, and *campesinos* flock to those haciendas that pay best, and move geographically from one to another as the season advances to coincide with the peak production of each site. Other factors also play a role in the choice of destination. Smaller family haciendas (also called *fincas*) may pay a smaller piece rate, but since there are fewer workers the accommodation is less crowded and the food is better, and some *campesino* families in La Estrella prefer these.

As I explained in Section 2, many families, particularly those cash poor and landless, depend on coffee picking salaries for household survival and what moral norms try to do is to 'bind' pickers to the priorities of the 'home' when they are making money outside the village. I also described in section 1 how both the salaries and working conditions vary depending on how remote the haciendas are, and how this has gender implications.

⁶¹ Subsistence farming in this case dependent on rainfed agriculture- the situation would change if technologies changed, such as with the introduction of irrigation in the dry season.

Women with childcare responsibilities stay in the closest haciendas, and hence earn less money for the same amount of work. It is important, however, to note the importance of the coffee economy (as I mentioned above) in the case of women working in haciendas as *permanentes* in giving women a degree of economic independence. As mentioned above, paid agricultural labour in the village is predominantly male-dominated, and most unskilled jobs available are agricultural jobs, hence women have comparatively less access to cash. Coffee picking allows women to make substantial cash savings. For example, two women who participated in the seed bank in which I was volunteering were speaking of a third woman who was a victim of domestic abuse, and one of them said: “I told her: work hard picking coffee and buy yourself a land plot so you can live on your own”.

In this section I have described the moral norms that shape what are called vertical relationships (Eriksen, 2001: 124) in terms of labour, showing how there are important differences in the degree of commoditisation of the labour exchange. The notion of ‘vertical relationship’ itself is problematic in the case of sharecropping and even day workers in patron-client relationships in La Estrella. Whilst these are relationships of subordination in the way the wealthier part captures more of the value of labour, they mimic some of the characteristics of kinship, affiliation and poor-to-poor exchanges: through reciprocity, trust, and the sharing of food and drink. Hence in even these ‘vertical relationships’ what is ‘help’ and what is ‘exploitation’ is a matter of contention. On the other hand, in the case of the haciendas, discourses of ‘*lo propio*’ (one’s own) discourage working there outside the picking season, portraying it as a sign of character weakness rather than a sign of need or an economic choice, and often people prefer to stay in the village. These moral ideologies that resist treating agricultural labour as a commodity are dropped in the case of the coffee harvest, in which *campesinos* go to haciendas pursuing high piece rates. The relationship with the coffee economy is gendered: men profit relatively more from it, but women also gain access to cash and a degree of economic independence they cannot obtain in the basic grain economy. As I will discuss below, this has important implications in the discussion of the relationship food sovereignty should have with the cash crop economy.

Conclusion

In la Estrella *campesinos* prioritise work according to kinship and affiliation. When farmers’ talk of offering their labour to someone else in La Estrella they speak of

‘helping someone’. Labourers first help their own nuclear family living in the home, then they help their household, then their family outside the house (family members that have become economically independent), then extended family and friends, and only after that other members of the community. The closer the bond, the higher people are in the list of priority, which is truly important in terms of labour scarcity in peak times, such as the planting and the harvest. Similarly, the closer the bond, the more labour is not treated as a commodity; nuclear family labour is unpaid, non-nuclear family labour (e.g. grandsons) in the household is paid at preferential prices or on occasions in ‘*mano vuelta*’ labour exchange, extended family and friends also have preferential prices, and beyond that people are hired at market prices.

These moral norms and obligations on price and prioritisation which do not follow profit maximisation or the laws of demand and supply can be seen as a form of resistance to the commoditisation of labour in a capitalist environment. Further, these social norms of employment allow for certain social insurance mechanisms preventing destitution and addressing emergencies within the *comunidad*. However, many of these forms of social insurance depend on the ‘tools of the master’ (Lorde, 1984): trading and selling labour for the production of a grain as a commodity, hence there is, as we saw in the case of traders, a small space for capitalist accumulation. Neighbours could claim to be helping out, but instead be undercutting their labour costs. It will be a matter of constant local contestation over which practices constitute exploitation and which ones help. Hence whilst these moral economy mechanisms enhance competitiveness of the poorest producers⁶², they do not necessarily prevent local capital accumulation: they contain it and stall it.

These moral norms of solidarity amongst kin and neighbours, compounded by labour scarcity, make it necessary for wealthier farmers to engage in patron-client relationships to capture labour for the peak seasons of sowing and harvest. Loyalty is ensured through the provision of credit and other services, as well as the mimicking of horizontal relations, through food sharing and drinking. Hence, vertical labour relations can be used to ‘help’ others, and gifts of labour time between neighbours can be used to undercut labour costs. The dichotomy of vertical relations/profit versus horizontal/gift is

⁶² These are ‘bottom line’ mechanisms of support to prevent destitution. Since labour exchange is carried out 1 to 1, labour support is not necessarily redistributive or equalising. Social insurance mechanisms in La Estrella are social safety nets for the poorest rather than mechanisms to enhance or maintain income or asset equality.

thus problematic, and can obscure forms of exploitation within *comunidades* or the role of patron-client relations in simultaneously absorbing value, through purchases and employment, from the poor (and keeping them so) but also keeping them afloat. The implication here is that those who advocate for food sovereignty need to see a complexity of interests and dynamics within the ‘community’. Whilst indeed there are elements of cooperation and solidarity, there are also class struggles at play that would shape people’s food sovereignty.

Similarly, I have shown that in La Estrella there is a degree of autonomy of the ‘*familia*’, the peasant family farm, from competitive labour markets, and families, nuclear and extended, do indeed organise their labour differently. Yet unlike what is implied by food sovereignty, the household is not a group of altruistic beings living together: there are dynamics of mutuality, duty and *also* self-interest within the household. The outcome, what Van der Ploeg, calls the “organic unity” of the household (Ploeg, 2009: 13), is the result of conflict and negotiation as well as cooperation, which is mediated through the articulation of moral ideologies of belonging, duty and work ethic. Yet also these moral ideologies can reify certain traditional gender and age divisions of labour in the household. Moral discourses of ‘sharing the household burden’, pushing each household member to ‘play their part’ are useful in harnessing intra-household cooperation, can reinforces conservative notions of the family. The twin aims of a food sovereignty based on family farming and the pursuit of women’s empowerment may work against each other.

Similarly, I have shown that women and men, girls and boys, profit differently from the basic grain economy and the cash crop economy. *Campesinos* in La Estrella *as a whole* benefit from the availability of coffee harvest labour as a complement (and safety net) to their basic grain production. Yet comparatively women have reduced power within basic grain agriculture and would stand to lose more if the cash crop economy were undermined: I have shown that coffee wages represent access to cash and job availability in difficult times for women. Hence, advocates of food sovereignty will need to take into account how the relationship to global cash crop economies is gendered, and hence discussions on women’s empowerment need to go beyond how things are managed in the household, and broaden out as well to discussions on relationship with global markets.

The entanglement between the subsistence economy and the coffee economy brings to the fore the problem that if food sovereignty advocates such as Via Campesina wish to emphasise local markets and are suspicious of global commodities, there are certain functions of the cash crop economy to peasant resilience that would need to be addressed⁶³. As I showed in Chapter 4, export markets are valued and relied upon, and they bring cash into a subsistence economy where value is ‘trapped’ in grain and assets, and they provide a livelihood buffer for *campesinos*, although I also highlighted how it brings along different kinds of risks associated to its global links. If the goal were to develop local markets, the need for cash provision and livelihood insurance would need to be met by other means.

In this chapter I have shown how the moral economies of *campesinos* in la Estrella partially resist the commoditisation of labour, as we saw in the case of land and food. Moral norms channel agricultural labour to the household, the family and the *comunidad*, allowing for a certain degree of autonomy of *campesino* households from the market, and allow for solidarity networks that work as a social safety net for emergencies and the elderly. Despite this resistance to commoditisation, moral ideologies of labour allow for partial (and in particular circumstances) engagements with competitive labour markets such as hacienda work, which are necessary for the survival of households, particularly the poor and landless ones. Whilst these moral norms enhance the competitiveness and survival of *campesino* households and the *comunidad*, they may disguise or play down class and gender conflicts within it. In the concluding chapter I will show how these moral economies of food, land and labour can feed into a debate on food sovereignty that captures the complexities of peasant livelihoods and their different aspirations.

⁶³ Please note that the relationship between the cash crop economy and subsistence producers is different in the case of Nicaragua to other countries. Due to the availability of land through the expansion of the agricultural frontier, there has been relative labour scarcity in the Highlands of Nicaragua, shaping *campesinos*’ relationship to the haciendas (Baumeister 2008). *Campesinos* have been traditionally able to plant their own food in relatively fertile lands and hence have not depended solely on coffee salaries for survival. In countries where elite land grabs for cash crops were extensive; land relative to population is scarce (and hence labour abundance); and low fertility of land makes food crops risky, meaning *campesinos* have a very different and more subordinate relation to the cash crop economy and to hacienda employers. See for example Tania Li’s work on highland peasants in Sulawesi Indonesia, who turned to cocoa due to, amongst other factors, little land available and a high environmental risk associated to traditional food crops (Li 2015). This labour scarcity and land availability in Nicaragua will decline in the future due to the exhaustion of the agricultural frontier, population increase and the increase in land grabs due to bio-fuels and commercial cattle ranching (Baumeister 2013).

Chapter 7. Conclusion

In this thesis I have analysed in depth the embeddedness of the *campesino* economy of La Estrella, using the lenses of food production, land and labour. In turn, I have appraised the way in which *campesino* moral economies relate to processes of commoditisation in capitalism. I have also explored the practices and discourses that *campesinos* may pursue and articulate to become resilient to these processes of commoditisation, such as the pursuit of household economic autonomy and community solidarity. This understanding enabled me to appraise what food sovereignty would look like in peasants' everyday lives when it is rooted in their moral understandings of the economy of which they are part.

This conclusion is structured as follows: in Section 1, I will aim to answer the second research question that enquired about peasants' material and moral relationship to commoditisation and how social embeddedness impacts peasants relationship to capitalist markets. In the subsequent two sections, I answer the third research question that enquired about the role of *campesino* autonomy and solidarity when engaging capitalist markets. In Section 2 I reflect on the role social embeddedness and moral ideologies of kinship, affiliation and locality play in shaping that autonomy from the market, as well as the drawbacks in terms of gender and class inequalities. In Section 3, I highlight the importance of market mechanisms for solidarity in capitalism and in what ways this breaks the dichotomy market=profit vs. gift=mutuality. In this section I also reflect on what processes of commoditisation can imply in terms of agrarian change and the resilience of *campesino* livelihoods. I finish this concluding chapter by answering my first research question 'what does food sovereignty in everyday life look like?', outlining what elements should be captured in a concept of food sovereignty rooted in *campesino* moral economies.

Section 1. Resistances to commoditisation, balancing subsistence and engagement with capitalist markets

Campesinos in La Estrella react to commoditisation processes in different ways depending on the commodity and in the particular circumstances in which that commodity is being produced or exchanged. Land is almost never treated as a commodity, and moral ideologies of land articulated in the *comunidad* resist treating it as something which can be freely exchanged in the market. This occurs despite the fact

that legally land can be sold freely in the market. *Campesinos* in la Estrella who sell are shamed and portrayed as having a lack of work ethic. The only justification for land sale is dire necessity, if at all: since a powerful discourse of *se debrouiller* assumes that if you really sacrifice yourself and are creative, you can eke out enough to hold onto the land. Access to land is central to *campesinos*' lives: as Roberto put it 'land is food' and land allows you to have '*lo propio*': your own. The history of Nicaragua and the results of this ethnographic research show that rural folk aspire to produce in their own plot of land. Sandinista State Farms in the early 80s, despite providing fair working conditions for employees, neglected this aspiration and failed to win the support of rural Nicaraguans. Even today, work in haciendas was described by those who worked there as a stepping stone to buy your own house plot and build your house; and then work in agriculture through rental or sharecropping and save enough to eventually buy your own piece of land which your children will inherit. Of course, despite this moral economy of the land resisting commoditisation, land sales still occur, but mostly as a product of death or illness of a main breadwinner in the household (Ruben and Masset, 2003). The resistance to commoditisation is not complete, and some land consolidation occurs. I explore this further below.

Labour relations, relative to land, can be partially 'disembedded' from social relations and sold in the market at wages determined by supply and demand. However, moral norms in La Estrella define very clearly under what circumstances labour is disembedded and when it is subject to the expectations of social relations. In La Estrella, moral ideologies of the household, of kinship and community reciprocity guide the prioritisation and pricing of labour. The labour requirements of the 'home' come first, then the nuclear family, followed by the extended family, and ultimately the 'neighbour'. Labour prices are increasingly cheaper, and priority higher, the closer the social bond. Moral ideologies about family duty, reciprocity and work ethic discipline household members to prioritise their family's planting, work that is unpaid. Moral ideologies of kinship obligation and 'solidarity amongst the poor', channel labour at preferential prices to family and community. Hence profit-seeking ventures, such as wealthy producers or hacienda owners, struggle to find labour under these circumstances, and have to resort to debt-bondage, patronage and mimicking neighbourliness to ensure the loyalty of workers. However, labour is not always fully embedded, when the *postrera* harvest is finished, workers are free to search the most

profitable hacienda to pick coffee in the winter months of December to April. Labour then is treated more like a commodity, although the moral obligation to the ‘home’ remains even if people are far away from the *comunidad*, and some of the coffee earnings will need to be rechanneled to the household, “to make the house better off”. This is particularly important, since the story of *campesinos* in La Estrella is an example of the entanglement of the food crop economy with the cash crop economy. Landed farmers who are net food consumers, or landless farmers with little investment capacity, depend on the extra income from coffee farming. Even for better-off farmers who in normal times produce surplus grain sale, coffee picking acts as a safety net if they suffer subsequent crop losses.

Out of the three ‘commodities’ I analysed in this thesis, grain is what is treated most often as a commodity by *campesinos* in La Estrella. But commoditisation is by no means complete. *Campesinos* articulate particular rules about when grain is treated as a commodity and when it isn’t. *Campesinos* do sell their corn and beans to traders or in Guanuca market, which are linked to Central American grain markets. However, there is a strong emphasis on food self-reliance that cuts across class in La Estrella: wealthy or not, *campesinos* in La Estrella prioritise growing basic grains regardless of their profitability. The impact of not having enough to eat is too large to risk depending solely on the market to acquire food. Hence *campesinos* in the *comunidad* prioritise storage (*ajustar*) and then sell the surplus of grain. Food is sold to traders at market prices, but between neighbours in the *comunidad* food is exchanged at discount prices, and, in cases of destitution or emergency, food can be given away for free. There is a moral ideology of ‘fair prices’ in the community, as those who meet simultaneously the consumption needs of the consumer, as well as cover the production costs of the producer. On the other hand, when trading in the market, *campesinos* want a fair share of their profits. If a trader (or the State through their sourcing programme ENABAS) is making extra profits due to a price hike, farmers sense of fairness ‘as a share of wealth’ (Ferguson, 2015) is that they should get a bigger cut. Community gossip can mitigate extractive behaviour of local traders. Even when grain is sold in the Guanuca market in Matagalpa, as much determined by supply and demand as could be, social embeddedness still plays a role by nurturing *campesinos*’ loyalty through a sense of commonality and trust. This does not contradict Polanyi’s notion of embeddedness, since he saw the difference between capitalist systems and non-capitalisms as centred

“on the degree or character of embeddedness” (Zerbe, 2014: 99). The degree and character of embeddedness will vary depending on the commodity and the social context that surrounds that particular exchange.

These different degrees of commoditisation, or rather, *campesinos*’ moral economy resisting commoditisation but simultaneously also enabling certain resources “to fall in and out of commodity” (Appadurai, 1997: 15) status are a form of making the most of the capitalist markets that they are immersed in, whilst protecting themselves from the worst impacts of integration. *Campesinos* in La Estrella cannot isolate themselves from capitalist markets, but instead engage with them (as much as they can) in their own terms. This is similar to what Van der Ploeg calls ‘distantiation from the market’ (Ploeg, 2009: 49). In a *campesino* community like La Estrella, within the consciousness of individual *campesinos*, there are two competing and coexisting economic logics, a subsistence one that mitigates risk and aims for the survival of the household, and a commercialisation one which treats things as commodities and aims to maximise profit. The dialectical relationship of these two logics determines this partial engagement with capitalist markets. The subsistence logic is upheld by the *campesino* moral economy, ethical imperatives about holding onto food and to sustain capacity to be self-reliant in food, obligations to ‘help others’, through food sales at a discount (or free in times of need), through ‘fair rents’ that allow for the survival of the renter, and through working for each other at preferential prices. Ultimately, these norms ensure *campesinos* can produce at much lower production cost than they would in a commoditised economy, and they can make ends meet despite low grain prices. Once subsistence is guaranteed, some farmers can afford to “produce for commercialisation”, and hence allocate their resources to maximise profit, taking calculated risks: either intensifying bean production, planting in the summer months in the humid *Apante* region, or even investing in horticultural crops such as tomatoes or peppers. When a *campesino* household manages to *salir adelante* (be better-off), social expectations in the community discipline them into remembering of their responsibility to ‘help each other amongst the poor’, hence they are expected to serve others by hiring them, or, in case they are landlords, by renting land out at an affordable price.

Food sovereignty academics advocate for a ‘re-embedding’ of food systems, and this rings true to the ethics that *campesinos* displayed in La Estrella. However, what my research highlights is the nuance that *campesinos* need the flexibility to bring food and

labour in and out of the commodity status in particular circumstances in order to subsist and in some cases to prosper within capitalism. I explore whether this is distantiation or internalisation of markets below in Section 4.

Section 2. Social embeddedness, autonomy from capitalist markets and conservative forces

I have explored in this thesis how social relations define the allocation (and prioritisation of that allocation) of grain, land and labour, who it is sold to (given as a gift or rented to), and the price agreed for these exchanges. These in turn are enforced by moral norms and expectations of what makes a responsible household member, a dutiful family member, a caring neighbour, a fair landlord, a just employer, a non-ruthless trader and so on. These moral economies enable *campesinos* to pursue autonomy from capitalist markets, both independently as the household (*la familia*) or as a community (*la comunidad*).

Autonomy of the household is achieved through three key mechanisms: self-reliance in food, preferential access to land, and access to unpaid family labour and preferential labour arrangements. As mentioned above, self-reliance is captured in the nurturing (or aspiration) to have '*lo propio*' (one's own). Having a piece of land in which to practice agriculture is the aspiration of a majority of *campesinos* in La Estrella, what Edelman called the right of farmers to continue being agriculturalists (Edelman, 2005: 332), and social norms discourage actions that may jeopardise this right to '*lo propio*'. As I described in Chapter 6, the moral ideologies of the 'home' are a strong contributor to the survival of the household. Filial and spouse duty to the home is achieved through discourses of mutuality, reciprocity, duty and work ethic, which ensures household members pull their weight for the home. They do so by ensuring people fulfil the tasks they are assigned at home, and in the case of agricultural labour, that they prioritise their time to the planting of the house, which they do for free, instead of pursuing paid work elsewhere. Similarly, preferential market exchanges with nuclear family outside the home, extended family and neighbours in the community mean that land rental, labour and purchased grain comes at a relatively cheaper price than they would in a fully commoditised market.

The autonomy of the community is also achieved through these socially embedded market exchanges supported by particular moral ideologies. This happens through these

preferential market mechanisms in which grain, land and labour are available at the preferential prices I mentioned earlier, but also through the partial disciplining of wealthier producers, landowners, employers and traders by highlighting what their obligations are towards the community (see below). Particularly strong is the responsibility of a market exchange within the community to meet the subsistence of those who are in a subordinate position. Grain has to be exchanged at a 'fair price', so production costs are met and its consumption is affordable. Land rental has to be at such a price that it allows for tenants to make a living. People in need in the community (particularly so if they are family) are entitled to be hired as a form of help. These mechanisms are grounded in ideas of community solidarity 'between us poor people' and of land as a gift of God, and hence everyone is entitled to a share of its wealth.

These results chime with key ideas of *campesino* identities and sense of belonging to the land and to their community that Via Campesina and their supporters from academia articulate throughout their policy documents and academic literature. In the basic grain communities of Central Highlands of Nicaragua there are strong forces of kinship and affiliation and community identity at play that relates to ideas of the 'family farm' and 'community' for which food sovereignty supporters advocate.

However, there are downsides to these moral economies of 'home' and 'community' inasmuch as they disguise both inequalities within the household and class differences in the community. Whilst I have shown that these ideas of the home and community are key to *campesino* survival in capitalist markets, through capturing resources and making them relatively more affordable, they can also be the vehicle for conservative notions of the family or class. In the case of the household, there are several discourses that rein household members to prioritise the 'home' rather than their own interests. Two of them are particularly relevant for gender inequalities: the shared burden discourse and the *vagos* discourse. The shared burden discourse determines what roles each household member must fulfil in order to avoid collapse of the home, and women who pursue activities outside the home run the risk of being called *vagas* (vagrant, irresponsible: see Chapter 6). Often the roles attributed are conservative gender roles of women staying in the home, being in charge of housework and childcare and participating in the harvest but receiving no remuneration for this participation in agriculture. Decision-making and budgeting in corn and bean production for the majority of households in La Estrella is

traditionally a man's role, hence submitting to traditional gender roles can represent less economic independence for women.

The challenge for the food sovereignty movement is to uphold the idea of the 'home' facing the 'intrusion' of capitalist markets in the household (which is tempting household members with higher wage rates), without falling into conservative notions of the family. Via Campesina is aware of this, and much of its work has focused on feminism and power relations in the household. Yet somehow this policy area of 'women', which covers representation in social movements, the valuing of women's labour in agriculture and the need to ensure women have access to resources, and are not subject to domestic violence, is not connected at a theoretical level to a gendered analysis of markets. When discussing markets and food systems: trade regimes, food vs. cash crops, dumping, the unit of analysis is the family farm, and what seems to be lacking is an analysis on how women and men benefit in different ways from both subsistence (food crops such as corn and beans) and export-led (cash crop such as coffee) economies. In La Estrella, for example, the coffee economy is crucial in acting as an economic buffer for new female-headed households, and in the case of harvest salaries, it is the main source of cash income for women since they have relatively limited access to cash incomes in the basic grain economy.

Similarly, the moral ideologies that have positive outcomes for the 'community' can be rooted in discourses of work ethics that present the poor and landless as responsible for their own destitution. I showed that land sales are discouraged through the iconic portrayal of virtuous landed *campesinos* who love their plot so dearly so as to never sell it, even in difficult times, because they combine the sacrifice of withholding consumption with the creativity, imagination and wit to *rebuscarselas* (to make ends meet). The flip-side of this attribution of this virtuous *campesino* is the landless *campesino* who, by extension, is included in the criticism of those who sold their land, even if they didn't have it in the first place. They are portrayed as consumerists, with little self-discipline to make ends meet and the capacity to *rebuscarselas*. The landless are thus separated culturally from the landed as having a different nature or disposition, and as people who only have the capacity to work in the haciendas. The same arguments are made by wealthier surplus grain producers or traders in responding to the criticisms of their workers, sharecroppers or clients: they indicate their higher status is a product of their sacrifice by withholding consumption and engaging in hard work, a work ethic

they accuse their subordinate counterparts of not having. The food sovereignty movement spearheaded by Via Campesina brings together landed and landless peasants in the struggle against neoliberalism. What my research shows is that these negative cultural portrayals of the landless by the landed can represent a significant obstacle towards seeking common ground for policies such as land reform. Another element that may cause intra-community tension is food sovereignty policies that have an impact on prices. Net food consumers (those who don't *ajustan* and hence don't produce enough to store throughout the year and depend on purchasing grain from the market) and net food producers (those who produce surplus which they then can commercialise) may have different views on what level prices should fluctuate. However, as I showed in Chapter 4, surplus food producers do take into account the needs of consumers when speculating on 'fair prices'. My point here is that class alliances within the category '*campesino*' will inevitably be fraught with conflict, although by no means impossible, as long as the moral ideology of community solidarity is emphasised and negative stereotyping of the poor and landless is discouraged.

Section 3. Solidarity, the tools of the master and the moral battlefield of capitalism

I have shown throughout this thesis how *campesinos* in La Estrella mostly depend on market mechanisms in order to 'help' each other. In the case of grain, family, friends and community receive preferential prices that are supposed to, as the moral discourses go, cover production costs and be affordable. In the case of land, nuclear family get it for free, and friends and family rent it at a discount. Finally in terms of labour, people 'help' others in their planting by selling their labour at a cheaper price, or 'help' their poorer family members by hiring them. It is mostly in times of emergency or destitution when food and labour is transferred for free. I showed in the case of the death of a breadwinner, both family and community stepped in with free labour, food and cash to put them back on their feet. Similarly I showed cases in which destitute elderly people were given free food and labour.

Also the responsibilities of the wealthier and landed towards the poor occur through giving fair market prices: traders are criticised for purchasing grain at prices that are too extractive, landowners are expected to rent land for a price that will allow the farmer to

meet his or her costs of production when they sell the grain in the market, and lastly wealthier employers ‘help’ their poorer family members by seeking their paid work.

The use of market mechanisms for the purpose of solidarity and patronage whilst immersed in capitalist markets brings forward a particular conundrum. What is ‘help’ and what is ‘exploitation’ is contested, because the mechanisms for exploitation and help coincide: through the setting of price and conditions of sale. My research in La Estrella problematises the notion that there are vertical relations and horizontal relations that occur separately, that there is a sphere of profit seeking market exchange and a sphere of mutuality and gift-giving. Relationships that would be considered horizontal, such as ‘helping the family’ or ‘helping us amongst the poor people’ through grain sales or labour exchange, might in fact disguise situations in which one part is in need and accepts a lower day rate. Relationships that would be considered vertical, as those between a local trader and a *campesino* selling her crops or an employer and their labourers, require ‘uppers’ to mimic horizontal relationships to build trust and a notion of ‘being the same’ as their subordinate counterparts. Traders emphasise their provenance from the community and share food and drink in addition to the ‘capture’ of sellers and labourers through debt, either through *adelantado* (credit on future harvest) or through advance payments on future work. Further, because market mechanisms can be portrayed as ‘help’, wealthier traders, landowners and employers can portray themselves as ‘helping’ the poor by engaging in market exchange with them whilst simultaneously capturing most of the value of their crops through low prices, charging extortionate land rental prices or undercutting wages. This conundrum has occurred since the inception of capitalism, in which the industrial capitalist portrayed his business and his work in a positive light, in terms of generating employment. By locating the generation of value in the worker and not in the capitalist, Marx was providing a counter-narrative (Harvey, 2010: 122-23). The same ideological struggle continues in our corporate world today, with corporations justifying their prominence as a service to the world ‘community’, by generating employment, providing affordable goods and caring to make sure their value chains are fair and sustainable (Gardner and Lewis, 2012: 116). They construe their activities as a gift (Rajak, 2006). This is true too of agri-food corporations, which portray their actions as ‘help’, in terms of contributing to food security and economic development. In the same way subordinate workers, renters and

producers in La Estrella need to articulate ideas of fairness and subsistence rights in their everyday exchanges, Via Campesina and other food sovereignty advocates have correctly understood that their struggle is an ideological one, as much as a material one. Hence much of their power resides in providing a counter-narrative to the discourses of these corporations (Patel, 2009). This counter-discourse, like that of peasants in La Estrella when confronted to capitalist markets, is a moral economic one, and the challenge is to ensure that the moral discourse at the global level is indeed a reflection of the peasant moral economy (Edelman, 2005).

In La Estrella, moral ideologies of land, grain, and labour play a role in socially embedding those markets, as I've mentioned above, in different degrees depending on the 'commodity' in question and in different circumstances. Land sales are only socially acceptable as a last resort; and grain and labour exchanges are shaped by a shared understanding of the entitlement of *campesinos* to subsist. However, because the mechanisms of solidarity are the same that are used for capitalist accumulation, market exchange in a legal environment that treats these as commodities, there is the question whether *campesinos'* moral economies in capitalist markets are trying the impossible task of 'dismantling the master's house' with the masters' tools (Lorde, 1984). This is compounded by the fact that many *campesinos* in La Estrella depend on the participation on the cash crop economy to survive. Bernstein would argue that these *campesinos*, who are now petty commodity producers, have 'internalised' capitalist markets and are inevitably bound to the compulsive forces of the market (Bernstein, 2010: 102-04). This assumes a uni-directionality of history characteristic of "deterministic evolutionist and teleological assumptions" (Araghi, 2009: 118) of agrarian change, yet what the history of *campesinos* in Nicaragua shows is a moral economy adapted to history as emergent.

The dialectic of subsistence and commercialisation and the social embeddedness of exchanges has allowed for *campesinos* to contain, stall and mitigate accumulation. The channelling of resources towards the family and the community, and the setting of prices shaped equally by social position as well as supply and demand, have made capital accumulation, both locally in La Estrella as well as in the hacienda economy, more difficult. As an Ai Kido warrior is only mindful of the next move, the resistance to commoditisation as a feature of the moral economy of the peasantry plays a similar role:

it adapts to *emerging* challenges, and it *gains time* against capital accumulation. In Polanyi's words: "the rate of change is often of no less importance than the direction of the change itself" (Polanyi, 2001: 39). In this way, the political-economic environment might change. This does not mean that *campesino* livelihoods are impermeable to adverse economic circumstances (e.g. too low grain prices), but rather that they are more resilient to them due to the way they organise their economies to promote autonomy (Ploeg, 2013: 12). Productive resources can be redistributed, for example through land reform. I showed how much the landscape of La Estrella changed when the government purchased land from Pablo Montoro who had previously accumulated 50 MZ of land from neighbours and redistributed it to 120 members of the Las Tunas social movement. This shows that *campesinos* in Nicaragua are political actors as well as economic, and their direct action and coalescence in social movements can generate change. Similarly other changes in the political economy of agriculture (Holt-Gimenez, 2006), including State intervention in agriculture, credit or trade markets, will reshape the environment in which *campesinos* operate, reducing constraints but also creating new challenges. The flexibility of *campesino* livelihoods, as well as the capacity to produce in circumstances where no profit can be sought, gives it a degree of resilience to changes in the economic environment. Like Van der Ploeg, I see moral economies of the *campesino* household and community as having the capacity to shift in both directions depending on the economic and political environment, towards commoditisation (entrepreneurial agriculture) or towards subsistence (repeasantisation): commoditisation as a continuum along which *campesinos* move (Ploeg, 2009: 6).

Conclusion. A food sovereignty rooted in *campesino* moral economies

Taking into account the ethos and aspirations of *campesinos* in La Estrella which I have recorded in this ethnography, and since one of the key objectives of this research was to contribute to a notion of food sovereignty rooted in everyday moral economies of peasants: what would this food sovereignty of everyday life look like?

Food systems that uphold food sovereignty should be able to cater simultaneously to both economic logics of subsistence and commercialisation – '*producir para el consumo*' as well as '*producir para el comercio*'. On the one hand, this entails ensuring there are mechanisms in place that meet the objective of household survival and enable

the ‘right to continue being agriculturalists’ (Edelman, 2005: 332). My research has shown that self-reliance in own-food production is central to *campesinos*’ moral economy as a form of mitigating the impact of grain market fluctuations. Hence, since the objective of the subsistence ethic is to mitigate risk, to enhance people’s choices in crops or technologies, what is required are insurance mechanisms or safety nets that ensure subsistence. This could include insurance against crop failures, but also livelihood shocks such as the death or illness of a breadwinner. Another form of insurance *campesinos* focus on is ‘just prices’, understood as prices that cover costs of production as well as affordability of consumption. *Campesinos* in Nicaragua see a role for the State in upholding ‘just prices’, including the role of the State as a purchaser of grain (although not the sole one). This exists in the case of State company ENABAS, but the scale of operations has not been big enough to make an impact on price fluctuations, so it has only affected those who are directly involved with them as sellers.

Addressing the ‘safety-first principle’ would enable farmers to diversify to higher-value crops that may yield higher returns, such as has been the case with horticultural products in other countries. Alternatively, it would allow for farmers to choose agroecological farming techniques. Farmers in La Estrella use *hybrid* methods of production, which include no tillage and the use of native and nativised seed varieties, yet they involve the use of agro-chemicals. However, ‘*sin químicos*’ production is valued and many agroecological skills have already been acquired. For agroecology to be implemented, the risk of the transition cannot be borne by those treading the subsistence line. Such transition could only occur with market and public support to incentivise farmers to take up agroecology, since the benefits of implementing it take time to establish themselves, whilst the effects of discontinuing agrochemicals are immediate: risk of disease, lower production until soil fertility is recovered, and so on. Support could include premium prices, long-term purchase agreements and solutions to reduce short-term drudgery.

I have established that in *campesinos*’ eyes food is not an ordinary commodity, but as I mentioned in Section 1, *campesinos* also rely on grain being a commodity under certain circumstances. Similarly, ‘producing for commercialisation’ is another important *campesino* economic logic. *Campesinos* also aspire to participate in the market and obtain material benefits from it. The market mechanisms and the behaviour allowed of

intermediaries have to meet the *campesino* idea of fair share. When *campesinos* sell to traders, even if it is through future harvest *adelantado*, they expect the prices they receive to be in consonance with the profit that the venture is ultimately achieving. If prices fluctuate upwards, *campesinos* expect their farmgate sale prices increase accordingly. This ethics of wanting the ‘fair share’ of the industry as a whole not only applies to producers, such as the case in La Estrella, but even workers. This is important in terms of State companies like ENABAS, who have the responsibility to provide floor prices, but also are expected to transmit higher prices when these are high. This also has implications for the presence of grain corporations such as Cargill that fail to do correct price transmission, and engage in hoarding. Similarly, *campesinos*’ right to a fair share discourse imply also that retail business that captures the added value of food products is not giving producers in their value chains a fair share. This is increasingly the case due to food retail concentration both globally and in Nicaragua (Vorley et al., 2012, Michelson et al., 2010, Balsevich et al., 2006a). Insofar as transnational corporations capture a majority of value added to agricultural products (Raynolds, 2000) and externally impose crops, farming methods and land use (McMichael, 2015), there is little space for them in a food sovereignty paradigm rooted in *campesino* moral economies.

Food sovereignty based on *campesinos* moral economies is one in which *campesino* households enjoy relative autonomy, in terms of being able to engage with capitalist markets on their own terms, so as to benefit from cash incomes but also being able to secure their freedom from hunger. Self-reliance, what *campesinos* in La Estrella call ‘*lo propio*’, is, in their eyes, best achieved through relative reliance on own-food production. For this purpose, *campesinos* in La Estrella have shown that land tenure is crucial for ‘*lo propio*’, because it guarantees subsistence. As mentioned in Section 1, it is the least commoditised and most socially embedded commodity in La Estrella. Food sovereignty is achieved when *campesinos* have a right to land, either through direct land tenure or through fair rental prices. Highland *campesinos* leverage against hacienda labour exploitation has been due to their relative access to land, achieved partially through Sandinista land reform and through the expansion of the agricultural frontier,

enabling relative labour scarcity⁶⁴. The centrality of land tenure and access will become even more important in the near future in Nicaragua due to the exhaustion of the agricultural frontier (Rueda Estrada, 2013) and the increase in global meat demand. Baumeister has reported that ‘land grabs’ can occur in Nicaragua for commercial cattle rearing (Baumeister, 2013). If the Sandinista government is serious about its commitment to food security and food sovereignty, mechanisms to ensure access to land for *campesino* subsistence farming should be in place. This guaranteed access to land for *campesino* farmers can be argued not only because it is what they value, but also because family farming is “a better vehicle for guaranteeing food sovereignty” (Ploeg, 2013:11). I have shown that *campesinos* produce food even when it is not profitable, hence producing in circumstances in which entrepreneurial farming would choose not to invest. Further, their production is more resilient due to the mechanisms of resistance to commoditisation, nurturing autonomy and depending on family and community solidarity. As I described above, *campesino* families are less likely to go bust in times of shock. Hence *campesino* family farming can guarantee food supply even under duress. Of course, as mentioned above, having resilience does not mean that if circumstances are adverse enough the *campesino* mode of production cannot be broken.

Food sovereignty advocates have a clear preference for food production as opposed to cash crop production (Via Campesina, 2010b). However, this ethnography shows that such a preference is problematic. In the case of the Highlands of Central Nicaragua, the subsistence basic grain economy is highly entangled with the coffee economy. I have shown the role that coffee harvest salaries play in guaranteeing household reproduction for the poorest households and as a buffer for crop losses or livelihood shocks in household who producing surplus grain. Whilst basic grain production remains central both in terms of food production and incomes, coffee plays an important role in risk mitigation. This is particularly important in an environment of highly fluctuating prices (particularly in the case of beans) and with the intrinsic risks of agricultural production such as weather shocks, plant diseases, and so on. Any move away from a coffee economy should take into consideration its contribution to *campesino* household income security and in bringing cash into the *comunidad*. Similarly in other context, family

⁶⁴ This labour scarcity through the increased total availability of land through the expansion of the agricultural frontier has come at a high environmental price: between 1990 and 2010, 31 percent of the forest cover was converted into arable land (Source: UNSTATS)

farmers may rely on coffee production to ensure subsistence (Burnett and Murphy, 2013). In Nicaragua, some small scale coffee farmers also produce corn and bean for self-reliance in food (Bacon et al., 2014). Rather than directly write-off cash crops, these should be judged by their capacity of being produced by *campesino* households, their potential for incorporating agroecological techniques and their contribution (as a form of crop diversification) to livelihood risk reduction. Another important caveat to point out is *campesinos* in La Estrella depended on reliable food crops *which are also commodities* for household survival and market engagement. However, this situation may not always arise. For example, population increases, low fertility and high environmental risks made peasants choose to move from their traditional crops to cocoa production in Sulawesi, Indonesia, and subsequently locked them in an exposed situation to market fluctuations (Li, 2015). In Li's view, food sovereignty could only be pursued by farmers if a new appropriate food crop is found or through other means of ensuring livelihood sustainability, even if depending on cash crops.

Lastly, to finish my digression on cash crops, I have spoken of the role of the coffee economy in mitigating risks in the basic grain economy through the provision of cash and harvest salaries. However, I should highlight that this risk is transformed rather than made to disappear. Export cash crops make national economies vulnerable to global fluctuations in supply and demand. The coffee crisis of 1990 is a case in point. If food sovereignty is to be achieved, the exposure to these shocks in cash crops should be minimised. This could be achieved globally through global marketing arrangements, such as the International Coffee Agreement that was in place until 1989, but also locally in ensuring there is a diversified portfolio of labour intensive industries *campesinos* could rely on in case one crop would fail. Nicaragua has relied solely on a handful of low-value agricultural commodities, including grains, coffee and cattle. Other potential industries could include horticultural production, if the State were able to give the necessary financial and extension support. In parallel, social safety nets would also play a central role in mitigating the impact of these shocks in global markets on people dependent on cash crop salaries. These measures inevitably require more progressive taxation and other revenue raising schemes as well as public spending, hence food sovereignty is inevitably linked to a degree of fiscal sovereignty. Nicaragua's reliance on IMF loans makes such an expansive fiscal policy particularly difficult, although ALBA support have given Nicaragua more leverage with the IMF (Hunt, 2013).

To finish, food sovereignty is achieved when the connection between producers and consumers is maintained. Food sovereignty advocates emphasise the importance of face-to-face interaction to sustain the feeling of mutuality and obligation, and hence aim to ‘localise’ food systems. My research shows that indeed market exchanges that occur between people of the same *comunidad* tend to be socially embedded, and the circumstances and needs of producer and consumer are considered, based on their common humanity and a sense of an entitlement to eat and to be able to produce in the future. Yet I also showed that *campesinos* in La Estrella are able to feel that sense of connection, of a shared humanity with consumers, who are seen as people with needs to be met, even if they are beyond the *comunidad*. Hence there is potential for similar mutual relationships to occur beyond the local market, and for *campesinos* to accept trade-offs and concessions vis-à-vis consumers (e.g. in the consideration of ‘just prices’). This is what fair trade advocates argue, that there can be mechanisms to replicate that special connection through space (Fridell, 2003, Zerbe, 2014). However, this ‘personalisation’ of the consumer is significantly more fragile, and it can disappear if the farming household sustainability is jeopardised. In times of shock, the faraway consumer can be dismissed as an abstract idea rather than people. Hence the importance of ensuring subsistence simultaneously to nurturing connections between *campesinos* and consumers. *Campesinos* in La Estrella are keen to engage in other markets (national and Central American) but understand the nation-state economy as their own household economy, only purchasing abroad what a country cannot produce itself. This is at odds with the ideology of free trade that WTO, CAFTA and other agreements are based on. Hence inevitably a questioning of those trade agreements is in the interest of food sovereignty.

Food sovereignty can only be achieved in a struggle that explores difference as much as it mobilises around commonality. Strategic essentialism around ‘the peasant’, the ‘peasant family farm’ or the ‘peasant community’, while grounded on real moral ideologies of the peasant, cannot obscure the struggle that occurs *within* those categories. Gender and class differences need to be taken into account when discussing the architecture of food systems. This is particularly true in terms of degree of exposure to commodity markets. As I described above, the relationship between *campesinos* and commodity markets are gendered. Decisions to prioritise certain crops, technologies, or

market channels are gendered, as I showed in the gendered relations towards the subsistence basic grain economy and the coffee economy. Therefore discussions around women's empowerment have to be included transversally in all discussions on commoditisation. The same goes in terms of class differences within 'the *campesino*': capacity for investment, net food consumers or producers, landed or landless, patron or employee, these may shape different priorities in issues central to food sovereignty such as price controls, land reform, trade agreements, and workers' rights. These differences need not be irreconcilable: they need to be brought forward and debated.

In this thesis I set myself the task of establishing what we could learn from the *campesino* moral economies that shape the commoditisation of grain, land and labour, and how these could sustain everyday notions of food sovereignty. I have shown that farmers require different degrees of commoditisation depending on the 'commodity' at hand, and require maintaining the ability for moral norms to make things fall in and out of commodity status. The objective of this is to ensure autonomy from the market, both as households, as *familias campesinas*, and as communities. Autonomy is achieved by a combination of an economic logic of subsistence and an economic logic of commercialisation. It is underpinned by solidarity, shaped by the social embeddedness of market exchanges with ideologies of kinship and affiliation. Embeddedness thus plays a central role in achieving that autonomy from capitalist markets, and containing selfish behaviour in the household and the community. These dynamics of autonomy and solidarity have succeeded in containing and stalling capitalist accumulation. A problem has arisen when market exchanges, the tools of the capitalist master, are used to deliver solidarity. It thus allows exploitation and solidarity to become a moral battlefield, where exploiters can portray themselves as helpers. The pattern of vertical vs. horizontal relations becomes less useful, because increasingly wealthy *campesinos* and traders have to mimic horizontality to maintain patronage, and *campesinos* can use kinship and affiliation 'horizontal' relations to exploit each other. This research contributes to break down the idea that market exchanges are used for profit seeking and gifts for mutuality. What this entails is that *campesino* food sovereignty entails also an ideological battle, in which subordinate *campesinos* must hold those who extract value from them to account (traders, intermediaries and corporations) when they don't meet the basis of mutuality they claim to espouse. Food sovereignty has to contribute in providing such a counter-narrative, putting forward ideas of 'just prices' (understood as

covering costs of production and affordable to consume) and ‘fair share’, both in prices (when profits of an industry must be proportionally shared by the producer and workers), and in access to resources such as land. Food sovereignty must also cater for the dialectic between subsistence and profit, simultaneously ensuring livelihood security by mitigating risk, and also allowing for a beneficial, yet partial, incorporation into markets. Food sovereignty requires creating a food system in which agroecology is made feasible and profitable and where market interactions are ruled by mutuality, fair prices and fair shares. In Nyeleni, a new counter-narrative was successfully deployed by a nascent food sovereignty movement. If the movement grounds its work in the ethos that brings *campesinos* together whilst simultaneously acknowledging and debating the tensions between them, they might just succeed in creating a fairer food system.

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Glossary

ADDAC	Asociacion para la Diversificacion y el Desarrollo Agricola Comunal (Association for Diversification and Community Agricultural Development)
CA	Central America
CENAGRO	Censo National Agropecuario (National Agrarian Census)
CIEETS	Centro Intereclesial de Estudios Teologicos y Sociales (Inter-church centre of theological and social studies)
ENABAS	Empresa Nicaraguense de Alimentos Basicos (Nicaraguan Company for Basic Foods)
EU	European Union
EuropeAID	European Union Agency for International Development
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations
FDL	Fondo de Desarrollo Local (Local Development Fund)
FEWSNET	Famine Early Warning System Network
FIAN	FoodFirst Information and Action Network
FSLN	Frente Sandinista de Liberacion National (Sandinista Front for National Liberation)
FUNDEGL	Foundation Denis Ernesto Gonzalez Lopez
GM	Genetically Modified
HH	Household
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INTA	Instituto Nicaraguense de Tecnologia Agropecuaria (Nicaraguan Institute for Agrarian Technology)
MAGFOR	Ministerio Agropecuario y Forestal (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry)
MIFIC	Ministerio de Fomento, Industria Y Comercio (Ministry of Investment, Industry

	and Trade)
MZ	Manzana (Most used measure for land area)
NAFTA	North American Fair Trade Agreement
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
PCAC	Programa Campesino a Campesino (Farmer to farmer programme)
Q	Quintal (Most used weight measure for the commercialisation of grain)
SIMAS	Servicio de Información Mesoamericano sobre Agricultura Sostenible (Central American Information Centre for Sustainable Agriculture)
UN	United Nations
UNAG	Union Nacional de Agricultores y Ganaderos (National Farmers' Union)
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNO	Unidad Nicaraguense Opositora (United Nicaraguan Opposition)
USA	United States of America
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WTO	World Trade Organisation

Appendix 1. Map of La Estrella

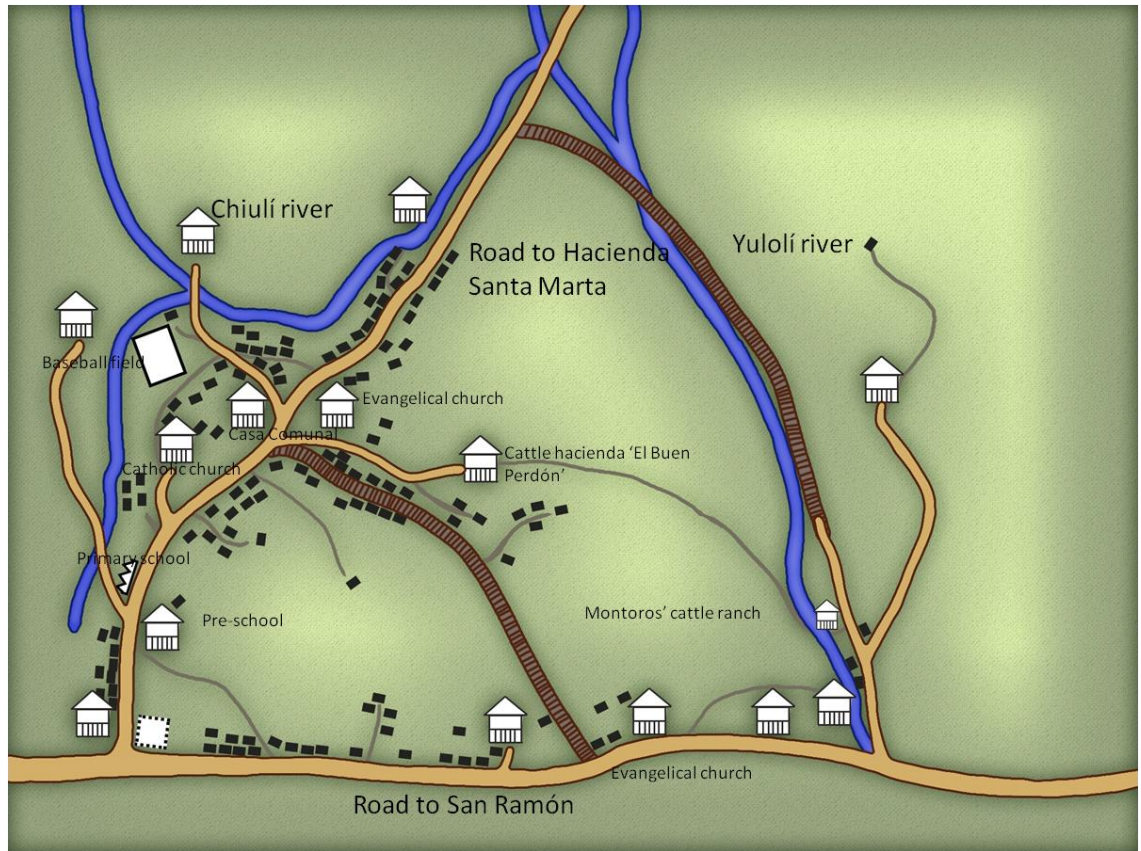


Figure 8. Map of La Estrella (Source: CPC La Estrella)

Fecha:

Datos:

Primero: listar personas que viven en la casa, incluyendo nombres edades y relación familiar con la persona entrevistada:

Nombre de persona que vive en la casa	Edad	Relación familiar con entrevistado

Segundo, rellenar estos datos (lo puede hacer al final de la entrevista ya que la información la han recogido en el cuadro)

Cuantos matrimonios/parejas viven aquí:

Cuantos adultos: Mujeres____; Hombres____

Cuantos niños: Niños____; Niñas_____

Profesión:

1. ¿En que trabajan?

- le trabaja de alguien mas
- agricultura
- ganadería
- pulpería
- compra y venta de grano
- reciben ayuda de alguien de afuera
- otra

Comentarios:

Tenencia de tierra

2. ¿Tienen su familia tierra? SI/NO

3. ¿Cuántas manzanas?

4. ¿Para que la usan?

(Indicar cuantas MZ se destinan para cada siembro: por ejemplo MZ para maíz, frijol, ganado, y otros rubros)

5. ¿Tienen las escrituras de la tierra? SI/NO

6. Si contestó SI: ¿A nombre de quién?

Tierra prestada (por ejemplo de un familiar- sin pago)

7. ¿Le deja alguien usar parte de su tierra? ¿Quién?

(Nota: si mencionan alquiler o 'a medias' vayan a la sección apropiada)

8. ¿Cuántas MZ?

9. ¿Para qué las usan?

(Indicar cuántas MZ se destinan para cada siembra: por ejemplo MZ para maíz, frijol, ganado, y otros rubros)

10. Esas tierras, ¿se las han dejado sólo para una siembra, o se las han dejado definitivamente?

Comentarios:

Alquiler de tierra a otras personas

11. ¿Alquila su tierra a alguien más? SI/NO

12. ¿Cuántas manzanas?

13. ¿A quién se la alquila?

14. ¿Le puedo preguntar a qué precio?

15. ¿Para qué la usan?

(Indicar cuántas MZ se destinan para cada siembra: por ejemplo MZ para maíz, frijol, ganado, y otros rubros)

Alquiler de tierra de otras personas

16. ¿Están pagando alquiler de tierra a otra persona? SI/NO

17. ¿Cuántas manzanas?

18. ¿A quién se la alquila?

19. ¿A qué precio?

20. ¿Para que la usan?

(Indicar cuantas MZ se destinan para cada siembro: por ejemplo MZ para maíz, frijol, ganado, y otros rubros)

Comentarios:

Mediería

21. ¿Trabajan a medias con alguien más? SI/NO

(Preguntar en general- y también en el último año)

22. ¿Que ponen ustedes? (mano de obra/tierra/semillas/químicos/abonos)

23. ¿Con quién trabajan a medias?

24. ¿Cuántas MZ? ¿Qué han sembrado?

Comentarios:

Trabajadores

25. ¿Han contratado trabajadores/mozos este ultimo año? SI/NO

26. ¿Quién/Quienes?

(Detallar los nombres)

27. ¿Cuántos días?

28. ¿Cuánto les pagaron al día?

Comentarios:

Ganado

29. ¿Tienen ganado (vacas)? SI/NO

30. ¿Cuántas cabezas?

31. ¿Cuántas cabezas de:

a) ovejas

b) cabras

c) cerdos (chanchos)

d) gallinas y otras aves de corral

Producción de frijol y maíz

32. ¿Qué tan grande es su producción de maíz y frijol?

(Indicar numero total de quintales tanto de maíz como frijol, y de cuantas MZ salieron)

33. ¿Ajustan con su producción para todo al año o en algún momento les toca comprar maíz y frijoles? ¿Si les toca comprar- a partir de qué mes?

34. ¿Cuánto destinan al comercio y cuanto dejan para consumo familiar?

(En número de quintales tanto de maíz como de frijol)

35. ¿A quien le venden?

36. ¿Tienen producción en Apante? SI/NO

37. ¿Cuánto frijol sacaron?

Comentarios:

Trabajo Asalariado

38. ¿Alguien en su familia le trabaja a alguien más? SI/NO

(Preguntar tanto por trabajos estables, como trabajos de jornalero y corte de café)

39. ¿Quiénes? ¿Qué tipo de trabajo?

40. ¿Dónde?

41. ¿Trabaja todo al año o solamente en temporadas? Si es en temporada ¿Cuándo es la temporada?

42. ¿Cuánto más o menos cobran por ese trabajo?

Comentarios:

Apoyo de familiares emigrantes

43. ¿Tienen algún familiar viviendo en otro país? SI/NO

44. ¿Quiénes?

45. ¿En qué país(es)?

46. ¿En qué trabajan? ¿Es temporal o permanente? (agricultura/construcción/servicios etc.)

47. ¿Les/le envían dinero a ustedes? SI/NO

48. ¿Cada cuanto? ¿Más o menos cuantos reciben?

Comentarios:

Crédito

49. ¿Han hecho algún préstamo grande en el último año? SI/NO

50. Si la respuesta es NO: ¿Por qué?

Si la respuesta es SI ¿Para qué usó el préstamo?

51. ¿Qué cantidad?

52. ¿Quién se lo otorgo?

53. ¿Debe devolverlo en grano o dinero?

Comentarios:

Organización

54. ¿Trabajan ustedes en una cooperativa o de forma individual?

55. ¿Hay alguien en su familia que trabaje de forma voluntaria con una organización? ¿Cuáles?

56. ¿Hay alguien en su familia que es un promotor de alguna organización? ¿Cuáles?

57. ¿Han recibido ayuda de alguna organización (semillas/letrinas/libros/zinc)? ¿Qué recibió de cada organización?

(Primero dejar que contesten, y después de eso, mencionar uno por uno los programas que han pasado por el horno: Cieets (letrinas, pilas), Vision Mundial, Plan Techo, Bono Productivo, Minibono, Movimiento Comunal, etc.)

58. ¿Usa el banco de semillas? SI/NO

59. ¿Por qué?

Capacitación

60. ¿Hay alguien en su familia que ha sido invitado a alguna capacitación? ¿Cuáles?

61. ¿Hay alguien en su familia que ha participado en alguna capacitación? ¿Cuáles?

62. ¿De qué organizaciones? ¿Dónde? ¿Cuándo?

63. ¿Quién le ha invitado a las capacitaciones?

64. ¿Cuales piensa usted que le han mas útiles? ¿Por qué?

65. ¿Cuándo es la próxima capacitación y quien va de su familia?