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**DIGNITY AND JUST PRICES: THE MORAL ECONOMIES OF FARMING  
IN THE AGE OF AGRO-INDUSTRY\***

**DIGNIDAD Y PRECIO JUSTO: LAS ECONOMÍAS MORALES DE LA AGRICULTURA Y  
LA GANADERÍA EN LA ERA DE LA AGRO-INDUSTRIA**

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**ABSTRACT:** The hegemonic agro-food system currently dominant in Spain and other European countries challenges farmers' livelihoods. This paper addresses farmers' (un)sustainabilities from a moral economy perspective, focusing on discussions about just prices. We argue that it is important to consider the historical perspective of food systems from a political economy point of view and to examine tensions and clashes between values and norms through the notion of moral economy. We analyse these perspectives through various case studies in different Spanish regions: farmers in Galicia, viticulturists in El Penedès and "alternative" provisioning systems in Catalonia. Furthermore, we combine the moral economy perspective with feminist and eco-feminist contributions that help us to understand one of farmers' most common demands: just prices that guarantee livelihoods and dignity. This paper also deals with the ambivalent role of the state as a price regulator and with farmers' aspirations of autonomy from the market and the state. The global health crisis caused by COVID-19 during the first half of 2020 stresses the need to continue exploring the (un)sustainabilities of our hegemonic agro-food system and the potentialities and limitations of counter-hegemonic food provisioning systems that try to build alternative food paths.

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**KEYWORDS:** Farming; Just Price; Sustainability; Values; Moral Economies; Dignity.

**RESUMEN:** El sistema agroalimentario hegemónico actualmente dominante en España y otros países europeos desafía los medios de vida de los agricultores. Este artículo aborda las (in)sostenibilidades de los agricultores y ganaderos desde una perspectiva de economía moral, centrándose en discusiones sobre precios justos. Argumentamos que es importante considerar la perspectiva histórica de los sistemas alimentarios desde el punto de vista de la economía política y examinar las tensiones y choques entre valores y normas a través de la noción de economía moral. Analizamos estas perspectivas a través de diversos casos de estudio en diferentes regiones españolas: agricultores y ganaderos en Galicia, viticultores en El Penedès y sistemas de aprovisionamiento “alternativos” en Cataluña. Además, combinamos la perspectiva de la economía moral con contribuciones feministas y ecofeministas que nos ayudan a comprender una de las demandas más comunes de los agricultores y ganaderos: precios justos que garanticen los medios de vida y la dignidad. Este documento también se ocupa del papel ambivalente del estado como regulador de precios y de las aspiraciones de los agricultores y ganaderos a la autonomía del mercado y el estado.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Agricultura; Precio justo; Sostenibilidad; Valores; Economías morales; Dignidad.

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## 1. AGRO-FOOD SYSTEMS IN SPAIN

### 1.1 HEGEMONIES AND (UN)SUSTAINABILITIES IN AGRO-FOOD SYSTEMS

The hegemonic agro-food system currently dominant in Spain and other European countries challenges farmers' livelihoods. This paper addresses farmers' (un)sustainabilities from a moral economy perspective, focusing on discussions about just prices. Moral economies deal with moral values and cultural norms found in every economic practice and help us to analyse processes of integration, opposition and resistance between values.

Since the 1960s, the agricultural system has been characterised by heavy industrialisation and an increasing reliance on agro-chemicals, fossil fuels and other inputs. Thus, the Green Revolution transformed some traditional agricultural activities, such as the use of local seeds or manure from local farms, which are now supplied by industrial sectors. Hence, material inputs and labour processes linked to farming have been appropriated by industrial capital (Goodman and Redclift 1991). These new agricultural industrial products were later reincorporated into agricultural activity in the form of improved seeds and agrochemical fertilisers that farmers have to buy each year (Badal *et al.* 2011). Therefore, industrialisation has imposed the full monetarisation of the agrarian econ-

omy and many of the family farms previously organised around a subsistence economy had to redirect their production to obtain surpluses through the sale of products outside the farm so they could buy these industrial inputs. Nevertheless, farming still depends on “raw and natural” materials that are the basis of all the processes, as well as on manual labour. It is difficult to think about farming without this “natural” substrate and human labour.

Alongside these changes, crop diversity has been replaced by monocultures that strengthen mechanisation and intensify labour at farms (Sevilla 2006). The dominance of monocultures and the control of seeds have led to great loss of food biodiversity (FAO 2019).

Besides, the heavy mechanisation of agricultural work has contributed to a gradual drop in the population dedicated exclusively to farming. Data coming from enriched countries show a critical drop-off in the number of farmers: the main trend is a shift in the source of livelihood from an agricultural to a non-agricultural sector (Bernstein 2016). Furthermore, the vertical integration of agricultural production has concentrated power and technical and economic decision-making into a single point in the food system, relegating agricultural products to be an input of supply, processing and distribution processes (Sevilla 2006; Soria *et al.* 1988). This agro-industrial context hinders the continuity of farming and rural livelihoods (Soranelles and Casal 2014). In this sense,

some authors refer to *depeasantisation* as a process that empties the rural areas of peasants, as a specific form of deagrarianisation in which peasants lose their economic capacity and social cohesion and shrink demographically (Hussain and Anzar 2019), as agriculture is transformed into a business (Sevilla 2006) and a process that erodes peasant practices and introduces market rationality in agriculture (McMichael 2012).

For instance, in Catalonia, the north-eastern region of Spain, only 1,4% of the active population works in the primary sector in 2020, according to data from Spain's National Statistics (INE), while farmers accounted for over half of the active population in the early 20th century and 23% in 1965 (Pomar *et al.* 2018). These data are even more critical if we separate farmers by age. In 2017, only 3% were less than 24 years old, while 23% were over 55 years old. In Galicia, the north-western region of Spain, the data are quite similar: only 5% of the active population works in the primary sector. Furthermore, there are only 256 farmers between the ages of 25 and 29, while there are 12,505 farmers between the ages of 60 and 64 (INE). These data show an ageing population and a lack of transfer between generations. One of the key factors driving the ageing of farmers and the lack of such transfer in Spain is the decline of agricultural income. Spain's total agricultural income dropped by 8.4% in 2019. Nevertheless, final prices for consumers have continued to increase, according to the Consumer Price Index (CPI). Namely, the CPI rose about by 49.5% from 2000 to 2020 (INE). Based on monthly reports, the Coordinator of Farm and Livestock Organisations (COAG) concludes that prices paid to farmers are multiplied by 4.5 on average compared to prices paid by consumers. The organization of the present agro-food system is dominated by transnational distributor enterprises that consider food as a commodity that generates economic benefits (Solar and Pérez 2013) and impose unjust distribution of value through the food chain.

While we were writing this paper in February 2020, Spanish farmers all over the country demonstrated to demand just prices. One of the most common demands was for prices to be regulated so that agrarian products could not be sold for less than the production cost. In this context, on 25 February, the Spanish government issued a legal decree on agriculture and food to deal with what was described as a "crisis" in the agricultural sector. The government declared that various factors must be taken into account to understand this "urgent situation": the fall in prices perceived by farmers, the damage caused by climatic effects, trade tensions, the

volatility of commodity prices in stock markets, the increase in the price of agricultural inputs, the greater rigour in production and the imbalance when fixing prices on the food chain (BOE 2020). Given the agricultural sector's atomisation, standstill and heavy reliance on demand, these new measures stipulate that the production cost must appear in every purchase contract. These contracts must also specify that the prices cover the production costs, including seeds, seedlings, fertilisers, pesticides, fuel, energy, machinery, repairs, irrigation, animal feed, veterinary expenses, subcontracted work and salaried work.

Another major obstacle, especially for young farmers, is access to land (Noihr 2017). Indeed, the appreciation in value of some cultivated land has had a heavy impact on depeasantisation in some areas (Gascón and Milano 2018).

Alongside this decrease in the number of farmers, the number of farms has also shrunk. Sixty per cent of the farms in Catalonia disappeared between 1962 and 1999 (Badal *et al.* 2011). Between 1999 to 2009, an average of 12 farms are estimated to have disappeared per week. Likewise, the farms that remain are getting bigger—in 2009, 47% of the farms hoarded 92% of the useful agricultural surface in the Catalan region (Pomar *et al.* 2018). In Galicia, the figures are very similar and in recent decades and especially since the beginning of the 2000s, the number of registered farms has continued to drop. Almost 15,000 farms have disappeared in the last decade. Specifically in 2015,<sup>3</sup> one family farm is estimated to have disappeared each day<sup>4</sup>. Just as in Catalonia, while small and medium-sized farms have been disappearing during these years, farms with more than 100 cows have been increasing. After the strong processes of intensification and loss of farms from the 1960s to the 1990s, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and

3 During the CAP reform (2014-2020), there was a significant effort to dismantle the instruments for regulating markets and production, favouring greater volatility in prices. One of the specific instruments dismantled in 2015 were milk quotas, which significantly liberalised the sector and substantially affected Galicia.

4 Data taken from the newspaper *Praza Pública*: "Más dunha explotación láctea pechada ao día e dez céntimos por litro menos que hai dous anos", Pardo, M. (3 February 2016). Available at: <<http://praza.gal/economia/11109/mais-dunha-explotacion-lactea-pechada-ao-dia-e-dezcentimospor-litro-menos-que-hai-dous-anos/>>. Accessed: 7 June 2021.

the agro-environmental measures began to promote and subsidize the diversification of processes and activities in rural areas with the aim of setting the population. Therefore, it started a period characterized by the promotion of the diversification of economic activities as well as of the singularization in product quality (Soronelles and Casal 2014).

The agro-industrial production model is linked to a “kilometric food” centralised and globalised distribution model controlled by a few transnational corporations holding a strategic power that affect strongly to other sectors from the agro-food system (Fine *et al.* 1996). Indeed, Burch and Lawrence (2009) refer to financialisation to express the increased influence of finance capital on the agro-food system, that creates situations in which these transnationals may take large profits. These companies are what end up determining what we consume, the price of food, its origin and how it is prepared (Montagut and Vivas 2009: 5).

In Europe, 110 distributor groups channel exchanges between 3 million farmers and 160 million consumers (Vorley 2003). These large distributors sell their products to consumers through supermarkets and hypermarkets. In fact, the consumption of food in these kinds of markets has continued to increase (in Catalonia, by 211% from 1995 to 2004), while the number of small establishments in neighbourhoods and towns has fallen permanently (in Catalonia, by 55.74% from 1995 to 2004) (Vivas and Montagut 2007; Badal *et al.* 2011).

The industrial agro-food system has severe environmental consequences, as well as heavy dependence and limits such as pollution, water disposal, fossil fuel depletion, health risks for workers and consumers (Martínez Alier and Schülpmann 1992; Martínez Alier 1999; Naredo 2015). Thus, the externalities of the agro-food system are quite similar to those that may be found in other industrial manufacturing processes (Goodman and Redclift 1991; González de Molina *et al.* 2007).

## 1.2 FURTHER RESEARCH ON FARMING

Agro-industry poses serious challenges to farmers’ sustainability and sets out several research questions regarding these issues. Among the many fields of study, we suggest five essential domains for researching agricultural systems. This article only focuses on the first of them regarding just prices and dignity.

Nevertheless, the selection does not aim to be exhaustive or complete, but rather a way to encourage and suggest further understanding and research of farming today and the exploration of food paths that deal with current limitations and unsustainabilities in order to achieve dignity for farmers.<sup>5</sup>

On the one hand, prices are an essential arena for research. Many farmers stress that the state must regulate agricultural prices to ensure the establishment of a minimum price that covers production costs and thereby guarantees farm’s economic sustainability. Their main demands, which notably include just prices, hinge on the need to create a free and public mediation system. This system should guarantee that sale agreements no longer solely reflect the interests of major corporations.

Thus, we suggest it is important to evaluate the outcomes of the Spanish government’s recent intervention in regulating agricultural prices and to examine the details of its application. How will the legal decree take into account differences regarding the degree of mechanisation, weather conditions, irrigation systems and the intensity of manual labour among farms? The decree also raises possible changes on final prices previously established in contracts depending on the “final development of the market, the amount delivered and the quality of the product”. As such, which agents will establish these factors and how will they effectively be determined? Finally, we suggest that it is necessary to explore if this legal decree will be an effective way to redistribute value throughout the agro-food chain and subvert the currently unequal situation.

Nevertheless, some food provisioning systems have intended to ensure just prices for consumers and producers alike by creating alternative food paths based on trust, cooperation and reciprocity among agents. These supply systems commonly grouped under the academic concept of Alternative Food Networks (AFN) are characterised by some of the following aspects: short food chains, the supply of organic and local products, direct relationships between producers

5 For instance, the COVID-19 health crisis has emphasised the need to continue exploring food paths based on ICTs. During this crisis, there has been a significant rise in the use of ICTs, especially from the link of distributors to consumers. As well, there has been an increase in proximity food interest and consumption (Batalla *et al.* 2020). Experts predict that these trends will only continue to grow.

and consumers that leave out intermediaries and networks based on local economies (Renting, Marsden and Banks 2003). In general, the aim of these food provisioning systems is to guarantee a just price for producers and prevent dependence on intermediaries. Several authors have analysed the potential of alternative systems, showing how they differ from a fully market based system (Goodman *et al.* 2012), while others have emphasised their integration into capitalist market relations (Whatmore *et al.* 2003). Grasseni (2013) approaches AFN not by focusing on their alternative nature, but as specific grassroots provisioning systems that question some of the assumptions of the capitalist and globalised agro-industrial model. In the Spanish context, López (2011) describes AFN as essential elements that connect the city to rural environments and fabrics strategic alliances among consumers and farmers with a political dimension beyond hegemonic capitalist market.

We also suggest that it is important to continue investigating whether these “alternative” provisioning systems guarantee farmers a decent life (*vida digna*),<sup>6</sup> whether they are fair for both producers and consumers and whether they can potentially reach a greater number of people, which refers to their possibilities of scaling up. Thus, they are still vulnerable to possible changes affecting different agents and the environment. For example, producers who enter periods that require extra care (due to illness, maternity or death) and consumers who lose their jobs or undergo changes in availability due to maternity or changes in working hours all affect network sustainability (Homs, Flores-Pons and Martín 2021).

This paper addresses issues regarding the former field of study by revisiting some theoretical concepts such as food regime, moral economy, just price, value and values and alternativeness by reviewing the bibliography and studying three ethnographic cases in Spain conducted by the authors. On the one hand, the case of the family dairy farms in Galicia. The ethnographic research includes three years of intermittent participant observation, from 2013 to 2015 and forty semi-directed interviews with members of nine family dairy farms, the secretary of one of the main agrarian unions in the region, and also with different

technicians and important stakeholders in the agro and dairy sector. On the other hand, the case of the viticulture sector of El Penedès (Catalonia). This ethnographic research includes one year of participant observation (2019-2020) and fifteen semi-directed interviews to viticulturists and other key agents from the sector (people participating in trade unions, agrarian cooperatives and other wineries). Finally, the article takes into account the ethnographic work developed on alternative provisioning food networks in Catalonia that includes long-term fieldwork (2008-2018) and more than sixty interviews to farmers, distributors, consumers and other experts. Nevertheless, in this introduction we briefly expose four more research areas that this paper does not address but that we consider essential to the analysis of farming sustainability.

A second area of research refers to the disappearance of farms and depeasantisation, as well as the potential for repeasantisation (Van der Ploeg 2008, 2018). We suggest examining the crucial factors behind the disappearance of farms and farmers: access to land, changes in agricultural income, the effect of a farm’s size on its sustainability in an agro-industrial context, vertical integration and contract farming (Langre 1988), the increased use of technology and industrialisation processes, public policies and so on (Soto 2002; Calcedo 2009; González de Molina *et al.* 2017).

We also propose exploring strategies of returning to a rural lifestyle or what is called repeasantisation (Van der Ploeg 2008). Here, we find the neo-rural phenomenon (Nogué i Font 1988) and the neo-peasantries (Chevalier 1993), a new impulse for repopulating and revitalising a peasant lifestyle. Neo-peasants and neo-rural people are mostly young people with higher education who migrate from the city to the countryside with the intention of reproducing a rural and peasant lifestyle. In general, these are people with little or no prior ties to rural livelihoods, with political motivations very often linked to degrowth, the anti-development movement, environmentalism, libertarian communism and so forth, who initiate highly diversified agricultural activities (gardening, orchard farming, chicken farming, bread making and so on). Nevertheless, the economic viability of these exchanges is quite rare and they often include other actions aimed at strengthening self-sufficiency in other areas such as housing or energy (squatting, sharecropping, restoring abandoned houses, using renewable energy, car-sharing and so on) (Escribano,

6 Throughout this paper we will use the words “decent life” to translate the Spanish expression *vida digna*. Nevertheless, the Spanish expression is strongly tied to the concept of dignity analysed further in section 5

Lubbers and Molina 2020). Furthermore, the collective and political dimension of most projects is enormously significant for their development (Pratt and Luetchford 2014; Escribano *et al.* 2020). We suggest studies that deal with how these new communities are inserted into pre-existing agricultural communities and how their struggles and resistance permeate rural contexts. What are the preconceived ideas about the rural way of life and to what extent are they based on a certain idealisation of the countryside? To what extent does the aspiration of neo-rural projects on autonomy and independence of the capitalist market get to materialise? To what extent can we refer to these projects as sustainable and viable?

Another area of research regarding farming sustainability with a long academic and activist background is the ecological economy perspective, which examines the environmental effects of agro-industry. Ecological economists set a value on these externalities as costs and explore how they are managed (Carpintero and Naredo 2006; Naredo 2010). The unequal distribution of economic benefit and ecological impact, environmental governance and degrowth are other key lines of research in the ecological economy perspective (Martínez-Alier 2005; McMichael 2011; Demaria *et al.* 2013).

A fourth domain consists of a review of the concept of peasantry in anthropology (Wolf 1969; Kautsky 1974; Scott 1976; Narotzky 2016). On the one hand, the peasantry appears in classical literature with certain autonomy because they own part of the means of production. However, they have a particular connection to the broader society, characterised by the transfer of surpluses to a dominant group (Wolf 1976). Discussions about peasantry also highlight a particular economy focused on the social reproduction of households instead of the search for profit (Narotzky 2016). Peasants' livelihoods are characterised by a diversification of resources and strategies for reproduction and by an interconnection between household and farming, including agriculture and livestock<sup>7</sup>.

Furthermore, the peasant has traditionally been associated in the literature with a political subject, resistant to cultural change and to capitalist forms of

production (Badal 2014). In this sense, we ask to what extent today's farmers can be considered resisting the continuous advance of capitalism.

This line of research picks up on classical agrarian studies and economic anthropology (Chayanov 1974; Bernstein and Byres 2001). Is the peasant mode of production different from the capitalist one? If so, how?

Finally, a fifth essential issue is to explore the political dimension of different rural social movements that are developing at different scales: local (agro-ecological consumer cooperatives), regional (farmer networks) and global (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra, Via campesina). Calle (2010) distinguishes demonstrations that promote new forms of radical democracy with horizontal and self-managed practices (Calle 2009) and proposals in the field of production that raise the need for endogenous development (Sevilla 2006). According to the author, these proposals feed each other and we find new social movements such as political environmentalism, peasant networks or production-consumption cooperatives that are initiatives resulting from these interactions.

Most of the issues above hinge on a common question regarding the sustainability of farming in the current agro-industry system, which is the main background of this paper as well.

Finally, we want to call attention to the necessary and suggestive connection between academic research, social movements and farmers, in accordance with Participatory-Action-Research (PAR) (Cuellar and Calle 2011; Chevalier and Buckles 2013; Guzman *et al.* 2013; Méndez *et al.* 2019;). In this article, we seek to take a theoretical approach to some of the key aspects of agrarian economies, based on our fieldwork carried out in different parts of Spain between 2008 and 2020. Specifically, we focus on the study of "alternative" supply systems in Catalonia, the livestock and milk production sector in Galicia and the sparkling wine sector in Penedès, a region in Catalonia. This theoretical approach cannot be understood without considering the situation of the Spanish countryside in which agro-food production and the people who support it see their sustainability threatened by the market crunch, public policies and the subsumption of all aspects of life to capitalism. The article also includes some of the struggles and resistance for just prices that crystallise the desire and demand to continue living as farmers.

7 These issues were one of the main lines of the panel discussion "Peasants nowadays: challenges and strategies for a decent life (*vida digna*) in the agro-industry era" (coordinated by Escribano and Homs) presented during the first Catalan Congress on Anthropology (Tarragona, 2020), in which both authors participated.

This paper addresses some theoretical concepts that we illustrate with ethnographic studies mentioned before carried out by authors and other academics that we believe are very useful tools for analysing and delving into the problem of unsustainability in the agricultural and livestock sector. Thus, the aim of this paper is to contribute to the theoretical discussion about just prices and dignity in the agricultural and livestock sector. The article is structured in five parts and a final section; each section includes a theoretical review of one or more key concepts and an ethnographic example that allows to land and embody the discussion. The last section includes some final remarks regarding farming sustainabilities.

First, we suggest reviewing the concept of food regime in order to resituate farming and food as key aspects on the configuration and development of the capitalist economy. Indeed, agro-industrial production is not determined by human food needs, but by the circulation and accumulation of capital (McMichael 2009). We then stress the importance of the concept of moral economy in the demand for just prices in order to analyse socio-economic practices and highlight tensions and ambiguities among different moralities. The prism of moral economy is essential for understanding just price discourses and practices. Next, we briefly examine the role of the state and public policies (both national and supranational) regarding the sustainability of farmers who long for the government to play a regulatory role in today's free market context. The entry of Spain into the European Union and the application of the CAP affected significantly the institutional and economic framework of food production because it marked an important breakdown in the previous protectionism for many food products (Sineiro García 2008). Closely linked to discussions about just prices, we raise the issue of conflicts and tensions between the economic value and the social, environmental and political values of economic exchanges. Thereafter, we explore some of the incipient contributions in this field from feminist economies and eco-feminism that advocate displacing capital and bringing life to the heart of economy. Thus, we reflect on the links and dependencies between households and farms, between the reproductive and the productive spheres. Finally, we discuss some farmers' struggles and resistance that help us to continue imagining other possible food paths.

## 2. HISTORICAL PROCESSES ON FOOD PROVISIONING SYSTEMS

### 2.1 FOOD REGIMES: FROM THE GREEN REVOLUTION TO GREEN CAPITALISM

The historical perspective is essential for understanding the processes that have been transforming agricultural and livestock production from a global point of view. It also helps us to observe how tensions and conflicts arise. One example of this is the disappearance or resilience of food production outside the agro-industrial sphere. The concept of food regime fits this type of analysis. The discussion on which this concept focuses is impregnated with the "agrarian question" (Narotzky 2016). The key aspects here are the disappearance of the peasantry<sup>8</sup> through dispossession and proletarianisation processes (Bernstein 2016: 611-612) during the development of capitalism, but also the supposed "anomaly" implied by the persistence of peasants in modern capitalism.

The concept of food regime arises mainly from the discussion between McMichael (2009, 2016) and Friedman (1989, 2016). Later, Bernstein (2016) also analyses the concept from a political economy perspective. These analyses show the strategic role of agriculture in constructing the capitalist economy.

These authors in their discussion around this notion establish two previous food regimes and a third that has been emerging since the 1980s. The first food regime spanned from the 1870s to the 1930s and was characterised by the import of essential grains and livestock from tropical colonies to Europe.

8 In this paper we use the term farmers and not peasants because we think that today's agro-industrial context has added complexity that makes it difficult to use the term peasant, which has traditionally been linked to a stagnant monolithic category. These debates centre on the unresolved agrarian question of whether to consider peasants a cohesive category guided by a specific economic logic (Chayanov 1986) or whether they are affected by economic differentiation which mainly consists of dispossession through the development of capitalism (Lenin 1977). The agro-industrial situation today has blurred boundaries and presents high levels of complexity among people that produce food. In this paper, we only use the term peasant to: 1) refer to classic discussions; 2) review questions about the validity (or invalidity) of the term and its specific aspects; and 3) mention the concepts of repeasantisation and depeasantisation when used by the authors who coined the terms.

In the second food regime, which was active during the post-war period after the Second World War (1950s) and the 1970s, the flow of US food surplus was redirected to the empires of post-colonial states that were located in strategic Cold War settings. This US food surplus was sent in the form of food aid and encouraged the selective industrialisation of the so-called third world, thereby ensuring the loyalty of these countries towards imperial markets and against communism. These states adopted the technologies of the Green Revolution and important land distribution reforms were enacted, partially to stop riots and peasant protests. Thus, market relations were extended to the rural world. Agribusiness has been developing links between national agricultural sectors during this process, connecting them with production and global distribution chains.

Through the agro-export model, agriculture became an exceptional sector worldwide and the United States became the dominant exporter (McMichael 2009: 143). As a result of the internalisation of the agriculture industry, the regulatory power of the world economy shifted from the state to capital.

The third food regime, which has been developed from the late 1980s onwards, goes further in the aforementioned process of the second regime, but with the incorporation of new countries. There is also an increasing exodus from the countryside to the city, but movements with an alternative view of agriculture (food sovereignty, slow food, etc.) have also arisen alongside the intensification of these processes. The third regime also represents a flourishing of the free trade system, giving rise to new issues such as safety, quality through private food standards and biotechnologies. During this period, more importance has been placed on environmental policies and the emergence of what is called “green capitalism” (McMichael 2009).

In general, there is a shift from public to private initiatives; a shift from the state, bringing private industry into play. Thus, industrial power and economic liberalism are institutionalised in the global food system, strengthening market relations by privatising states. The World Trade Organisation (WTO) will be a key institution in this succession of changes, as this politically instituted process of economic liberalisation is conveyed through the WTO agreement, but also through other supranational institutions such as the European Union. Subsidies granted through the CAP involve direct payments to

producers, thereby decoupling prices from production costs. This allows for the establishment of a single price worldwide, nullifying productive differences according to the specific socio-economic and environmental characteristics of each area.

In the third food regime, Friedmann (2016) observes the existence of a shift that she calls the “corporate-state and inter-state shift” (2016: 675), which involves a transition from capital that attempts to use major institutional changes to appropriate social initiatives through agro-food capital. She points to the fact that big companies “learn” from social movements to conduct this shift. This contradiction stems precisely from the “corporate-environmental regime” with which the author associates the third food regime and the emergence of green capitalism. It is also in this context that the concept of sustainability has become important, widely and demagogically used by capital and large companies for their own interest.

Dispossession also appears as an important feature in the third food regime, taking place through different factors such as prices disconnected from costs, “world prices universalised through liberalisation” (Bernstein 2016), land grabbing and the international market through global commodity chains dominated by the large agro-food industry. In the latter, processes such as contract farming stand out.

What is ultimately described in this third food regime is the “neoliberalisation of nature” (McMichael 2009), greater industrialisation of agricultural production and the devaluation of the role of ecological knowledge and “natural cycles” which are no longer taken into account.

## 2.2 SPECIALIZATION IN DAIRY FARMS AND APPROPRIATION OF ORGANIC AGRICULTURE

Next, we present two cases that exemplify some of the processes identified by McMichael and Friedmann as characteristics of the second and third food regimes, respectively. First, we explore the effects of the Green Revolution and of the European Union’s CAP on dairy farms in Galicia. We then examine the appropriation of organic agriculture through the standardisation of organic products by agribusiness as an example of green capitalism, which characterises the third food regime.

Spain’s agricultural model based on heavy state interventionism gradually ended in the 1950s and the

market and private sector became essential players. Agricultural policies implemented during this period focused on mechanisation and technological adaptation. In Galicia, the Green Revolution especially concerned dairy specialisation and facilitated the emergence of an agro-industrial complex that also began to accelerate and increase the dependence of family farms on the market.

The effects of Franco's dictatorship on the destruction of the preceding public system of innovation fully shaped implementation of the Green Revolution model, which was clearly inspired by the United States. In this period, there was a tendency to devalue practices and knowledge that emanated from the rural community (Lanero and Freire 2011; Iturra 1988). The modernisation of agriculture and livestock focused on the application of scientific research developed unilaterally by specialists. This was most unlike what had happened before the dictatorship, when agrarian associationism and the farmers themselves worked closely with specialists in implementing agricultural innovations (Lanero and Freire 2011).

A significant consequence of the dairy specialisation process in many Galician farms during this period was the loss of diversity in environmental terms, but also, as Soto (2002) highlights, loss in economic terms, because the loss of diversity also affects land productivity.

The commodification of production factors and of the entire production process - with Spain's entry into the European Economic Community (EEC)- created high levels of dependence on external factors. Agricultural income also stagnated or fell, especially towards the end of the 1970s. This process was mainly affected by a relative drop in agricultural prices and rising costs (Soto 2002). The alliance between industry and the state was strengthened at this time, and although this period supposedly witnessed the revitalisation of the agrarian sector in general, what really happened was that it was being completely subordinated to the interests of agro-industry.

The admission of Spain into the European Union in 1986 and the subsequent application of the CAP would significantly affect the economic and institutional framework in which the Galician agricultural sector developed. First, this caused a breakdown in the protectionism that had supported many food products in the Spanish market. Spain's previous system, which ensured sale and minimum profitability

for producers, had to open up considerably to European Community exchanges, which were very competitive with the main Galician productions. Furthermore, the obligation of the CAP brought about important changes for family farms (Sineiro García 2008).

The first measures to be applied were related to sanitation campaigns and required farmers to pay high costs to improve and renovate facilities for the sake of animal welfare. At some farms, these requirements were so rigorous that they led to the slaughter of all their livestock (Fernández de Rota y Monter and Irimia Fernández 1998). Also, one of the most restrictive CAP measures was applied to milk production through a quota policy. The implementation of this measure forced the Galician dairy sector into a complex situation that ended up saddling the farmers with debt and even led to the emergence of a black market for dairy products (Langreo 2004; Martínez Álvarez 2018).

At the beginning of the CAP implementation, intervention prices were a main feature. These prices are guaranteed minimum prices for agricultural products. In case the minimum price is not reached the member states are obliged to buy and store the surplus. Intervention prices gradually faded when the CAP reforms began, because they supposed an excessive protection of the domestic market. In the 1990s, the CAP settled a significant reduction of intervention prices to bring them closer to world market prices. Indeed, direct and structural CAP aid became important in the late 1990s and early 2000s in an attempt to compensate for the drop in intervention prices. Nevertheless, farmers have generally never embraced this "compensation" and state that they do not agree that CAP direct payments replace the price that must be paid for what they produce. The "just price" discourse that will be analysed later in this paper resonates soundly here.

Our second example focuses on the integration of organic agriculture into green capitalism. With the development of agro-industry in the 1970s, various agents involved in agrarian systems in different ways (farmers, environmentalists, consumers, academics and so on) began to criticise and discuss their struggles with the agricultural model resulting from the Green Revolution in order to promote another type of agriculture that would be more respectful of the environment and people (Alonso 2008).

Since the 1980s, this type of agriculture, which is commonly called biological, organic or ecological in enriched countries, has spread largely due to the important

growth of the sector. The first regulations were created to avoid fraud along the 80s and 90s. Since then, the massive production and distribution of organic products via conventional supply chains indicates that what started as a movement criticising and opposing agro-industry has become a major player in the agro-food system whose main purpose is to maximise profit and accumulate capital. Thus, some critics claim that organic farming that occurs entirely in the capitalist market contradicts the initial interpretation of organic farming as a project of social emancipation (Desafinando 2003: 16).

The dominant regulatory system facilitates the reproduction of conventional market logics that favour technical, economic and legal aspects (Galante 2002: 51). Thus, other socio-political issues that could promote provisioning alternatives, such as the organisation of producers or direct access to consumers, are not included in these certification systems. According to Cuellar and Torremocha (2008), the current third-party certification system favours farm specialisation, since monoculture certification is less expensive and bureaucratically simpler, subtly excluding small farms with diversified crops. Furthermore, it fosters the vision of “disease treatment” in crops and therefore an idea of organic agriculture that consists of substituting inputs, that separates production from consumption and that finally homogenises organic production. Hence, it is an organic agriculture specifically designed to fit the hegemonic agro-industrial model.

In Catalonia and other regions, the certification system and the consequent organic production standardisation has even appropriated the term organic, exemplifying the total integration of organic agriculture into green capitalism. In this sense, those people who are not registered as operators in the competent certification organism cannot safely use the word organic to describe their products and must refer to these food with other explanations: seasonal vegetables, products that respect the environment, agro-ecological food, etc.

There are other certification strategies more commonly used in agroecology, such as participatory guarantee systems (PGSs), which are not exclusively based on standardisation. These systems have an organisational scheme that combines solid principles with flexible rules, participation in horizontality and respect for environmental and human diversity. PGSs are tools for exchanging experiences and knowledge and become processes of social construction (Torremocha 2012).

However, the different regulatory systems do not coexist in an open space of possibilities. In a capitalist world, the relationships between different socio-economic practices and, specifically here, between different systems regulating organic production, are based on opposition, resistance and integration. Every counter-hegemonic discourse or practice is continually threatened by capital’s tendency to subjugate all spheres of human life. According to Narotzky (2014: 249), any counter-hegemony appears as a “foreign body that must be either assimilated (that is, digested and incorporated) or destroyed. Integration is the middle ground when a group is allowed to retain certain non-threatening signs of identity as long as it fully submits to hegemonic demands”. In this sense, the pressure of formal regulation occasionally destroys informal mechanisms that end up being categorised and penalised as illegal. At other times, it tries to integrate the counter-hegemonies that end up losing their autonomy to the capitalist forces that dominate the global economic scenario, as has happened in a broader context with organic farming integrated into green capitalism.

Capitalist integration occurs through very specific processes: standardisation, regulation and institutionalisation. The creation of standards and the consequent creation of norms and the institution to enforce the norms in organic farming has facilitated the integration of organic production-distribution-consumption in the circulation and accumulation of capital. Throughout these integration processes, discourses and practices have been depoliticised and values that do not cater to the interests of capital have been discarded (Homs and Narotzky 2019). To conclude, we relate food standards not only as an effective mechanism for integration, but also as an agro-industry capitalist moral economy (Busch 2000) that appears as the only possibility, since all other values involved in the regulation of production-distribution-consumption are eventually destroyed or integrated. In the following section, we extensively analyse the concept of moral economy and its role in the metabolisation of the political economy of capital through provisioning systems.

### 3. THE MORAL ECONOMIES OF FARMING IN THE AGE OF AGRO-INDUSTRY

#### 3.1 MORAL VALUES IN ALL ECONOMIES

The term “moral economy” has picked up steam in recent years. This probably has to do with the com-

plex international situation, riddled with conflicts arising in the crisis situation and the implementation of measures and policies directly related to the strong neo-liberal market drift fully affecting society. If this notion of moral economy has proven anything, it is that it is essential for analysing the moral values and cultural norms in every economic practice. Through this concept, we can observe the different social norms and obligations and how certain moral concepts are ultimately redefined by different actors.

In particular, moral economy has been central to studying issues related to the ethics of food and food trade, such as famine, risk management and subsistence, the cultural and political dimensions of food markets and rebellion and different conflicts related to food production and consumption (Hossain and Kalita 2014: 819).

As we will see, factors such as value, a decent life (*vida digna*) and the principles of justice and just prices acquire profound new dimensions from the perspective of moral economy in an analysis in which the relationship and dialectic produced between the community, the state and the market are important. The notion of community is important to moral economy. Thompson (1971), the first to coin this term, mentions the importance of the community in talking about what he calls a “legitimising notion” (*Ibid.*: 79). The population involved in the subsistence riots in 18th-century England believed that they were defending traditional rights and customs supported by the consensus of the community. It follows from this idea that the social sphere, the importance of considering the community and society as a whole, are key to this analysis. This is a matter that the Scholastics and authors who later discussed their work also explored, such as when they analyse the purposes of market exchanges and the importance of the very notion of value (Dempsey 1935; Baldwin 1959; Friedman 1980).

Since Thompson (1971) and Scott (1976), peasant communities have been a recurring element throughout the analysis and development of the notion of moral economy. Later on, Edelman (2005) analysed these communities from the 21st century and gave it a transnational character. However, we believe that it is important to link the analysis of the concept of moral economy not only to a group of agents or to a particular community, but also to specific processes of capital accumulation and transfer (Palomera and Vetta 2016).

The idea of moral economy highlights concepts such as justice, exploitation and subsistence ethics, which point to common standards of justice and equity (Scott 1976). Exploitation consists of the unfair distribution of efforts and rewards from which the requirement of a distributive equity standard is derived. This also leads to a key idea related to the idea of justice itself: “the existence of injustice implies a norm of justice” (*Ibid.*: 158). This idea of exploitation present in Scott’s analysis, centred on moral values, also implies a relationship between individuals in which the existence of an exploited party implies the existence of an exploiting party. The power of one party, and the vulnerability of the other in the different agreements or deals that may arise, will tend to violate these common standards of justice.

Scott (1976) also links the idea of exploitation with the ethic of subsistence: a moral principle rooted in the social exchanges and economic practices of peasant society whose central idea is based on the right to subsistence, and is also the demand giving visibility to the concept of just price. It is a shared moral idea about whether a price is considered just or not.

It is in this concept of just price that anchors current notions of justice in rural communities, so it is pertinent to focus on just price as a way to talk about moral economies, as we will see in the next section. Today, the right to subsistence remains just as important as it was when Scott presented it for the first time. However, under the current circumstances, the right to subsistence has since transformed into the right to continue being farmers (Edelman 2005). The continued decline in prices over the course of the last 50 years amidst unprecedented connectivity between markets and the rise of technologies that have helped to intensify production, along with the persistence of export subsidies (USA and Europe) and dumping practices, has produced a situation in which the subsistence crisis has become permanent. The “usual” subsistence crises continue (floods, livestock diseases, plummeting prices, etc.), but the new causes have a clear origin in the process of economic liberalisation that has grown in recent decades and affects not only the peasantry, but also a broad spectrum of social groups.

Finally, it is important to point out the ambiguity and ambivalence also present in the concept of moral economy. Thompson (1971) was the first to cite the absence of a certain morality in the market economy. For him,

the “new political economy” was alien to moral imperatives, so he argued that the old paternalistic economic model appealed to moral norms while the new one did not. In other words, he claimed that the market economy lacked moral norms. In a review of these issues (Thompson 1991), he later concluded that particular types of morality could be adopted in different types of economies (1991: 270). Both in Thompson’s revised approach and in subsequent analyses (Booth 1994; Whyte and Wiegatz 2016), we can observe that what is produced is rather a clash between different value and moral obligation regimes. These different regimes may even appear to overlap or as compatible with different morals. These analyses also indicate that simultaneous coexistence and clashes between different morals usually appear in contexts in which morality is ambiguous or ambivalent, or when the spheres of obligation and responsibility are not well defined.

In these communities, production and distribution are embodied in a certain morality that redraws the community and the place of economy within it. At the same time, in a dialectical sense, the economy may be bathed by the norms of the community of which it is a part. It is then possible to view all economies, including those in the market sphere, as moral economies, since they are embedded in the ethical framework of their own communities (Booth 1994).

In the case of the market economy, there is a transition to a new form of moral integration of the economy, which has to coexist with the norms of the community to which it belongs and with which it sometimes clashes. Therefore, the market is considered a sphere of justice whose operations or actions can connect with different spheres entailing other principles of justice.

The concept of moral economy can be presented as a critique of the laissez-faire economic model (Luetchford and Orlando 2019: 19) or even as a “political strategy of the relatively weak” (Hossain and Kalita 2014: 820), but we must bear in mind that the market economy has its own values and moral obligations as we will exemplify on the next section.

In her analysis of the significance of gender in forming global markets, Lourdes Benería (2007) looks at Polanyi and his approach to the social construction of national markets:

“[...] Polanyi argues, the market economy was socially constructed and accompanied by a profound change in the organisation of society itself. Thus, the

construction of the laissez-faire market economy required ‘an enormous increase in continuous, centrally organised and controlled interventionism’” (Benería, 2007:14).

As we can see, the market economy is not alien to moral imperatives because major changes were necessary to achieve social reorganisation when constructing it. These changes also affected values and moral obligations. As Benería (2007) points out, “market society had a strong influence in human behaviour”.

Finally, we stress the importance of a moral economy approach cross-referenced by class and capital. Thus, as Narotzky (2015) points out, the inequalities generated by certain forms of capital accumulation mediated by state regulation are imbued with norms, practices and meanings by agents in different socio-economic positions. Thus, moral economies reproduce and reinforce the patterns of capital accumulation. However, there may also be situations where these patterns are challenged or even subverted. Hence, moral economies integrate political economy because they focus on how capital and class relations are embedded in a specific time and space with particular social reproduction practices (Palomera and Vetta 2016). Thus, moral economy facilitates the analysis of how free market forces are located and contextualised in order to ensure their reproduction.

### 3.2 OPPOSITION, INTEGRATION AND CONFLICTS BETWEEN MORALITIES

Different moralities, values and norms are often used in the same context, meaning that moral discourses and practices overlap, complement each other and are used differently depending on the agents and their specific circumstances. Nevertheless, moral discourses and practices may also exclude each other and become areas of tension, clashes and resistance. In this section, we exemplify the different moralities regarding prices in farming through two ethnographic cases: 1) Galician farmers that have demanded just prices for the milk they produce for decades, but especially in 2015 after the end of the milk quotas; and 2) viticulturists in El Penedès (Catalonia) who have staged several demonstrations calling for just prices for grapes and wine in the summer of 2019 after a severe price drop.

The protests in Galicia were preceded by significant price drops in the contracts that the industry offered to farmers, even with the former threaten-

ing to not collect the product if the latter did not sign those contracts.

The concept of “just price” as demanded by the Galician producers appears to clash with the concept of sustainable price during the crisis of 2015. The concept of sustainable price has begun to be used mainly by the central and autonomous government, as well as the dairy industry and distribution networks. It has especially emerged at a time when all the actors in the sector have come together to conclude pre-agreements and agreements to resolve the situation. At first, “sustainable price” is defined as a price that would guarantee the end of production below the cost price. But between the pre-agreement and definitive agreement (which the main agricultural unions finally did not sign due to their disagreement), the National Commission of Markets and Competition (CNMC) ruled that it is unreasonable to ban or criticise selling at a loss, because in certain situations this could stimulate competition and bring benefits to the consumer. This statement by the CNMC is reflected in the final agreement, which removed initial allusions to prices covering production costs and replaced them with vague language about industry payments to contribute to the “sustainability” of farms.

Throughout this process, farmers claimed that this “sustainable price” was not clearly defined and was used by the government to help industry and distribution networks to avoid ensuring a just minimum price. The clash between “sustainable price” and “just price” indicates tension between economic and social sustainability. Thus, both concepts are based on completely different and opposing moral universes: farmers’ moral values differ from those of their antagonists, the dairy industry and the state. The use of the “sustainable” concept in this context is based on the idea of a price that ensures the existence of farms that supply the market and consumers with products, without specifying if they must be family farms or corporate farms that produce on an industrial scale. By invoking the concept of “just price”, farmers refer to the need for a price allowing them to live with dignity only off what they produce, enabling the reproduction of the domestic group and farming as a way of life, which is significant in the Galician rural context.

To understand this issue of just price versus sustainable price that has arisen amidst the price crisis and liberalisation of the dairy market, it is useful to think of capitalism as another type of moral economy, and not as a system lacking it. As Thompson describes in *The*

*Moral Economy Reviewed* (1991), this is more about different regimes of value and moral obligation, that is, different morals. Similarly, Booth (1994) argues that the market is a concrete sphere of justice, which in this case is different from the sphere of justice of a social order (social reproduction). As the author puts it, these two spheres of justice are different and clash, but they can also adjoin, overlap and coexist. Nevertheless, it is important to always highlight the power relations usually present in this coexistence, as we can observe in the ethnographic case.

The second example, discussed in more detail in a forthcoming publication (Homs Forthcoming), addresses discourses on grape prices among different agents involved in producing cava (sparkling wine) in the El Penedès region. In the summer of 2019, viticulturists from the largest cava-producing region in the country organised several demonstrations and strikes demanding just prices after grape prices plunged. When trying to explain why the price of grapes had fallen so low, Designation of Origin (DO)<sup>9</sup> grape and cava producers, as well as members of the two largest farmer’s unions, the three wineries that dominate the production and marketing of cava in the region, many managers at first- and second-grade cooperatives and farmers all argued that the market was unbalanced due to instabilities in supply and demand. More specifically, while demand has increased by a very small percentage over the last few years (on average 4%), supply has increased in larger proportions because of labour intensification and the expansion of the authorised planting surface from 34,000 hectares to 38,000 during 2017-2019. In addition, the three larger wineries controlling 80% of the cava market have clearly prioritised low-cost cava production focused on increasing the number of bottles and lowering the final price for consumers instead of producing smaller amounts and promoting their quality. This prioritisation has accelerated the drop in prices perceived by farmers. During the grape harvest of 2019, a kilogram of grapes was purchased at 30 cents on average. This was 28% lower than the price from the previous harvest and according to several experts it did not even cover the costs of pro-

9 Designation of origin (DO) is a geographical indication that guarantees the origin and quality of a wine that is made from certain varieties and following some established production practices. The DO for cava was founded in 1959 and is attached to the Ministry of Agriculture. It consists of representatives of viticulturists, winemakers, agricultural unions and autonomous communities in the cava-producing region.

duction that professionals estimate at a minimum of 40 cents. From this perspective, there is more supply than the market can absorb and the price of grapes has fallen to seek this supposed balance between production and consumption.

A moral economy based on self-regulated markets through a balance between supply and demand appears in most public discourses by different agents, especially those situated at certain positions of power within the current framework of unequal socio-economic relations. However, viticulturists themselves also argue and justify the low price of grapes due to an oversupply and reduced demand. At this point, we raise the Gramscian concept of hegemony, defined as cultural domination by certain elites and social structures, which can help us to enrich the concept of capitalist moral economies (Palomera and Vetta 2016). Hegemonic processes continue as the dominated adopt the explanatory frameworks of the dominant. Farmers not only reproduce this explanatory framework, they also point out the impossibility of a just price. In fact, even after the government regulates prices, as we described in the introductory section, viticulturists do not interpret it as real change and only speak about it when asked specifically for their opinion on the new legal decree. The most usual answer is a simple comment (“Ah, yes, that’s fine”), which we interpret as incredulity regarding the regulation. Therefore, the morality of the free market based on the self-regulation of supply and demand is hegemonic and affects all agents.

Furthermore, viticulturists demand a just price that at least covers the production costs of growing vineyards. Thus, farmers ask governments or other institutions to regulate the market, such as the DO for cava. This morality based on price regulation in order to cover production costs must be contextualised as the restructuring of agricultural production based on intensified industrialisation and mechanisation in order to increase vineyard productivity. Hence, it entails prioritising the number of kilograms of grapes over their quality.

As indicated above, farmers that demand a just price that covers production costs add that this can never. Price regulation discourses embed the economy with norms and values distinct than those in the supply and demand paradigm. This morality is based on the fact that it is not acceptable to sell agricultural products below production costs. Hence, this moral per-

spective is opposed to and pitted against the morality of the free market. From a capitalist moral economy perspective, regulation and price fixing are seen as attacks on the accumulation of capital and considered immoral. Meanwhile, farmers consider it immoral that these companies take all the profit and demand a fair distribution of profit along the agro-food chain (Homes Forthcoming).

In connection with the concept of dignity, during the demonstrations during the harvest of 2019, farmers demanded just prices ensuring the sustainability of their activities in the economic, social and environmental spheres. In other words, they called for prices ensuring that they would be able to remain farmers and maintain their way of life. We can relate this moral principle of the right to subsist with the aforementioned ethics of subsistence of peasants (Edelman 2005). Furthermore, these were not only demands for their “survival” and for being able to live as farmers, but also for their dignity. As we will see in greater detail later in this paper, just prices must allow for a decent life (*vida digna*).

Finally, there is a fourth discourse with specific values and norms regarding the price of grapes. In this case, price fixing is based on the socio-economic relationships between the agents involved in the supply systems. This is the case for supply chains based on direct relationships between producers and consumers that circumvent major transnational corporations as mediators. In this context, prices can be set in accordance with other values and norms beyond supply and demand and market self-regulation. This fourth example is quite rare among viticulturists. As we will see in the final section of this paper, it is more extended to other crops such as vegetables or fruits. We describe these moralities as counter-hegemonic, as they specifically address the injustices of the free market and are committed to building other fairer provisioning systems regulated by socio-economic relations between farmers and consumers. However, we cannot consider them autonomous, but structured with the capitalist market.

To conclude, we have listed four of the most commonly repeated explanations about grape price fixing, though they are extrapolable to many other products. We have also cited some of the moralities, values and norms behind each of the discourses: 1) the balance of supply and demand, 2) public price regulation in order to cover production and investment costs in an

agro-industrial context, 3) the establishment of just prices that guarantee farmers' dignity and 4) a socially-mediated price established by producers and consumers. However, we also stress that these discourses and moralities do not play out in a scenario of harmonic coexistence, but one of conflict and resistance. In particular, the ideology of the free market prevails as the hegemonic explanation for fixing grape prices and all other moral regimes are located at certain times and by specific agents.

#### 4. JUST PRICES IN FARMING

##### 4.1 JUSTICE, EXPLOITATION AND SUBSISTENCE RIGHTS

The concept of just price has been widely analysed through the lens of moral economy because it allows us to observe how certain moral concepts are mobilised, (re)interpreted or (re)defined by different actors involved in different market practices.

The idea of exploitation—the power of one party and the vulnerability of the other that tends to violate common standards of justice (Scott 1976)—is linked to the right to subsistence and to the concept of just price. As we mentioned above, just price is a shared moral concept whereby a price is considered just or not. As Luetchford and Orlando (2019: 3) put it, “Prices raise political and ethical questions that are ultimately questions of justice”. Yet “commensuration”, the criteria for establishing if a price is appropriate or just, is also important for them, because it allows us to see the social relations (i.e., power relations) in setting prices (2019: 4). Different interpretations of commensuration coexist and overlap in everyday life (2019: 5).

Although current discussions about justice in food production focus on the concept of just price and the right to subsistence, even if the historical causes of a subsistence crisis persist today, farmers' main demand is not limited to the idea of subsistence, but to the right to continue being farmers (Edelman 2005). There are also new causes for the subsistence crisis that clearly originate in the economic liberalisation that has only been increasing in recent decades. Edelman believes that there has been a continued drop in prices over the last 40 years that will hardly change due mainly to the connections between the markets, which he defines as bigger than ever. He also points to high-performance technologies that help to intensify

production and that “[...] fill the silos and warehouses and glut the markets” (2005: 336). The concentration of vertical integration into large companies (contract farming) is also significant, as it allows them to supply the inputs and control the most profitable part of the agricultural market. All these issues, along with the United States and Europe's export subsidies and dumping practices, are largely the cause of the continuous fall in prices. In this context, the subsistence crisis becomes permanent.

For example, two of the main consequences of the vertical integration in large companies and the intensification of production in the dairy sector in Galicia have been: 1) the enormous power that the dairy industry has acquired, leaving the state in a secondary role; and 2) the industry's huge capacity as a result to set prices unilaterally and thereby control supply and demand. This creates a scenario that reproduces the typical behaviour of an oligopsony, although not contract farming specifically.

According to Galician farmers, the continuous drop in prices began with Spain's entry into the EU. They consider that the prices paid for the milk before Spain entered the EU in 1986 were higher. To verify this we can deflate prices and transform current prices prior to the entry in the EU into constant prices of 2008 when milk prices were at a peak with respect to previous years. This allows us to observe how effectively the milk price was higher before the entry in the EU than in 2008. Higher prices lasted until the first years of the 1990s just when the CAP began to reduce intervention prices. For example, if we deflate prices from 1982, a liter of milk that in this year was paid to the farmers at 25.11 pesetas would have had a value of 0.49€ in 2008; while the price paid precisely in 2008 was 0.38€. In addition, members of these family farms argue that the introduction of animal sanitation, with the corresponding controls and requirements on milk quality, as well as the milk quota, not only left the industry in a dominant position, but also allowed it to fix rates in a highly volatile way.

Right after entering the EU, there was a short-time experience of price negotiation in Spain between 1987 and 1989 (Dairy Interprofessional Agreement of 1987). This period of negotiation was broken at a time of strong tensions in international markets which favour a strong drop in prices during the first months of 1990. This situation laid the foundations of the dominant position of the industry. Furthermore, the

lack of negotiations and the impossibility of reaching agreements was also extended to the rules of price formation. The dairy industry generates a diversity of criteria in the payment for quality (of the milk) and also a significant multiplicity in complementary bonus. In addition, there is also a lack of clarity in the base price which contributes to a further muddying on the determination of the milk final price and it also allows the industry to have a great influence on this final price. This insufficient homogeneity in the criteria that form milk prices (together with the discretionary and singularized treatments that dairy industry carries out among producers, generating even more tension around the price issue) is exposed in a report - Proposal for an indexation model for milk farm gate price in Spain- prepared by Institute of Studies and Development of Galicia (IDEGA) in 2003 for Dairy Interprofessional Organization (INLAC)

The enormous power acquired by the dairy industry became clear in the months before the milk quota was eliminated in April 2015. In this period some unions denounced that a few dairy industries started to lower the price in the contracts they offered to farmers. The industries threatened not to collect the milk unless the farmers signed the lower contracts. Still, the price of milk in Galicia was already the lowest in Spain. The companies were initially offering annual contracts with a price of 0.20€/liter, and when the farmer refused to accept this contract, the company offered another three months contract with a higher price, around 0.26€. This situation worsened when the quota ended on 31 March, generating a sense of uncertainty and concern among producers. Farmers thought that they had a weak negotiating position with the industry, in part because of agreements between major dairy companies that have been taking place for years. In these agreements, the companies set on prices and distributed the areas for collecting milk, leaving farmers unable to change companies if they were not satisfied with the conditions imposed on them.

In June 2015, three of the major companies in Galicia stopped collecting milk from several producers, arguing that the required quality standards were not being met. Tension grew in the dairy sector. From then until mid-September, protests and *tractoradas* (demonstrations where farmers block the street with their tractors) took place, including blockades of major companies and logistic centres to prevent products from leaving. Producers, industry players, distributors

and the government attempted to reach an agreement, but this did not end satisfactorily for producers. The farmers' main demand during this time was for the creation of a free and public mediation system to ensure that the sale agreements would longer solely reflect the interests of major corporations. But above all, what the farmers demanded was the payment of a just price for the milk they produced. This just price would allow them to live with dignity and maintain their way of life in rural areas, which they consider very important in Galicia.

The situation is not better nowadays and during 2020 some unions denounced that dairy companies are breaching the recent decree introduced in the Food Chain Law. As we mentioned in the introduction, this law requires the inclusion of a clause in the contracts that ensures that the price agreed between the company and the producer covers production costs. Due to the absence of an official reference on production costs, industries are imposing their own criteria under the threat of not collecting the milk from the producer if they do not agree with the price. The average price in Galicia from January to April 2020 was 0.32€ according to the Spanish Agrarian Guarantee Fund (FEGA), while studies carried out by the Ministry of Agriculture place the average production costs in Galician dairy farms at 0.39€.

#### 4.2 JUST PRICES AND THE AMBIVALENT ROLE OF THE STATE

Scholastic authors understood that maintaining a community seeking prosperity for all its members was essential for establishing a just price and they thought that the state was the guarantor of this process. As noted by David Friedman (1980), Thomas Aquinas and the Scholastics viewed institutions as utilitarian artefacts that were justified by social considerations of the concept of public good. The family and the state were "natural societies" for these authors (Dempsey 1935). One of the main functions of the state would be to ensure the economic prosperity of its members as well as to promote and protect the different relations that kept the community together in an attempt to meet their material needs.

Galician farmers share a similar view. In the 2015 protests, agricultural unions and producers deplored the passivity of the state. They argued that the state, which is responsible for ensuring that the industry offered contracts to farmers, did not introduce any mechanism to guarantee that these contracts were

properly negotiated or to prevent them from being arranged unilaterally. The situation that the farmers criticised was directly related to the broader process of internalisation of the agricultural business, whose outcome is the movement from state to capital in the regulatory power of the world economy. The aspects described above by Edelman (2005) as central to the subsistence crisis, such as intensified production and contract farming, also belong to this broader process and give more power to the industry, while relegating the state to a secondary position.

The farmers' demands raise the need for the state to play a strong role in solving the problems of the sector. They think that it should act as an arbitrator, serve as a device to ensure the proper functioning of its economic activity as producers and punish the parties responsible for blocking those efforts.

Some producers have also argued that the state must establish a method of control that allows farmers to produce enough to maintain a decent life while avoiding the intensification of production, which many of them consider one of the main causes of the sector's worsening situation. These ideas about state control are in line with the concept of a controlled or managed market exposed by Polanyi (2014).

At the same time, their demands also feature the state as promoter of a destructive production and trade model, becoming a true "antagonist" for these farmers (Badal 2014). Therefore, we can observe an ambivalent nature in their relationship with the state. While they distrust the state, they also yearn for its protection.

#### 4.3 JUSTICE AND COMMENSURATION: VALUES IN TENSION

Aristotle was the first to study the question of justice and commensuration in relation to price. He argued that exchange must be proportionate, given the differences between people and their products (Luetchford and Orlando 2019: 7). Christian ethics and Scholastic authors such as Thomas Aquinas also analysed this issue. They took into account market-related factors such as labour and costs (including others such as risk, transport, etc.), but also highlighted the importance of the social sphere in setting prices. Thus, these authors raised the importance of a subsistence price that can help to keep society running. In his study of Aquinas, Baldwin (1959) pointed out that one of the purposes of profit in market exchange

(the "just motive") must be the intention of contributing to the common good by meeting the community's needs (1959: 66). Therefore, these authors argue that a combination of the market price and the subsistence price can establish a just price. Despite this combination, they stress the importance of the social sphere and of taking into account the community and society as a whole, as occurs in the subsistence price. Just prices are important for maintaining the community or society by ensuring the prosperity of its members. As Baldwin (1959) pointed out, Aquinas understood that prices must be also ethically justified. These questions lead us to another important aspect of our analysis of just price, which is value. Where the different actors find value is important. Although the Scholastics considered the just price to be the intrinsic value of the commodities, they also explained it in relation to the number of buyers and sellers. That is, the market price would be well defined only in a situation where there were many buyers and sellers (in a perfect market situation). As the situation approached pure cases of bilateral monopoly (one buyer and one seller), the price would become less determinable. Hence the importance that these authors granted to arbitration, since they asserted that a "perfect arbitrated price" depends on the knowledge of the subjective values of both negotiating parties. This subjective value is the value that each party gives to what is exchanged and it depends on the position of each with respect to a huge number of social conditions. Thus, in a perfect market, the exchange supposedly self-regulates.

The relationship between the farmers and industry (both in Galicia and El Penedès) is not a bilateral monopoly as described by the Scholastics, but rather an oligopsony. In this situation, a small group of claimants or buyers has power and control over the prices and quantities of the product, thereby leading to a disadvantage for producers. As such, agro-industry is the actor that holds the power and controls prices. And as the Scholastics perceived, it is very difficult to determine the intrinsic value of the commodities, since the price is unilaterally imposed. Actually, the price is agreed among the few buyers that exist, so the difficulty in determining the intrinsic value of the commodities lies in the fact that there are not enough buyers competing with each other. The question that arises is whether a perfect market is capable of producing a just price, and the answer that emerges is one of political order, because as the Scholastics

themselves pointed out, not everyone holds the same power in the exchange relationship. It would be useful here to raise the issue of commensuration again, which allows us to observe social relations (and in this case power relations) in establishing prices (Luetchford and Orlando 2019).

The milk industry in Galicia generates diverse criteria in paying for quality and significant multiplicity in complementary bonuses, but also penalties that lower the price. There is also a lack of clarity in the base price, which makes determining the final price of milk even hazier, as it has great influence over it.

To understand how Galician farmers allocate value, we must consider that the way in which they talk about the price varies considerably, depending on their positionality, the context and the other party. It is common that within five minutes in the same conversation about price, they will even talk about it in terms of the market or in terms of social justice or subsistence. When they speak about their demands, farmers often express what they consider a just price (although they may also define the just price in monetary terms, the cash amount they need to subsist as farmers). They raise the idea of a price that allows them to continue producing and to live a decent life.

Another recurrent idea in these farmers' definitions is the need for the price to cover production costs. This is because significant losses are sometimes incurred, especially in recent years (and more since the elimination of milk quotas in 2015, which led to heavy liberalisation of the market). This jeopardises the livelihood of these farmers, hence the importance that Edelman (2005) grants to the transformation of the right of subsistence into the right to continue being farmers.

Therefore, in these farms it is possible to observe a constant (but also an overlapping) tension between two different types of values: a value in terms of the market and another value that is closer to the social (or social reproduction) sphere. It is in this tension occasionally found on the farms that we can see where value is created and how it circulates (Pratt and Luetchford 2014: 14).

This tension around value (market value/social value) also reveals certain contradictions. Farmers talk about their dependence on the market value, but they also indicate the need for this income (obtained via the market) to cover the reproduction of the family. So the fairness or equity of price obtained in the

market is not established just in terms of the market, but also in terms of another social sphere, in this case the domestic group. Hence, although these farmers operate in a market economy, the fairness or equity with which a just price is measured is established in terms of social value.

The ideas expressed by the farmers are in line with what Luetchford and Orlando (2019) say about the problem of commensuration: "how to convert the qualities of objects and people's actions (use value) into quantities of money for the market (exchange value)" (2019: 27). One of the "political" possibilities they suggest is "to escape exchange value by strengthening use values of all sorts, from the house to the community" (2019: 28).

## 5. VIDA DIGNA AND SUSTAINABILITIES

### 5.1 SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS

From the perspective of feminist and eco-feminist economies, Amaia Pérez-Orozco (2011, 2014), Silvia Federici (2013), Yayo Herrero (Herrero *et al.* 2019) and other authors set out two fundamental lines of the economy: the sustainability of life and the placement of life at the centre of the economy. In the words of the economist Amaia Pérez-Orozco (2011: 32), "Placing the sustainability of life at the centre means considering the socioeconomic system as an assembly of various spheres of activity (some monetised and others not) whose articulation must be valued according to the final impact on vital processes". Thus, beyond the production-reproduction dichotomy widespread in academia and among some activist sectors since Smith, Ricardo and Marx (Carrasco 2014), in this section we argue that it is important to raise the concepts of the sustainability of life and of placing life in the centre when studying small farmers' livelihoods.

Reigada (2012) suggests to analyse from a feminist point of view, the commodification of food and nature in order to unveil the implications of the gender relationships in two different paradigms: agro-industry and food sovereignty. As well, feminist economy allows to approach to food systems from a wider perspective of the reproduction of life. Thus, facilitating the study of food systems from a holistic point of view beyond the productive capitalist bias.

Moreover, feminist theory facilitates the encounter between political economy and people's bodies, that

is, the embodiment of the globalized socioeconomic system. In this sense, Sarkis (2018) analyses the effects of the crisis and austerity measures on women's bodies and details how the compression of work and life caused and stressed by the socioeconomic crisis is embodied in the painful and exhausted bodies and spirits of women. This continuum between work and life is found repeatedly in small-farming where it is difficult to clearly distinguish work from life or from a more classic academic perspective, production from reproduction. Indeed, feminist economies proposals displace the capital / labour conflict in terms of capital / life (Pérez-Orozco 2014).

Sustainability and living a decent life (*vida digna*) are issues that concern the livelihoods of people involved in small-scale food production. When they demand just prices, the idea that arises is that prices must allow them to live a decent life. Moreover, in their approaches and *emic* ideas surrounding farming, sustainability is linked to the concept of sustainable livelihoods, strongly imbricated with care regarding their family, domestic group, community, environment, landscape and animals. In other words, the sustainability of life includes the possibility to continue producing food, to maintain their way of life and to take care of people, other living beings and the environment surrounding them. A Galician farmer expressed this connectivity with life and the rest of all living beings as "being part, a little bit, of the circle of life".

In the context of small-scale food production (in both *etic* and *emic* terms), we observe a constant tension between the three fundamental aspects that make up sustainability: economic, social and environmental. To achieve the harmony of these three spheres, just price is an essential issue for farmers because it allows them to maintain their rural livelihoods. The farmers wish to combine production and reproduction at the same time, while taking care of the environment and landscape. Nevertheless, this desire clashes with agro-industry needs that disrupt the harmony of the three aspects of sustainability. Indeed, agro-industry generates tensions between economic, social and environmental sustainability (Martínez Álvarez 2018).

Backed by public policies such as CAP, the market economy leads small farms to prioritise agro-industrial food production and strengthen productivity in order to obtain the maximum benefit. Focusing on productivity may often force small-farms to carry out prac-

es with harmful consequences for the environment. Moreover, CAP entails an unsolved contradiction when fostering competitive agriculture and extensive and respectful agricultural practices at the same time. Therefore, farmers stand at a crossroads of adapting their farms to productive demands and leaving aside the reproduction of their way of life and production techniques that ensure sustainability in a broader sense. Thus, farmers must either adapt to the demands of capital or disappear. This critical situation is reflected in the census of farms that we presented in the introduction to this paper; the number of small farms and farmers continues to decrease year after year.

Just prices must enable farmers' livelihoods, the social reproduction of domestic groups, family and community and make it possible to live a decent life (*vida digna*). Indeed, in an analysis focused on sustainability and with a moral economy perspective, it is essential to delve into the concept of a decent life.

The demand for dignity appears repeatedly in several contexts in which analysis through the prism of moral economy is considered important. It is possible to observe this, for instance, in the demands springing from structural adjustments in the industrial sector (Narotzky 2016) or in peripheralisation processes in energy production (Franquesa 2018), as well as in many other contexts, such as food production and supply (Franquesa 2019).

Claims for dignity can be understood as part of a process of political conquest, as well as an emancipatory demand in the framework of processes of accumulation by dispossession. Dignity is expressed as social worth, that is, "it asserts the value of the person in a particular structure of social reproduction" (Narotzky 2016: 84) and arises as outrage (*indignación* in Spanish, the reaction against passively accepting the denial of one's dignity) and as opposed to resignation.

The central element in the idea of dignity is to take into account the immaterial or intangible value of the material, the social worth as we already mentioned. This idea is evident in the context of food production when the claim for a decent life arises associated with the concept of just price. The claim for a just price refers to the possibility of living with dignity of what it is produced, being able to maintain livelihoods and carrying out social reproduction. Thus, living autonomous and decent lives, both in and from the land (Franquesa 2018: 15).

## 5.2 THE DESIRE FOR DIGNITY AND AUTONOMY

Demands for autonomy linked to the idea of a decent life are especially present in food production and supply. This link can be observed through the search for greater independence from the market and the state or supra-state measures that shape food production. One of the arguments that Galician farmers use when they talk about autonomy, along with the desire for less dependence on production costs, is the possibility of making a living off what they produce with dignity instead of receiving subsidies from bodies like the EU through the CAP.

In the case of alternative supply systems, dignity emerges from the ability to establish cooperation, relationships and agreements with all agents from the food provisioning systems. The processes and consensus in establishing prices among consumers and producers are specific examples where autonomy from the market is highlighted (Homs and Narotzky 2019).

Agro-ecological farmers also soundly reject dependence on subsidies (“We want to make a living off what we do”). Thus, autonomy is emphasised as independence from the market and the state. For instance, a farmer who raises organic chickens argued during a debate on social networks<sup>10</sup> regarding the benefits of considering farmers as public employees, such as teachers and doctors, that “an agrarian basic income would mean that farmers would be even more dependent on the administration, with more bureaucracy and less autonomy. In other words, it would aggravate the damage already being done by the CAP”. During the discussion, she added that there are other ways by which the local authorities can support small farmers, such as by creating land banks, by expropriating land in disuse, limiting land prices to avoid speculation, reclassifying urban land as agrarian, limiting the free market of agricultural products by increasing taxes to the agro-food industry and taxes to import agricultural products, establishing public policies that help to supply soup kitchens and canteens with local food from small producers, declaring a moratorium on building large supermarkets and so on.

Viticulturists from El Penedès demand a decent life

10 Debate partly reflected in the newspaper *El Salto*: “Basic agricultural income, a rural revolution”, Patricia Dopazo, 16/10/2019 Available at: <<https://www.elsaltodiaro.com/agroecologia/una-revolucion-rural>>.

when the prices imposed by large transnationals that control the cava market impede the sustainability of grape production. Hence, a decent and just price (*precio digno, precio justo*) must ensure the continuity of their socioeconomic activity and their livelihoods. Farmers emphasise that winemaking is part of the identity of El Penedès and that they have maintained and cared for the landscape through agriculture. However, this environmental and social sustainability is threatened because grape prices do not guarantee the reproduction of their lives. This same idea is strengthened by environmental platforms such as SOS Penedès, which interprets the demand for a just price as key for the whole territory: viticulturists are essential agents in building and maintaining the landscape and land of El Penedès, as well as in developing a local economy. Furthermore, their activity provides several environmental benefits for the entire population.

In all these ethnographic cases, the concept of just price crystallises farmers’ longing for social, environmental and economic sustainability, which is currently threatened by the continued expansion of the agro-food industry. Thus, we propose to take into account the perspectives of feminist economies and moral economies in research regarding farmers’ livelihoods and struggles. Indeed, both analytical frameworks help us to understand discourses and practices observed in small farms.

## 6. RESISTANCES AND STRUGGLES

### 6.1 JUST PRICES IN “ALTERNATIVE” PROVISIONING SYSTEMS

As we have seen in all the previous sections, just prices have been a central demand of farmers whose sustainability is threatened. However, the demands for a just price are not circumscribed to farmers’ demonstrations and strikes in towns and cities demanding just prices from the market and the state, as there are also examples of producers and consumers forging alliances based on reciprocity and direct relationships in order to establish just prices for all agents participating in food networks. These food supply models are often grouped into the academic concept of Alternative Food Networks (AFN) (Goodman and Goodman 2009).

“Alternative” provisioning systems have been developed throughout the world with their particular names and peculiarities: CSA (Community Supported

Agriculture) in the United States (Hinrichs and Lyson 2009), AMAP (Association pour le maintien de l'agriculture paysanne) in France (Lamine 2008), Teikei in Japan (Kondoh 2015), GAS (Gruppo di Acquisito Solidale) in Italy (Grasseni 2013), etc. Despite the differences among all these initiatives, most of them integrate crop planning strategies, stable prices throughout the year, direct or close relationships between consumers and producers, risk taking by consumers regarding production losses due to weather conditions such as frost or hail, etc. (Counihan and Siniscalchi 2014; Siniscalchi and Harper 2019). Thus, they are oriented towards re-embedding food production and consumption in relationships of proximity (Renting, Madsen and Banks 2003).

In Spain, there are many examples of agro-ecological cooperatives related to these supply systems that maintain direct relations between producers and consumers in order to jointly decide on the organisation and functioning of their particular agro-food system, such as Bajo el Asfalto está la Huerta in Madrid, La Orti-ga in Sevilla and El Brot in Reus (López and López 2003; López and Badal 2006). These initiatives are viewed as part of the agro-ecology paradigm from a food sovereignty perspective (Cuéllar and Sevilla 2013).

This section will analyse the *alternativeness* of these networks and the possibility of achieving just prices for food through an ethnographic case study in Catalonia (Spain) that reflects some widespread obstacles in these provisioning systems existing (and resisting) in a capitalist world.

## 6.2 AGRO-ECOLOGICAL COOPERATIVES IN CATALONIA

There are many different kinds of agro-ecological provisioning systems, but the most common model in Catalonia is based on groups of consumers that establish direct relationships with producers, while cooperation and reciprocity structure socioeconomic exchanges (Homs and Narotzky 2019).

This model is based on unpaid work carried out by “volunteer” members and remains small, with the idea of guaranteeing good governance and the participation of members. As a consequence, the growth model has been based on group multiplication and replication. Consumers have prioritised having a direct relationship with producers, knowing how they produce and process, as well as being aware of their political project and their working conditions (Homs

2013; Alquézar *et al.* 2014). Nevertheless, there are also limitations in these direct relationships. Scale can be a concern, as consumer groups may purchase insufficient volumes, especially in relation to the commercial management and time consumption involved in maintaining a direct and trusting relationship (Homs, Flores-Pons and Martín 2021).

We also observe that in many cases, consumers' commitments remain focused on buying and do not engage in deeper practices of shared responsibility. For example, an agreement to share production risks in practice, such as possible losses due to weather or pests, is quite rare. Nor is it common for participants to bear responsibility for access to the means of production, finance, production planning or the achievement of good working conditions among producers. Therefore, the proximity of direct links between consumer groups and producers is not synonymous with mutual responsibility and would be better described the way some consumers do: “We get to know each other”.

## 6.3 PRICES WITHIN AND BEYOND THE MARKET

Price fixing is crucial for the sustainability of agro-ecological productive projects, not only with regard to economic viability, but also from a broader perspective that includes social, cultural and political dimensions (Homs, Flores-Pons and Martín 2021). In some cases, there are agreements regarding food prices through assemblies of consumers and producers. When establishing prices, all participants take into account several environmental, social and economic factors. Indeed, many informants refer to the viability of projects that include more aspects than mere market economic factors, though these are also present.

For producers and consumers, prices have to be considered just and stable. “Closed baskets” (*cestas cerradas*) are food boxes prepared by farmers in which consumers do not choose the amount or varieties of products. Therefore, they are a strategy that ensures the stability of producers' earnings over the course of a full year regardless of possible seasonal variations or weather incidents. With a similar aim in mind, bakers propose equal prices for different kinds of breads to promote consumption of old varieties of wheat. These varieties are less productive and their conversion into flour is more labour-intensive, so in the conventional market, prices are higher.

Nevertheless, producers argue that they lacked initial references of prices at the beginning of the project and prices often fail to cover production costs. Furthermore, many tasks such as the selection of seeds, internal meetings, assemblies with consumers or other unpaid tasks are not included in product prices. Then, several invisible and unpaid tasks usually related to the reproductive dimension of the project are not taken into account when prices are established. However, producers express difficulties in proposing price hikes for fear that consumers may react negatively due to the aspiration that agro-ecological food should be affordable for everyone (Homs, Flores-Pons and Martín 2021). Moreover, although prices are often considered unjust for producers because they do not cover production costs, prices are high enough to restrict economic diversity among consumers. Indeed, within food cooperatives, it is rare to observe the participation of impoverished sectors of society.

During assemblies and discussions to fix prices, consumers sometimes compare prices with those from conventional supply channels such as supermarkets or the marketplace. The comparison is eventually used to argue that farmers should offer lower prices. In these situations, social, cultural and environmental values are put aside and the market economic value is prioritised. These kinds of situations show the tensions and conflicts of producers and consumers' different interests as expressed by Marx: producers want higher prices that cover production costs and that guarantee a decent income, whereas consumers want lower prices (Wilk 2019). In these discussions, the market value and other social values crash into conflict as different moral spheres are in tension. Thus, ambiguities appear while discussing prices.

Beyond the ideal distinction between "open" and "closed" economies proposed by Pratt and Luetchford (2014), these provisioning systems suggest political criteria that move away from the capitalist market, yet these systems are intimately connected to the market in several ways or, as expressed by Narotzky, enjoy *dependent autonomy* from the market (Narotzky 2016).

Some authors have detailed that prices could fall through an increase of scale in these provisioning systems. This could involve the introduction of intermediation and the professionalization of certain tasks such as marketing, dissemination and so on. Nevertheless, these changes entail the redefinition of direct relations and self-management that have thus far

been two main pillars of these provisioning systems (Martín, Homs and Flores 2017).

#### 6.4 "ALTERNATIVES" IN A CAPITAL-CENTRIC AGRO-FOOD SYSTEM

Therefore, despite the willingness to create a supply system that guarantees just prices for both producers and consumers, prices still do not guarantee the sustainability of productive projects or the accessibility of agro-ecological products to most part of the population. These provisioning systems are still imbued with market and capitalist logics guiding socioeconomic exchanges. Thus, there are many aspects inherent to these networks, such as the recovery of old varieties of vegetables and fruits, artisanal work, decisions made in assemblies, relationships of trust and proximity that a competitive (and unjust) price in the market cannot sustain.

Despite the ideological obstacles, certain strategies have recently been implemented to overcome some of these limitations: professional intermediaries with an ethical view of intermediation, increasing the scale of cooperatives, professionalization and so on. However, the potential of these initiatives still needs to be evaluated. In fact, these are strategies developed partially to adjust to capitalist market requirements and become more competitive in this situation.

To conclude this section, people involved in these provisioning systems focus on relocating and re-embedding the economy through reciprocity and cooperation. Nevertheless, they still remain linked to and dependent on the capitalist market and the regulatory framework of the state and supra-state institutions and do not seem to pose a challenge to either one. Therefore, it is difficult to foresee their potential to present an alternative to the hegemonic agro-food system from either a political or a moral economy point of view. Indeed, just prices may still be considered unjust from both perspectives. Thus, farmers resist precariously in a market economy while many consumers are not available to participate in these networks because of high prices and other causes.

#### 7. (UN)SUSTAINABILITIES: DIGNITY AND AGRO-FOOD SYSTEMS

Throughout this article, we have argued that it is important to consider the historical perspective of food systems. In particular, food regime analysis is a

key tool for exploring farmers' current situation and the consequences of agro-industry from a political economy point of view. It is also essential to observe the tensions and clashes among values and norms through the notion of moral economies, as well as demands for a just price: a price that allows a decent life. We also reveal the importance of combining moral economies with the feminist economy and eco-feminist perspectives regarding the idea of relocating life to the centre of the economy. In short, we argue that it is relevant to address the drift of food production and supply from all these points of view and scales.

By combining the historical perspective with ethnography, we can examine how certain processes such as the Green Revolution have had specific consequences for farmers and how these have often been viewed as obstacles and problems for their sustainability. Hence, farmers' general impoverishment is due to the fall in agricultural income, the irreversible drop in agrarian prices and the significant increase in production costs. All are indispensable factors for understanding the unsustainability of rural livelihoods.

Differences among territories and food sectors can be observed depending on the development of industrialisation after the Green Revolution. Thus, development and intensification has gone further in some specific areas compared to others. As such, Galician farmers refer to the feeling of "being trapped" between two forces pulling in opposite directions. On the one hand, they are forced to produce more intensively and follow market rules, but on the other hand, these conditions make it difficult for them to maintain their way of life and livelihood in rural areas. In El Penedès, farmers are completely "trapped" and the industrialisation and intensification of their production has mostly concluded. These producers have given up their way of life and the few who continue to work in the fields consider farming as their livelihood, as a kind of employment. Nevertheless, they still claim to have a *passion for the land* ("pasión por la tierra") as an essential motivation to continue taking care of vineyards and the landscape. However, continuity from one generation to the next is practically non-existent and those who do still perform agricultural activity claim that they have adapted to all the demands of capital but still do not live with dignity. In fact, they often work in viticulture as a financial supplement to pensions or have other sources of income (salaried work or incomes from other members of the domestic group). Thus, there is a transition from "be-

ing trapped", as Galician farmers express it, to "bending over and dropping their drawers", as viticulturists argue that they have adapted to every demand made by agro-industry but have not yet reached dignity.

The state could be expected to act as a regulating agent of tensions between the different aspects of sustainability: economic, social and environmental. The state could balance the conflicts between taking care of the environment while prioritising productivity or between ensuring the sustainability of the rural community while mechanising farms. Nevertheless, the state is currently not playing this role. Farmers wish in varying degrees of intensity that the state could act as an arbitrator or as a regulator of the market, mainly as a price regulator. Viticulturists would like the state to act as a regulatory agent in an ideal situation, but far from any real possibility, whereas Galician farmers raise it as a central demand in their protests and urge the creation of a public mediation system to negotiate prices. Despite the possibility of the state acting as a regulator of the market, farmers consider the state to be an antagonist, too, viewing it as largely responsible for their situation and as a benefactor of agro-industry. Therefore, we conclude that the state's expected role is ambivalent: farmers sometimes seek its protection while other times they conclusively reject it.

Feminist and eco-feminist perspectives raise the sustainability of life and the relocation of life to the centre of economy to rethink the classic academic dichotomy between production and reproduction (Pérez-Orozco 2011; Reigada 2012; Federici 2013, 2015). Moreover, the question of dignity can be essential to settle the capital-life conflict present in this scenario. The centrality of life as a fabric that includes reproduction and farming as inseparable resonates with farmers' demands when struggling for a just price that guarantees their livelihoods and dignity ("vivir con dignidad"). Hence, the question of dignity—linked to the idea of placing life in the centre and the possibility of reproduction—is also central for farmers when they articulate just prices discourses. Demands for a decent life always appear connected to demands for a just price or even more explicitly for a decent price ("precio digno"). These demands are usually associated with farmers' requests for autonomy, both from the market and the state. Nevertheless, dignity is expressed fundamentally as social worth: the immaterial stands out in a context in which material value prevails. An example of this idea can be seen in the words of a farmer talking

about pride in small-scale farming: “We should be able to live with dignity... It seems that we feel embarrassed to work with cows. We don’t have that pride... We, the people who work with cows, have always been considered scum”...

The hegemony of agro-industry hinders “alternative” supply systems from building provisioning systems beyond the capitalist market. “Alternative” provisioning systems are still imbued with capitalist logics based on the exploitation of people and territories, which impedes other values and norms from prevailing. Hence, social, environmental and political values are put aside and market values conduct economic exchanges. As long as prices are still framed in a market economy, just prices for both producers and consumers may be improbable in these “alternative” circuits.

To conclude, nowadays farming in Spain is crossed by several unsustainabilities generated and intensified by the development of agro-industry since the sixties. Farmers are trapped at the crossroads between market economy marked by the power of distribution companies that impose prices, quantities and quality standards, the regulation at different scales (supranational, national and regional administrations) that by the moment is inefficient to ensure their sustainability and the desire to continue living as farmers. In this context of disappearance of farms and the acceleration of depeasantisation, farmers demand just prices that ensure economic viability as well as their livelihood sustainability and dignity.

Finally, if we take into account the global health crisis that emerged during the first half of 2020 while writing this paper, several studies point to the role of agro-industry as a trigger for health crises (WHO 2015; IPES-Food 2017, 2020; FAO 2018). Furthermore, during this period, many citizens have chosen “alternative” food provisioning systems such as food cooperatives, local markets, buying directly from farmers online and so forth. Thus, once again, we observe how the hegemonic agro-food system continues to generate environmental, social and economic unsustainabilities, although this time on a larger scale.

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