

Controversies of the moral economies of agroecology insights from ethnographic research in Andalusia

Laura mendoza-sandoval¹

Abstract

This paper aims to contribute to the debate on the cultural aspect of the agroecology movement. Especially focusing in the alleged value-system change that collective actors prefigure. Taking the perspective offered by moral anthropology, the moral world-making of situated subjects (Fassin, 2012), I interrogate the usefulness of the term presenting a possible reading of the role of “the moral” in the field of study without falling in a prescriptive function but a descriptive one. In line with a decolonial perspective in as much the western ethical standards are put into question, and instead focusing on the way in which andalusian agroecology initiatives frame and perform their agroecological practice. Here I present some moral dilemmas, meanings and practices through which different agroecology collective actors² sustain, frame, organize and disseminate their agroecology projects. In sum the paper aims at unfolding the moral world-makings of situated realities that operate in the agroecology movement area in three terrains of importance: price settings, framing work, more than human responsibilities. By noticing the active processes of dealing with their dilemmas and contradictions as agroecology organizations I present the ongoing ways in which activists manage cognitive dissonances and create their moral worlds.

Keywords: moral anthropology, political agroecology, situated knowledge, ethnography

Introduction. Bringing back the moral to social movement studies

In this paper I propose to study food movements, particularly agroecology collectives in Andalusia, through the moral anthropology lenses. As food movements claim that the current food system is *unfair, unjust and*, at the same time suggest that there are already existing ways of producing and consuming *good, fair and healthy* food through collective mobilization and self-organization, a big share of their motivation and framing is grounded in moral claims. Their aim is to foster and strengthen certain moral values over the *destructive and immoral dominant food systems* they diagnose, criticize and withdraw from: the agro-corporate food regime. A decolonization of food systems, emancipating from the extractivist capitalist

¹ PhD candidate Social & Political Sciences at Scuola Normale Superior, laura.mendozasandoval@sns.it

² Assamblearian Unitary cooperatives: Hortigas (<https://hortigas.es/>) and La Acequia (<https://laacequia.org/>). Non-assamblearian Community Supported Agriculture: Enredaos con la tierra –ECLT- (<https://enredaosconlatierra.org/>), Casa Farfara (<https://casafarfara.com/>), Rancho de Las Militantes (NA)

corporate regime and instead reclaiming the power, knowledge, resources and will to create the autonomous, non-exploitative and interdependent food systems. Indeed, Considering that it is possible to understand and construct the moral world-making in the agroecology movement by identifying the categories, communities, agents, issues, debates that are present in the creation of a moral world-makings, I find it useful to follow Sevelsed & Toboul (2022) attempt to revisit a “loss paradigm” in social movement scholarship and bring back moral *and morality* as a powerful explanan³ for collective action.

Yet the moral aspect must be addressed empirically. Not taken as a given or as western moral philosophy has taught us, as universalistic values through which reality is prescribed and judged ethically. As this route risks confusing morality with moralism as Hache & Latour (2010) elaborate in their two axiologies. The idea is to grasp those concrete and pragmatic instances when activists in the agroecology collectives frame and perform their actions and decisions as *morally driven*. It is not just to categorize and list what is deemed good and bad in the agroecology milieu. But rather, to describe in detail the processes and the chain of significants and contradictions that situates their practices. With that initial discernment would be possible to assess the ways, instances and areas in which agroecology initiatives are decolonizing the (social) economies where they are embedded.

“Moral questions are embedded in the substance of the social, it is not sufficient to analyze moral codes or ethical dilemmas as if they could be isolated from political, religious, economic or social issues” (Fassin, 2012, p. 4)

In the social movement scholarship there was a time in which the moral was in the center of explanation of collective action. Yet, the paradigm conceptualized feelings (moral sentiments) as proxies of a moral world-making (Jasper, 1997). Instead of taking that route, the moral anthropology approach proposes to unfold actors’ associations and the active moral world-making construction as situated agents. This perspective enables us to ask specific questions on human life and get new answers on the matter in that direction (Fassin, 2012). Recalling that the intention as researchers is not to verify people’s deeds and judgments to a corresponding definition, but to apprehend morality in acts and discourses in a pragmatist sense (Lambek, 2010). A paradigm that allows us to understand what people in the agroecology milieu do and what do they mean concretely when they consider to be *moral* or *immoral, generous, rightful or wrongful*.

In social sciences the study of the moral has been approached, mainly, in two ways. By one

³ Explanandum is the description of the phenomena that seeks to be explained. Explanan are the elements that can explain what was desired to be answered. I.e **explanandum**: why there is **smoke**? **Explanan**: because there is **fire**

part, seeing morality in relation to *obligations and duties*. Taking that the *moral discernment* is an *embodied compliance* that sometimes comes in the form of *desire* (to be righteous). By the other, those who consider morality and ethical codes as the outcomes of and active/dialectic subjectivation process. Here, individuals embedded and socialized in a given context, even if they are structured and constraint by societal norms, have agency (Fassin, 2012). As the will to act deliberately and to position and respond to a moral issue is in the center of the second approach, it is in this line of thought that the moral anthropology that I applied can be located.

The main problem that provoke this reflection is the prevalence of moral -as in righteous- statements about the agroecology movement, and the potency of agroecological solutions to a multi-systemic crisis rooted in five centuries of modern/colonial violence & dispossession (Giraldo, 2018). It is also an invitation to cautiously assess the way moral economy, as a compound concept is used across the field. Moral economy is a laden concept that due to space limitations won't be elaborated in detail here. Following Edelman (2012) and Fassin (2009) the concept has mutated its meaning in its journey across disciplines. It originated as an analytic category used in peasant studies to analyze and bring to light processes of mobilization, of class consciousness formation, of tactics of daily resistance that are legitimized by the moral-ordering of the world of those who are being marginalized and dispossessed. Then, in other fields like medicine, anthropology and contemporary sociology the term is dissociated from the heuristics that pinpoint class conflicts. Daston's use of moral economy in the sociology of science is one of these examples: "*a moral economy is a web of affect-saturated values that stand and function in well-defined relationship to one another. (...) A moral economy balances system of emotional forces, with equilibrium points and constraints*" (1995, p. 4). This conception of moral economy, closely related to the idea of value-system, connects moral world-making to the affective dimension of practices. Both in the literature outside the classic peasant question and in its colloquial use in alternative economy spaces this is the most used understanding of moral economy.

When the term appears in the agroecology literature, the concept is used as a conceptual framework. Grounded in the tradition of peasant studies or reproducing normative statements (Goodman, 2004; Guzmán & Woodgate, 2013; Homs Ramirez de la Piscina & Martínez Álvarez, 2020; Meek, 2014). Few voices have articulated a critique to the appropriateness and use of the term. Galt (2013) explains the double sword of the moral economy in California CSA. Arguing that the use of the term is questionable and pinpointing the negative effects it has for the farmers practicing CSA she surveyed. In the face of the ambivalent uses of the term moral economy, I searched for a mid-way perspective to address the role of values and subjectivation in the agroecology milieu in Andalusia. Thus in the moral-economy posed by a moral anthropology perspective to collective action I found a solution.

As it allows us to inquire how certain questions, moral or non-moral are addressed in a moral register. This is, recognize who and how are engaged in the moral-making of the world. As Wathne (2022) reminds us that the role of social movements and activists as moral agents passes to recognizing how they prefigure their political theories and horizons through their daily cognitive-praxis. She supports this idea by revisiting the work of Feierman (1990), Peasant Intellectual, and her own PAR with the Kenyan Peasant League, member organization of La Via Campesina.

“Moral anthropology deals with how moral questions are posed and addressed or, symmetrically, how non moral questions are rephrased as moral. It explores the moral categories via which we apprehend the world and identifies the moral communities that we construe, examines the moral signification of action and the moral labor of agents, analyzes moral issues and moral debates at an individual or collective level. It concerns the creation of moral vocabularies, the circulation of moral values, the production of moral subjects and the regulation of society through moral injunctions” (Fassin, 2012, p. 4)

Besides these, other set of questions arise when the ontological and epistemological bases of political action differ from those studied in the social movement literature. How to account for the emotional-moral connection when the political action is placed and framed in the everyday life affirmation of hopeful alternatives? Applied and performed in the mundane space-time of the everyday life (Forno & Wahlen, 2022) and not solely during episodic contentious political activity, like demonstrations and protests. Nor during conventional politics activities with their rhythms like lobbying, campaigning, etc.

In the center of the food movements is to re-appropriate the food systems, starting by localizing them and strengthening the local community economies (Gibson-Graham, 2014; Gibson-Graham et al., 2013). Reason why political consumerism (Balsiger, 2013; Bossy, 2014; Boström et al., 2019), especially through the propositive *buycott* strategy is so widespread in Spain (Lekakis, & Forno, 2019; novo Vazquez & Garcia-Espejo, 2021). In every conversation I had during the research this political action was raised with other adjectives, like “ethical”, “responsible”, “critical” consumption. The idea of using their arsenal, their “carro de combate” everyday, for most of their market-decisions, aiming to change society by acting in the market, informed by ethical principles is the “only way they have left to actually procure for a change” (conversation with Tamara ex-gardener in a unitary agroecology cooperative summer 2021). Even if the aggregate model of social change is not the full paradigm of social change in their minds, the way one of the veteran members of the unitary agroecology cooperative in Cordoba posed it: “at least we know we are not contributing to the generalized wrong doings in the market and society” (interview ortiguilla, summer 2021).

Unfolding moral world-makings in three terrains of agroecology initiatives

In the research I am doing, I aim at grasping ways in which agroecology initiatives are creating/ intervening their own moral world-making. As one of the dimensions of the prefigurative politics is the capacity of collective actors to align values and actions (Yates, 2015), and if needed, create alternative value-systems that enable those desired worlds to be enacted. This means they are constantly and collectively *attuning* their moral compass in their particular contexts. I stress here the verb *attuned* instead of *use*. As it denotes an active interaction of the actors with the matter of concern (Latour, 2004) turning them -through a deliberative ethical/aesthetical/political process- matters of care (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). In what follows I will briefly outline three terrains of the agroecological practice in Andalusia where moral controversies and world-making were evident: Economy, through just price setting; Work, through a dignification of livelihood; More-than-human solidarities. Unfolding some reflections and negotiations that inside the initiatives were done over pragmatic issues to pursue their agroecological visions.

Economy: Being financially sustainable, from just prices to not selling veggies, and the mix economies.

Having a self-sustainable economy and setting the prices of the agriculture products that agroecology initiatives produce is the first of the terrains for the moral world-making. This one is the closest one to the original use of the concept of moral economy, and indeed is the one that according to Edelman (2005) keeps being central to the vindications of the peasantry in the XXI century. Reason why La Via Campesina encourages the exemption of agriculture from the WTO, in order to effectively interrupt the commodification of food by transforming the way it is priced in the globalized market. The rhetoric around the just price in food movements and particularly in the short food supply chains where agroecological produce is channeled, is that the product price should be able to cover the production costs while at the same time be affordable to the consumer. This is stressed especially against the common trope (and criticism) that “eating ethically, healthy, locally, seasonally is a luxury, due to the high prices of the higher quality of foods that are branded organic and ecological”. Thus in order to be considered a non-elitist agroecological project there must be a balance between the subsistence minimum and the consumers’ sovereignty to good food.

In the unitary cooperatives and the CSA⁴ this issue is addressed straightforwardly: “We do not

⁴ In as much Enredaos con la Tierra, Las Militantes and Casa Farfara operated through a model of closed-basket system. The latter started to consider opening the closed-basket scheme, and setting individual prices to the products to experiment different arrangements to sustain financially their project.

sell vegetables, nor box schemes”. Their stance on how to maintain the financial sustainability of their collectives, without falling in the dynamics of becoming a “mere consumption group”, is that they share the costs of maintaining the collective project. They decouple the price of the vegetables from the monthly quota. Each member is expected to contribute (money and time) to get their share of fresh seasonal and local vegetables every week. In practical terms this means that the cooperative has a simple accounting system in which they add all costs (house rents, wagon costs, workers wage, welfare system for the team, fuel, machinery, seeds and plants, etc.) and divide them according to the productive units, the vegetable boxes that each consumption group (GAC) has.

“When new people come to try our box-scheme and they pay their weekly quota, we must make them understand that they are not paying for an expensive lettuce, but for our decent wages as well” (ECLT, 2020)

The challenge is that throughout the year the amount of people that take part of the collectives fluctuates. So the share of maintenance costs of the project vary across seasons as well as their effective income. The difficulty arises as the agroecological collectives have a high turn-over of people and GAC’s are measured by boxes but are managed by people (militants). Thus, the emphasis for the stability of these type of agroecology collectives has been placed in the quantity of the boxes, a proxy of their militancy, rather than in the quality of the militancy. This distinction (militants vs militancy) according to Manzanera (2020) has weakened the anarchosyndicalist organization per excellence in Spain, CNT. Not being able to be financially sustainable with the entry of (monthly changing) quotas, extra activities are required for their financial stability. Crowdfunding campaigns, raffles with products and services of allies in the agroecological movement area, merchandising products (calendars, t-shirts) to sell and fund their collective, while creating a collective identity through a sort of self-made political branding. And also parties and events to raise funds through sales of food, drinks and raffles and what not.

A shared sense of exhaustion expressed by old members witnessing ebbs and flows of the collective were putting into question this heterodox mixed finance system. Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the dependency to this activity was evident, and posed questions about how this model for financing the projects was becoming inconvenient for some of its members. Concerns about the efficacy of funding the collective depending on these events were raised. As often the amount of costs and effort invested for them were not effectively distributed, and the revenue received was fluctuant. Thus not a sustainable financial input for a collective with fixed and growing costs. But aside from being a questionable funding strategy, which needs to be assessed thoroughly with economic studies about the cooperatives economies, during 2023 in Hortigas the question around the

dependency of parties took another route.

The fact that most of the revenue from the parties came from the sales of alcohol raised a controversy in Hortigas to the point of proposing a change in that. A group of people proposed to the assembly to consider having alcohol-free events in order to prove two things. Firstly, question an overall social dependency on alcohol for socializing in public. Aiming to be coherent and critical with specific sensibilities around problematic alcohol consumption in their context, often related to violence (i.e. gender violence) and also to a blind support of those industries⁵. If they have already been promoting sustainable diet based on plant based meals offered in their public events, guaranteeing that all dishes were vegetarian (not vegan), why not also promote a more conscious alcohol consumption by firstly getting rid of it and bringing the discussion to their circles. As one person puts it, if “we are in activists concerned spaces with environmental and ethical issues, we should put in practice that in our activities as well”. Secondly, and more related to the ethics behind their economy, experimenting if in fact their financial stability was dependent on the alcohol sales during the parties. And if so giving this awareness and transparency, being able to deliberate as a collective how to compromise or seek alternatives more aligned with what they wanted to promote as a collective.

The common narrative is that the prices should be fair, both for the producer and consumer. This means that they should be able to cover all the costs of production, with that including the waged labor involved in a capitalist economy. Though, what occurs is that this is hardly the case, and indeed, by focusing too much in the expectation that a fair price equalizes a decent living leads to a cognitive dissonance in the milieu. There is a level of compromise in which the people that is part of the movement acknowledges that having a proper livelihood from any agriculture activity (conventional or agroecological, collective or family-based) is the exception and difficult to obtain in today’s economies. Especially if a standard level of wellbeing is also expected (i.e. being able to afford time for vacations and rest once per year). Thus, the diversification of income is already normalized to the point that the main income to maintain a person’s wage is already transferred to other activities. In La Acequia this was an exception, as for over a decade the collective has had as their top priority to guarantee a proper salary to their hortelano. Hired in rule and with all the welfare system in play. Contrastingly, most of the rural workers I meet in Hortigas had parallel independent jobs (translation, cosmetic, restorations, or were partially living from their own savings, unemployment benefits and family support too). At the CSA in Alpujarras, Casa Farfara, they are already envisioning to set a rural center in the town, Almocita. A town that is part of the

⁵ Even if, as far as I witnessed in the agroecology events the procurement of beer followed a boycotting tactic: supporting local, artisanal and politically aligned beer cooperatives.

Municipalities in Transition Network⁶ and where the rural center offering courses and collaborative research on their approach to agriculture, emotional agriculture, has a promising fit.

Work: Livelihood, militancy, freed from the system?

In one of the entries of the diary orchard published in May 2011, one of Hortigas members posed an open question while offering his own reflections. He posed, “what is the role of the rural working team (grupo motor, almocitas) inside the cooperative? Because I have reflected that the way we answer this question changes completely the way we relate to them. Are they super militants? Are they our employees and therefore have labor rights by law, or are they “freed” from the system as a union worker would be?”. This question remained relevant when I meet my interlocutors almost ten years after. When I was talking with one of the hortelanas she was questioned such ambivalent role within the collective, but more importantly the pitfalls of it. After a long debate, which actually created a schism in the collective more than 10 years ago, the rural-working group was formally hired and subscribed to welfare system, protecting them with social security. Hired as workers by the newly created association solely for the purpose of that. The contracts meant they could be covered by the welfare system, having access to health assistance and very importantly, access to the unemployment benefit *-el paro-* when they finished their role of hortelanas. Something that is part of the personal finances of people in Andalusia and Spain.

The way this anarchist-oriented collective made a compromise with the need to provide security to the working-team has been an ongoing creative experimentation. Trying to hack the system, by using it in the way that benefits them, without falling in the trap of bureaucratization nor risking the law realm. Hortelanas as workers are hired strategically with a figure that gives them flexibility to their activities. The distribution of time-allocation and salary according to the type of work regime used, complicates the working planning that considers the weekly incoming labor from the city GAC members, but that as far as I was told and observed, was always in deficit. Members of agroecological cooperatives have both the right and duty to work in the orchards each month at least 2 times in summer, 1 in winter period. The pitfalls for such an arrangement is that everyone knows in the collective that the job required in the orchards “does not know about schedules or part-time/ full-times notation”. Thus they know that those hired by the association and working in the agriculture front are working more hours than the ones they are hired for. The tolerability of this arrangement in Hortigas changes through time according to the constituencies and the internal cohesion of the collective. While writing this piece the collective has been assessing their actual (in)capacities and compromises in how to self-manage their economy, how

⁶ <https://municipalitiesintransition.org/pioneers/almocita/>

distribute labor in the working group, which indicates a moment of active deliberation about the of a structural challenges and diverse ideological stances within the collective.

Though most consumers I talked to expressed the tension that such contradiction presented to them. They feared and shamed exploiting their own cooperative comrades, in a similar way they felt rage and pity to migrant workers' exploitation under the corporate-industrial fields. My interlocutors though noted that this shame and guilt would not be there if the distribution of labor was a reality. Though, there seemed to be a normalization of the free-rider phenomena in collective action. In the words of one interviewee he said, "remember that few are the yeast". A minority comply with their duties and "tira del carro" in these collectives. Few can mobilize and keep the masses active. During the time I was there a substantial working hours' deficit was being suffered in both cooperatives, which impacted heavily in the collective moral of the groups. Then, the working team in the orchards are put in a double precarious situation: legally their rights as workers are not being fully fulfilled and in practice they are being left with most of the labor to maintain the orchards, something that is explicitly unwanted in the collective. At the end of the day, part of the narrative and normalization of the country-side and rural live is to accept its precariousness, its hardships. From here is that emerges a more or less attitude of paternalism, that reinforces the rural/urban, producer/consumer dichotomy, and that clearly creates tensions among the groups.

Is in this terrain when a plethora of affections invade the narratives and the practices of people in the collective. By one side, there is a sense of guilt and shame for the lack of responsibility and care that collective gives to their working-team. By the other, there is the feeling of pride and joy that is felt when one complies with their labor-duties. It is interesting how this feeling was embodied in the muscle fatigue sensation (las agujetas gave a sense of pride) joyfully anticipated by members of the collective in the after-orchard beers.

One of the conversations we had with orchard frequenters was illustrative of the complex moral world-making of their universe of activism filled with cognitive dissonances they need to process. "I would'nt ever like to live from the land, to work the land, it is a difficult and painful life. It is too much sacrifice. I can come from time to time and work a bit, but I know I could not do it permanently". Linking such a narrative with an overarching Christian ethos seems like the working-team of these cooperatives are conceived as martyrs: both pitied and elevated in a sort of redemption state. This is the moment in which the risk of romanticization of precarity comes to play. And something that those in the working team adamantly rejected. In the words of one of hortelanas I meet during a visit, when talking about the desirability of having a rural life: "rural life is good when its slow and with many hands; otherwise I am not interested". Yet how to implement a "new rurality" with those values and vision is still an open-ended question that keeps being explored and experimented. As the re-peasantization

of the societies is the theoretical pathway, in practice what is seen in the ground presents other more nuances alternatives to be further understood.

More than human exploitations? Water-(over) use & the (un)solved antiespecist debate

One of the main tenants of agroecology is to re-vitalize the soils treating them as living organisms that are a *matter of care* (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). Contrary to the ideas imposed by the green revolution and its modern/colonial paradigm rooted in the cartesian cosmology that degrades “nature” to an inert object, that is life-less and at disposal for men’s appropriation for their own benefit (Shiva, 2016). Three concrete practices that are promoted in agroecological action to return the agentic and vitality nature to soils involve to *nourishing* them (fertilization), *watering* them (irrigation) and its *aerating them* (tilling). In this third polemic an extra one that may stand by itself appears: the use or rejection of traditional tilling⁷ methods that involve more than human agents: mules, bulls and their *muleros*. Is in this polemic where I see another aspect of the moral world-making of agroecology as an ongoing unsettled controversy within the initiatives around how to relate to the more than human agents in the agro-ecosystem, following/negotiating with different agroecological principles.

Water access is a key point in the agriculture sector and also for any agroecological initiative. In Spain it is also a matter of socioecological struggle. The water use in agriculture thus, has been a crucial matter dominated by a discourse of a “responsible use of water in the fields”. Knowing that Spain has been alerted for an accelerated desertification process in which water bodies are drying up, water is perceived as a scarce resource to be protected and “well-managed”. Concerns around the proper and sound use of water are present almost everywhere. In hortigas the water irrigation used is “*a manta*”. A traditional water irrigation technique based on *acequias*, *a system of channels that implements controlled floods in the cropped areas*. This method has a high water consumption in comparison with others more efficient, like dripping or aspersion. Thus, the riego a manta is *increasingly being frowned upon; framed* as irresponsible agriculture as is perceived as wasteful water system. Also this system of irrigation is costly to maintain in terms of labor. As it is manual, the hortelanas work with gravity and the system of channel. Have to open and close doors in the main channels (they have to know where they are), and then in the plots of land where the orchards are, they have to open and close the grooves with a hoe to allow the flow and circulation of the water through the field. This task can easily take half of a working day of an hortelana in the decentralized fields of Hortigas.

⁷ In Casa Farfara they practice a no-tilling agriculture for example. And instead focus most of their attention in re-nourishing the soils with their own organic fertilizers.

Contrary to this dominant rhetoric about the proper uses of water, and a modest attitude that is implied, Hortigas emphatically sustains the *acequia* irrigation system, and insists in it as a way of territorial defense. For the unitary cooperative located in the Lecrin Valley, the ongoing use of *acequia* is a way to engage in an ongoing territorial struggle against water-bottling companies that are privatizing water in the region without the condemnation of the country. It is not just a nostalgic maintenance of ancient infrastructures (dating the times of Al-Andalus). Nor an uncritical reproduction of a traditional agrarian technique for the sake of keeping it. They defend the use of the *acequia* even if the costs of keeping it are higher than the benefits they have from it. It requires a lot of work, it is stressful when being done, as they need to control the flow of the water in the field, and negotiate with neighbors their slot of time to flood their plots, and so on. In the practice of keeping the *acequia* irrigation system they position morally in two ways: re-valuing heritage and traditional-agrarian practices and also as an appropriate way to generously water the whole soil, not just the crop plant. A right of a commons that treats the soil as a living organism that is cared for (also the practice of keeping the high mountains with vegetation, and the uphill *careo* to keep the draining system from the Sierra Nevada downhill, etc). Rejecting therefore the optimization and managerialization mentality imposed by the corporate-food regime that endorses the optimization of resources to get maximum benefits to the minimum cost by promoting dropping irrigation systems. Optimizing water to each plant of the crop, as if not the entire soil ecosystem deserved hydration.

In reference to the fertilization is very interesting that is through this practice, of introducing compost and manure to the soils, the intention is to enhance the soil properties. The sources of nutrients were self-made (mountain micro-organisms, bokashi) or fetched from nearby animal farms or stables. For both of these ways of fertilizing the soils, people have to have know-how, relations with neighbors based on reciprocity and also time allocation. In sum, caring for the soil implies to create and maintain a web of relations of cooperation among peers and neighbors, human and not. Implies also a recognition and knowledge of the territory. Both socially and biologically speaking. For example, knowing where to find and what kind of mix of biomass from the mountain can create the proper mycellium to inoculate and enrich the soils. Recognizing the relevance of more than human agents in agriculture in this point is crucial, and also opens another controversy about the ethical use of non-human animals for an anthropocentric benefit. A debate confronting antiespecism and agriculture.

It is not rare to have within agroecology collective a diffused practiced of vegetarianism and veganism across its members. An antiespecist discussions is often manifested within the collectives in relation to the methods used to till the soils. The traditional use of tillage animals and its technique were used and vindicated by Hortigas for long time. The work with mule/mulero was hired at least twice per year for specific agriculture works. Antiespecist

members of the cooperative were not comfortable to be in a collective that endorses the use and -in their view- exploitation of animals in their work. Thus the discussion was opened and sessions to deliberate alternatives and care about these sensibilities were set again during 2022-2023. The question how to replace the animals with collective work in order not to further exploit to fellow human comrades, nor to mechanize further the agri-work was in the center of the discussion. Also is worth noting that not the same kind of reaction or polemic was brought when addressing the ways to fertilize the soils. Implying that they also entail a compromise or unawareness with husbandry practices (manure comes from stables) the collectives indirectly depend of. Thus the mobilization of moral debates in the antiespecist and more-than-human exploitation are discretely mobilized for specific human-more-than-human relations. These is a fleshy terrain to be further explored.

Concluding remarks

Social movements and collective actors are to be recognized as moral agents who seek to transforming societies at the midst of a socioecological collapse. Analyzing them as such can allow us to better understand the moral world-makings of those desired and possible worlds, the compromises and dilemmas that are negotiated in the ecotopias (Centemeri & Asara, 2022) emerging as an alternative to colonial/modern capitalist ways of living. This entails an intellectual and politico-ethical effort, in not (pre)assuming a moral righteousness of their practices; but to be able to trace the chain of significance, the negotiations and active elaboration of such value systems that orient their practices and mold their judgement system. Unpacking the moral world-making of agroecological collectives, which is to trace the controversies around pragmatic issues that traverse them, this paper contributes to a situated understanding of the production of an activist ethos. An ethos that, intending to decolonize its standards of judgement, starting with overcoming anthropocentric biases and incorporating non & more than human entities and entanglements in its moral judgements. At the same time, acknowledging the power relations within the collectives, dismantling and questioning paternalism attitudes that disempower the agents, and instead bringing to the table the factual material conditions in which the collectives are based, depend and can (re)generate and circulate more appropriately, seeking to practice non-punitivist but accountability and transformative models of organization.

Is worth noting that what inspired such description is not an evaluation or assessment of the internal coherence and consistency of the agroecology activist milieu. Quite the contrary. Noticing the cognitive dissonances in the milieu, inspired me to unfold those contradictions, tensions and heated debates (controversies) about very concrete matters. Interrupting the assumption and expectation of a sort of *rightouseness* that rests heavily on the shoulders of those who participate in the movement area. An expectation that is un-matching the concrete material realities in which the collectives are embedded, ubiquitous across the narratives of

the interlocutors, and from which the sentiments of guilt and shame sprout.

Rather, it is possible to identify some of the dilemmas & contradictions, the points of view and reasoning that come to play in the moral world-making in the agroecology milieu. They are not solely framed in ideological terms but were grounded in the lived, experiential and affectional dimensions of the agroecological practice. They also changed as the collectives have also done it. Having contradictory, patchy features that despite its incompleteness and messiness de-monstrate that different perspectives and alternatives are always possible. Here lies the metaphoric potential of naming agroecology initiatives hopeful monstrosities (Anderson et al., 2021), as they de-monstrate alter-natives, but also they problematize the expectation of the “purity politics” warned by Mygind du Plessis & Husted (2022).

“The question is: can we also understand prefiguration as a form of purity politics, in the sense of ignoring our messy entanglements with complex webs of suffering and injustice in order to live out a ‘pure’ utopia in the present? If prefigurative politics involves ‘the unwillingness to compromise one’s values, ‘a determined attempt to avoid co-optation’ and an adamant distaste for reformist goals (Breines, 1980, p 427), we might understand prefiguration as an attempt to remain pure and untainted by the institutional logics and concomitant injustices of the society in which these movements operate” (pg 221)

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