Connecting through *the seed:*

**Alternative Agriculture and Peasant Resistance in the Colombian Coffee Axis**

Master Thesis
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Preface

During January and April 2014 I conducted fieldwork research in Colombia, in Caldas, Risaralda, Quindío (The Coffee Axis) and Cundinamarca department. This thesis is the outcome of an exploration into a country that, because of its geographical and cultural closeness to my own, I approached it with confidence and ease, to rapidly realize that I could not pretend to grasp its complexity based on my own background. I never felt so welcomed, respected and supported as a foreigner, as a researcher and as a friend, as in Colombia. I also never felt so doubtful and insecure about what to do and where to go, being constantly warned about the risks of my academic ambitions. University professors, eminent peasant leaders, governments officials, environmental activists, random people in a bar, in the street, inside coffee plots; whenever I went I felt welcome, even if I was usually told to be careful, not to be alone, not to trust anyone. Even while meeting and interviewing peasant leaders, used to persecution, executions and disappearances of their comrades and probably used to mistrust unknown people asking questions, I did not felt the distance I was expecting. Probably, they wanted me to know their country, to show me that things were all right despite all the suffering. They did not hide their own stories of persecutions and exile, nor restraint from giving their opinion about the situation. However, my topic had to change from studies of power relations in a rural Cauca, to a more neutral topic politically speaking as alternative agriculture and seed exchange networks in the Coffee Axis. It is however, a strongly political issue today, particularly after the recent agrarian strike, but it can be easily depoliticized and being understood as a matter of pure environmental conservation. I will show that this is not the case at all, but it worked for me in the context of my research and helped me to approach people easily.

Due to ethical matters, I will not give names of campesino and indigenous leaders, nor activists. Some seed custodians and agroecological producers might be named, only when I know that the information will not compromise them. Finally I would like to thanks all the people who helped me find my way through their country; the Bogotá activists, the campesinos and indigenous peasants and seed custodians. I dedicate this work to them, and hope you all find peace in your land and in your hearts.
Introduction

In developing countries since the 80’s and 90’s, with the retreat of the state from economic and social spheres, corporations start to play an undisputed role in shaping the livelihoods of people. In the rural context, agribusiness has experienced major expansion, establishing increasing control over land and resources endorsed by national and transnational legislations. The consequences of radical commoditization processes in peasant economies and the effects on biodiversity and human health as a consequence of the use of agrochemical inputs and genetic manipulation have raised concerns about sovereignty and rights. While corporations’ control over farming processes seems to be expanding in developing countries, food sovereignty, autonomy, protection of local knowledge and biodiversity are increasingly becoming central concerns among peasant organizations and movements. The struggle for the control of natural resources and cultural knowledge related to agriculture is an important feature of today’s agrarian transformations, the fight for seed control being one of its main representations.

Today, agricultural land it’s being progressively oriented towards the production of cattle feed and biofuel\(^1\) contributing to a “rush for land” (Borras et.al, 2012; Li, 2012), a tendency which deepened after the entrance of agricultural products into the speculative market following the 2007 economic crisis (Rubio, 2008). But the standardization of agricultural processes and the globalization of problems seem to be generating an effervescence of rural social responses at different scales (Petras, 2008). The re-emergence of the peasantry as a relevant political actor has two major reasons: the reliance on agribusiness as the main development strategy which has led to growing corporate control over land and resources and foster environmental degradation; and the possibilities brought by digital communication technologies allowing coordination of action and the sharing of local experiences (Juris, 2005, Escobar 2009) contributing to increasingly unified responses from national and transnational agrarian movements (Borras et.al, 2008, Kloppenburg, 2010; Martínez-Torres & Rosset, 2010; Rosset et.al, 2010). As a way to

\(^1\) The entrance of agricultural products in the speculative market as commodities after the 2007 economic crisis, the demand for meat production to supply emergent Asian economies, the growing demand for biofuel and the increasing price of oil. (Rubio, 2008)
resist the impacts of these global tendencies, giving back to farmers the control over their resources and production processes, peasant and farmers organizations increasingly advocate for the necessity to adopt alternative perspectives on agriculture leading to more sustainable forms of production and more self-sufficient economies.

Seeds can be considered as the final element of the agricultural process that agribusiness needs to control in order to dominate the whole process of production. Even if they are still controlled and managed by farmers in most rural contexts, through property laws and sanitary regulations farmer’s control over their seeds is being limited.

Fighting over the protection of biodiversity and the defence of peasant-based economies, networks of peasant and indigenous organizations, NGOs, scholars and urban activists are focusing on securing seeds against the control that states and transnational corporations are asserting through property laws and sanitary regulations. Organizations have risen in the defence of seeds, and developed strategies that aim to impact at different levels: on local grounds through the building of seed exchange networks (Da Vía, 2012) the establishment of transgenic-free territories (TFT) (Pearson, 2012) and the fostering of local economies in order to secure and promote alternative agriculture among rural communities; on national grounds as legislative and policy-making interventions and leading informational campaigns; and on global grounds through coordination of transnational strategies (campaigns, meetings etc.) and building digital platforms of knowledge exchange and production.

In my fieldwork I focused on the work of alternative agriculture networks in Colombia’s Coffee Axis in the context of the current peasant strike of 2013-2014. Defined by their focus on agroecology and particularly the defence of seeds, I wanted to see how they are coping with a political and legal context that threatens their possibility of existence through the fostering of property laws and regulations over seeds as part of a wider agroexport development strategy in the country. During my stay, I contacted organizations coordinating national campaigns for seed defence operating from Bogotá, and through them I was able to access campesino and indigenous organizations in the Coffee Axis. I observed the strategies, organizational forms and actual results of their actions considering the

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2 The UPOV convention of the WTO was made to protect property over plant varieties. (to be discussed in the next section).
particular institutional context in which campesino and indigenous are inserted. I realized that the capacity to assert alternative development projects in rural Colombia depends largely on the capacity to establish territorial autonomy and resource sovereignty, which is heavily influenced by ethnicity. However, the context of national agrarian mobilization in the country, boasting strong support among diverse actors in civil society, has created conditions for local organizations to scale up from local to regional and national transcending ethnic ascriptions, and being influenced by the transnational ground.

Theoretical questions: peasantries, peasant movements, conventional and alternative agriculture

The seminal work of Chayanov (1961) established the qualitative difference between peasant and capitalist economies expressed in terms of rationality (Shanin 1973). Having the family at its core, peasant households aim to socially and materially reproduce their livelihoods and not to generate profit and economic growth like a capitalist entrepreneur. Therefore in peasant economy there is no separation between capital and labour and categories of salary, price and profit are not applicable. (Chayanov, 1961, Forero, 2013). The idea of a peasant moral economy (Scott, 1973) means that inside family and local community, peasant relations are based on reciprocity and production is oriented towards subsistence (Martinez-Torres and Rosset, 2008) while surplus, if there is any, is commercialized.

This model has oriented the scholarly understanding of rural societies, while the question about the form and degree of interaction between peasant and capitalist economies (usually thought of as the former being "absorbed" by the latter), has motivated the building of models trying to give sense to commoditization processes inside peasant agriculture (Schejtman, 1981; Van der Ploeg, 1986, 2010; Bernstein & Byres, 2009)

During the 1980’s and 1990’s when structural adjustment policies were applied in southern countries, rural reality seemed to have dramatically changed and peasant livelihoods began
to depend more and more on wage labour and commodity production in order to reproduce the household (Bernstein and Byres, 2009). A debate over the consequences of commoditization started, implying some conceptual discussions about the applicability of the term *peasantry* as a valid notion in the current agrarian configuration (Bernstein, 2011). In this economic context peasant economies are partly commoditized in order to produce and reproduce their unit of production (Schejtmam 1980, Forero, 2010), and they have to compete with other forms of agriculture like entrepreneurial farming and capitalist farming (Van der Ploeg, 2009). Thus, the degree of commoditization should not be considered the decisive element to define the peasantry, but rather the nature of the relationships that households undertake inside the family and community based on reciprocal relations (Forero, 2010) and the struggle for autonomy inside a global economic system characterized by dependency (Van der Ploeg, 2009).

Van der Ploeg (2009) builds up a definition of today’s peasantries as a relation of co-production with the environment through labour, and with society at different levels (family, community and global economic system). Patterns of cooperation within a local community allowed peasant households to cope with harsh environmental and politico-economic situations (Schejtmam 1980); so they must be thought of as part of a wider economic system on which they depend, and from which they are never isolated (Wolf 1966). So the peasant condition is defined by a constant struggle for autonomy expressed in the development of a self-controlled and self-managed resource base and immersed in a dialectic of dependence and cooperation relationships (Van der Ploeg 2009).

3 In the classical definition given by Wolf (1966), peasant is a small-scale agriculturalist who produces mainly for family subsistence. A farmer is an agriculturalist who produces for the expansion of its enterprise; his earnings being reinvested. In this study, farmer will refer in general to any worker who depends on farming and peasant to a particular kind of farmer as defined above. Even if it could be argued that the distinction relies on differences of scale of production or market integration (Van der Ploeg, 2009), the definition of peasant emphasises the nature of family and community relations based on reciprocity.

4 In rural studies, the use of peasant or farmer seems to depend on particular theoretical and political perspectives. Peasants are sometimes considered “farmers of the South”, therefore immersed in binding social relations within a local community, immersed in traditions etc. While farmers imply a business led form of agriculture often related to “Northern farmers”. I found that distinction ethnocentric and not helping at all to understand the complexity of today rural context. Others, refuse to use the term peasant, using small-scale farmers, family based agricultural producers etc. Others, generates a definition of peasants and farmers based on the economic rationality of the household members and on the form and content of relations within local community (Forero, 2010).
In Latin American rural studies, *economía campesina* (peasant economy) and *el campesinado* (the peasantry) are widely accepted categories even if some features of Chayanov’s model have been overcome\(^5\) (Schejtman 1980, Forero, 2010, 2013). Today *campesino*\(^6\) is still a valid analytical category, structurally different from a capitalist mode of farming, even if very much inserted in capitalist economy\(^7\). However, to be *campesino* in Latin America is not a simple economical distinction but a socio-political and cultural one. Socio-politically, *el campesinado* represents the class of poor agricultural workers usually understood in opposition to the rural *patron* or *latifundista* (landowner) who holds land and privilege. Today, besides processes of class formation inside the rural according to successful or unsuccessful market integration, *el campesinado* refers in general to small-scale family-based producers\(^8\). Culturally it is an identity defined by being close to the land and rural traditions, having forms of cooperation and reciprocity often absent in urban spaces. Indigenous and afros were included in the campesinado until the 1970, until they started to claim ethnic rights and led a parallel struggle. Today, *campesino* mainly represents the rural *mestizos* rather than indigenous, but *el campesinado* in the common discourse tends to refer in general to the class of rural workers independently of their ethnic origins.

**Conventional dependence/Alternative autonomy**

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\(^5\) Schejtman proposes a definition of the peasant considering its insertion in the capitalist system while keeping its own rationality. The family-needs are satisfied not only through in-farm family work as in Chayanov’s model, but also through off-farm work as wage labor, petty-commodities selling or orienting his production for the market. Forero (2010), concludes in the case of Colombia that, apart from specific cases, he could not find peasants whose rationality was directed only to satisfied family needs. He states that nowadays the peasantry belongs as much as anybody else to a consumer society which creates needs that cannot be satisfied without having direct access to monetary incomes.

\(^6\) In Latin-America the term *campesino* refers to a social category having certain social and economic dispositions (*economía campesina* – peasant economy) and can be translated as *peasant*. But it also refers to a cultural group, the rural *mestizos*, the cultural syncretism between european and indigenous, that constitutes the majority of Latin-American population, differing from indigenous and afrocolumbian communities.

\(^7\) It’s interesting to notice that in Latin America, despite the changes experienced in agriculture during the 80’s and 90’s, the concept of *campesino* has seldom been questioned. I state that the radical introduction of large-scale agribusiness as a development strategy gave light to the important distinction between *economía campesina* (peasant economy) and *agroindustria* (agribusiness).

\(^8\) This does not mean that there are no conflicting interests among producers; as we will see in Part 1, inside Colombian peasant movement there are class divisions that conditions its unity. However the term *campesino* in political terms works as a form of "agrarian populism" (Bernstein, 2011) underestimating internal differences.
The process of commoditization is often described as a movement towards dependency relations, due to the loss of autonomy implied by relying on external inputs and economic support. The introduction of commodity relations in the resource base reproduction process makes peasants more dependent on external inputs and on technical-administrative relations related to the introduction and management of those inputs (Van der Ploeg 1986). This process is called *externalization*.

Externalization started in agriculture with the introduction of Green Revolution technologies that would improve yields and crops’ protection and it represents the basis for what is called *conventional agriculture*. It impossible to deny the great contribution that the Green Revolution made in increasing production yields (inputs) and easing up farmers’ work (mechanization of agriculture), but the environmental consequences and dependency dynamics that it generate, have been the basis for different levels of critiques and the conceptualization of *agriculture alternatives*.

Environmentally, the strong use of agrochemical inputs has negative impacts on human health as well as on biodiversity. The emphasis on monoculture and the use of pesticides, herbicides and fungicides affects biodiversity undermining elements that are playing a role in the ecosystem dynamics. On the other hand technological packages are often associated with improved varieties of seeds, which are supposed to lead to greater yields under certain controlled conditions (quantity and application of inputs). So a process of seeds and products selection starts, meaning that farmers use certain seeds and focus on certain products based on market offer and demand\(^9\).

A multiple dependency dynamic appears: the resource base becomes dependent on external inputs in order to produce what the farmer wants; the farmer becomes dependent on credits in order to afford the technological shifting; the farmer also becomes knowledge dependent towards development agencies and corporations who “know better” how to apply the technologies; and in the case of unsubsidized economies (most of poorest countries following structural adjustments’ policies), farmers specialized in one crop are strongly affected by the fluctuation of prices in the market.

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\(^9\) To give just one example, in Colombia the CIAT (member of the CGIAR group) has gathered around 20,000 varieties of bean seeds which have been used by local populations for over 6000 years. Today in a supermarket in Bogotá, we cannot find more than 12 varieties.
An example of radical externalization is given by Stone (2007, 2010, and 2011) in his studies about the effect of the adoption of GM crops by Indian cotton farmers. Stone states that those farmers are facing *agricultural deskilling* due to a sequence of technological shifts introduced since the Green Revolution being deepened through the introduction of hybrid and GM seed varieties that have increased vulnerability of crops to agroecological changes and farmers dependence on external economic and technical support. GM and hybrid seeds cannot be reproduced in-farm and so they need to be purchased every year while property rights over seeds act as an important limitation for their reuse. So the peasantry today is mostly engaged in dependency relations toward agribusiness through inputs and seeds (Stone, 2011). The issue of seed privatization and GM technology is probably the most polemical feature of this process, comprising a global opposition far beyond peasant movements. But how is autonomy asserted in a context of growing dependency dynamics?

In relation to farming practices, assertion of autonomy would mean to look to control as much as possible the means, the process and the outcomes of production. Some peasants will diversify their activities to include off-farm work for example, as petty commodity commercialization (Bersntein, 2009, 2011). But in relation to farming itself, autonomy means to look to rely as little as possible on external elements for reproduction. As we saw, a conventional approach to agriculture is grounded on dependency relations for the reproduction of the resource-base. What we call *alternative agriculture* looks forward to achieve exactly the opposite: to assert autonomy through the development of the resource-base using and reusing in-farm elements and therefore avoiding dependency caused by inputs. In relation to seeds, alternative approaches needs to have access to a free

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10 Glover (2010) tells us that Monsanto’s Smallholder Program stationed resident staff in Indian villages in order to solve farmer’s agronomical problems as a way to promote Monsanto’s technological packages. Elyachar (2002) gives as an example on how Monsanto was in charge of delivering credits to small farmers in Bangladesh for the purchasing of their own products.

11 Hybrid seeds cannot be reproduced dying after one harvest. GM seeds as maize or cotton produced by Monsanto, used to have the so called “Terminator” technology but it was never commercialized (Glover, 2010; Stone, 2011). However, evidence shows that GM seeds even if they can be reproduced three or four times, experienced a fast deterioration of their quality, which basically makes them useless after one harvest. But even if it could be reproduced, property right regime does not allowed its reuse which could be a limitation in countries were the stae or the same companies could be monitoring what seeds farmers are using.

12 Like environmental and consumers’ movements.
circulation of locally adapted varieties in order to defend their economic autonomy and environmental sustainability\textsuperscript{13}.

Agroecology, as the main expression today of alternative agriculture\textsuperscript{14}, is a science and a set of practices that seeks to apply “ecological science to the study, design and management of sustainable agroecosystems” (Altieri & Toledo, 2011)\textsuperscript{15}. Even if the principles of agroecology could be applied to alternative as well as conventional modes of farming, the important issue is that the knowledge it brings, allows for more environmentally adapted forms of production with or without the use of inputs. In any case, dependency toward external inputs is reduced by fostering adaptation of the resource-base to local ecological conditions.

Cooperation among peasant and farmers implies a struggle for autonomy at higher levels of aggregation (local community, cooperatives, peasant unions, peasant movements etc.). Among peasants it is said to have allowed their persistence despite the penetration of capitalism in agriculture (Van der Ploeg, 2008, 2010; Box, 1986), working as a form of resistance, especially when immersed in competition with entrepreneurial and large-scale capitalist farming. Outside the farm, autonomy is through producers’ organizations as cooperatives, unions and different forms of political participation (Kerkvleit, 2011).

But autonomy should be thought also on a transnational scale. While dependence has increased during the last decades with the expansion of agribusiness, cooperation has also

\textsuperscript{13} Local seeds are said to be more resilient in agroecological terms. Improved seeds are said to have greater yields in the short term when associated with specific inputs. But locally adapted seeds can better resist climate change and grow without the need of inputs.

\textsuperscript{14} Agroecology (to be explained in the next section) is not a synonym with alternative agriculture, but in this study I focus only on agroecology for two reasons:

First because agroecology includes most of other forms of alternative farming or at least shares it same principles. However organic farming managed as monocultures and therefore dependent on organic inputs is not base on agroecological principles (Altieri & Toledo, 2011).

Second because as we will see, for transnational peasant movements as well as some international development agencies, agroecology is thought to be the more successful alternative in social and economic terms.

\textsuperscript{15} “The core principles of agroecology include recycling nutrients and energy on the farm, rather than introducing external inputs; enhancing soil organic matter and soil biological activity; diversifying plant species and genetic resources in agroecosystems over time and space; integrating crops and livestock and optimizing interactions and productivity of the total farming system, rather than the yields of individual species.” (Altieri & Toledo, 2011)
scaled up. Transnational Agrarian Movements (TAM), have to be understood as a necessity for globalized struggles in a context where agriculture policies are designed and applied by international organizations (World Bank, IMF, WTO). La Via Campesina, being the main expression of TAMs today, is said to exist as a reaction towards the re-structuring of agriculture expressed in structural adjustment programs, free-trade agreements, Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs) of the WTO and food security oriented international policies as proposed by the World Food Summit (Desmarais, 2007). Opposing what some have called the new Green Revolution based on the continuation of a neoliberal approach to rural development through the deployment of biotechnology in agriculture (Altieri and Holt-Gimenez, 2013), la Via Campesina defends Food sovereignty through an agroecological approach to agriculture and has established seed as the forth resource after land, water and air (Kloppenburg, 2008).

The concept of food security is defined by FAO at the 1996 World Food Summit as "when people have at all times, physical and economic access to sufficient safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life" (FAO, 1996). This has been questioned by agrarian movements because it does not refer to how access will be provided, avoiding the questioning of the agricultural and food system that has until now monopolized the way in which food is produced. Dependency and environmental damage are not included in the definition.

Opposing food security, La Via Campesina has built the concept of food sovereignty defined as “the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems” (La Via Campesina, 2007). This concept has been the main goal of many peasant organizations and it is directly related to the quest of sustainable

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16 According to Borras (2009) Transnational Agrarian Movements (TAM) present new distinctive features that are important to point out: (1) greater direct representation of the rural poor in policy-making arenas; (2) more extensive scope and scale of political work; (3) use of information and communication technology for collective action; (4) focus on human-rights and citizen right claiming beyond national borders; (5) assertion of movements’ autonomy from actual and potential allies. La Via Campesina is not the only TAM, but the most important in terms of scale and nature of its demands. Other TAMs are the International Federation of Agricultural Producers, IPC for Food Sovereignty and International Land Coalition (Borras, 2010).

17 It is composed by 164 peasant and farmer’s organizations based on 73 countries from the South and the North. See viacampesina.org
alternatives to diminish environmental degradation and dependency. La Via Campesina as an alter globalization movement, functions as a network of organizations working autonomously in the local, but being strategic in the global: it addresses concerns affecting all peasants struggling to foster and maintain autonomy inside an economic system based on commoditized relations.

*Alternative agriculture as networks*

The rise of TAMs and the increasing connectivity between organizations at different scales is better conceptualized under the concept of *network*. Alternative agriculture initiatives connected or not to higher level of aggregations, tend to operate as decentralized networks as a form of opposition to logics of verticality prevailing in top-down forms of development (Maeckelberg, 2012).

Escobar (2009) in his research on alternative development initiatives in the Colombian Pacific, states: "Biodiversity, social movements, capital, knowledge, and so on, are decentralized, dispersed, and transnationalized ensembles of processes that operate at many levels through multiple sites" (pp.11). Therefore the image of *networks* is the best representation of processes of knowledge production issued from the interaction of multiple actors, places and scales helped by the development of digital information and communication technologies (Juris, 2005; Escobar 2009).

In the case of social movements and networks, Diani and McAdam (2003) stress the centrality of NGO's, struggles against specific policies and shared interests among organizations as the basis for alliance building. In our discussion, the fight over seeds and the fostering of alternative agriculture as part of peasant movements bring together local organizations, regional and national peasant unions, transnational movements, environmental and development NGO's, scholars, activists etc. to fight against national and transnational policies and legislations such as the UPOV Convention of the WTO, or national property laws on seeds; and to build up common strategies at different scales. However the struggles mostly focus on local grounds and are bound to national contexts; the transnational has not to be overvalued in its possibilities to actually trigger changes. The transnational level in the case of peasant movements fuels local processes and allows
organization of struggles following examples from other places. But, in the case of TAMs, claims of representation of the peasantry on a global scale need to be questioned (Borras et.al. 2008). So, I state that the transnational level in the case of activism works mainly as a platform of knowledge production for local struggles, but many local organizations seldom participate or are concerned about international activism.

Alternative agriculture networks relates to different organizations working in their own contexts to promote agriculture alternatives. Because we are referring to networks, I do not state that those organizations are devoted only to alternative agriculture or that they are actually permanently linked together and organized to reach a predetermined goal. They can share the same interests with different intensity, and they can set common strategies to oppose particular threats in certain situations. Therefore I define alternative agriculture networks as autonomous organizations promoting alternative agriculture to different degrees and strategically connecting to defend it according to specific contexts.

Colombia 2013-2014

Colombia offers an interesting example of the global issues of today’s peasantries and the Colombian peasant movement is a current example of the scaling dynamics due to its internal diversity and the nature of the demands expressed. Colombian armed conflict has at its core a struggle over land reform, and Colombian peasants have suffered the consequences of decades of violence which has generated millions of displaced people and land grabbed for coca cultivation by armed groups and criminal organizations, and investments in mining, biofuel, cattle raising and others by transnational corporations and local elites (Forero & Urrea, 2013; Grajales, 2011). The signing of the Free Trade Agreement with Canada in 2011 and with the US in 2012 which consolidated the tendency toward liberalization of the agrarian sector that started in the beginning of the 1990’s, has provoked strong opposition from the peasant movement leading to a national agrarian strike in 2013-2014. The breadth that it gained had to do with the historical accumulation of unfulfilled demands of the Colombian peasantry. In parallel, for the first time in Colombia and setting a precedent in the region, the Colombian peasant movement has included
among their demands the abolition of laws and regulations that strengthens corporate and state control over seeds, being part of the conditions for the signing of the FTA with North American states. By doing that, the movement is also advocating for a shift in the development model proposing a major emphasis on the promotion of agriculture alternatives as part of a peasant-based development strategy.

The legislation related to seed distribution and commercialization in Colombia has progressively encouraged the certification and patenting of seeds which has led to the criminalization of the use of uncertified traditional varieties and the promotion of GM seeds and other certified varieties. The 9.70 resolution of the Colombian Agricultural Institute (ICA) dictated in 2010 represents paradigmatic features of this tendency. The government states that through regulation over seeds the sanitary standards and quality of Colombia’s products can be guaranteed. The movement defends peasant rights to food sovereignty, and agroecology as the best way to reach it.

While I was building up my research proposal, initially aiming to study corporate control of seed and processes of commoditization in peasant agriculture, I came across Colombia’s peasant strike in an online journal. I started to follow the news about it, and I was surprised to read that one of its main causes were regulations over seed use and commercialization that had started to criminalize peasants just because they were using uncertified seeds; seeds that do not have property and have not undertaken a process of certification by the state. I came across the documentary 9.70 from Victoria Solano, showing the impact of Resolution 9.70 for Colombian peasants through the case of rice producers in Campoalegre, Huila department, where tons of rice seeds were destroyed. My idea to focus on the effects of seed commoditization seemed to have found a perfect case to research on.

So I decided to do a case study on how the new regulation was triggering processes of dependence and resistance between actors engaged in rural development on a specific municipality of Cauca department where organizations I contacted had projects ongoing.

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18 Laws protecting property right of seeds in Colombia are: Law 1032 (Article 6) of 2006 and Law 1518 (necessary for the approval of UPOV 91). To be discussed in Part 1.

19 While I was contacting organizations in Colombia who were working for the defence of seeds, I realized that some of them were working in Cauca, so I decided to go there.
The power relations involved in this scenario would have told me how knowledge about seeds is produced when the state and corporations are monopolizing the right to own seeds.

Methodological considerations

Before stepping into the field, I contacted two members of Grupo Semillas and Swissaid, NGO's working on seed exchange networks and promoting alternative agriculture initiatives in Colombia. My plan was to get information from them about an ideal area to do a case study about my topic of research. Once I was there, they could meet me only after two weeks, which meant that I had to look for new contacts myself while waiting for them to receive me. I contacted university professors and government officials related to rural development, but I also met people in Bogotá who led me to activists and people engaged in the peasant struggle of 2013. After the agrarian strike, most people in Bogotá knew about the seed issue and its political implications so it was not difficult to approach people with different backgrounds in order to get a general picture of the situation. I started to contact and interview as many people involved in my topic as I could in order to have a general idea of what was actually happening there: academics from the fields of rural development, economy, biotechnology and anthropology; activists engaged in the defence of seeds, urban peasants, peasant leaders, Ministry of Agriculture employees, ICA employees, students, artists, and anybody who could tell me what was actually happening there with Resolution 9.70 and the peasant strike. I realized how complex the situation was, and how limited my knowledge of the deep causes of the Colombian peasantries discontent were.

Once I finally met organizations' representatives, they invited me to an annual meeting of Red de Semillas Libres, an initiative to connect local process of seed defence in order to build up a national platform of seed exchange and seed-related knowledge production. In that meeting where they were going to discuss the planning for this year’s work I encountered people I had met before in my early inquiries, which gave me a sense of the range of the activists’ network I was researching.

In this exploratory phase I gathered information about different possible areas of study. One of the first conclusions I drew was that Cauca, my hypothetical choice, was not
a possibility due to security issues. Every possible place had pros and cons, so my choice was not easy to make. Finally through a peasant leader participating in Red de Semillas Libres, I contacted campesinos organizations in the Coffee Axis. In parallel to that, through Swissaid, I contacted indigenous organizations in Riosucio (in Caldas Department, also in the Coffee Axis) working specifically on seed conservation and exchange.

These two networks, the campesino and the indigenous, even if they have significant differences related to the nature of their demands and their functioning, connected around agroecology, seed conservation and exchange activities, and peasant-related political struggles\textsuperscript{20}. I decided to focus separately in each of them looking at their internal work and how they build up links with other organizations and actors on a local, regional and national scale. I also observed where and how they connect with each other, and how this relation would help to describe the Coffee Axis network in its complexity and to say something about alternative agriculture networks in the country. The indigenous organizations I worked with (Red de Semillas de Riosucio and ASProINCA) where based in Riosucio (Caldas department) doing a localized work but starting to build up links with campesinos organizations in other parts of the Coffee Axis under the initiative of the NGO Swissaid. In order to work with them I had to settle for some time in Riosucio. On the other hand the campesino organization I worked with (ADUC-Caldas) had headquarters in most municipalities of the region, which made me travel around the region. Some of them were participating in other networks from Risaralda and Quindío departments (Red de Custodios de Semilla de Risaralda, Red de Familias Custodias de Semilla del Quindío) which I also studied.

It is important to stress the differences between the territorial scope of campesino and indigenous organizations, where the former is based on a limited territory inside a municipality while the latter are spread around the region. This did affect my methodological strategy that could be defined as a sort of combination of a one place

\textsuperscript{20} Indigenous and campesinos have to be considered as peasants from a socio economic perspective. The difference is that indigenous movement consist on ethnic based organizations with claims around territory, self-determination and cultural rights. Campesinos are \textit{mestizos} (basically mix between Europeans and Indigenous like most of Latin Americans) with no ethnic claims, but a class-based perspective. Campesinos’ organizations work as peasant unions, fighting for peasant-based rural development. When I talk about the peasant movement in Colombia, I refer to campesinos, indigenous and afro organizations alike.
ethnographic account (on Riosucio's indigenous organizations) and multi-sited research on the different and spatially dispersed campesino organizations.

I also contacted other actors playing a role in the networks, like university professors, students and functionaries from Universidad Technológica de Pereira (UTP) and Universidad de Caldas in Manizales, both of which were fostering alternative development in the region.

I performed three categories of interviews: to producers, to organization leaders and to local experts. Those categories were not fixed, some interviewees fit in more than one. I mainly asked producers about their personal history focusing on the particular events that made them engage in alternative agriculture in order to see the impact of these initiatives in peoples’ daily life. There were two kinds of producers, the agroecological producer and the seed custodian\(^\text{21}\). To organization leaders I inquired about the organizational and ideological features of the organization; I was particularly interested in looking at the connections between different organizations on a local, national and global scale. I focused on the different strategies to resist legal control over seeds. And finally to the experts I asked them according to their field of interest (academic, activists, government officials etc.) to attain a wider picture of the political, economic and historical context in which I operated.

I also did participant observation working in the farms and participating in the different meetings and congresses held by the organizations at local, regional and national levels. Finally, I should say, I built up significant relationships with people who, starting as informants became close. Those relationships unintentionally ended up being the most fruitful, allowing me to have open and honest conversations which gave me a deeper sense of the issues discussed.\(^\text{22}\)

\(^{21}\) To be explained at length in Part 3

\(^{22}\) This work is based on my own ethnographic experience and in-depth interviews. Field notes, video and audio recordings and transcriptions are the empirical proof that I did my research alone. If someone would like to have a look at them I offer open access.
Before proceeding it is necessary to specify some conceptual features that may be unfamiliar to readers. Trying to overcome differences between the English and the Latin American traditions in rural studies, I consider el campesinado colombiano (the Colombian peasantry) today as small and medium-scale family producers differentiated by class and ethnicity and constituting the legacy of the movement that has historically mobilized for structural reforms in rural Colombia. Therefore el campesinado refers to a non specified category including all rural workers from any origin, being landowners or landless. When I stress class differences I refer to small-medium-scale farmers and peasants, where the former refers to a rural middle class struggling for better market incorporation, while the latter tend to focus on access to land and promotion of peasant-based economies\(^{23}\). Farmer is used also as a generic term to define someone who farms. And when I refer to ethnic differences, I refer to indigenous, afrocolombians and campesinos, rural mestizos\(^{24}\) with no particular ethnic adscription being the majority of rural workers in Colombia.

The present work is divided in three main chapters. In Part 1, I will briefly contextualize the Colombian peasant movement today understanding it as the prolongation of the historical demands of the peasantry, and try to relate it to the role that alternative agriculture organizations are having in it today in the 2013-2014 mobilizations. In Part 2, I will introduce the context of the Coffee Axis and the indigenous and campesino organizations I worked with. And in Part 3, I will analyse their strategies in the local and try to give sense to their relations in a regional and national ground understanding them as economic, politic-organizational and communicative networks influencing and being influenced by global processes.

\(^{23}\) I will explore these differences in Part 1.

\(^{24}\) The word mestizo expresses a cultural syncretism issued mainly from the contact of europeans, indigenous and afro cultures. It is the basis for the building of a national identity in Latin-American countries.
Part I - The Colombian Agrarian Movement and Alternative Agriculture Networks
On 19th August 2013 started a national agrarian strike having the Colombian peasantry as its main actor. The strike was not an isolated event but the result of a long history of unfulfilled claims for land reform, the perpetuation of an armed conflict resulting on thousands of victims, displacement and land-grabbing (Forero 2010), and free-market policies in the rural consolidated by the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the U.S. and Canada from 2011 and 2012. Behind all of this lies a systematic misrecognition of the peasantry as social subjects and relevant actor of development (Salgado 2010).

The complexity of rural Colombia could be hardly addressed in the present research. The multiplicity of actors divided by diverse geographic regions, ethnicity, class and ideology, struggling by different means (some of them by any means) to assert demands, ideas, interests and power, are too complex to give a definite perspective about it. But in order to refer to today’s agrarian movement, it is mandatory to give sense to the main issues affecting rural Colombia.

According to UNDP Report on Colombia in 2011, 32% of Colombians are rural dwellers, and according to Forero (2010) peasant production predominates in Colombia representing around 67% of national agricultural production. But in parallel, the high rate of land concentration (land Gini of 0.86) reflects the permanence of deep inequalities. In terms of human development, the peasantry faces five great challenges: access to land, access to credit, insufficient technical assistance, threats against their rights and their life and insufficient political participation and fragmented collective action (UNDP 2011).

In the present section, I will briefly introduce the Colombian armed conflict understanding it as the radicalization of an agrarian conflict rooted on a struggle for land (Grajales 2011). Afterwards I will refer to the peasant movement today, based on my own field experience and press information 25 analyzing the national strike of 2013-2014, and I will explain its relation with alternative agriculture movements and ideas. Finally, I will refer specifically to those organizations working in a national scale which are fostering alternative agriculture networks and discuss their convergence and divergence with the national agrarian movement.

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25 Mainly the online media Agencia Prensa Rural in www.presanrural.org
I. Peasant Movement in Colombia: from land reform to the agrarian strike 2013-2014

The emergence of left wing guerrillas since the 1960’\textsuperscript{26} and the start of what is commonly referred as the “Colombian armed conflict” is a radicalization of a struggle over land related to the bipartisan violence that strokes the country side in previous decades\textsuperscript{27}. The cycle of violence in rural Colombia is rooted in a deeply stratified society which, as in the rest of Latin-America, represents a legacy from a colonial past perpetuated in the present due to a permanent “state of exception” inherent to armed conflicts, as well as neo-colonial logics implicit in the global economic ordering (Escobar 2008). State of exception seems to have been the rule in Colombia.

Agrarian reform has been the central demand of the peasantry as well as the guerrillas, in order to end with the \textit{latifundio} (large estate) system. In most of Latin-American countries during the 1960’ and 1970’ the discussion over agrarian reforms\textsuperscript{28} as a condition for structural transformations in the rural, became a central topic of debate. The creation of the ANUC (Asociación Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos – national association of users of state agricultural services) in 1967 by President Camilo Lleras Restrepo (1966-1970) as a way to involve the peaanstries in a process of land reform, sets the basis of today’s peasant organizations. But the failure of that process due to the defence of landowners’ interests during subsequent governments, radicalized part of the pacific peasant movement of previous years (Grajales, 2011).

\textsuperscript{26} FARC-EP, ELN, M-19, EPL, \textit{Movimiento Armado Quintín Lamé, Comando Ricardo Franco Frente-Sur}.

\textsuperscript{27} \textit{La Violencia} taking place from 1948 to 1958 was the most violent confrontation between Conservatives and Liberals which is said to have established the conditions for the armed conflict of the second half of the XXth century.

\textsuperscript{28} We understand Agrarian Reform as stated by the CNMH (National Centre for Historical Memory) as: “(...) a policy which aims to transform agrarian structures that became an obstacle to economic, social and political development of rural areas and society in general. The policy unleashes processes of transforming power relations built over land property, allowing landless peasants or peasants with small land, to have access to resources, while giving the possibility for social ascension and development of democracy in the country side.” (CNMH 2013) – translated by the author.
While pressure from peasant organizations and the guerrilla was rising up through land intakes, landowners started organizing militias to defend their lands. Land claims of the peasant movements were systematically omitted and progressively the violence escalated (Thomson 2011). The consolidation of paramilitarism during the 1980’s and the 1990’s, as the armed wing of landowners, rich entrepreneurs and drug traffickers, intensified the conflict.

Paramilitaries do not target only guerrilla groups, but actually its main victims are peasants and indigenous labelled as guerrilla sympathizers (Hristov 2005). This allowed the systematic assassination of political dissidence (particularly left oriented) especially among peasant organizations, and later during Uribe’s government (2002-2010), a process of massive land grab that allowed the consolidation of agribusiness (mainly agrofuels) mining and other national or transnational large scale investments. (Grajales, 2011). In parallel, guerrilla groups particularly the FARC-EP as much related to drug traffic as paramilitaries and drug mafias, where also displacing people for the establishment of coca plantations.

According to CNMH (Centro Nacional de Memoria Historica) (2013) from 1958 to 2012 the conflict has generated 220,000 people killed (81.5% civilians versus 18.5% combatants) and 25,000 forced disappearances; from 1985 to 2010, 5 million people have been displaced and 8.3 million hectares of land dispossessed or abandoned by force. The most affected during these long years of conflict have been the rural population and mainly peasant organizations that saw their members being constantly menaced and assassinated with the passive complicity of governments. As the context suggests, the armed conflict has been functional to a development strategy based on agribusiness and expulsion of the workforce to the cities (Salgado, 2010). Therefore Colombia represents vividly and dramatically the complementary relation between economic development and violence (Escobar, 2008)

Uribe’s government (2002-2010) intensified a neoliberal strategy in the rural, establishing a land policy based on subsidies for the purchase of state land, which benefited transnational and national corporations, increasing land concentration and privileging agribusiness over family-based production (CNDH, 2013). Hundreds of thousands of

29 Guerrillas, paramilitaries and army are responsible for the killing of innocent civilians and politically engaged leaders. However paramilitaries have the higher rates of land grabbing, massacres and assassination of political dissidence (CNDH, 2012).
hectares of the land grabbed by paramilitaries (partly with the help of the Colombian army) have been legalized and integrated in the global economy via agribusiness and the land market (Escobar, 2009, Grajales, 2011; Forero & Urrea, 2013) increasing land concentration during the last decade\(^{30}\) (Machado and Meertens 2010). In parallel, repression over peasant leaders increased, limiting their possibilities to oppose rural policies. The arrival of Juan Manuel Santos in 2010, change the political landscape of Colombia in a somehow positive way for peasant organizations

While Uribe denied the existence of a conflict and considered it a fight against terrorism, Santos did recognize it\(^{31}\). The government’s new approach to address land issues enabled peasant organizations to re-assert their demands. The severe land concentration and unprofitability as the cause and consequence of the armed conflict, affects global competitiveness and conditions human development in the rural (Forero, 2010\(^{32}\), Mondragón, 2011\(^{33}\), PNUD, 2011) reflecting the continuation and deepening of structural problems.

II. The Peasant Movement in Colombia (2013-2014) and current agrarian debates

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\(^{30}\) The repealed Law 1152 of 2007 pretended to regularize tenure of land grabbed by paramilitaries, to limit the creation and expansion of indigenous and afro territories and to ban the Peasant Reservation Zones (Zonas de Reservas Campesina or ZRC). According to Law 160 from 1994, ZRC are an initiative to regulate the occupation and economic use of wastelands by poorer peasants, and to promote sustainable peasant-based agriculture. They were conceived as way to give lands to landless campesinos as a way to solve the country’s land problem. The ZRC where targeted during Uribe’s government as FARC enclaves, reason why they were banned. With Santos they were again recognized. They do not hold however, the same autonomous status than indigenous and afro communities, but their inhabitants are struggling for it.

\(^{31}\) The promulgation of the Law 1448 for Victims and Land Restitution in 2011 and the new peace dialogues between the FARCs and the Colombian government in La Habana since 2012 were signs of a new way to face the conflict.

\(^{32}\) Forero (2010) states that land is monopolized by unproductive large estates devoted to extensive cattle rising.

\(^{33}\) Since the economic openness there has been a reduction of 22\% in the annual harvested area since 1990. The high prices of land have affected products as sugar cane, where the cost of production is extremely high in relation to other countries becoming impossible the export of ethanol. (Mondragón, 2011)
The fight for land and territoriality of campesinos, indigenous and afros, together with a strong questioning of a development strategy fostering corporate control over resources and considering peasant economies as a barrier for growth, are the main reasons of the agrarian strike. Today, an agrarian reform is justified by most of rural actors to solve partly or entirely rural issues, due to the permanence of a land tenure structure deeply concentrated together with high rates of rural poverty, low incomes, the armed conflict and the gap between the rural and the urban (CNDH, 2013). Others, particularly associations of large landowners and producers’ guilds, are in favour of a land-oriented policy which enhances economic productivity without significantly altering the land structure.

The Colombian agrarian movement that started in 2013 is composed mainly by the junction between two different sectors of the campesinado: Dignidad Campesina (Peasant Dignity) movement representing middle and small-scale farmers; and movements and organizations representing the peasantry among campesinos, indigenous and afros and demanding land and resources sovereignty with the promotion of peasant-based economies. Dignidad Campesina represents family-based farmers rather than peasant farmers, and their struggle is mainly for getting more support to compete in national and international markets thus raising a strong critique on Free Trade Agreements. Each dignidad defends their particular products (potato, coffee, cotton, sugar-cane onion and cattle), and the movement as a whole focus on the defence of national production and demand the promotion on family agriculture for middle and small-scale producers. Therefore they address issues of competitiveness in the market (TLCs, prices of fertilizers and oil, 34 MIA (Mesa Agropecuaria y Popular de Interlocución y Acuerdo), CNA (Coordinador Nacional Agrario), MUA (Mesa de Unidad Agraria), ANZORC (Asociación Nacional de Zonas de Reserva Campesina), FENSUAGRO etc. But also afro and indigenous national organizations as the PCN (Proceso de Comunidades Negras) and ONIC (Organización Nacional Indígena). The two main left-wing social and political movements in the country Marcha Patriótica and Congreso de los Pueblos are participating in the mobilizations through their related organizations (MIA and CNA respectively). The summit held in March 2014 in Bogotá called “Cumbre Agraria campesina étnica y popular” gathering this sector of the peasantry, reflects the effort of the peasant movement to build up common demands inside the agrarian movement and the Left. 35 Referred to those living in colonization areas as ZRC. 36 In Colombia they are also considered campesinos, referring to their social group. If they are peasants or farmers is more a theoretical debate among rural scholars according to their level of market integration or the nature of their social relations (Forero, 2013). However in Latin America campesino refers to family-based producers and poor rural dwellers in general, reason why they also consider themselves campesinos. It is the fact that they are family-based producers.
protection of national production) but do not the land problem, which is what has distanced them with the rest of the movement.

The second group, representing the majority of the movement and left-wing oriented political forces, focus their demands on solving structural problems of rural Colombia (land concentration, market-oriented policies, human rights violations etc.). They demand the participation of rural communities in the management of their own territories, the development of local economies based on food sovereignty, the limitation and regulation of large-scale investments having impacts on the rural (mainly mining projects), the fostering of a policy promoting viable alternatives to illicit crops (coca, poppy and marihuana), the defence of political rights and the solution to the pending problems of the victims of the conflict. 37

While the dignidades seems to be defending their interests as medium and small agricultural entrepreneurs and not addressing a radical critique to the economic model, the second group pretends to represent the interests of the majority of rural dwellers which in most of the cases have been negatively affected by a development strategy being pushed through violence, and demand deep political transformations to guarantee the autonomy of local territories. The more politicize discourse of the second group articulates demands that goes beyond the rural, addressing issues of human and social rights allowing the incorporation of urban sectors (as the students and urban unionists) to the struggle 38.

One important feature of the agrarian strike relies on the visibility of the peasants as a relevant actor in Colombian society. The movement which struck the main cities of the country for several months, was not only supported by trade unionists and students’ movements, but also by average urbanites apparently disconnected from the issues addressed by the peasantry which felt compelled to support the people representing the “roots” of Colombia. In Bogotá it was common to hear from people when asked about the reasons to support the agrarian strike that: “all of us, in a way or the other, came from the country.”

37 According to the official declaration issued from the National Agrarian Summit of March 18 2014. See note 34.
38 While Dignidades called for a
III. Alternative Agriculture in Colombia and the national agrarian strike

In my experience in Bogotá in January to March 2014, I realized the impact that the national peasant strike had inside Colombian society. The effervescency of 2013’s protests was still in the air, and the streets were covered by messages of support to the peasantry through simple pamphlet-like tags or giant murals. Through those interventions, the peasant struggle was framed as a dimension (a very central one) in the long history of social struggles and unresolved problems of the lower classes. The longing for peace and social justice, the condemnation of assassinations and persecutions of political leaders, the students’ demands, the rejection of FTA, together with the defence of seeds and food sovereignty etc. were all parts of a unique piece of collective discontent. In the first moment I realized the relevance of the seed issue in the middle of all of this and I could feel that what I was looking for was actually happening right there, but certainly framed in ways that I could not understand yet.

Image 1 – “Our land, our seeds”; Graffiti in the centre of Bogotá, January 2014

The idea that seeds are or could be used for corporate interests shielded on exclusive property right laws was one of the main concerns of the movement and had important repercussions among urbanites. Few months before the strike, the documentary 9.70 of Victoria Solano started to circulate in the web creating a sort of alarm among Colombian
society about the dangers of 9.70 ICA Resolution, which declares illegal the commercial use of uncertified seeds limiting the use and free circulation of local seeds. Whether the documentary was accurate or not, it is not central here. What is true however is that it enabled to increase the visibility of the possible consequences of property laws over seeds among peasant organizations and urbanites, and it helped to include among the movements’ demands the derogation of the resolution. But how and why did the seed issue become part of the peasant demands?

The first contacts I had in Colombia were members of environmentalists and development NGO’s as Grupo Semillas and Swissaid. They also represent the most fervent opposition to property laws over seeds and GM crops, and focusing their work mainly in raising public awareness about the importance of agricultural biodiversity for food and sustainable development. To get in contact with them allowed me to approach a “central spot” from which most of alternative agriculture networks connected in one way or the other.

1. To what alternative networks are we referring to?

Alternative agriculture networks in Colombia are composed by NGO’s, local peasant organizations, producers’ organizations, peasant unions, religious congregations and university members, and they stand as a major concern in the discourse of a great part of the Colombian agrarian movement. I state that there is a tendency among alternative agriculture organizations to link together localized initiatives of as a way to resist the present legal context, and to promote and put into practice alternative forms of production and organization here and now. Among the mentioned organizations, the ones who, by their somehow neutral and relatively delocalized position have been more fiercely working on creating proper networks are NGOs. They also apply strategies and propose conceptual frameworks issued from a “global ground”, or a transnational networking of activists for biodiversity and alternative agriculture development, who have been sharing their experiences building a decentralised source of knowledge. However, local processes cannot

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39 The documentary was a source of debate among activists and ICA members about certain unclear elements of Resolution 9.70.
be understood as a consequence of NGOs’ work, but rather as particular experiences grounded on environmental, social and political contexts, enriched and supported by them. They help to frame their local struggles to fit in wider arenas (regional, national, global).

Alternative agriculture networks in Colombia have oriented their strategies in two areas: the establishment of alternative channels of exchange and commercialization (peasant markets, agroecological markets, fair-trade, producers-consumer networks etc.), and alternative forms of production (organic, agroecological, biodynamic, permaculture etc.)40 related to changes in family and community dynamics.

Agroecology as a set of farming, ethical and political principles it’s being applied and promoted at different degrees. We find agroecological oriented organizations as those participating in MAELA41 (Movimiento Agroecologico de America Latina y el Caribe), independent local producer's organizations and NGO’s promoting agroecology; we find peasant organizations and unions promoting agroecology but not addressing it as their main concern; and we find initiatives issued from academics, students and functionaries of universities that aim to foster existing organizations through trainings, organizing peasant markets and diffusion events.

Agroecological organizations count on property free and locally adapted seed varieties, which strongly tight them to seed exchange networks. Inside agroecological organizations the recovery of seed varieties, their conservation, reproduction and exchange, is considered to be central. Nowadays, seed exchange networks have become organizations by themselves all around the world following the example of initiatives in Spain, Italy and France (Da Via, 2013) and recently fuelled by the call for building up seed exchange networks by the Indian activist Vandana Shiva. So agroecological organizations and seed exchange networks have to be understood as two different but interdependent initiatives. Agroecological organizations need seed exchange networks and seed exchange networks’ main objective is to secure seed access to agroecological producers (but not only to them).

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40 Alternative forms of productions are manifold, and according to Salgado (2010), in Colombian we found around 20 different types.

41 MAELA, Agroecological Movement of Latin-American and the Caribbean, is a movement proposes sustainable alternatives to the current global economic system based on agroecology as asset of practices and ethical principles. Their perspetive on agroecology is not only econocial and social but also strongly political. See. [http://maelac.wordpress.com/maela/](http://maelac.wordpress.com/maela/)
In Colombia that relation is clear: organizations promoting agroecology they all advocate for the right to freely dispose of seeds, and promote the figure of the *seed custodian* as a way to foster the formation of seed exchange networks. The seed custodian, understood as a member of a local community who by personal choice save seeds and share or exchange them with others, has been key in maintaining access to seeds and seed biodiversity in rural societies. Seed exchange networks are conceptualized as *networks of custodians*, therefore every member participating on them being a farmer or not, has to save and exchange seeds and hopefully reproduced them in farm.

2. National struggle for seeds: against GMO’s and seed regulations

Agroecological organizations fighting against seed loss have existed for at least twenty years in the country, but the concern has been present for decades among environmentalists. The entrance of GMOs, as well as the fostering of laws and regulations protecting property over seeds, has motivated strategies of resistance among alternative agriculture networks.

Apart from important localized processes in different parts of the country, Swissaid and Grupo Semillas are the two main organizations focusing their work particularly on the promotion of agroecology and campaigning for seeds’ defence on a national scale. According to Escobar (2009), Grupo Semillas is one of the progressive biodiversity oriented NGO’s aligned with internationally known networks as GRAIN and ETC Group. The same can be said about Swissaid in relation to the work they have been doing in Latin American countries. Each organization has their own objectives, but they have been working together for years to oppose GM crops, property laws on seeds and promoting agroecological initiatives around the country. They apply an overall strategy based on an informational campaign around the importance of genetic resources and the dangers of GM

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42 The issue of seed privatization has been fiercely addressed by organizations as GRAIN. See [http://www.grain.org](http://www.grain.org)
43 Grupo Semillas’ main strategy is informational, even if they have also agroecological schools in afros and indigenous communities in Tolima and Cauca. Swissaid is an NGO working in different countries and having particular objectives according to contexts. In Colombia they have been supporting community organizations for the building up of alternative life projects (Escobar, 2009).
seeds\textsuperscript{44}, they foster public debate about public policies affecting biodiversity, they are supporting local initiatives involved in sustainable agriculture, and together with other organizations, they have been leading a legal struggle against laws and regulations having a negative impact on biodiversity and peasant’s livelihoods.

The introduction of GM crops in 2002 motivated processes of resistance among environmentalists organizations. Grupo Semillas and Swissaid tried to raise awareness about the dangers of GM crops among rural communities and were successful in advising indigenous communities\textsuperscript{45}; eventually some of them started to officially oppose the technology. Considering that in Colombia there have been identified around five hundred varieties of corn (Semillas de Identidad, 2012) the economic, dietary and cultural importance for indigenous communities is impossible to deny. The relative autonomy of indigenous resguardos\textsuperscript{46}, as stated by the Colombian constitution of 1991 and by the 169 Convention of the ILO, allowed them to oppose GMOs in political and legal terms. So under the advice of Swissaid some resguardos have been declaring themselves as Transgenic Free Territories (TFT) (Pearson, 2012), controlling the entrance of corn from outside and looking forward to consume only varieties produced in situ. The ICA had to respect indigenous autonomy, and stated that no GM crops could be placed closer than 300 meters from a TFT\textsuperscript{47}. It is interesting to notice that the more successful processes are issued from ethnic based communities.\textsuperscript{48}

Following the example of México in relation to the protection of traditional corn against GM pollution, Grupo Semillas and Swissaid through the campaign Semillas de Identidad (Identity Seeds)\textsuperscript{49} started to build up an informative campaign around Colombian varieties of corn according to different regions, and their proximity to GM corn plantations.

\textsuperscript{44} The magazines Semillas and Biodiversidad are edited by Grupo Semillas.
\textsuperscript{45} Indigenous peoples from the Atlantic Coast as the Zenú in Cordoba and Sucre Departments, are said to have a “corn-based culture” and a great corn biodiversity. It is understandable that they were the firsts to adopt measures against GM corn.
\textsuperscript{46} Resguardo should be understood in English as “indigenous reservation”; autonomous territories partly ruled by the indigenous themselves (See Chapter II).
\textsuperscript{47} Even if in legal terms it is a victory for the communities, in practical terms it is useless to prevent the pollination of local varieties with GMOs considering that pollen can fly for many kilometres and pollinate.
\textsuperscript{48} As an example, see the work of Escobar (2009) in relation to afro communities of the Colombian Pacific.
\textsuperscript{49} Swissaid campaign being applied in Colombia, Nicaragua and Ecuador.
In the political ground, together with peasant organizations they have been presenting legal objections to the Constitutional Court on laws and regulations that negatively affects biodiversity and peasants’ livelihoods. They have been successful particularly regarding Law 1518 that was going to approve the UPOV 91 convention of the WTO in Colombia. But the more challenging work for seed protection has been the fostering of seed exchange networks in the country. Swissaid started to enhance existing seed exchange networks in the departments of Nariño and Caldas (see Chapter III) and is currently promoting the articulation between local networks on a regional scale.

As a way to articulate initiatives inside the country and on a continental level, they joined in 2012 the Red de Semillas Libres de America as an initiative started by Vandana Shiva to build a Latin American network. In different Latin American countries, existing networks started to build up national seed networks after the creation of RSL de America. In Colombia, Red de Semillas Libres de Colombia gathers around 80 organizations from all over the country and has been led mainly by Grupo Semillas and Swissaid. It is composed by producers’ associations, local seed exchange networks, agroecological associations, campesinos, afros and indigenous organizations. Their aim is to build a decentralized network of seeds and information exchange and to work for seed protection at different scales. However RSL is still a very centralized initiative around Grupo Semillas and Swissaid and Bogotá activists. Their main challenge is therefore main challenge is to build up bridges between the local, regional and national levels.

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50 Article 4 of Law 1032 of 2006: forbid the reuse of seeds owned by companies or those mistakable with one owned by companies.
Resolution 9.70 of ICA: in order to improve the quality and healthiness of Colombian products, it limits the commercial use of uncertified seeds declaring them illegals.
Law 1518 of 2012: approves the UPOV 91 convention of the WTO.

51 It was considered unconstitutional because it violates the rights for consultation of indigenous and afro communities. UPOV (International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants) started in 1961, was revised in 1972, 1978 and 1991. The objective of the convention is the protection of new varieties of plants by intellectual property rights. Even if at the beginning only few countries signed the convention, during the last twenty years countries controlling the seed business (mainly U.S. and Europe) put pressure on non-developed or emergent countries by conditioning the signing of free trade agreements through the adoption of UPOV. Even if most countries have signed UPOV 1978, UPOV 1991 is still rejected by many, mainly because it strengthens property protection over seeds increasing the quantity of years for the seed to be protected; it totally prohibits the reuse of protected seeds and it matches GM seeds with non-GM seeds. Basically it allows a greater control from seed producers over agricultural production processes.
3. The agrarian movement and the seed issue: reasons and limitations

In relation to alternative agriculture networks work for seed protection, it seems that the main responsibility relies on the efforts of Swissaid and Grupo Semillas. The informational strategies they have developed have positioned them as the main organizations fostering seed defence in a national ground. Nowadays, by leading the organization of RSL in Colombia, their importance is even more visible. However, even if some seed exchange networks at the local ground have been enhanced through the work of Swissaid, it definitely does not bear the responsibility on building them. Local networks fostered by the work of traditional seed custodians, agroecological organizations, universities and peasant organizations have in parallel existed for years.

The place that the seed issue has inside the agrarian movement today has to be understood as a political assertion. However, even if the emphasis varies from organization to organization, behind the rejection of seed commoditization there is a critique on private appropriation of natural resources and its effect for farmers’ autonomy. As I showed before, inside the agrarian movement there is on one side a moderate questioning of the economic model focusing on competiveness and trade by firmly opposing FTA, and on the other, a radical questioning of the development model rejecting FTAs but also claiming for the necessity to build up political, social and economic alternatives. The signing of FTAs particularly with the U.S. implies the strengthening of property laws (CEPAL, 2006). Even if ICA members have denied the relation between Resolution 9.70 and FTAs, the restrictions that it implies for farmers, together with the existing property laws (particularly Article 4 Law 1032) are evidently useful to promote and protect private interest of transnational American based seed companies as Pioneer and Monsanto.

Another reason is the focus on food sovereignty that many peasant organizations have adopted. The possibility to reproduce and reuse local seeds represents the basis to choose and control the farming process. Among peasant movements and particularly among indigenous organizations, food sovereignty as a goal implies a series of transformations that questions the territorial ordering and decision capacities of local communities in rural
Colombia. So the politically loaded concept of food sovereignty is used in order to emphasise the distance with food security approaches and to express the need for a profound change in the development model. Even if there is no much consensus among them about the actual “alternatives”, they all tend to agree on the fact that sustainable solutions are needed and corporate control over peasant’s knowledge and resources have to be stop. In parallel, peasants having experienced displacements are familiar with the importance of seeds for rebuilding their life in new settings.

However there are some features of the agrarian movement that can makes us understand the limits of the inclusion of seed defence as a main demand. First, the movement is diverse in ethnicity, classes, regional origins, ideologies, natures of the organizations and actors involved, therefore particular demands are context dependent. Second, this diversity suggest a strategic alliance to ask for common as well as particular demands; considering recent history of rural Colombia, the quest for unity is mandatory to put pressure on the government and have consistent impacts. Third, there is not necessarily agreement about the actual meaning of concepts as food sovereignty generating misunderstandings, or strategic use of the terms to fit on particular agendas.

The political discourse on the peasantry as a somehow homogeneous group is consider by some authors as a populist recourse difficult to sustain in today agrarian configurations (Bernstein, 2011; Borras, 2010). The differences between Dignidades and more radical peasant organizations is a good example of it; but also inside the latter the multiplicity of organizations have divergent opinions on how to resolve the demands of the peasantry and lower classes in general. In relation to alternative agriculture networks, we mentioned before different levels of commitment towards agroecology which reflects priorities inside organizations but also differences on how to understand strategy. Maeckelberg (2011) states that inside alter globalization movements prefiguration has become strategic, expressing a distance with the traditional left that understands strategy as a lineal path to reach “revolutionary goals”. Inside alternative agriculture networks in Colombia we observe a similar phenomenon between organizations fostering agroecology as a way to put in practice food sovereignty as a strategy in itself “here and now”, and those who promote it in their discourses but see it as an objective to achieve through systematic structural changes. The differences I could observe inside RSL between peasant
organizations and environmental NGO’s on how they understand food sovereignty and how they have deal with the seed issue shows differences due the goals that both seek as organizations.

According to a representative of Grupo Semillas, peasant leaders participating in the strike generally do not understand the root of the problem and focus their demand on the derogation of Resolution 9.70 as if everything ended there; the documentary 9.70 bares also responsibility on this: “It is a terrible mistake to think that we are going to “fix” Resolution 9.70 and the problem will be over. The documentary points it as The problem. Nevertheless, it is just the operational instrument through which the seizures are done. It directly affects farmers, but indirectly all the set of norms (property laws) do. ICA states that by adding an article the problem is over. We think that we have to go to the bottom of the problem, because this system in ten or fifteen years will destroy all local seed supply systems." This shows that the debate on property laws over seeds has not been properly incorporated by all peasant organizations, at least not in the same way that NGOs have.

On the other hand the emphasis on seeds from the environmentalist side tends to put on a second ground issues as access to land, major concern of peasant movements. According to some of RSL members, the refusal to explicitly address issues as land reform was one of the reasons why some initial participants decided to quit. A peasant leader participating in RSL explained to me that they have differences with the NGOs referring to the meaning given to food sovereignty: (...) if there is no autonomy it’s because there is no control over the means of production and production goods. Without this, there could be no productive autonomy, therefore no sovereignty, therefore no security. (...) We cannot refer to the three terms as one. That is where the differences are, that is why we are not fully integrated in the network (RSL).” This illustrates the complexity of the Colombian peasant movement.

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52 Sería un error gravísimo pensar que le vamos a hacer un arreglo a la 9.70 y se acabó el problema (...). El documental mostró que esa era el problema ...En el fondo es el instrumento operativo a través de los que hacen los decomisos. La 9.70 es el puntal de entrada al problema, directamente es el que afecta pero indirectamente son todas las normas. El ICA plantea que al ponerle solo un artículo se soluciona todo.. Nosotros pensamos que tenemos que ir más al fondo, porque al final este sistema en diez o quince años puede aniquilar con todo el sistema de semillas locales.

53 (...) sí no hay autonomía es porque no hay soberanía sobre los medios y bienes de producción. Sin esto no puede haber autonomía productiva, y sí no hay soberanía y no hay autonomía de los procesos productivos, entonces no hay seguridad. Quieren seguridad alimentaria en base a la importación de alimentos. No se
today, where different concerns are tried to be addressed altogether by a diversity of organizations. It also shows the limits of concepts as food sovereignty, being understood somehow differently according to the backgrounds and goals pursued by those who use it.

In this chapter I tried to briefly address the main concerns of the Colombian peasant movement today, understanding it as the continuation of a long struggle for radical reforms in the rural allowing an equitable land distribution together with more democratic forms of political participation; but it is also a call for economic and political alternatives to the current national and global economic system. The fight for land reform, the demands of justice for victims of violence and displacement, the critique on the agroexport development model based on FTA, the defence of seed against corporate interests… this are all demands of a diverse agrarian movement which has been able to articulate a common struggle despite ethnic, regional and unionist interests. The outcomes of this process have yet to be seen.

We discussed on how alternative agriculture networks promoting agroecology and fighting for seed defence, have been able with the leading protagonism of environmental NGO’s, to organize national informative campaigns, influence legal arenas and enhance local process of seed defence. The fact that the seed issue became one of the main demands of the peasantry, show us the importance of the quest for alternative forms of production among rural communities for reaching food sovereignty. But the differences in the understanding of the concept are rooted on the necessity to be fitted into particular political agendas. The differences between NGOs and some peasant organizations, particular unions, expresses this differences.

In the next part we will zoom into the Coffee Axis where I will show how alternative agriculture networks are working on the ground. We will explore the diversity of organizations having different degrees of commitments to agroecology and seed defence, and we will see how the context from which they issue conditions importance they give to alternative agriculture as well as their success.
Part II - The Coffee Axis
Alternative agriculture networks in the Coffee Axis can be classified according to their ethnicity (indigenous/non-indigenous) and the features of the organizations (agroecological/seed exchange networks). First, I will briefly describe the ecoregion of the Coffee Axis in relation to its historical formation, and its current economical features. It will be important to explain the features of the coffee-based peasant economies of the region and try to understand the reasons that motivated the quest for alternatives among campesino and indigenous organizations. In order to give sense of the differences between indigenous and campesinos I will emphasize on local history and resistance struggles in the indigenous-based area of Riosucio. As I will show, the cultural specificity of Riosucio’s indigenous in the Coffee Axis context will help us to understand the possibilities to build up alternative agriculture according to ethnicity in the current context of rural Colombia. In parallel I will refer to the campesino and neo-rural context participating in alternative agriculture networks. As I will explain later, the means (legal, material, cultural and historical) that indigenous communities have to support their demands compare to campesinos, and, related to that, the possibilities to assert specific territorial claims instead of delocalised demands over rights, enables a more successful building of alternative projects.

The Coffee Axis is a region located around the central string of the Colombian Andes, consisting on the departments of Caldas, Risaralda, and Quindío. Geographically it is considered as Andean rain forest with average temperatures of 19 °C. With a total combined area of 13.873 km², it represents about 1.2% of the Colombian territory. The total population was around 2.276.847 according to the last census (DANE, 2005). The indigenous population represents around the 2.8% of the total population, equivalent to 64.602 people, and the afrocolombian population around the 3.5% equivalent to 79.271 people.

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54 Also some parts of neighboring departments as Antioquia, Tolima and Valle del Cauca are considered to be part of the Coffee Axis due to their coffee production. But in this study I will consider only the three mentioned departments.
55 According to the Colombian office in charge of the census (DANE), the population for 2013 represents 2.453.091 people.
people (DANE, 2005). The rest is considered to be white and mestizos\textsuperscript{56} from paisas origins, descendants from the Antioqueño\textsuperscript{57}’s colonization of the mid-XIX century.

Image 2 – Topographic map of the Coffee Axis. Source: DANE

The region is well known because of its coffee production, and due to its geographical and ecological characteristics is considered to be the best place of the country for it. The slope coffee cultivation in volcanic soil, together with the appropriate climate makes it particularly suitable for coffee and other tropical crops. However, after the coffee crisis in the beginning of the 1990s its economic importance significantly decreased.

\textsuperscript{56}In Colombia there is a distinction between mestizos and whites based on a phenotypic features. However, I consider the non-indigenous and non-afro as being mestizos in cultural terms. Mestizo meaning a subject issued from an historical process of national identity formation, similar to other processes in Latin-America.

\textsuperscript{57}Antioquia (capital Medellin), the neighbouring department limiting with Caldas from the north. Antioqueños are also called paisas, and have a strong regional identity. People living in the Coffee Axis usually consider themselves to be paisas.
The Coffee Axis it is said to be the outcome of a process of colonization during the XIX century mainly by Antioqueños. During the Colonial period some areas of the axis were occupied by Spanish colons and part of the indigenous population was incorporated to the encomienda system, particularly for mining exploitation. The current settlements in places as Riosucio and Supía are the consequence of colonial and prehispanic mining. Local indigenous population mostly decimated after the firsts two hundred years of Spanish colonization, held communal land, or resguardos, under the authority of the Cabildo, indigenous government led by an hereditary Cacique (Appelbaum, 2003).

The official story tells us that during the XIX century, Antioqueños colonized the territory in their quest for land and guaquería (Vito, 2008) and led a process of frontier colonization that would become an epic narrative and foundational myth of the coffee region. In order to understand the process of settlement and colonization, Appelbaum (2003) states that we have to consider the inter-regional dynamics of the post-independence period as well as the quest for gaining control over “wild” and resource rich territories (post-colonial colonization). As well as in most of Latin-American countries at that time, the necessity to occupy “virgin” land was not only an economic entrepreneurship, but had also a “civilizing” mission in a context of regional and national identity formation.

The Coffee Axis was part of Cauca region in the beginning of the nineteenth century. Cauca’s elites decided therefore to incorporate the “wild” territories of the region, already partly occupied around mining enclaves as those in Riosucio and Supia, through Antioqueño colonization (Appelbaum, 2003). Cauca contrasted with the “racially homogeneous and economically developed” region of Antioquia. Cauca’s elites thought that to develop the backward country side of the region, Antioqueños could colonize and help to “bleach” the local population consisting on indigenous and afro population. With the help

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58 Today, in the modern configuration of reguardos under the 1991 Constitution, there is no Cacique but Gobernador (Governor) which is democratically elected every year.
59 Guaquería means the search for indigenous treasures, mainly golden artefacts.  
60 The work of Pinto (2000) is a good example to explore the reasons behind the colonization of southern Chile and the military occupation of Mapuche territory in the mid-XIX century. The supposed civilizing mission based on an evolutionist view of races and history among elites, tended to demonize indigenous people and sometimes defend their extermination. The internal colonization of the Coffee Axis shares roughly the same logic.  
61 The myth of the Antioqueños colonization is rooted on a racial construction of Colombian identity present in the discourse of nineteenth centuries elites (Applebaum, 2003). Antioqueños, considered to be white, hard workers and religious, were viewed by Caucas’ elite as the best option for inner colonization.
of Caucan land speculators Antioqueños started to arrive to Riosucio settling on land own communally by indigenous resguardos gaining major economic influence and positioning themselves as leading political actors. In the case of indigenous communities of Riosucio, this myth of the white colonization as a foundational event, has been constantly questioned by the assertion of indigenous rights over land and cultural difference.

I. Riosucio: a long process of indigenous resistance.

Riosucio is a municipality in the northwest of Caldas Department with more than 35,843 inhabitants (DANE, 2005) it is composed of 100 settlements (veredas), and among them four indigenous reservations (Resguardos): San Lorenzo, Escopetera y Pirsa, Nuestra Señora de La Montaña and Cañamomo y Lomaprieta. The indigenous population represents around 75% of the total population (DANE 2005). In economic terms, agricultural producers in Riosucio are peasants with small land tenure and important reliance on coffee production. Echevarría (2006) show that land property in Riosucio is based on small holdings where 42,86% have less than 1 hectare, 40,4 % between 1 and 3 hectares and 16,54 % more than 3 hectares. As in the rest of the Coffee Axis, the type of production depends on the altitude. Most plots are situated between 1200 and 1900 meters above sea level engaging in the production of coffee, sugar cane, plantains, bananas, yucca and different kind of fruits and vegetables⁶².

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⁶²While moving up from 1900 sugar cane disappears and after 2300 coffee production is not possible anymore. Below 1200 there is mostly sugar cane but no coffee.
Today, even if there has been a major mix between colons and indigenous, ethnicity is an important factor of distinction among riosuceños. The myth that gives birth to Riosucio has to do specifically with how two racially and culturally distinct groups inhabiting the same territory decided to live together. The two main settlements that preceded Riosucio were the Spanish and Afro-based mining enclave of Quiebralomo, and the indigenous settlement of La Montaña. They were in constant litigation for land and other issues. Through the intervention of Father Bonafont⁶³ they decided to move together to the area of Riosucio (literally meaning dirty river) where they founded the town in 1819. A fence separated the indigenous and the Spanish plazas (squares) until it was finally demolished around the middle of the XIX (when Antioqueños arrived). Riosucio’s

⁶³The priest of La Montaña, considered to be a moral hero of the nascent Colombian nation.
intellectuals claim that the demolition gave birth to the mestizo *raza riosuceña* (Appelbaum, 2003).

From the indigenous point of view, they were never mestizos, but indigenous struggling for regaining their lands progressive usurped by colons. Legislations during the XIXth century tended to protect or dismantle indigenous resguardos according to the political ideas of governements and pressures from land speculators. In the narratives of progress, the division of indigenous land was the condition to reach key elements for economic development and participation in national society: private property instead of communal property guaranteeing the same land regime for all Colombians together with wage labour and market oriented production instead of subsistence agriculture. Coffee, for example, was introduced in the beginning of the XXth century by an Antioqueño priest which advised indigenous to plant it together with other market oriented products to replace their self-consumption production. Planting coffee, he said, would wash their sins.

During the 1960’ and 1970’s, indigenous from Riosucio took part in the emerging Colombian peasant movement and integrated the ANUC (See Part I). But during the 1970’s there was an eruption of identities based on ethnic and environmental concerns (Escobar, 2008). Before the construction of a national indigenous movement, there was not a unity among Riosucio indigenous, but rather independent struggles issued from each resguardo (Appelbaum 2003). Particularly during the 1980’s indigenous cabildos started being rebuilt and a struggle for communal property recognition and land recovery started. In order to assert their territorial claims, cultural difference and identity needed to be reinforced.

Traditionally, the white and mestizos minority has held economic and political control of the area while possibilities of indigenous people to participate in political

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64 Appelbaum questions the innocence of indigenous leaders in relation to their loss of land. She shows how in some periods some were in favour of land division, and helped land speculators. However, that was not the general tendency, and it could be interpreted as a form of “adaptive resistance”.

65 The political Liberals in Colombia have been closer to lower classes in their struggle to assert individual human rights but the liberal discourse on private property as a basic human right had the perverse effect of indigenous land division and dispossession. In this sense, indigenous tended to be more comfortable with the conservative discourse that naturalizes the division of society in distinct groups, allowing them to have specific claims (as Law 89 form 1890). However today, those distinctions are obsolete.

66 Appelbaum (2003) gives an account on this, and during my fieldwork some interviewees referred to the relation between religion and coffee production as acculturative and disciplinary forces.

67 The origins of Riosucio’s indigenous are not clear. Some said they belong to the Embera Chamí people, but Appelbaum refuses to give a clear statement on this. She suggests that originally every *resguardo* represented the survival families of distinct tribes inhabiting the area, mostly decimated during the first years of Spanish colonization.
have been co-opted. The two traditional political parties, Liberals and Conservatives have been allied against radical peasant movements aiming to change the patterns of land tenure. The guerrillas claim to support indigenous land rights, which can explain the systematically assassination of Riosucio’s indigenous leaders during more than two decades by paramilitary forces. But leaders they have usually maintained a policy of neutrality, even if in parallel, many youngster have been reeuted by guerrillas.

Through 1991 Colombian Constitution, Riosucio’s resguardos were recognized as socio-political autonomous institutions with inalienable rights over collective land, part of the communal land has been returned, and resguardos receive state resources to invest in their own projects. But even after the territorial autonomy has been recognized, violence against indigenous leaders did not stop. During the first decade of the XXIth century, the worst assassinations occurred. In 2014 when I did my field work, the violence seemed to have cease, or at least diminished. But the history of land struggles, political persecution and assassination has taught indigenous from Riosucio to picture their everyday life as a process of resistance. However, resistance is not only related to defend their land, but also their natural resources. The environmental degradation of the Coffee Axis has been a consequence of the irresponsible expansion of the coffee frontier and the fostering of coffee monoculture under a green revolution approach. Inside the over populated resguardos of Riosucio based on familiar small-holdings, environmental degradation has been a source of impoverishment and decrease of life standards.

I observed that resistance in the current indigenous context of Riosucio, is referred nowadays not so much to land recovery (which has been partly returned during recent years), but to the protection of environment and the creation of social and economic

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68The assassinations of indigenous leaders suggest a deliberate form of co-optation. E.g. In 2003, the indigenous leader Gabriel Angel Cartagena candidate to Mayor of Riosucio, was assassinated by paramilitaries together with three of its associates while he was going to inscribe his candidature. The AUC (United Self-Defenses of Colombia) claimed nexus of the CRIDEC (Regional Indigenous Council of Caldas—composed by the Gobernadores from the Resguardos of the region) with the FARC. Appelbaum recalls the assassination of José Gilberto Molato Largo in 1988, and Maria Fabiola Largo Cano in 2000. http://www.verdadabierta.com/component/content/article/229-perfiles/1562-gabriel-angel-cartagena-gobernador-indigena-de-caldas
alternatives to current coffee-based economies. Alternative agriculture constitutes today, in the resguardos of Riosucio, the main strategy to improve life standards and *buen vivir*\(^{69}\).

The issues raised by the effects of coffee production are not to be seen only in indigenous ground, but as a structural problem affecting the peasantry of the Coffee Axis in general. Violence to repress peasant land claims, and coffee production as a form of integration to the global market through strong economic dependency and environmental degradation, could be considered as the two main challenges for indigenous and campesinos’ movements in the Coffee Axis.

II. FEDECAFE and the crisis of conventional agriculture

Coffee was introduced in the mid-nineteenth century, and due to the excellent conditions for its production particularly in the Coffee Axis, it quickly became the main Colombian export product. Compare to other products in Colombia as sugar cane and African palm, the coffee production has been historically in the hands of small tenants rather than landlords (Molano, 2013). This export-led strategy based on medium and small-scale production it is partly due to the role played by la Federación Nacional de Cafeteros\(^{70}\) (FEDECAFE). However, during the *paro cafetero* in February 2013 peasants demanded its restructuration, claiming that it does not represent their interests anymore.

FEDECAFE was born in 1927 as a union of producers in order to support coffee production in the country. Its main goal was not only to secure and expand coffee production, but also to contribute to the well-being of its associates families by leading development projects (roads and house building, subsidies, scholarships etc.). Its resources are issued from the National Coffee Fond collected from a quasi-fiscal tax that fluctuated with the world prices and is currently assessed at a maximum of 6 cents per dollar per pound of green coffee exported (Forero, 2010b).

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\(^{69}\) Concept derived from the Andean worldview meaning to satisfy needs in equilibrium with Nature (Pachamama).

\(^{70}\) National Federation of Coffee Producers.
Its development strategy is based on a strict Green Revolution model characterized by the following elements: intensive coffee monoculture, technological packages (improved seeds and agrochemical inputs) and credits. The main critics against it relates to the lack of democratic representation of its members and to environmental degradation as a consequence of its development strategy. In every municipality they are represented by the Committee of Coffee Producers, an office that organizes the services offered by FEDECAFE at local level.

In the beginning of the 1990´s a coffee crisis started which has progressively decreased Colombia´s leading role as coffee exporter. The de-regulation of the coffee prices on the global market due to the abandonment of the International Coffee Agreement in 1989, together with the shift from a protectionist to an a economic liberal model, are the direct causes of the coffee production crisis. The total land for coffee production in the country has decreased in about 200,000 hectares from 1990 to 2008 (Forero, 2010).

The contribution made family-based producers upon national coffee production is very significant. Around 78% of coffee producers are family-based producers representing 55% of total coffee production; 50% of them possess less than one hectare of land and 80% less than 5 hectares (Forero, 2010). The coffee crisis forced many large producers to abandon coffee production, increasing the rate of family producers. Today even if the importance of coffee as an income generator is undeniable, producers have diversified their production for self-consumption or the market.

In order to understand the rise of alternative agriculture in the Coffee Axis today, it is important to analyse the impact of coffee production and particularly the role played by FEDECAFE in shaping peasants livelihoods. In my fieldwork, I realized that many peasants currently engaging on alternative agriculture had a sort of trauma due to the dynamics of dependency and environmental degradation that FEDECAFE´s model was fostering.

Peasants adopted coffee monoculture through FEDECAFE for the development possibilities it offered. The model proposed consisted on focusing primarily on coffee to sell in the market and leave behind traditional farming based on a diversified production for self-consumption. This market-oriented model implied that producers should not grow anything else but coffee, because the more coffee they grew, more money they will have
and therefore could afford to buy whatever they needed for family consumption instead of producing it in-farm.

Senior producers in Riosucio remember when around 1965 FEDECAFE started offering inputs and credits to foster coffee monoculture. Most peasants accepted the offer and realized that even if in the beginning it looked like they were earning money, they quickly realized they did not earned as much as FEDECAFE told them.

“I will never forget when they say that, because it was a mortal sin what they did to us... To end up with the grim, because before in the elders’ farms, there was grim, there was the old Arabica coffee which was very resistant and many other crops also. But FEDECAFE gathered us and told us this: “with 1 hectare you can have 10.000 coffee trees, every tree gives one kilo each, that coffee costs a certain amount of money... so if you don’t do that you will only loose. You are poor because you want it.””

Technical and economic support to coffee producers was offered by the federation, but instructions from federation’s technicians had to be followed in order to get the technological packages and therefore credits. Those credits are binding not only because of the debt they generate, but also because one condition to get the credits was to follow as much as possible the farming instructions imposed by FEDECAFE. This model implied the establishment of strong dependency over technological packages offered by the federation and over banks through debts.

After the firsts harvests, we didn’t know what to do with all that coffee, there was coffee everywhere and the yields were huge. We earned a lot, but we had to give back to pay the inputs and the interests. The rest was for buying beans, corn, plantains... because we only had coffee.\footnote{Entonces eso las primeras cosechas no teníamos donde echar el café, era café por todas partes y la producción era hartoísima. Se ganaba pero teníamos que devolver muchas para pagar los abonos, intereses...El resto teníamos que comprar el frijol, maíz, plátano... porque no teníamos sino café nada más.}

After coffee monoculture was incorporated, soon some producers realized that the promises of the federation were misleading. They realized that with the money coming from great
yields of coffee, most of it was going back to the federation in order to pay the inputs and the interests, and the rest was used to buy the food they could not produce anymore. Others realized that after having replaced their previous crops with coffee and started to apply inputs, they had negative results due to an inappropriate use of them.

I had a hectare and a half downhill and I planted 15,000 coffee trees. When the coffee tree was loaded the field collapse and almost half of it was gone. Imagine the loss... Caturro Coffee did not have enough roots. I came back yelling at them... they did not low down my debt, but they gave me more time to pay it. Many of us were punished the same way.

These events worked as a trauma for many peasants all around the Coffee Axis. Many of them started working in agroecological organizations, or have strengthened subsistence production in order to face the uncertainties of the coffee market. The agricultural strategy fostered by FEDECAFE has permitted great yields among producers besides the crisis that have affected Colombian coffee production during the last 20 years. Forero (2010) states that the Green Revolution was successful among small-scale coffee producers\textsuperscript{72} because a medium intensity technological shift was introduced allowing a selective introduction of new technologies rapidly incorporated in their resource base (as fertilizers and pesticides) but keeping local seeds instead of adopting improved varieties.

But the main impact of this model was socio-environmental due to a progressive loss of in-farm and off-farm biodiversity. As the coffee frontier was growing, the natural landscapes had to be adapted for the coffee production, which meant basically to get rid of rainforests. At the same time, while producers were focusing only in coffee, they started to abandon agricultural practices oriented to other crops as beans, corn, yucca and different kinds of tubers and fruits for self-consumption.

The impact on environment as well as the dependency logic introduced by FEDECAFE was the basis for expressions of resistance. Agricultural practices and biodiversity were not lost mainly because some producers, even against FEDECAFE advices, kept on cultivating \textit{pan coger}\textsuperscript{73}. On the other hand, \textit{seed custodians}, used to save

\textsuperscript{72}According to Forero (2010) 78\% of coffee production in Colombia comes from peasant agriculture.

\textsuperscript{73}Everyday food production.
and exchange them or give to other members of the community, never totally disappeared from the region, nor did the custom among many peasants to save seeds inherited from their predecessors. In Riosucio, where coffee was introduced as a way of “civilizing” the indigenous, to oppose FEDECAFE’s policies became a form of cultural assertion.

III. Entering the Coffee Axis

In my meeting with Red de Semillas Libres (RSL) I met an important campesino leader from Acción Campesina Colombiana, a federation of campesinos organizations being represented in many departments around the country. He putted me in contact with the ADUC-Caldas (Asociación de Usuarios Campesinos de Caldas) the departmental campesinos association of Caldas department. I also knew from Swissaid, that in Riosucio indigenous resguardos where leading very interesting process of GM resistance, agroecological farming and seed exchange networks. Therefore I had two doors to enter the Coffee Axis, both related with alternative agriculture and interestingly both working separately having indirect connections through some of its members and at different scales (regional and national).

I arrived to Manizales, capital of Caldas, and met a representative of ADUC-Caldas who took me around the department to show me the work they were doing and introduce me to those working on seed conservation. We visited the municipalities of Risaralda, Anserma, Riosucio and Supía. He was holding meetings in different municipalities, with the idea to inform the members about the latest events of the peasant strike, on how the negotiations with the government were going and what the next steps to go through were. Sometimes the issue of reparation toward victims of violence was the important topic, sometimes they were discussing about seeds, GMO’s and 9.70 Resolution, sometimes they were talking about the next parliamentary elections and for whom they should vote or not according to their propositions etc. I realized that the reasons why ACC participates in RSL are more complex than just environmental care, biodiversity or cultural knowledge loss. So it was interesting for me to get to know from the insight an organization as ADUC-Caldas,

74Do not confuse with Risaralda Department.
who was basically a peasant union, which had an important concern over the defence of seeds, but framing it in different ways compare to NGO’s as Grupo Semillas and Swissaid. I told him I was interested in going to Riosucio, because I had heard in Bogotá that there indigenous peasants were leading interesting processes in alternative agriculture. Of course he knew about them and suggest me to stay over there and find out what was going on by myself. His organization, while having representation among Riosucio’s campesinos, did not have projects involving indigenous organizations, not even in relation related to seeds. Processes of seed conservation where led in Riosucio by indigenous, while they were supporting other processes all over the department.

So basically Riosucio was supposed to be an interesting place for me according to the campesinos organization and according to Swissaid. Thanks to ADUC-Caldas and AMUC Riosucio, the Municipal Association of Campesinos de Riosucio, I could stay in the Casa Campesina which became my operation centre in the area. I have to specify that in Riosucio my focus was on indigenous alternative agriculture networks, because campesinos networks were not really significant in the area.

The Casa Campesina was situated in the Plaza de la Candelaria (the old indigenous square, see Chapter II). It was an old building who belonged to the campesinos’ organization since the 1970’ and had been divided in parts and sublet to other organizations as the CRIDEC and ASPROINCA (Asociación de Productores Indígenas y Campesinos). So I started to work with indigenous organizations as while staying in the Casa Campesina. I was in the middle of a relationship between indigenous and campesinos that with was not without tension, even if they did not seem to be having important issues between them right now.

75 These campesinos organizations are basically peasant unions, which mean that what brings them together is their quality of peasant understood as a labor category or class. In this sense, ethnicity is on a secondary place. Even if in campesinos organizations its members are usually from mestizo origins, in the case of Riosucio where a majority of the population declares to be indigenous, the AMUC of Riosucio even if it had a prevalence of campesino members also included indigenous producers.
76 It is a house to give shelter to campesinos coming to Riosucio from the country side.
77 AMUC of Riosucio did not have as a priority the promotion of alternative agriculture. It focused mainly in supporting displaced organizations (Asociación de Desplazados y Victimas de Riosucio), discussion and participation in wider peasant struggles, and fostering agricultural development among its associates by helping them to have access to municipal or departmental funds.
78 See note 15 in this chapter.
79 To be explained in Part III
I was coming back once a week to Manizales to meet people from ADUC-Caldas, and later on I would stay few weeks out while going to Pereira in Risaralda, around Quindío or back to Bogotá. My fieldwork was therefore a constant movement around three departments, meeting seed exchange organizations, peasant unions, agroecological producers’ organizations, both campesino and indigenous-based.

The idea to include both perspectives seemed pretentious in the beginning, until I realized that the building up of regional and national networks for local seeds protection and conservation in a current context of a national peasant movement, was suggesting me that interethnic relations should be considered and/or a perspective going beyond ethnic divisions should be adopted. Including different perspectives would enrich my understanding of the whole issue. Moreover, the task was eased by the fact that the Coffee Axis does not have an large indigenous population and that locate mostly in the north-west of Caldas.

In this chapter I tried to give a sense of the historical context of the Coffee Axis, and particularly Riosucio. I wanted to show the impact of coffee production in its economic and cultural sense. The division and occupation of indigenous land and the fostering of coffee can be analyzed separately as two distinct phenomena. The data, however, suggests a strong connection between them if we consider the ideological justification behind them. The idea was basically to erase their indigenous “distinctiveness” expressed mainly in subsistence agriculture and communal land property, and to fit them into the cultural project of modernity based on private property and market oriented production: the fostering of coffee production was therefore the best way to do it.
Part III - Resistance among indigenous and campesinos alternative agriculture organizations
In this section I will show how localized struggles aiming to defend local seeds are issued from peasant unions, agroecological producer’s associations and indigenous organizations, but enhanced through the support of NGO’s and universities. The struggle is particularly connected with the defence of agroecology as a viable form of alternative agriculture, a concern of diverse organizations having specific and sometimes exclusive claims, but connecting through the seed. The fight for Seeds, beyond its politic-economic implications for food sovereignty and peasant autonomy is therefore implicitly a fight for freedom and life, understood as features of Nature itself.

Agroecological organizations and the seed exchange networks that supports them, aims to deepens farmer autonomy on the household level through changing the relations with the Nature and with Others. Independently of the ideological background of the organizations (left-wing union, indigenous world vision, environmentalist, neo-campesinismo etc.) there is a way of framing their struggles in common terms. There is a rejection of a development model that is implying a particular relation with Nature and a particular understanding of Society. Nature as resources, as the material over there which can be owned and mastered for particular interests; and Society as the conflicting and hazardous relations among socially and culturally stratified individuals. Instead, alternative agriculture networks seems to be suggesting a systemic understanding of nature based on equilibrium, where every element depend with each other guaranteeing a natural order from which we can naturally not escape. Society is not ontologically different from any other form of natural ordering and therefore we should learn how to live in Nature in order to know how to live in Society. This led to networked forms of organizations as opposed to pyramidal, decentralization as opposed to centralization (Escobar, 2008). The autonomy of elements is reinforced to stress interdependence dynamics (not dependency, which works only one way). The household, the community and the territory need levels of autonomy (economical and social) to be able to develop and improve, but it can only be reached through maintaining equilibrium with a natural order.

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80 Universities themselves are not officially supporting agroecology or seed exchange networks, but some academics, functionaries and students are.
The building up of regional and national seed exchange networks fostered by NGOs like Swissaid consist on bringing together independent initiatives of seed conservation. I suggest that the success of those initiatives is very much conditioned by the presence or absence of institutional conditions. Those conditions depend on national legislations, as well as financing possibilities, which are unevenly distributed among the peasant movement. Besides those inequalities, the tendency seems to be a rebuilding of a peasant movement that leaves behind distinctions based on ethnicity or trade unions to think itself as a class-based movement demanding possibilities to assert rights at local level.

Alternative agriculture organizations in the Coffee Axis have to be pictured as heterogeneous initiatives aiming to foster economic, social and cultural transformations. Greater territorial control allows greater capacities to influence and shape local policies, and therefore organizations with lesser territorial scope are more likely to have tangible results. But capacity for territorial assertion is also determined by national legislations and international conventions which give rights and benefits to particular groups inside the peasantry as indigenous and afro communities. Therefore alternative agriculture networks in the current context of rural Colombia have to be analysed considering the ethnic variable, which conditions the scope and the political struggles behind organizations.

I will first introduce the indigenous and campesino organizations engaging in alternative agriculture in the Coffee Axis, and give sense of the network showing how they relate with each other and also what separates them. The idea will be to build an image of the network. Afterwords I will show the work of those organizations and its outcomes in campesino and indigenous grounds.

I. Alternative agriculture organizations in the Coffee Axis

In this section I will present the organizations I worked with according to their ethnic adscription. Even if inside those organizations we found members from different social backgrounds that could be classifieds in other terms of class or ideology, I realized that the most important distinction was ethnicity. However the organizations are not representing all
the actors involved. Some initiatives are not well integrated in networks or are just starting their work, so their participation was not really important in the regional dynamics. Therefore this network considers the most influential organizations in a regional and national level working with the a certain degree of institutional support (NGOs, universities, unions, resguardos etc.) and being more successful in pushing their goals and aspiration beyond their own local context.

1. Campesinos and neo-rural organizations

To be campesino is to be a rural worker with no ethnic adscription. In principle, a campesino is a mestizo having probably a strong regional identity (as it is often the case in Colombia) but with no specific rights over the territories in which he settles. His rights over land for example, are guarantees by the same property regime as any other Colombian. Being the land issue central to any peasant movement, and due to the weak land distribution that characterizes the country, campesinos struggle mainly for land reform and to assert territorial rights that could enable the fostering of development according to their own interests (e.g. prohibiting the entrance of investments that could endanger their livelihoods).

The situation of campesinos organizations in the Coffee Ax is determined by the following elements:
- Campesinos, are not recognized legally as a group having particular as indigenous and afrocolombians do. The word campesino does not appear in the Constitution. For this reason, they lack from the legal and institutional tools to assert sovereignty in specific territories.
- Identity is class-based (the peasantry) and/or union-based (the coffee or sugar cane producers). Identity also relates to regional identities as the paisas (Antioquia descendents), but it does not ethnicize organizations. In the contrary it is based more on the unity of their class than in the differences of their origins. Land reform, recognition of territoriality,

81It is interesting to notice that in Riosucio some indigenous peasants were participating in campesinos organizations rather than indigenous ones.
human right respect, agriculture subsidies etc. are claims for the recognition of particular rights.

Because I focused on alternative agriculture in campesinos’ ground, methodologically I could not apply the same strategy as among indigenous organizations. Spatially campesinos’ organizations encompasses different territories at different scales, much easier than indigenous one which by claiming their particular identity and specific rights over certain territories, tend to scale up with much more difficulty. So the space of action of campesinos in the Coffee Axis, is basically the entire region (the three departments) except the resguardo lands of indigenous communities.

I identified two types of networks addressing alternative agriculture in different ways and intensity: the campesinos organizations in Caldas Department (ADUC-Caldas)\(^82\), and the agroecological and seed exchange networks in Risaralda and Quindío (Red de Custodios de Semillas de Risaralda, Red de Familias Custodias de Semillas del Quindío and Corporación Agroecologica de Risaralda)\(^83\). Both types are connected through some of their members who participate in both of them at the same time, helping to create a network gathering organizations with different ultimate scopes. The emphasis given to alternative agriculture in each organization tells us about how the defence of seeds and the agroecological proposal are being addressed at different scales (local, regional, national) among campesinos organizations.

\textit{a. ADUC-Caldas (ACC)}

Asociación Departamental de Usuarios Campesinos de Caldas (ADUC-Caldas) is a departmental campesino organization who aims to represent Caldas’ peasantry, understood as small-scale family-based agricultural producers. It represents 23 municipal organizations (AMUCs), and takes part in Acción Colombiana Campesina (ACC). It is basically a peasant union defending the interests of the peasantry giving its members the possibilities for

\(^{82}\)Risaralda and Quindío had also their own campesino organizations, and I contacted some of their members through ADUC-Caldas. There are not fixed boundaries among them. Campesinos I interviewed in Risaralda for example, where participating in meetings of ADUC-Caldas more actively than in their local organizations. This is explained by the fact that ADUC-Caldas is the departmental organization in the Coffee Axis who has been working more seriously in alternative agriculture.

\(^{83}\)Some participants ADUC-Caldas
economic improvement and political participation through information, training and education. They therefore aim to represent Caldas’ campesinos in regional and national political mobilizations, and to influence social and economic policy-making at municipal and departmental levels.

ADUC-Caldas works mainly with campesinos rather than indigenous or afro peasants, because ethnic based groups have their own channels of representation. ADUC-Caldas uses both conceptions of campesino, understanding it as a sub class inside the working class, which in practice means that their members are defined firstly by their place in the class struggle; and campesino as rural mestizos, a culturally distinctive group inside the peasantry and the most important in numbers and territory control. Basically the class discourse which gave birth to campesino organizations in the 1970’ is still use in a political context were ethnic identities are recognized and have their own interests, political projects and possibilities to assert them.

In the social ground ADUC-Caldas is committed to the defence of human rights inside communities and to warranty the possibility for democratic political participation. Therefore they support municipal associations of victims of the armed conflict (Asociaciones de Víctimas) and negotiate with authorities forms of reparation. They have been actively participating in the coffee producers’s strike (paro cafetero) and in the national peasant strike through ACC-CGT taking part in the MUA.84

In the economic ground they advocate for a development that puts the peasantry at the center. They struggle for the improvement of campesinos’ conditions demanding greater support from the state. The association have also units to support its members in three different areas: technical support, entrepreneurial development and training on agroecology and tourism. The emphasis on developing sustainable forms of agriculture through agroecological farming and the defence of local seeds is clearly the most prevalent element of the association’s discourse.

ADUC-Caldas has adopted agroecology as a way to foster food sovereignty and assert a political position. During the last two years they have led trainings on topics as food sovereignty, local seeds, local democracy and organic agriculture. Some years ago, the association had fostered an agroecological school headed at the Botanic Garden of Calda’s

84 See Part I Note 10
University. The school was a place for training on agroecological farming but it also became a space for debate and raising political awareness among young people. It was finally shut down in 2008 due to persecution to ADUC-Caldas’ leaders during Uribe’s government. Now the agroecological unity of ADUC-Caldas has demonstration farms and education programs for leaders in different localities in collaboration with the Botanic Garden.

The goal is to promote self-provisioning among households so they can “step into the market with a full belly”, and have greater negotiation capacity. The idea is that peasant families could reach certain degrees of autonomy and improve the quality of their food. The surplus of the production is meant to be sold in peasant or agroecological markets as those organized by Caldas’ University. But even if they promote agroecology they do not go against conventional agriculture understanding that most of producers are depending from it. The conditions for Caldas’ peasantry to promote and support agroecological farming are not yet there. Therefore, they do not radically market oriented coffee production or FEDECAFE, but just give the necessary tools to its associates to improve their autonomy.

So the concerns of ADUC-Caldas are economic, political, environmental and nutritional, but the context does not allow the establishment of agroecology as a major economic strategy. Due to the development model of coffee monoculture, peasants are used to produce under the guidance of FEDECAFE, which is the only organization which gives credits. Market oriented production and consumption is the prevailing strategy among Coffee Axis’ campesinos. Acknowledging this, ADUC-Caldas struggle with authorities to ask for subsidies to coffee production, while at the same time puts all its energy on strengthening food sovereignty through agroecological farming based on a radical critique of capitalism and its dependency logics. But is this a contradiction or a logical strategy according to the particular context? What are the differences between this position and the one held, for example, by indigenous resguardos? We will discuss this latter, but just to say that different territorial dispositions between the organizations have to be considered as key elements for the understanding of these differences.
b. Seed exchange networks: Red de Custodios de Semillas de Risaralda and Red de Familias Custodias de Semilla del Quindío

Inside seed exchange networks in Risaralda and Quindío, we find a diversity of members issued from different grounds. Most of its members, particularly in Risaralda’s network, are campesinos practicing traditional agriculture as customary practice. We find also members of the university world (academics, students and functionaries), environmental activists, handcrafters, agroecological and organic producers etc. Networks were born as a necessity in order to sustain and enhance agroecological projects already existing in the region, as the Escuelas Campesinas de Agroecología (ECA) and Corporación Agroecologica de Risaralda (CORA). This diversity which is not present among campesinos unions, makes me refer to them as neo-rural-based organizations; many of its main participants are not issued from the peasant world, but are rather building up a peasant way of life according to their political position or lifestyle.

Seed custodians issued from the campesino ground perform seed conservation practices as a customary practice. As it is the case in general with seed custodians, their bond with seeds is strongly emotional. Because some of them had suffered displacement, the recovery and conservation of seeds has become a way to rebuild their lives in new locations. In the campesino context, the participation in organizations tends to serve as platforms enabling to improve their social and economic conditions. As Barrera (2012) points out, most of Risaralda’s custodians participates simultaneously in other organizations where they may have been motivated to establish themselves officially as custodians. Some participated actively in ADUC-Caldas for example.

In the case of neo-rural custodians, we refer to people who left the city to live in the country side. This is a growing tendency in Colombia as in many other places (Van der Ploeg, 2008). In the Coffee Axis, however, particularly in Quindío, the rural and the urban are not clearly demarcated, which means that the bond with the country side is always been strong among urban dwellers. But members of these networks told me that, particularly in

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85 Agroecological peasant schools
86 Risaralda’s Agroecological Corporation.
the last three years, more and more people are approaching them in order to take part in the process, which tells us a lot on how the neo-rural phenomenon is becoming increasingly important.

Neo-rurals working in the network have a strong political commitment, and they are strongly devoted to find ways to live with nature as much harmonious as possible. Their idea is to re-think nature-society relations through a better understanding of its dynamics of complementation. Even if this perspective tends sometimes to reify traditional rural societies, it asserts a construction of the present through rediscovering and assessing campesino and indigenous heritage while promoting more horizontal forms of organizations at households and community level. The idea of the network is consciously putted in practice, aiming to experience new forms of organization which are not based on hierarchical structures. But the seed exchange network is in its starting phase and its outcomes are modest. Most of its members do not live from farming but practice agroecology or save seeds as a way to partly self-supply their households. In these networks we find also “the institutional custodian”, a custodian working for governmental institutions (Municipalities, UTP, CARDER\textsuperscript{87} etc.) who stimulates the development of seed networks serving as a broker between rural communities and specific institutions. This custodian is key for campesinos networks, allowing its representation and support at higher institutional instances. The close link between RCS de Risaralda, UTP and CARDER is an example of how institutional custodians can play a key role in getting institutional support. It tells us that networks are actually made by people inside institutions rather than by institutions themselves, and their success is therefore strongly conditioned by social skills, motivations and previous networks of individual members.

c. Universidad Technologica de Pereira (UTP) and Universidad de Caldas (UC) stimulating seed exchange networks?

Inside the Coffee Axis relations among organizations, institutions and people are not limited by departments; social relations are based on a regional ground more than a

\textsuperscript{87}Corporación Autonoma Regional de Risaralda (CARDER), is the institution in charge of planning and implementing environmental policies inside the department. One of its representatives is actively participating in Risaralda’s network.
departmental ground. Quindío and Risaralda’s networks work independently but are very much connected, and Caldas’s campesinos organizations include members from Risaralda and Quindío.

The networks of Quindío and Risaralda work separately organizing their own peasant markets and their own ways of organizing exchange and conservation. But key actors in promoting those network have been some academics and functionaries working at the Faculty of Environmental Sciences at UTP and the Botanic Garden of UC.

The establishment of an agroecological gardens inside universities has allowed the interaction between academic and the peasant worlds, working also as a space for exchange and production of knowledge related to biodiversity conservation. In parallel the agroecological market which started in 2010 in UTP taking place once a month inside the university, and the national event called Ecovida in UC every two years together with monthly agroecological markets, have allowed the promotion of alternative agriculture and peasant markets. Both initiatives are thought as educative initiatives for university students, and extension activities of the university.

Another important contribution to the building up of seed exchange networks, was the course on Seed Custodians organized by the UTP in 2013, gathering people from Quindío and Risaralda’s networks. The course was meant to strengthen among custodians their technical knowledge about seed conservation and plant uses, but also about the legal situation of seeds in the present context (UPOV 91, Resolution 9.70.). This have to be seen as a strategy among some network members working in the university ground, to improve their networks in technical and educative terms in order to be prepared to resist the current institutional and economic context.
2. Indigenous organizations in Riosucio

a. ASPROINCA

The Asociación de Productores Indígenas y Campesinos\textsuperscript{88} ASPROINCA work with around 350 families in the Municipalities of Riosucio, Supía and Quinchía. Most of the affiliates are indigenous, but also campesinos’ families\textsuperscript{89}. It was born as an association external to the resguardos and the municipalities, aiming to give tools to families so they can self-manage and sustain themselves in the context of the coffee crisis in the beginning of the 1990s’. It is said to be the first indigenous’ based producers’ association in Riosucio. Today, we find ASPROINCA working side by side with municipality and the resguardos, implementing local policies related to resources conservation, economic development and promoting traditional culture through peasant markets and regular seed exchange events.

Originally ASPROINCA was the initiative of a priest\textsuperscript{90} from Pereira who started working with panela\textsuperscript{91} producers in the resguardo of San Lorenzo. The objective was to develop poorest families’ economies that did not have access to credits offered by FEDECAFE. But soon it became clear that in order to reach major environmental and economic sustainability they had to start developing alternatives to coffee production, considering the coffee crisis in the beginning of the 1990s. With the support of Swissaid they started building up a system of self-manage credits, named fondo rotatorio (rotating fund) aiming to give loans with very low interest rates for developing producers’ resource base by-passing banks and the Committee of Coffee producers. The economic crisis and its impact among local economies characterized by smallholding land tenure, the environmental degradation as a consequence of decades of expansion of coffee monocultures, and a new wave of ideas to implement sustainable forms of agricultural

\textsuperscript{88}Indigenous and Campesinos Producers’ Association

\textsuperscript{89}In my study I only considered indigenous in ASPROINCA, but not campesinos. Even if there is representation of Campesinos in Supía and Quinchía, they are not as important in numbers and in the organization as indigenous.

\textsuperscript{90}Some catholic priests and nuns inspired by the Church’s Social Doctrine and Liberation Theology have been fostering producers organizations around Colombia, and have interesting works outside NGOs and peasant organizations to promote seed conservation and agroecology. E.g. Sisters of Saint John the Evangelist in Manizales. See http://granja-sanjose.blogspot.nl/

\textsuperscript{91}Unrefined whole sugar cane. It is one of the main elements of Colombian diet.
development\textsuperscript{92} played a key role in shifting the emphasis of the organization. The project had to go beyond a conventional approach to agriculture and started to promote a conversion to agroecological farming. But even if some ASPROINCA producers are fully organic producers, the organization does not reject the use of inputs among their members. Instead they promote an ecological perspective based on progressively reducing inputs, while promoting a farming perspective based on soil conservation, farm multi-functionality through crop and animal diversification and energy recycling through compost and alternative sources of energy (solar, biodigester\textsuperscript{93} etc.).

ASPROINCA has contributed importantly to environmental conservation and economic development involving family and community in resources and farming management (Corrales & Forero, 2007). Even if most of Riosucio’s peasants are not directly part of ASPROINCA, some resguardos’, departmental or municipal projects are implemented by them involving greater number of families not directly part of the organization\textsuperscript{94}. One of the conditions for its success seems to be the support the organization had from the resguardos, particularly of Cañamomo y Lomaprieta and San Lorenzo. An initial support from Swissaid helped to start the initiative, but it stopped in the year 2000 after the NGO realized they did not need it anymore. Some cabildo members who were also part of the organization realized that the resguardos should promote elements of ASPROINCA as the care for environment and food sovereignty. Today the mentioned resguardos have placed those concerns in the centre of their policies.

So the creation of ASPROINCA and his shift towards agroecology were a response to the environmental and economic conditions in the Coffee Axis in the beginning of the 1990’s. Its permanence through time is mainly due to his success in improving economic and environmental conditions and therefore having influenced the policies of local authorities. The support from local authorities in Riosucio is key for the success not only of ASPROINCA, but also of seed exchange networks. Later we will see how the fostering of

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{92}According to Corrales and Forero (2007) the Colombian NGO CIPAV promoted alternative agriculture as a way to overcome the coffee crisis.
\textsuperscript{93}A system based on anaerobic digestion that pipes gas coming from animal and vegetal waste in order to use it for domestic use.
\textsuperscript{94}An example is the communitarian watershed management in the community of Lomitas in San Lorenzo involving around 60 families for the cleaning, protection and conservation of water sources.
\end{footnotesize}
an indigenous identity by the resguardo’s authorities is rooted in theory and practice on agroecology.

b. Red de Custodios de Semillas de Riosucio

As a traditional farming practice, and as a form of cultural conservation and resistance, seed custodians have saved seeds continuously for generations. In the resguardos of Riosucio, it is usual to find varieties of corn and bean that have disappeared from other areas, but are still being produced for consumption in few family farms. As we already discussed, one of the main reasons for the loss of seed biodiversity was the adoption of a coffee monoculture strategy fostered by FEDECAFE. In Riosucio among indigenous organizations the issue of seed in general (its loss, its progressive privatization, its “pollution” by GMOs etc.) started to be taken seriously and became an object of concern.

The work of ASPROINCA was influencing the way in which authorities in the resguardos were addressing issues of territory and culture. Considering that the Colombian Constitution of 1991 gave to indigenous communities a greater possibility to conceptualize and implement development strategies according to their own views and objectives, agroecology and environmental concerns started to become a framework under which territory, political-economic autonomy and cultural resistance acquired new meaning.

The problem of seed loss and privatization has been addressed by ASPROINCA and consciousness was raised; but they did not establish it as the central issue around their work nor were they strict about using only local seeds. But environmental NGOs started to campaign more and more around protecting seeds particularly after GM seeds were introduced. In this context, Swissaid decided to focus in making visible the figure of the seed custodian, as a way to show the cultural importance of their work, as well as his relevance in the current environmental situation.

The first step towards local seed protection was the declaration of Riosucio as a Transgenic-Free Territory (TFT) in 2006. This meant that the municipality and the resguardos would not deliver GM seeds to producers, and their introduction by any other means is forbidden. So in order to establish a local source of seeds to supply the internal demand, it was necessary to count on a local network of seed custodians in charge of
conserving, multiplying and exchanging (through barter or selling) local seeds. Among the four resguardos, only two of them (Cañamomo y Lomaprieta, and San Lorenzo) adopted the protection of seeds as part of their internal policy, but only one (Cañamomo y Lomaprieta) started to support the building of a local seed network: the Red de Custodios de Semillas de Cañamomo y Lomaprieta. I name that network Red de Custodios de Semillas de Riosucio, because when I did my study, even if the network was mainly supported by Cañamomo y Lomaprieta’s cabildo, its members were also part of other resguardos.

Officially constituted by around thirty members among which we find custodians and cosecheros (harvesters)\(^95\), the network centres its work around the following seed-related activities: identification and classification (on botanical features and cultural uses); production and multiplication; exchange and commercialization; in-farm and off-farm conservation (construction of seed houses). The support they have from Swissaid, the resguardo, and lately from the municipal government, allows the network to keep functioning even if they do not have yet sufficient yields that can bring them enough revenues to significantly contribute to their own households\(^96\).

I just described the indigenous and campesino organizations I worked with in the Coffee Axis. Among campesinos the departmental peasant union ADUC-Caldas is encouraging seed custodians to keep on conserving and exchanging seeds while promoting agroecological farming directed toward strengthening peasants’ autonomy. The campesino and neo-rural seed exchange networks from Quindio and Risaralda, very much connected with each other through the work of university members, are also indirectly connected to ADUC-Caldas through some of its members participating in both organizations. In the case of indigenous, we referred to ASPROINCA an organization working to support peasant economies through including elements from agroecological farming to face the coffee crisis and environmental degradation. ASPROINCA’s example has influenced local authorities

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\(^95\)Persons in charge of sowing and harvesting certain seeds predefined by the organization. They perform a more technical job helping the custodians to reproduce seeds in a later scale. Considering that the land is scarce in Riosucio, to count on cosecheros is key for the performance of the network.

\(^96\)We will discuss this issue later. But it is necessary to say that the economic viability of these initiatives is key for their future success. Peasants cannot allow themselves to voluntarily venture (at least not for long) in farm-related projects that will not have a concrete retribution, if they have not secured their own family needs.
and today resguardos’ and municipal policies are directed towards fostering communitarian management of natural resources. This is particularly clear looking at the support resguardos are giving to seed exchange networks as Red de Custodis de Semilla de Riosucio. The conceptual map of the networks try to picture the relations between organizations and institutions:

Image 4 Alternative Agriculture Networks in the Coffee Axis (preliminary map)

In this map strong relations of cooperation, support or mutual dependence are represented by clearly defined lines, while less strong, unclear or partial connections are represented by discontinuous lines. Red de Semillas Libres being an initiative trying to put together the diversity of alternative agriculture organizations in a national level has to be thought more as an idea or a goal than a actual organization. We can observe that in the indigenous’ side, there are more strong links than in the campesinos’ side, more institutions supporting seed exchange networks and local authorities engaged supporting alternative agriculture. In the campesinos’ side however apart from the logistic support of universities (which in also directed to indigenous organizations) there is only in the case of Risaralda, a good understanding with CARDER which materializes in limited forms of support.
However, there are many connections between organizations through members working in parallel in more than one.

In the net part I will refer to the strategies of fostered by the organizations. We could roughly analysing its implications for peasant economies, local communities and the building of regional alternative agriculture networks as a form of resistance.

II. Seeds conservation, reproduction and exchange: political and economic resistance strategies of peasant organizations in the Coffee Axis

In the Coffee Axis the concern over seeds has been growing during the last decade among campesino and indigenous organizations. However in the current context we are observing greater capacity of these networks to coordinate and start a process of network expansion. I will explain which are the main strategies of alternative agriculture networks in the Coffee Axis and show how the struggle is incorporated among organizations as a way to assert sovereignty (food, political, economic and cultural sovereignty) having different outcomes according to the institutional context in which they set.

The work of the organizations to foster alternative agriculture can be briefly described as *fortalecimiento de lo local* (strengthening the local) and development *through* networks. In practice this is expressed in the strengthening of local economies (household, community and territory) and local organizations and developing connection and dynamics of interdependence with others (households, communities and territories). How this model of organization is putted in practiced by agroecological organizations and seed exchange networks?

1. The strengthening of local economies

   a. Agroecological household production: process of re-peasantization through re-skilling and in-farm family work
As we discussed in Part II, the radical adoption of FEDECAFE technological packages generated among some peasants a trauma that push many to keep traditional farming or to look for alternatives. The work that organizations like ASPROINCA did on promoting agroecology and the success it had on converting producers from conventional to agroecological, shows us that there are clear economic benefits for the peasants in adopting agroecology. In parallel, peasant unions as ADUC-Caldas is telling its members the advantages of agroecology for reaching food sovereignty, and foster its application at least for family production. According to the producers and organization representatives, apart from economics, there are also environmental, social and cultural benefits.

It is said that knowledge required for agroecology comes partly from traditional farming knowledge, which could mean that farmers can adopt it easily. In the Coffee Axis after decades of coffee monoculture that is not the case. Some senior producers can have some traditional knowledge, but it was not necessarily transferred to the new generations who did not seem to need it. Moreover, ecological conditions on the local and the global ground have changed, so traditional knowledge cannot necessarily cope with them anymore. Climate change has been felt and it is common to hear from producers that they do not understand how the weather is going to be anymore. So scientific knowledge derived from ecological biology and the introduction of new technologies (e.g. biodigester) is needed to create the necessary equilibrium in order to achieve agroecological production.

The cases of ASPROINCA and ADUC-Caldas are interesting because none of them is actually fostering a radical agroecological shift among producers. We observed that in the case of ASPROINCA’s members, some households possessing small quantity of land could manage to produce entirely organic or at least incorporate key agroecological farming strategies (as soil conservation and crop diversification), raising and diversifying their production for home consumption increasing their surplus and therefore improving their market capacity (Corrales and Forero, 2006; Forero, 2010; Tabares, 2011). There is a diversity of producers having different levels of incorporation of agroecology in their strategies.

A fully agroecological producer has completely shifted from conventional to agroecological agriculture. He has introduced the same changes than the other members, but pushed them as much as he can. Therefore, he is not only able to produce around 80%
of the total amount of food for family consumption (Forero, 2010), but he has developed his farm’s soil in such a way during few years that he does not need to apply inputs to coffee or panela to have enough incomes. He can even sell his coffee as organic, gaining 30% extra per kilo. The level of production has increased in general with the same quantity of land than any of his neighbours. As an example I give the case of Aníbal who has been working with ASPROINCA for more than twenty years. Having around 1 hectare and a half of land and four family members, he manages to have the following elements in his farm: organic coffee production, organic panela production, a small forest reserve for construction (particularly guaduas), a variety of crops which supply most of family and animal needs (depending on the harvests), different animals supplying most of the meat, milk, cooking gas, soil fertilization and transport (chicken, pigs, milch-cow, horses), he has a fish tank in the roof of his house and a variety of medicinal plants. Sometimes he even hires other neighbours seasonally to help them with the harvests
So the success of those initiatives arises from personal commitments with the agroecological perspective, which in practice means a personal attachment to farming as such. Those who practice agroecology needs to be entirely devoted to their farm, which is a personal choice, not a constriction. It implies a radical commitment to peasant agricultural work and life style.
Some aspects of it could be adopted without needing to become a proper agroecological producer, but anyway sacrifices are needed from the household. The process of conversion from conventional to agroecological takes around three years, in which producers particularly if having little amount of land, have to struggle to adapt his crops to the new conditions. Both farming perspectives show different ways to relate to farming implying different life expectations.

The daily effort needed to maintain a farm without inputs requires the mobilization of the whole household around farming life. The multi-functionality of the farm based on diversification of production demands a division of labour which cannot be omitted. Animals are usually inside a stall and need to be fed, the different crops needs to be constantly looked after, compost preparation needs daily care and garbage selection, fertilizing the soil requires a longer and harder work than applying inputs etc. In the case of coffee, producers state that organic production widely differs from the conventional one. Organic coffee implies a permanent care of the plants and the production is constant along the year even if the amount per plant is smaller. Conventional coffee needs less effort giving instead two harvests a year only, but each of them of greater quantity.

The increase of in-farm work and the intensification of family involvement in agricultural work decrease the possibilities of off-farm work and help developing autonomy through increasing self-consumption. It is a process of re-peasantization where the bound between the peasant household and agricultural work is strengthen. So this perspective challenges not only a market-oriented approach to farming, which is already part of the “coffee culture” of the region, but more in general, it challenges development as such and the money-based principles of the consumerism society (in which Coffee Axis peasant are very much inserted).

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97 It is important to emphasise the fact that we are referring here to tropical agriculture, which means that there is a constant production along the year. Different plants may have different rhythms, and can be giving two or even three harvests a year. This show how important is a full commitment to farm work in this approach.

98 The application of inputs does not requires as much effort as the daily care of an organic farm. One kilo of artificial fertilizer Works for an hectare, compare to around 30 kilos of compost.

99 I do not mean that agroecology is equal to peasant farming and conventional it’ is not; I mean that agroecological farming demands major attention reducing the possibilities to do works off-farm and progressively abandon rural life. Agroecology reinforces the pleasantness of the household by fostering self-consumption rather than market production.
Most of fully agroecological peasants at least in Riosucio tended to be aged, while among the local youth those ideas do not seem to be very popular. Youngsters would prefer to work less in farm keeping a conventional approach, and having time for working outside the farm in mining (small-scale mining is still practised in the area) or the going to the cities. It was a common topic among organizations in Riosucio, that young people in general are caring less and less for farming work. ADUC-Caldas as well as some resguardos are receiving young people interested in agroecology which are being trained in agroecological schools; and university students are participating together with peasant organizations in agroecological projects. But those cases do not seem to represent a general tendency among young rural dwellers of the Coffee Axis.

The commitment to farming is strongly related to certain principles and values rooted in moral and political views. There are important differences between ASPROINCA and ADUC-Caldas in the way they approach agroecology, which resonates in the particular views of their members. ADUC-Caldas has been promoting agroecology and a more friendly rapport with nature, and its members which are fully committed to it are mainly traditional campesinos struggling to sell their products in peasant or agroecological markets. There is a view of their work as necessary in order to improve the healthiness and quality of food, to protect nature from being polluted with agrotoxics and to avoid the control of corporations over their resources. In the case of ASPROINCA I found the same discourse but with a slightly important difference: they are asserting territoriality based on ethnicity, therefore the protection of environment and resource control through agroecology as an economic alternative get a specific, contextual meaning.

b. Protection of territories to secure seeds and agroecological farming

But how to reach autonomy and sustainability in a context where there is danger of crossbreeding with GM seeds, pollution with agrotoxics used in the predominant conventional model and where control of territory, meaning the capacity of local

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100 One main reason has to be with the access to land, which is becoming a real problem for most of young families. As we shown before, there is an over population of the resguardos and young need to leave to the cities leaving their life as peasants.
communities to decide the way to live in it, is mostly in hands of central governments (national and departmental) following a mainstream development strategy where commoditization over resources and agroexport are privileged? In a local scale, these organizations try to influence local instances of decision at the municipal and departmental level, and they try also to put pressure at the national level through national mobilizations. This is the case of campesino unions as ADUC-Caldas, which has been demanding to Caldas Governor and parliamentarians to develop sustainable agriculture based on food sovereignty principles. However, campesinos do not have the possibilities to influence the local context in which they live as much as indigenous organizations.

The Colombian Constitution from 1991 recognizes indigenous territories as territorial entities (entidades territoriales), equal to departments, districts and municipalities. Therefore they have the right to be governed by their own authorities, managed their resources in the way they want and perceive incomes directly from the central state (Article 286-287, Chapter I Colombian Constitution). In practical terms this allows the resguardos governed by a cabildo to have the authority to decide the way they want their community to live. Of course the autonomy is not complete, understanding that anyway they depend from the Colombian state and that it has been accomplice in human right violations inside their territories after 1991. But in practice they have been able to recover most of the usurped land lost since Colombia’s independence, to stop important mining projects in the area and now to establish Riosucio as a Transgenic Free Territory. Riosucio’s resguardos as Cañamomo y Lomaprieta and San Lorenzo have established their own Life Plans 101 based on food sovereignty and environmental protection under agroecological principles. As we saw, the work of ASPROINCA had a positive response from local authorities who decided to walk on the same path by themselves.

101 As an example see Escobar (2008)
For example Cañamomo y Lomaprieta has different commissions, who work for the development of particular areas of interests. There is a health commission, an environmental commission, an education commission etc. and also a food sovereignty commission. The food sovereignty commission, for example, delivers local seeds to producers asking them to return the same amount after the harvest. However the condition is that they do not have to use inputs on them. This allows the protection of seed biodiversity, the promotion of sustainable agriculture and seed self-sufficiency at the resguardo level.\footnote{Seeds that are said to be non GM delivered by the ICA have been tested showing confirming crossbreeding with GM seeds.}
Moreover, the current indigenous mayor, has been supporting these initiatives together with the resguardos. The municipal government have decided to purchase the seeds they deliver to farmers for development support to RCS, in order to avoid the entrance of GM seeds and promote local economies.

The emphasis made from local authorities and agroecological organizations as ASPROINCA and RCS is to develop local economies. Seeds should be produced inside the territory to avoid GM crossbreeding and municipalities and resguardos pretend to supply internal demand with them; agroecological markets are periodically organized as well as seed exchange events; and local agro industries inside the resguardos producing organic coffee have been also supported.

However, this is an ongoing process and not yet an accomplished fact. The seed suppliers which are mainly custodians from RCS do not have yet the capacity to fulfil even the local seed demand. In parallel, agroecological markets do not allow yet producers to live from agroecological farming. It is therefore important for organizations to be connected with other similar initiatives outside the territory particularly for seed supply. Interconnectivity is a key element of these networks, considering that they are a minority even inside Riosucio, having resguardos, municipal government and NGOs supporting them.
c. The fostering of exchange and commercialisation to strengthen local economies: from resistance to competition

Households are never alone and never totally self-sufficient, particularly regarding seeds. That's why they need to have channels through which to exchange seeds and its surplus production. Therefore organizations will seek to develop networks of exchange and commercialization. The building up of seed exchange networks look forward to achieve two main goals: the development of trust economies based on horizontal forms of reciprocity, and the spread of local seeds as a way to avoid their loss in a context of GM spread (particularly corn) and establishment of norms that criminalize their use. In every meeting they held, every seed custodians bring seeds and exchange or give others: and in the case of people who are not custodians but seldom participate in meetings (like myself), they just give you seeds hoping that you will plant it, grow it and do the same. Apart seed
exchange events, custodians do *mingas*, communitarian work usually held in a custodian’s house in order to help him with his farming work.

Image 8 – Meeting RSC de Risaralda, La Florida, March 2014

Having solidary economy at the core, alternative agriculture organizations, but also peasant unions aim to rebuild economy based on trust and affective relations, rather than competition and mistrust as in the capitalist market. Depending upon which organization those trust relations could be grounded on different principles; among unions is class solidarity, among indigenous they would invoke a traditional culture based on reciprocity; among neo-rurals will be the rebuilding of human relations in general etc. What it is important it is that before personal interests there are greater concerns, and the critique of a model and the building of alternatives has to be grounded on different ways of thinking and relating with each other’s.
But the truth is that alternative organizations still have to deal with daily life inside the capitalist system. This is particularly important in the case of poorest peasants with no other incomes besides those they can get working on their small pieces of land. That’s where commercialization appears as a central concern of agroecological organizations, and now also, of seed exchange networks.

The plaza de mercado (market square) is the place where local peasant products can be sold, but in parallel organizations seeks to set up alternative markets for agroecological producers where they can get a fair price and do not have to compete with larger producers and wholesalers. It is important for them to have a space where they can show their work and share information and knowledge between themselves and with the visitors. In other words, to have a particular space in order to enhance the work performed by households and organizations.

UTO and UC host agroecological markets once a month, and at municipal level or vereda level, local organizations periodically organizes markets and seed exchange events. In Riosucio those initiatives are supported mainly by the municipality and the resguardos and organized by ASPROINCA, or RCS. To have the possibilities to sell their products and being valued as agroecological producers or seed custodians, gives to producers the necessary feedback to continue with the process and hopefully enlarge it. The agroecological producers of the Coffee Axis do not seem yet to be able to have significant revenues with their products. The goal of the producers is therefore to build up a market of agroecological product, with informed clients who appreciate and value the work of the producers willing to pay a bit more. But the idea is not to have an elite market, but rather to promote cultural changes inside society in relation to consumption patterns in order that their products could be appreciated by larger amounts of people. That is why to have an alternative market allows informing the people about the work they are doing for seed conservation and sustainable development and therefore “educating the consumers”.

Seed exchange networks are trying to go beyond “exchange” and start seed commercialization. The idea is to create incentives for the custodians and seed harvesters to boost seed production. Inside the Coffee Axis only Riosucio’s network has manage to build up a commercial strategies around seeds, mainly bean and corn seeds. The reason behind is that producers in Riosucio, being most of them small-scale, will not invest time on
producing seeds if they need to get money through coffee, banana or panela. The more sustainable for their economies it becomes, the more possibilities of success they have in terms of expanding the use of local seeds among the municipality, the region or the country. The idea however is not to become seed businessmen’s, but to keep always in mind what is the real purpose of their work.

Apart from the municipality and resguardos RCS de Riosucio has also started to sell their seeds outside their territory. They have a constant demand from organizations and producers in other parts of the country. The only problem is that they cannot satisfy the demand, which is also increasing year by year. Therefore they need to expand the network and deepen seed production. One custodian once said in a meeting something that it is illustrative of the processes of alternative agriculture networks in general, but particularly in Riosucio: “we are not resisting anymore, now we are competing”.

We can observe that inside alternative organizations there is a tension between commercialization and exchange. Depending on the point of view of the organization and
on their own possibilities, that tension is resolved in different ways. Organizations lead by peasants themselves, do not seem to address this as a logical problem; a division between inside and outside is made and ends the discussion: “we exchange inside, we sell outside”. But then the contradiction is transferred to the commercialization sphere, where en ethic is demanded. The price has to be fair and the relations developed with the customer should be based on respect and trust rather than interest.

However a division among alternative agriculture networks has appeared in relation to seeds. Some environmentalists argue that seeds cannot be sold by principle, they do not belong to anybody and therefore they cannot have a price. This represents a logical consequence of the idea of “free seeds” and the fight against property laws. They defend themselves saying that those who made such statements do not depend on farming (something I notice also myself). Therefore they argue that the price is not over the seeds, but over the work of the custodians. It is actually a contribution to them in order that they can continue with their work.\textsuperscript{103}

An important challenge for commercialization is the establishment of quality standards. Under what principles do someone knows that the seed purchased is actually a good seed? And if it is not, who is going to answer for it if the seed does not work properly? Seed exchange networks particularly RSC Risaralda, are working on Sistemas Participativos de Garantía (Participatory Guarantee Systems), which is an internal certification made by members of the network to other members. And when the client who only sees the product in the market wants to buy seeds or agroecological products, he has to trust the organization and decide through experience if the quality is acceptable. This certification by trust needs strong bonds between organization members and between clients and the organization. It is once again an attempt to build social and economic relations through principles and values oppose to those prevailing in the capitalist market.

\textsuperscript{103}It is interesting to notice that among urban activists engaged in environmental struggles or alternative agriculture, there is a “common sense” denying money by principle. It is said to represent by itself a sort of negative influence (or energy, or flow or whatever), and it is directly associated with capitalist values. In other words, they over fetishized money. In parallel, there is a sort of idealization of traditional cultures, particularly the indigenous one, believing that they lived in societies as those they want to build up today (based don trust, reciprocity, barter, solidarity etc.). So when they see indigenous entrepreneurs they would think that they lost their “indigeneity” because of their contact with capitalism, which it is a way of looking at it. In my experience it often works the other way around: money is integrated in indigenous logics as a valid object of exchange in relations that do not have necessarily to do with commerce, as for example indigenous doctors and patients.
d. Expanding the network: organizational strategies of seed exchange networks

As we showed in Chapter I, Red de Semillas Libres de Colombia is an initiative that looks forward to create a decentralized network of people and organizations working for the defence and promotion of local seeds. We mentioned that during the first years of ASPROINCA the organization was supported by Swissaid. Today the NGO is supporting different seed exchange networks around Colombia and is looking to connect them in bigger networks (regional, national etc.).

Seed networks as they are being structured and pictured today, are a contemporary ideal model of seed exchange dynamics present in peasant and indigenous cultures. Existing local networks and seed custodians are identified, valued and enhance through a process of rationalization of means, time and ideas, in order that the work that they do can persist and grow (Escobar, 2008). The so-called ‘seed exchange networks’ and customary forms of seed circulation are shaped based on different reasonings. A customary seed custodian was aiming to reproduce his livelihoods and those of his community, and probably the exchange of seed was either part of daily gifts and favours’ exchange, either part of wider chains of reciprocity that involved cattle, women, and right over territory etc. The free circulation of seed was therefore part of broader systems of reciprocity, but not a system by itself. The current seed networks as those I have been working with, focus particularly on seed because of the identification of a problem and the fulfilling of needs: local seeds are being extinguished through the impacts of conventional agriculture and property laws, and they need to be recue in order to guarantee food sovereignty, environmental and health standards and as a way to promote more horizontal forms of socio-political organizations in the rural.

The way of organizing today’s networks depend on the motivation of its members. There are no rules on how to organize them, but NGO’s and transnational organization and initiatives promoting them usually apply implicit set of principles. The concept of network already suggests that the structure should tend to be decentralized as much as possible, and
participation has to be voluntary according to the personal motivations and possibilities of each participants. Swissaid in his work of promotion of seed exchange networks, gives organizational advices to the custodians and suggest ideas according to their own experiences supporting networks and other experiences in other countries. But there is not a definite statement on how to build them up.

Since two years Swissaid has been helping to build up Riosucio’s networks in order that it can self-sustain itself and really contribute to the enhancement of local seed use inside their territory. They decided to support them one more year but with fewer resources, considering also the support they get from the resguardo of Canamomo y Lomaprieta, and the municipality of Riosucio. Swissaid support the paying of some persons in charge of improving certain weak aspects of the organizations. It can finance trainings, or hire someone for technical monitoring regarding agroecological production or seed conservation. It organizes audits for the organization to identify the shortcomings and work on them. However we have to emphasise that the contribution in financial terms is not big, but, it serves at least to start particular activities. For example for the commercialization strategy, Swissaid donated funds to the organization, so that when custodians had produce a certain amount of seeds they could sell it first to the organization receiving an immediate monetary compensation and without having to struggle with the selling. It was also useful to buy seeds they cannot produce to other networks and give to custodians. Working as a rotating fund, it allows to progressively increase the amount of seeds available for the organization.

The current organization of the network in Riosucio is as follows: independent custodians according to their own motivation and possibilities pre-establish which varieties they are going to reproduce and the amount production. Every custodian household has to be though as an in farm seed house, where there should be always the possibility of reproducing the chosen seeds. But, the network has its own Seed House, which is an off-farm space where they store and conserve seeds. It is a place open for the custodians in order to get the seeds they need and deliver the seeds that are leftover. The cosecheros (harvesters) do not actively participate in the meeting, but are told to reproduce certain seeds that the organization needs at certain moments of high demands. This form of organization is a basic structure that can be complexified according to the size of the
networks or the variability of seed production. More Seed Houses could be built in order to enlarge it creating forms of interactions between them (supplying each other in the case of needs).

In 2014 Swissaid decide to expand seed exchange networks in the Coffee Axis and in other parts of the country by linking existing processes. Taking the example of RSC of Riosucio, Swissaid decided to promote Red de Custodios de Semillas del Eje Cafetero (Coffee Axis’ RSC) buy strengthening RSC de Risralda and Quindío and connecting them with RSC of Riosucio. By expanding the network and making it regional, alternative agriculture networks would be enhanced by having a constant access to greater varieties of local seeds. The aim is to keep on expanding it and linking it to other regional process to build a national one.

The starting regional network would change the previous dynamics of the Coffee Axis’ alternative agriculture in the region:

*Image 10 – Alternative Agriculture Networks in the Coffee Axis, 2014*
Final considerations: what does alternative agriculture suppose to mean?

Focusing on local level dynamics, I could observe that the current strategies of different organizations, have different meanings grounded on the specific social and cultural backgrounds of their members and organizations. The campesino union, the neo-rural agroecological market, the indigenous seed exchange networks; they all have a particular reasons to be. They all share similar concerns about rural Colombia: the longing for peace, for environmental sustainability, for social justice, for cultural recognition etc. Each of them will probably emphasise some ideas before others, or frame them differently than the other. Each organization will approach and give meaning to alternative agriculture in a particular way according to their particular raison d’être.

ADUC-Caldas members pointed out the importance of defending seeds, on how the concern was made part of their struggle because the development model fostered through violence and dispossession was blocking more and more their possibilities to exist in dignity as peasants. The environmental degradation and the increasing dependence over transnational corporations controlling the global agriculture system need to be opposed from the farm itself, by developing more harmonious forms of production to increase peasants’ autonomy reaching food sovereignty. But in parallel to this, campesinos need to have full recognition of their rights to be peasants; they need land, territorial and resource sovereignty, and the conditions for exercising their political rights in peace. Having felt threats, persecution and assassinations, the struggle of ADUC-Caldas and ACC based on a complete rejection of violence, aims to reach social justice putting humanness at the centre inspired by Christian Humanism. Their only chance to succeed as campesinos, is to keep on fighting and demand full recognition of their rights, respect to their lives and customs and social assessment of their central role in society: being food producers.

From the indigenous perspective, being also peasants, they fully share the concerns of campesinos. They have been historically marginalized in their own territories, treated as second class members of society and have seen their rights for land constantly denied. They have suffered the impact of environmental degradation and economic dependency, and just recently were able to have political representation at municipal level, after decades of watching their leaders being assassinated. However they have finally gained rights; but not
fully, and they know it. They cannot trust the state neither the powerful, and they constantly frame every project they organize to develop their communities as resistencia. They do not considere themselves to be privileged because of their territorial autonomy; it is their right as indigenous, as peasants. And they know that if tomorrow a mining company arrives (as those who are already pushing to enter) they will have to fight once again. But they have gained rights that the state has somehow respected. Even if governments and companies have tried to violate them, the constitutional court has proved them right. For some of them, agroecological farming is part of their roots, being similar to the old style subsistenc agriculture of their ancestors. Most of them did not know how to cultivate como los antiguos (as the ancestors), but others never forgot what they were told. They were forced to plant coffee and abandon their subsistence crops as a form of assimilation, and now they promote agroecology and environmental conservation as a form of cultural assertion. In the resguardo of Cañamomo y Lomaprieta, the school of agroecology is an initative gathering the main members of the commissions, to train them as political leaders. Agroecology has become the theoretical background to assert their political position towards the current politic-economy order and European oriented cultural hegemony.
Conclusion

At the end of March 2014, a crucial meeting took place not far from La Florida, a locality near Pereira, the capital city of Risaralda department. Seed custodians from all over the Coffee Axis came together in order to officially give birth to a project that would enhance their previous achievements, and give the possibility to strengthen their own organizations: the creation of Red de Custodios de Semillas del Eje Cafetero (The Seed Custodian Network of the Coffee Axis). The idea came from Swissaid after they expressed their willingness to support Risaralda and Quindío’s networks and linking them with the one in Riosucio to create a regional one.

In the meeting participated seed custodians from Risaralda and Quindío, a leading representative from RCS de Riosucio, a leading representative from Swissaid, academics and functionaries from Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira, a representative from CARDER, representatives from Congreso de los Pueblos,104 members of the Eco-village movement, independent newspaper and radio journalists, researchers and guest participants. The meeting was characterized by informality and confidence. People knew what was happening there was important, but it did not change the nature of the relations they had cultivated until now. This trend of seed networks, does not detract their relevance and importance, on the contrary, it reflects the kind of bonds cultivated inside, rooted mainly on a sincere individual motivation together with the building up of relations based on trust and closeness.

Before Swissaid representative started his speech, Toño, a Quindío’s network member, stands up and proposes a particular group dynamic to start the meeting and to get to know better the members of the new born network. More than thirty people present had to stand up in a circle facing each other inside the conference room. He grabs a roll of string and explains his idea. Each one should introduce himself and then refer to two people among the presents, that he or she knows through the seed. In other words, people that maybe introduced them to the organization, taught them something about seeds etc. So the

104 Movement issued mainly but not only from the indigenous movement in Cauca department which states the necessity to gather different popular initiatives around Colombia in order to build up a legislative framework addressing territory, economy and forms of governance. Their main idea is to think and apply down top forms of governance based on previous social movements’ experiences in Colombia and Latin America. See Part I
thread goes to the second chosen person and, without cutting it, it passes to the one next to Toño on his right who has to do the same.

Besides the presentation of the network’s members, the idea was to have a real representation of how the network looks like. For instance, new members or visitors will probably have few links; but those who are appointed several times are probably key actors in building up the network (nodes). The specificity of the network, he said, relies on interpersonal connections around the issue of Seed where its members participate voluntary and without constriction in a horizontal form of organization. Relations and not pre-established structures are the basis of a network. The nodes inside it are represented by those who helped the most in building it up as we see it today.

After the presentation, we were completely entangled, and from a view from above we could have roughly seen how the Seed Custodian’s Network of the Coffee Axis looked like. The ritual-like performance lasted more than one hour, and we had a small break after it. The meeting started afterwards.

The Swissaid representative, started to tell the presents the story of their work around seed protection and GM opposition. The introduction of GMOs set the alarm among some indigenous communities, and environmentalists realized they should start to defend Corn, because of its importance in terms of biodiversity for Colombian agriculture, as well as its cultural relevance for indigenous people. Swissaid thought that in order to defend seeds, they had to know first what is there to defend. It was necessary to make a diagnosis of corn varieties in the country, and make visible seed custodians as key actors for the maintenance of seed as natural and cultural heritage. The problem of seed contamination and loss seemed to have been initially a concern among the agroecological movement and certain indigenous communities rather than campesinos or afros. The autonomy that ethnic communities had, gave them the possibility to declare themselves as Transgenic Free Territory. Among campesinos, the fight against GM contamination tended to be more part of a discourse rather than a real initiative. One reason is that they do not have any particular rights or protection of their territories, so organizations started to look for the possibilities to reach arrangement with municipalities in order to declare transgenic-free municipalities, an idea that has not been particularly successful.
Following experiences in other countries, they gained insights and ideas on how to defend seeds: the consumers movement against GM products in Europe, particularly in France; seed production and local supply strategies in countries as Nicaragua, Mexico and Brazil through the establishment of Seed Banks (later called Seed Houses following the suggestion made by La Via Campesina)\(^{105}\); seed exchange networks in Ecuador, Spain, Italy and France (Kokopelli being the main reference). They realized that the challenge was to develop a local seed supply, and in 2011 they started to work with the resguardo of Cañamomo y Lomaprieta and Red de Guardianes de Semillas de Nariño. Conditions had to be made for local seed production of to avoid their entrance from the outside that could be contaminated. They needed to build exchange networks supported with Seed Houses, and a committed group of custodians and seed producers. One way of encourage seed production, was to go beyond seed exchange and think about commercialization. That’s how they faced another great problem: 9.70 Resolution from the ICA which prohibited the commercialization of uncertified seeds.

They have been opposing property laws over seeds for years, but the approval of Law 1032 in 2006, the signing of UPOV 91 through Law 1518, and then 9.70 Resolution in 2010 were really pushing seed privatization. Their main strategy is to promote disobedience and opposition to legislations aiming to limit farmer’s control over seed. Legal struggles as well as the strengthening of local seed supply chained at regional, national and transnational levels are consider to be the main challenges of today’s’ fight for seed defence.

After this introduction, Swissaid officially announced that they will contribute economically and organizationally to build up a regional network. The goal is to raise production capacity of custodians and expand seed circulation possibilities around the Coffee Axis. In order to do that, Swissaid proposed the engagement of an expert for monitoring custodian’s seed production; the construction of Seed Houses to storage seeds in every department; the setting of trainings on agroecological seed production and on legal issues related to seed commercialization; and to establish Riosucio’s network as the one in charge of leading the process due to its advance expertise on the matter.

\(^{105}\) According to the representative, La Via Campesina, considered Seed Bank as an over economistic concept.
Swissaid intervention sums up the current situation and challenges for today alternative agriculture networks in Colombia,. It is clear account on how the global, national and local scales (or grounds) interact.

Concepts, experiences, and strategies from other organizations in other countries, served as inspiration and as a source of knowledge about the way to frame and perform local struggles in the Coffee Axis. By situating them in a wider frame, the message of the NGO is clear: this is a global problem and therefore there is a prevailing necessity to scale up and coordinate global opposition. We have seen that transnational NGOs as Swissaid play a key role as brokers between scales, being advisors and supporters of local processes using their expertise on global struggles.

In a national context, regulations and legislation criminalizing seeds directly influence the way they have to act in order to oppose them. The context in which they are right now, with a national agrarian mobilization which helped to make their struggles visible, is a challenging one. They have to double their resistance against an increasingly oppressing situation; and in parallel that pressure has helped them to get attention and concern form wider sectors of society which are progressively getting involved with them.

On the other hand, food sovereignty, as one of the main goals of the national peasant movement, is a form of everyday politic-economic practice among alternative agriculture organizations as those present in the Coffee Axis. The ideal of food sovereignty brings together organizations with sometime contradictory means and objectives: ethnic movements struggling for their full recognition and respect of their human and indigenous rights, left-wing social movements trying to unify the struggle to reach “peace with social justice”, campesino organizations demanding their recognition as a socio-cultural specific group inside society, agrarian unions demanding protection over their production etc. they all agree in the necessity to build up a new development model for rural Colombia. But the possibilities to asses food sovereignty is strongly conditioned by structural conditions in a country with an armed conflict that has resulted in millions of people displaced and land grabbed. While access to land and sustainable peace are not guaranteed, territorial, socio-cultural and economic sovereignty and therefore food sovereignty will be just words inside political statements to fit particular agendas.
But Swissaid’s work on building a national network is just starting, and the recent building of Red de Custodios de Semilla del Eje Cafetero (Seed Custodians Networks of the Coffee Axis) exemplifies this tendency. After Riosucio’s network got sufficiently strengthen, Swissaid decided to link it with Risaralda and Quindío networks. The rapprochement of indigenous and campesino initiatives is considered to be the basis for the success of seed networks. It seems that today’s peasant struggles in Colombia are allowing to re-create the unity of the peasantry beyond ethnic borders. Issues as the protection of seeds, are considered to be of global concern so the struggle also has to.

In the local ground, we observed how indigenous based networks were having greater possibilities to asses seed networks and agroecological projects, while campesino organizations, with no ethnic and therefore territorial claims but rather representing a social class (the peasantry) facing an historical misrecognition, are clearly limited in their possibilities to put in practice a food sovereignty discourse.

Indigenous resguardos of Riosucio, the legal protection they have through 1991 Constitution and 169 Convention of the ILO, has allow them to recover thousands of hectares of occupied land, to resist the entrance of mining projects and to ban GM crops. Resguardos have built Life Plans where they set the basis for the development model they want for their communities; some have established agroecology as a framework to educate political leaders because it allows them to combine cultural and economic resistance with territorial control and resources protection. The fight for food sovereignty is considered to be the continuation of processes of resistance among resguardos. Seed networks are the basis for the reintroduction of hundreds of varieties of traditional seeds and they have started to supply Riosucio’s internal demand for corn and bean seeds, while the agroecology-base initiative ASPROINCA has contributed to visualize the possibility to build up sustainable alternatives while improving economic conditions. Both are working side by side with, or are being supported by the cabildos, the municipality and Swissaid. However since their recognition, assassination and persecution of indigenous leaders has not stopped, mining investments are still pushing in and GMOs have already entered their territories through pollination and seed distribution from development institutions. The basis for the defence of their territories lays on a process of recognition and assessment of
their own natural and cultural heritage which needs to be constantly updated and deepened in order to assert their autonomy.

In the mestizo context, we found a major diversity of organizations and initiatives proposing alternative agriculture. We basically divided them between campesino based organizations, and neo-rural based organizations. Campesino organizations in the Coffee Axis build up their struggles based on a peasant identity, which is rooted in their condition as workers, or producers (of coffee or panela mainly). They fight for the right to be campesino, as to say, families having a particular relation with nature (peasant agriculture), having a particular relation among themselves (unions, cooperation), and a specific role to play inside society (food supply). ADUC-Caldas and ACC are engaged in the defence of seeds and place food sovereignty as a central concern of their organization. In practice agroecology becomes mainly a political ideological affirmation rather than a viable economic option (as in Riosucio). I state that the building up of alternative agriculture is not their main goal because structural conditions of the peasantries do not allow to do it. Their main concern is to reach an equilibrium between autonomy, sustainability and concrete economic possibilities in the current social context. No particular legal framework protects campesinos from large-scale investments in their territories and they do not have the autonomy to decide local development projects; therefore they have to compete in the global market with no comparative advantages.

In the case of seed exchange networks in Risaralda and Quindío, we find campesinos as well as universities’ academics and functionaries, environmental activists, handcrafters, neo-campesinos etc.. In campesinos organizations as well as seed networks fostered by neo-rurals, there is the lack of support from government institutions. Instead, a very important contribution comes from the university context through the work of some academics heading at the Botanic Garden of Universidad de Caldas, or the Faculty of Environmental Science of Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira. Universities as such are not officially promoting alternative initiatives, but some functionaries and academics are openly doing it. Communal agroecological gardens, the monthly organization of agroecological markets, the work they do on teaching on agroecology and the training on Seed Custodians are all very important and fruitful initiatives. The recent support offered
by Swissaid, will probably tend to fortify those networks and help them to reach some level of self-sufficiency as indigenous networks have.

Summing up, alternative agriculture networks in the Coffee Axis are conditioned by having or lacking means for territorial control available for organizations. Those means differs according to the recognition or misrecognition of particular rights over territory which gives the possibility to shape it according to self-established criteria. Ethnic based organizations in Colombia are more likely to succeed in fostering more profound alternative agriculture initiatives due to the major autonomy they have gained, the extra economic support they have from the state, and the major presence of environmental NGOs working with them (Escobar, 2008). Campesino organizations in the Coffee Axis organized under union-like forms of representation, are not bound to territories but are present all along the region and they defend their peasant condition as workers and not an ethnic identity. They defend their right to produce what they want as they want (food sovereignty) therefore they assert they identity through their struggle for autonomy. But at national level those distinctions get blurred by the contingency of today’s Colombian context, as well as the work fostered by initiatives as Red de Semillas Libres led by NGOs like Swissaid and Grupo Semillas.

On the global ground, the existence of transnational movements and activists networks is suggesting, is that the peasantry today, beyond any form of particularism, is facing the same kind of menaces and is building similar strategies to face them. The idea of Food Sovereignty have been fully incorporated in the discourse of alternative agriculture networks in Colombia, but also as one of the main goals of the entire Colombian peasant movement. The calling for unity from the campesino movement, sometimes contrasts with the focus on territorial autonomy wanted by ethnic communities. However the experience of 2013 peasant struggle, did have an impact on fortifying a class-based peasant identity. From the campesino struggles of the 1970s, to the ethnic-based struggles at the end of the twentieth century, today we can observe a tendency to nuance those boundaries. The campesinos are working for getting their own recognition from the State in order that peasant agriculture could be accepted officially as a valid development path for rural
Colombia rather than a heritage of underdevelopment, as the neoliberal approach suggests. They know, according to indigenous movements’ experiences, that the recognition of certain rights could give them room for maneuver for defending sovereignty over land and resources and foster peasant-based local economies\(^{106}\). It seems that the struggle for autonomy among peasants organizations, as a response to the tendency of capital control and accumulation of resources and knowledge, leads to the strengthening of local economies initiatives directly opposing market oriented approaches. But the interconnections suggested by network models, perfectly allows participation at different scales according to political contingency. There is no contradiction between fighting for peasant unity and for the control of indigenous territories, or between the official recognition of campesino as a distinct social category, and the fight for the unity of the working class. Peasant demands seems to reach unity while scaling up, keeping the local as the concrete and real locus for the practice of alternative worlds.

\(^{106}\) The building up of Zonas de Reservas Campesinas (Campesino’s Reservation Zones) in newly colonized territories in the middle 1990s, is an example of the struggle to build campesino’s autonomous projects beyond ethnic claims.
Bibliografía


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