

Resisting, Learning, Growing

The Role of Social Movement Praxis in UK Agroecology Transformations

Presented for the degree of PhD

July 2024

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SUMMARY

The current industrial agrifood system is unsustainable, prompting calls for agrifood system “transformation”. But conflicting interests among actors lead to differing problem framings with many approaches failing to address power and politics, relying on technical fixes that uphold the corporate industrial model. Agroecology, a radical transformative paradigm, integrates science, practice, and politics to promote change led by social movements. While agroecology scholars and activists emphasise the importance of social movement praxis in fostering transformations, research focuses on Global South movements and neglects social movement theory. This thesis addresses this gap by exploring the role of social movement praxis in UK agroecology transformations, drawing on agroecology and social movement conceptual frameworks. Using participatory action research and activist ethnography, I focus on the Landworkers’ Alliance (LWA) and other actors advocating a political articulation of agroecology.

The thesis empirical contributions are firstly, demonstrating how the movement fosters transformative change by developing members’ drives, powers, and consciousness through prefigurative praxis. Secondly, I identify that while the movement’s prefigurative subculture strengthens a sense of collective identity amongst members, it also serves to alienate wider actors such as mainstream farmers, limiting transformative impact. My conceptual contribution proposes an agroecology movement ecology framework, building on a grassroots model, incorporating feminist of colour coalitional politics. This framework emphasises the importance of diverse movement spaces and actors in progressing systemic change and the need to strategically connect action within a movement ecosystem to build collective power. I highlight the critical roles for prefigurative “home” spaces and more risky and heterogenous “coalition” spaces to progress transformation. I identify three types of learning transformations require - entry, deepening, and transformative-transgressive. Finally, I recommend that anchoring in prefigurative praxis allows the movement to engage a broader range of strategies and positions while guarding against co-optation, reflecting agroecology’s ecological and pluriversal nature.

CONTENTS

Summary	i
Contents	i
List of Figures and Tables.....	iv
List of Acronyms	v
Acknowledgements	vii
1. Introduction	1
1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.2 Agroecology and Transformation	3
1.3 My Research Journey.....	11
1.4 Research Questions.....	12
1.5 Research Contribution	14
1.6 Thesis Outline.....	15
2. Understanding Agroecology Transformations	18
2.1 Introduction.....	18
2.2 Agroecological Narratives and Transformation	19
2.3 Frameworks for Agroecology Transformations	23
2.4 Social Learning Processes in Transformations.....	36
2.5 Agroecology as a Transnational Agrarian Movement	44
2.6 Summary of Chapter	48
3. Ecologies of Social Movement Praxis	50
3.1 Introduction.....	50
3.2 Defining Social Movements	51
3.3 Social Movement Theorising.....	52
3.4 An Ecological Approach to Social Movements	62
3.5 Chapter Summary.....	78
4. Methodology	80
4.1 Introduction.....	80
4.2 Transformative and Pragmatic Research Approach.....	81
4.3 Research Inquiry.....	83
4.4 Combining Participatory and Activist Methodologies	84

4.5 Research Journey.....	86
4.6 Generating data	99
4.7 Analysing the data.....	108
4.8 Contributing to Movement Praxis	113
4.9 Chapter Summary.....	115
5. Situating the UK Agroecology Movement.....	116
5.1 Introduction.....	116
5.2 The Landworkers' Alliance	116
5.3 Movement Landscapes	121
5.4 Key Movement Spaces	125
5.5 Chapter Summary and Overview of Findings Chapters	128
6. Movement (Sub)Culture in Transformations	130
6.1 Introduction.....	130
6.2 Prefigurative Politics in the Movement.....	135
6.3 Tensions and Divisions in and Beyond the Movement	148
6.4 Conflicts and Complexity in Movement Strategy.....	164
6.5 Chapter Summary.....	173
7. Organising for Transformation	175
7.1 Introduction.....	175
7.2 Navigating Growth.....	176
7.3 Prefiguring Democracy	179
7.4 Community, Connection, and Collective Identity.....	195
7.5 Movement building and Theories of Change	205
7.6 Summary of Chapter	211
8. Learning for Transformation	214
8.1 Introduction.....	214
8.2 Horizontal Learning.....	215
8.3 Combining Practical with Political.....	224
8.4 Diálogo de Saberes	227
8.5 Building Multi-Scale Social Movement Networks	233
8.6 Chapter Summary.....	249
9. Agroecology Movement Ecology	251
9.1 Introduction.....	251

9.2 Building Bridges	252
9.3 Holding Complexity and Diversity	259
9.4 An Agroecology Movement Ecology Approach	263
9.5 Chapter Summary.....	277
10. Conclusion	279
10.1 Transformative Agroecology Movement Praxis	279
10.2 Extending the Movement Ecology Approach	284
10.3 Pathways from here.....	287
10.4 Prefiguring Towards Transformative Change	288
Appendices	290
Appendix 1. Table of Research Participants.....	290
References	292

LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

<i>Figure 1. Four pillars of transformative agroecology learning.</i>	25
<i>Figure 2. Research timeline.</i>	70
<i>Figure 3. The Landworkers' Alliance Annual General Meeting and Winter Shindig 2018 Poster.</i>	71
<i>Figure 4. Collaborative wall for sharing projects and networking at WRFFC.</i>	73
<i>Figure 5. Timeline of different data collection methods.</i>	83
<i>Figure 6. Participants at the 'If we don't design systems, we inherit them' workshop organised by the RLG action learning group at Land Skills Fair 2021.</i>	88
<i>Figure 7. Data analysis process.</i>	94
<i>Figure 8. Farm hack guide.</i>	97
<i>Figure 9. Landworkers' Alliance logo.</i>	100
<i>Figure 10. LWA Organisational Structure in early 2023.</i>	103
<i>Figure 11. Diagram situating LWA as part of broader agroecology movement.</i>	107
<i>Figure 12. Land Skills Fair posters for 2021, 2022, and 2023.</i>	113
<i>Figure 13. Land Skills Fair Programme for Friday.</i>	114
<i>Figure 14. Elements of the political agroecology movement's prefigurative politics</i>	119
<i>Figure 15. The hearth at one of the Organisers' Assemblies.</i>	123
<i>Figure 16. LWA Album "Stand up Now" Cover.</i>	142
<i>Figure 17. The LWA's Annual Democratic Calendar.</i>	167
<i>Figure 18. Spectrum of Allies diagram.</i>	248
<i>Figure 19. Diagram to show a possible transition pathways through the movement ecosystem.</i>	251
<i>Figure 20. Representation of a movement ecosystem.</i>	251
<i>Figure 21. A photo showing a section of ANA's flags representing key shared principles.</i>	258
<i>Table 1. Principles of a Food Sovereignty articulation of agroecology.</i>	8
<i>Table 2. Gliessman's five levels of agroecology transformations.</i>	10
<i>Table 3. Event sample for detailed fieldnotes</i>	85
<i>Table 4. Summary of interviews.</i>	89
<i>Table 5. Types of learning for agroecology transformations</i>	217

LIST OF ACRONYMS

AGM	Annual General Meeting
AL	Action Learning
ANA	National Agroecology Alliance (Articulação Nacional de Agroecologia)
ANAP	National Association of Small Farmers (Asociación Nacional de Agricultores Pequeños)
ARC	Agroecology Research Collaboration
ATTER	Agroecological Transitions for Territorial Food Systems
BLM	Black Lives Matter
BPOC	Black people and People of Colour
CFGN	Community Food Growers' Network
CG	Coordinating Group
CIDSE	International Cooperation for Development and Solidarity (Coopération Internationale pour le Développement et la Solidarité)
COP	Conference of the Parties (United Nations Climate Change Conference)
CP	Peasant Confederation (Confédération Paysanne)
CSAN	Community Supported Agriculture Network
DEFRA	Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs
DIY	Do-It-Yourself
ECVC	European Coordination Vía Campesina
ELC	Ecological Land Cooperative
ELMS	Environmental Land Management Scheme
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations
FFCC	Food, Farming & Countryside Commission
FLAME	Food, Land, and Agriculture: A Movement for Equality
FTE	Full-Time Equivalent
HLPE	High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
INRAE	National Research Institute for Agriculture, Food and Environment (l'Institut National de Recherche pour l'Agriculture, l'Alimentation et l'Environnement)
IPBES	Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
IPES-Food	The International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual and others
LION	Land In Our Names
LSF	Land Skills Fair

LVC	La Vía Campesina
LWA	Landworkers' Alliance
MLP	Multi-Level Perspective
MST	Landless Workers' Movement (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra)
NAP	No Action Points
NFU	National Farmers' Union
NFYFC	National Federation of Young Farmers' Clubs
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NRFC	Northern Real Farming Conference
NSM	New Social Movements
OA	Organisers' Assembly
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OF&G	Organic Farmers and Growers
OFC	Oxford Farming Conference
OGA	Organic Growers' Alliance
OOTL	Out On The Land
ORFC	Oxford Real Farming Conference
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PCI	Problem-Centred Interviewing
PfL	Pasture for Life
PPM	Bread for the World (Pan Para el Mundo)
REAL	Racial Equity, Abolition and Liberation
RLG	Resisting, Learning, Growing
RMT	Resource Mobilisation Theory
SALT	Solidarity Across Land Trades
SME	Social Movement Ecology
SOS-UK	Students Organising for Sustainability
STEPS	Social, Technological and Environmental Pathways to Sustainability
TAM	Transnational Agrarian Movement
TEK	Traditional Ecological Knowledge
T-Learning	Transformative-Transgressive Learning
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization
WRFFC	Wales Real Food and Farming Conference
YFF	Your Farming Future

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This PhD would not have been possible without the many activists, landworkers, and farmers who took the time to be part of this research. I particularly want to thank the members of the action learning group whose critical reflections and knowledge of movement praxis contributed so much towards the research analysis and shaping my own political action. To all of the activists in the Landworkers' Alliance working continuously towards making a better food system, you have inspired me and given me a source of strength in this journey. I hope this research and all that comes from it supports you in this work well into the future.

I also wish to acknowledge my supervisors, Hannah Pitt and Antonio Ioris, and all of the valuable feedback and advice they have provided throughout this research. Particular thanks to Hannah for supporting me through the ups and downs of the PhD with kindness and patience. Finally, I want to thank my beautiful community and networks of friends, family, partners, and comrades. I am one part of an ecosystem and none of this would be realisable without the love, joy, wisdom, and practical support of these connections. An especially big thanks to: Zoltan for working so many weekends with me and supporting me immensely in the final months of thesis writing; Oli for all the support, advice, and help with making tough decisions over the years; Oana, Um, and Aiman for motivating me to keep going and being patient with me; and to Chloé for the many ways you have supported me throughout this whole journey, from afar and through some intense and beautiful writing retreats.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

We are living in an era where it is widely acknowledged that dominant agrifood systems both contribute to and are highly vulnerable to a range of unprecedented global crises (COP28 2023). The “hidden costs” of the current globalised industrial agrifood system, or corporate food regime (McMichael 2021), include health impacts such as disease and food insecurity, environmental impacts – not least the climate and ecological crisis, and associated social, cultural, and economic impacts including risks to rural livelihoods, land concentration, and loss of biocultural knowledge (IPBES 2019; Willett et al. 2019; IPCC 2022; FAO 2023; FAO et al. 2023). These disproportionately affect Global South populations, especially women, rural communities, and those in poverty (Raj et al. 2022; FAO 2023), while corporations continue to profit (Gonzalez 2015; Reisman and Fairbairn 2020). Anthropogenic climate change and ecological degradation threaten stability of agrifood systems through extreme and unstable weather conditions, declining insect populations, and biodiversity loss (Hayhow et al. 2019; IPBES 2019; IPCC 2022). Additionally, the Covid-19 pandemic and global conflicts have further stressed the food system, exposing vulnerabilities and inequities in global supply chains (Altieri and Nicholls 2020; Garnett et al. 2020; Power et al. 2020; Ben Hassen and El Bilali 2022). In this context, there is increasing and widespread acknowledgement that *transformative* agrifood system change is required to achieve sustainable and just futures for all (Biovision 2019b; Global Panel on Agriculture and Food Systems for Nutrition 2019; Willett et al. 2019).

Sustainability transformations involve “fundamental changes” in socio-technical-ecological systems (Patterson et al. 2017), addressing persistent social problems and reckoning with path dependencies of dominant practices and power structures leading to current unsustainability (Avelino et al. 2016, p.557). However, the language of “transformation” risks becoming depoliticised and ineffectual through increasing use

(Feola 2015; Brand 2016; Blythe et al. 2018). It crucial to interrogate sustainability framings underlying calls for transformation, remaining attuned to how power can co-opt radical and genuinely transformative approaches, leaving root injustices such as capitalism, patriarchy, and colonialism untouched (Scoones et al. 2015; Temper et al. 2018). As Stirling (2015) argues “what ecological and social justice challenges actually require, is not controlled ‘transitions’ driven by incumbent structures, but vibrant agonistic political mobilizations towards more open-ended ‘transformation’” (p.55). Top-down, corporate-led solutions such as “sustainable intensification”, “climate-smart agriculture”, and large-scale monoculture organic farming are criticised for replicating logics and inequities of the industrial agrifood system and thus being unable to deliver transformative change (Horlings and Marsden 2011; Altieri 2012; Garnett and Godfray 2012; La Vía Campesina (LVC) 2014; Bernard and Lux 2017; IPES-Food 2022; Walthall et al. 2024). In contrast, agroecology, as a bottom-up civil-society-led approach, is increasingly recognised as a holistic and transformative paradigm for food system change (IPES-Food 2016; HLPE 2019; Bezner Kerr et al. 2023; Spirito et al. 2023).

Agroecology takes an ecological approach to the whole food system based on principles rather than universalised practices, considering ecological, techno-productive, socioeconomic, cultural, and sociopolitical dimensions (Francis et al. 2003; CIDSE 2018; Rivera-Ferre 2018). While agroecology is also threatened by co-optation, in the last few decades a vibrant transnational social movement has emerged to progress and defend agroecology (Nyéléni 2015; 7th International Congress of Agroecology 2018; Giraldo and Rosset 2018). Social movements in this respect are critical in challenging depoliticisation as they both confront power structures and provide protected spaces to develop transformative practices and discourses (Stirling 2015; Pelenc et al. 2019; Törnberg 2021). As such, the agroecology literature places strong emphasis on the role of social movements and civil society in driving agrifood transformations based on agroecological principles (Giraldo and Rosset 2018; Nicholls and Altieri 2018; Anderson et al. 2020; Giraldo and Rosset 2022). In particular, agroecology scholars promote *movement praxis* – the collective organising and learning practices of a movement forged through the

dialectical relationship between action and reflection - as a key mechanism for transformations (Anderson et al. 2018; Rosset et al. 2019; Val et al. 2019; Meek 2020; Tornaghi and Dehaene 2020; Dale 2021). This thesis seeks to support agroecology transformation efforts by deepening understanding of the role of movement praxis in critical agrifood system change and the challenges this faces. Responding to a relative lack of research on Global North agroecology movements, I focus my empirical research on the emergent UK agroecology movement. I draw on the body of academic and activist literature on social movements to produce “movement-relevant” research (Bevington and Dixon 2005) which contributes both theoretically to literature on agroecology, social movements, and sustainability transformations, and practically to grassroots social change efforts.

In this chapter, I first review literature on agroecology and transformations, highlighting the contested nature of both terms. I emphasise the critical role of social movements in forwarding agroecology, outline a food sovereignty articulation of agroecology, and introduce “political agroecology” as a transformative food systems approach. I then describe my research journey, including my methodological approach, before expanding on my research questions. Finally, I outline the academic and social contributions of the research and detail the thesis structure.

1.2 Agroecology and Transformation

While agroecology overlaps with sustainable farming models such as organic, low-input, regenerative, biodynamics, and permaculture (Hathaway 2016; Rosset and Altieri 2017; Muhie 2022), divergence between these lies in the extent to which they focus on whole system transformation, considering its political and social dimensions, rather than simply technical practices (Migliorini and Wezel 2017; Tittonell et al. 2022; TABLE [no date]). In this section, I chart the conceptual development of agroecology, emphasising a political articulation which is the focus of this research. I distinguish between the language of transitions and transformations, relating this to agroecology.

1.2.1 Defining Agroecology

Agroecology represents a highly contested domain of meaning, reflecting contending interests and paradigms of agrifood system change. It is seen as a “territory in dispute”, that is, a site of conflict over ideas, theories, and framing which attempt to define its structures, practice, and scope (Rosset and Martínez-Torres 2012; Giraldo and Rosset 2018). In its broadest sense, agroecology is “the integrative study of the ecology of the entire food system, encompassing ecological, economic and social dimensions” (Francis et al. 2003, p.100) and takes three interconnected forms: as a science, practice, and social movement. Depending on the historical and contextual development of agroecology, each of these dimensions and forms have been emphasised to different degrees (Francis et al. 2003; Wezel et al. 2009). Within and across these expressions there exist multiple perspectives and narratives (Tomich et al. 2011; Rivera-Ferre 2018; Bell and Bellon 2021) leading to different “agroecologies”¹ (Méndez et al. 2013). The definition of agroecology chosen determines how research is carried out, how practices are adopted, the approach taken to transitions, the value given to local and farmer knowledge, the boundaries of the system considered, and the role and form of social movements (Giraldo and Rosset 2018; Biovision 2019a). In particular, the presence or absence of politics and political analysis in agroecology as well as its grounding in territories is key to determining the extent to which it represents a transformative paradigm for food system change or not, something I explore fully in Chapter 2 (Gliessman 2013; Levidow et al. 2014; Rivera-Ferre 2018; Anderson et al. 2020).

Agroecology first emerged conceptually in the 1930s as a scientific discipline focusing on ecological interactions at the plot or field-scale (Francis et al. 2003; Wezel et al. 2009). In the 1970s and 1980s, peasants, rural social movements, NGOs, and academics mobilised agroecology to provide an alternative discourse which challenged the social and environmental harm wrought by the industrialised modernist agriculture which characterised the Green Revolution (Gliessman 2014; Rosset and Altieri 2017). It

¹ In fact, Agroecology Pool identified as many as 23 definitions of agroecology (Biovision 2019)

expanded to include the ecology of the whole farm system or agroecosystem and began to take account of social, cultural and economic contexts (Altieri 1989; Wezel et al. 2009). From this perspective, agroecology as a science and practice is acknowledged as rooted in the study of pre-colonial and pre-industrial agriculture (Altieri and Toledo 2011; Gliessman 2014), recognising locally adapted and culturally embedded practices of indigenous and peasant agriculture (Rosset and Martinez-Torres 2013). It thus combines “the recovery and revalorisation of traditional peasant farming methods, and the innovation of new ecological practices” (La Vía Campesina (LVC) 2010, p.2). As such, agroecology cannot be seen as a fixed set of practices universally applied, but rather a set of principles adapted to local contexts (Nyéléni 2015; CIDSE 2018; FAO 2018). From the 2000s, agroecology came to be more widely viewed as the ecology of the whole food system, integrating understanding of territorial, national, and global markets and economic and political forces shaping agroecosystems (Francis et al. 2003; Gliessman 2014).

Agroecology as a science takes an ecological approach to agri-food systems, with agroecological research considering interactions between living things, including humans, at different scales (plot, farm, agroecosystem, food system). It has thus evolved into a broader field seeking to understand the social, political, cultural, economic, and environmental dimensions of developing sustainable and just agrifood systems (Ruiz-Rosado 2006). This has led authors to promote transdisciplinary, action-oriented, and participatory research approaches to work closely with a diverse range of agroecologists² (Méndez et al. 2015; López-García and Cuéllar-Padilla 2018). Such research approaches aim to support the development of locally adaptive practices led by farmers and peasants rather than impose technologies developed by scientists, as in Green Revolution agriculture (Levidow et al. 2014; Pimbert 2017b).

² Here, “agroecologists” refers to the broad definition of “people who study and/or promote agroecology and the agroecological transformation of farming and food systems, be they academics, researchers, extensionists, activists, advocates and/or farmers, peasants or consumers, including their leaders” (Rosset and Altieri 2017, p.35).

In terms of production practices, agroecology at the agroecosystem level is based on principles of recycling biomass and encouraging nutrient cycling, building healthy soils rich in organic matter, enhancing biodiversity and beneficial biological synergies, conserving water and soil, and diversifying species and genetic resources at the field and landscape level (Altieri 1996; CIDSE 2018; Anderson et al. 2020). Critically, this means working towards eliminating external inputs, particularly agrichemicals, to develop holistic and integrated agroecosystems. Expanding to the food system, principles of agroecological practice promote re-localised food chains and re-embedding farm and food system practices in local cultures and knowledge practices to enhance farmer and peasant autonomy from globalised value chains, build solidarity between producers and their wider communities, and support the flourishing of diverse food cultures and relationships to the land and environment (CIDSE 2018; Gliessman et al. 2019).

A growing evidence base supports arguments that agroecological systems based on these principles can improve yields and profitability, enhance biodiversity, address climate mitigation and resilience, strengthen social relations, and combat rural poverty by providing stable rural livelihoods and addressing nutrition and food security (D'Annolfo et al. 2017; HLPE 2019; van der Ploeg et al. 2019; Anderson et al. 2020; Betancourt 2020; Bezner Kerr et al. 2021; Kansanga et al. 2021; Amoak et al. 2022; Dittmer et al. 2023). However, benefits of agroecological practices are constrained by wider socio-political and economic factors, such as intellectual property rights, land rights, public policies, and education systems which reinforce the dominant corporate industrial agrifood system (Anderson et al. 2020). This underlines the importance of integrating the science and practice of agroecology with the social movements and politics of agroecology (Rivera-Ferre 2018; Bell and Bellon 2021).

González de Molina (2013) highlights the critical role of social movements in addressing inequities within the food system which limit agroecology's potential. This includes challenging power relations within markets i.e. the dominance of agribusiness and large retailers, land reform, and inequities in access to resources and supportive infrastructure. Agroecology movements build collective power to campaign for supportive local, national,

and international policies and challenge those that hinder agroecology transformations (Rosset and Martínez-Torres 2012; Anderson et al. 2020). In this respect, agroecology has its roots in rural social movements, particularly peasant movements in Latin America where it was first linked to the concept of food sovereignty (Wezel et al. 2009; González de Molina 2013; Méndez et al. 2013; Sevilla Guzmán and Woodgate 2013; Gliessman 2014).

Food sovereignty is 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” (Nyéléni 2007, p.9). Articulated at the International Nyéléni Forum in 2007³, it serves as a “strategy to resist and dismantle the current corporate trade and food regime” by centring the interests of current and future generations, in developing sustainable food systems. This includes supporting local economies, promoting transparent trade that ensures just income and consumer rights, ensuring producers’ rights to access and use natural resources, and equitable social relations (Nyéléni 2007, p.9). While agroecology featured in this initial call for food sovereignty, it was at the 2015 International Nyéléni Forum on Agroecology that agroecology was articulated as integral to food sovereignty, aligned with these principles.

Summarising the Nyéléni Declaration on Agroecology, Anderson et al. (2015, p.3) present the key principles of a food sovereignty articulation of agroecology (see Table 1). This integrates ecological and techno-productive, socioeconomic and cultural, and sociopolitical dimensions of agroecology (CIDSE 2018; Rivera-Ferre 2018), framing it as a grassroots political movement aimed at transforming power relations through recognising diverse cosmovisions, knowledges, geographies, and identities. The transnational peasant movement La Vía Campesina has been key to forwarding agroecology as a proposal of food sovereignty. Formed in 1993, it claims to represent over 200 million peasants through its 182 member organisations across 81 countries (La Vía Campesina (LVC) 2021).

³ The International Nyéléni Forum on Food Sovereignty brought together “more than 500 representatives from more than 80 countries, of organisations of peasants/family farmers, artisanal fisher-folk, indigenous peoples, landless peoples, rural workers, migrants, pastoralists, forest communities, women, youth, consumers, environmental and urban movements” in the village of Nyéléni, Mali.

Table 1. Principles of a Food Sovereignty articulation of agroecology adapted from Anderson et al. (2015, p.3) which summarises the Nyéléni Declaration on Agroecology (Nyéléni 2015).

Way of Life	Agroecology is a way of life and the language of nature
Ecological Principles	Agroecological production is based on ecological principles.
Territories and commons	Territories are fundamental pillars of agroecology, as are collective rights and access to the commons.
Diverse knowledges	The diverse knowledges and ways of knowing of peoples are central.
Cosmovisions	Our Cosmovisions require equilibrium between nature, the cosmos and human beings. Without land and peoples agroecology cannot be defended.
Community, collective action and solidarity	Families, communities, collectives, organisations and movements are the fertile soil in which agroecology flourishes. Solidarity between peoples, between rural and urban populations, is a critical ingredient.
Autonomy from global markets	The autonomy of agroecology displaces the control of global markets for self-governance by communities.
Political and transformative	Agroecology is political; it requires the challenging and transforming of power structures in society.
Women	Women and their knowledge, values, vision and leadership are critical.
Youth	Agroecology can provide a radical space for young people to contribute to the social and ecological transformation underway in many of our societies.

Within the last decade, political conceptualisations of agroecology expressing the centrality of movements and civil society have become increasingly prominent in the agroecology literature (Sanderson Bellamy and Ioris 2017). This is represented by the approach of *political agroecology*, understood as the application of political ecology to the field of agroecology (González de Molina et al. 2019; Anderson et al. 2020). Political ecology as a field “seeks to unravel the political forces at work in environmental access, management, and transformation” understanding that “politics is inevitably ecological and that ecology is and inherently political” (Robbins 2019, p.3). This has developed to include “a sensitivity to environmental politics as a process of cultural mobilization, and the ways in which cultural practices – whether science, or “traditional” knowledge, or

discourses, or risk, or property rights – are contested, fought over, and negotiated” (Watts 2017, p.259). Such a perspective is therefore highly relevant in understanding the integration of the dimensions of agroecology and its discourses. González de Molina et al. (2019) present political agroecology as both an ideology for transforming the dominant regime toward agrarian sustainability and a pragmatic approach to advancing agroecology and food sovereignty, informed by political ecology and agroecology movement experiences.

Rather than a specific proposal or narrative, political agroecology is an approach which shapes the unfolding of agroecological narratives and associated collective action based on analysis of power in the food system. As Anderson et al. contend,

Political agroecology is based on the recognition that the current state of any agroecosystem reflects the power-laden relationships of different social actors in that system, such as between agribusiness and farmers or between people of different genders or ethnicity, over time. Thus, any change to an ecosystem is likely to have unequal impacts on different members of society (Anderson et al. 2020, p.23).

Reflecting such an analysis, Trevilla-Espinal et al. (2021) call for a feminist perspective in agroecology to understand the ‘matrix of oppressions’ of heteropatriarchy, capitalism and colonialism and transform power relations. Similarly, Montenegro de Wit (2021) promotes an ‘abolitionist agroecology’ to strengthen analysis of structural racism and racial capitalism in food systems. In addition to food sovereignty then, political agroecology connects with food justice, land justice, racial justice, the right to food, and other expressions of justice struggles. Conceptualisations and practices of agroecology which take such a political approach, I refer to as political agroecology. In Chapter 2, I delve further into debates around agroecological narratives and transformation, arguing political agroecology is critical for achieving transformative agrifood system change. First, however, it is necessary to examine the framing of *transformation* within the fields of agroecology and sustainability *transitions*.

1.2.2 Transformations and Transitions

Academic literature addressing sustainability transformations and transitions is broad and transdisciplinary, reflecting that transformations themselves describe complex, dynamic, and political processes of co-evolutionary change between multiple systems (Patterson et al. 2017, p.3). While many authors use transition and transformation interchangeably (Hölscher et al. 2018), some employ both distinctly (Smith et al. 2005; Geels and Schot 2007; Pelling 2010), or make the case for one over another (Stirling 2015). Moreover, there are tendencies within different fields of research towards either transformation (i.e. transformative pathways to sustainability and socio-ecological transformations) or transition (i.e. socio-technical transitions and transition management), which I briefly review in Chapter 2.

While the field of socio-technical transitions has evolved greatly in recent years, some remain critical of its capacity to produce fundamental systems change by failing to challenge the vested interests which maintain current hegemonies, and to adequately conceptualise power and agency (Avelino et al. 2016; Temper et al. 2018; Geels 2019). In this light, transitions are seen to be “managed under orderly control, through incumbent structures according to tightly disciplined technical knowledges and innovations, towards a particular known (presumptively shared) end” (Stirling 2015, p.62). In contrast, Stirling poses transformations as alternative processes which “involve more diverse, emergent and unruly political alignments, challenging incumbent structures, subject to incommensurable, tacit and embodied social knowledges and innovations pursuing contending (even unknown) ends” (2015, p.62). Based on this distinction and following other agroecology scholars (Levidow et al. 2014; Anderson et al. 2020; Tornaghi and Dehaene 2020), I address agroecology *transformations* rather than *transitions* to highlight the political, grassroots nature of change and the comprehensive transformation needed for the entire food system. This aligns with the *transformative* and *transgressive* learning approaches (Cranton and Taylor 2011; James and Macintyre 2017; Anderson et al. 2018) I engage with in this research as mechanisms for facilitating such change. However, just as Padel et al. (2020) have, I reserve the language of *transition* for on-farm changes and other

individuals' change processes guided by agroecological principles. I now briefly detail how my journey to and through the research has shaped my methodological approach and research inquiry in studying such transformations.

1.3 My Research Journey

I approached this research as an activist and community organiser in intersecting social justice and food movements. My experiences in these spaces, along with my background in teaching and educational studies, shaped my interest in critical pedagogy and movements as spaces of radical adult education. Committed to participatory research, I sought to support the agroecology movement's efforts through collective critical inquiry and movement-embedded research (Chatterton and Routledge 2007; Choudry 2015; Cox 2015). I identified the Landworkers' Alliance (LWA), the UK member of La Vía Campesina, as a central actor promoting political agroecology. Beginning with a participatory action research (PAR) orientation (Fals Borda 2001; Kindon et al. 2007), I attended LWA events and engaged with activists to identify a useful area of inquiry. Initially focusing on farmer-to-farmer learning practices in the movement (La Via Campesina 2017b; Anderson et al. 2019a), my research expanded to include broader social learning and organising practices, or *movement praxis* (Conway 2013). This evolution was shaped by the movement's shifting direction during the research period and by the Covid-19 pandemic. The LWA grew significantly in this time, increasingly emphasising the development of prefigurative organising practices and learning practices for transformative change. That is, alternative practices developed in the here-and-now that prefigure the future the movement wants to see, aligning their means and their ends. Coincidentally, the Covid-19 pandemic meant a temporary pause of in-person activities and the flourishing of online organising and learning spaces which brought opportunities and challenges for the research: activists had more time to engage in online collective learning spaces, but key movement events were cancelled or adapted.

My methodological approach developed to combine PAR with activist ethnographic research approaches (Hale 2008) with the aim of producing “movement-relevant” theory (Bevington and Dixon 2005) and adapting to the shifting movement context. This enabled an explorative approach to data collection, following emerging lines of inquiry and opportunities to support movement praxis through semi-structured interviews, “observant participation” (Costa Vargas 2008), focus groups, and an action learning group (Rigg 2014). Critical to my approach to the research methodology and literature was the idea of “ecology of knowledges” (de Sousa Santos 2014), reflected in the agroecology movement concept of “diálogo de saberes” or dialogue between ways of knowing (Martínez-Torres and Rosset 2014). Within my research, this implies valorising knowledge produced within social movements and recognising “the copresence of different ways of knowing and the need to study the affinities, divergences, complementarities, and contradictions among them in order to maximize the effectiveness of the struggles of resistance against oppression” (de Sousa Santos 2018, p.8). Thus, while I focus primarily on the agroecology and social movement literature, I highlight connections to concepts in different fields and engage with grassroots knowledge production, both from wider activist literature and methodologically through critical inquiry and analysis within the movement. This commitment to developing movement-relevant theory in support of social transformation is embedded in the formulation of my research questions.

1.4 Research Questions

The overall aim of this thesis is:

To support agroecology transformations in the UK by understanding, developing, and sharing social movement praxis.

In working with and within the agroecology movement, the research seeks to co-produce valuable insights and knowledge to advance food system transformations. This reflects the assertion of Levkoe et al. (2020) that the “success and progress of [food systems] scholarship cannot be separated from the work of practitioners and activists” (p.1).

To address this aim, the following questions frame the research inquiry:

1. *What role can social movement praxis play in driving agroecology transformations in the UK?*

To understand both where the movement is having impact and movement actors' own analyses of how to further foster transformations through movement praxis, I ask how different elements of movement praxis *can* contribute to bringing agroecology to scale. This grounds the inquiry in current action while recognising movement praxis as continually unfolding through collective critical reflection and experimental action.

2. *What limits the transformative impact of agroecology movements in the UK?*

In seeking to support agroecology transformations and engage with and in movement praxis, it is important to take a critical lens on where movement praxis is limited to look towards overcoming such challenges.

3. *How can social learning practices in UK agroecology movements support agroecology transformations?*

Given the importance of social learning practices in the agroecology literature and the initial research inquiry, I particularly seek to explore the role of movement learning practices in transformations, again moving from concrete practices towards the potential they encompass.

4. *How is UK agroecology movement praxis shaped by place and/or its agrarian nature?*

Recognising the importance of territories and rural social organisation in agroecology, I consider how the agroecology movement's praxis is distinct from other non-agrarian movements and consider how the UK context, and different local contexts, determine the development of movement praxis and its impact on transformations.

In answering these questions, I have sought to contribute theoretically and empirically to the academic literature, and practically to broader social movement efforts, as I now outline.

1.5 Research Contribution

While agroecology literature has predominantly focused on Global South movements, this research contributes an understanding of agroecology movement praxis in the Global North, namely the UK. Despite the emphasis on social movements in the agroecology literature, there has also been little engagement with social movement literature. This thesis bridges these two fields, engaging both academic and activist social movement frameworks to deepen analysis of movement praxis in agroecology transformations. I employ the concept of prefigurative politics to highlight the benefits and challenges of movement praxis, connecting to more recent agroecology research engaging this concept (Wald 2015; Tornaghi and Dehaene 2020; Dale 2021). Using Raekstad and Gradin's (2019) framework which highlights the *powers*, *drives*, and *consciousness* developed through prefigurative politics, I examine the positive impacts of agroecology movement praxis, contributing empirically to understanding of this. I also address key debates in the prefigurative politics literature around strategy and movement subculture, exploring the tension identified between prefigurative niches and broad-scale movement building (Maeckelbergh 2011; Smucker 2017; Raekstad and Gradin 2019; Yates 2021) through the empirical research which highlights limitations of prefigurative agroecology movement praxis in engaging a broader base. Responding to this, along with calls for multi-scale multi-actor networks to advance agroecology transformations (González de Molina et al. 2019; López-García et al. 2019; Anderson et al. 2020; Hubeau et al. 2021), I integrate insights from the literature on social movement coalitions to advance a “social movement ecology” framework (Ulex Project 2022; Ayni Institute [no date]). This builds upon activist conceptual frameworks (namely, social movement ecology and spectrum of allies) and perspectives on coalitions forwarded by early US feminists of colour such as Bernice Johnson Reagon (1983) and Gloria Anzuldúa (2002; 2009; 2022). The resulting framework

can be applied to understand the development of multi-actor movement networks and coalitions in other agroecology movement contexts and support efforts of broader movements progressing sustainability transformations.

Both the social movement and agroecology literatures recognise movements as vibrant spaces of knowledge production and theorisation (Holford 1995; Conway 2013; Choudry 2015; Pimbert 2017a; Val et al. 2019; Meek 2020). In this research I have brought together academic and activist theorising, both by integrating conceptual frameworks and through a methodology based on co-inquiry and critical analysis within the movement.

Additionally, through analysing the social learning practices in the UK agroecology movement, I contribute to understandings of the role of learning in agrifood system transformations and sustainability transformations more broadly. Specifically, I apply the transformative agroecology learning framework of Anderson et al. (2018), extending it by identifying the role of different types of learning in transformations and deepening analysis of dialogue between different knowledges and positions in the agrifood system. I integrate this into a broader agroecology movement ecology approach, emphasising the need for diverse, interconnected actors and movement spaces to progress agroecology transformations, balancing broad-based collective action with a radical political articulation of agroecology. This has been developed to not only contribute to academic literature and theorising but, importantly, to be practically useful for grassroots movement analysis and strategic action. Namely, by providing an approach to move beyond the binary of radical vs. broad-based organising to strategically consider the roles that diverse movement spaces and coalition work play in progressing systemic change. I now provide an overview of the thesis structure through which these ideas are developed.

1.6 Thesis Outline

In the next chapter, I review literature on agroecology transformations, exploring tensions between conflicting narratives and emphasising political agroecology as critical for transformative change. I synthesise key literature on the processes, mechanisms, and

conditions of agroecology transformations to highlight the important role of social movement praxis. Chapter 3 provides an overview of debates in social movement literature, arguing that theory should be relevant and useful for movements. I identify key concepts and areas of literature useful for understanding agroecology movement praxis: prefigurative politics, social movement ecology, and coalitions. In Chapter 4, I present my participatory activist research methodology, critically reflecting on my positionality as a scholar-activist and elucidating my decisions regarding data collection and analysis.

Chapter 5 prefaces the main empirical chapters, introducing the Landworkers' Alliance (LWA) as central to the "political agroecology movement" and the research, positioning them within the wider sustainable agrifood movement. In Chapter 6, I evaluate the prefigurative politics of the UK political agroecology movement, highlighting benefits and challenges for agroecology transformations. While the movement's prefigurative politics in many ways contribute to fostering agroecology transformations, I identify how the resultant movement subculture engenders tensions and divisions within the wider movement and with more mainstream farmers, limiting the transformative potential of movement praxis. Chapter 7 examines LWA's organising practices, emphasising the positive contribution of the movement's prefigurative praxis, through democratic organising and strong collective identity, in supporting transformative collective action. I argue that these prefigurative organising practices provide a means to ground the movement in radical politics while enabling engagement with broader agrifood system actors and strategies necessary to progress transformations.

Chapter 8 focuses on the movement's social learning practices, emphasising the prefigurative and transformative nature of its horizontal pedagogies while recognising the need for more spaces of dialogue and collective learning with those beyond the movement. This leads me to identify three types of learning important in agroecology transformations (entry, deepening, and transformative-transgressive), arguing that diverse interconnected movement learning spaces are needed to foster such learning. Chapter 9 synthesises arguments of the previous empirical chapters to propose an agroecology movement ecology framework. Drawing on the movement's self-analysis and the work of

early US feminists of colour regarding coalitions, I advance a social movement ecology framework in relation to agroecology transformations. Finally, in Chapter 10 I summarise the key arguments of the thesis, explore the generalisability of the movement ecology framework, and discuss research limitations, identifying useful areas for future investigation.

2. UNDERSTANDING AGROECOLOGY TRANSFORMATIONS

Families, communities, collectives, organizations and movements are the fertile soil in which agroecology flourishes. Collective self-organization and action are what makes it possible to scale-up agroecology, build local food systems, and challenge corporate control of our food system.

Declaration of the International Forum on Agroecology (Nyéléni 2015)

2.1 Introduction

The quote above from the Nyéléni International Forum on Agroecology points to key elements of a political conception of agroecology and associated pathways of transformations which I elaborate in this chapter. That is, the centrality of peasant and farmer-led social movements in driving bottom-up territorially embedded processes of scaling through both fostering enabling conditions for transformative change while challenging the disabling dynamics and narratives of the corporate food regime (Holt-Giménez and Shattuck 2011; Ferguson et al. 2019; Anderson et al. 2020; Giraldo and Rosset 2022). In this chapter, I bring together key areas of the agroecology transformations literature which has proliferated in recent years in response to the urgent need for wholesale change of the food system (Sanderson Bellamy and Ioris 2017; Wezel et al. 2018b; Niggli et al. 2023). I emphasise the critical role of social movement praxis in agroecology transformations, highlighting the relative lack of engagement with social movement theories in the agroecology literature and the limited empirical research on agroecology movement dynamics in the Global North. Building on recent literature (González de Molina et al. 2019; Anderson et al. 2020; Hubeau et al. 2021), I argue that the complexity of transformations necessitates participatory governance, engaging multiple actors in collective learning and action. Such multi-actor processes require consideration

of the narrative boundaries of agroecology and strategies for ensuring it maintains its transformative potential (Bell and Bellon 2021).

In the first section of this chapter, I explore debates around the contestation of agroecology as a concept, presenting arguments for political agroecology as the basis for transformative change. In the second section, I explore distinct frameworks agroecology scholars and movements have developed for understanding the levels, drivers, and conditions involved in bringing agroecology to scale (Gliessman 2016b; Mier y Terán et al. 2018; Anderson et al. 2020). In particular, drawing on both agroecology and sustainability transformations literature, I consider the role of social movements in both the constructive (building of alternatives) and destructive (challenging dominant paradigms and systems) processes of transformation (Temper et al. 2018; Anderson et al. 2020; Feola et al. 2021) as well as the tensions inherent in navigating pathways of transformation amongst diverse actors (Scoones et al. 2020). This leads on to the third section on social learning processes in transformations as critical mechanisms for scaling agroecology and facilitating co-learning between diverse ways of knowing. Finally, as much of the literature has empirical grounding in the Global South, particularly Latin America, I examine differences between Global North and Global South agroecology movements as well as how they are able to come together in transnational agrarian movements like La Vía Campesina through an approach of “unity in diversity” (Desmarais 2007).

2.2 Agroecological Narratives and Transformation

As highlighted in the previous chapter, multiple framings of agroecology have emerged as it begins to be taken up by a wider variety of actors. Radical scholars and social movement actors have increasingly warned of the risk of co-optation, depoliticisation, and dilution of the concept (Nyéléni 2015; Giraldo and Rosset 2018; Rivera-Ferre 2018; Anderson and Maughan 2021). This leads to calls to defend and define agroecology lest it meet the same fate as the term sustainability, hollowed of meaning and “widely used as a narrative tool

for legitimating the status quo” (Bell and Bellon 2021, p.303). This is expressed in the Nyéléni Declaration of the International Forum of Agroecology:

Popular pressure has caused many multilateral institutions, governments, universities and research centers, some NGOs, corporations and others, to finally recognize “agroecology”. However, they have tried to redefine it as a narrow set of technologies, to offer some tools that appear to ease the sustainability crisis of industrial food production, while the existing structures of power remain unchallenged. This co-optation of agroecology to fine-tune the industrial food system, while paying lip service to the environmental discourse, has various names, including “climate smart agriculture”, “sustainable-” or “ecological-intensification”, industrial monoculture production of “organic” food, etc. For us, these are not agroecology: we reject them, and we will fight to expose and block this insidious appropriation of agroecology (Nyéléni 2015, para. 9).

Evident in this quote is the importance of power and politics in a transformative vision of agroecology, and the identification of clear narrative boundaries establishing opposition to depoliticised approaches forwarded by actors interested in merely “fine-tuning” the dominant regime while leaving its basic material and immaterial infrastructures intact.

Such narrative boundaries have been expressed in the agroecology literature as dualistic oppositions distinguishing between different “agroecologies” (Méndez et al. 2015; Biovision 2019a) based on their transformative potential: strong versus weak (López-i-Gelats et al. 2019); radical versus reformist (Holt-Giménez and Altieri 2013); transforming versus conforming (Levidow et al. 2014); and emancipatory versus false agroecology (Giraldo and Rosset 2022). Transformative agroecologies, it is argued, integrate science, practice, and social movement forms of agroecology and consider the whole food system, addressing ecological and techno-productive, socioeconomic and cultural, and sociopolitical dimensions (Méndez et al. 2015; Gliessman 2016b; Rivera-Ferre 2018). They are grounded in the political struggles, social organisation, and local and traditional knowledge of peasants, farmers, and their communities both as an inherent part of agroecological practices and as a means to confront capitalist discourses and relations of

production and reproduction (Sevilla Guzmán and Woodgate 2013; Rivera-Ferre 2018; Anderson et al. 2020). As such, they are characterised by peasant and farmer autonomy and seek to transform power structures through strengthening horizontal organising and learning processes in rural social movements based on culture (Giraldo and Rosset 2022). In contrast, the “neoliberal” or “reformist” framings of agroecology (or “false agroecologies”) often promoted by governments and NGOs, Giraldo and Rosset (2022) argue, focus on technical change while continuing to reflect the colonial and development logics of the dominant regime through disempowering ways of working with farmers and centralising knowledge. This has led some authors to explicitly link agroecology to post-development, as a critique of mainstream development paradigms and alternative for developing pluriversal decolonised realities (Woodgate 2015; Giraldo 2019; Gliessman et al. 2019; Svärd 2021; Toledo 2022).

Thus, while the ‘10 Elements of Agroecology’ framework of the Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) (2018) combines the three dimensions of agroecology, its failure to centre politics and power means it remains reformist (Rivera-Ferre 2018). On the other hand, the definition provided by CIDSE (2018), an international network of social justice organisations, can be seen to be transformative as it encompasses environmental, social, cultural, economic, and political principles of agroecology and defines agroecology as a means to gather political support, “avoid co-optation and fight against false solutions”, and ultimately support the agroecology movement in achieving food sovereignty and climate justice (p.3). These narrative distinctions are necessary for progressing a transformative agenda for agroecology; however, they may fail to address the complex and messy processes of transformation that must be negotiated between diverse actors.

Magda et al. (2021) argue that dualisms such as transforming/conforming, while focusing on “the depth and radicality of the change proposed”, tend “to eclipse the ontological relationships of actors (or researchers) to the very ‘change process’ itself” (p.34). That is, the extent to which objectives, means, targets, and pathways are predetermined by some actors (determinist) or defined along the change process via collaborative evolution (open-

ended). Moreover, as Bottazzi and Boillat (2021) comment, boundaries between narratives of agrarian sustainability “are not impermeable, and actors mainly belonging to one trend can move to another through specific aspects of their discourse” (p.4). Similarly, it is important to recognise these transformative visions of agroecology as an ideal, a set of guiding principles that may not match on-the-ground practice in agrarian movements. The agroecology and food sovereignty literature has at times been criticised for presenting an idealised image of farmers’ and peasants’ practices, and of shared radical visions within movements (Bernstein 2014; Soper 2020). In reality, individual members may have conflicting or contrasting framings, a lack of connection to these concepts, or limitations in how they can realise them (Meek 2016; Calvário 2017; Dumont et al. 2021). As Dumont et al. (2021) contend, it is important to interrogate this gap between ideal and practice and the various barriers actors face in different contexts. Agroecology movements must therefore find ways to navigate this diversity of experiences, strengthening coherence around a transformative conceptualisation of agroecology while recognising that pathways of transformation often involve shifting narrative boundaries, over time and in relation to different actors (Bell and Bellon 2021).

As Bell and Bellon pose, it is possible to have agroecological narratives which are both “strong” in that they express a distinctly radical proposal, distinguishing them from other narratives, and “open” in the permeability of their narrative boundaries, inviting disruptive change and collaborative processes of co-evolution. From this perspective, political agroecology provides a valuable approach to narrative building. Through the application of political ecology, it involves an ongoing analysis of power and politics in support of agroecology transformations (Toledo and Barrera-Bassols 2017; González de Molina et al. 2019). Political agroecology both grounds change processes in radical “transformative” conceptualisations of agroecology and the action and experience of social movements, while acknowledging the need to build broader multi-actor alliances at different levels to shift institutional power (González de Molina et al. 2019; Anderson et al. 2020). Such an approach is suitable for recognising that processes of transformation are complex and non-linear, and as such, agroecology narratives are likely to evolve over time in relation to

different political contexts and configurations of strategic alliance-building (Bell and Bellon 2021; Hubeau et al. 2021).

This is truer to the reality of agroecology movements (Hubeau et al. 2021; Sharma and Van Dyke 2021) and “the pragmatics of agroecology as a narrative strategy” employed by them (Bell and Bellon 2021, p.293). As Sharma and Van Dyke (2021) find in their experience of Indian and Belgian agroecology movements, “movements do not enact practices mechanistically translated from predetermined visions, rather they engender political consciousness through collective thinking/action, and expand the horizon of what is imaginable and achievable in a specific context” (p.268). Thus, while they may often outwardly present unified agendas and discourses, critical reflexivity is involved in navigating differences within agroecology movements “which reflect the historically situated lived experiences of participants positioned differentially within social hierarchies and their uneven capacities to enact transformative practices” (p.268). This requires continual reflection on the power dynamics within and beyond movements as they shift over time, and narrative boundary strategies (Bell and Bellon 2021) which account for the benefits and risks inherent in strategic alliance-building. Taking political agroecology as a guiding approach, I now examine the literature on transformations to better understand the processes and pathways of change, including the scales, mechanisms, and conditions involved in advancing agroecology transformations.

2.3 Frameworks for Agroecology Transformations

Agroecology transformations are understood in the literature as ongoing processes operating at many levels or stages, from the individual farm level to agroecosystems, and then wider food systems and policies (Gliessman 2016b; Wezel et al. 2020). Analytical approaches to agroecology transformations have tended to focus on amplification or ‘bringing agroecology to scale’ and have focused on the drivers and practices for increasing agroecological production within and across territories, based on empirical research (Brescia 2017a; Mier y Terán et al. 2018; Ferguson et al. 2019). Authors have

employed sustainability transformations frameworks to analyse both enabling and constraining factors for agroecology transformations (Duru et al. 2015; El Bilali 2019a; Anderson et al. 2020; Schiller et al. 2020). Across this literature, horizontal learning and organising methodologies, social movement pedagogies, and political learning and mobilisation have been identified as core components of agroecology transformations (Meek 2015; Mier y Terán et al. 2018; Nicholls and Altieri 2018). These are explored further in the subsequent sections on agroecology learning and agroecology movements. In this section, I begin by giving a brief overview of the wider landscape of sustainability transformations literature before delving into conceptual frameworks specific to agroecology transformations.

The field of sustainability transformations research addresses fundamental societal transformations towards sustainable and just futures. Sustainability transformations are seen as complex, context-specific and multidimensional, requiring co-evolutionary change of technologies, markets, culture, infrastructures, and politics (Geels 2002; Loorbach et al. 2017; Köhler et al. 2019) and engaging multiple actors and systems at different levels (Leach et al. 2007; Avelino and Wittmayer 2016) and scales (Hansen and Coenen 2015). Within this broader transdisciplinary field, multiple approaches have developed (Patterson et al. 2017; O'Brien 2018; Köhler et al. 2019) which each have strengths and weaknesses in relation to understanding agroecology transformations (Duru et al. 2015; Ollivier et al. 2018) and may in fact need to be combined to effectively bring about transformations (Scoones et al. 2020). Two key areas of research I briefly outline for their conceptual relevance for agroecology transformations are socio-technical transitions and transformative pathways to sustainability.

Socio-technical transitions research takes a systemic approach (Scoones et al. 2020), focusing on radical shifts within 'meso'-level socio-technical systems by investigating the development, acceleration, and institutionalisation of socio-technical innovations, such as agroecology (Markard et al. 2012; Köhler et al. 2019). Socio-technical transitions theories, particularly the Multi-Level Perspective (MLP), have been frequently applied to agri-food systems and agroecology (Sutherland et al. 2014; El Bilali 2019b; Magrini et al.

2019). The MLP (Geels 2002; Geels 2005; Geels and Schot 2007), provides a heuristic framework to analyse transitions as interactions between three levels: *niches*, *socio-technical regimes*, and the *socio-technical landscape*, where agroecology movements can be understood as niches, the corporate industrial agrifood system as the regime, and wider political, environmental, social, and economic context shaping food systems as the landscape. The extent to which niche innovations are successful in transforming the regime depends on their level of development, the nature of niche-regime relations, and the types of landscape changes (Geels and Schot 2007). For instance, changes at the landscape level may put pressure on the regime causing destabilisation and presenting *windows of opportunity* for the diffusion of niche innovations to take hold and substantially disrupt and transform the regime.

The MLP and overall sociotechnical approach, however, have been subject to several critiques, subsequently informing their development (Geels 2019; Köhler et al. 2019). Particularly relevant to the study of agroecology are criticisms that they inadequately address the role of power and politics (Avelino et al. 2016; Avelino and Wittmayer 2016), framings and narratives (Scoones et al. 2015), and social movements and civil society in transformations (Temper et al. 2018; Törnberg 2018). Sociotechnical transitions overly focus on the development of new technologies whereas, as Feola et al. (2021) highlight, sustainability transformations involve both processes of construction or ‘making’ (creating alternatives) and deconstruction or ‘unmaking’ (challenging and dismantling dominant paradigms such as capitalism). This dual action is clearly reflected in a political agroecology approach through the focus on developing agroecological food systems within territories while seeking to address wider political systems, power structures, and dominant framings through collective mobilisation, framing, and social organisation of peasants and farmers.

In contrast, the pathways to sustainability approach developed by the STEPS centre at the University of Sussex is an enabling approach to transformations, focusing on “fostering the human agency, values and capacities necessary to manage uncertainty, act collectively, [and] identify and enact pathways to desired futures” (Scoones et al. 2020, p.66). It

presents a critique of, and alternative to, depoliticised and technocratic approaches to social change by: centring power and politics; identifying and critically engaging with diverse framings of sustainability; explicitly promoting social justice and analysing the implications of dominant framings on marginalised groups; considering the interplay of transformations at multiple scales; and emphasising agency and the critical role of social movements and citizen initiatives in transformations (Leach et al. 2007; Scoones et al. 2015). I therefore draw on a transformative pathways approach as it resonates with political agroecology, bringing to the fore an analysis of the multiple narratives existing within and beyond rural social movements which underly different, sometimes conflicting, transformation pathways. While the socio-technical transitions approach emphasises this less, it still provides useful conceptual and analytical frameworks for understanding niche-regime interactions. Both conceptualise transformations as *processes* of change, engaging multiple levels and actors, along diverse pathways towards a sustainable and just future. This connects to understandings of agroecology as a journey, a territorially embedded process which requires scaling at different levels.

2.3.1 Agroecology as Process

As I have presented in this chapter, agroecology is seen as offering a transformative paradigm to guide pathways towards sustainable food systems. Such agroecological pathways are diverse, context-specific, and operate at multiple levels and scales (González de Molina 2013; Nicholls and Altieri 2018; Rivera-Ferre 2018). As Gliessman (2016) highlights, agroecology transformation “is an ongoing, constantly changing process of building relationships, sharing knowledge, guaranteeing sovereignty, introducing resilience, and providing everyone with the right to food” (p.894). Likewise, reflecting some challenges highlighted earlier, Wise (2016) suggests that it makes more sense to consider agroecology as a transition rather than as an ideal, a journey rather than an endpoint, especially for farmers who face many barriers as they shift their practices away from an industrial model. This is reflected in Gliessman's (2016b) ‘Five Levels of Agroecology’

(Table 2) which break down agroecology transformations into five steps as a way of analysing how advanced they are. These are:

Table 2. Gliessman's five levels of agroecology transformations (2016b).

1.	Increasing the efficiency of industrial and conventional practices in order to reduce harmful and costly inputs;
2.	Substituting alternative inputs and practices for industrial/conventional inputs and practices;
3.	Redesigning the agroecosystem based on ecological processes;
4.	Reconnecting producers and consumers;
5.	Building a new sustainable global food system, based on equity, participation, democracy, and justice.

Gliessman’s framework begins with the ‘Efficiency-Substitution-Redesign’ model (Padel et al. 2020) and builds on it by adding fourth and fifth levels to acknowledge the aim and necessity within an agroecology paradigm to change wider relationships and structures of food systems. These stages tend to be overlapping rather than sequential and linear.

As highlighted in section 2.2, several actors have tried to articulate a consolidated set of principles to define agroecology (Nyéléni 2015; CIDSE 2018; FAO 2018). While these are generic, the application of these in different contexts “can generate diverse pathways for incremental and transformational change towards more sustainable farming and food systems” (Wezel et al. 2020, p.1). Principles of agroecology have been used as a basis to understand pathways, considering the extent to which actors practices align with these principles (Barrios et al. 2020; Wezel et al. 2020; Dumont et al. 2021). Such assessment tools and levels can be very useful heuristic devices for conceptualising the many possible pathways of agroecology transformations. However, they lack an explanatory framework regarding how farmers, communities, or territories move from one stage of transformation to the next (Padel et al. 2020, p.153), or how transformations are supported or hindered. This first requires an understanding of scaling processes and their embeddedness in territories, which I explore next as a way to analyse mechanisms and conditions for bringing agroecology to scale.

2.3.2 Scaling and Territorialisation

Agroecology transformations as I have described are driven by “bottom up, civil society-led processes of self-organization” and involve going beyond individual farm transitions to transform local, national, and global food systems (Anderson et al. 2019b, p.2). In the agroecology literature this has relatively interchangeably been called scaling, massification (Ferguson et al. 2019), amplification (Nicholls and Altieri 2018), or territorialisation (Magrini et al. 2019) of agroecology, though each term has specific connotations which all contribute to an understanding of “bringing agroecology to scale” (Mier y Terán et al. 2018). Collectively, Mier y Terán et al. (2018) define this “as a process that leads ever-greater numbers of families to practice agroecology over ever-larger territories and which engages more people in the processing, distribution, and consumption of agroecologically produced food” (p.639). Rather than implying increased size (i.e. larger farms and increasingly long and globalised supply chains), scaling here refers to scaling of principles which “means working not toward a single big endeavor, but a multitude of contextualized, articulated agroecologies” (Ferguson et al. 2019, p.723). Whilst these terms are often used interchangeably with transition or transformation in the agroecology literature, scaling is in fact a distinct pathway of transformation, a bottom-up process whereby niche innovations become more widespread to impact wider system change. This approach to transformation has so far received the most attention from agroecology researchers and civil society and is what I mean when I refer to transformations here. As Pitt and Jones (2016) highlight, it is important to interrogate and more concretely define this pathway for food system transformation. How does scaling function and what are its outcomes?

Agroecologists have most characterised two amplification processes, ‘scaling out’ and ‘scaling up’, with a third dimension, ‘scaling deep’, added more recently. As Rosset and Altieri (2017, p.99) comment, these first two evolved from discussions around how to increase the impact of grassroots rural development Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) (Gonsalves 2001; Pachico and Fujisaka 2004). However, similar typologies of scaling have emerged in many fields concerned with change, contributing to sometimes

conflicting definitions in the sustainability transformations literature (Pitt and Jones 2016; Lam et al. 2020). For agroecology, scaling out (or horizontal scaling) describes processes “by which more people (farmers, families, communities) in greater physical areas are aware of or practice agroecological principles” (McGreevy et al. 2021, p.3). Whereas scaling up (or vertical scaling) involves the diffusion of ideas, approaches, and methodologies from the grassroots to the level of institutions, policies, and law.

An earlier contribution in relation to rural development came from Uvin and Miller (1996) who spoke of ‘scaling up’ the impact of NGOs and distinguished four types: quantitative (akin to scaling out), functional, political (akin to scaling up as defined above), and organisational. Functional scaling entails an expansion of the number or type of activities an organisation carries out and organisational scaling refers to developing organisational strength and sustainability. These two additional categories are useful in understanding the role of civil society organisations in transformation. Uvin and Miller (1996) further outlined “paths” within each type such as spread, replication, and integration in quantitative scaling (See table in Uvin and Miller 1996, p.356) which provide more concrete ways to understand scaling processes.

In addition to scaling up and out, scholars have developed the concept of ‘scaling deep’ or ‘deep agroecology’. Botelho et al. (2016) describe deep agroecology as the process of rearticulating spiritual connection between humans and nature, such that knowledge and practice is embedded and contextualised within the local environment. Scaling deep thus involves the cultural rooting of agroecology in territories (Brescia 2017b; García López et al. 2019). As Guzmán Luna et al. (2019) argue, it can “contribute to territorial resilience by reinforcing positive feedbacks between peasant identity and ecological functions” (p.765). The notion of depth in scaling can be seen in other sustainability transformations literature similarly emphasising cultural transformation and the contextualisation of sustainability innovations (van den Bosch and Rotmans 2008; Lam et al. 2020). Nicol (2020) brings this third dimension of scaling to agroecology through applying Moore et al.’s (2015) typology for social innovations. For Moore et al. (2015), scaling deep entails impacting cultural roots and is “based on the recognition that culture plays a powerful role in shifting

problem-domains” (p.77). Some mechanisms of scaling deep they highlight are transformative learning, networks, and communities of practice. The addition of scaling deep is critical in the context of the fundamental paradigm shift needed for agroecology transformation and its rootedness in territories.

In this sense, scaling deep is more clearly represented in the terminology of territorialisation which describes both territorial expansion and embedding. Territorial expansion is encapsulated well in the term massification (from the Spanish *masificación*), defined by Ferguson et al. (2019) as “describing both engagement with masses of people and development of a movement that is increasingly dense in terms of the practices and relationships involved in any given territory” (p.722). The concepts of territory, territoriality, and territorialisation have been much debated in political geography and have contrasting meanings across disciplines and cultural contexts (Antonsich 2017). Territory in relation to agrarian studies has two elements: governance and affect/culture (Shattuck and Peluso 2021). In the first sense, territory entails the creation of material and immaterial boundaries over which authority or sovereignty is claimed, for instance the modern state. In the second sense, it is a lived space with which individuals and social groups identify and feel a sense of belonging, producing the territory intentionally through their social and cultural practices. It is not hard to see then, as Val et al. (2019) assert, that “territory is intimately related to power and control over social processes through the control of space” (p.880) and is a key concept for food sovereignty.

Territorialisation is the process by which a territory is made and comes to be claimed and controlled at different geographic scales. As McGreevy et al. (2021) explains, in contrast to amplification which focuses on person-person interactions to scale agroecology, territorialisation takes a broader view and “describes how different symbolic and material characteristics come to dominate or contest a territory” (p.3). In the context of La Vía Campesina, this contestation is framed as between peasant farming and transnational agribusiness, peasant territoriality and capitalist territoriality (Mançano Fernandes 2008). Agroecological territorialisation therefore represents both the processes of scaling within a territory and the conflicts over land, resources, and ideas that this entails, and can be

viewed as part of wider processes of ‘re-peasantisation’ (van der Ploeg 2011; van der Ploeg 2012). However, the notion of scaling itself, Holt-Giménez (2006, p.163) comments, can ignore the structural barriers, dangers of bureaucratisation of grassroots organisations, and potential conflicts and tensions within partnerships when attempting to bring projects and practices to scale. What is required then is an understanding of what drives scaling, and how wider structures or conditions support or hinder agroecology at different territorial scales, which I now explore.

2.3.3 Conditions for Agroecology Transformations

Agroecologists have increasingly been emphasising a social analysis of the drivers and conditions of agroecology transformations (Rosset 2015; Sanderson Bellamy and Ioris 2017). This analysis avoids “universal solutions and blueprints for transformation, instead focusing on “relationships, processes, policy, power, and practice that nurture social organization, learning, and adaptation” to facilitate place-specific agroecological systems (Ferguson et al. 2019, p.722). Multiple agroecology scholars have identified sets of drivers based on empirical research and case studies, with social organising and social learning amongst peasants and farmers being a key component (Ranaboldo and Venegas 2007; Rosset 2015; Khadse et al. 2017; McCune et al. 2017; Mier y Terán et al. 2018; Nicholls and Altieri 2018). More recently, Anderson et al. (2020) have built on previous research to identify six “domains of transformation” grounded in political agroecology: rights and access to nature, knowledge and culture, systems of economic exchange, networks, equity, and discourse.

Applying the Multi-Level Perspective (MLP), Anderson et al. (2020) conceptualise each domain as an interface of niche-regime interactions, going beyond just an analysis of drivers or “enabling conditions” developed by niche actors (predominantly agroecology movements and civil society) to consider the barriers or “disabling conditions” represented by regime lock-ins. While using MLP as a basis, they address critiques of the framework highlighted earlier by explicitly using the language of transformation and centring power and agency in their understanding of change processes. This leads to a

strong focus on bottom-up participatory governance to coordinate action across the domains at different scales. I now briefly explore each domain, focusing on the connection between social organising, social learning, and discourse in developing multi-actor, multi-scale networks capable of effecting transformative to highlight the critical role of social movement praxis in fostering agroecology transformations.

The first domain, *rights and access to nature*, concerns land, water, seeds, and soil. Transformations are enabled by conditions like secure land tenure, resistance to “western” intellectual property rights, and just land reform. Some disabling conditions include regime lock-ins that restrict land access and permit land grabbing. The second domain recognises the critical role of *knowledge and culture* in transformations, acknowledging the link between power and knowledge, i.e., who determines whether different forms of knowledge production are valued and resourced or not. In this respect, traditional ecological knowledge, such as indigenous knowledge, grounded in culture and local environments is seen as key to fostering agroecology. As are social learning processes, including participatory and popular education approaches such as farmer field schools, peasant-to-peasant approaches, and peasant universities (McCune et al. 2014; Anderson et al. 2018; Val et al. 2019) facilitating the development and exchange of such knowledge. Given the knowledge intensive and context-specific nature of agroecology, these are critical mechanisms of territorialisation, contributing to capacity-building and empowerment (Rosset et al. 2019). Such approaches run counter to the top-down transmission of decontextualised scientific knowledge via technicians and extensionists typical of green revolution agriculture which serve to marginalise farmer knowledge and disempower farmers and peasants (Freire 1973; Machín Sosa et al. 2010). However, scaling agroecology necessitates dialogue between knowledge systems, referred to in the literature as *diálogo de saberes* (Ranaboldo and Venegas 2007; Martínez-Torres and Rosset 2014; de Sousa Santos 2014). This aims at subverting dominant knowledge systems to facilitate horizontal exchange between ways of knowing, as I cover in the next section.

The third domain of *systems of exchange* reflects the identification of agroecological markets as drivers of transformation (Ranaboldo and Venegas 2007; Khadse et al. 2017; Mier y Terán et al. 2018). To facilitate agroecological territorialisation, diverse articulations of territorial markets at different scales, beginning from the base of local markets (IPES-Food 2018) and extending through cooperative and democratic models (González de Molina et al. 2019). Such markets allow peasants autonomy from capitalist global market pressures and ultimately lead to the transformation of producer-consumer relationships, supporting food sovereignty and food justice (Mier y Terán et al. 2018; Nicholls and Altieri 2018). This includes food labelling and regulations when they are carried out in participatory ways to support diversified agroecological production. For instance, Participatory Guarantee Systems (Hirata et al. 2019) rather than costly top-down certification schemes which can result in passive consumerism and prioritisation of large-scale export-oriented production and monocultures, as with some organic certification schemes (Jaffee and Howard 2010). Further, globalised markets based on decontextualised, specialised, export-oriented supply chains and external inputs promoted through government subsidies limit the potential for more autonomous and diversified agroecological markets.

Networks, the fourth domain, speaks to the territorial forms of social organisation “that provide the basis for the collective, coordinated actions needed for agroecological transformation at different scales” (Anderson et al. 2020, p.101). Social learning processes are strengthened through social organisation of peasants and farmers in agroecology movements and civil society initiatives (Val et al. 2019) and movements’ own processes of self-study have contributed to understanding of scaling. For instance, transnational networks such as La Vía Campesina have sought to systematise effective methodologies and share them amongst members (Rosset et al. 2011; Khadse et al. 2017; LVC 2017). Beyond the scaling of agroecological knowledge and practice, networks and cooperative organising increase autonomy from the corporate food system by enabling sharing of resources and labour for the development of agroecological food systems (Holt-Giménez 2006; Rosset 2015), such as with machinery and seed cooperatives (de

Tourdonnet et al. 2018; García López et al. 2019). Having a strong civil society with a basis in peasant and farmer organising, means a diversity of interlinked organisations and networks can bring new actors into the agroecology movement and enable strategic alliances with powerholders and institutions to scale up agroecology (Anderson et al. 2020). Social organisation enables collective political action and is thus critical to countering structural barriers to agroecology in different domains as well as fostering alternative approaches and systems, the unmaking and making emphasised by Feola et al. (2021). Where networks are weak, peasants and farmers tend to have less power to effect change within wider systems and “islands” of agroecological practice remain isolated and fragmented.

This connects to the final two domains of equity and discourse. As highlighted earlier, political agroecology involves understanding and transforming oppressive power structures within the food system. This can be supported by forms of organising that support active participation of women and young people, recognising their critical role in agroecology, and social struggles which organise, empower, and defend the rights of other marginalised actors. Inequity, however, is pervasive across society and much work is needed to counter white supremacy, patriarchy, and other dominant forces and address the ways these show up in land distribution, institutional dynamics, and even alternative food movements (Holt-Giménez and Shattuck 2011; Moore and Swisher 2015; Bezner Kerr et al. 2019; Trevilla-Espinal et al. 2021). As well as material inequities, this involves contestation of the immaterial, ideas and values (Rosset and Martínez-Torres 2012; Khadse et al. 2017). As highlighted earlier in this chapter, discursive struggles play a critical role in determining the potential of agroecology transformations. Social movements and civil society are important sites for constructing collective liberatory discourses and, from that basis, can organise to discursively defend agroecology from co-optation by contesting depoliticised framings employed by other actors (Giraldo and Rosset 2018; Val et al. 2019). However, in seeking to build multi-actor networks and alliances to enable transformative change, movement actors may choose to strategically adopt less radical framings to engage externally or to participate in spaces of productive

dialogue between competing perspectives (Bell and Bellon 2021; Hubeau et al. 2021). Whether such engagement between diverse actors and pathways of change results in transforming the dominant regime or reinforcing it depends on the structures of governance and power involved as well as maintaining the centrality of politics in narratives (Anderson et al. 2020; Hubeau et al. 2021; Sharma and Van Dyke 2021).

In order to both foster enabling conditions and tackle disabling conditions of transformations, linking across domains, it is necessary to engage with multiple actors, including institutions and policymakers, in multi-level reflexive and participatory forms of governance (Marsden 2013; Anderson et al. 2020; Hubeau et al. 2021). As Scoones et al. (2020) argue, facilitating plural pathways of transformation entails “negotiations among contending knowledges and divergent interests”, which is necessarily political as it means “confronting disparate views, interests and forms of incumbent power” (p.70). This involves facilitating “tactical alliances” and “looking for political openings: in who has the capacity to act and what mobilizations are required to challenge incumbent interests and constraining structures” (p.71). This requires ongoing reflexive processes to highlight power dynamics and tensions between actors and continually reshape discourses and strategy to direct transformative change. As Sharma and Van Dyke (2021) argue that “dialogues within and across movements are imperative for making the tensions visible, and to negotiate practices of change that do not reproduce the exclusions of agroindustrial food systems” (p.271). Such negotiations require a reflexive balancing between “malleable” or “open” boundaries that support openness to different perspectives, collaboration, and continuous questioning of objectives and processes, as well as the determination of more closed non-negotiable boundaries of discourse and directionality, both as a strategy for projecting unified resistance and for building collective identity and trust amongst movement actors (Bell and Bellon 2021; Hubeau et al. 2021; Sharma and Van Dyke 2021). Bringing together these perspectives in the agroecology and sustainability transformations literatures, I wish to highlight specifically that developing multi-level governance structures capable of supporting collective action across domains requires effective social learning processes to “frame and tackle persistent problems” (Hubeau et

al. 2021, p.271) and build understanding and alignment across diverse perspectives and interests. In the next section, I explore key approaches and frameworks for understanding the role of social learning in agroecology transformations.

2.4 Social Learning Processes in Transformations

So far in this chapter, I have identified the need for change across multiple scales and domains and the importance of both a political agroecology vision and the construction of multi-actor networks engaging broader perspectives in agroecology transformations. Across this, the significance of social learning to scale out practices, adapting them to territories, and develop political consciousness and discourse became apparent. In this section, I outline social learning processes emphasised in the agroecology literature as critical for transformations. These focus on horizontal processes based on critical pedagogy, dialogue between ways of knowing (*dialogo de saberes*), and transformative learning.

2.4.1 Campesino-a-Campesino

Campesino-a-campesino (*peasant-to-peasant* or *farmer-to-farmer*) (CaC) is one of the most established social learning methodologies, positioning peasants as central protagonists in attempts to massify agroecology. It is rooted in Freirean popular education (Freire 1973; 1996) and based on local peasants' needs and local realities, valorising their knowledge through farmer experimentation and horizontal knowledge exchange (McCune and Sánchez 2019; Val et al. 2019). CaC has been shown to be a powerful approach to agroecological territorialisation in many contexts (Khadse et al. 2017; LVC 2017b; Nyantakyi-Frimpong et al. 2017) and is viewed as the 'movement' form of agroecology training and education (McCune et al. 2014), though has been most influential in Latin America (Holt-Giménez 2006; Saavedra Montano et al. 2017; Rosset and Val 2018). While the methodology was first developed in Guatemala in the 60s, it was the National Association of Small Farmers (ANAP) of Cuba who achieved most impact, launching a

countrywide CaC movement in the 90s to scale agroecology to tackle a food crisis following the Soviet Union's fall (Holt-Giménez 2006) and growing from 200 to 110,000 families involved in 10 years (Val et al. 2019). La Vía Campesina have since promoted this successful experience through exchange visits and publications (Rosset et al. 2011; LVC 2017b), making CaC an organisational priority as one of the main engines for the massification of agroecology combined with grassroots movement organisation (Val et al. 2019).

While farmers have always engaged in experimentation and learning from their neighbours, the CaC methodology formalises these processes to ensure they lead to radical and systematic change (Machín Sosa et al. 2010). It is based on the idea that farmers trust more in the experience of fellow farmers and what they can see in action for themselves than what extensionists and technicians tell them to do (Holt-Giménez 2006). The CaC methodology relies on three roles: farmer-promoters, facilitators, and coordinators (Pan Para el Mundo 2006; Rosset et al. 2011; Rosset and Val 2018). Farmer promoters are identified in their community for their successful agroecological practices and desire and ability to teach others. They use their farm as their classroom, inviting other farmers to see practices for themselves and gain confidence to begin to experiment with and implement such practices themselves. Farmers may then become promoters themselves, creating a multiplier effect. Facilitators, who can be farmers but may be agronomists or technicians, help link up farmers who have specific challenges to farmer-promoters who have suitable agroecological solutions through organising local workshops, meetings, and farm visits for peer-to-peer knowledge exchange. Finally, the coordinators operate at a larger scale ensuring experiences cross geographies by organising exchanges and gatherings. The success of the CaC methodology therefore relies on a high degree of what Brazil's Landless Workers' Movement (MST) call "organicity" (Rosset and Val 2018), the degree of organisation in a movement and how its activities interconnect effectively (Fernandes 2000). A high level of organicity provides the "social and organizational fabric for agroecology to spread" (LVC 2022a, para.5) through peasant organisations or local structures such as coops and women's groups.

In contrast to the disempowering and disabling approaches of conventional agricultural extension used to spread green revolution technologies through top-down linear transmission of learning, i.e. the ‘banking’ model (Freire 1996), CaC empowers farmers to develop their own solutions tailored to their locality. This is critical for agroecology which is knowledge-intensive and cannot be transmitted as a recipe (Maughan and Anderson 2023). Conventional extension takes a paternalistic and domesticating approach, placing university-based scientific knowledge in a hierarchy over locally embedded traditional and indigenous knowledge (Freire 1973; PPM 2006). The job of the agronomist or technician is often to promote pre-packaged and pre-determined technical solutions and convince peasants to use them. This translates into a very different way of constructing and sharing knowledge (Machín Sosa et al. 2010) and CaC is seen as having more potential to rapidly scale agroecology due to the multiplier effect through farmer promoters rather than reliance on one-to-one interactions between extension workers and farmers (Bernal et al. 2023). Within the field of agricultural extension and education, however, participatory approaches such as farmer-led research and farmer-to-farmer learning have increasingly been promoted in recent years. As these are not embedded in rural social movements and driven by peasants these do not represent the CaC methodology (McCune et al. 2014). Instead they often replicate the same underlying logics of traditional extension, viewing farmer-to-farmer models as simply a low-cost and effective way to extend specific technologies (see for example Kiptot et al. 2016; Hailemichael and Haug 2020; Goeb and Lupi 2021) rather than seeking transformation. This continues hierarchies in knowledge production, whereas transformative approaches to learning involve challenging such power dynamics, as is reflected in the concept of *diálogo de saberes* which I explore next.

2.4.2 Diálogo de Saberes

Diálogo de saberes, or dialogue between ways of knowing, is an important concept informing social learning and organising processes within La Vía Campesina (LVC) (Martínez-Torres and Rosset 2014; Anderson et al. 2018). As agroecology is defined by pluralism, pedagogical approaches need to both recognise the diverse cosmovisions and

local realities of different actors and be able to communicate between them. This is critical for LVC as a transnational agrarian movement representing farmers, peasants, and indigenous peoples from all over the world with vastly different historical experiences (Desmarais and Nicholson 2013; Edelman and Borras 2016). Even within a territory there is the need to support intergenerational exchange and bring into conversation the scientific and technical knowledge often brought by researchers and agronomists with the vernacular knowledge of people (McCune et al. 2014). *Diálogo de saberes* as an educational perspective, reflective of de Sousa Santos' (2014) 'ecology of knowledges', recognises there are many valid ways of knowing the world and value in sharing experiences across them without seeking to dominate or homogenise. This challenges the hegemony of "logical, Cartesian, historically Eurocentric knowledge", considering it on an equal basis with local peasant knowledge and indigenous ways of knowing amongst others (McCune et al. 2014, p.32). As highlighted earlier, bringing diverse and contending perspectives into dialogue while acknowledging and addressing unequal power dynamics in knowledge production and sharing is critical in fostering transformations. The concept of *diálogo de saberes* is employed by LVC at different levels to navigate the heterogeneity between and within member organisations and informs wider social learning practices in the movement, some of which I outline next.

2.4.3 Social Learning Processes and Institutions

La Vía Campesina (LVC) view peer-to-peer methodologies based on critical pedagogy and *diálogo de saberes* as core elements of processes of *formación*⁴, that is, training which supports the construction of the peasant political subject through critical praxis (McCune et al. 2014; McCune et al. 2017). As La Vía Campesina note, such training develops

⁴ The Spanish word *formación* roughly translates as "training" but is employed in La Vía Campesina and Latin American social movements to encompass a broader idea of forming social actors through education which centres cooperative and egalitarian values in order to realise a new society through critical action and reflection (McCune et al. 2014; McCune et al. 2017).

understanding of the historical and socio-political context of agroecology practice and struggles and is therefore vital for agroecology transformations:

Discussing and implementing political-agroecological training in each movement and organization is important because it makes it possible to understand the historical process, and the progress, limits and challenges of the praxis of struggle. [...] In an increasingly complex and difficult global political context, it is essential that the training of activists and political and technical cadres provide them with a capacity to critically interpret reality to transform it (LVC [no date], para.9).

As well as the CaC methodology, this encompasses a whole series of agroecology trainings, schools, workshops, exchanges, and international “encounters” or gatherings which encompass practical and political learning and action.

Through its member organisations, LVC claims over 70 schools and training processes globally (LVC [no date]). In Europe these are mostly projects and farms that are centres for farmer-to-farmer knowledge exchange whereas in Latin America more formal institutions of learning, such as the network of Latin America Institutes of Agroecology (IALAs) which began in Venezuela in 2006 with the support of Hugo Chavez and have since been developed in many other countries (LVC 2022b; Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign 2022). These training institutes focus on providing an alternative educational route for rural youth, supporting their involvement in the movement and scaling agroecological practice. By providing an educational alternative based on the unlearning of and opposition to colonisation, patriarchy, and capitalism, formación processes develop an ‘agroecological consciousness’ (Rosset et al. 2019) and make possible the imagining of futures beyond oppressive systems.

Agroecological formación such as peasant schools and CaC are examples of wider “peasant-to-peasant processes” including international and national political organisation and articulation and cooperation amongst peasant organisations, which La Vía Campesina see as critical for agroecology transformations (Val et al. 2019). Organisation, education, and action are thus seen as the interrelated elements of agroecology movement praxis. On

one hand, it is recognised that “educational-pedagogical training takes place in all spaces of political struggle” (Rosset et al. 2019, p.903). On the other, agroecology movements are seen to intentionally use educational processes for critical self-reflection, movement-building, and constructing new strategies. As highlighted in section 2.3, such horizontal learning and organising practices drive amplification by sharing effective practices, generating engaging discourse, developing alliances, designing and organising alternative relationships with other food system actors, and identifying and mobilising around agrarian reform (Val et al. 2019, p.874). While critical pedagogy and diálogo de saberes are more prominent in Latin American movements, these concepts and associated methodologies have been transmitted through LVC to inform approaches in the Global North, being combined with the framing of transformative learning as I now explore.

2.4.4 Transformative Agroecology Learning

Transformative Learning describes processes of perspective transformation through deep shifts in individual’s frames of reference (Mezirow 1997; Cranton and Taylor 2011) and therefore in their identity (Dirkx 2006; Illeris 2014). Agroecology, as a radically different food system paradigm, necessitates such shifts. While many of the social learning processes mentioned have been well-studied in the Global South, Global North contexts remain underexamined. Anderson et al. (2018) address this gap through action research with the European Coordination of Via Campesina (ECVC), developing a framework identifying the key elements of a transformative approach to agroecological learning in social movements. Although they recognise transformative learning as an established theory in Adult Learning, they engage minimally with relevant educational literature in which questions of learning for social change have been explore. I thus outline their framework before connecting to broader literature on transformative learning in sustainability transformations.

The ‘four pillars’ of transformative agroecology learning Anderson et al. (2018) identify (see Figure 1) weave together the in-situ practice of agroecology with the political project of food sovereignty: diálogo de saberes; horizontal learning; combining the practical and the political; and building multi-scale social movement networks.

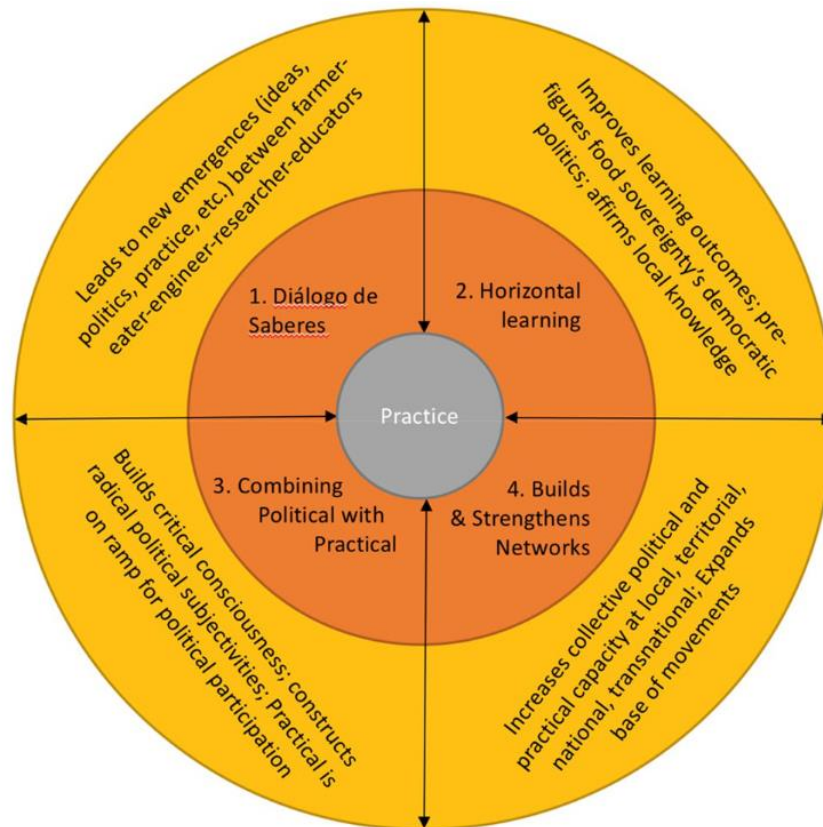


Figure 1. Four pillars of transformative agroecology learning (orange) linking agroecological practice to food sovereignty (yellow) (Anderson et al. 2018, p.543).

Anderson et al. (2018) particularly focus on bringing food producers into dialogue with: other producers with different perspectives and positionings; other food system actors such as consumers; and formal education and research institutions. Horizontal learning approaches connect to the peasant-to-peasant processes described by Val et al. (2019). They are prefigurative in that they “are rooted in the belief in our collective ability to make history and transform society” (Anderson et al. 2018, p.540). Such practices recognise that everyone has something to contribute and are useful in not only building confidence,

personal connections, and solidarity, but also developing movement leaders, organisers, and facilitators to strengthen movement organising.

Combining political and practical action and learning means both addressing practical problems as political rather than just technical and making sure political work does not lose touch with those on the ground doing practical work. Integrating political learning can overcome individualising tendencies in changing farming practice to “promote collective subjectivities as the basis for collective action” (Anderson et al. 2018, p.541). Finally, building social movement networks from the local level up to the national and international supports farmer-to-farmer processes and allows agroecology to scale. Moreover, education is used as a movement and organisational strategy, strengthening movement building through training movement cadre, inter-organisational learning, and developing collective narratives and tactics.

While Anderson et al. (2018) critique Mezirow’s conception of Transformative Learning for focusing on individual change rather than collective action, many authors have advanced the theory to address collective and contextual dimensions of learning and clearly articulate a social change goal (Kovan and Dirkx 2003; Kroth and Cranton 2014; Buechner et al. 2020; Brookfield 2022; Nicolaides and Eschenbacher 2022), including in relation to agroecology education (Horner et al. 2021). By connecting further to the transformative learning literature, analysis of transformative agroecology learning could be strengthened. Within the field of Sustainability Education the concept of ‘Transgressive Learning’ has been additionally suggested, combined with transformative learning as “T-Learning” (James and Macintyre 2017) to emphasise the need to uncover and disrupt power structures and hegemonic norms that lead to planetary destruction (Peters and Wals 2016). The literature on transformative and transgressive learning can contribute to understanding agroecology transformations as such social learning processes are necessary in forging multi-actor alliances and reflexive forms of governance, fostering dialogues that acknowledge power dynamics between actors and support collective political action (2.4). The social learning approaches outlined in this section, though employed differently in Global North and Global South contexts, are connected and

spread through the global agroecology movement at various levels to promote transformative praxis. In this final section, I focus on agroecology as a transnational movement that seeks to unify diverse national movements while respecting their unique expressions and contexts in order to progress agroecology transformations at different scales.

2.5 Agroecology as a Transnational Agrarian Movement

Agroecology is a transnational movement bringing together diverse peasant, rural, and food movements globally, as evident in transnational alliances like LVC (Rosset and Martínez-Torres 2012). Edelman and Borras (2016) define Transnational Agrarian Movements (TAMs) as “organizations, networks, coalitions and solidarity linkages of farmers, peasants and their allies that cross national boundaries and that seek to influence national and global policies” (p.1). Organising as part of a TAM facilitates access to resources for members and increases their political strength. Member organisations exchange information, strategies, and organising practices as well as supporting each other’s campaigns and developing collective action. La Vía Campesina (LVC) is recognised globally as the main voice of organised peasants and small farmers. Though a longer history of peasant networks, mobilisations, and transnational alliances led to its formation, LVC was officially formed in 1993 at an international conference of peasant and small farmer organisations in Belgium (Desmarais and Nicholson 2013) in opposition to neoliberal globalisation (Edelman and Borras 2016).

LVC supports members to share and scale effective practices, such as campesino-a-campesino and agroecology schools, and develop collective language and culture, such as *místicas*⁵ and organicity (Rosset and Martínez-Torres 2014; Khadse et al. 2017; Rosset et al. 2019; Claeys and Singh 2022). However, in attempting to build a broad-based global

⁵ *Místicas* are symbolic spiritual and cultural practices often carried out at the start of LVC gatherings and may include music or poetry. They can be used to create a sense of commonality, acknowledge and value different cultures of participants, and connect to the emotional and more-than-human aspects of the struggle.

peasant movement based on “unity in diversity”, critics argue that food sovereignty narratives insufficiently address the heterogeneity of supposed peasant farmers in relation to Global North-South divides, social class, identity, political vision, and historical context (Bernstein, 2006; Edelman & Borras, 2016; Morena, 2015; Soper, 2020). The food sovereignty demands of actors within and between member organisations are diverse and at times conflicting (Edelman and Borras 2016; Soper 2020). It is important then to examine the differences between and within national contexts that shape the unfolding of agroecology transformations.

2.5.1 Global South-North Differences

As already highlighted, the majority of existing agroecology research focuses on the Global South, particularly Latin America (Anderson et al. 2018; Wezel et al. 2018b; Ong and Liao 2020). In particular, there is limited empirical research on UK agroecology movements and existing research has tended to focus on urban agroecology (Nicol 2020; Logan 2021). Global North agroecology movements are embedded in vastly different historical, social, economic, and cultural contexts to such peasant movements, whilst nonetheless being influenced by South-to-North exchange through LVC. Agroecology movements in Europe and the US have developed more from anti-capitalist, anti-globalisation and environmental movements than from peasant resistance (Rosset and Altieri 2017). In fact, some argue that the category of peasant is hardly relevant in the Global North where there is “an almost total hegemony of business-type agriculture” (López-García and Cuéllar-Padilla 2018, p.100). However, Van der Ploeg (2018) argues that due to the self-generated limitations of modernisation (reduction of efficiency of inputs, climate change, soil degradation etc.) and the shift to the wider context that made modernisation first possible (cheap fossil fuels, state financing, stable and regulated food markets) we are now seeing processes of re-peasantisation triggered as “a search for autonomy” (van der Ploeg, 2012, p. 273). Re-peasantisation entails both an increase in the ‘peasantness’ of agriculture, which is very much resonant with agroecology, and an increase in peasant numbers via entry from outside and (re-)conversion of entrepreneurial to peasant agriculture.

Van der Ploeg's rearticulation of the peasantry has created a space for the study of European and Global North contexts (Monllor i Rico and Fuller 2016; Calvário 2017; McGreevy et al. 2019; Milone and Ventura 2019). These 'new peasantries' are still on the margins of the highly industrialised farming systems in the Global North but find commonality with the approaches to agriculture and economic positions of Global South peasants. La Via Campesina (LVC) similarly employs a broad definition of peasant (see LVC 2016, p.6) which intentionally gives space for a broad-based movement mobilisation and transnational solidarity (Edelman and Borras 2016). However, while such newcomers have been uncritically celebrated elsewhere (Monllor i Rico and Fuller 2016; Dolci and Perrin 2018), their embeddedness in agriculture and the historical processes that have shaped them require further examination when considered in relation to existing literature on agroecological learning and transformation.

Countries in the Global North have been shaped by very different historical processes and have been on different sides of global power dynamics in the food system through processes of colonisation and (neo)imperialism. The fact that "de-agrarianisation and tertiarisation are older and deeper processes" in Global North contexts, and especially the UK, compared with Global South countries presents particular challenges and creates specific socio-material relations (Calvário, 2017, p. 403). For instance, Isaac et al. (2018) highlight how agroecology in Canada has developed in direct response to "the degradation caused by a productivist approach that stretches back to the earliest forms of settler colonial agriculture" (p.11) rather than the resurgence and revival of traditional, place-based knowledges that define other Global South agroecologies (Rosset et al. 2020). Similarly, Aare et al. (2020) questions the implications for food sovereignty in a Northern context where traditional practices have been long forgotten.

The UK offers a particularly distinct context, even compared with the rest of Europe, of advanced industrialisation and de-agrarianisation (Prados de la Escosura 2004). The political-economic, socio-cultural, and environmental reality of the UK has been formed through its history as a major colonial power. The UK has long relied on imported food and food cultures which shape its contemporary foodscapes (Collingham 2018). Related to

this, successive processes of land enclosures beginning in the 17th century as well as the industrial revolution resulted in mass urbanisation and proletarianisation of rural populations meaning that for generations people have been divorced from land-based practices and the biocultural knowledge attached to them (Fairlie, 2009; Mingay, 1968; Neeson, 2008). Following the trend across Europe and other Global North contexts, farm sizes have increased as farmer populations have decreased (Eurostat 2018), leading to a drastically different farming landscape to many Global South contexts which still have a large rural population and economies based on small farms (Herrero et al. 2017).

Peasant agriculture in the UK is incredibly marginal. This contrasts with Latin American contexts where there is a larger, more organised, and historic peasant contingent which have been pursuing a transformative vision of agroecology linked to food sovereignty for far longer (Anderson et al. 2018). López-García and Cuéllar-Padilla (2018) argue that while agroecology movements in the South emphasise massification through peasant organisations of their peasant bases, Northern movements focus on alliance building with both agroecological and conventional agrarian and non-agrarian actors. This reflects how these realities shape the possibilities and pathways of transformation. Moreover, as a transformative articulation of agroecology is less established in European contexts, agroecology remains more ambiguous and risks being easily co-opted by the many powerful actors competing to define it (Anderson et al. 2018).

Global North contexts can, however, offer new and valuable directions for agroecology transformations. In the US context, Brent et al. (2015) argue that intersections with movements for agrarian justice, food justice (particularly its intersection with racial justice), and immigrant labour could all strengthen the broader agroecology and food sovereignty movement. La Via Campesina manages to support the development of such local articulations of agroecology whilst at the same time bringing together learning to strengthen the global movement and establishing a shared articulation of principles. This diversity is seen as a value rather than a challenge, reflecting the movement's pluriversal perspective. Rather than romanticising or reifying this global peasant community they recognise that "communities should be seen as sites of diversity, difference, conflicts, and

divisions most often expressed along gender, class, and ethnic lines and characterized by competing claims and interests” (Desmarais 2007, p.37). Desmarais (2007) explains that LVC is able to weave together these diverse contexts through well-defined structures for representation and democratic decision-making (p.28). Thus, while agroecology movements in the Global North are strongly shaped by their contrasting contexts, they are influenced by this North-South exchange of knowledge, solidarity, and collective organising. More research is required to understand these influences on the development of Global North movements and the role movements play in fostering transformations in these contexts.

2.6 Summary of Chapter

This chapter examined the importance of transformative conceptualisations of agroecology, emerging from a political agroecology approach, in directing sustainable agri-food system change and countering depoliticised paradigms which seek to co-opt agroecology. These transformative framings integrate the ecological and technoproductive, socioeconomic and cultural, and sociopolitical dimensions of agroecology, treating its science, practice, and social movement forms as interconnected. They emphasise power and politics, viewing agroecology transformations as bottom-up processes rooted in peasant and farmer struggles, like food sovereignty, and knowledge practices. However, transformations require engaging a broad range of actors, necessitating consideration of narrative boundaries and boundary strategies in forming strategic alliances capable of shifting institutional power and transforming dominant paradigms.

Through reviewing literature on agroecology and sustainability transformations, I have shown that transformations involve diverse pathways of change, operate at multiple levels and scales, are inherently political, and involve both dismantling dominant paradigms and creating alternatives. Key to understanding these pathways are ideas of scaling and territorialisation, which involve engaging more people in agroecological practice within

and across territories, changing institutions and policies through collective action led by farmer movements, and shifting cultures and values in line with agroecological principles. Using Anderson et al.'s (2020) six domains of transformation framework, I examined how agroecology movements act both to foster enabling conditions for transformations and tackle the disabling conditions presented by regime lock-ins. I emphasised the importance of multi-actor alliances based on multi-scale reflexive and participatory forms of governance (González de Molina et al. 2019; Anderson et al. 2020; Hubeau et al. 2021). Such collective action and the scaling out of agroecology rely on effective horizontal social learning processes, including transformative and transgressive learning.

Social learning and political organising practices are deeply intertwined in agroecology movements, reflected in the idea of agroecology movement praxis. However, the praxis of agroecology movements and its role in fostering pathways of transformation are highly contextual. I identified limited research on agroecology movements in the Global North, and the UK in particular, as a gap worth exploring. Additionally, while political agroecology emphasises social movements as underpinning transformations, there has been little engagement with the social movement literature. In the next chapter, I address this by exploring contributions from academic and grassroots social movement literature, focusing on prefigurative politics and social movement coalitions to advance a social movement ecology approach to understand the multi-actor alliances needed for agroecology transformations. These concepts from the social movement literature are then combined with those in agroecology transformations in analysing the thesis's empirical findings to contribute to both literatures.

3. ECOLOGIES OF SOCIAL MOVEMENT PRAXIS

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I highlighted how the social organising and learning practices of agroecology movements are critical for agroecology transformations. This is reflected in the emphasis on transdisciplinary, participatory, and action-oriented approaches such as participatory action research and scholar-activism (Méndez et al. 2015; Levkoe et al. 2020; Duncan et al. 2021; Wit et al. 2021), which I explore further in Chapter 4. Despite the importance of social movements in agroecology literature, engagement with social movement literature has been limited. Exceptions include studies on framing processes (Rosset and Martínez-Torres 2014; Schnyder 2022) and repertoires of collective action (Bottazzi and Boillat 2021). At the same time, some social movement scholars advocate for moving beyond classic sociological framings to engage with theorising grounded in movement praxis (Bevington and Dixon 2005; Croteau 2005; Choudry 2015). In this chapter, I explore what this means for social movements in agroecology transformations. Reflecting the concepts of *dialogo de saberes* and *ecology of knowledges* (Martínez-Torres and Rosset 2014; de Sousa Santos 2014), I aim to create dialogue between academic and grassroots social movement literatures and the agroecology literature to develop an ecological approach to social movement building as the central conceptual framework for this thesis.

I begin by defining social movements and connecting this to agroecology as a movement. The second section reviews key sociological approaches to studying social movements, their evolution, and criticisms, including their disconnection from movements' own strategies and sense-making and the absence of Global South perspectives, especially concerning territory. I then discuss movement praxis as a basis for grassroots theorising and knowledge production, resonating with the agroecology literature due to the influence of popular education. In the third section, I develop an ecological approach to social movements, drawing on *social movement ecology*, *prefigurative politics*, and *coalitions*.

This framework, emerging from my research in conversation with the UK agroecology movement's praxis and relevant literatures, will be further elaborated in Chapter 9.

3.2 Defining Social Movements

Social movements have long been recognised for their potential for social transformation (Carrillo 2020), as a means for groups to articulate and push for their interests (Snow et al. 2018). But what distinguishes social movements from other collective forms of action like interest groups or political parties? Della Porta and Diani (2006) identify three defining characteristics: social movements have conflictual relations with clearly identified opponents, dense informal networks, and a distinct collective identity (p.20). Authors tend to distinguish the form of collective action and political participation that social movements engage in as extra-or non-institutional or non-conventional, i.e. through various forms of protest (Snow et al. 2018; della Porta 2020). However, many have highlighted the tendency for social movements to become institutionalised over time, potentially evolving into political parties or interest groups (Choudry 2015; Snow et al. 2018).

Scholars have further emphasised that movements entail some degree of organisation, coordination, and temporal continuity – that is, a level of sustained activity (Yearley 2005; Snow et al. 2018; Carrillo 2020). They are not to be confused with riots or protest events but can emerge from them or provide an organised and resourced base for more short-lived action. And while movements are somewhat organised, della Porta (2020) is emphatic that they are not organisations themselves but instead “nets of relations between diverse actors, which often include organizations with formal structures” (p.657). However, as Tarrow (1998, p.123) adds, social movement organisations (SMOs) provide the wider movement with strategic leadership, a focal point for interaction of activists, and a source for recruiting members.

Based on these characteristics, agroecology can be seen to be a transnational movement of movements, operating at interconnected local and national scales. Agroecology

movements clearly position themselves in opposition to the corporate food regime. They involve dense networks of producers, activists, researchers, peasant and farmer organisations, and other agroecological food system actors connected within and across territories. As a transnational movement, agroecology has a collective identity centred on a food sovereignty articulation of agroecology, at the same time as allowing for local expressions of agroecology and movement strategies through the approach of “unity in diversity”. They engage in non-institutional collective action to scale agroecology through territorial markets and social learning processes, for instance, at the same time engaging with political institutions to embed agroecology at broader scales, either through strategic alliances with powerholders or forms of advocacy and protest (Mier y Terán et al. 2018; Anderson et al. 2020; Hubeau et al. 2021). Finally, agroecology as an organised and coordinated struggle has persisted for decades and while certain peasant and farmer organisations are often key to local mobilisation, the movement encompasses far wider networks of relationships between diverse actors, as can be seen in multi-actor alliances at territorial scales (Anderson et al. 2020; Hubeau et al. 2021) and global forums like Nyéléni (Nyéléni 2007; Nyéléni 2015).

I have taken a broad conceptualisation of social movements, drawing on debates and commonalities across the literature. However, social movement scholars often orient their definitions towards particular analytical focuses depending on their sociological lens. In the next section, I introduce some key theoretical approaches in the academic literature before examining critiques of these, leading to a valuing of theory that is grounded in movement praxis.

3.3 Social Movement Theorising

There is a wealth of theorising about social movements, seeking to understanding the dynamics of movements and their role in social transformations. Social movement theory is often considered in the literature to refer to the academic theories produced predominantly in the US and Europe based on sociology and political science (Della Porta

and Diani 2006; Conway 2013). However, the theoretical work done to understand social movements is far broader, encompassing Global South perspectives on social movements, and the “praxis-based knowledges” produced by social movements through practices of critical reflexivity (Motta and Nilsen 2011; Conway 2013; Choudry 2015; Fadaee 2016; Leraul 2019). In this section, I contrast perspectives on theorising social movements to justify the conceptual choices I make in constructing a social movement ecology framework for understanding movement dynamics in agroecology transformations.

3.3.1 The Field of “Social Movement Studies”

Over time, various analytical approaches have been developed to study social movements. Histories of social movement theory tend to centre on the theoretical traditions of North America and Europe, as well as the shift in thinking necessitated by the emergence of movements in the 1960s such as the student, civil rights, environmental, peace, and feminist movements, compared with traditional labour or nationalist movements (see Eyerman and Jamison (1991) for a rigorous account of social movement studies and Snow et al. (2018) for a more recent overview). These approaches determine which aspects of a movement are stressed and how movement participants and their actions are conceptualised. For instance, in Resource Mobilisation Theory (RMT), a dominant approach developed largely in North America since the 1970s (see McAdam et al. (1996)), social movements are understood by their ability to garner resources to pursue common interests, and movement participants are viewed as rational actors engaged in cost-benefit analysis of forms of action. They focus on how movements organise. Whereas theorists in the New Social Movement (NSM) paradigm developed in Western Europe (see Melucci (1980; 1985) and (Touraine 1981; 1985)) focus on how social actors come to define their collective identity, as well as what they viewed as the more culture and values-based nature of the “new” social movements emerging since the 1960s. These theorists argued that the NSMs went beyond the demands of class and the contestation of state

power to address issues related to personal and social identities via communicative action (Kuk and Tarlau 2020).

Other perspectives connected to these two dominant approaches are Political Process Theory (Tilly and Tarrow 2015), which views movement actors as identifying and exploiting political opportunities to further their causes, and the study of discursive framing processes (Benford and Snow 2000) used by movement actors to garner support. These various approaches infer different levels of analysis, from the micro (individual and psychological) to the meso (organisations and collectivities) and macro (societal processes). Eyerman and Jamison (1991), propose a further approach which they argue brings together these different levels and their interactions through understanding social movements as “cognitive praxis”, that is the distinct relationships to knowledge and development of consciousness that characterise them.

This connects to the field of adult education where social movements have long been recognised as vibrant spaces of learning and knowledge production (Finger 1989; Welton 1993; Foley 1999; Kilgore 1999; Holst 2002; Scandrett et al. 2010; Hall et al. 2011). Influenced by the New Social Movements (NSM) literature and popular education (Cho 2010), theorising in this field often emphasises processes of ‘conscientisation’, and social movements are seen both “as sites of identity, learning, knowledge generation, and pedagogy” and as catalysts “for personal transformation and collective change” (Walter 2007, p.251). Social movement learning describes both learning that occurs within a movement through participation - learning *in* movements - and learning that happens beyond a movement through interaction with it and due to its existence and influence on wider social knowledge - learning *from* movements - which is often overlooked (Eyerman and Jamison 1991; Hall and Turray 2006; Holst 2018).

In their notion of cognitive praxis, Eyerman and Jamison (1991) attempt to bring together analysis of both learning *in* and learning *from* movements. They view the significance of social movements “not merely as a challenge to established power, but also and more so a socially constructive force, as a fundamental determinant of knowledge” (p.48), and thus as a vital source of social innovation. Within this, they identify the important role of

‘movement intellectuals’, derived from Gramsci’s concept of ‘organic intellectuals’ (1971), as those acting within the movement who articulate the movement’s cognitive praxis and provide ideological direction. At the same time, they recognise “knowledge creation as a collective process”, a result of social encounters within movements, between movements, and between movements and their opponents, rather than “the “discovery” of an individual genius” or “the determined outcome of systemic interactions within an established research and development system” (Eyerman and Jamison 1991, p.57). They therefore challenge classical approaches which they see as reifying social movements, instead seeking to understand them as processes in formation interacting within historical socio-political contexts.

As a broader approach, this clearly has relevance for agroecology movements which are seen to drive societal transformations both as destructive and constructive forces evolving over time. As shown in the previous chapter, social learning processes in movements are seen as key to framing a transformative conception of agroecology, scaling agroecological practice, and supporting horizontal and participatory forms of organising at different levels through political analysis and dialogue between diverse ways of knowing. This connects to the three “dimensions of cognitive praxis” that Eyerman and Jamison (1991) identify as integrally constituting a social movement: cosmological (basic assumptions or beliefs, worldviews), technological (the specific technological interests that a movement develops around), organisational (particular organisational paradigm, including modes of producing and disseminating knowledge). For example, in the environmental movements Eyerman and Jamison (1991, p.66) studied this entails an ecological worldview (cosmological), small-scale alternative technologies like renewables (technological), and a democratic knowledge production and anti-elitism (organisational). Thus, they attempt to bring together the different levels and focuses of previous sociological approaches, including the focus on collective identity and conscientisation in NSM theory and the importance of organisational processes for mobilisation, instead reinterpreting them through the alternative lens of cognitive praxis. As Hall and Turray (2006) summarise, “they focus simultaneously on the process of articulating a movement identity (cognitive praxis), on

the actors taking part in this process (movement intellectuals) and on the context of articulation (politics, cultures and institutions)” (p.7). While this approach centres knowledge production in movements and addresses some challenges of other sociological theories, it is still in some ways subject to the criticisms leveled at the academic field of social movement studies such as the privileging of western sociological perspectives and absence of territorial analysis.

Critiques of classical theories in social movement studies have emerged predominantly from scholar-activists in the field of social movement learning and those engaged in Global South movements. The dominant sociological approaches, they argue, can end up producing a narrow or overly abstracted analysis of movements (Bevington and Dixon 2005; Croteau 2005; Choudry 2015). By rigidly adhering to one approach, there is a risk of forcing a movement to fit pre-defined concepts and producing a fragmented approach which ignores the complex, dynamic, fluid, and multifaceted nature of social movements (Choudry 2015, p.48). Moreover, as the field has focused on Western sociological theorisation and contexts it misses out on a whole range of theoretical contributions from the Global South, within other fields, and beyond academia (Kapoor 2011; Jaramillo and Carreon 2014; Choudry 2015). Since the 1990s, there have been increasing attempts to address these shortcomings, particularly acknowledging the emergence of highly visible transnational and Global South social struggles such as global justice and alter-globalisation movements, including the Zapatistas⁶ and the food sovereignty movement. For instance, volumes focused on the study of Southern movements have sought to understand them “on their own terms” rather than as empirical sites for the application of theories generated in the North (Motta and Nilsen 2011; Fadaee 2016). Additionally, and connected to analysis of the coloniality of knowledge (Lander 2000; Quijano 2007), there has been increased emphasis on participatory and activist research approaches aimed at

⁶ The Zapatistas are a group based in Chiapas, Mexico, organised around the Zapatista National Liberation Front (EZLN) who rose up against the Mexican government in 1994. They focus on struggles for anti-globalisation, direct democracy, land reform, and the liberation of indigenous peoples and have become a symbol of radical left resistance and alternative governance globally, particularly for anarchists.

deconstructing hierarchies between academic and movement-based knowledges in different contexts (Hale 2008; Motta 2011; Choudry 2015).

One critique emerging from the Global South particularly relevant for the study of agroecology movements addresses the lack of grounding in territories and analysis of space and place (Moyo and Yeros 2005; Halvorsen et al. 2019). This highlights the inadequacy of previous approaches in understanding agrarian struggles, land occupations, and indigenous activism, as well as squatting, neighborhood organising, and protest camps. Particularly key to this development has been Brazilian geographer Fernandes' conceptualisation of socio-territorial movements, grounded in analysis of the land occupations of the Landless Rural Workers Movement (*Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra*, MST) (Fernandes 2000; Fernandes 2005). Territory and territorialisation are key in understanding such movements whose attempts to appropriate space are defining features of their political projects.

Territories further represent sites of struggle against domination and oppression in which knowledges and pedagogies of resistance are developed: these are aimed at the formation of the historical-political subject through critical consciousness (Barbosa 2016; Meek 2020). As in the previous chapter, recognising such territorial and praxis-based knowledges represents a challenge to the hegemony of Western scientific knowledge. As such, authors have critiqued the dominance of the intellectual production of Northern universities in the study of social movements, arguing that this represents wider colonial knowledge politics which suppress, invisibilise, or render inferior theories produced in the Global South and grounded in communities and social struggles (Choudry and Kapoor 2010a; Barbosa 2022). As Leraul (2019) argues, “‘our’ colonial, university knowledge too often disappears those knowledges authored by social movements in their movement”, capturing and containing social movements within sociological theory separated from practice (p.9). A contrasting “critical” approach advocated by Gutiérrez Aguilar (2014) and summarised by Leraul (2019), entails focusing primarily “on the struggles themselves, their strategies, evolution, acts of meaning making, and ‘horizons of desire’” and being open to “the polyrhythmic movement of movements that overflows individual and

collective identities and the silos of categorical knowledge” (p.11). This reflects wider calls for research and theorising which is relevant to movements and takes seriously the theorising of movements themselves based in movement praxis (Bevington and Dixon 2005; Nabudere 2008; Conway 2013).

I now return briefly to the cognitive praxis approach in light of these criticisms. Eyerman and Jamison (1991) recognise how social theories are shaped by the particular social and political contexts they are born in, opening the potential to challenge dominant Northern theories despite their deep engagement with them. They recognise knowledge production in social movements as playing a central role in wider societal transformations and as a broader approach and conceptual framework there is resonance with the agroecology transformations literature. Critically however, they still place the researcher in a privileged role of being able to produce relatively detached external analysis of movements, locating the development of theory outside of movements. In light of the critiques outlined above, this is problematic as it re-embeds hierarchies between academic and activist knowledge and may result in research that is not relevant for movements themselves. Part of this distance comes through “read[ing] social movements historically” (p.62) largely through analysis of documents, which negates the possibility of responding to the needs, sensemaking, and strategies of movements as they unfold. Moreover, and perhaps related to this, the concept of cognitive praxis leans too heavily towards the articulation of ideas and knowledge rather than the ongoing political action of movements, and potentially its embeddedness in territories, as generating and embodying knowledge. In the next section, I consider the broader and more commonly used concept of movement praxis because it addresses some of these limitations. I explore what it means to produce movement-relevant research and engage with praxis-based theorising, particularly in relation to the UK agroecology movement.

3.3.2 Movement praxis

Movement praxis is not only how movements develop new knowledge, but how this informs action and vice versa. Choudry (2015) describes well this role of praxis in social change:

As people struggle with problems and injustice in their everyday lives, through the unity of theory and action – also called *praxis* – they can learn, think, and act to bring about broader social, economic, political, and ecological change, rejecting “common sense” assumptions and explanations and building a deeper understanding of power structures and relations” (p.22).

Praxis entails theorising as a collective practice within movements through processes of “reflection and action which truly transform reality” (Freire 1996, p.100). This theoretical development within movements serves foremost the purpose of social transformation and, as highlighted, is often little recognised within the study of social movements (Bevington and Dixon 2005; Conway 2013; Choudry 2015). Such theorising, which Bevington and Dixon (2005) highlight as an integral part of day-to-day social movement activity, tends to produce theory which is directly relevant and valuable for social movements as it is born out of them.

While both activists and academics produce theory, it tends to look different and be shaped by different motivations (Croteau 2005; Flacks 2005). Social movement actors engage in varying degrees of formal and informal research and with a range of theoretical and analytical frameworks, all with the aim of driving effective social and political action at its core (Conway 2013). Rather than traditional social movement theory, activists often engage with histories of earlier struggles and movements and broader social theory, which Bevington and Dixon (2005) and Choudry (2015) argue is because traditional social movement theory lacks relevance for practical action. This, they contend, is due to disengagement of academic social movement research from practical grassroots action, where academics are often positioned as providing objective and detached analysis. Choudry (2015) instead argues that “knowledge production/research and

organizing/action are mutually constitutive” (p.132) and disputes the “false distinction” (p.122) made between activist and academic theorising, urging us to take seriously theory produced in social movements and reflect on how we valorise and legitimate different sources of knowledge.

The disconnect between academics and activists can end up detrimental to both, risking activism which is short-sighted and less impactful and research which lacks relevance and quality (Croteau 2005; Choudry 2015). As Croteau et al. (2005) argue,

Activism uninformed by broader theories of power and social change is more likely to fall prey to common pitfalls and less likely to maximize the potential for change. Social movements without access to routine reflection on practice are prisoners of their present conditions. Theory uninformed by and isolated from social movement struggles is more likely to be sterile and less likely to capture the vibrant heart and subtle nuances of movement efforts. Theorists without significant connections to social movements can end up constructing elegant abstractions with little real insight or utility (p.xiii).

For academics, producing movement-relevant theory means engaging in dynamic and reciprocal relationship building with movements themselves to ensure accountable and high quality research (Bevington and Dixon 2005; Peters 2005; Greenwood 2008). This can be done by being actively engaged *in* movements and/or carrying out the research *with* direct participation of movements. In this respect, Participatory Action Research (PAR) is often favoured as an approach to research in and with social movements (Choudry 2014b; Cox 2015; Langdon and Larweh 2015) as it is fundamentally based on the interrelation of action and theory, producing knowledge democratically with(in) communities to address real concerns (Fals Borda 2001). Other politically committed and engaged approaches to movement research include political activist ethnography (Frampton et al. 2006), militant ethnography (Juris 2007), engaged activist scholarship (Rouse and Woolnough 2018), and critically engaged activist research (Speed 2006). I explore these in more depth in my methodological chapter.

In relation to agroecology transformations, developing movement-relevant research that engages with movement theorising through a participatory and activist methodology has led me to consider an ecological approach to movement building. Connecting to the idea of *diálogo de saberes*, I have sought to engage both with academic literature and concepts - particularly where they are produced through active engagement with movements - and conceptual frameworks produced directly through social struggle. This means bringing these concepts into conversation in a way that reflects the movement's values and takes a pragmatic approach to the use of theory to further agroecology transformations. I engage with Eyerman and Jamison's (1991) cognitive approach to further justify and frame my movement praxis focus and employ some of their concepts in analysis of the movement's social learning practices. However, in light of their limited engagement with present action and self-analysis of movements, I emphasise instead the idea of *social movement ecology* in my analysis. This has emerged directly from movements as an activist model and has significant relevance for the agroecology movement, resonating with the movement's ecological worldview and the concept of "unity in diversity" in *La Vía Campesina*. It further connects with the argument that complex multi-level and multi-scale pathways of transformation are needed, engaging diverse actors across domains (Chapter 2).

Developed predominantly by activist training centres Ayni Institute and Ulex Project, the social movement ecology approach argues that as social transformation is complex, movements with a higher level of synergy and diversity, particularly regarding different theories of change⁷ and movement actors, have greater chance of success. In this respect, it puts forth both a particular framing of movements and a theory about movement success based on an ecological worldview and developed through analysis and movement praxis. This is proposed with the explicit aim of supporting activists to

⁷ In relation to social movements, a theory of change expresses a set of beliefs about the value of certain forms of action for achieving identified social change goals (Whelan 2020). The term emerged in the 1990s as a way to uncover and make explicit underlying strategic assumptions which motivate action, and thus brings to the fore an analysis of why things are the way they are in the first place, and usually integrates past experiences or knowledge of the outcomes of previous tactics (Beautiful Trouble [no date]). It can be likened to beliefs about different pathways of transformation.

understand the dynamics of movements they are in and more effectively take collective action. However, as seen in the previous chapter, different approaches to change held by diverse actors in the food system often represent conflicting ideals. Bringing them together for collective action involves understandings of power and politics. To foreground and interrogate these I emphasise *prefigurative politics* as a way of grounding collective action in the principles of transformative agroecology and *coalition politics* to better understand the complex dynamics involved in multi-actor alliances in agroecology transformations. I detail and bring together these concepts and areas of literature in this next section.

3.4 An Ecological Approach to Social Movements

The central conceptual framework in this thesis is *social movement ecology*. In this section, I build upon prior work to further advance it as a framework for movement building. This involves bringing in greater analysis of power and politics to argue for the central role of *prefigurative politics* in guiding collective political action capable of transforming society, particularly in relation to agroecology transformations (Tornaghi and Dehaene 2020; Dale 2021; Sharma and Van Dyke 2021). It also entails deepening an analysis of *coalition politics* to ensure multi-actor alliances, networks, and coalitions do not detract from a movements' transformative potential. In particular, I mobilise the distinction between *home* and *coalition* spaces made by Reagon (1983) arguing that transformative pathways involve the existence and connection of diverse spaces in a movement ecosystem, as well as attention to power dynamics and boundary setting in coalition work.

3.4.1 Social Movement Ecology

The concept of Social Movement Ecology (SME) involves taking an ecological approach to movement building, recognising that “diversity and mutualism — rather than monoculture and antagonism — are the conditions for strength and survival” (Ayni Institute [no date]). Such an approach helps “us to conceive of a movement as able to contain non-aligned,

antagonistic, and even contradictory identities” and begin “to transform depleting and unhelpful conflict or antagonism into more creative or generative tensions or even synergy” in order to build collective power (Ulex Project 2022, pp.93–4). Both the Ayni institute and the Ulex Project, activist training centres in the US and Spain respectively who have advanced this concept, emphasise recognising and appreciating strengths and weaknesses of different theories of change within a wider movement. That is, different perspectives on how social change comes about and the effectiveness of specific tactics considering this. Ayni identify five “fundamental theories of change”: *alternatives*, *personal transformation*, *inside game*, *structure organising*, and *mass protest* - with the latter three forming the category of dominant institutional change and, within that, the final two identified as “outside game”, that is, working to effect change in institutions externally.

While “theory of change” is common parlance within social movements, academics studying social movements have engaged little with the term (Hestres 2015). As well as Ayni’s categorisation, there exist several other ways of distinguishing between theories of change and forms of strategic action: Mobilising, Organising, and Advocacy (McAlevey 2016); Gee’s (2011) Ideological, Economic, and Physical Counterpower; and Meadows’ (1999) Twelve Leverage Points. Additionally, a resource on Campaign Bootcamp (2022) adapted originally from peacebuilding work (OECD 2012) details ten common theories of change including ‘individual change theory’, ‘healthy relationships and connections theory’, ‘political elites theory’, and ‘grassroots mobilisation theory’. Groups tend to adopt 2 or 3 theories of change and each has associated methods or tactics. What is common across these various frameworks, all developed in practical activist contexts, is the acknowledgement that theories of change each have strengths and weaknesses and are most effective when used in some combination.

An ecological approach to social movements is a stance, a position on *how* diverse actors work together as a movement to build collective power. Rather than promoting any one approach, it invites movement actors to hold complexity and tensions, aiming for more symbiotic relationships, rather than seeking to annihilate difference. The emphasis is on

developing a “healthy” movement ecosystem where “the complexities and nuance that come with social change” are acknowledged while developing more complex collaborations, alliances, and coalitions (Ayni Institute 2023). The notion of a movement ecosystem has similarities to the concept of “movement community” in social movement studies which encompasses “all actors who share and advance the goals of a social movement: movement organizations; individual movement adherents who do not necessarily belong to SMOs; institutionalized movement supporters; alternative institutions; and cultural groups” (Staggenborg 1998, p.182). However, Ayni especially do not give much detail on how to navigate tensions and complexity within movements or understand which antagonisms are generative and which are harmful.

In this respect, Case (2017) raises several valuable challenges to the ecological metaphor in Ayni’s early movement ecology training. Firstly, he considers the issue of boundaries – who can be considered in the movement ecosystem and what kind of change are they seeking? This requires an explicit ideological orientation and vision, without which “there would be no soil from which to grow a conceptual SME”, Case argues (2017, p.79). This needs to be specific enough to guard against cooptation but not so precise that it leads to excessive fracturing, as has been common in radical left movements (Downey and Rohlinger 2008; Smucker 2017; Ghaziani and Kretschmer 2018). The second issue regards agency. This involves recognition that members of a movement ecosystem do not just act within the constraints of their environment but also intentionally act to shape it. Likewise, the idea of survival and life in the metaphor needs to not just consider the longevity of movements and their organisations but encompass achievement of goals as well. Finally, Case (2017) points out that “in reality the natural world can be as harsh and merciless as it is harmonious” (p.80) and there must be serious consideration of the possibility of predatory or parasitic relationships as well as competition for resources within movements. The interactions between different parts of the movement and their roles in the movement ecology requires deeper attention.

Case (2017) highlights that within movements, debates over theories of change are not necessarily the most divisive, especially as many movement organisations recognise the need to adopt multiple approaches to change.

Disagreements between [theories of change] are nowhere near the most contentious in the movement. Rather, the nastiest disputes are often between similar types of groups. Tactical approaches (disruptive versus conciliatory, violent versus nonviolent, etc.), key political positions, engagement with reforms versus repudiation of systemic fixes, identity claims and privilege, responses to interpersonal abuse and sexual violence, access to capital and resources – these are sites of the most passionate infighting (Case 2017, p.82).

Touching upon some of these and drawing upon a range of sources, Ulex (2022, pp.94–9) go beyond just looking at theories of change to consider diversity in: activist roles (Moyer et al. 2001; Adams 2019); movement capabilities (Tufekci 2018); contexts through which activists engage in the movement (i.e. professional, identity, everyday life, workplace) (Cox 2019); and issues and struggles.

A key tension that lies behind many of these issues is between the movement’s more radical and moderate elements and how they work together. Mainly framed from the perspective of moderate groups, Haines (2013) designates this the “radical flank effect” within movements. That is, the effect that the radical faction of a movement has on the moderate faction’s success. In positive cases it makes the moderates’ demands more palatable by contrast to decisionmakers, and in negative cases it discredits or delegitimises the struggle. Of course, there are differences between movements defined as radical through armed or violent tactics and those that are more ideologically radical (Downey and Rohlinger 2008; Chenoweth and Cunningham 2013). In the case of agroecology transformations, as explored in the previous chapter, there are differentiations between those who promote a radical and transformative agroecology and those whose agroecological visions can easily be coopted and subsumed within the current system (Rivera-Ferre 2018; Giraldo and Rosset 2022). The social movement ecology approach provides a broader framing for appreciating such movement complexity

and recognising the value of synergistic collaborative action which engages a diversity of movement actors and forms of action. However, while bringing together parts of the movement representing different levels of political challenge has potential benefits of broadening the movement's base and appeal, it carries many risks (Brooker and Meyer 2018). Across the next two sections I address these risks to further develop the social movement ecology approach.

In the first section, I explore one theoretical orientation, prefigurative politics, in more depth due to its relevance for agroecology movements. I argue that while movements operating a strong prefigurative politics aligned with a radical vision are sometimes limited in their reach (Wright 2010; Engler and Engler 2016), they are central in realising transformative social change due to ways they embed a future vision of a liberatory and sustainable society in the here-and-now. Social movement ecology itself can be seen to represent a prefigurative approach to movement building based on ecological principles which I argue can be strengthened through more attention to power dynamics and politics between movement actors. This I explore in the subsequent section through the literature on coalition politics, particularly a perspective articulated by early US feminists of colour.

3.4.2 Prefigurative Politics

Prefigurative politics, prefiguration, or prefigurativism has come to be seen as an orientation towards social change describing both the building of alternatives in the here-and-now and alignment between means and ends of political and social action (Raekstad and Gradin 2019; Yates 2021). Prefigurativism has its roots in anarchism and Marxism and has further been influenced by feminist, decolonial, anti-racist, and ecological practice and thought (Raekstad and Gradin 2019; Monticelli 2021). It is often applied to political projects such as the Zapatistas, Rojava⁸, feminist movements ('the personal is political'),

⁸ Rojava is the Kurdish word for the western part of Kurdistan in Syria. The Rojava revolution, under leadership of Kurdish women, stood up against the ruling system and terrorist groups like ISIS. Based on the ideology of imprisoned Kurdish leader Abdullah Öcalan, the people of Rojava have developed a democratic confederalist model grounded in a commitment to women's liberation and ecology.

Occupy, and other anti-globalisation movements. From an anarchist perspective, it is positioned in contrast to Marxism-Leninism and the idea that revolution necessarily entails a vanguard seizing state power before implementing a revolutionary society (Raekstad 2022). Instead, prefigurativism holds that developing a free, equal, and democratic society cannot be achieved through action which reflects the hierarchies and power dynamics we wish to see eradicated and that such forms of political action undermine the possibility of achieving such a future (Boggs 1977; Monticelli 2021). Prefiguration is necessarily experimental and pluriversal: rather than assuming a desired future which is fixed and constructed by a small group of revolutionaries it involves popular emancipation and democratic processes which seek to include everyone in building a new future (Raekstad and Gradin 2019; Jeffrey and Dyson 2021).

In relation to Ayni's fundamental theories of change, prefigurative politics are most reflected in *alternatives* and *personal transformation* but this takes a somewhat narrow conceptualisation of prefigurative politics. The categorisation Ulex use based on Wright's (2010) strategies of transformation provides more depth: creating alternatives within the system (*symbiotic*), building alternatives outside the system (*interstitial*), producing rupture (*ruptural*). This categorisation more explicitly recognises the political traditions, cultures, and identities behind theories of change, and the tensions between them. This is crucial, as "to simply advocate for a 'diversity' of approaches [...] without reckoning with how some of those approaches are diametrically opposed to one another, is to abandon strategic thinking altogether" (Engler and Engler 2016, p.246). This relates to the earlier criticism of Ayni's Social Movement Ecology course by Case (2017) that it somewhat ignores the underlying political values and ultimate goals of movement actors engaging different or even the same theories of change. From this perspective, prefigurative politics emphasises interstitial revolutionary change (Wright 2010) rather than seizing power or working within the political system, that is, planting the seeds of a new world in the cracks of capitalism (Holloway 2010). Practices which prefigure a future society and expose or create cracks in the current system are then expanded and scaled out, linking up with the aim of eventually replacing it.

In recent years there has been a rise in the application of prefiguration across disciplines, to diverse movements as well as protest events, everyday practices, and sustainability experiments (Yates 2021; du Plessis and Husted 2022). Following Raekstad and Gradin (2019), I choose a broad definition of prefigurative politics as “the deliberate experimental implementation of desired future social relations and practices in the here-and-now” (p.10). Yates (2021) identifies five functions associated with prefigurative politics: prefiguring alternative institutions and practices to supplant current institutions; learning through experimentation to create examples and inspiration for others; preparing or resourcing collective social actors through prefigurative alternatives as sites of socialisation, collective identity formation, and care; directly achieving change right now rather than delaying or compromising through engagement with dominant institutions; paying attention to the micropolitics of social action to address important ethical and social justice issues and inequities (p.1044).

Criticisms levelled at prefigurative politics, however, tend to focus on a narrower conceptualisation (Raekstad and Gradin 2019; Yates 2021). For example, many base their analysis on the Occupy movement (Roberts 2012; Smucker 2017; Soborski 2019). Critics dismiss prefigurative politics as divisive identity politics or ineffectual lifestyle politics, claiming that it is susceptible to co-optation, insularity, individualism, and escapism (Smucker 2017; Soborski 2019). They argue that it lacks strategy and organisation, is impractical and sometimes inaccessible, and detracts from efforts to seek systemic change (Srnicek and Williams 2015; Polletta and Hoban 2016). These critiques have been addressed in depth by several authors (Maeckelbergh 2011; Raekstad and Gradin 2019; Yates 2021). For instance, Raekstad and Gradin (2019) show how prefigurative politics in fact develops the *drives*, *powers*, and *consciousness* necessary for creating future revolutionary societies, and Yates (2021) demonstrates how different functions of prefigurative politics support the *reproduction*, *mobilisation*, and *coordination* of social movements. While criticisms of prefigurative politics do highlight important pitfalls, they tend to ignore the large number of prefigurative movements who engage in strategic political work, solidarity with wider marginalised groups, and action to oppose current

systems of power; in other words, engaging with multiple theories of change while remaining grounded in a prefigurative politics.

Prefigurative politics, in this respect, is not in fact inconsistent with other strategic approaches which protest dominant institutions and seek reforms and can include ‘oppose-based actions’ or be complemented by them (Cornell 2011; Maeckelbergh 2011; Sørensen 2016; Naegler 2018). This reflects the social movement ecology approach of seeing the complementarity between theories of change and acknowledging that many groups mobilise multiple approaches in their strategy to tackle complex change.

Proponents of prefigurative politics tend to recognise the importance of engaging with current systems which limit alternatives, but do not rely on seeking control over, or concessions from, dominant institutions as the basis for change (Raekstad and Gradin 2019; Monticelli 2021). In fact, Raekstad and Gradin (2019) see prefigurative politics as operating within a *process view* of change whereby revolution occurs through mass organisations and movements concurrently enacting prefigurative alternatives and fighting for reforms which then open up space to further expand these alternatives and develop the power, drives, and consciousness of their members. In this way, revolution occurs from below through smaller shifts in the short term and large-scale change in the long-term.

Somewhat similarly, and based on an impressively rigorous analysis of theories of transformation, Wright (2010) argues that new relations developed by such interstitial strategies can “both function as practical demonstrations that another world is possible, and can potentially expand in ways which erode economic power” (p.371). When combined with reform-based strategies which aim to gain long-term concessions from the ruling class (symbiotic strategies), and some degree of ruptural strategies in the form of political struggles which challenge and confront power and take advantage of moments of crisis to progress alternatives, he argues transformation in hegemonic capitalist societies could be possible (Wright 2010). These views of revolutionary change have at their centre prefigurative politics strategically advanced by collective actors with the help of successive reforms and ongoing confrontation with power to maintain gains towards a

new society. This reflects the SME approach, though I emphasise the explicit centring of prefiguration.

These models of revolution are not dissimilar to the approaches to transformation in the agroecology literature covered in the previous chapter. As such, agroecology scholars have increasingly engaged with the concept of prefiguration to describe agroecology and food sovereignty movements (Wald 2015; Tornaghi and Dehaene 2020; Dale 2021; Sharma and Van Dyke 2021; Houde-Tremblay et al. 2023). Agroecology transformations can clearly be seen as having prefigurative dimensions as they focus on bottom-up change and implementing and amplifying agroecological alternatives in the here-and-now rather than necessarily waiting for a change of power to create the conditions for a new food system to be implemented. At the same time, the literature on transformations recognises the importance of a favourable political context, moments of crisis, and confronting systems that stand in the way of transformations. There is not one fixed agroecological food system but a multitude which are never complete, achieved through continuous place-based experimentation and brought about through both constructive and deconstructive processes - opening and expanding cracks in the system to develop alternative food systems. Finally, the movement's organising practices and micropolitics reflect a commitment to equality, justice, and horizontalism, and an emphasis on movement praxis which challenges and moves beyond capitalism, patriarchy, and colonialism reflecting emphases of prefigurative politics. The ecological lens that informs much of the global agroecology movement's prefiguration can be seen in La Via Campesina's (LVC) organising approach of "unity in diversity" (Desmarais 2007). This supports collective action precisely through recognising and appreciating a diversity of movement actors, strategy, and roles, as is represented in the idea of Social Movement Ecology (SME). However, this unity in diversity is not neutral, it involves the articulation of shared politics as well as navigating conflicts and tensions between movement actors, understanding the power differentials between them. This is also an issue that needs further addressing in the agroecology transformations literature (Chapter 2). In this last section, therefore, I draw on the literature on movement coalitions to go deeper into the dynamics between movement

actors in their attempts to come together for collective action towards societal transformation. I further consider the extent to which prefigurative politics may limit potential for coalition and might therefore impede transformation.

3.4.3 Coalition Politics

Coalitions are recognised within the social movement literature as a critical means through which movement actors seek political outcomes, and as sites of both cooperation and conflict reflecting wider intra- and inter-movement dynamics (Van Dyke and McCammon 2010). They go beyond informal networks and information sharing and entail more involved collaborative joint action between groups or social movement organisations and relatively stable and coherent structures (McCammon and Moon 2015; Brooker and Meyer 2018). Brooker and Meyer (2018) identify four types of coalition: within-movement, cross-movement, identity group coalitions (including intersectional and cross-ethnic), and state actor-social movement coalitions (pp.254-5). Coalitions can be short or long-term, based on different organisational models and across different geographical scales (p.253).

One key benefit of coalition is the increased potential for mass mobilisation as they draw upon the multiple constituencies, resources, and legitimacy of different groups as well as the appeal and visibility of the coalition itself (McCammon and Moon 2015). Through broader participation and tactical diversity, working in coalition increases the possibility of political impact (Van Dyke and Amos 2017; Brooker and Meyer 2018). Moreover, coalitions can positively impact organisations through wider access to resources, network-building, and development of tactical repertoires and framing through diffusion and collaboration (McCammon and Moon 2015). Additionally, Gawerc (2020) notes particular benefits of diverse coalitions (particularly in terms of race, ethnicity, and class) are the potential to make a more powerful statement, bridge societal divides, foster strategic advantages through decision-making that encompasses diverse perspectives, enlarge the scope of the conflict, and reduce social distance with the regime and elites. Conway (2013) suggests that engaging with plurality means “the knowledges that arise in and through coalition politics are particularly prescient for the building of a world with the space for many

worlds within it” (p.1). While in these respects, coalitions seem to be an obvious choice for enhancing collective power to pursue a cause, fostering and maintaining coalitions is challenging, and their emergence and success is determined by multiple factors.

Literature on coalitions tend to identify four sets of conditions shaping their development: political environment (opportunities and threats); alignment of ideology, identity, and goals; social ties; and organisational structures and resources (Staggenborg 2010; McCammon and Moon 2015; Van Dyke and Amos 2017; Brooker and Meyer 2018). While political opportunities and threats often provide the impetus for groups to work together, other factors determine whether this is restricted to single campaigns or events, or whether coalition endures (Van Dyke and Amos 2017). For instance, coalitions are less likely to emerge or be successful where groups are less connected through social ties and have strongly divergent identities and ideologies (Diani and Bison 2004; McCammon and Moon 2015; Zajak and Haunss 2022). The role of “bridge builders” or “brokers”, individuals who are members of multiples groups and can support coordination, trust-building, and information flow between groups, can in this respect contribute to the development of coalition (Beamish and Luebbers 2009; von Bülow 2011; Horizons Project 2022).

Coalitions between diverse identity groups, however, are particularly challenging as there are often cultural and political differences, different framings, motivations, and tactics, as well as power asymmetries and lack of overlapping membership (Gawerc 2020, p.6).

Brooker and Meyer emphasise the dilemma of benefits and risks of coalition:

 Holding together a large and diverse coalition requires compromise and successful balancing of member organizations’ competing ideologies and interests. The dilemma for activists is that deploying diversity, that is, showing a range of interests and constituencies in support of a common cause, is newsworthy and suggests potential political power. But managing diversity, that is, serving the range of interests and groups within a coalition to maintain engagement, is an ongoing and often frustrating struggle (2018, p.261).

Similarly, where there is significant distance between radical and moderate groups in a movement, coalitions are less likely and carry with them the risk of compromising the identity of organisations and their legitimacy with their followers and powerholders (Downey and Rohlinger 2008; Haines 2013; Brooker and Meyer 2018). Downey and Rohlinger (2008) locate actors within a movement via their theory of change or “strategic orientation”, splitting this into two dimensions: “depth of challenge” and “breadth of appeal”. This highlights the trade-offs that groups often make between propounding more radical and transformative ideas and reaching a broader base. That is, groups presenting a deeper challenge to the system tend to have a narrower appeal than groups with more moderate proposals. This connects to a challenge to prefigurative politics highlighted earlier: that in emphasising the embodiment of radical politics groups remain insular and limited to a narrow reach, potentially limiting coalition efforts (Smucker 2017; Soborski 2019).

Prefiguration usually entails “niche” or “free” spaces where alternatives can be developed collectively through learning and experimentation outside of the dominant system (Polletta and Kretschmer 2013; Törnberg 2018; Yates 2021). Such spaces and groups have their own subcultures and provide sites of socialisation, collective identity formation, and care which resource and prepare collective actors by developing their motivations, capacities, and consciousness towards radical social change (Raekstad and Gradin 2019; Yates 2021). However, some authors have highlighted how such subcultures and prefigurative practices can be alienating and inaccessible to newcomers (Smucker 2017), or even reflect and come to be associated with dominant identities such as whiteness that put off others from joining (Polletta 2005; Polletta and Hoban 2016). Smucker (2017) designates this tension between the positives and negatives of a strong collective identity often found in prefigurative movements as the ‘political identity paradox’. As Engler and Engler (2016) caution, “new movements may arise from the margins, but if they want to make change for the majority, they shouldn’t seek to stay there” (p.274). Prefiguration seeks to expand alternatives and include the whole of society and thus needs to reckon with the various barriers, contexts, and starting points that shape diverse actors’

relationships with prefigurative practices. The approach to addressing this dilemma and the challenges of diversity in coalition come down to the different ways of viewing coalition.

In her book examining the contributions of feminist politics to coalition, Taylor (2022) distinguishes between the politico-ethical perspectives articulated by “early US Women of Color coalition feminists” and those that emphasise merely ethical or philosophical justifications for coalition. She warns against progressive coalition politics that involve “naïve aspirations to universal ethical community” in which subjugated groups seamlessly coalesce into broader coalition. Instead, Taylor (2022) asserts that for influential activist theorists in the 70s and 80s such as Bernice Johnson Reagon, Gloria Anzaldúa, Audre Lorde, and the Combahee River Collective, coalition is “actively chosen for the sake of a political commitment to undermining oppression in all its forms and acutely attentive to the arrangements of power that situate such encounters” (p.72). Such coalition politics is political in the sense of considering “the arrangements of power that both demand coalitional activism in the first place and situate tensions and struggles within coalitional spaces” (p.73) and ethical in that it “encourages an ethical sensibility characterized by love and existential transformation” (p.2). From this perspective, coalition is seen as a collision of differences, a dangerous, potentially life-threatening struggle. As Reagon (1983) asserts, “you don’t go into coalition because you just like it. The only reason you would consider trying to team up with someone who could kill you is because that’s the only way you can figure you can stay alive” (p.356-7). Thus, coalition as articulated by these early feminists of colour is not just an ethical imperative or a practical strategy but a question of survival through collective liberation.

Reagon’s framing of coalition was first introduced to me by Navigate Coop in a workshop at the 2022 UK People’s Food Summit through Reagon’s quote, “if you’re in a coalition and you’re comfortable, you know it’s not a broad enough coalition”. For this reason, Reagon (1983) distinguishes between “home” and “coalition” spaces. Spaces in this context refer to social spaces “defined by actors and positions and the relations that associate them” (Liu and Emirbayer 2016, p.63). While often embedded in or related to physical spaces,

these “are not geographic territories, but spaces that involve actors and social actions” (Liu 2021, p.125). They are defined “by how actors are located in spatial positions and how they are constituted and related by their positions and mutual interactions”, evolving over time in “interdependent and mutually constitutive ways” and shaped through interactions with other spaces (Liu 2021, p.125). For Reagon, the interaction and distinction between home and coalition spaces is important since coalition is “a monster” that “you have to feed” and “so you better be sure you got your home someplace for you to go to so that you will not become a martyr to the coalition” (p.361). In other words, she argues both for the value of protective spaces for specific groups, particularly marginalised groups, away from wider society while at the same time strongly advocating for coalition spaces to counter naïve insularity and as critical for long-term social change and survival.

Reagon’s description of home spaces and their limitations, resonates with those of prefigurative politics and free spaces:

That space while it lasts should be a nurturing space where you sift out what people are saying about you and decide who you really are. And you take time to try to construct within yourself and within your community who you would be if you were running society [...] you act out community. [...] Of course, the problem with the experiment is that there ain’t nobody in there but folk like you, which by implication means you wouldn’t know what to do if you were running it with all of the other people who are out there in the world (Reagon 1983, p.358).

There are some similarities with this distinction between home and coalition proposed by Reagon and Smucker’s perspective on the political identity paradox. He also argues for the need for groups to develop both strong *bonding* (internal cohesive identity or home) and *bridging* (coalition building) (Smucker 2017, p.98). However, critically, Smucker’s idea of coalition reflects his focus on contemporary movements in the US like Occupy, which were dominated by white middle-class activists. Thus, he regards coalition as less of a struggle and matter of survival for subjugated groups and more of commonsense strategy for leftist politics.

Smucker (2017) argues against what he sees as the insular politics of radical prefigurative groups and the tendency towards increasingly marginal differentiation of groups through radical politics and identity politics, criticising it as the internalisation of neoliberal logics (Kumar et al. 2018; Haider 2022). His coalition politics are based on constructing “universalizing frames” to articulate “a broad and inclusive we within which many different kinds of people feel a sense of belonging” (Smucker 2017, p.255). It is political in the sense of aiming to influence “politics proper” (p.103), viewing coalition as effective strategy. This is useful from a strategic point of view and raises important issues relevant to how identity politics have shifted since the 70s and 80s (Haider 2022). But in doing so reduces prefigurative politics to “collective ritual” (p.105) rather than seeing its necessary role in developing the cultural and organisational practices capable of addressing the “unequal power differentials and at times hostile race, class, gender, and sexuality divides” (Taylor 2022, p.82) inherent within coalition. Instead, the politico-ethical articulation Taylor outlines is more consistent with an explicit embracing of plurality as expressed in the notion of “unity in diversity” that La Vía Campesina base their international organising on. That is, the idea that “communities should be seen as sites of diversity, difference, conflicts, and divisions [...] characterized by competing claims and interests” (Desmarais 2007, p.37) rather than seeking to homogenise or gloss over difference.

The perspective on coalition that feels more in line with agroecology and prefigurative politics is therefore one that sees the potential for prefigurative politics and identity politics to strengthen broad-based coalition organising rather than just detract from it. Haider (2022) reveals how initial articulations of identity politics such as those of the River Combahee Collective were in fact aimed at expanding rather than contracting the sphere of political action through addressing multiple struggles as interconnected.

Intersectionality in this sense, is not about the increasingly marginal differentiation that Smucker identifies (p.113) but about recognising that struggles against capitalism must include struggles against other systems of oppression. In this light, Ulex (2022, pp.86–91) usefully distinguish between *empowering*, *limiting*, and *liberatory* identities. Empowering

identities reflect the positive elements of shared collective identity in the “political identity paradox”, they empower people to take collective action and challenge power dynamics. However, when these become overly rigid and attached to an “oppositional identity” they can “undermine our abilities to build connections, alliances and coalitions, [and] adapt to changing circumstances” (p.86). These limiting identities, the other side of the paradox, can then reproduce “othering” and lead to fragmentation of movements which “side-line wider socio-political transformation” (p.89). Beyond this binary however, there are liberatory identities which develop from a place of empowerment to understand that “our identities (like our views) are always incomplete, partial, and provisional” and “cannot ultimately provide the security we seek in them” (p.91). Thus we are able to foster movements that “honour diversity and pluralistic conceptions of truth and identity” (Ulex Project 2022, p.90) whilst struggling for social justice.

Recognising the multiplicity of home and coalition spaces is a step towards honouring diversity and pluralism. It is not an either/or, in or out, bonding or bridging. There are no home spaces, however narrowly defined, that do not also embody difference. This is supported by a framing of identity-based groups as coalitions themselves (Crenshaw 1991; Carastathis 2013). As Carastathis (2013) contends,

Conceptualizing identity groups as “in fact” coalitions shifts our attention to the “intersectionalities within”—the multiplicity and contradictions of our identities disregarded by social movements that have failed to grasp the social totality and lived experiences of multiple oppressions in a nonfragmented way (p.961).

Considering the multiplicity of identities within groups, thus produces a “counterhegemonic interpretation of intersectionality” more consistent with the earlier analyses of feminists of colour mentioned (Carastathis 2013, p.961). It allows us to examine the various privileged and marginalised positions we each hold and explore how collective identities are constructed within groups to foreground or downplay certain experiences (Roth 2021). Home and coalition, therefore, represent not a dichotomy but a spectrum. Social spaces can have varying levels of heterogeneity in terms of actors and positions and collective actors may feel at home to greater or lesser degrees in different

spaces or in relation to various aspects of themselves. The further from home one gets, the more the discomfort, risk, contending interests, and power dynamics there are to navigate but the more there potentially is to gain for collective social transformation. Such an understanding of home and coalition spaces therefore strengthens a social movement ecology approach acknowledging both the value of prefigurative niches and the risks and necessity of multi-actor alliances for agroecology transformations.

3.5 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have integrated academic and activist literature on social movements with agroecology research to explore the role of social movement praxis in agroecology transformations. The first two sections define social movements and outline key theoretical approaches in social movement studies. Starting with Eyerman and Jamison's (1991) cognitive praxis approach and addressing critiques of classical sociological approaches, I emphasised the importance of engaging with movement praxis for understanding social movements and developing theory with(in) movements. This necessitates participatory and activist (or politically engaged) research methodologies, as I discuss in Chapter 4. In the context of agroecology movements, critiques of traditional social movement theories highlight the need for a territorial analysis in understanding knowledge production and political action. Building on previous concepts from the agroecology literature (Chapter 2), I make the case for the development of a social movement ecology approach which emphasises prefigurative politics and coalition politics, integrating both academic and activist theorising.

Social movement ecology provides a way of thinking about social movements based primarily on an ecological worldview and a practical activist tool for understanding how diverse parts of a movement come together in transformative collective action. As the concept has been developed thus far, it emphasises the complementarity of different strategic theories of change and embraces diversity and pluralism in movements seeking synergy rather than competition between diverse movement actors. However, I argue that

for such an approach to be useful for agroecology transformations it needs firstly to take into consideration the central role of prefigurative politics in shaping trajectories of collective action, and secondly a more in-depth analysis of power and politics in coalition work. Using prefigurative politics as a base for multi-level collective action, leads to a process view of revolution in which prefigurative institutions and social practices are continually progressed through mass movement organisations struggling for successive gains via reforms and ruptural strategies.

For such collective action to be transformative it must address the multiple tensions between groups with different ideologies and identities and the potential risks of working together more in coalition. In the final subsection, therefore, I examined the research on coalition politics and identified an articulation of coalition shaped by early US feminists of colour which I propose aligns with agroecology and deals with some of the challenges inherent in prefigurative politics relating to collective identity. Central to this is viewing coalition as potentially dangerous but ultimately necessary for collective liberation. From this, I identify the value of diverse spaces connected in a movement ecosystem to support collective action towards transformative change. On the one hand, more nurturing and protective *home* spaces where prefigurative politics can flourish and, on the other, various levels of *coalition* spaces for which boundaries and collective identity must be constructed to ensure such alliance building does not compromise transformative change. This more developed social movement ecology approach will be applied to understand the agroecology movement's praxis in Chapters 6, 7, and 8 and developed further in relation to the movement in Chapter 9.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

As outlined in Chapter 2, social movement praxis in agroecology transformations is under-theorised in relation to social movement literature and under-researched in Global North contexts like the UK. My research addresses these gaps by exploring the role of movement praxis in UK agroecology transformations, specifically within the *political agroecology movement*. In particular, I centred my investigation on the Landworkers' Alliance (LWA), “a union of farmers, growers, foresters and land-based workers” (LWA 2024e) who are the UK member of La Vía Campesina (LVC).

Guided by transformative and pragmatist research paradigms, my qualitative methodology combines participatory action research (PAR) and activist ethnography with the aim of generating movement-relevant research and engaging actively with movement praxis. This approach aligns with the agroecology and social movement literatures (Bevington and Dixon 2005; Méndez et al. 2013; Levidow et al. 2014; Choudry 2015) while reflecting my personal commitment to social and political transformation. The methodological design has been emergent and iterative, adapting to the movement's changing reality, the impacts of Covid-19, practicalities of working with movement activists, and opportunities to deepen key lines of inquiry. Data collection included interviews, action learning sets, focus groups, and participant observation over almost three years.

This chapter begins by outlining my overarching methodological approach based on “principled pragmatism” (Maignashca 2011) and abductive inquiry (Tavory and Timmermans 2014), reflecting a dynamic interaction between literature and movement praxis. I then present the research aim and questions before detailing the participatory activist methodology I used. Next, I provide an account of my research process, including entering and embedding in the UK agroecology movement, adapting to changing movement praxis and activist capacities, and maintaining relational reflexivity in my scholar-activist role. Finally, I describe my methods for generating and analysing

data and explain the how I contributed to movement praxis through research dissemination and continued engagement.

4.2 Transformative and Pragmatic Research Approach

As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, agroecology represents a transformative paradigm for food system change, requiring a corresponding research approach (Levidow et al. 2014; Cuéllar Padilla and Sevilla Guzmán 2018; López-García et al. 2021).

Transformative agroecology research seeks to tackle “the unsustainability, social injustice, and paradigm shifts that are necessary to create resilient and just food systems and societies” (Walthall et al. 2024, p.2) through integrating with practical and political action (Bell and Bellon 2021). A transformative research paradigm more broadly is “rooted in a critique of power relationships, with [...] transformative goals for institutions and systems of oppression” (Hurtado 2015, p.286). Recognising the complexity of the multiple intersecting crises of our times, the research takes a “pragmatist twist” (Romm 2014) to further the question of how to most effectively bring about change, responsive to the movement context (Morgan 2014) and contributing to movement praxis (Choudry 2015). Pragmatism, developed by philosophers like Charles Sanders Pierce, William James, and John Dewey, “understands knowing the world as inseparable from agency within it” (Legg and Hookway 2021, p.1). It is thus highly relevant for research on movement praxis, involving the reflexive interaction between theory and political action.

Kelly and Cordeiro (2020) outline three core methodological principles of pragmatic inquiry: an emphasis on actionable knowledge; recognition of the interconnectedness between experience, knowing and acting; and inquiry as an experiential process (p.1). These principles point to knowledge generation which, rather than searching for a single universal truth through pre-defined methods, seeks practices which provide useful knowledge for one’s action as it evolves. Maiguashca’s (2011) “principled pragmatism” which they identify as guiding feminist antiglobalisation activism, combines transformative goals with practical strategies. This is defined as a prefigurative mode of praxis “animated by a Utopian vision that shapes not only the content of activists’ [or researchers] demands and aspirations, but also how they seek

to achieve them” (p.544). Such an approach develops strategic knowledge that is context-specific, rooted in concrete experiences, and “grounded in a complex, nuanced analysis of concrete power relations” (p.544). Relating to this research, this leads to aims focused on transformative social change rooted in movement praxis, and methods and analysis which reflect the values of political agroecology, develop knowledge that is grounded in the concrete experiences of activists, and seek to understand and address complex power dynamics.

Reflecting the pragmatist orientation, research processes are open-ended and non-linear, involving a commitment to flexibility, adaptability, and compromise (Maignashca 2011, p.545). For this research, this entailed being creative with methods, approaches, and lines of inquiry to be sensitive to what was needed in the moment and to attend to questions of power. Developing the research inquiry and analysis involved an iterative and emergent process, communicating between the reality of the (UK) agroecology movement and the academic and non-academic literature to generate understanding that supports ongoing movement praxis. This open-ended and non-linear process reflects an abductive approach to inquiry, which is itself based on pragmatist philosophy (Tavory and Timmermans 2014; Bellucci and Pietarinen 2023).

Compared with inductive (data-driven) inquiry, or a deductive (theory-driven) inquiry, abductive inquiry begins with surprising or unexpected observations, inferring theories or concepts to make sense of them (Timmermans and Tavory 2012; Brinkmann 2014; Kennedy and Thornberg 2018). This sense-making process then necessitates further data collection or analysis to see whether the ‘situation’ is resolved, resulting in an ongoing process combining inductive and deductive elements. The goal of abductive inquiry “is not to arrive at fixed and universal knowledge through the collection of data” but rather “to be able to act in a specific situation” (Brinkmann 2014, p.722). This approach aligns with participatory action research (PAR) as a cyclical process of action and reflection (Kindon et al. 2007) and activist research as responsive to the movement’s needs and direction (Croteau et al. 2005; Langdon and Larweh 2015). I elaborate on these methodologies shortly, but first, I frame the research inquiry based on this approach.

4.3 Research Inquiry

The research aims and questions have evolved over time through a continuous back and forth engagement between the academic literature and the reality of the UK agroecology movement. The resultant aim is:

To support agroecology transformations in the UK by understanding, developing, and sharing key elements of Social Movement Praxis.

Within this, I sought to understand the contextual factors and wider social movement dynamics which shape movement praxis and influence its success in fostering agroecology transformations.

4.3.1 Research Questions

The following questions frame the research inquiry and methodological approach.

- 1. What role can social movement praxis play in driving agroecology transformations in the UK?*
- 2. What limits the transformative impact of agroecology movements in the UK?*
- 3. How can social learning practices in UK agroecology movements support agroecology transformations?*
- 4. How is UK agroecology movement praxis shaped by place and/or its agrarian nature?*

In asking how agroecology movements *can* contribute to transformations, I am establishing the inquiry both in what *is* and what *could be* to understand where movement praxis furthers the movement's transformative goals and address challenges it faces. This reflects the temporal aspects of the prefigurative praxis of principled pragmatism (Maignashca 2011). It speaks to participatory and activist agroecology research as ongoing pedagogical processes which extend beyond the end of the research (López-García and Cuéllar-Padilla 2018), as I present in this next section.

4.4 Combining Participatory and Activist Methodologies

From the outset, I approached the research with commitment to Participatory Action Research (PAR) principles, recognising the strong activist character of participatory research in the field of agroecology (López-García and Cuéllar-Padilla 2018). PAR and activist research share a desire to bring about social change, beginning from the standpoint of those who are marginalised and/or hold knowledges which challenge the dominant system (Fals Borda 2001; Kindon et al. 2007; Mertens 2008; Choudry and Kapoor 2010b). PAR “represents a counterhegemonic approach to knowledge production” (Kindon et al. 2007, p.9) by breaking down boundaries between researchers and those who are “researched”. Not only does it recognise “the existence of a plurality of knowledges” (p.9), but, through the use of participatory research design and methods, it foregrounds knowledges which have been systematically excluded and marginalised, such as those of farmers and peasants. This connects with both the notion of diálogo de saberes (dialogue between ways of knowing) and the Campesino-a-Campesino (CaC) (peasant-to-peasant) methodology promoted by La Via Campesina (Chapter 2). As with CaC, the origins of PAR can be traced back to Freirean popular education as a community-based research process aiming to promote conscientisation for social transformation (McIntyre 2008; Macdonald 2012). Furthermore, as a methodological approach PAR is particularly valuable in acknowledging social movements as valid and vibrant sites of knowledge production as well as action (Choudry 2015; Langdon and Larweh 2015).

While PAR seeks to involve participants in the research design, implementation, analysis, and dissemination, this can often be challenging in reality, particularly within the dynamic context of a social movement (Chatterton and Routledge 2007; Raynor 2019; Bodini et al. 2020). As Eisenhart (2019) highlights, “equal” (the same) participation at every stage of the research process is not always “equitable” (according to each person’s interest, capacity and expertise). McIntyre (2008) agrees in the sense that it is important to develop “commonsense” forms of participation decided by the group so “participation is viewed as a choice, not an imposition” (p.15). In this research, I placed emphasis on developing opportunities for reflexive, collective, and relational learning around movement praxis (Van Dyck et al. 2018) in order to adapt

it to the specific context of what was feasible and desirable in the movement. This centred on establishing an action learning group (Pedler and Burgoyne 2015), which ran for almost a year, and facilitating focus groups where participants organising together had opportunities to reflect on their practice. A participatory and dialogical approach informed my broader research design through engaging in informal conversations and everyday organising with activists to understand how to make the research “movement-relevant” (Bevington and Dixon 2005). This involved a certain amount of “moving with the movement” (Langdon and Larweh 2015) by being continuously sensitive to and responsive to movement needs and direction, as I elaborate in the next section.

Within this context, it felt valuable to draw upon activist ethnography (Hale 2008) to strengthen the PAR approach, integrating participatory methods with ethnographic fieldwork from my position as an activist. This echoes Orlando Fals-Borda’s call for action researchers to become “fully involved” in much needed “educational, cultural, political, social and economic movements” (Fals Borda 2006, p.358). Similarly, Chatterton and Routledge (2007) highlight the tendency for participatory researchers to be “more interested in the R than the A in PAR” (p.217) and advocate for more activist-oriented PAR. Activist ethnography describes an approach to “producing reliable knowledge of the social in order to facilitate transformative aims” (Frampton et al. 2006, p.6) and entails engaging in social movement praxis and integrating both academic and activist theorising (Choudry 2012). Practically, this meant becoming an “observant participant” (Costa Vargas 2008) in the movement and interviewing organisers in the movement about their movement praxis. As my involvement deepened, the fieldwork incorporated a degree of autoethnography, reflecting on my own practice and experience in the movement through my research journal or as co-participant in focus groups and interviews (Cann and DeMeulenaere 2012). Autoethnography challenges the dichotomies of insider versus outsider and observer versus participant (Reed-Danahay 2019). I explore these dynamics further in the next section, examining my dual roles as scholar and activist.

4.5 Research Journey

During the course of my research, my inquiry developed from an initial focus on farmer-to-farmer learning towards a broader study of social movement praxis and my role in relation to the movement shifted. The research design and focus were shaped by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic as most activity moved online for a period of time and online communication became more normalised within movement praxis.

However, in-person events before the pandemic and as it eased were still critical in forming relationships with participants and understanding movement praxis. In Figure 2, I provide a timeline of the research journey representing these elements, including some significant movement events as well as key roles I took on within the movement and different stages of data collection. These are explored further in this section and the subsequent section on generating data.

4.5.1 Entering the field

In the winter of 2018, having recently signed up as a Landworkers' Alliance (LWA) supporter member, I travelled with a landworker friend to the LWA's Annual General Meeting (AGM) (see Figure 3, LWA 2018) with the aim of identifying a research topic that would be useful to the movement. The focus of the gathering was agroecological learning and training and an opportune moment arose in one of the participatory workshops on regional farmer-to-farmer learning; participants expressed a desire to share practice between regions while wanting to understand how practices were adapted to their different contexts. I presented myself to the group as a (potential) researcher and proposed carrying out research on the topic to an enthusiastic response. This was followed by more concrete discussions with key coordinating members at the event with whom I later shared my research proposal before submitting it in my application for the PhD.

This was my first experience “entering the field” in the ethnographic sense (Chughtai and Myers 2017; Kostera and Krzyworzeka 2023). Reflecting a participatory action research perspective, entering the field – if one is not already part of it – precedes the

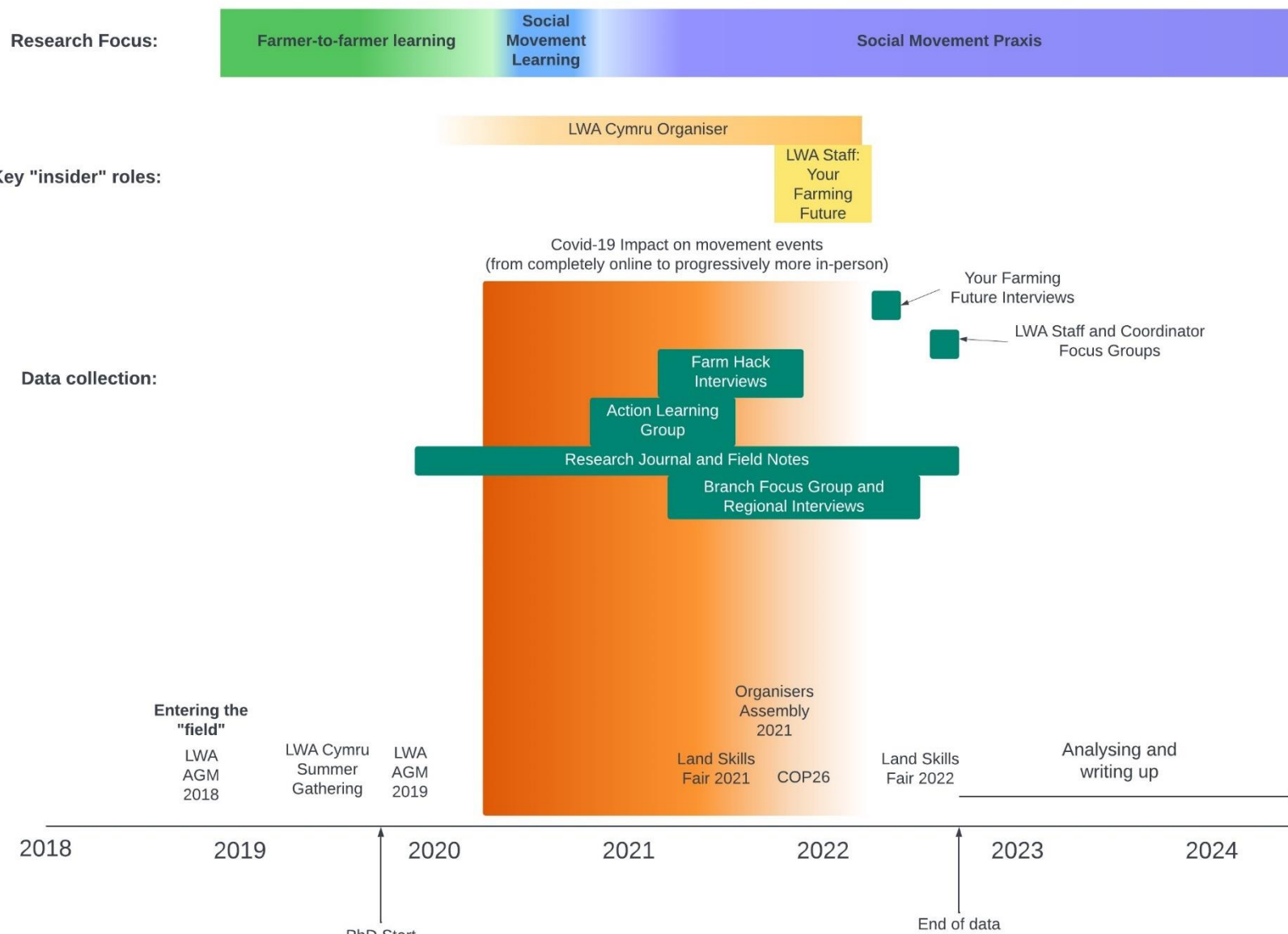


Figure 2. Research timeline including shift in research focus, key "insider" roles I took in the LWA, different forms of data collection, and some key movement events. Own diagram.

possibility of data collection, as the research inquiry formulation should as much as possible be collectively determined with those in it (Kindon et al. 2007). The “field” in the case of the agroecology movement, rather than a concrete place or clearly bounded small group, such as traditional anthropology tends to refer to, can be understood more broadly as a “social world(s) constituted by a set of actors focused on a common concern” (Nadai and Maeder 2005, p.1). Moreover, Nadai and Maeder (2005) argue that in relation to sociological ethnography, the field is not “found somewhere out there, but is constructed by the researcher”, with its contours emerging during the research process as multiple sites are identified as relevant to the unfolding research inquiry.



Figure 3. *The Landworkers' Alliance Annual General Meeting and Winter Shindig 2018 Poster (LWA 2018).*

I initially identified Landworkers' Alliance as central to the inquiry as they were the main organisation forwarding an explicitly political conception of agroecology and were linked through their membership in La Vía Campesina (LVC) to the transnational agroecology and food sovereignty movement. The LWA itself has no central office or base but consists of

landworker members, staff, and supporters spread across the UK. Those in the LWA and wider agroecology movement come together through online organising and events, and in-person gatherings like farm visits, protests, regional gatherings, festivals, and conferences. The movement is in this respect a “fuzzy field” with unclear boundaries (Nadai and Maeder 2005) existing across multiple sites, both physical and online (Hannerz 2003; Ahlin and Li 2019; Howlett 2021). Moreover, I recognised LWA to be part of a broader movement ecosystem (Funke 2012a; Ulex Project 2022), made up of rich relational webs with other movements, networks, projects, and movement spaces or events.

After the LWA 2018 AGM, I began attending more movement gatherings to build trust and develop relationships through getting actively involved and engaging people in the research process. For instance, at the LWA Cymru (Wales) summer gathering in 2019 just before my PhD I had the opportunity to briefly discuss first steps of the research with key members. And shortly after I began the PhD, I attended the Wales Real Food and Farming Conference (WRFFC) seeking out co-inquirers (see Figure 4) and the LWA AGM 2019 where I facilitated a workshop entitled ‘How can land-based workers and researchers better collaborate’ with a fellow scholar-activist. The latter resulted in a draft guide on ‘How to do research with LWA’ which later fed into the Agroecology Research Collaboration’s (ARC) Research Guidance booklet (ARC 2023) and encompasses many of the considerations that have come to shape this research. For instance, the importance of building relationships, involving landworkers and activists in the research process from the start, being sensitive to capacity issues, and designing accessible outputs in formats relevant to the movement – much of which resonates with the wider literature on participatory and activist methodologies (Chatterton and Routledge 2007; Choudry 2015; Langdon and Larweh 2015).

I began capturing these early experiences and personal reflections through my research journal, after obtaining ethical approval from Cardiff University. This formal ethics process provided an initial framework for considering issues such as informed consent and data storage which I address later in the section on generating data. However, attempting to lay out research ethics in advance of ethnographic fieldwork is unrealistic as unforeseen

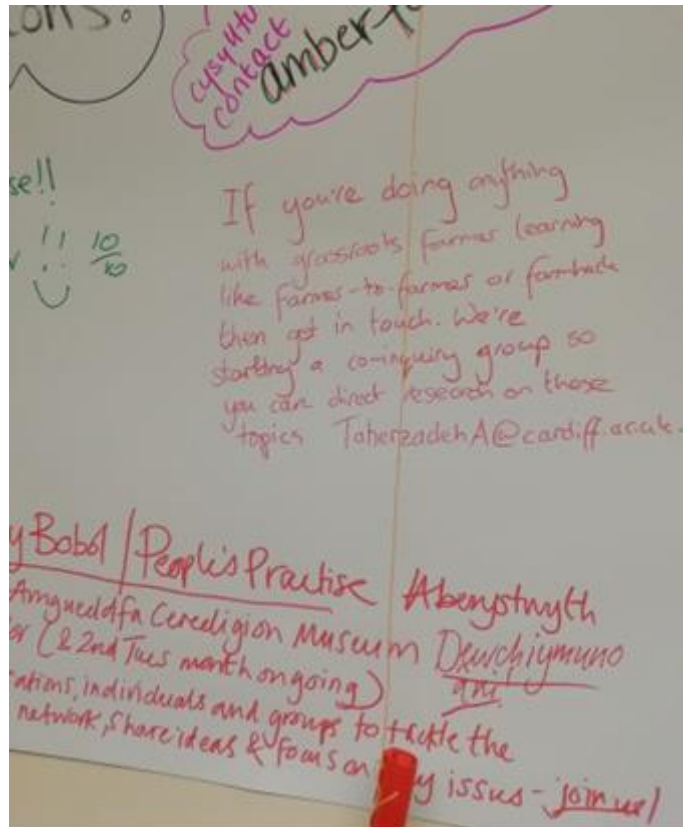


Figure 4. Collaborative wall for sharing projects and networking at Wales Real Food and Farming Conference. Own photo.

“ethically important moments” will arise throughout the process (Guillemin and Gillam 2004; Iphofen et al. 2018). Moreover, university ethical approval processes are often products of a positivistic approach to social research and are not well-suited to understand PAR and activist ethnography (Greenwood 2012, p.126). As such, procedural ethics alone are insufficient since ethics are “relative, situational, and contextual, rather than universal and abstract” (Mason 2017, p.84). An ‘ethics in practice’ is needed, involving an ongoing reflexive, situated and relational process (Guillemin and Gillam 2004; Mason 2017) as I describe across the next two subsections.

4.5.2 An Emergent Inquiry: Moving with the movement

Central to an emergent and iterative research process, is consideration of how “research relationships are formed, and the way these relationships are embedded in movement-articulations that determine whether the research is positioned to be a synergistic addition

to movement processes—a moving with movements—or an extractive process for academic purposes” (Langdon and Larweh 2015, p.283). The early in-person events I attended were critical for developing relationships and gaining a richer understanding of the movement. This meant that when the UK went into lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020, I was already involved in local movement organising and had established some good connections to support the shift to online research and organising.

The early stages of the pandemic required me to reflect on and adapt the research inquiry and methods. There were no longer in-person farm events and I had begun to understand that in contrast to well-documented Global South campesino-a-campesino practices, the LWA’s farmer-to-farmer practices were less structured and LWA members were less integrated in the rural social fabric, meaning they were often disconnected from neighbouring family farmers and lived far from one another. During the first year of the pandemic, I engaged in other projects which informed the research. I initiated an online community of practice called Community Food Network Cymru with community food organisers in Wales and undertook four interviews with food system organisers which fed into an article and podcast on the impacts of Covid-19 (Sanderson Bellamy et al. 2021; Taherzadeh 2019). I also helped conduct a survey of farm hack⁹ participants with a researcher from Coventry University and farm hack activists, resulting in a short report (Taherzadeh et al. 2021). This led to a series of interviews with farm hack organisers which are included in this research.

Through engaging in various forms of online activism and observing how the movement adapted to the crisis, I decided to broaden the inquiry to look at wider grassroots or social movement learning practices. While the movement already organised using online communication, the pandemic accelerated this and made online learning more commonplace. Therefore, “as the digital unfolds as part of the world that we co-inhabit with the people who participate in our research” it is important to come to understandings

⁹ Farm hacks in this sense are events where people gather to collaboratively design tools and technologies for small-scale sustainable farming. I provide a more in-depth explanation later and in Chapter 5.

of the field as encompassing both online and offline spaces (Pink et al. 2015, p.20). This meant the research had a large emphasis on online organising, events, and methods punctuated by in-person gatherings as these resumed. The more I became involved in movement organising, the more I realised that social movement learning and organising cannot be considered separate. Learning occurs in the movement in both non-formal and informal ways in relation to agroecological farming practice as well as political education and organising. Organising practices are critical in facilitating learning events such as farm tours and workshops. This led to my ultimate focus on movement praxis as a way to integrate these as well as respond to the increasing focus on the development of democratic organising processes within the LWA.

Moving with the movement thus involved continuous and cyclical creative processes of identifying and pursuing interesting lines of inquiry, designing appropriate research methods, and analysing movement practice through both collective and individual deliberation. One key area of inquiry developed through conversations with activists around understanding the agroecology movement's relationship to the wider agricultural sector in the UK in order to consider its transformative impact. This involved exploring tensions between agroecological and conventional farmers and the ways in which organisations within the movement functioned in terms of reaching different demographics. Focusing on the LWA has meant that my interactions were predominantly with agroecological landworkers and activists who are mostly young new entrants (Tahezadeh 2019) and tend to differ to what would be seen as more "traditional" farming communities. I sought to address this through a set of interviews with farmers beyond the LWA as I explain in section 4.6. A further area of inquiry formed around the increasing emphasis on addressing racism and other forms of marginalisation in the movement and wider food system. Understanding my position in relationship to these areas of inquiry and how my relationships with movement actors impacted the research process required critical reflexivity, particularly in relation to navigating my role as a scholar-activist, as I now explore.

4.5.3 Navigating the role of scholar-activist

Entering the field, I was aware I might encounter distrust of researchers within the LWA who were at the time overwhelmed by research requests (Gobo 2008; Brem-Wilson and Nicholson 2017). At the same time, as an activist involved in intersecting movements¹⁰, I shared many cultural, political, and sometimes social connections with movement activists which supported my acceptance into movement spaces and networks (Gobo 2008). Despite sharing many social locations with activists and agroecological landworkers in the movement, I began with an intense awareness and insecurity around my identity as an “imposter” - an urban researcher - and of all the power dynamics involved in having that position. Throughout my involvement and organising within the movement I maintained close attention to the balances of power between myself and participants, while attempting to develop a “critical friendship” with the movement (Brem-Wilson and Nicholson 2017). This meant providing critical feedback to the movement but with “a spirit of solidarity” shaping how those insights are shared in order to support the movement’s development.

Throughout the research I was “overt” as a researcher (Balsiger and Lambelet 2014), but my position in relation to the LWA and the movement changed as the research progressed, shifting from being a relative “outsider” to becoming an increasingly active and well-connected “insider” (Uldam and McCurdy 2013) or “complete member” (Adler and Adler 1987). This membership in the movement was not a strategic and temporary means to illicit information and deeper understanding from participants but represented my genuine growing commitment to the movement and the evolution of my wider life, work, and activism. As many scholar-activists have found, the boundaries between life, research, and activism became increasingly blurred (Humphrey 2007; Askins 2009; Choudry 2014a).

¹⁰ Prior to my involvement in the agroecology movement, I had been part of community food and gardening projects, environmental activism, no borders activism, and animal liberation activism as well as being involved in squats, occupations, social centres, and protest camps.

In understanding the ethical dimensions of these blurred boundaries, it is important to address the two significant roles I took on within the LWA (see Figure 5). First, a year into the research I was asked to join the LWA Cymru organising group. I remained on the organising group for the majority of the data collection period helping to organise and facilitate member gatherings, participating in meetings, and attending the LWA Organisers' Assemblies as one of two or three representatives of the Cymru branch. Secondly, two years into the research I took a part-time job at the LWA. I worked for the LWA for six months on a project called Your Farming Future funded by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). My role involved coordinating peer-to-peer learning groups and farm tours with farmers predominantly outside of LWA to support their transitions to agroecological systems. Through the Your Farming Future project, I was able to build rapport with farmers who were outside of LWA and often occupied different cultural and political identities but were interested in sustainable farming practices and therefore represented opportunities to scale out agroecology. Both roles shaped my data collection and were important in pursuing key lines of inquiry – such as how the LWA reaches out to more conventional farmers – and gaining access to opportunities to generate additional data. In each case, when invited to the role, I highlighted my position as a researcher and that I would have both 'hats' on and take some notes based on my observations and experiences in the role. However, Uldam and McCurdy (2013, p.947) highlight that it is easy for participants to forget this due to the blurred boundaries of scholar-activism. I tried to be sensitive to this, restating my researcher position at times or being mindful of how my observations were recorded, or not recorded, with an ethic of solidarity and attention to power.

Navigating the role of scholar-activist, Humphrey (2007) argues, involves “activating the hyphen” of insider-outsider rather than dissolving it by “treading the tight rope” between both positions, acknowledging the tensions inherent in this dual positionality. Couture et al. (2012) further challenges the insider-outsider dichotomy, viewing it as a spectrum in light of the intersectionality of identities. For instance, my identity as a queer person of colour gave me access and insight into identity-based organising and experiences in the

movement. At the same time, my position as a researcher rather than a landworker as well as my more privileged experience as someone of mixed British-Iranian heritage who was born in the UK distanced my experiences from others in those spaces. Understanding how my various social locations and roles shaped the research process, the movement's praxis, and my interactions with those researched requires critical reflexivity (Lozano 2018) and, as Lather (2011) proposes, can be addressed through an understanding of "research as praxis" which aligns with the PAR and activist methodology I have outlined.

Lather (2011, p.263) suggests that "for researchers with emancipatory aspirations" empirical research can support movement praxis by encouraging self-reflection and deeper understanding. As such, reflexivity is a relational process involving ongoing dialogue and co-learning with research participants where they "are actively involved in the construction and validation of meaning" (Lather 2011, p.268). Thus, developing and engaging in spaces of reflexive collective learning on movement praxis were both key to my research process and methodology – for instance, the action learning group and reflective focus groups - and stimulated my own critical reflexivity as an activist and researcher. Rather than romanticising movements or focusing on producing celebratory narratives, researchers have the potential to uncover critical currents within movements and bring their own critical analysis to support dialogical processes of theory-building (Choudry 2015; Lozano 2018). Reflecting this, my research analysis (4.7) brought together critical analysis of activists and myself to develop theory which aims to address movement challenges to support praxis. Such processes were open-ended and evolving, reflecting what Pillow (2003) calls "reflexivities of discomfort" in that they render the knowing of oneself as researcher and research participants "as uncomfortable and uncontainable" (p.188). For instance, discussions with other activists helped me to situate my experiences of adapting my clothing to fit the movement's aesthetic as not just a personal experience reflecting my anxiety about being seen as too "urban" as a non-landworker but connected to wider experiences of the subculture as reflecting white and middle-class sensibilities¹¹.

¹¹ This in particular is developed in Chapter 6 and formed part of my wider critical understanding of the movement subculture.

To engage with these uncomfortable reflexivities, I sought to render myself “naked” in the field (Thurairajah 2019) by forming genuine relationships with participants through commonalities and shared commitments whilst revealing my outsider status as a non-landworking researcher. This permeability of boundaries fostered trust with participants, deepening insight into the social realities of the movement (Thurairajah 2019). However, there were times where I pulled up “the cloak” (Thurairajah 2019), in order to build trust with participants and maintain ethical boundaries to better support them and meet expectations. For instance, in the YFF programme I maintained more boundaries as these farmers were generally older, white, often male, and largely working in animal agriculture. In this case, I was careful of sharing my identity as a vegan, both as a facilitator and a researcher, as I knew it would increase wariness of my “outsiderness” as a young, urban, female-presenting person of colour who may be visibly queer. In this instance, exposing my political values would have compromised my ability to create a safe learning space learning for farmers and would have likely affected their openness in discussing the movement with me (Craft and Pitt 2023). However, despite emphasising my role as a researcher separate to the LWA and the importance of critical feedback, as the facilitator of their peer-to-peer sessions participants may have struggled to be fully honest about their programme experience. At the same time, I tried to challenge the perspectives and positions of myself and others within the movement, particularly in understanding the experiences of more conventional farmers and others beyond the movement by using a critical and empathetic approach to navigating difference (Macintyre and Chaves 2017).

Another key area of reflection relates to my capacity as a desk-based researcher being paid for my involvement in the research in comparison to participants who were not. This involved understanding how to make engagement with the research more accessible whilst at the same time acknowledging that dynamic and trying to convert it from “power over” to “power with” participants (Grant et al. 2008; Hunjan and Keophilavong 2010). Particularly being attentive to the language used, the format of communications, and continually acknowledging the knowledge present and produced in farming and activist communities. In this respect, the principles of *reciprocity* and *accountability* were central

in guiding my overall approach (Greenwood 2008; Pulido 2008; Lather 2011; Cox 2015) and bring together the practices and ideas discussed in this section.

Reciprocity involves a mutual give and take. Drawing upon feminist scholars, developing reciprocal relationships requires attentiveness to power relations (Powell and Takayoshi 2003; Huisman 2008) and a ‘politics of care’ (Askins and Blazek 2017). Reciprocity or service regarding social movements is not individualised but supports collective work and can be judged by “whether it replicates extractive forms of research that mine movements for data, or parallels and reinforces movement processes and deepens movement reflections” (Langdon and Larweh 2015, p.283). I considered other activists and landworkers as co-subjects, colleagues and friends as opposed to “informants”. That is, “a full person who has a right to structure research relationships to meet [their] own interests and to demand reciprocities from the professional researcher in return for collaboration” (Greenwood 2008, p.325). As a PhD researcher, however, there can be many barriers to meeting these demands due to lack of skills, experience, resources, and status as academics (Huisman 2008; Pulido 2008; Greenwood 2012). Additionally, as the LWA initially lacked capacity to engage consistently with research projects which did not contribute financially to staff time¹², the very negotiation of these reciprocal relationships within the LWA was not always possible to do formally and collaboratively. Knowing this, I tried to be attentive to the creative ways in which I could develop reciprocal relationships while being aware of setting realistic expectations.

Huisman (2008) makes the argument that the research and acts of reciprocity or ‘service’ should be integrated rather than separate. Nevertheless, academic timescales are often inconsistent with the pace of movements and take time to deliver useful outcomes. I therefore addressed reciprocity at three levels: everyday movement practice, research methods, and research dissemination. *Reciprocity as movement practice* involved things

¹² Later in the research the LWA, along with several other sustainable farming organisations, formed the Agroecology Research Collaboration (ARC) and hired a part-time research coordinator. While I met once with the research coordinator to discuss suitable outputs and contacts and attended an ARC event, the research process was already well underway and capacity was still fairly low to engage with PhD research.

like writing newsletters, helping organise and facilitate events and workshops, making resources, caring for others, and attending and coordinating protest marches. *Reciprocity as research method* largely centred on facilitating and supporting “spaces of mutual meaning-making” (Langdon and Larweh 2015, p.283) as I have already described. Finally, *reciprocity as dissemination* involved consideration of what would be most useful as outputs to share and develop practice within the movement as well as using the research findings in both academic and non-academic settings to foster wider food system change, as I discuss in the final section of this chapter.

These reciprocal relations are connected to the idea of accountability to the movement. This means acknowledging that as a scholar-activist I am not a “lone maverick” but “*embedded in a web of relationships*” to which I should be highly accountable (Pulido 2008, p.351). This means both ensuring that research is relevant and seeing myself as “*part of a community of struggle*” not just for the moment that it takes to collect data but as part of carefully considered and collective medium and long-term plans (p.351). Being accountable involves attending to power dynamics within the research process (Pulido 2008, p.352), as I have explored. Reciprocity and accountability entail a careful balancing of roles between activist and academic so the research can break free of the ivory tower of academia whilst still engaging sufficiently to be of high quality and provide a valuable contribution (Cancian 1993; Pulido 2008). On the one hand, this involved making sure that problem formulation, process and outputs reflected the movement context rather than privileging my own academic work and agenda while having a long-term view of my responsibility to the movement beyond the end of data collection (Pulido 2008, p.351). On the other hand, being accountable as a researcher within the movement meant contributing to movement praxis with useful theoretical concepts as well as engaging meaningfully with theorising within the movement rather than separating the two. This required me to develop my academic skills and ensure I had enough time and energy to produce high quality and impactful research (Calhoun 2008). I did not always achieve this balance and my overemphasis on activist involvement in the first few years of the PhD

limited my capacity to communicate emergent research processes and findings to the movement. First, I describe my processes of generating data for the research inquiry.

4.6 Generating data

Using the LWA as a focal point and recognising movement networks as rhizomatic (Funke 2012a) rather than contained and discrete, data collection encompassed a range of movement activities and spaces relevant to political agroecology movement praxis (Tornaghi and Dehaene 2020). My approach to sampling was ‘purposive’ or ‘theoretical’ in that it involved selecting groups, individuals, types of practice, and activities based on their relevance to my evolving research questions and lines of inquiry (Mason 2017, p.59). As the emphasis was movement praxis, I focused on the perspectives of movement actors who were actively engaged in organising and participating in movement events. The data generation centred around several key spaces:

- **Significant movement learning events** including Land Skills Fair, farm hack, and alternative farming conferences;
- **Farmer-to-farmer learning groups** such as online groups and in-person farm tours organised by sector or location;
- **Movement building work and key organising structures** including AGMs, strategy days, trainings, workshops, meetings, movement documentation and communication, and the organisers assembly.

There were three main methods of data generation: “observant participation”, action learning groups and focus groups, and interviews, carried out across online and physical spaces. Additionally, as part of my involvement in the movement I read LWA materials such as emails, which I refer to in empirical chapters to provide additional context. Figure 5 provides an overview of the forms of data collection which I further detail in this section.

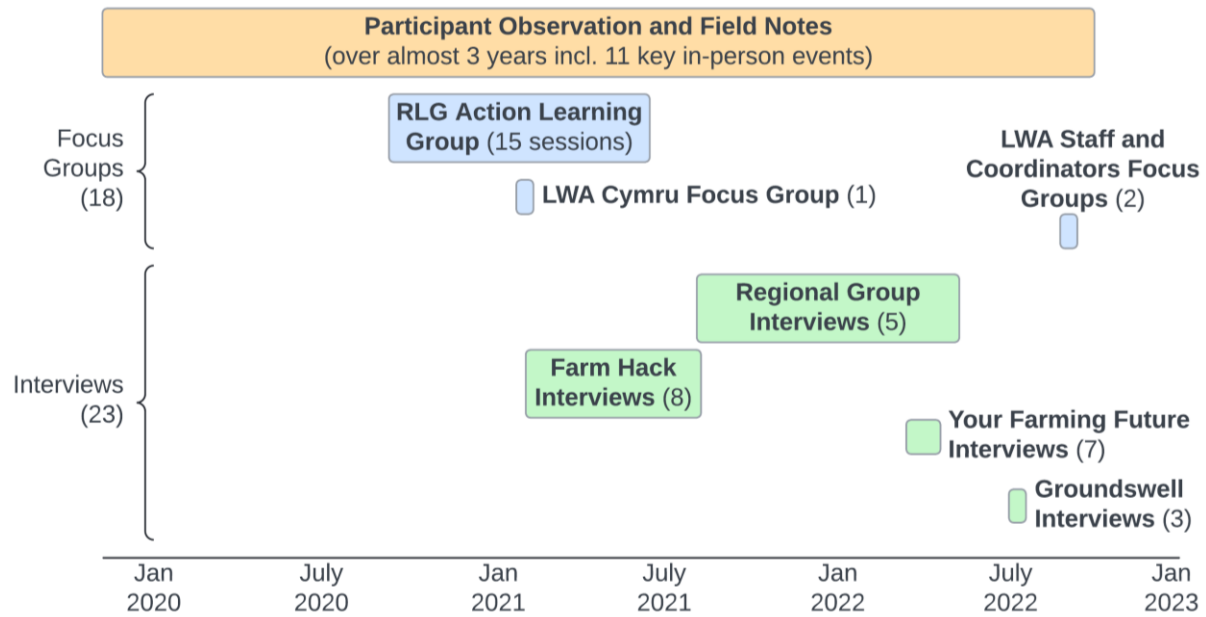


Figure 5. Timeline of data collection methods and topics including numbers of data collection events. Own diagram.

It is important to recognise much of the data generation was “digitally mediated” (Murthy 2011, p.159) just as much of human interaction is now digitally mediated, acutely so at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic. This was first in the sense that the use of digital technologies such as online video meetings, webinars, collaborative online documents, and online platforms were a core component of movement praxis. Secondly, the methods themselves relied on digital technologies so even when the practices being observed or discussed were in-person, these were then captured using online video calling (zoom) or recorded digitally as fieldnotes. Online interviewing and group meetings were more convenient for both me and participants, who were spread out across the country. At the time of holding action learning groups and interviews online, everyone involved had developed a level of comfort with conversations mediated in this way which was important to minimising barriers presented by these form of communication (Mason 2017, p.129). I now detail each of these methods.

4.6.1 Observant Participation

Participant observation as an ethnographic method often employed by anthropologists has been criticised within both activist and Participatory Action Research (Fals Borda 2001; Nabudere 2008). Traditionally, it had been presented as a way for an outsider researcher to participate in and observe the cultural practices of the “other”, providing a supposedly objective and detached account of it. As Greenwood (2008) argues, participant observers “participate only as a data-gathering strategy and not for the purpose of creating relationships of mutual obligation and collaborative learning” (p.324). Activist ethnography challenges this “by the restructuring of the ethnographer as a political ally of the people among whom she is doing fieldwork rather than as a live-in inquisitor” (p188). I have decided to use the more appropriate term “observant participant” offered by Costa Vargas (2008, p.175) to refer to “active participation in the organized group, such that observation becomes an appendage of the main activity”. While the field notes serve the purpose of recording details about movement practice, they also offer “a means to reflect on the effectiveness, transformation, reformulation, and application of everyday interventions” (p.176) to further agroecological change to the food system. As an engaged activist researcher, observant participation allowed me to capture a nuanced and in-depth understanding of the “highly fluid, rapidly shifting phenomena” (Plows 2008, p.1530) of agroecology movement praxis and helped generate insights into the perspective of movement activists on their intentions and practices (McCurdy and Uldam 2014, p.41). This complemented and guided other data collection methods.

My research journal captures almost three years of movement participation from November 2019 to October 2022 through ongoing observations and reflections and more in-depth field notes taken at key in-person events (Table 3). I documented and reflected on everyday movement practices and interactions such as meetings, events, and movement communications in which I was participant, organiser, or both. These entries were often brief and focused on what felt like interesting insights for the ongoing research inquiry. This included reflection on my role as facilitator and project staff in Your Farming Future. When in-person events restarted as we slowly emerged from the pandemic, I selected 11 key

events to attend and take more detailed field notes. Having attended in-person movement events prior to the pandemic, I knew what critical spaces for learning, organising, and networking they were. While some online events tried to incorporate more social and cultural aspects, these were present in much deeper and more diverse ways during the in-person events. The 11 events I focused are outlined in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Event sample for detailed fieldnotes

Event type	Description
<i>Farm Tours</i>	Important farmer-to-farmer learning practices, often organised regionally, to share practice first-hand from a farm and create an opportunity for networking. I recorded fieldnotes for two organised in connection with LWA regional groups and one organised for Your Farming Future.
<i>Land Skills Fair 2021 and 2022</i>	A key annual summer skill-share and farmer-to-farmer learning festival organised by the LWA. I both participated and facilitated workshops.
<i>LWA Organisers Assembly</i>	Along with another LWA Cymru organiser, I represented our branch in the first LWA Organisers Assembly in October 2021, an annual gathering focused on democratic member-led organising in the LWA.
<i>COP26</i>	The UN climate conference held in Glasgow, Scotland, in November 2021 where LWA had a permanent base from which they organised events, mobilisations and meetings.
<i>LWA Cymru Summer Gathering 2021</i>	An annual event organised by the LWA Cymru group to bring together members for farmer-to-farmer learning, movement-building, and networking.
<i>LWA LGBTQIA+ Strategy Day</i>	As a member of this group, I participated in the strategy day in March 2022 which aimed to strengthen and develop organising as a member-led identity-based group.
<i>Women and Non-Binary Farm Hack</i>	An annual farm hack event organised on a farm in the South-West to bring together women and marginalised genders to learn from one another.

For these events, I wrote ‘scratch notes’ or jottings in the moment or immediately after and later typed them up as a fuller account (Arora and Bubp 2017). Fieldnotes were largely focused on broader descriptive accounts of practices, settings, discussions, and balances of power rather than attempting to capture dialogue verbatim or analysing interpersonal

interactions. I had planned to attend Groundswell, a regenerative agriculture festival, to gain more insight into wider sustainable farming spaces and contrast to political agroecology movement spaces. Unfortunately, I tested positive for Covid-19 just before and so instead I interviewed three LWA staff who had attended, as I describe in a moment. First, I cover the action learning group and focus groups.

4.6.2 Action Learning Group and Focus Groups

Action Learning (AL) is an approach developed within the field of Organisational Studies to apply learning to organisational practice through an AL group or “set” (Pedler and Burgoyne 2015). Critical Action Learning additionally emphasises power and politics in organisational learning (Rigg 2014). While mostly applied to workplaces and not applied to promote social transformation, the concept and basic tenets of critical action learning informed the methodological approach I took which centred on critical movement praxis. I brought together a group of movement activists to collectively learn about movement organising approaches and then critically assess praxis in the agroecology movement and reflect on their own practice. The action learning group, called Resisting, Learning, Growing (RLG) after the research thesis title, started in September 2020 and continued meeting regularly until May 2021. The aim of RLG, collaboratively defined, became to “support the UK agroecology movement to become more powerful” by supporting “individual groups and the movement as a whole to develop effective organising systems and coherent strategies” (RLG 2020). As an activist in the movement, I engaged in all discussions drawing upon my experience and sharing my reflections which were informed by both academic and movement praxis.

My choice to start an action learning group was spontaneous. Soon after realising that activists had little capacity or interest to engage in participatory research governance, I came across a nine-week online course by Navigate Coop called *Living Systems for Thriving Groups*. The course drew upon various systemic approaches to group organising within their “Living Systems” framework to support groups and organisation working on social and ecological justice to become clearer on their purpose, analyse power

dynamics, and develop systems for: Decision Making; Conflict Engagement; Support, Care & Connection; Resource Distribution; Feedback and Information Flow (Navigate 2020).

Realising this would be a valuable form of reciprocity to extend to movement activists and a chance to discuss issues of movement organising, I offered to pay for a small number of activists to attend as a group. Through existing networks of landworkers and activists linked to the LWA such as email and WhatsApp groups, I shared the opportunity to participate in the nine-week course as part of an action learning group and formed a group from those who responded setting an initial meeting before the course.

The Resisting, Learning, Growing AL group began forming alongside the course through 30-minute sessions and following this we decided to meet regularly to apply our learning to the agroecology movement. Participation fluctuated as activists were often struggling with multiple commitments and the impacts of living in a pandemic. Nine people started the course and by the end five remained to form the AL group alongside me, with an additional activist joining for two sessions. Overall, notes or recordings of 15 meetings were analysed as data sources. I additionally reflected on various stages of the group's development within my research journal.

All five core group members were very active in the movement which led to deep and interesting analyses of the movement but meant that they could only maintain participation for a certain period. The two who remained in RLG are both growers, activists, and talented facilitators actively involved in organising systems for social justice. The three of us began working with groups within the LWA to support movement building and facilitated workshops at the Land Skills Fair to encourage strategic thinking about systems and power within the wider movement (see Figure 6). We produced a blogpost for the LWA website reflecting on our course learning (Crowe and Taherzadeh 2021).

In addition to the AL group, I organised three reflective discussions with LWA organisers, staff, and coordinating group members. As a method this falls somewhere between action learning group and traditional focus groups as it centred on movement praxis and was part of an ongoing discussion about how to organise effectively (Chiu 2003; Garcia-Iriarte et al. 2009). The LWA Cymru reflective discussion was planned and facilitated online with the

LWA membership coordinator who was interested in understanding how the member-led groups organised and how they could be better supported. I was encouraged by the group to participate in discussion as an organiser alongside the five other branch organisers. As a final form of data collection and way of collectively reflecting on initial findings, as I discuss in the analysis section, I held two reflective online discussions involving seven key LWA staff and coordinators.



Figure 6. Participants at the 'If we don't design systems, we inherit them' workshop organised by the RLG action learning group at Land Skills Fair 2021. Own photo.

4.6.3 Interviews

Interviews were employed to generate in-depth information about experiences of movement praxis from those with most insight and involvement. Qualitative interviewing allows for the social “construction or reconstruction of knowledge” through dialogical interactions between researcher and interviewees (Mason 2017, p.110). It values people’s knowledge, experiences, interpretations, narratives, and discourses and understands that these are situated and co-produced relationally (Brinkmann 2017; Mason 2017). The interviews were mainly focused on understanding the intentions behind practices, their

evolution, and reflecting on successes and challenges from the perspectives of key organisers. Participants and organisers in the movement were asked about their own learning and experience of events. Farm hack interviews were conducted as a part of a participatory activist research project aimed at evaluating farm hack events and producing a farm hack guide.

In addition, several participants who had regularly attended online peer-to-peer groups and in-person farm tours in the Your Farming Future programme were interviewed. The aim was to get their perspective of a farmer-to-farmer approach and understand their experience as farmers on the peripheries of or outside of the movement looking in. This set of interviews aimed to address two key areas of inquiry not sufficiently addressed through other LWA practices. That is, the role of structured and ongoing farmer-to-farmer groups in supporting agroecological transformations and the possible cultural barriers to engaging more conventional farmers in the agroecology movement. Finally, three LWA staff were interviewed on their experience of attending Groundswell regenerative agriculture festival to gain better understanding of the culture and demographic of this space. Overall, 23 interviews were carried out as summarised in Table 4.

Table 4. Summary of interviews.

Topic	Interviews
<i>Farm Hack</i>	8 interviews with farm hack organisers and session facilitators.
<i>Regional organising</i>	4 interviews with LWA regional organisers, and one joint interview of 2 organisers from a regional growers' group aligned to the LWA.
<i>Your Farming Future</i>	7 interviews with participating farmers.
<i>Groundswell</i>	3 interviews with LWA staff after attending Groundswell.

The interviews were semi-structured and based on a Problem-Centred Interviewing approach. Problem-Centred Interviewing (PCI) is “used for collecting and reconstructing knowledge about ‘problems’ (i.e., socially and individually relevant issues) from the perspective of interview partners in a discursive-dialogic way” (Reiter and Witzel 2020). Such interviews are “participatory research encounters of knowledge co-construction,

joint interpretation, and active understanding” (p.2). As a method it resonates with an abductive approach as it combines the openness of a qualitative interview with “a reflexive exchange of social scientific prior knowledge and practical common-sense knowledge” (p.2). As such, interviewees and interview themes were chosen in response to ongoing analysis which combined insights from the field, the literature, and my own “travelling” within and beyond the movement (Witzel and Reiter 2012).

Almost all interviews were carried out online using Zoom and, where practicable, an interview guide was sent to interviewees beforehand. Interview length ranged from 30 to 90 minutes. All interviews were recorded where practical, otherwise notes were made and checked with the interviewee. Most interviews were transcribed verbatim but for those that were excessively long and involved a lot of discussion which was not relevant to the research inquiry, I summarised as notes.

4.6.4 Consent and Anonymity

All interviewees and action learning members completed participant consent forms which outlined data usage and storage, and their right to withdraw. Data was stored securely per Cardiff University policies for a maximum of 5 years. Consent forms were completed online, apart from for farm hack interviews where an adapted form was used due to collaboration with another project¹³. Research details were communicated clearly before and during interviews and the action learning group process.

Consent forms offered two anonymity options: complete anonymity or contact for consent. While data presented in this thesis and other academic outputs maintains complete anonymity for all interviewees, the second option allows for identifiable contributions in movement resources such as guides and podcasts. The data was largely unresponsive, and the vast majority of participants opted for the second option. For the thesis and other academic outputs, pseudonyms were used for individuals. However, the

¹³ The interviews also informed a participatory and activist research project conducted with Coventry University to produce a practical Farm Hack Guide as I detail later in this chapter.

names of groups I was an organiser in - LWA Cymru, the Your Farming Future project, and the LWA identity-based groups - are not anonymised as their context is important and they are easily identifiable in their singularity and online presence. I provide an overview of participants including their pseudonyms, key roles, and forms of data collection relating to them in the appendices (see Appendix 1).

Obtaining consent for observant participation was more complex. Due to high involvement of ethnographers in the field, particularly if from an insider position, it can be difficult to obtain truly informed consent for observant participation (Uldam and McCurdy 2013; Mason 2017; Delamont and Atkinson 2018). Individual withdrawal rights are less applicable due to the collective nature of data generation (Delamont and Atkinson 2018, p.122). Consent is challenging partly due to the blurred boundaries between different roles that ethnographers take on during fieldwork and the level of trust and depth of relationships often formed (Huisman 2008; Mason 2017). I addressed my dual position as scholar-activist in movement settings and events, announcing this in group introductions and individual conversations. In such cases, as explained earlier, my critical activist approach to research ethics shaped what and how observations were recorded or reported on. For instance, at a BPOC-only event, I identified myself as a researcher but refrained from extensive note-taking to maintain the space's integrity, only including a brief characterisation of the whiteness of broader movement praxis expressed by some participants as it felt useful to the movement and those event participants to highlight this tendency.

While the data generated encompasses processes of individual or collective reflection on movement praxis, there was also a formal process of data analysis incorporating some participatory elements, as I now detail.

4.7 Analysing the data

Taking a transformative and pragmatist approach, the research analysis is ultimately concerned “with applications – what works – and solutions to problems” (p.10) which

facilitate social change and elucidate power relationships (Creswell 2013, p.73). Abductive analysis is well suited to PAR and activist research as it is iterative and reflects the organic processes of collective deliberation and movement praxis. As a researcher, this entails familiarisation and defamiliarisation with the data and the field through successive revisiting and reflection which allow space for experiences in academic and non-academic life to spark moments of insight and new perspectives on the data (Brinkmann 2014; Earl Rinehart 2021). As Earl Rinehart (2021) explains, “[w]hether an idea germinates from a leisurely (and timeconsuming) swim, is prompted by something read or heard, I return to the evidence (and my desk) to weigh and evaluate any working theory” (p.309). For me, these ideas often arose through discussion with friends or colleagues, reading fiction books, or through community organising. However, collective sense-making as part of critical movement praxis within research methods and everyday movement practice was key. Moreover, when evaluating potential interpretations, we can ask not only how strong the argument is for an interpretation but also how much a certain way of conceptualising what is happening is useful for the movement and how much it contributes meaningfully to wider understandings of the issue in the academic literature and beyond (Earl Rinehart 2021, p.309).

As suggested by Firestone and Dawson (1982), qualitative analysis is strongest when it combines intuitive, procedural, and intersubjective approaches. The intuition of the research from the researcher’s deep involvement in the field "is the richest and primary source of subjective understanding" but can be difficult to communicate as a methodology and therefore scrutinised for credibility (p.2-3). While these iterative intuitive processes of analysis were largely not formalised, they were captured in my research journal as well as the action learning group transcripts. Procedural analysis uses processes of data organisation such as coding and allow cross-checking of data for triangulation, for instance, increasing the trustworthiness of findings. However, these processes are a tool to support analysis rather than the analytical process itself (Brinkmann 2014). Finally, intersubjective analysis involves interaction around the research findings, this can be between other researchers or with participants and "provide

a way of 'negotiating' the multiple interpretations possible in procedural analysis to develop a "consensus on a 'best possible' interpretation" (p.16). As can be seen in Figure 7, I combined all three approaches to analysis with intersubjective analysis informing most analytical stages due to the methodology's dialogical nature.

The analysis involved three main formal stages alongside ongoing informal intuitive and intersubjective processes. The first stage occurred towards the end of the action learning group recorded meetings, using thematic analysis (Lochmiller 2021) to identify five key findings based on group discussions. AL group members then left comments on the digital document, and we discussed the findings in the following meeting. These provided a basis for the ongoing inquiry. The second stage occurred when the main data collection concluded due to a sense of 'data saturation', that is, additional interviews and observations seemed to offer nothing new to the inquiry (Saunders et al. 2018). Tracking the emergent research findings through intuitive and intersubjective analysis, I identified a set of initial findings. These were then used as a basis for further intersubjective analysis. Key LWA staff and coordinating group members who had in-depth knowledge of organisational history and strategy were invited to one of two reflective focus groups. Prior to the online meeting, I produced a summary of initial findings in the format of an online slideshow and voice recording to make engagement accessible. In each group, we discussed the initial findings and had further collective discussion on LWA strategy and development to address key questions arising from the data. These reflective discussions were then transcribed and added to the body of data. Data saturation was thus further strengthened through collaborative member checking and reflection (Urry et al. 2024). This relates to all reflexive collective learning processes built into the research, particularly these reflective discussions with key LWA members and the action learning group, but also informal discussions with movement members as way to verify emergent findings.

The third stage was the main procedural analysis. Before detailing this, it is important to address the role and process of coding in the abductive analytical process. Brinkmann (2014) challenges the idea that qualitative inquiry should be reduced to a narrow

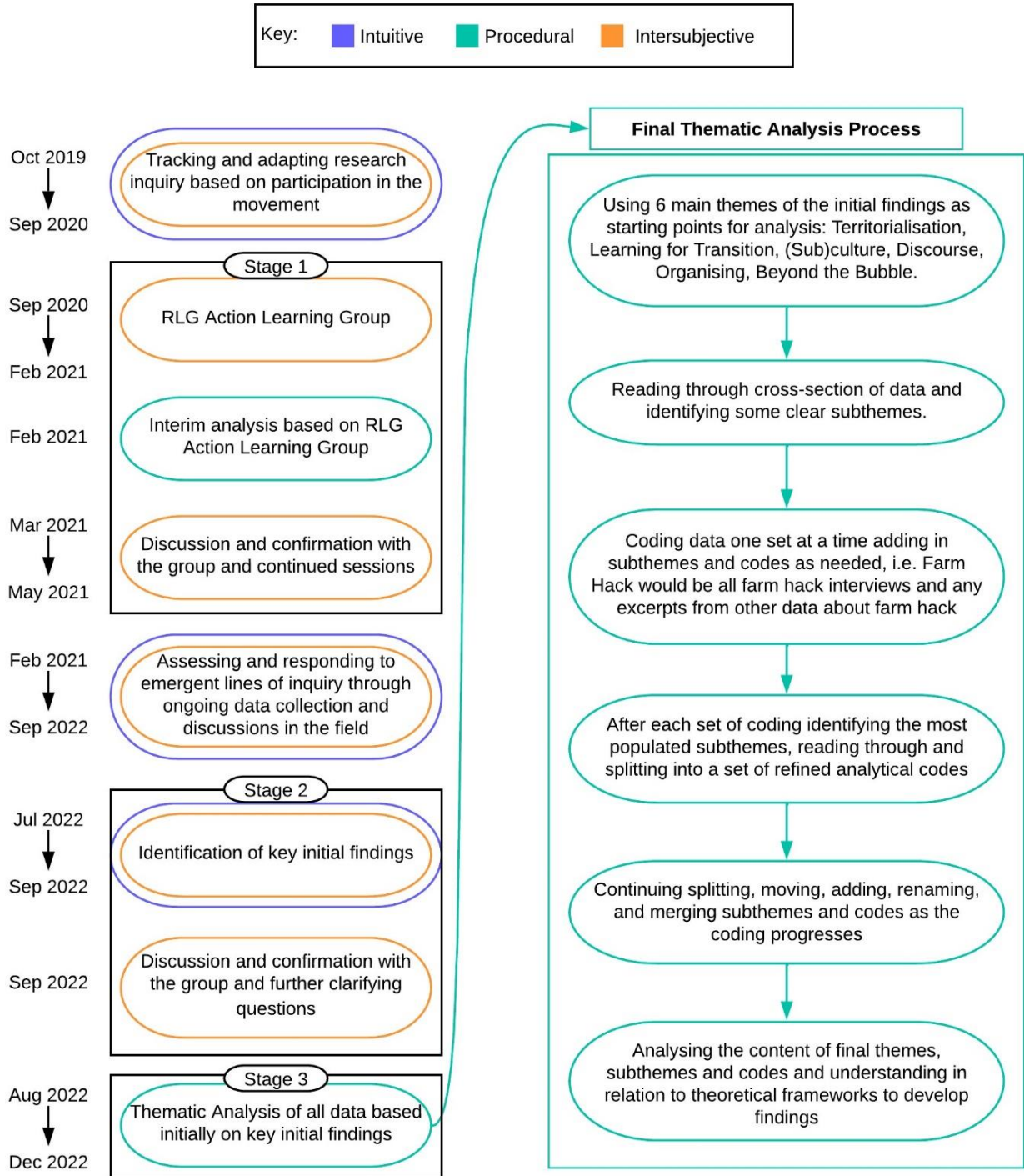


Figure 7. Data analysis process detailing three main stages, intuitive, intersubjective, and procedural elements as well as stages of final coding for analysis.

emphasis on coding of empirical data rather than broader creative, situated, and philosophical processes of sense-making. In contrast, Tavory and Timmermans (2014, p.59) promote methodological guidelines such as coding and memo-writing as a means of guarding against a “tendency to modify our remembered experiences so they fit better with the kinds of narratives we already want to tell”. In my data analysis, I recognised the value of empirical data and coding in both familiarising and defamiliarising with the field (Tavory and Timmermans 2014) while acknowledging the wider intuitive and intersubjective process of analysis which inform the coding and interpretation of codes.

Using the main themes identified in the initial findings as a basis, I reviewed a cross-section of the data to devise an initial cross-sectional coding framework based on first identifying broader categories (*territorialisation, learning for transition, (sub)culture, discourse, organising, and beyond the bubble*) which I believed would help capture the data and address the research questions (Mason 2017, pp.194–206). I began to identify themes and subthemes within these or ‘codes’, that is, researcher-generated interpretations that symbolize or attribute meaning to portions of data (Saldana 2009, p.6). I identified a coding framework through a process of sense-making, building on existing deliberative processes, my background knowledge, epistemological orientation, awareness of theories as “sensitizing concepts”, and openness to the data ‘surprising’ me (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane 2006; Timmermans and Tavory 2012; Mason 2017, p.203). This abductive approach differs from traditional Grounded Theory which tends to work from the data upwards by assigning codes line by line, paragraph by paragraph (Tavory and Timmermans 2014, p.59). Moreover, given the large quantity of data collected over several years, this provides a practical approach to analysis within the given timeframe.

Next, this initial framework was applied to organise and code the data within NVivo 12 Plus. I coded a set of data at a time, for instance all data related to farm hacks, adding additional codes as necessary. After each set of data, I reviewed the most populated subthemes and split them into a refined set of analytical codes. As this process progressed, alterations were made to the framework to better reflect the data by adding, splitting, moving, merging, or redefining codes. Additionally, memos were written

throughout to track analytical decisions, connections between themes, and connections to wider theoretical frameworks and my own experiences. Initial findings were additionally presented and discussed at key points with peers. These practices of ‘audit trails’ (Morse 2017, p.1340) and ‘peer debriefing’ (Creswell and Miller 2000), contribute to research quality and rigor. This was further achieved through triangulation of data sources and exploration of negative evidence in the interpretation of findings (Morse et al. 2002; Fusch et al. 2018). Further, the interpretation of findings involved identifying and constructing movement-relevant theory, suitable in terms of both value and accessibility for practical application. A key element of this involves identifying ways for the research findings to contribute to movement praxis in the short and long-term, which I address in this final section.

4.8 Contributing to Movement Praxis

As highlighted in this chapter, a key part of the participatory activist methodology involved facilitating spaces of relational and reflexive collective learning. These spaces enabled the mutual exchange of academic and activist ideas, strengthening both praxis and research. The action learning group was particularly important in this regard. While many activists were familiar with key agroecology concepts, our discussion around scaling introduced the concepts of *massification* and *territorialisation*, which they found useful. The Navigate Coop Living Systems course provided useful frameworks for us all which fed into wider movement praxis, particularly as the LWA shortly after adopted this model. Using insights from the course and other facilitation models we shared amongst ourselves, such as convergent facilitation, we supported effective organising and facilitated decision-making in the movement. For instance, we facilitated a process between two regional groups to explore urban-rural dynamics and an organising event for FLAME, LWA’s youth branch, to reflect on their organising practices. Action learning group members also shared useful concepts, such as spectrum of allies (Bloch 2019), which influenced my conceptual framework.

In terms of contributing directly to the movement through my research, I focused on practical tools, podcasts, blogs, and workshops as relevant forms of dissemination. First, I produced a practical guide on running farm hack events, drawing on the farm hack interviews and produced collaboratively with other activists in the format of an easily reproduceable black and white zine (Farm Hack Guide Project 2023). Reflecting farm hack’s open-source ethos, it was licensed as creative commons and uploaded as a wiki on Appropedia (Darren 2023). I also created a podcast based on the farm hack interviews as podcasts were identified as a popular and accessible media in the movement. This was part of a podcast series aimed at sharing the research findings, with further podcasts planned as conversations with activists based around the thesis findings.

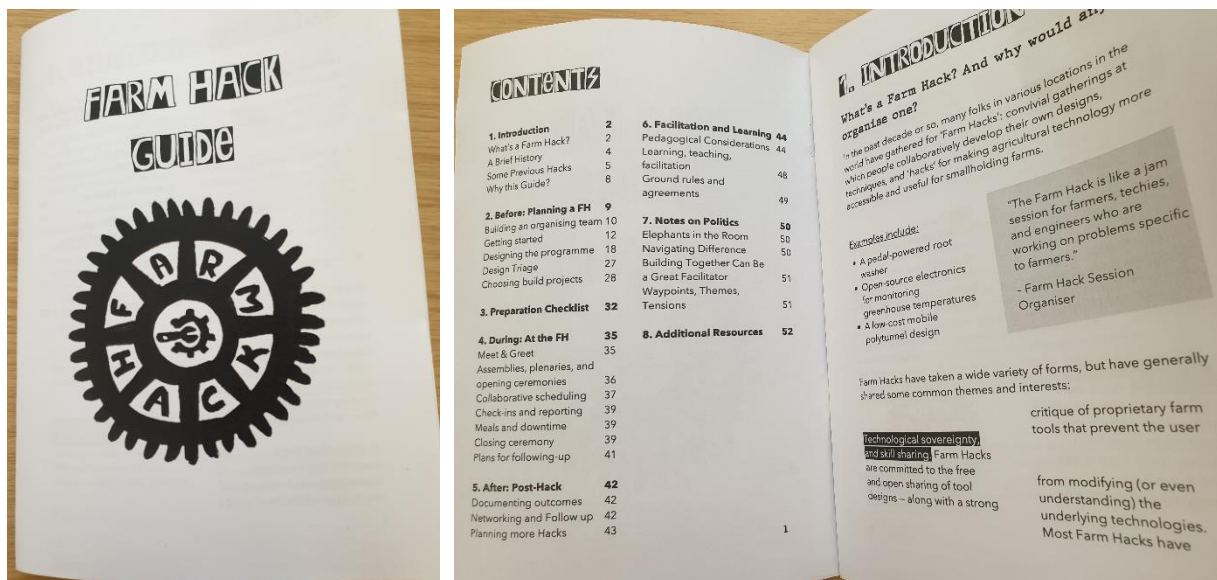


Figure 8. Farm hack guide. Own photo.

Workshops and presentations at key movement events were another dissemination methods. As well as the initial Land Skills Fair (LSF) workshop with the action learning group, I collaborated with one member to run a workshop entitled “Building Collective Power in the Agroecology Movement” at LSF 2022 based on ideas that came to form my final conceptual framework on social movement ecology. At the Oxford Real Farming Conference in 2023, the two of us ran a workshop entitled “Let’s get strategic! Building the movement for food sovereignty in critical time” and I ran a session to present my main research findings. The latter led to me being invited to contribute to a workshop for A-Team

Foundation, an agroecology funder, on movement building. My ongoing commitment and embeddedness in the movement ensure that I will continue sharing the research findings to support movement praxis.

4.9 Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have outlined my methodological choices describing the iterative and cyclical processes of decision-making. Underlying these choices were the transformative and pragmatist paradigms which led to an abductive approach to inquiry and informed the choice of a participatory action research and activist ethnographic methodology. This entailed an approach which centred on processes of collective reflexive and relational learning embedded in movement praxis to support agroecological transformations in the UK by understanding, developing, and sharing key elements of movement praxis. An iterative approach to sampling and selection of methods allowed me to address my three research questions and maintain a reciprocal relationship with the movement. The following four chapters go on to present research findings, answering research questions through engaging with academic and movement literatures to develop movement-relevant theory.

5. SITUATING THE UK AGROECOLOGY MOVEMENT

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I introduced the Landworkers' Alliance (LWA), the UK member of global peasant movement La Vía Campesina (LVC), as the study's focus. The LWA and their allies are central to the political agroecology struggle, which I argued in Chapter 2 is necessary for positive food system transformation (Rivera-Ferre 2018; Giraldo and Rosset 2022). To understand the role and limitations of the political agroecology movement in such transformations, it is important to first describe and situate it within the broader sustainable agrifood movement and the wider agricultural landscape. This chapter provides a background on the UK agroecology movement, using data from movement experiences, organisational documents, and online materials. It begins with an overview of the LWA – its history, growth, structure, collective identity, and strategy – then outlines the wider movement landscape, including both allied and differing organisations. The chapter concludes with descriptions of key movement spaces important to this research, such as Land Skills Fair, farm hack, and the Oxford Real Farming Conference.

5.2 The Landworkers' Alliance

The LWA's origin story is bound up with the beginnings of an organised food sovereignty movement in the UK. Many people mark this point as the first UK Food Sovereignty Gathering in 2012 hosted at OrganicLea, a community food project and workers cooperative in London. During this, a splinter group met to discuss founding the LWA. The account of LWA I give next is based on a presentation from key LWA activists to member organisers at an event I attended in 2021. In this, four main threads were identified as leading to LWA's creation. Firstly, up to 2011 there were large-scale protests organised around important government summits, such as the Global Day of Action demonstrations coinciding with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) meetings. This is where founding LWA members became aware of and met La Via Campesina (LVC). Secondly, in the 1990s and 2000s a tension

emerged between two opposing approaches to environmentalism: deep green radical vs. light green reformist approach. The former emphasised land sharing and the latter focused more on conservation. Thirdly, a base of UK charities and food projects developed who viewed themselves within the global food sovereignty movement and focused on global hunger. And fourth, the Ecological Land Cooperative (ELC) was established to support new entrants¹⁴, addressing access to land problems in the UK. Informed by these experiences and emerging currents, the LWA was founded based on solidarity with global peasant movements, a deep green radical and food sovereignty perspective, and supporting and representing the needs of new entrants.



Figure 9. Landworkers' Alliance logo.

The key characteristics the LWA defined themselves by were: having an internationalist outlook; being a democratic and member-led union; being a social movement and not career-oriented; basing themselves in productive work and that experience; encompassing all landwork, including forestry, fibre production, and fishing; and having a systemic critique of the current political landscape while promoting an economic

¹⁴ The Landworkers' Alliance has defined a 'new entrant' as "anyone from a non-farming background who is thinking about a career in land work, undertaking volunteering, in training or education, starting a business or has been running a land-based business for up to 5 years" (LWA 2023d) though also allows people to self-define. There are varying definitions of new entrant (Creaney et al. 2023) and many LWA members continue to consider themselves new entrants far beyond 5 years while some other farmers who have come from a farming background consider themselves new entrants if they have worked for a significant period in another industry and then returned to farming, perhaps with their own new business. For the interest of this thesis, I tend to distinguish new entrants as those from non-farming backgrounds, in line with LWA's definition, while recognising those operating farm businesses longer than five years may still identify or be identified as new entrants.

model beyond capitalism. As they described it, they entered into a vacuum in the UK of agrifood movement organising, as opposed to an NGO approach, causing them to look internationally for inspiration. The LWA began to learn from established movements in the Global South, recognising shared political visions, and became members of LVC. This reflects the “unity in diversity” approach of La Via Campesina which allows them to work together in the struggle for food sovereignty despite vastly different contexts (Desmarais 2007).

In 2013, LWA representatives joined other LVC members at the 6th Global Conference marking 20 years of La Via Campesina. This was described as an eye-opening and formational experience for them. They met delegates from the Zapatistas and began engaging in the European Coordination of LVC (ECVC). Particularly influential in these formative stages was Confédération Paysanne (CP) of France, from whom the LWA were able to learn a lot due to the relatively similar context to the UK, including the idea of reclaiming a peasant identity. LWA got involved in policy processes at the UN and EU level and began to realise the importance of a collective global voice for producers. The early development of the LWA relied largely on voluntary work of landworker members and was inconsistent due to demands of seasonal agricultural work. Increased core funding to cover staffing has allowed the LWA to develop significantly since 2016, and in an accelerated way since 2020 with the implementation of their 5-year development plan, as I cover in the next section.

5.2.1 Organisational Structure and Growth

The LWA describes itself as both a union and a social movement. Membership “is open to individuals, partnerships, groups and organisations who support the principles of Food Sovereignty and are actively engaged in farming, growing, forestry and land-based work, including land-based crafts and food processing” for a relatively low annual membership cost (LWA 2023c). Due to the political moment of Brexit, Covid’19, and climate emergency the LWA has changed and grown a lot in recent years. Youth landworkers (aged 16-25) are now separately recognised and can join for a heavily reduced membership fee, and non-landworking “supporters” like myself play “an increasingly important role in bringing income from donations, and helping support,

accelerate and multiply [LWA's] advocacy and campaigning work” (LWA 2021c, p.10). In 2019, when this research formally began, the LWA had around 1000 members, 100 supporters, and the equivalent of 3.5 full-time staff (FTE) (LWA 2019b, p.2). Three years later in 2022, this had more than doubled to 2193 members, 461 supporters, and 123 youth members (LWA 2022). In 2021, due to various funded projects, particularly related to Brexit, the staffing had spiked to 21FTE spread over 43 people (LWA 2021c, p.8). This rapid growth initiated a process of intentional organisational work to ensure the LWA remains true to its values which I explore further in Chapter 7. The LWA has drawn inspiration from the Democratic Confederalist model of other movements such as Rojava Revolution in Kurdistan, the Zapatistas, LVC, and CP. They have begun to build democratic structures and processes to support representation of members as they grow, particularly centring marginalised perspectives.

Figure 10 presents an attempt to give a snapshot of this constantly evolving structure which I cover in more depth in Chapter 7.

Until recently, the LWA's membership and activities have been concentrated in South-West England and the South in general where there are more established alternative agrifood scenes. The LWA has steadily and intentionally developed their branches (England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland) and regional groups, increasing membership in areas like Scotland and the North of England. Many regional and branch groups formed organically through local member organising so the structure and format of these varies. Member-led identity groups have developed to connect members and improve representation of marginalised identities. These are: the LGBTQIA+ group - Out on the Land (OOTL); Racial Equity, Abolition and Liberation in Landwork (REAL); the youth branch - Food, Land, Agriculture: a Movement for Equality (FLAME); and an emerging women and diverse genders in forestry and landwork group. LWA membership has historically been heavily skewed towards horticulture though this has shifted. For instance, between 2019 and 2020, there was a 90% increase in arable members and 68% increase in dairy members (LWA 2020a, p.7). Additionally, there is an intention to organise by sectors, though the only formally organised sector is Forestry, or the 'Woody Branch', in reaction to the strong slant towards farming in the overall membership.

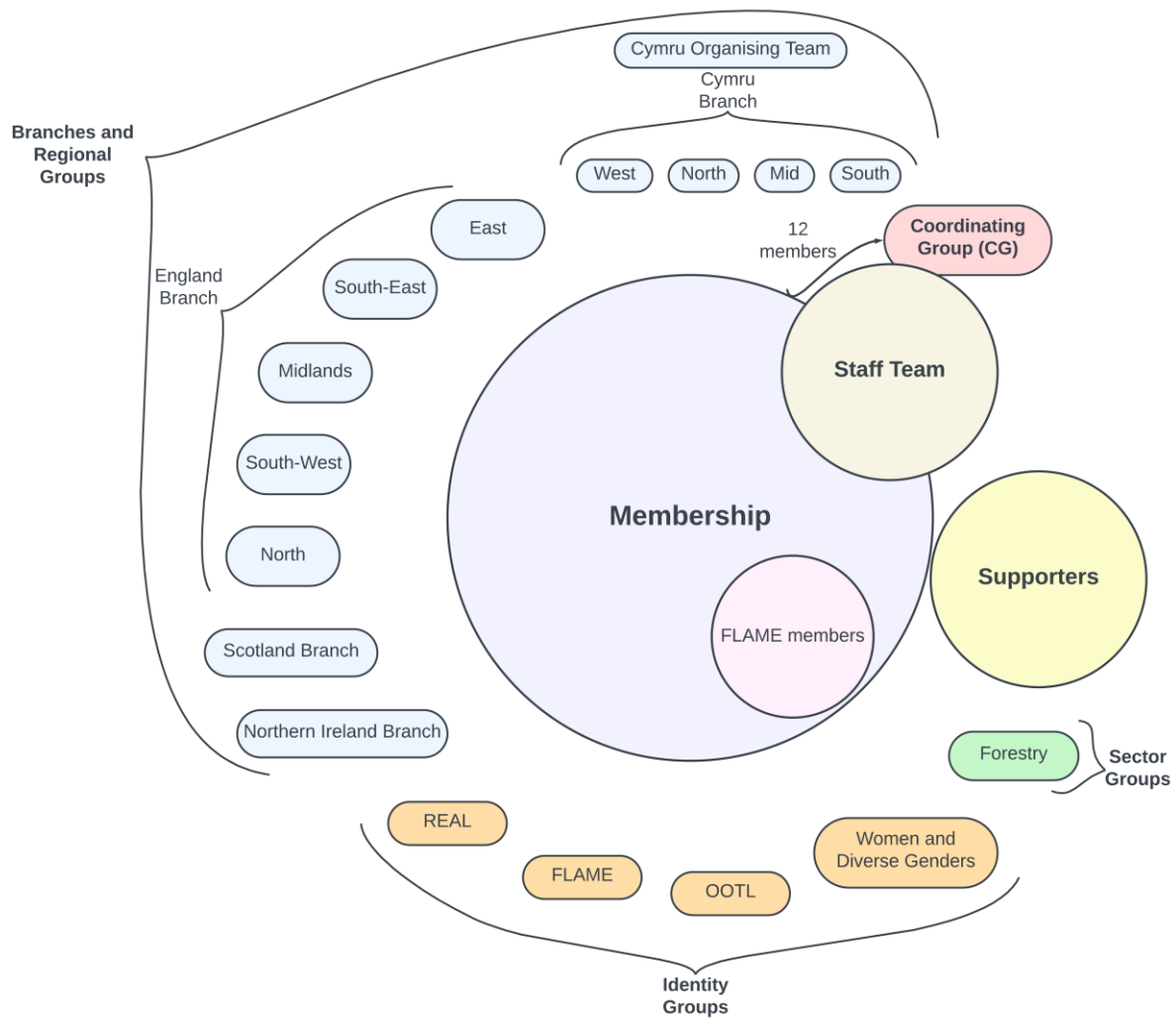


Figure 10. LWA Organisational Structure in early 2023. Own Diagram.

The coordinating group and member-led groups are supported and connected through staff members who are themselves organised in a flat structure of teams and projects with pay parity across the organisation. Staff are largely recruited from membership on a part-time basis, though this has shifted as they have grown, the impact of which I discuss further in Chapter 7. This has gone alongside work to strengthen and develop a coherent sense of collective identity and strategy, as I outline in the next section.

5.2.2 Strategy and Collective Identity

A big element of LWA’s vision from the start has been as a movement which connects the whole food system rather than just farming. The LWA’s stated mission is to “improve the livelihoods of our members and create a better food and land-use system for everyone” (LWA 2023e). They define their approach by Food Sovereignty,

Agroecology, Right to Food, and Social Justice, demonstrating their political agroecology approach (LWA 2023f). While basing their definition of food sovereignty on that of LVC, they translate the six pillars of food sovereignty (Nyéléni 2007) for the UK context (see LWA 2023d). The development of shared language and collective political identity has been strengthened through educational and media work, something I cover further in Chapters 7 and 8.

As a movement organisation, they attempt to bring together several theories of change to transform the food system in line with their political agroecology vision. Central to this is “grassroots organising and social movements as drivers of social and political transformation” (LWA 2023f). Prefigurative politics is apparent in their emphasis on democratic organising, healing the impacts of systems of oppression within and through movement organising, and integrating “the future into the day to day of land-based work” through developing practical agricultural solutions and realising alternative food systems (LWA 2023f). However, they see it as important to “develop and defend legal and policy instruments that protect and advance the changes necessary for the society we are building” (LWA 2023f). These strands are reflected in the 5-year Development plan (2020-2025) organised around four strategic lines of action: Building social networks and solidarity (amongst members and with land-based workers around the world); facilitating agroecology training and exchange; creating media and advocacy materials; and campaigning and lobbying. Organisational gatherings and movement spaces are critical in furthering this work and developing a sense of collective identity and shared purpose. Before I give an overview of key movement spaces, it is useful to situate LWA in relation to wider movements.

5.3 Movement Landscapes

Defining and demarcating the agroecology movement’s boundaries is challenging. Agroecology is employed differently across the wider sustainable agrifood movement in which there is significant collaboration and crossover between movement organisations with different framings of agroecology or representing intersecting approaches such as Organic, Biodynamic, Permaculture, and Regenerative Agriculture. While in the literature there are attempts to more clearly distinguish between these

agricultural approaches (IPES-Food 2022; Tuttonell et al. 2022; TABLE [no date]), in the broader movement the boundaries are less clear and constantly shifting. Movement activists observed that agroecology has gone from marginal to gaining traction, or at least acknowledgement, in wider agrifood spheres. This has not been without tensions, particularly as the agroecology movement has in many ways emerged from and alongside the longer standing organic movement in the UK, which has come to be centred on certification and often associated with elitism and ethical consumerism (Jowit 2010). While many in the agroecology movement identify with organic, agroecology is generally seen to go beyond organic, taking a more holistic ecological approach and emphasising the food system's social and political dimensions.

What I observed in the movement and through discussions with participants, is that it is becoming more commonplace for the sustainable agrifood movement as a whole to identify with the term agroecology – if often not always a very political conception of agroecology – and promote it as a vision for the way forward (Food, Farming & Countryside Commission [FFCC] [no date]; Soil Association [no date]). This raises challenges around the dilution and co-optation of agroecology, which I explore in subsequent chapters. However, while the LWA “is unique for its politics” within the movement, as one member organiser puts it, appealing to what another member organiser describes as “the most food sovereignty-focused and engaged farmers”, it has fostered shifts within the wider movement towards recognising the political and social dimensions of agroecology.

The LWA sees itself both as a social movement and as a movement organisation within the wider food movement. To minimise confusion, I will refer simply to “the LWA” when specifically talking about the LWA and its organising practices. Following Tornaghi and Dehaene (2020), I refer to the “political agroecology movement” or sometimes just “the movement” when speaking about general observations and interactions with those that subscribe to political agroecology but aren't necessarily, or not only, LWA members. Finally, I will use “the wider [sustainable agrifood] movement” for the broader field of social movement organisations and actors, the “social movement industry” (McCarthy 2022) or “social movement community”(Staggenborg 1998), related to the issue of sustainable food and farming. Within this constellation there are some who are much

closer to the LWA in terms of values and others who represent more reformist and technological framings. While I found that some individuals struggle to clearly differentiate between agroecology and organic or regenerative agriculture, others speak passionately about the importance of these distinctions and the threats posed by other terms.

The LWA's boundaries are also not so clearcut. The LWA sits within ECVC and LVC, linking them to food sovereignty movements globally. While members of LWA have varying levels of engagement and involvement with the LWA, there are many others who consider themselves part of LWA as a movement but who are not paying members or landworkers. Many members are part of other farming networks and unions such as Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Network, Organic Growers Alliance (OGA), Organic Farmers and Growers (OF&G), and Pasture for Life (Pfl). LWA's black members and members of colour may be involved in Land In Our Names (LION), a relatively new grassroots Black-led collective focused on connecting land and climate justice with racial justice which collaborates with LWA. I offer a simplistic representation of these distinctions and porous boundaries in Figure 11. In reality, activists and organisations aligned with different approaches overlap and connect between these spaces and it is more of a heuristic distinction I have made to distinguish the praxis of actors concerned with political agroecology. More broadly, there is considerable overlap and connection between the political agroecology movement and wider justice and environmental movements such as climate justice, food justice, right to food, and land justice movements, and therefore struggles for racial justice, queer liberation, and feminism.

The wider movement is becoming increasingly well networked and organised and there exists a strong spirit of collaboration, even if there are tensions between different approaches at times, as I explore in the next chapter. The LWA holds this complexity and spirit of collaboration within its organising structure. In some territories where there is already strong participation in a closely aligned network, these networks have in a sense become de facto regional groups. This is the case for Community Food Growers Network in London who work closely with the LWA South-East group to represent London, and more recently, Talamh Beo in Northern Ireland where there has

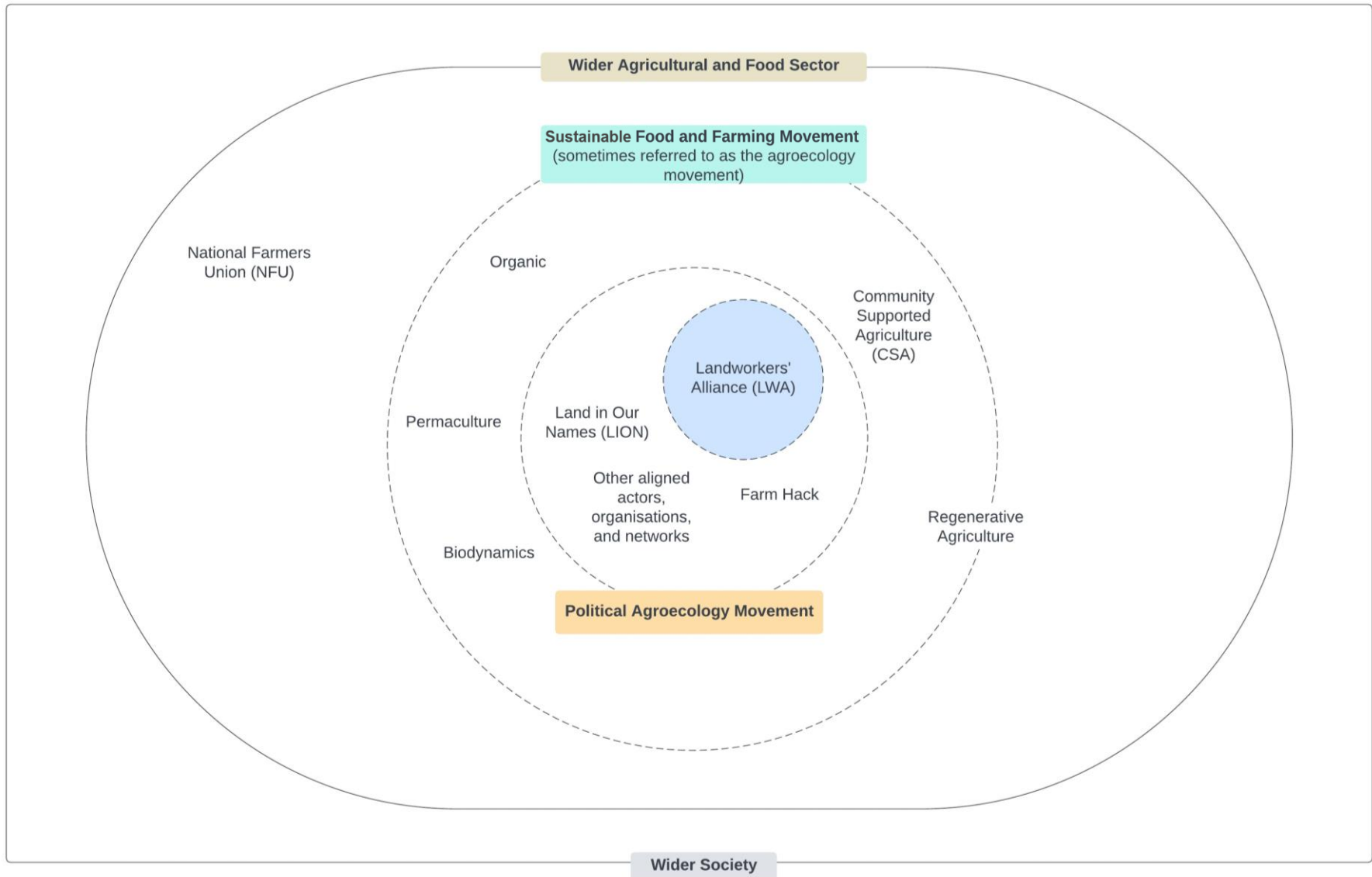


Figure 11. Diagram situating LWA as part of the political agroecology contingent of the wider sustainable agrifood movement, or agroecology movement, which exists within the broader agrifood sphere in society (includes agricultural approaches and organisations representative of these). Own diagram.

been a distinct lack of LWA organising to date. There is a somewhat collaborative though also fraught relationship with a newly emerging landworkers union, Solidarity Across Land Trades (SALT), which is being driven by LWA members who recognised the challenge of fairly representing workers' rights within a growing LWA that increasingly contains both farm managers and their employees and trainees.

LWA holds a particular position within not only the wider movement but also the wider farming sector, both for their radical politics and for the demographics of their members. The LWA's politics were defined by members using terms like DIY, anti-capitalist, anarchist, feminist, anti-colonial, internationalist, and anti-racist. This was counterposed to other parts of the wider movement that had less of a social and political analysis and whose organising did not reflect these values. As mentioned already, a large part of the LWA's membership is comprised of new entrants. That is, those who do not come directly from families working in agricultural or forestry and therefore have challenges in accessing land (Styles et al. 2022). LWA tends to represent small-scale farmers and growers who rent rather than own the land they work. These farmers are often not well represented in the bigger farming unions like the National Farmers Union (NFU) who tend to represent larger industrial or 'conventional' farmers and landowners. The membership of LWA is strikingly younger in age than the mainstream farming population and seemingly even that of more traditional organic farming unions, and has a larger representation of women and other marginalised identities (Norrie 2017; LWA 2021a; Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) 2023). Differences in agricultural approaches, identities, and cultures across the movement and in relation to mainstream farming create certain tensions and barriers to transformation as I explore in the next chapter. In the next section, I briefly describe some key movement spaces important in this research.

5.4 Key Movement Spaces

I detail the following movement spaces or types of gatherings both as they are significant in understanding the UK agroecology movement landscape and as they figure in my data

collection. This is not an exhaustive list and centres around LWA as the main focus of study. These events tend to emphasise peer-to-peer learning, with participants significantly contributing to the programmes.

5.4.1 LWA Organisational Gatherings

Within LWA, there are various organisational gatherings which bring together members to organise collectively and exchange skills and knowledge. These have always been critical for developing a strong movement culture, community, and sense of identity. Until 2019, the main event had been the Annual General Meeting (AGM) gathering in Autumn which involves a mixture of skill sharing and workshops, organising meetings, rituals, celebration, and the official AGM meeting which includes decision-making and voting for the coordinating group. The 2020-2022 AGMs were not possible in person in due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the increased size of membership meaning reaching quorum required larger participation and more complex venue logistics. As different elements of LWA have grown, additional gatherings developed such as regional and branch gatherings, member-led group gatherings and organising meetings, strategy days for the CG and/or staff team, and the organisers' assembly for member organisers. These are beginning to be tied together into more formal democratic processes, what the LWA are calling the 'democratic calendar', which I explain more in Chapter 7.

5.4.2 Oxford Real Farming Conference

A critical and longstanding space for the movement is the Oxford Real Farming Conference (ORFC), organised by the Real Farming Trust every year in January. The ORFC began in 2010 as an alternative to the Oxford Farming Conference (OFC), the prestigious annual event started in 1936 which was seen to embody industrial farming (Agri-TechE 2020). The early ORFCs involved protests outside the OFC led by farmers and growers who went on to set up the LWA (ORFC 2022, p.2). While the OFC is hosted by Oxford University, the ORFC is based in the town hall and now spreads out over several venues including a church, pub, and a museum. ORFC, just like the LWA, has grown a lot in the last few years, selling out

early every year. In 2019 and 2020, the ORFC had around 1000 attendees in Oxford. In 2021 and 2022, due to the Covid-19 pandemic they transformed into a global online conference attracting over 5000 participants in 2021 (ORFC 2021). The return to in person gatherings in 2023 brought a hybrid conference with 1800 delegates in person and 4400 online (ORFC 2023). It is a space which now brings together a broad range of farming and food organisations and people working across the wider movement. It has for a long time been a key moment in the movement calendar for people to connect with one another and with the wider movement. Parallel conferences have emerged in Wales since 2019 (Wales Real Food and Farming Conference) and in Northern England since 2020 (Northern Real Farming Conference).

5.4.3 Land Skills Fair

Land Skills Fair has run for three consecutive years in summer from 2021 to 2023 at Abbey Home Farm in Gloucestershire. It is a weekend-long festival organised by LWA in collaboration with Land In Our Names and other partners. Organisers describe it as “a multigenerational and multicultural skill and knowledge exchange that aims to provide a safe space for everyone to learn from each other and explore different land-based topics and practices” (LWA 2023a). As Land Skills Fair is positioned much closer to LWA it reflects a political agroecology position and is a space for LWA and allied members and activists, though has become a useful point of entry for people interested in landwork and aligned with the politics.

5.4.4 Groundswell

Groundswell is another weekend-long festival hosted every summer at a farm in Hertfordshire since 2016. It is significant in the wider movement as it represents the Regenerative Agriculture (or Regen Ag) position and has been successful in attracting a large number of more conventional farmers interested in Regen Ag and Conservation Agriculture. It has grown substantially in recent years with 5500 attendees in 2022 and 6500 in 2023 (Groundswell 2023). While it is less likely that LWA members will attend

Groundswell, particularly due to its emphasis on arable and livestock farming, they have had a stall there with the aim of engaging farmers.

5.4.5 Farm Hack

Farm hack is a “worldwide community of farmers that build and modify [their] own tools” (Farm Hack [no date]) based on open-source principles, critical pedagogy, food sovereignty, technological sovereignty, and decentralised organising and exchange. While much of this exchange is online, farm hack also describes in-person gatherings based on the same values which offer spaces for farmers, engineers, programmers, activists, and others to build hacks together and exchange knowledge and skills. These gatherings tend to be relatively small and take a more DIY approach to organising. Farm hack began in the US and there have been over 10 farm hack events in the UK. There is strong crossover between those involved in the farm hack movement and LWA.

5.5 Chapter Summary and Overview of Findings Chapters

This chapter has provided a descriptive account of the main focus of this research, the Landworkers’ Alliance (LWA). I have given an overview of the LWA’s origins, organisational structure, principles, and strategy and situated them in relation to wider movements and movement actors. This offers a reference point for the subsequent chapters in which I delve into the agroecology movement’s praxis and discuss their impact in fostering agroecology transformations as well as their limitations.

In the next chapter, based on the findings of this research I argue that the movement’s transformative potential is both strengthened and hindered by its prefigurative culture and that one of the main limitations to transformations is division within the wider movement and in relation to conventional farmers. The movement faces a challenge in navigating the tension between expanding their reach and maintaining their political vision of agroecology and beneficial prefigurative culture. In Chapters 7 and 8, I present findings on organising and learning practices of the agroecology movement respectively and explore

how this tension plays out in these. In Chapter 9, I bring together findings and arguments of previous chapters to articulate a social movement ecology approach as a way to move beyond this tension through an emphasis on diversity, synergy, and embracing complexity in movement praxis.

6. MOVEMENT (SUB)CULTURE IN TRANSFORMATIONS

6.1 Introduction

I arrive late Thursday afternoon to the Land Skills Fair. The field for live-in vans, campervans, and caravans is just starting to fill out and campers are trickling into the site. The site is modest: a large field with three medium festival tents and smaller gazebos and tents. There is an open-sided barn used as the main eating area and a gazebo for the kitchen. A water station and sinks have been set up nearby and volunteers have labelled everything with makeshift cardboard signs. I leave my camping equipment so I can explore and one of my friends reminds me, “don’t forget to take your cup and plate for dinner”. The main kitchen is run by an activist catering collective, and attendees have been asked to bring crockery.



Figure 12. Land Skills Fair posters for 2021, 2022, and 2023 (left to right) (LWA 2023a).

There was a big firepit in the centre surrounded by carved logs and an art installation made from wheat sheaves and wood. On arrival, volunteers checked our tickets and gave us wristbands. Tickets included reduced-price tickets for LWA members and supporters, black people and people of colour (BPOC), and youth.

Tickets were on a sliding scale from 'low-income', to standard, to the higher 'pay-it-forward' ticket, with free bursary tickets available if needed. The volunteers are all young (perhaps aged between 20 and 30), and are smiley, friendly, and chatty. I can see others sitting on the floor under the barn making decorations and a few more in the distance busy stringing up the last of the bunting and erecting gazebos.



Figure 13. Land Skills Fair Programme for Friday. Own photo.

The programme, handwritten on cardboard, kicks off with an opening ceremony at the fire pit and some music. Tomorrow's events include talks, farm tours, skills sharing, workshops, social spaces, and craft activities. Practical sessions cover tool handling, using weeds as soil health indicators, and starting goat dairying. More conceptual sessions explore community supported agriculture, agroforestry, and agroecological transition. Other topics range from navigating the planning system to political campaigns (e.g., resistance to HS2, anti-GM campaign) and discussions on movement building, social justice, and international solidarity, including a talk on

Indian farmer protests and a space for 'visioning the world we want to see'. There is a demo kitchen with an intriguing session titled 'No meat! No Blood! No Bones!' by London-based community food projects, which I discover is named after a vegan hip hop song and involves sharing affordable plant-based recipes to address inaccessibility of organic food and vegan lifestyles.

Facing me is the anti-oppression tent coordinated by Land In Our Names (LION) where I'll be running a workshop with RLG Action Learning Group members called 'If we don't build our systems, we inherit them'. On the other side of the field is a space for FLAME members and a family area with children's activities. Finally, near the entrance to the woodland there is the craft village covering land-based skills like basket-weaving, tanning, and woodwork. On Sunday the programme finishes with a big feast, a ceilidh¹⁵, and a closing ceremony.

I make my way to the anti-oppression tent. Inside, the walls are adorned with vibrant African fabrics. It's not long before I bump into someone from LION, and we join others on hay bales in the sun. A remark catches my attention: "I've discovered a subculture I wasn't aware of... it's less white than I thought". Compared to just a couple of years ago, there has been a noticeable shift in representation: more BPOC attendees, sessions on racial justice and decolonisation, collaborations with BPOC-led projects, and a more diverse cultural offering beyond the usual British folk music and poems. Still, the vast majority remains white.

I go along the woodland path in search of the 'green room' for talks and the adjacent farm shop. En route, I strike up a conversation with a newcomer who is a professional gardener but interested in food growing and wants to do things more ecologically. She discovered Land Skills Fair through attending the recent Groundswell Festival but remarks that it is "quite a different crowd here" and shares that she changed her outfit because she felt overdressed.

¹⁵ A ceilidh is a traditional Irish and Scottish gathering involving folk music and dancing which is popular with land-based movements in the UK.

I pass the craft area organised by The Rewild Project. This crowd is a slightly different part of the movement ecosystem but overlaps with the LWA. I notice quite a few white people with dreadlocks here and many people roam barefoot, engaging in activities like blacksmithing and wool spinning. The festival site is now buzzing with arrivals, hugs, and animated conversations.

As 6pm approaches, we gather around the fire pit for the opening ceremony—a lively mix of speeches, poems, and performances including drums by a black musician from Gloucester, a rousing speech by a key LWA staff member about how we need to seize this moment to create change, a poem about slugs from a FLAME member, and giving gratitude to the trees from the Woodland Branch. Later, at the DIY bar I get chatting to LWA folk about the event food while they roll cigarettes. One comments, “it’s expensive, it’s not really consistent with the focus on good food being accessible for everyone that is the normal vibe of LWA events”. Someone else chimes in, “yeah, and it just isn’t enough, I don’t think they realise that landworkers need to eat more”.

I cross paths with Nora, an LWA coordinator. We delve into the recent staff strategy day held at a permaculture farm. Navigate Coop were brought in to help develop LWA’s organising systems using the “living systems” framework to effectively manage non-hierarchical working in a growing organisation. Nora emphasises the need to adapt systems to keep pace with the “massive growth” from “12 people in a backroom getting £10,000 and not knowing what to do with it to suddenly handling grants of £200,000 or more”.

This ethnographic description illustrates the organising and learning practices in the political agroecology movement, and various ways values and identity are symbolically expressed and cohered for different groups within the wider movement. In this chapter, I explore the impact and limitations of movement praxis in fostering agroecology transformations, addressing research questions 1 and 2 through the concept of prefigurative politics which permeates its (sub)culture at various levels. Reflecting debates in the prefigurative politics literature, movement actors I spoke with identified the

movement culture or subculture as both supporting and hindering transformations, a challenge Smucker (2017) terms the 'Political Identity Paradox'. On the one hand, the radical prefigurative culture was found to foster a strong collective identity and sense of commitment and contribute to changing wider food system practices, and on the other, it served at times to alienate wider groups of people, such as more mainstream farmers.

Culture is understood here as the “symbolic expressive aspect of social behaviour” (Wuthnow 1987, p.3). Despite divided literature around the question of culture (Ferguson 2008; Lentz 2017; Fox and King 2020), I use the concept due to its popular use amongst movement actors, understanding it as something which is actively and sometimes strategically constructed and reproduced while recognising it to be reflective of social class, race, and other intersecting identities. Following Johnston and Klandermans (1995), I understand movement culture or subculture to encompass “phenomena such as collective identity, symbols, public discourse, narratives, and rhetoric” (p.vii) as well as “softer” factors such as “customs, beliefs, values, artifacts, symbols, and rituals” (p.3). The cultural context of a social movement includes different levels: activists’ collective framing of a cause, the cultural materials they employ to mobilise and maintain support, their shared beliefs and feelings about strategies and tactics they adopt, and the meanings held by other actors beyond the movement who may support, oppose or be indifferent to the movement (Jasper and Polletta 2018, p.64). In understanding how the political agroecology movement attempts to transform society, consideration of these various elements of their cultural context and the tensions between them is crucial.

I argue that while prefigurative politics is critical to a transformative theory of change as it develops committed movement cadre and ensures enacted change aligns with a radical framing of agroecology, care must be taken to avoid the pitfalls of an exclusive or overly purist prefigurative movement culture that limits engagement with those currently beyond the movement. In the next section, I describe the ways in which the movement is prefigurative and highlight the role prefigurative praxis plays in bringing about the political agroecology future activists envision by using Raekstad and Gradin's (2019) framework of *powers*, *drives*, and *consciousness*. In the following section I delve into some points of

tension within and beyond the movement in relation to culture and identity. In the final section, I show how movement actors feel conflicted over how to address tensions around movement culture, particularly while defending agroecology from co-optation, and analyse the impact of such tensions in limiting agroecology transformations.

6.2 Prefigurative Politics in the Movement

In Chapter 5, I described the LWA's organisational structure as democratic, anti-hierarchical, and addressing issues of equity by centring participation of marginalised groups (Maeckelbergh 2013; Raekstad and Gradin 2019). However, taking the broader conceptualisation of prefigurative politics proffered by Raekstad and Gradin (2019) as one based on the idea that power is dispersed throughout society, means "not only paying attention to organisational forms, but also our political analysis, our broader practices, language, ideas and assumptions, physical spaces, food, social relationships – in short, *everything*" (p.33). Further, Yates and de Moor (2022) make the distinction between prefiguration as the simple practice of alternatives, and prefiguration as "a collective attempt to realize alternatives here and now as a step towards achieving broad social change in the future" (p.185). This strategic intentionality can be seen in LWA's theory of change (LWA 2023f) and was evident in many conversations I had with LWA activists. And while, as I explore further in Chapters 7 and 9, prefigurative politics is not the only approach, building alternatives as a collective political strategy can be said to be a defining aspect of the movement's politics and its culture.

The LWA's political agroecology vision is expressed throughout its organisational structure, organising and learning practices, language, and movement culture in ways which prefigure *democracy, equity and justice, alternative socio-ecological relationships, and alternative farming and food systems* (see Figure 14). I refer to *democracy* due to its common usage in the movement, while recognising it as a contested term (Skaaning 2021). As in the wider alterglobalisation movement, democracy refers to practices of collective self-determination ("real" democracy) based on principles of horizontality rather

than state systems of representational democracy (Maeckelbergh 2013; Graeber 2014). Similarly, while the *equity* domain of agroecology transformations in Anderson et al. (2020) relates to all inequitable and unjust power relations in the food system, the term *justice* is additionally used here as it commonly employed in the movement and literature – as in food justice, land justice, racial justice, climate justice etc.. Equity tends to be understood as recognising and addressing differential access to resources and participation in society, while (social) justice is often employed in relation to tackling the root causes of inequality, discrimination, and marginalisation by seeking to dismantle and transform systems, paradigms, and social relations that uphold these.

Prefigurative Politics of the Agroecology Movement

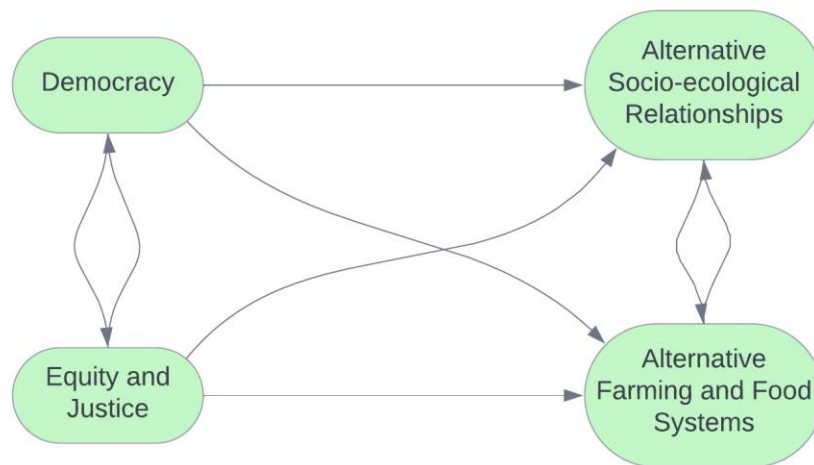


Figure 14. Elements of the political agroecology movement's Prefigurative Politics. Own diagram.

In Figure 14, I categorise key areas where the movement prefigures its desired future. This encompasses on the one hand, efforts to realise a more democratic society based on equity and justice and, on the other, actions taken to foster alternative socio-ecological relationships between people and their environment and alternative socio-technical agrifood systems. In other words, the movement develops both ‘material’ and ‘immaterial’ infrastructures of social change (Schiller-Merkens 2022b). Realising genuinely democratic processes in movement organising goes hand in hand with addressing issues of injustice

and inequity, thus democracy and equity and justice can be seen to be mutually supportive (Raekstad and Gradin 2019; Endo 2023).

Similarly, building alternative agrifood systems (environmental, technical, and economic) based on political agroecology is closely linked to reshaping relationships amongst people and between humans and the nonhuman world (social-cultural), both of which are informed by principles of democracy, equity, and justice (social-political) (Rivera-Ferre 2018; Wright 2021; Bezner Kerr et al. 2022; Toledo 2022; Tilzey 2024). Alternative socio-ecological relationships in the context of the movement included care, community, land connection, and food culture. The creation of alternative agrifood systems, which is perhaps the most obvious focus of prefiguration in the movement, is realised through building networks and exchanging knowledge to develop alternative farming practices, territorial food systems, and alternative global relationships in terms of international solidarity and trade. The movement's prefigurative praxis across these four elements significantly develops in its members' the *powers*, *drives*, and *consciousness* (Raekstad and Gradin 2019) necessary to bring about a future society based on the principles of political agroecology, as I now demonstrate. These prefigurative aspects of movement praxis are explored in more depth in Chapters 7 and 8.

6.2.1 Fostering Drives to Engage in Action

In their version of prefigurative politics, Raekstad and Gradin (2019, p.46) use *drives* to “cover the full range of springs to action” including “wishes, desires, goals, values, or concerns” and motivations to act. Here I demonstrate how LWA's radical prefigurative politics can develop the desire and commitment in people to bring about an agroecological future through collective action. Many activists I spoke to were drawn to the LWA and to practicing agroecology because of the unique combination of radical politics and tangible positive action rather than due to a background in farming. Clare, who works for the LWA and is a food grower and facilitator in London, comments:

A lot of people that I know have become growers from being like activists or from being in campaigning. [...] we're not in food growing because we grew up as farmers, it's because we had a political framework or a systemic critique (Action learning group).

This political vision attracts many new people into farming who are often much younger than the average farming demographic¹⁶. It works to mobilise allies or those who only want to take up land work alongside other work, thus creating a diversity of new involvement in agriculture (Milone and Ventura 2019). Leah, a regional coordinator reflects:

Not everybody wants landwork to be their income, you know, full stop. But a lot of people want there to be a more just food system and a lot of people want there to be a way of confronting ecocide and climate change in a more immediate way (Interview).

So, for those who desire a more just food system, taking action to develop alternative farming practices and food systems aligned with a radical politics provides that immediate way to address systemic challenges.

Several activists commented on how taking practical action to create a different world was more motivating than other approaches to social change such as campaigning. In the action learning group sessions, Anna describes how previously working for a food justice NGO they had felt like they were “moving further away from doing a different food system” and so they left to work on farms. They are now a part-time grower at a market garden and do a mixture of movement building and facilitation work. Another group member, Clare, values agroecological landwork as it is both “nourishing and feels good [...] on the emotional, psychic level” as well as existing “within a radical framework” without bringing “the burnout exhaustion of campaigning work”. All of this emphasises the political intention of activists’ practice of alternatives.

¹⁶ In 2016, over a third of all farm holders in the UK were over the age of 65 years and only 3% were aged less than 35 years (DEFRA 2022).

The movement's alternative socio-ecological relationships, influenced by the politics and culture of LVC members in the Global South, were also a motivating factor.

Rob expressed how he liked that the movement took inspiration from the Global South and was based on a deep love for the planet rather than just figures of climate change (Organisers' Assembly, Research Journal).

One example of this is the hearth practice (see Figure 15) where participants bring something meaningful from their land-based project to display as a centrepiece for the event. LWA gatherings reflected an emphasis on connection to food, land, and community. Very often hosted at an agroecological farm, they involve communal feasts using local agroecologically-produced ingredients, a strong sense of community and inclusion, and rituals such as the hearth that invite spiritual and cultural connection to the land – practices which I return to in Chapter 7. Here is a short excerpt from my research journal on an LWA organising and social gathering.

As we walked around the farm buildings, we encountered an idyllic site. It was so sunny! Gorgeous countryside, old farm buildings, people gathered around tables, children and adults playing in a paddling pool, nursing infants. It reminded me of the kinds of scenes depicted in early feminist sci-fi utopias. [...]

Note: These things are important for a movement, these social happenings, the connection, the location, the food, the music, it all ties into a culture that people want to be part of, it is utopic and shows what we are fighting for.

Such movement spaces shape the desire of those in them and by creating utopian cultures that reflect political agroecological values they give people “a shared taste of a future society that it's hard to turn away from” (Raekstad and Gradin 2019, p.75).



Figure 15. The hearth at an Organisers' Assembly in the centre of the main meeting space.

Even for wider spheres of society who are not brought into the movement through their political values, the creation of alternative agrifood systems in particular can shape their desire to break away from the industrial food system. Several movement actors spoke about the importance of demonstrating viable and successful agroecological alternatives to other farmers, the wider public, and to politicians. This exchange involving Carl and Andrew in the action learning group speaks to the importance of 'being the change you want to see' in order to inspire change in others.

Carl: Andrew's just put in the chat: "you can't persuade anyone about anything... 'Be the change' is a cliché but it is an extremely effective way of inspiring people." And one of the things that I find useful is when I've got farmers who've embraced a form of agroecology and really, and really gone for it, and it's working for them, and then introduce them to other people. And I think it's important for people to see success - whatever word you want - but to see something where there is effective positive change in a way that they can kind of understand (Action learning group).

Carl has worked for decades in the movement, having been very active in the organic movement, and more recently interacting with conventional farmers. His comments reflect the principles of the campesino-a-campesino methodology, that farmers trust in what they can see work in practice (Holt-Giménez 2006; Machín 2017). Other movement actors highlighted the importance of real-life alternatives in driving personal transformation, particular for the wider public, and supporting the case for policy change. However, it is not enough to simply have the desire for a different future, one must also have the power to bring it into being.

6.2.2 Developing Powers to Enact Change

The second dimension Raekstad and Gradin's (2019) framework is power. Power involves the interplay between internal capacities to accomplish things (instrumental power) and the external conditions which determine their effectiveness (structural power) (Wright 2010, p.112). The Landworkers' Alliance (LWA) and allied networks develop the powers of their members through networking, learning, and support, in turn growing the movement's collective power. They emphasise horizontal forms of learning and organising which have the potential to build the capacities of movement actors to enact alternative agrifood systems, alternative socio-ecological relationships, and democratic and just ways of ways of organising society.

Learning about democratic and equitable organising in the movement was in some cases formal and intentional, as shown in newsletter extract below,

- FACILITATION TRAINING AND MOVEMENT BUILDING FOR LWA ORGANISERS -

As more and more members take on organising roles in sectors, regions and branches of the LWA we are working to develop a training that offers a toolkit of skills for facilitating, strategising and organising effective projects and campaigns. In 2019 we secured EU Erasmus + funding to develop and deliver training in 'Facilitation Training and Movement Building for LWA Organisers' in 2019 and 2020 with the Ulex Project (LWA 2020b).

Training such as this is explicitly positioned as a way of developing the movement's democratic practices. In other cases, it was informal, achieved through experience in organising roles, as shown in this second quote from a farm hack organiser.

The facilitation was the main important thing I took from the event, a chance to develop facilitation and organising by learning through doing the events and building on that experience (Noah, Interview).

As Raekstad and Gradin (2019) argue, “achieving a free, equal, and democratic socialist society requires people with the powers to organise themselves and others in free, equal, and democratic ways” (p.71). In the LWA this is supported through their emerging democratic systems and the learning and reflection on movement praxis supporting them to continually evolve.

In addition to skills of democratic organising, movement actors gained knowledge and skills about agroecological production, business management, and developing local food systems through various forms of peer-to-peer learning (covered in more depth in Chapter 8). This empowers movement actors to practically bring about agroecological food systems. For instance, one farm hack organiser, Jack, spoke about how empowering it is to be able to develop “grassroots engineering skills” in order to fix your own tools, therefore challenging the dominance of proprietary technology (Milberry 2012). Reflecting on his own learning he shares:

Visiting other farmers has been quite a big part of my educational experience as well. Having a sort of network of other farmers that I talk to, and going to events, such as Landworkers' Alliance events, and the Oxford Real Farming Conference. These kinds of things have really given me lots of opportunities to meet people, and talk to people, and talk about different business models, and growing methods (Interview).

Jack speaks to the importance of relational aspects of building power (Raekstad and Gradin 2019, p.45), or “power with” (Avelino 2021). The positives of developing networks and community through the movement were core to many conversations I had with

movement actors. While landworkers remain relatively isolated in their day-to-day work, being part of LWA and similar networks gives them the opportunity to not only develop knowledge about implementing a different food system, but also social connections that enable territorial food systems to develop, for instance, through sharing equipment or creating local markets (Pimbert 2017a; Mier y Terán et al. 2018). In this way, the movement creates supportive external conditions for internal capacities to be effective. Finally, as I explore in chapter 7, developing the right capacities and environment for grassroots organising within a strong democratic structure supports not only the growth of the organisation but also its position within the wider movement, building collective power to achieve a political agroecological vision. However, such change also requires transformations of consciousness.

6.2.3 Building Transformative Consciousness

Consciousness and consciousness-raising within the movement refers to the power to be aware of, reflect on, deliberate, and change actions and ideas. “Developing revolutionary consciousness”, Raekstad and Gradin (2019) write, “requires developing the forms of practice that can nurture and sustain it” (p.74). In LWA, this is realised through the practice of developing alternatives (ways of organising and relating, farming and food systems) in combination with practices of collective critical reflection and peer-to-peer learning influenced by Freirean critical pedagogy. The latter reflects prefigurative alternatives to knowledge. As Anna shares, being part of the movement connects the practical action of building a better food system to a political consciousness:

We're food growers who have this radical vision for the world and there's this gap of like, how are we actually acting to bring about more of that vision of the world beyond the sort of micro level of like contributing better food to local communities and looking after the land on a small scale? We're such an important component for a much bigger political movement! And I was just thinking the other day about the Black Panthers and food was such a big part of that, feeding school kids and it being integral to building this political consciousness (Action learning group).

Thus, when everyday practices of building alternative food systems are embedded in wider political movements they can act as sites for developing revolutionary consciousness.

One way in which the LWA and allied movement actors support this political consciousness is through peer-to-peer learning events, where landworkers and activists come together to understand their practice more deeply as well as contextualise it in the broader system. For instance, experienced farm hack organiser and activist Dom believes the critical pedagogical approach and open-source philosophy of farm hack and similar popular education approaches have the potential to empower, motivate, and develop consciousness:

It's recognising that as individuals, you all have a sort of innate power and an innate viewpoint to offer to a process of learning and transformation [...] and that's where farm hack as an ideology and a philosophy can nail a little wedge into that little chink of consciousness and open that up as an option for making people aware of themselves in relation to the world around them. [...] the true impact is empowerment of people to think, communicate, act, and make changes in their lives. To stop giving away their power to act to governments and to stop thinking its governments who are going to save them. We need more people to be motivated to tackle the real problems they face in their daily lives (Interview).

This reflects that it is the practice itself, sharing knowledge and building and fixing things together, that can open up an awareness of one's capacity to act in the world. Thus for Dom, just as for Raekstad and Gradin (2019 p.51), expanding consciousness is integrally linked to realising and developing powers to enact change, which in turn affects our drives to do so.

In addition to this pedagogical approach, awareness of wider contexts was developed through political analysis which came into much of the technical learning at events as well as through talks and workshops on race, land justice, international solidarity, and food justice, to name a few. Speaking about a biochar session at a farm Hack, Noah comments:

It was really enlightening to see how somebody that's really passionate about a piece of technology can bring in a whole worldview and political position around equity through teaching about technology (Interview).

Noah highlights how technological learning in the movement offers opportunities to develop political consciousness through this wider social and political contextualisation. Beyond connecting the practice of agroecological land work with wider political issues, participating in the movement gives experience of and opportunities to reflect on democratic and just ways of organising. This critical reflection was a core part of the LWA culture and was encountered in most organising and learning spaces, whether through structured discussions or more informal social interactions.

In this way, the movement was constantly improving its practice and fostering the consciousness of those in it to understand their actions in relation to wider social structures and political issues. Sofia, a key staff member working on democratic structures reflects,

For me, the thing that bridges learning and organising is the internal feedback mechanisms that we have, like to learn [...] that kind of like how we connect how we organise, to how we learn, to how we then change how we organise, and learn from that again. [...] It is like what kind of internal mechanisms do we have for self-criticism in a constructive, kind of comradely way. How do we identify when we're doing things wrong, or we need to do them better? [...] Because as you said, there isn't a criticism of the LWA that the LWA isn't currently trying to address, or if there were one, I do really believe that people would do their best to try to take the steps to address it (Reflective focus group).

Sofia's comment reflects the ongoing iterative processes of reflexive movement praxis, representing "a dialectical theory of consciousness in which thought, action, and social relations are inseparable" (Carpenter and Mojab 2011, p.13). This collective critical reflection has enabled the LWA to be responsive to change over the last few years, taking

advantage of opportunities and continually assessing their trajectory and values-alignment.

An important part of this development has been collective reflection on the framings and concepts used in sustainable agriculture as they emerge and change. This included work to develop a collective articulation of political agroecology to strengthen the movement and influence wider society through local food organising and media and advocacy work. This process of conceptualising and defending agroecology is viewed by Sofia as integrally linked to developing strong democratic systems.

We have our definitions of agroecology and we can build them better, but how do we actually embed them in our reality, in our kind of shared consciousness? And that is through having the structures within our membership who connect to thousands and thousands of community members, of local economies, of other local groups, and so on. This is how we hold on to what it means to be agroecological and what it means to be a land worker and what kind of world we're trying to build [...] unless we have the mechanisms to really hold onto it and fight for it, the system will take it away from us (Reflective focus group).

Defending agroecology from co-optation was thus seen as an important impact of consciousness-raising practices as they strengthen the collective articulation of political agroecology and critical analysis of competing framings. These processes of consciousness-raising therefore “ensure [...] the future political relevance” (Yates & de Moor 2022, p.183) of the alternative socio-technical systems and socio-ecological relationships being constructed by grounding them within collective political action and awareness.

I have highlighted how the political agroecology movement’s prefigurative politics support the realisation of an agroecological future: drawing in new people to the movement and motivating continued commitment to the cause; developing capacities and providing a supportive environment in which to realise them; and fostering a revolutionary consciousness. I contributed empirical evidence to Raekstad and Gradin’s framework of

drives, powers, and consciousness, supporting prefigurative politics as an effective strategy for transformative social change. The agroecology movement combines different dimensions of prefigurative practice: developing alternative socio-technical systems alongside democratic organising and alternative ways of relating and being in the world. These will be explored in more depth across subsequent chapters. First, I address some critiques of prefigurative politics and examine them in relation to the agroecology movement.

In Chapter 3, I discussed several criticisms levelled at prefigurative politics. Firstly, prefigurative movements are criticised for being naïve and lacking political theory (Srnicek and Williams 2015; Soborski 2019). However, discussion with movement actors and the LWA's organisational materials reveal a strong political analysis of structural forces at play in the dominant industrial agri-food system, consistent with their political agroecology approach. The movement pays attention to informal hierarchies and structural inequalities which limit participation in both agriculture and the movement, attempting to address these inequities through political education, changes in movement culture, and democratic organising. Another criticism is that prefigurative movements lack strategy and narrowly focus on practicing alternatives in isolation of wider political action (Polletta 2004; Smucker 2017). However, the LWA and other political agroecology movement actors are often deliberating strategy, as described later in this chapter and future chapters. They consider prefigurative politics to be an important aspect of their wider theory of change which includes strategic engagement with dominant institutions through campaigning and policy work.

A more pertinent critique, however, is reflected in Smucker's (2017) notion of “political identity paradox”: while prefigurative movements cultivate a strong sense of identity to mobilise people to the cause and motivate commitment, that same strong identity and level of cohesion can “create walls between them and potential allies” leading “them down a dead-end path of insularity” (Smucker 2017, p.30). The tensions related to “cliqueyness” and “in-group vs. out-group” are apparent in this reflection from a key LWA staff member,

It can really feel like a clique I think from the outside. And that is both a kind of strength and a weakness, because when you're in it, you feel like you've got this really strong identity and culture and like you've found your tribe and you've got this kind of group of people that you resonate with. But then if you're on the outside, it can feel a bit daunting to kind of step in (Reflective focus group).

As agroecology scholar-activist Tarlau (2017, p.89) comments of the US context, “our lefty political identities often turn us into a subculture, which by its very name is limiting for making our politics mainstream and thus hegemonic”. In the next section, I explore the tensions and divisions in the wider movement and between the political agroecology movement and wider society related to this subculture which risk agroecology remaining marginal. In the final section I look at the political agroecology movement’s own awareness of this paradox and how it navigates it.

6.3 Tensions and Divisions in and Beyond the Movement

I think lots of what the LWA stands for is right but it's coming at it from a way that is going to alienate a lot of the people that it needs to convince, who should be listening. And I think that's a challenge.[...]

Because of where it started it is fundamentally a grassroots organisation, but it needs to have big grown-up conversations [...] it's sort of revolutionary in a way that it doesn't necessarily achieve the aims, the objectives that it set out to achieve because it is alienating in the process of being revolutionary (Paul, Interview).

The above quote highlights the political identity paradox – the way the LWA’s “revolutionary” image and culture potentially alienates people who need to be engaged – as perceived by a farmer on the Your Farming Future programme. Paul is himself a new entrant setting up a sustainable mixed farm but not of the same activist subculture as the LWA. The political agroecology movement and wider movement lack clear boundaries (Chapter 5) but tensions arise from differing framings, political ideologies, and cultural differences. In general, the wider movement exists in different spaces to that of

mainstream, industrial, or “conventional” farming, subscribing to different organisations and events (Ingram 2018). A good example of this is the antagonistic distinction between the conventional Oxford Farming Conference (OFC) and the alternative Oxford Real Farming Conference (ORFC) introduced in Chapter 5. While these divisions are increasingly being transcended, as I highlight in Chapter 9, the differences in political identity and culture are more pronounced and harder to bridge for the political agroecology movement as their values are more radical and more visibly expressed through their subculture.

Here I focus on the tensions and divisions within the wider movement and between agroecological ‘landworkers’ and more traditional or mainstream farmers. However, the subculture of LWA and similar movement spaces is not only off-putting for these farmers but can also be alienating for black people, people of colour, and working-class folk. Appealing simultaneously to these different groups can be challenging. I examine these tensions to provide useful critical analysis based on and contributing to the movement’s praxis while also acknowledging the complexity of culture and identity in the movement as a fluid and evolving space of action. I begin by characterising LWA membership to contextualise differences that arise in relation to movement culture.

6.3.1 Characterising LWA membership

Who does the LWA represent? Who feels at home in the LWA and similar movement spaces? This quote from Joy, an organiser of a regional growers’ group and LWA member, describing their entry into the sector encompasses some key characteristics of typical member:

I grow veg in Somerset on a four-acre market garden. I didn't have any connection to farming and grew up in a city. And as I became more interested in it through doing community work and then urban food growing and realised I wanted to get more into farming, I was really bowled away at the lack of...like training, basically. Like the idea for me to go to agricultural college felt completely inaccessible and wild

because I just wasn't even sure if at that point I was going to go into farming. And then there's all these kind of informal traineeships¹⁷. [...] But I did a bit of a wwoofing¹⁸ and met a few people and someone offered me the traineeship at a farm (Interview).

LWA members are often young new entrants to agriculture, having lived in urban areas at some point and usually attended university. Through this research I encountered several key members in LWA starting PhDs or doing master's courses alongside some land work. A common entry point is through urban agriculture or community food organising where some landworkers stay to establish or work on urban farms. There is a high proportion of women in the membership with women and marginalised genders often taking leading roles in the organisation, typically making up well over half of staff and coordinating group members. The representation of black people and people of colour (BPOC) in the political agroecology movement is better than within mainstream farming¹⁹ where 98.6% of farmers are white British (Norrie 2017) but still remains relatively marginal. Similarly to alternative food movements in the US (Slocum 2007; Alkon and McCullen 2011), those both inside and outside of the LWA have challenged it for being a “white, middle-class” movement, something which they seek to address through their prefigurative politics. This is not to say that LWA members are all young, white, middle-class, university-educated, urban new entrants, but that this has to date been the predominant character of members, aligning with other findings on newcomers (Monllor i Rico and Fuller 2016), and characterisation by those outside which the movement may seek to reach.

While the LWA has members who are older established rural farmers, the organisation has to date largely focused on supporting new entrants, with some members mentioning the

¹⁷ Traineeships are a common way for new entrants to enter into agroecological farming. Typically, they are one season long and involve living and working on a farm and being paid a small weekly stipend. See Taherzadeh (2019) for more on learning pathways of agroecological new entrants.

¹⁸ ‘wwoofing’ describes the practice of staying on and volunteering on farms, so name after the organisation that facilitates such exchanges, the World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF).

¹⁹ In recent years, LWA has sought to capture this information in its member registration form. Of 359 members who specified ethnicity, around 8% could be defined as BPOC (LWA 2024d).

challenge of attracting the older generation of organic farmers who had often been involved in earlier organic and back to the land movements (see Chapter 5). These new entrants usually take alternative routes into agriculture such as traineeships or volunteering rather than agriculture college. They are both politically motivated to enter the sector as environmentalists and anti-capitalists and seek an alternative to professionalised urban jobs where they can take tangible practical action and (re)connect with land and food, as identified in a previous study (Taherzadeh 2019). The idea of reconnection is often situated in relation to historical processes of displacement from the land such as the enclosures of the commons and colonialism. This can be seen in the following research journal entry noting the speech of a key figure at an LWA organisers' event who acknowledges the importance of other forms of action in the wider food movement.

Fiona emphasised the fact that we all make up the LWA and wanted to recognise that for some of us our family connections are quite far removed from the land. For her, coming from Scotland, she is just one generation away from farming but for many people in England they are very disconnected. She asks, how can we find reconnection? And offers a reframing: instead of 'new entrant', perhaps 'returning to the land'. Past identities of connection with the land have been intentionally decimated. However, she believes that everything starts with a seed.

The drive to reconnect to the land expressed by Fiona also came with awareness of the politics and challenges of entering into rural spaces where there were perhaps no previous ties.

The LWA definition of a 'landworker member' is broad and members do not necessarily work full-time in agriculture. They may combine land work with other forms of income, work seasonally, or have periods where they are not "on the land" but take on other jobs, often within the movement or somewhat related. LWA has typically represented small-scale agriculture and tenants, trainees, or farmworkers rather than landowners, with members operating or working on market gardens, veg box schemes and CSAs, and other localised and direct selling models. However, key LWA figures commented that

membership increasingly included landowners and larger-scale farms. What was most important, they shared, was alignment with the principles of agroecology and food sovereignty.

In terms of agricultural sector, horticulturalists or ‘growers’ are most represented in the LWA, though this is shifting (Chapter 5). There is crossover with those seeking off-grid self-sufficient lifestyles and it is relatively common for members to live in vans and caravans. However, the emphasis tends to be on producing food for wider communities and establishing successful business models rather than self-sufficiency. These characteristics and approaches to farming largely match up with what others have called ‘new peasantries’ and ‘neo-peasants’ (van der Ploeg 2012; Calvário 2017; Hummel and Escribano 2022). Neo-peasants have been identified by others as being part of the alterglobalisation movement and living out “their ideals in daily life challenging conventional understandings of politics, democracy, economics, morality and globalisation” (Hummel and Escribano 2022, p.5). These more individual practices of prefiguration shape the movements prefigurative politics and vice versa. However, there has been little discussion in the literature so far about how these neo-peasants interact with existing farmers in the Global North, a notable exception being Hetherington's (2006) study of organic and conventional farmers in Nova Scotia. The most significant manifestation of the political identity paradox in the movement is between conventional or traditional farmers and agroecological (new entrant) landworkers.

6.3.2 Farmer-Landworker Divide

Within the movement, I often encountered the oppositional binary between “landworkers” or “growers” practising organic or agroecological agriculture and “proper” or “mainstream” farmers mainly practising conventional agriculture who had a more traditional²⁰ rural farmer identity and culture. In this binary, the image of the farmer is an

²⁰ By this I do not mean traditional in the sense of pre-industrial farmer identity or necessarily traditional cultural practices, but a connection to farming communities and a culture and identity which is more what we expect when we think of farmers in the UK.

older, white man working on their own on a tractor for large parts of the day. It is assumed that he supplies to supermarkets or other big chains rather than local markets, operates on a larger scale, is more likely to practice animal agriculture, and is principally concerned with yield and profit. Other than for those working in campaigning, lobbying, or outreach roles in the LWA, landworkers tended to have very little personal interaction with conventional farmers apart from perhaps landlords or neighbouring farmers. As well as choosing alternative educational routes, they tended to engage very little or not at all with mainstream farming unions, institutions, and programmes, as has been identified elsewhere (Ingram 2018; Taherzadeh 2019). This was exacerbated by the fact that many members' farms were under the 5ha threshold to be officially considered a farm business by government and granted subsidy support. However, those who had been established for a long time, perhaps starting their journey as part of previous back-to-the-land and organic movements were somewhat more integrated. McGreevy et al. (2021) similarly find this of first-generation "agroecological lighthouse" farmers in Japan who are recognised as having established successful agroecological practices and having fostered social connections with surrounding conventional farmers so that their farms act as centres of learning and influence to amplify agroecology in their territories.

In contrast to the leftist, environmentalist politics of the landworkers, several movement actors characterised farmers as being "conservative with a small 'c'" and "stuck in their ways", unable or unwilling to make the changes necessary to avoid climate collapse. Some were more denigrating of conventional farmers, seeing them as more competitive and individual compared to the cooperative and communal peasant farmers of the Global South which the LWA model themselves after. Carl from the action learning group says:

The culture of farmers in this country isn't really very Via Campesina - outside LWA and a few others. It's more right-wing white men who are just so uptight and combative and defensive (Action learning group).

Carl's comment expresses his frustration with the "right-wing" politics and perceived patriarchal attitudes of farmers he has encountered.

Movement actors understood that conventional farming was undergirded by a different set of values, narratives, and beliefs to those in the agroecology movement. As farm hack organiser Emma comments,

There's just a whole different way of thinking compared to how I think about what we're doing at my farm, which is about connecting people to food, not making a profit but covering our costs and being a sustainable financial business. Our goal isn't to be rich, our goal is to feed people good food. So, when I was at one event and I said, 'yeah but it's not all about profit', they looked at me like I had two heads, you know. This was at Harper Adams at the DEFRA consultation. And it's like, wow, okay. So, Harper Adams is a place where they've just done the one acre where not a human hand has touched this one acre of wheat that's been grown because it's all been done by robots (Interview).

Emma's comment reflects the cultural politics of farming transitions (Meek 2016) and differing ideas of what it means to be a 'good farmer' (Burton et al. 2020), the embedded norms of farming practice that confer cultural capital and thus social inclusion in different settings (Sutherland 2013; Sutherland and Calo 2020). These differing norms led to value judgements made from both sides about the other's agricultural approach, and perceptions of being judged.

The landworkers were aware of being dismissed as "hippies" and "hobby farmers" (Sutherland 2013; Craft and Pitt 2023), not seen to operate at a sufficient scale to contribute seriously to food production. Their approach was perceived to be based too much on political ideology in contrast to the more practical knowledge and experience that determined farmers' practices. Colin, a conventional farm hack participant, called them "dreamers rather than doers". One long-term LWA activist and staff member believed that although agroecology was entering into the mainstream it was still "quite patronised, seen as quite cute but not really relevant". Finally, those in Wales experienced being judged to be "English incomers" and therefore dismissed and distrusted, reflecting Welsh-English rural tensions (Cloke et al. 1998). LWA organisers argued that this

characterisation was only partly true but recognised the need to present a more “legitimate” Welsh farmer image to be taken seriously.

If agroecologists were belittled and dismissed as impractical ideologues, conventional farmers were harshly judged for their unethical farming practices including their use of chemical pesticides and fertilisers, large scale, and embrace of modern agritech. Colin challenged this judgement instead characterising landworkers as close-minded.

I think there's a significant lack of openness to people who have not been brought up believing in the cause that there are things that thou shalt not do and they don't really have a reason to believe that other than you must believe that (Interview).

To Colin, blanket opposition to conventional practices like pesticides is a dogmatic belief held uncritically by movement actors and used to denigrate farmers. Similarly, farm hack organiser Dom recognised that farm hacks and similar spaces can be “antagonistic to conventional farmers”. He comments,

Often agroecological, small-scale and organic farmers are positioned in opposition to conventional farmers seeing them as wrong and bad, while they feel that they have the right way of doing things. They need to get off their high horses and recognise that all farmers work really hard and are trying (Interview).

However, mostly those in the political agroecology movement recognised the complexity of different farm setups and the oversimplification or “false binary” of agroecological vs. conventional or small-scale vs. large-scale, as well as the various pressures and challenges farmers face in changing practices, as I explore further in Chapter 9.

Differences between landworkers and farmers went beyond agricultural approach, involving other signifiers of ideology and identity. Several movement actors identified the difficulty of engaging those with similar practices but more traditional farmer identities such as “more mainstream organic farmers”, small to medium-scale regenerative farmers, and hill-farmers in Wales with agroecological practice. Cara, an LWA Cymru organiser, reflects:

I think the Welsh context is a bit different. There probably are a lot of people we don't reach who are actually very much on the same page as us, so they are small-scale and agroecological. They just happen to be Welsh speaking and come from a different background (Reflective focus group).

Aspects of the political agroecology movement subculture such as food, aesthetics, language, rituals, and pedagogy were seen to be off-putting to the large majority of farmers. Some of these differences related more to political ideology such as perspectives on social justice issues, land ownership, movement tactics, or political language, while others involved softer cultural expressions.

While the differing motivations and values behind conventional and organic or agroecological farmers' practices have been studied (Flaten et al. 2006; Inwood et al. 2013; Palomo-Campesino et al. 2021; Bakker et al. 2023), less attention has been given to wider cultural differences and how these shape farmer interactions or are embodied in farming organisations and networks. One exception is Hetherington's (2006) study of organic and conventional farmers in Nova Scotia where he identifies the importance of other expressions of culture in exacerbating division between these groups:

While the ethical aspects of the boundary between conventional and organic farmers seem to grow logically out of the very definition of the organic project, most aspects of this boundary have to do with quite unrelated issues. Landscape aesthetics, food tastes, ways of dressing, preference in music were all aspects of a barrier that seems to have a great deal more to do with class background than pesticides (p.52).

While in the context of political agroecology, these aspects of culture are not necessarily “unrelated issues” but part of prefiguring agroecology beyond merely a technical practice, they are indeed reflective of the urban, activist, middle-class identities of landworkers. However, while Hetherington and others (Willis and Campbell 2004; Mailfert 2007; McGreevy 2012a) have looked more at social relationships between farmers, I am

interested more broadly in how the culture of movement organisations and spaces shapes these and understanding them in relation to prefigurative politics.

As Cara's comment indicated, signifiers of political ideology and identity limit the possibility of LWA and other movement actors successfully engaging others beyond their subcultural bubble, reflecting the political identity paradox (Smucker 2017). This is true even for farmers who are already "ecologically-minded" but just more "mainstream", as Kerry, another regional organiser and staff member explains,

Some farmers just won't.....just won't dig the LWA vibe [laughs] it's just a little bit out there for them, like out of their comfort zone. And others are quite up for embracing it. And there's like a kind of a little crossover but there's also a bit of a chasm. I can't.....like there's some people that can transcend the kind of more mainstream - well, not mainstream, but like agroecological, you know, the environmentally motivated farmers which are definitely not the mainstream, they're a minority, but they're like they're still quite mainstreamy in what they expect to happen at an event, say (Interview).

It is useful then to understand the various (sub)cultural elements of the movement that alienate wider groups the movement may wish to engage, and their relation to identity.

6.3.3 Culture and Identity in Prefigurative Politics

The LWA embodies a convivial culture deeply influenced by their anti-capitalist politics and connection with Global South peasant movements. This influence extends to related spaces like farm hack. Key aspects of the movement's distinctive culture include clothing, music, facilitation, and food, all of which reflect a Do-It-Yourself (DIY) spirit. This DIY aesthetic is not just a rejection of consumerism and wastefulness, but reflects the movement's grassroots nature (Maeckelbergh 2009), often hosting events on farms with minimal budgets. An example would be compost toilets for events constructed from strung up sheets, wooden boards, a toilet seat, and bucket or hay bale. Personal aesthetics reflects this too, with individuals favouring worn or patched clothes as well as

adopting recognised activist or alternative aesthetics, such as mohawks, dreadlocks, piercings, tattoos, and political t-shirts. Countercultural clothing, Engler and Engler (2016, p.274) write, helps to create group cohesion, reinforcing the idea of a culture that rejects conventional norms, however, it serves to exclude others outside of this alternative culture, reflecting Smucker's (2017) political identity paradox.

There is a distinctly rural vibe to this aesthetic, a blend of practical clothing and a somewhat romanticised land-based look with thick woollen jumpers, dungarees, and baggy cotton or hemp shirts. While reflecting their values, Hetherington (2006, p.49) argues that organic growers' aesthetic choices symbolise an explicit rejection and distancing from middle-class privilege, symbols of affluence, and urban life, and a desire to assimilate with rural lower-class living. This aspiration towards a rural aesthetic can alienate those who already feel excluded from the British countryside (Cloke 2004) and is often at odds with how people of colour or people in cities dress. Two organisers of a BPOC agroecology gathering described it to me as “the olive-green brigade” – the countercultural norm of wearing this shade of green, almost like a landworkers uniform. We discussed how physical discomfort was somehow held up in movement spaces, with freezing cold showers, minimal camping setup, and not enough snacks, heating, or dry spaces, making them less accessible. While this is similar to the “aesthetic poverty” Hetherington (2006, p.56) describes of organic growers and is indicative of social class, I argue that is also about performing sustainability and anti-capitalist credentials, as Portwood-Stacer (2012) identify in their study of anarchist anti-consumption practices. Moreover, mainstream or conventional farmers are highly differentiated (Bell and Newby 1974; Bernstein 2001; van der Ploeg 2018a) and there is no simple way to describe class divides between landworkers²¹ and farmers in general. While a more in-depth examination of social class would be useful it goes beyond the scope of this research.

²¹ From more recent LWA membership registration data, of 262 LWA members specifying economic background around 42% self-identified as “middle-class” or something equivalent and 24% as “working class” or something equivalent, with the remainder largely expressing low and insecure income as a landworker (LWA 2024d). This paints a partial and relatively complex picture of the economic class of agroecological “landworkers”.

Many organisers in the movement, however, were self-reflective of ways dominant identities were expressed in movement culture, and efforts were being made to challenge the white middle-class nature of it. One strand of this was around the idea of cultural heritage and land. Early in my research, I found events were often focused on a sense of British/English heritage. Music and performance in the movement often involved UK-based folk songs (such as in the LWA's Stand Up Now album, see

Figure 16), protest songs, storytelling and poetry relating to land connection and land-based resistance such as "We Want the Land"²² and "The World Turned Upside Down"²³. For people with non-British heritage, like me, this can feel difficult to connect to and brings up challenges around sense of place and belonging, especially when histories of displacement and colonialism are involved. I came to understand that there were others in the movement, beyond BPOC folk, who found it difficult to feel this sense of entitlement to claim connection to rural Britain due to their backgrounds and upbringings. However, over time a richer expression of culture and narratives around land connection were intentionally forged which foregrounded the experiences and ancestry of BPOC activists.

²² By King Driscolls on the LWA Album "Stand up Now". It includes lyrics such "we want real rural life not picture postcards", "well we can't pay house prices and we can't pay the rent, but we can tow an old trailer, we can put up a tent, we could make the farmyard and fields our new homes if we had the land", "we could work fields by hand from morning till late, without combines or tractors or glycoposphate [...] if we had the land", "and the villages would bristle with work life once more [...] if we had the land" "So if you feel what I'm singing or you just hate your job, you like manual labour or upsetting snobs, join the raggle taggle convoy that they call a mob, and cry we want the land". These reflect the back to the land and anticapitalist sentiments of the movement.

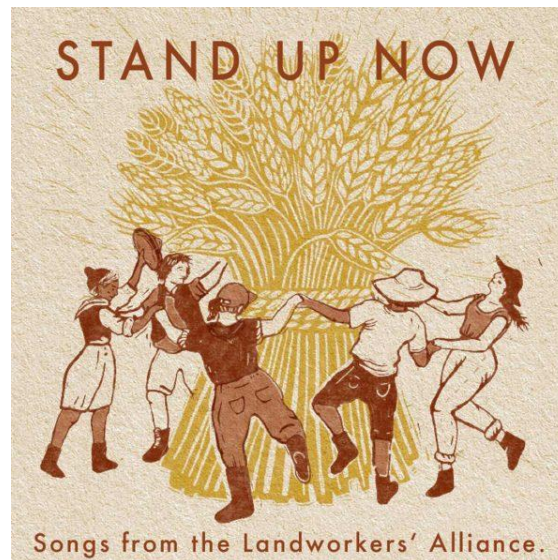
²³ By Billy Bragg about The Diggers of the mid 1600s, a religious resistance movement in England based on agrarian socialist ideas.

More recent music and performance has included artists and influences from around the world as well as more popular urban music like jungle and hip hop.

Figure 16. LWA Album "Stand up Now" Cover (LWA 2024f).

Another element of culture was food. This is always a big part of LWA events, big feasts of freshly prepared food collectively shared where the providence of ingredients is important. It is often a time of ritual, socialising, and celebration. Food at events is often vegan, and when there is meat and dairy it is well-sourced and often supplemental rather than the main option. This contrasts to more mainstream farming events as Divya, a vegan LWA staff member, comments of the food at Groundswell, the regenerative farming festival:

I was quite surprised with the food options. I think the cheapest meal I found was £8 and it was just like a slice of sourdough with some sauce on it and some artichokes.



And that was one of the like three veggie/vegan options and everything else was meat. It was like, you know, proper like chunks of meat hanging above barbecues or like, you know, it was very, very, very meat heavy (Interview).

Divya's comment reflects the different food cultures in terms of affordability and meat consumption. Veganism, in particular, was recognised as a divisive issue in the movement and source of tension with mainstream farmers (Craft and Pitt 2023).

Even within the wider sustainable agrifood movement, the culture around food differed and was not so central to events. An LWA staff member, Kerry, shared their experience of working in different organisations and trying to make food “part of the experience”:

When I start working at the Soil Association²⁴, I made the food part of the experience and that was like really like weird. [...]...like people are fine with having amazing food at events, so that's great. But like singing, like having a hearth with objects on it and celebrating our connection to the land, there's some things that I've not quite done in Pasture for Life events yet [laughs] (Interview).

Kerry’s experience highlights that some elements of the prefigurative culture, such as good local food, are easier to access for farmers, whereas additional “signifiers” of “left-wing values or progressive politics” at events and in their communications, she commented, would be too culturally alien, even for “very ecologically minded” farmers.

For instance, facilitation of LWA events tends to include rituals and spiritual practices, participatory activities, sitting in circles, and gathering for group photos while shouting “Viva La Via Campesina! Viva!”. There are multiple practices related to equity and inclusion such as sharing gender pronouns in group introductions and acknowledging systemic injustice. An example of this kind of prefigurative facilitation is the welcome speech at an online LWA AGM:

There is a practice of welcoming everyone, different people and beings and all different parts of people, an inclusion welcome that makes explicit the welcoming of marginalised identities and aspects of us under the dominant system. Each is a long list: Landworkers, different types of landwork and ways of engaging with landwork; different supporters, food system workers, everyone in the food system; identities: gender, bodies, race, heritage, language, disabilities, religion and faith; emotions (“However you are feeling today you are welcome” “We welcome how challenging things can be” overwhelming etc.); ages; families, elders, ancestors. There is also a mention of colonialism, the recognition of empire and white

²⁴ One of the main UK organic certification bodies and sustainable farming organisations.

supremacy and racism. We then go into breakout groups and share something we are proud of from the last year (Research journal).

This facilitation practice, which in different forms became quite common in movement spaces, aims at acknowledging systems of oppression, positioning the politics of the space as anti-capitalist, anti-racist etc., bringing the emotional and spiritual into the space, recognising and valuing the breadth of involvement in the movement and food system, and making the space feel inclusive to different people based largely on identity politics. Kerry reflected that those who engage with the LWA tend to already be open to such practices. This reflects a degree of commonality with other leftist political spaces and alternative counterculture. While such practices in part aim to make the spaces more accessible to some groups, they will be unfamiliar and alienating to others, particularly mainstream farmers.

This is reflected in a comment by another LWA staff member, Tammy from a more traditional farming background. She spoke to me about her challenge in initially feeling comfortable in the LWA culture and finding it “cliquey”.

We chatted about the LWA’s culture and how would not be very familiar or comfortable for a lot of UK farmers: the sitting in circles, doing check-ins, breathing exercises etc. Tammy doesn’t come from the kind of activist background or culture that allows me to feel comfortable in the movement despite not being a landworker. She has legitimacy of being a farmer but is different culturally or perhaps with her political background to a lot of people in the movement (Research journal).

Therefore, even for those who were within the political agroecology movement or very aligned with its politics there could still be a sense of exclusion.

At an LWA Organisers Assembly, several organisers commented that they were wary of becoming “a weird cliquey cult” and had an awareness of how close relationships and culture “can feel exclusive”. A staff member identified this dynamic as “I am a landworker, but I’m not one of the cool landworkers”. This was echoed by a coordinator active in LWA Cymru, Cara,

It's a running joke that my partner and I always used to have that you had to be young and beautiful to be in the Landworkers Alliance [laughs]. And actually the Welsh group is quite a safe space for those of us who are not young and beautiful, and don't always use the right language.....I think it can be quite scary, not just as a clique, but feeling that if you use the wrong language or you say the wrong things, you're kind of almost going to be like named and shamed (Interview).

Cara's comment points to a tendency in groups with a radical politics to 'call out' or "cancel" people who express views or use language which is exclusionary to people with marginalised identities or seen in some way as part of the dominant oppressive culture. While there is positive intent behind these practices which aim to make spaces more inclusive for people, they can risk becoming rigidly radical, Bergman and Montgomery (2017) argue, crushing experimentation and curiosity, and being hostile to difference, complexity, and nuance. Such rigidity or "purity" is another expression of the political identity paradox (Smucker 2017), it represents critical efforts to address injustice but can end up producing "limiting" rather than "liberatory" identities (Ulex Project 2022, pp.86–91).

On the other hand, the movement's social justice efforts more generally were seen to put off more traditional farmers or even get outright opposition. Kerry spoke of the push back they received for trying to organise a women-only event.

They couldn't accept that there's still sexism and discrimination or inequality in certain levels. They're like, no, it's all...that's all done now. So not even the other aspects to politics, but even just the kind of issues around equity and social justice are the tricky points for some farmers (Interview).

As Kerry comments, the aspects of the movement related to justice and international solidarity were seen as being irrelevant or too political for farmers. This is one conflict the movement faces in growing that I explore in this final section.

6.4 Conflicts and Complexity in Movement Strategy

So far in this chapter I have presented empirical examples of prefigurative politics within the political agroecology movement and shown this to be reflective of the political identity paradox: both contributing to a positive movement identity which mobilises people and alienating wider actors through its resultant subculture. I now turn to examine the role of prefigurative politics in agroecology transformations through their impact on processes of scaling and territorialisation. The tension between scaling out to bring in new entrants, including those who have been traditionally marginalised within the sector, and engaging with mainstream farmers to support their agroecological transitions is a major barrier to transformations related to the political identity paradox. I present activists' understandings of this dilemma in terms of movement strategy before discussing more nuanced understandings of the role of prefigurative politics in transformation processes.

6.4.1 Impact of prefigurative politics on transformations

It is useful to return to the literature on scaling and territorialisation of agroecology (Nicol 2020; Giraldo et al. 2021) to understand the strengths and challenges of prefigurative politics. Firstly, the strengths. The movement's prefigurative politics create impact through scaling deep, generating the shifts in *consciousness* needed for transformations and (re)connecting humans and nature (Botelho et al. 2016; Nicol 2020). Prefiguration supports scaling out as it *drives* participation and develops the *powers* to implement agroecological practices through learning and networks (Anderson et al. 2018; Mier y Terán et al. 2018), particularly for new entrants. Scaling up, the institutionalisation of agroecology (Khadse and Rosset 2017), occurs both through providing real examples of alternatives for policymakers and institutions, fostering broader *drives* and *consciousness* for change (López-García et al. 2019), and by generating the committed and organised political base needed to hold and promote a political articulation of agroecology through developing members' *drives, powers, and consciousness* (cf. Raekstad and Gradin 2019). At the same time, the LWA's democratic forms of organising can ensure that policy

demands reflect grassroots interests by developing *powers* for bottom-up decision-making (Maeckelbergh 2009; Raekstad and Gradin 2019). In these ways, prefigurative politics can direct and complement other political strategies so that engagement with policy does not draw them away from their radical goals (Cornell 2011; Maeckelbergh 2011; Raekstad and Gradin 2019), as I examine in Chapter 7.

In each of these dimensions there are limitations produced by the prefigurative and radical nature of the movement, particularly in relation to the farmer-landworker divide, and the specificities of the UK farming context. Part of scaling deep is the cultural rooting of agroecology within the territories (Botelho et al. 2016). While this is developed through connecting to folk culture, recovering heritage grains, and regaining traditional land-based skills, for instance, the fact that agroecological producers are dispersed and many are new entrants limits this aspect of territorialisation. Landworkers coming from urban backgrounds and encountering challenges in accessing land are often less rooted territories they work in and may lack the historical biocultural knowledge important for this aspect of territorialisation (Mailfert 2007; McGreevy 2012a; Creaney et al. 2023). Similarly to Zollet and Maharjan's (2021) observations of organic new entrants in Japan, agroecological new entrants often engage in agroecological learning and sharing of practices at a national or larger regional level rather than specific to territories due to being spread out and having weak social bonds with local farmers.

Territorialisation understood as scaling or massifying within a territory is thus challenged by the division between landworkers and the farmers that surround them. Most LWA regional organisers reported not having the “critical mass” of members needed to have effective territorial processes. This dispersed membership is a challenge LWA Midlands organiser Emma shares when I asked her if she feels connected to people in her region:

In the Midlands there's not a lot of organic farming, as it were, or sort of small scale.....people who would be LWA members. There's a little bit, there's little pockets. But it's not like in the South-West where there's 500 of them. I think we're about 100 members or something, spread out across a very spread out area (Interview).

An exception, as Emma mentioned, is the South-West of England which was recognised within the movement as an established hub of alternative food and farming with sufficient member concentration for organising on smaller local levels.

This contrasts to well-documented Global South contexts where small-scale farmers exist in relatively tightly knit rural networks through which agroecology can be scaled and local markets can be developed within territories (Mier y Terán et al. 2018; Nicholls and Altieri 2018). In these cases, peasant and farmer protagonism is emphasised in scaling processes, where ‘early adopter’ farmers develop an agroecological solution to meet a shared local challenge and then promote it within their community (Holt-Giménez 2006; Pan Para el Mundo 2006). But what does this mean in places where there are no peasants to speak of? Or where many of those representing ‘new peasantries’ (van der Ploeg 2012) are not the family farmers emphasised in agroecology movements but exist disconnected from the rural social fabric?

Andrew in the action learning group reflects on this contrast in relation to ORFC sessions on agroecology scaling in Global South contexts,

That was really, really fascinating just to learn about how quickly the movement was kind of growing in southern Africa, South Asia. I also feel a little bit hopeless to be honest because it's just, the UK is just, you know, it's the access to land thing again. So, so few small farms left that it's really hard to kind of spread this stuff. And I guess it feels like, you know, we're kind of operating on the fringes and without access to the main sort of network of agriculture and farming (Action learning group).

Andrew's comment highlights the lack of integration into mainstream agricultural networks (Ingram 2018), the dispersed nature of small-scale farming in the UK (Winter et al. 2016), and the challenge in accessing land for new entrants (LWA 2019a; Creaney et al. 2023). This represents power asymmetries in land distribution affecting social organisation for territorial governance and knowledge exchange (Anderson et al. 2020; Zollet 2022). While these structural issues need to be addressed, ultimately different types of actors

will need to overcome divides within territories to support agroecological territorialisation (McGreevy 2012a; Anderson et al. 2020; López-García et al. 2020; Hubeau et al. 2021). As McGreevy (2012) argues in the case of Japan, incoming farmers alone are likely unable to counteract the disappearance of local agricultural knowledge. This calls for local organisations and “hybrid forums” to bring together diverse actors in Global North agrifood systems (Pimbert 2017a; Hubeau et al. 2019; López-García et al. 2019; Anderson et al. 2020), as is the case with Llafur Ni, a Welsh network bringing together traditional farmers and new entrants to recover heritage grains. Such boundary crossing, however, raises questions around movement strategy and the risks of co-optation of agroecology.

6.4.2 Between Radical Politics and Broad-based Movement Building

The LWA’s prefigurative and radical politics both foster and potentially limit transformative change in different respects. Limitations arise from the political identity paradox (Smucker 2017), primarily through the farmer-landworker divide. While one LWA coordinator identified it as “an absolute classic activist problem”, authors have ascribed this strong emphasis on a politicised subculture to prefigurative and anarchist movements in particular (Portwood-Stacer 2012; Engler and Engler 2016). Several people in the movement recognised the “bubble” or “echo chamber” they were in and argued for the importance of breaking out to reach a wider audience. However, this presented a challenge which is expressed well by Clare, an LWA staff:

We are trying to build a certain kind of world and that's the world we want to invite people into and build together with them. And that might mean changing our culture, addressing some of that kind of subculture, like cliqueness, or like class markers or racial markers and things like that. And I think it's going to be hard, right, because we want to bring in conventional farmers, but we also want to bring in folks who are excluded from conventional farming because of our oppressive social systems. So, how do we do both those things and not put them in tension with each other, but actually see them as things that can both strengthen how we work in some ways? But I think it's super important that we do it (Reflective focus group).

Clare's reflection demonstrates the prefigurative intention within the LWA to build an alternative world with others and awareness that doing so will require navigating tensions between different identities, cultures, and perspectives to bring them into this collective action.

The intentional shift in LWA culture and organising practices to make the movement more inclusive of those marginalised within farming and wider society can be seen as a deepening of their prefigurative politics. It involves growing awareness of how power is expressed in our everyday interactions and the assumptions and prejudices which shape the culture of spaces (Raekstad and Gradin 2019, pp.92–93). Within the movement, these changes were being made most explicitly in relation to race, gender, and sexuality but there were fewer explicit intentions to address cultural differences in social class. However, such action was seen as in tension with engaging mainstream farmers as it was one part of the cultural divide with agroecological landworkers, as others have identified (Pimbert 2017a; López-García 2020; Facchini et al. 2023).

Still, over the course of the research there were increasing efforts to engage with mainstream farming spaces and organisations, as I detail in Chapter 9. Many recognised the challenge of changing conventional farmers' practices as one of the biggest barriers to food system change and therefore an area with large potential impact. There were, however, differing opinions within the LWA over whether it was the organisation's role to reach out to engage conventional farmers and support their transition or whether to focus on developing alternatives with those already open to them. Staff member Clare emphasises the difference between these two strategic approaches from her perspective,

And like for me just on an emotional reaction level because of like my politicisation as an anarchist, I'm much more drawn to the idea of building systems within the ruins [of capitalism] than I am to like converting people over [...] But they also have.....feel different (Reflective focus group).

This echoes Holloway's (2010) call to enact and expand alternatives within the cracks of capitalism and highlights how for Clare prefiguration feels more comfortable and consistent with anarchist politics compared to engaging with those in the mainstream.

Another key staff member, Sarah, on several occasions pushed back against suggestions that the LWA reach out to and be a space for conventional farmers. In considering how to tackle the issue of farmers being alienated by the LWA's political language and image she commented,

I don't know how you'd avoid it when we stand for really strong things so.....people do have to kind of do quite a lot of work to have that paradigm shift to go through that barrier (Reflective focus group).

She considered the LWA's role instead as supporting those who have already had that "paradigm shift" or who seek out the LWA themselves. One coordinator, Amelia, similarly questioned the tactic of outreach with conventional farmers and expressed fears that it could risk the politics and identity of LWA, diluting it.

This all amounts to a real sense amongst movement activists of wanting to protect their prefigurative and radical politics and the need to resist the potential co-optation of agroecology, reflecting concerns in the transnational agroecology movement (Nyéléni 2015; 7th International Congress of Agroecology 2018; Wezel et al. 2018a). As LWA coordinator Bay shared,

I think there needs to be some sort of proactive thing, which is just like how we stop agroecology becoming another term, that like in 10 years-time we're using a different term, and the Tory party is using this term. [...] how does it grow but not lose that depth of like, yeah, all of the wider kind of richness (Reflective focus group).

Bay's comment reflects the conflict that the LWA faces of wanting to ensure it holds onto its core values and the political nature of its agroecology vision while still growing. This tension was felt in relation to the wider sustainable agrifood movement where there were

differing agroecological narratives, as well as with engaging policymakers and mainstream farming organisations, a tension well highlighted elsewhere (Rivera-Ferre 2018; Wezel et al. 2018a; Hubeau et al. 2021). As demonstrated earlier and explored further in Chapters 7 and 9, this is related to integrated processes of consciousness-raising, strengthening collective identity, and developing democratic organising systems to support movement coherence.

Other movement activists expressed the risk of compromising on their values if they shifted their culture to have broader appeal. For instance, Sarah expressed a fear of losing the sense of home in the movement that many of them valued,

This challenge of like how do you make it open to people who don't identify with that subculture without sort of abandoning the people for whom that subculture is really important and, you know, provides a lot of certainty in a world that's otherwise hostile (Reflective focus group).

Sarah's comment emphasises the importance of the subculture in cementing collective identity and providing a protective and utopian space outside of the mainstream (Törnberg 2021; Yates 2021), which is part of what motivates participation (Maeckelbergh 2011; Raekstad and Gradin 2019). These quotes demonstrate the dilemma the political agroecology movement faces between increasing impact in the wider food system while maintaining and embodying politics that are central to their vision for change, in other words, the political identity paradox (Smucker 2017).

While the movement does well to scale out by bringing new people into the sector, its transformative potential is limited when considering scaling out through engaging existing farmers within territories. As Clare mentioned in the previous section, these two types of scaling out involve quite different processes, they *feel* different. Converting conventional farmers is different to supporting politicised new entrants, which is again different to mobilising agroecological small-scale traditional farmers or deepening the practices of 'ecologically minded' farmers already engaged in change processes. Tactics for scaling out need to be differentiated across the spectrum of farmers and food system actors,

recognising the “plural subject” of agroecology transformations in Global North contexts (López-García 2020; López-García et al. 2020). While there are questions over whether it is LWA’s role to convert less than willing conventional farmers, there is definitely a sense that there are many on the conventional-agroecological spectrum relatively aligned with the movement’s principles and/or more willing to change who they still struggle to engage due to movement culture. This all points to a need take a complex approach to address the limitations of prefiguration within movement strategy whilst seeking to retain its positive aspects and not dilute the radical vision underlying it.

6.4.3 Complexity, Diversity, and Concrete Utopias

The LWA has multiple strategic threads within its theory of change, with prefigurative politics as a central strand. This chapter demonstrates how the ‘political identity paradox’ (Smucker 2017) can be used to understand the movement’s key challenges. Offering a counterpoint to the more binary view of this tension, I conclude this chapter presenting a more nuanced approach to navigating this challenge, developed further across subsequent chapters.

Firstly, it is important to understand prefigurative politics as experimental and continuously evolving to address challenges and reflect more diverse perspectives. Rather than seeking ‘pure’ utopias “free from the contradictions of our times”, prefigurative movements strive to build ‘concrete’ or ‘real’ utopias (Wright 2010; Dinerstein 2022; Piccardi 2022, p.161). Prefigurative politics are based on hope that “another world is possible” and a desire for “a world in which many worlds fit”. This is a process of “becoming” rather than “being”(Dinerstein 2022) involving, as Sharma and Van Dyke (2021) write, “a constant dialectical negotiation between defining visions for a different future and necessary transformations of the present” (p.268). This becoming occurs through movement praxis and engenders political consciousness (Sharma and Van Dyke 2021; Dinerstein 2022; Piccardi 2022). As such, leftist movement politics have advanced significantly since the Occupy movement, the main example given in critiques of prefigurative politics, learning from its failings and adapting to meet new challenges.

I have shown some ways the political agroecology movement's praxis has evolved through processes of critical collective self-reflection and political education. Through active work on the part of organisers, the movement's prefigurative politics and culture is shifting to confront aspects which alienate marginalised groups and encompass a wider range of imaginaries. This ongoing process includes consideration of how to develop more nuanced and complex relationships with those who do not share their politics whilst at the same time resisting co-optation. Thus, in developing concrete utopias the political agroecology movement employs multiple strategies, combining prefigurative politics with oppositional action and seeking facilitative policy contexts to advance alternatives, as I explore in the next Chapter. This involves testing and retesting the limits of possibility and creating institutions that can expand those limits (Wright 2010, p.373) by developing people's drives, powers, and consciousness (Raekstad and Gradin 2019, p.58). It connects the strategic and the prefigurative rather than seeing them as separate (Cornell 2011; Maeckelbergh 2011; Yates 2021).

In highlighting challenges to the movement's transformative potential, I have distinguished between those embedded in the movement culture and those outside it. However, the reality is far more complex and boundaries are porous and overlapping. Part of the process of "becoming" through developing concrete utopias involves the fostering of diverse interconnected spaces within the political agroecology movement and wider movement. Some of these provide a sense of *home* for different actors, particularly for marginalised groups, while others represent more heterogenous and challenging *coalition* spaces (Reagon 1983), as I explore across subsequent chapters. This provides the promise of both advancing and protecting a political agroecology vision while enabling broader collective action and transcending of boundaries through multi-actor networks and hybrid spaces at different scales. Thus, while Smucker (2017, p.225-6) urges us to "step outside of our comfortable clubhouse [...] to articulate a broad and inclusive *we*" and denigrates attachment to radical and prefigurative politics, the concerns expressed by movement activists about the dilution and co-optation of agroecology are critical to address. Taking a more complex and holistic perspective on movement building and movement culture, as I

show in this thesis, means that advancing this transformative vision is not counterposed to attaining a broader movement base. Subcultures, after all, offer the possibility of reimagining the social landscape outside the prevailing norms of society at the same time as confronting it with a critique (Paris and Ault 2004, p.403). In the context of sustainability transformations, it is vital that viable radical alternatives are developed and demonstrated to others as part of resistance movements (Temper et al. 2018; Pelenc et al. 2019).

Defence of transformative and radical principles and their prefiguration in movement culture, therefore, is still important if we want to see the change we need.

6.5 Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have painted a picture of a divided and fragmented farming landscape, within which agroecological activists are marginal outsiders. This was done to emphasise a key challenge for the movement as identified through the research, namely the division between agroecological landworkers and more conventional or mainstream farmers impacting the potential to bring agroecology to scale. In reality, there are many complexities to this which I cover in more depth in Chapter 7 and 8. Further, there is considerable work done to transcend these boundaries which I explore in Chapter 9. I have focused on prefigurative politics in the movement to demonstrate its centrality to the movement's theory of change and the movement's positive impact in fostering transformations, whilst providing a framing to understand divisions that limit the movement's impact. Positioning prefigurative politics as vital for agroecology transformations does not mean only focusing efforts on constructing a different future whilst ignoring structural concerns and the need for oppositional strategies or pushing for supportive policies. It does perhaps mean centring radical values and learning how to keep hold of a transformative conception of agroecology while engaging with dominant institutions and reaching out to develop a broader base. This will inevitably mean finding ways to hold complexity and diversity in the movement and recognising the qualities of home and coalition spaces. In the next two chapters, I deepen the analysis of prefigurative organising and learning practices in the movement respectively, arguing for the need to

strategically develop and engage different movement spaces and cultures to further the movement. Bringing this together in Chapter 9, I explore movement efforts to bridge divides and build coalition, leading me to propose an agroecology movement ecology approach which builds on the US feminist of colour coalitional politics and social movement ecology framework introduced in Chapter 3.

7. ORGANISING FOR TRANSFORMATION

7.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I identified the tension between protecting and developing a political agroecology movement space and expanding the movement beyond its subcultural bubble to foster transformations. In this chapter, I delve deeper into the movement's organising practices and examine the strategic choices actors make in navigating this tension. During this research, the Landworkers' Alliance (LWA) grew substantially in membership and organisational capacity and complexity. Such growth brings with it risks of co-optation, depoliticisation, and demobilisation inherent with increased professionalisation, external funding, and engagement in policymaking arenas (Piven and Cloward 2012; Choudry and Kapoor 2013; Edelman and Borras 2016). I argue that in navigating this growth, the movement's prefigurative politics shape their approach to organisational model, culture, and movement building in a way that acknowledges practices as "not not, but not yet" (Swain 2019) the utopian future they direct towards. This experimental and emergent process of "becoming" (Dinerstein 2022) involves developing democratic and equitable forms of organising and alternative socio-ecological relationships which contribute to a sense of community and collective identity. In terms of strategy, these organising practices support the LWA to navigate diversity in membership, engage in institutional politics, and reach out to transcend boundaries within the wider movement while maintaining their transformative and radical politics, counteracting risks of organisational growth. Centrally, the experimental construction and strengthening of prefigurative home spaces provides an anchor for engaging in various coalition action, as I explore further in Chapter 9.

First, I provide an overview of key changes in the LWA as they navigated organisational growth, followed by details of LWA's emergent democratic organising systems and their role in facilitating transformative change. The third section examines the centrality of community, connection, and collective identity in the LWA's organising practices,

strengthening their sense of home. In the final section, I examine discussions on movement building and theories of change within the LWA. Ultimately, I show that in order to continue to grow while engaging in wider coordinated action and coalition building, deepening and strengthening their sense of home and democratic processes as an organisation was seen by key organisers as critical. Moreover, rather than emphasising abstract utopias, I demonstrate how LWA's political strategy reflects a "process view" of revolution (Raekstad and Gradin 2019, p.58), recognising "the political multilayered contradictions and tendencies that exist in the global capitalist world" (Dinerstein 2022, p.59) by engaging with policy as a necessary part of the ongoing realisation of an agroecological future and scaling of prefigurative alternatives.

7.2 Navigating Growth

The LWA's growth from 2020 to 2022²⁵ was shaped by external factors driving change, particularly Brexit, leading to a large increase in funding and resulting in a sudden expansion of organisational capacity and degree of professionalisation. The LWA chose to take advantage of political impetus provided by the proposed post-Brexit "public money for public goods" agricultural policy and various funding that became available. As a result, they significantly increased their influence within political and policy-making circles, which they often referred to as gaining a "seat at the table". While taking advantage of this political opportunity to grow the organisation and its influence was generally considered a positive choice, there was still awareness from LWA activists about the risks inherent in this shift in focus and rapid funding-driven growth. Being "very, very funding-driven" in "seizing the moment" of Brexit, coordinating group member Cara reflected, had allowed an expansion of membership but was also "a massive weakness" and risked them taking on projects in a "relatively unstrategic way". Similarly, at an organisers' event, member organisers expressed concerns about future "mission drift", and "losing our vision

²⁵ The research period 2020-2022 happened to come at a time of intense growth and change due to the confluence of external factors such as Brexit and Covid-19, and internal factors such as the LWA's new 5-year development plan which was initiated in 2020.

and politics because we're chasing funding". Further, there was an acute awareness of the risk of becoming divorced from the movement's grassroots base as the organisation grew, as has been identified elsewhere (McCarthy and Zald 1973; Edelman and Borras 2016). Recognising this challenge to bottom-up organising, presented an opportunity to spur organisational development from previously more informal processes towards more structured practices of democratic governance.

In terms of membership growth, several key LWA activists spoke about the challenge of going from what they saw as a small highly engaged membership to a much larger, staff-heavy organisation with lower membership engagement. However, as some authors have commented, while smaller informal groups of activists may feel more cohesive, the reliance on social relationships and assumed shared culture often leads to informal hierarchies and produces unity based on sameness (Freeman 1972; Polletta 2005; Maeckelbergh 2009). Dealing with this expansion of membership and staffing necessitated substantial internal growth to develop systems to ensure the movement remained "member-led" and was able to operate effectively at a larger scale. Sarah on the membership team commented that this involved "untangling the power structures within the LWA and restructuring them now that we're a much bigger organisation" and felt that while they were catching up with this process work "the member-led element" emphasised in their communications was "slightly over egged". This points to the emergent nature of prefigurative politics. While praxis is guided by ideals, activists take time to experiment with solutions while contending with complex realities (Swain 2019; Dinerstein 2022; Laamanen 2022; Schiller-Merkens 2022a).

Before this period of change, long-term activists described the LWA as being heavily focused on campaigning, with member organising and skill-sharing occurring in a more "haphazard" fashion though still a substantial element of movement praxis. Staff member Sophia acknowledged that the early days of the LWA was "kind of scrappy", with a small core of highly active members contributing in their free time which, as landworkers, meant most activity occurred in winter. As the LWA grew, the initial intent to have staff be practicing members, and thus on part-time contracts, was troubled by the limited capacity

of landworkers and need for consistency and new skills. The increasing professionalisation had meant that many staff were either not landworkers or not active as landworkers due to the demands of the work. This phenomena has been picked up in Edelman and Borrás's (2016, pp.94–5) study of Transnational Agrarian Movements (TAMs), where they highlight the potential for a gap to arise between leaders and their social bases as organisations grow and leaders engage more in transnational activism. The specialisation of knowledge required by this, they note, can lead them to become gatekeepers of institutional contacts and knowledge. However, while there were certainly key figures taking on multiple roles in the LWA and agroecology movement, including wider work within La Vía Campesina, what I found was that many tended to remain deeply connected to the land and their movement base. Notably, one key figure regularly involved in international work still frequently attended local and national agroecology gatherings while maintaining strong connections within their territory, with their own farm serving as a hub of local activity. This is not to deny a degree of concentration of knowledge and contacts with highly involved members and staff, but there was acute awareness of this, and it was recognised more as a lack of capacity and effective organising systems than power hoarding. Thus, as organising systems developed, efforts were made to increase access to information and decision-making and counter “cliqueyness”, as I describe throughout this chapter.

The increased funding and staffing from 2020 meant that member-organising, outreach, skill sharing, and member support was better resourced, and staff roles were designed to facilitate members’ democratic participation so these aspects could catch up with the LWA’s campaigning emphasis. This speaks to Uvin and Miller's (1996) functional and organisational scaling, defined alongside processes of scaling out and up in Chapter 2 as increasing the range of activities and organisational strength and sustainability. The membership team saw themselves as not just supporting social networks and solidarity amongst members but “building a base of power” and “giving the LWA a body that could move”. This led to the organisational structure introduced in Chapter 5 and elaborated in the next section, with member-led groups representing regions, identities, and sectors. While there were challenges to this ongoing and evolving process (della Porta and Rucht

2013; Swain 2019; Dinerstein 2022), the prefiguration of the movement's values, including commitment to non-hierarchical organising and attention to power, serve to counteract the possibility of depoliticisation and separation from the grassroots base in the long-term. As Kleidman (1994) found of social movement organisations, while professionalisation can inhibit, erode, or substitute for volunteer activism, it can facilitate it and often has a mixture of these effects. In the LWA, while there were some fears of staff roles substituting member activism, there was clear intention for them to in fact facilitate and strengthen it. With this, organisers recognised the need for effective democratic organisational structures and processes, and strong sense of collective identity and shared strategy to support the integration of member and staff organising as they navigated the sudden growth. This meant that although there remained a policy and campaigning focus, the movement's prefigurative aspects were strengthened and were able to in many ways direct the organisational growth and protect it from co-optation. I now present some systems and practices part of this intentional democratisation.

7.3 Prefiguring Democracy

As in wider Global Justice Movements (della Porta and Rucht 2013), those in the political agroecology movement tended "to be extremely sensitive to violations of forms of equality and democracy not only in society at large, and indeed around the globe, but also within their own ranks" (p.4). As the LWA navigated organisational growth, they strove to intentionally embed democracy in their organisational structure and culture. This represents an important aspect of prefiguring food sovereignty which emphasises local self-organising and participatory democracy joined up in "networks with multiple and overlapping sovereignties" (Dekeyser et al. 2018, p.226) to realise the right of peoples to define their own food and agricultural systems (Nyéléni 2007). As such, the LWA's democratic efforts reflect wider movement praxis in La Vía Campesina (LVC) and its member organisations based on principles of autonomy, horizontality, and equity (Menser 2008; Wald 2015). These prefigurative organising models were emergent and experimental, evolving over time in response to contextual challenges and growing

political consciousness amongst members (Laamanen 2022). First, I discuss the organisational structures LWA developed during this period and then how democracy, equity, and justice were prefigured within wider organisational culture.

7.3.1 Democratic structures

LWA organising structures have been influenced by their involvement in the wider food sovereignty movement. The LVC offers an impressive model of participatory democracy at a transnational scale with deliberative assemblies feeding up decision-making from local and regional levels (Menser 2008; Martínez-Torres and Rosset 2010). In particular, the LWA has taken inspiration from Democratic Confederalism, modelled by the Rojava revolution (Gerber and Brincat 2021), and the radical democratic models of groups like Confédération Paysanne and the Zapatistas (González Casanova 2005; Heller 2013). Raekstad and Gradin (2019) describe democratic confederalism as a prefigurative approach aiming “to replace capitalism and the state (along with racism, patriarchy, etc.) with a confederation of bottom-up and directly democratic assemblies, through which people self-manage their society in a free, equal, democratic, and ecologically sustainable way” (p.129). The key building blocks of such a model in the LWA are the *member-led groups*, which input to decision-making through a cycle of annual events forming a *democratic calendar* adjacent to an emphasis on *equity and justice in structures*. In this section, I particularly show how members are supported by new staff roles and funding to engage in the emergent democratic systems.

Member Organisers

Three categories of members were identified by staff member Sarah: “organised”, “mobilised”, and “represented”. Members who were not actively involved in organising were either considered to be *mobilised* if they were fairly active and came to events or demonstrations or *represented* if they were relatively inactive and represented by LWA through their lobbying and policy work. While the focus had historically been on represented members, the organisational growth had focused increasingly on organised

members, but Sarah felt that there was still work to do in mobilising more members, particularly for protests and actions. In recent years, substantial resources have gone towards strengthening and growing the various elements of grassroots member organising at different levels: sectors, branches and regions, and identity groups (see Chapter 5). These groups form the basis of the assembly model as reflected in democratic confederalism; they aim to provide spaces for direct democratic participation from the bottom-up. Many of these groups have formed organically and organise in different ways, with some groups more developed than others. Some groups have a formal group of 'organisers' or 'coordinators' whereas others have a looser distinction between group members and organisers, with organising meetings open to everyone. As noted in the previous chapter, experimenting with these organising models and practices develops the powers of members to realise democratic systems, while collective reflection on these practices develops their consciousness around issues of democracy and equity (Raekstad and Gradin 2019).

Regions with more members tended to become organised more quickly, such as in the South-West of England which is now breaking down into county-level groups, whereas regional subgroups of the Cymru (Wales) branch had only more recently emerged, with organising having remained at the branch level for some time. This echoes earlier discussion (Chapter 6) on the critical mass needed for scaling; requiring sufficiently dense territorial connections (Val et al. 2019). During my earlier involvement in LWA Cymru organising, events were mainly at a Wales national level and based in West Wales where there were more members. However, once membership had grown and the first regional assemblies were held, we were pleasantly surprised by the large turnout in South Wales. There was then a readiness and enough member farms within the territory to organise usefully at that level.

Member-led groups generally tended to have large fluctuations in how active they were depending on the fluctuating capacity of members. Organisers and staff continually reflected on how to support members to step into organising and sustain participation. They identified several practical factors that enabled or limited member involvement: time

and capacity, experience, confidence/personality, skills, access to information, and a clear way to slot in and take on tasks or roles. This reflects various other findings on mobilising and sustaining activist participation (Edwards et al. 2018; Rye 2024; Santos 2024). As common with activists (Cox 2011; Gorski and Chen 2015), member organisers were at risk of burnout from over-committing or juggling additional responsibilities and pressures. Some have ascribed the tendency of activist burnout to the internalisation of harmful capitalist values encouraging overwork and individualising responsibility and care (Gorski and Chen 2015; Brunella 2019; Bivens 2021), something recognised within the movement prompting consideration of how to create alternative practices of collective responsibility and care, as I explore later. Finally, activists must further contend with the emotional and material realities of capitalism and how that shapes their capacity to act in the world (Gorski and Chen 2015; Cox 2019; Morris et al. 2023). The challenge of organising under neoliberalism was encapsulated in staff member Sofia's comment in relation to improving the LWA's organising,

I think finding ways to increase the capacity of member organising, which amazingly is really there. People are hungry for it despite the fact that we live in this neoliberal world where one, the material pressures are really hard for people to engage in organising, and two, the kind of emotional pressures are also quite disconnecting and hard (Reflective Focus Group).

This quote exemplifies the enthusiasm of members to organise in spite of these challenges and the desire from the staff team to resource member organising.

As the LWA grew, member organising was better resourced through staff offering support, ensuring year-round continuity to bridge member organising efforts and help coordinate through seasonal fluctuations. While time and capacity were noted as the main barriers for busy activists and landworkers, they recognised that more confident and self-motivated people had more ease in jumping into organising. However, as staff member Sarah comments, this began to shift as more structure and support from staff facilitated different people stepping into organising,

Member organising is quite self-motivated, you have to be this kind of person that's just gonna get stuck in and like put your nose in and be like, well, I can do that. And I think that's changing with the more facilitation and engagement coordinators that are then trying to enable people to step into that role that wouldn't necessarily do that (Reflective focus group).

The challenge of getting members involved in organising was highlighted several times by Sarah who expressed that at times it still felt like an “us and them” within regions and branches between members and organisers or staff. Non-organising members would express, “LWA should do this...”, she commented, but she wanted them to see that “we are LWA” and all take responsibility. Member-led groups often discussed amongst themselves how to reduce barriers to member organising and support new organisers. For instance, FLAME (youth branch) developed a supportive onboarding process and OOTL (LGBTQIA+ branch) had No Action Points (NAP) meetings which they hoped would be less intimidating for people to attend.

One way the LWA staff tried to develop the resilience of member organising was through training, information sharing, and skills building: developing a Regional Handbook to induct new organisers and signpost organisers to relevant processes, resources, and information; facilitating experience sharing between organisers online and at events; and developing a programme of training opportunities related to facilitation and movement building. Staff member Sarah shared that she hoped that membership coordination staff roles would help to make organising “clearer and more fun and effective”. This capacity building was vital to navigate the balance between paid staff and member organisers and ensure that staff did not replace organisers but worked to mobilise and support them in their work.

The LWA has tried to support the development of member organising in areas or identity groups where it is less developed, sometimes directly through staff roles. For instance, the Scotland membership coordinator Kerry explains their plans to build member organising in the branch:

We've got a big summer gathering coming and we're doing a regional organising workshop at that. And that will be a chance for people that are coming along, including two members who are volunteers and really want to be regional coordinators, they're going to help cofacilitate that. And we've also got Carly coming up from the Northern region in England and they're quite an established group and have done loads of stuff so we're going to get her to share what they've been doing working on local campaigns, as well as regular farm visits and things like that. It's like a whole weekend event, so that people can start to identify where do they have clusters of members that might want to start connecting a bit more (Interview).

The event in Kerry's description is used as a launching off point for grassroots member-organising, joining people together in geographic regions with facilitated discussions and learning from another more developed group. Similarly, some key organisers reflected on how the emergence of the Cymru group in 2017 had been spurred by the new LWA membership coordinator contacting members in Wales and organising transport to the LWA AGM in East Anglia. Several members at an organisers' gathering shared that having a paid role supporting the regional and working groups in recent years has made a massive difference and made progress feel easier.

Through staff support, such as those instances just noted, member organising went from relatively disorganised and inconsistent efforts based largely on social connections, to being developed and consolidated for genuinely democratic systems. This supports arguments others have made that organisations "that combine strong membership involvement with professional staff positively contribute to membership influence" (Staggenborg 1988; Heylen et al. 2020, p.1229), challenging Michels' (1966) "Iron Law of Oligarchy" (Diefenbach 2019; Raekstad and Gradin 2019). That is, professional staff do not necessarily take over from members. Where there are suitable organisational structures and a strong will to prefigure democracy and challenge power inequities, staff can support and sustain grassroots involvement (Diefenbach 2019; Heylen et al. 2020). I now discuss the important role of in-person events like Kerry's Scottish member gathering in the LWA's democratic systems.

Democratic Calendar

Part of more recent developments in LWA's democratic systems is the idea of an annual "democratic calendar" (see Figure 17). This is a series of events, some less defined than others, that oscillate between grassroots member events and staff and coordinating group gatherings. The aim is to provide a mechanism for feedback between the growing membership and those making key decisions in the LWA, largely through the member organisers. This is the connective tissue of the democratic assembly model. Thus, the member organisers' task is to communicate information to the membership and then gather their views on questions of strategy, policy, or training needs, for instance, and communicate that through the Organisers' Assembly and other mechanisms to staff and coordinators. Additionally, there are opportunities for members to more directly have input and insight into the organisation such as by attending the Annual General Meeting (AGM), member surveys, and policy consultation groups. This is still far from a fully functioning democratic system and remains fairly informal but is being built upon each year to ensure the LWA remains member-led as it grows.

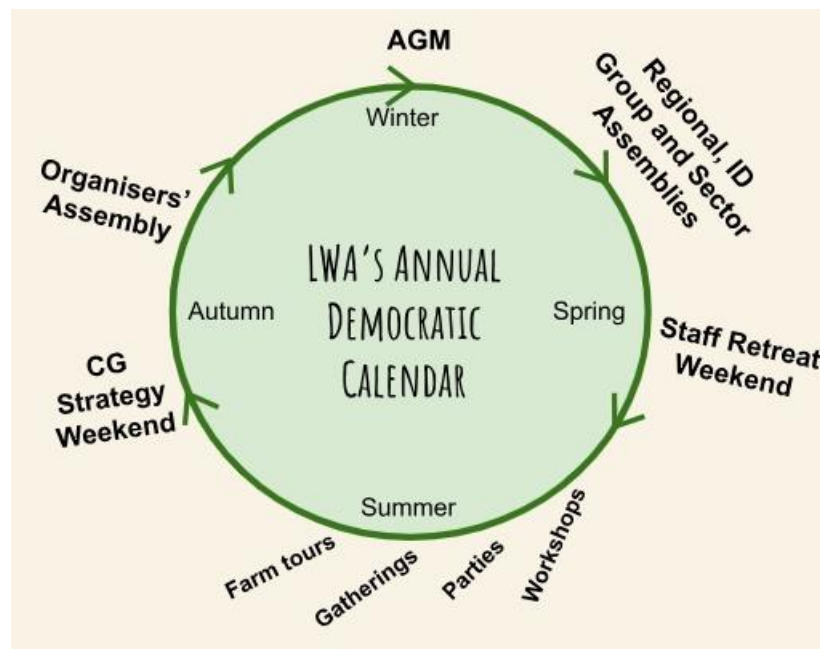


Figure 17. The LWA's Annual Democratic Calendar (Email communication from membership staff to member organisers 2022).

The Organisers' Assembly (OA) is a key moment in the emergent democratic calendar, a new body within the LWA "which seeks to increase the member voice and acknowledge the contributions of some of [the LWA's] most engaged members across LWA branches, regions, sectors and identity groups"²⁶. It was first established in Autumn 2021 and designed as a fully funded opportunity for several representatives from each member-led group to gather together for celebration, collective learning, skills sharing, and network building. This is based on the assembly model "used across social movements including La Via Campesina, Confederation Paysanne (Peasants' Confederation in France) and the Rojava Revolution in Kurdistan" and seeks to provide "a home-grown model of grassroots democracy across the LWA!"²⁷. Through participatory workshops and group discussions at the OA, member organisers provide feedback and steer on the LWA's broader direction of travel.

The aim is for this body to move towards a more formal democratic body as the different elements of the democratic calendar develop. Sarah on the membership staff team believed that the key challenge was to "engage people enough and make them empowered enough to know the kind of thing they can contribute at the organisers assembly and do it kind of clearly and confidently through a democratic process of consulting their [member bases]" (reflective focus group). This speaks to the importance of empowerment and capacity building in prefiguring democracy and sustaining member involvement (Raekstad and Gradin 2019; Santos 2024). As Raekstad and Gradin (2019) argue, this is key to ensure people can engage effectively and equitably in democratic and non-hierarchical structures both now and in the future. An important aspect of this is the embedding of equity and justice in structures through explicit recognition of groups who are often marginalised in governance processes.

²⁶ Email to member organisers from membership coordinator Sofia (September 2021)

²⁷ LWA email newsletter to members and supporters (October 2021)

Equity and Justice in structures

One way that the Landworkers Alliance (LWA) emergent democratic structure centres marginalised identities is through its member-led identity-based groups (see Chapter 5). This reflects wider practices in LVC and related movements which have come to see the importance of dedicated assemblies for groups such as women and youth whose voices are often excluded within traditional organising structures (Martínez-Torres and Rosset 2010; Piccardi 2022). These identity-based groups have a dual function in the LWA; they allow members with marginalised identities to find strength and community in coming together, and they create opportunities to identify shared experiences and articulate their struggle. In other words, they provide a home space for groups marginalised within the movement and wider society (Reagon 1983), that is, a protective space where groups have the potential to experiment with prefiguring the society they want to see. This aligns with Smith and Raven's (2012) characterisation of niches as having shielding, nurturing, and empowering properties. Foregrounding these groups supports power inequities and issues of justice to be addressed in both the organisation and wider movement through creating space for those voices to be heard and organised around (Gawerc 2020). The identities represented are FLAME (Youth), Out On The Land (OOTL – Queer and Trans), Racial Equity, Abolition, and Liberation (REAL – Black people and people of colour), and Women and Diverse Genders in Forestry and Landwork.

More recently, there has been more concerted effort to address geographic power imbalances, ensuring groups in the North of England, Scotland, and Wales are supported to counter the dominance of Southern England. Kerry explained how in the early days of the LWA, Scottish members had felt “sidelined” by all organisational events happening in the South of England, particularly the South-West, and therefore felt they could not impact LWA’s decision-making. In recent years there has been more effort to organise national events in these other regions to counter the South-West focus as well as the paid membership staff roles to support organising and events in these areas. Additionally, the LWA has an intention for diversity, inclusion and representation in the coordinating group (sectors, identities, geographies).

Without these explicit structures and intentions, there are just informal structures and systems which are often based on social networks and can reflect wider societal power dynamics, as expressed in the famous feminist essay, “The Tyranny of Structurelessness” (Freeman 1972). These informal hierarchies are recognised within contemporary prefigurative movements, Maeckelbergh (2011) writes, as “the assumption about power that is built into practices of horizontality is that power always centralizes, and so structures and procedures are needed to continuously challenge this centralization. Horizontality is the process of continuously decentralizing power” (p.10). This is reflected in Kamal and Wall's (2024) statement on racial justice work in the LWA where they consider all forms of liberatory work as central to prefiguring food sovereignty and land justice in the movement. This involves attention to power dynamics in not only organising structures but wider movement culture and everyday ways of working.

7.3.2 Fostering Democratic culture

In this section, I detail processes of prefigurative experimentation and collective reflection aimed at embedding democracy into movement culture and organising practices, particularly through recognition and subversion of power inequities. As De Vita and Vittori (2022, p.77) argue, this involves deep understanding of historical forms of domination and the building of new subjectivities and relationships through changing political, social and economic infrastructures. As such, the progressive development of anti-oppressive and anti-authoritarian modes of organising is “the subject of profound and creative inquiry” in a movement, a form of conscientisation (De Vita and Vittori 2022, p.87). Organisers in the LWA and wider political agroecology movement worked to increasingly address barriers to participation in movement events and democratic processes, guided by an ethics of horizontality, anti-oppression, and care.

Member organising events tended to be facilitated in deliberative and participatory ways using many tools to ensure active participation. For instance, sessions at events such as the OA, the AGM, or regional assemblies would often involve a mixture of “go rounds”

sitting in a circle for broad input²⁸, “temperature checks”²⁹ or “spectrum lines”³⁰ to get a sense of feelings on a topic or decision, and breakout groups or pair discussions³¹ where members discuss ideas before feeding them back to the whole group. In addition, there was frequently explicit acknowledgement of how power influenced participation. For instance, a facilitator might encourage those with more privilege and confidence to restrain their contributions while making explicit space to prioritise those who are often silenced. This contributes to and is shaped by the development of political consciousness in the movement (Levkoe 2006; Raekstad and Gradin 2019), as members become more aware of power dynamics in movement spaces and adapt their practices to address them.

The combination of facilitation practices noted above and in the previous chapter aimed to ensure decision-making was both effective *and* inclusive, particularly considering people’s available time and energy. This runs counter to characterisations of prefigurative organising as endlessly long, unstructured consensus-based meetings (Fians 2022; Laamanen 2022) and supports arguments of the relative efficiency of contemporary, or even past, horizontal movement practices as well as their attendance to power dynamics (Polletta 2004; Leach 2016). In addition to facilitation practices aimed at addressing power dynamics, certain event organising practices became widespread throughout the movement such as sliding scale ticketing and bursaries to reduce financial barriers to

²⁸ This is where each person in the circle goes round and contributes something, usually responding to a prompt. For instance, it could be introducing themselves or giving two words that reflect how they feel about a particular process.

²⁹ The practice of temperature checks usually uses hand signals but can include numbers or colours to get a quick sense, on a scale, of participants feelings about something. For instance, it could be used to identify the degree of interest in having a separate discussion about a topic that has arisen

³⁰ This is where participants are asked to stand somewhere between two points representing the two ends of a spectrum to reflect their position on an issue. This is often posed as level of agreement with a statement, like an interactive Likert scale, for instance, “we have good information flow in the group, and everyone is easily able to access the information they need to do their tasks”. Participants at different points on the spectrum are then asked to elaborate on their choice.

³¹ Breaking into small groups allows for more people to participate directly and for feedback into the group to be more thought through and consolidated. Participants are often asked to record their discussions on flipchart paper to report back afterwards. This reduces the barrier to participation in large groups and is an efficient way for many voices to be heard.

events³², “safer spaces” policies³³ to guard against potential oppressive and harmful behaviour, and childcare to increase accessibility for parents. This speaks to the diffusion of movement practices, both relationally through actors crossing between movement spaces and through awareness of shifting prefigurative praxis in wider left movements (Polletta and Hoban 2016; Soule and Roggeband 2018).

Additionally, at larger events there would often be spaces and sessions where identity groups could gather and, in some events, quiet spaces and care coordinators to address inclusivity around neurodivergence and mental health. This last element particularly points to the importance of a feminist *ethics of care* in the movement in developing effective and just processes (Polletta 2004, p.229) and contributing to social reproduction in the movement (Yates 2021). This was discussed in one of our action learning group sessions:

Clare: And it's very hard for everybody, and so I think you need to build a culture where there is an expectation that care will be needed, and that support is needed. And what I really like is when I see people talking about collective care and emotional support as a really radical paradigm. [...] sometimes it can be really simple [...] like that thing, "well, we will have childcare". Even that says a lot. You don't need to then provide a space for mothers to talk about how hard it is. You just recognised a need, and that care is happening already. It's not making a fuss, it's just making it real.

³² As mentioned in the vignette of Land Skills Fair at the beginning of the last chapter, sliding scale ticketing is used to offer different price levels based on what people are able to afford. Sometimes, cheaper tickets are explicitly made available for marginalised groups to increase access and make explicit the desire for such groups to participate.

³³ For instance, the LWA's safer spaces policy aims, “to make participation in LWA events supportive and non-threatening while encouraging mutual respect, non-violence and community building” (LWA 2023b, p.1). This is done by asking people to commit to several principles: joy and fun, respect and consent, presence and listening, sharing, acknowledging privilege, and shared responsibility for self and other (p.1). These are elaborated along with an accountability process for when these principles are not upheld.

Clare expresses the view of care as radical politics and something which should be integrated and normalised in movement practices rather than something that is “making a fuss”, reflecting a feminist ethics of care (Lin et al. 2016; Sharman 2023). This idea of a feminist ethics shaping LWA’s practices was also picked up by Sofia who shared that she did not think that LWA would have been able to weather their massive organisational growth in the way that they had if they were not an organisation led largely by women. By this she was referring to the way LWA responded to the rapid growth with concurrent embedding of democracy and equity in organising guided by an ethic of care and solidarity (Ishkanian and Peña Saavedra 2019; Piccardi 2022).

Wider issues around accessibility of events were seen by organisers as particularly critical in relation to the democratic calendar, recognising the differential structural barriers affecting activist participation (Craddock 2020; Montagno et al. 2021). For instance, in an email about organising regional assemblies, member organisers were encouraged to make the events “as accessible as possible” to enable democratic participation, with suggestions to use sliding scale ticketing, support travel costs and organise liftshares amongst members, provide bursary tickets, or have the “assembly” discussions themselves be unticketed. Thus, as well as the various forms of capacity building and staff coordination mentioned in the previous section, democratic participation was supported through financial resources for member-led events. Prior to this, member events were largely DIY relying on the use of member’s farms and funding themselves through ticket sales. LWA Cymru organiser Cara reflected that this limited member engagement to those who could afford to attend events or lived close enough to farms where events were hosted. This had the effect of reproducing the representation of members in certain areas as members who were unable to access events were “not seen”. However, while increased funding enabled democratic participation in many respects, there were concerns about the sustainability of basing democratic processes, such as the OA, on such funding. This connects to wider debates around the risks of dependency on external funding in social movement organisations (Vincent 2006; Cox 2019). The LWA’s approach in this respect reflects Miguashca’s (2011) notion of “principled pragmatism”; while developing

strategies for autonomy from external funding in the long-term, organisers and staff recognised the importance of funding to foster democratic organising and address accessibility in the short-term, remaining critically reflexive around the role of funding in movement building.

Within the wider movement, these practices based on an ethics of care and attention to power inequities were seen as distinct to the LWA and other political agroecology movement spaces. For instance, in an action learning session the lack of such prefigurative practices at the Oxford Real Farming Conference (ORFC) was highlighted:

Clare: I mean me and Divya have had various bitchfests at the Oxford Real Farming Conference previously about the inaccessibility of it and the whiteness of it. [...]

Carl: I think it's a big problem, partly because, you know, it's in Oxford, it's run by white middle-class people - who are lovely people but - and the British growing scene is largely white male. So, the LWA coming up as it has, sort of the last few years, has been really positively disruptive.

Divya: [...] in terms of the childcare, I was pretty saddened because I've actually given feedback on that and I'm sure lots of other people had as well that there was no childcare. And still nothing was done about it the year after, which I thought was really disappointing. And then I think there was also a thing that I think a few of us had got an LGBTQ+ group together and we'd asked to be put on the programme and they didn't put us on. Even though they had given us a space. And just, you know, things like that where it's like quite easy to do and it would make a huge difference.

This quote distinguishes between organising culture in the wider movement, reflecting its dominant “middle-class white” character, and the LWA’s radical and intersectional politics which are seen as positively disruptive to this, pushing equity onto the agenda in the wider movement (Billington 2022; Kamal and Wall 2024). It highlights how the dominance of privileged identities in the farming scene can lead to a lack of attention to equity (Moore and Swisher 2015; Finn 2019).

Over time, however, issues of justice and accessibility were increasingly taken up in the wider movement as the LWA and other radical influences helped to shift debate and movement culture. ORFC 2020, for instance, represented a distinct change in conference content and attendance with several sessions focused on race in farming organised with the newly formed Land In Our Names (LION) and with Leah Penniman from Soul Fire Farm in the US, author of *Farming while Black* (Penniman 2018). This was the last in-person conference before the pandemic, and several months later Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests erupted across the UK giving another boost to and raising the profile of networks like LION. LWA continued to play a key role in furthering issues of equity and justice in the wider movement, particularly related to race, gender, and sexuality, as noted in the previous chapter. Based on my own observations and those of other participants, these changes to movement culture and organising practices, supported by collaborations with organisations like LION, meant that movement spaces began to be more accessible and inclusive and therefore more diverse. As with all prefigurative organising, this remained a work in progress in the movement (Terry 2023; Kamal and Wall 2024), gradually shifting and responding to power dynamics through experimentation and developing political consciousness (Laamanen 2022).

The attempts to prefigure democracy highlighted in this section resonate with della Porta and Rucht's (2013) statement that while “groups struggle more or less constantly to implement democratic practices and behaviours to the fullest extent possible” they “attentively watch and criticise their practices in light of their democratic values”, experimenting all the time to better realise them (p.7). It is important to recognise the challenge of fully realising these utopian visions while still embedded in current social and political systems, which have opposing logics and serve to disempower people (della Porta 2015; Swain 2019; Scurr and Bowden 2021; Dinerstein 2022). The practices described here contrast to frequent characterisations, often based on the Occupy movement, of prefigurative organising as relatively structureless and as such reproducing wider social power dynamics through unrecognised informal hierarchies (Reinecke 2018; Soborski 2019; Fians 2022; Laamanen 2022). This supports Polletta and Hoban's (2016)

analysis of contemporary activism as reflecting “several decades of awareness of the ‘tyranny of structurelessness’ [...] as well as familiarity with discourses and tools of ‘anti-oppression’ work” (p.297), leading to an experimentalism in approaches to decision-making and disavowal of ideological purism of radical democratic practices. This means today’s activists “do not assume that equality exists among members of the group just by saying it does. Rather, they see decision-making as a place to work through inequalities that are informal, unacknowledged, and pervasive” (p.297). Swain (2019) describes this as “ends-effacing prefiguration” which, while guided by principles, is not fixed on a single defined end goal but it constantly being worked towards and re-evaluated with diverse horizons possible so that prefigurative practices are “not not, but not yet” the utopian ideal.

These continually evolving practices to support member involvement in the LWA aim at not only building organising capacity but making horizontal organising more inclusive as members become aware of different challenges and power dynamics. The democratic systems and practices outlined here, bring movement actors closer to realising this vision as “the only way for people to sufficiently develop their powers for new forms of free, equal, and democratic organising, is by practising doing so” (Raekstad and Gradin 2019, p.72). At the same time, the continuous experimentation and reflection on organising practices that was evident builds the consciousness of members as they understand how power unfolds in everyday practices and larger systems (Raekstad and Gradin 2019; De Vita and Vittori 2022; Laamanen 2022). Finally, while the increased staffing and funding resulting from LWA’s growth does pose some risks, in this section I have made the case that overall, this has positively contributed to democratic participation of members due to the organisation’s prefigurative politics. That being said, engaging members in democratic organising and sustaining commitment is not only a case of suitable organisational structures and practices but relies critically on fostering a sense of community, connection, and collective identity (Gamson 1991), the relational and affective dimensions of movement organising (Rye 2024; Santos 2024), which I now explore.

7.4 Community, Connection, and Collective Identity

In this section, I describe LWA organising practices which prefigure alternative socio-ecological relationships and cohere a collective organisational identity through developing strong social bonds and sense of community, fostering connection to food and land, and developing a cohesion around purpose and narrative. This I argue is particularly critical for developing member drives and consciousness to participate in the movement and LWA's democratic processes. As Gamson (1991) argues, "any movement that hopes to sustain commitment over a period of time must make the construction of a collective identity one of its most central tasks" (p.28). This involves a sense of collective identity at different levels: organisational (the LWA), the wider movement, and solidary (Gamson 1991). The latter refers to collective identity forged mainly through shared social location, such as within identity-based groups in the LWA or wider movement. This collective identity and sense of community is a critical aspect of *home* spaces (Reagon 1983), social spaces within the movement akin to "free spaces" (Polletta and Kretschmer 2022) or "niches" (Smith and Raven 2012) which create protected environments for people, particularly marginalised groups, to collectively prefigure the future they want to see. As such, Eyerman and Jamison (1991) view the collective articulation of movement identity as "a process of social learning in which movement organizations act as structuring forces, opening a space in which creative interaction between individuals can take place" (p.55). Creating a strong sense of home grounded in a political conceptualisation of agroecology, I argue, enables LWA to hold a degree of diversity within their membership as well as engage more widely with actors beyond the political agroecology movement without risking co-optation. This reflects Reagon's (1983) assertion that home spaces are important in supporting people to engage in the risky work of coalition building.

In prefiguring a new society, LWA members are driven not only by addressing shared interests through the practical realisation of new farming and food systems, but by the solidarity, care, joy, and sense of connection they find in the movement. As an LWA staff member said in summarising a discussion about group organising at the OA, "it is not just

about productivity but about radical community”. Similarly, staff member Sarah expresses of the LWA,

It's really amazing when people do discover it and it is a space that represents views that aren't in any other farming, growing space. It's not just about the practical techniques and stuff you can learn, it is a kind of political, like grassroots.....it's almost like a religion for some people. Like the místicas at the end, like that is people's.....often their spiritual outlet compared to other things. When people find it and it is like, 'oh, finally', it does really feel like a really strong family (Reflective focus group).

Sarah highlights several important elements of collective identity: shared rituals, values, and politics, and a strong sense of community. Likewise, reflections from organisers at the OA emphasised the importance of connection, shared “sense of purpose”, and a “culture of community” in the movement. Cultivating collective identity was an intentional aspect of organising, supporting Melucci's (1996) framing of collective identity as an ongoing dynamic process rather than a fixed form. As LWA Cymru organisers shared in the reflective focus group, “it's making a vibe that people are part of something and that there's a social group of like-minded people that they can tap into” and about “generating that sense of community and sense of identity” in the group. This sense of community is developed at multiple levels, through the member-led groups and at national LWA events.

Events typically centre celebration, ritual, and sharing good food. In doing so, they develop alternative socio-ecological relationships defined by solidarity, care, and connection with other people and the more-than-human. Action learning group member Clare contrasts this to “neoliberal late-stage capitalism which is all about alienating you from your connections and isolating and individuating your experiences”. Clare’s comment speaks to the individualising and disconnecting social aspects of neoliberalism, positioning people as rational and competitive individuals expected to adjust to multiple societal crises alone (Dardot and Laval 2017; Laamanen et al. 2022). Instead, as Laamanen et al. (2022, p.16) find, participation in prefigurative movement organisations like the LWA emphasises empowering social relationships of collaboration, care, and solidarity which can

destabilise neoliberal socialisation. Connection and networking in the movement were noted as particularly important since many agroecological landworkers are isolated on their farms and in relation to mainstream farming communities.

The social aspect of organising and learning events was constantly stressed by participants and organisers in the movement and seen to complement and have equal importance to the practical aspects of events in driving agroecological transformations. As farm hack organiser Noah shares, the value of farm hacks was in combining “real tangible outputs” with “meeting loads of people that share your values or are involved in projects similar to yours, and networking and relationship building”. Similarly, South-West growers group organiser expressed that “the social aspect of it was as important as the learning bit”. The relationality emphasised in these horizontal learning and organising spaces is similarly identified in Anderson et al.'s (2018) study of the European Agroecology Initiatives where they found learning experiences were centred “on personal connections, not merely professional development” (p.541). The strong social bonds developed at such events often lead people to get involved in organising and commit further to the movement (Diani 2018; Hunt and Benford 2018). As Val et al. (2019, p.883) find with peasant-to-peasant processes, “alternative construction networks” are woven “in which the solidarity mystique is recreated, common values are reinforced and a collective conscience for social mobilization for transformation is gradually built”. This speaks to the development of drives and consciousness for transformative action through prefiguration (Raekstad and Gradin 2019).

There is a risk, however, of this strong sense of community becoming “cliquey”, making spaces and organising less accessible to others (Chapter 6). This can lead to the concentration of information, resources, and decision-making amongst those who are well connected. For example, one action learning group member who had been involved in regional LWA organising commented that decisions could often be made informally between those who had been in the group for longer - “I just need to make a decision, maybe I'll phone up so and so”. However, this means that “there's this implicit power dynamic between the people who have been there for a while and know everyone and

know what's going on and the new people”, they reflected. As demonstrated earlier, these dynamics were shifting as democratic systems and practices were further developed and, as with the cultural barriers raised in the previous chapter, activists were increasingly aware of them.

Despite these challenges, the sense of community and collective identity in the LWA was highlighted as highly valuable in motivating political action and prefiguring a better world. One key emphasis of this, as alluded to in Sarah’s comment, is spiritual and cultural connection to the land. Movement spaces frequently brought in elements of land and food connection. This entailed rituals largely shaped through connection to La Via Campesina and other Global South influences, such as the *místicas* and hearth practice mentioned in the previous chapter (Claeys and Singh 2022). As Nicholson and Borrás Jr. (2023, p.618) express, the *místicas* at the start of La Via Campesina meetings bring together members’ diverse experiences through a common reality of spiritual relationship with nature and the land. Folk culture was a strong element of collective identity expressing connection to land such that folk songs, poems, and storytelling of histories of land struggles were regularly a feature of movement events. For instance, the collective “Three Acres and a Cow” and their Welsh analogue “Gafael Tir” (*Three Acres And A Cow* [no date]) provided the entertainment for several LWA national events, combining folk songs and storytelling to share histories of popular land resistance in the UK.

LWA events would often invite cultural contributions from members related to the land they worked as well as those representing the territory where they were hosted. This was further embedded in the food culture. Whether as a bring-and-share meal or a catered feast, movement actors prefigured the food system they wanted through using local produce from small-scale agroecological farms and sharing freshly prepared food collectively. Mealtimes were convivial feasts, focal points for socialising as well as connecting to the vision of a new food system. This connection to alternative food cultures and the more-than-human, is a distinguishing aspect of what Centemeri and Asara (2022, p.131) call ecological prefiguration, embodying “forms of coexistence between human beings and other living beings, with the intention of sustaining the transformation towards

an ecological society”. In positioning against the extractive and exploitative use of natural resources under capitalism (Tornaghi and Dehaene 2020) and disconnection from food production and food culture in highly industrialised societies (Forno and Wahlen 2022), these experiences open up the possibility of shifts in consciousness towards more ecological and interconnected ways of being.

The community solidarity, land-based rituals, land histories, and food culture were amongst some of the ways movement actors sought out new connections with the land and with each other outside of dominant systems. However, while many new entrants did not have strong historical ties to the land they farmed, this connection to land was further troubled by questions of identity and colonialism (Chapter 6). As I reflect in this journal entry early on in the research,

There are definitely tensions to be explored around the placelessness that many people feel in the UK, particularly those growing up in the cities, that leads them to seek out a connection with the land. But it has to be recognised that those claims of a connectedness to a culture, that project to root back to past folk traditions and land rights history feels a lot more comfortable for white British people. So, this whole idea of who can have connection to the land, who has access, whose heritage are we talking about? How do we re-territorialise without excluding, to embrace a diversity of expressions of connecting to land and heritage that enhance our understanding of what it is to steward the land rather than getting stuck in past British culture, folk music, and heritage as if it cannot be added to? (Research Journal).

This search for community, identity, and sense of place represented here poses the risk of reifying land-based cultures through nostalgia for a lost traditional, and therefore often nationalistic, rurality (Hetherington 2006; Sallustio 2021). As Guthman (2014) argues, the agrarian populist ideal often found in Northern organic movements can be “based on particular class, race, and gender privileges, as well as a deep rooted cultural conservatism” (p.208). While there were some strands of this kind of agrarian idealism in

the movement culture, they became progressively challenged and critically reflected upon over subsequent years.

The question of embracing diversity and change in land-based cultures whilst still seeking to recover and defend biocultural heritage was thus increasingly taken up within the movement. For instance, at a learning event about the Kurdish Freedom Movement, one member raised the question, “how can we speak about connection to the land in the UK in a way with is not alienating if you are not connected generationally to the land you live on?”. The movement thus recognised the differences between the UK context, with its long history of industrialisation, enclosures, colonialism, and migration, and the Global South movements they were inspired by, and sought to understand what this meant for land connection and food sovereignty. This reflects the nature of prefigurative politics as always in a process of “becoming” (Dinerstein 2022), with racial politics and land justice a key area of critical learning and development of praxis in the political agroecology movement.

The notion of land connection was constantly being cultivated and reimagined, over time drawing in wider cultural influences and challenging issues around belonging and heritage in relation to racism and colonialism. This, as well as the celebratory nature and centrality of food, is exemplified in the following vignette describing a feast at the LWA base at COP26 in Glasgow:

After the meal there was a mística, a set of cultural sharings. It began with a Scottish song on the bagpipes with associated folklore. This was followed by Ada who drew from her Yoruba ancestry and spiritual practice to invite ancestors into the room. She poured water on the ground in the four directions (N,S,E,W) and asked people to call out ancestors they were grateful for who had led them to be here. Thanks was given to the kitchen team with people banging loudly on the table and whooping. The kitchen team explained where all the food had come from. Next came the offering by the woman from La Via Campesina’s Canada member organisation. She had made a kind of geometric mobile from string which she explained was called a spider and was part of her Eastern European heritage prior to her family moving to Canada generations ago. She acknowledged her settler

status in the settler colony of Canada and the indigenous peoples whose land she resides upon in the modern naming of her state/city. The spider was made of wheat and traditionally is made each year to hang in the house and absorb unwanted energy. She connected this practice to COP: what energy we want to generate and promote and what we want to ward off. She then sung a beautiful traditional village harvest song from this same tradition (Research journal).

The *mística* in this vignette includes a range of cultural influences. Moving away from a simplistic focus on “British” land-based culture, it reaches back into the past to draw upon different land-based traditions whilst relating them to the here and now and recognising the influences of colonialism and migration. This exploration of the messy relationships between heritage and traditional knowledge, on the one hand, and the complexities of modern identities and relationships to land, on the other, was live and continually unfolding within the movement.

These elements came together to form a strong and evolving sense of collective identity in the political agroecology movement. Underpinning this, was the development of a shared language and vision. An important aspect of this was discourse, a key theme in the data, which focused on defining *agroecology* by tying it to concepts like *land justice* and *food sovereignty* and differentiating it from *regenerative agriculture* and *organic* (Tittonell et al. 2022; Bless et al. 2023). In recent years, the LWA has done more to mark out its position on these key terms through educational workshops, such as member-led workshops on defining food sovereignty in a Welsh context, and resources, including a video series defining LWA’s framing of key concepts (LWA 2024a). At the same time, however, many members I spoke to struggled to define agroecology, and one action learning group member pointed out that it “sounds so official and maybe even academic” and was difficult to explain to the public. Whereas terms like regenerative agriculture were more easily engaged with but open to interpretation, and organic was defined clearly through certification. The political articulation of agroecology in the UK was seen to come most strongly from LWA, but participants argued that it was important more groups took up the term agroecology, particularly emphasising its political and social elements (Levidow et al.

2014; Giraldo and Rosset 2022). Having and defending a strong political articulation of agroecology was therefore seen as important in shaping how it was taken up in the wider movement and policy and farming circles (Rivera-Ferre 2018), which I discuss further in Chapter 9.

As well as defining agroecological practice, member organisers at the 2021 OA saw the importance of “strengthening discourse to help direction of change”, that is, informing shared strategy. Sofia highlighted the need for a “shared language across LWA of what it means to engage and scale up and build capacity among our membership”. This meant developing a shared organising ideology to understand how the movement they are building “walks” and “moves” as well as holding onto the “broader narrative of who we are and what we're fighting for”. An example of this is at the OA 2021, where the vision and strategy of LWA and La Via Campesina was shared to help members understand the movements they were part of, and members were engaged in discussing what needs to stay the same and what needs to change in organising as the LWA experiences huge growth. Managing that growth while holding onto a clear shared identity relied on longstanding staff members like Sarah who felt they had a role in maintaining “[LWA’s] cultural knowledge and the history and knowing where we've come from and where we're going”. Such a shared identity and vision, while needing continuity, also needed to be able to hold diversity and complexity. For instance, member organisers at the OA raised the question of “how to keep a cohesive LWA identity” while “bridging diverse members within the vision”. For Clare, this was about having a “very strong and clearly communicated vision” to bring people along with which emphasised what views are shared and where there is internal divergence. As Ospina and Foldy (2010) find in their study of social change organisations, the leadership of key organisers and staff can work to connect these perspectives through supporting collaboration and bridging between perspectives. One example several members cited was the veganism vs. meat tension which the LWA worked hard to hold space for, acknowledging there was disagreement between vegan and non-vegan members but agreement about being against industrial farming and the need to drastically reduce meat consumption. As Clare reflected, “we don’t exist to be like, this is

the *one answer*". Likewise, Sofia recognised that while it was important to identify a cohesive strategy, it was ok that different members would see and resonate with different parts of it like the traineeship programme, the local WhatsApp groups, or the campaigns, for instance.

The question of holding complexity and diversity came up repeatedly in LWA discussions of movement building. This echoes Edelman et al.'s (2014) assertion that "the degree of tolerance for pluralism is one of the biggest and most challenging questions confronting food sovereignty practitioners", requiring careful consideration (p.922). It was acknowledged that there was "no homogenous membership" but that it was LWA's role to "incorporate and hold difference". In this respect a certain degree of conflict and heterogeneity was seen as generative, reflecting LWA's ideals around diversity, complexity, and cooperation (Ghaziani 2008; Hewitt 2011). As already mentioned, challenges brought by different member identities has produced productive disruption leading to tackling social justice issues. Additionally, the LWA needed to hold differences amongst membership in terms of scale (large vs. small-scale farming), urban vs. rural, and farmworkers vs. managers or landworkers. The latter led to the creation of the union Solidarity Across Land Trades (SALT) which, while emerging from tension, generally has a positive relationship with LWA with members sitting in both and serving a function that LWA is not able to. As Ghaziani and Kretschmer (2018) argue, these elements of the movement can sit alongside one another, and rather than inferring weak collective identity, can be based on a strong collective identity which emphasises diversity as a strength.

Thus, while the elements of movement praxis discussed in this section came together to determine a strong sense of organisational and movement collective identity and sense of home, it also integrated *nested* and *overlapping* home spaces (Liu 2021). Nested social spaces are those fully embedded inside one another. For instance, the women and non-binary farm hack, BPOC growers' retreat, and LWA Cymru gatherings all provide smaller communities within the movement where particular collective identities and connections can be formed. The first two are identity-based and provide space away from the dominant white and male culture of farming respectively. Though, as Carastathis (2013) argues, it is

valuable to conceive of identity groups themselves as coalitions due to the intersecting nature of oppressions. The third provides a space for connection around the Welsh context that is more accessible for Welsh members as it is closer and “more gentle than the central Landworkers' Alliance events in that they're a bit smaller and quieter” (Cara, LWA Cymru organiser). Yet even with this there are regional differences and differences between “incomers” and those with Welsh heritage. Thus, all spaces contain varying degrees of home and coalition for different people. This is true also in the wider movement where overlapping spaces, sharing some common actors and positions, interpenetrate one another. Examples of these are other agroecology movement organisations and organic farming events like the Organic Growers Gathering. Additionally, the ORFC, while being a large event made up of many different organisations, farmers, and activists with somewhat differing visions for a sustainable food system, is nonetheless an incredibly important space of convergence, a rare chance to see many contacts in the movement. It encompasses both elements of comforting and energising home and more challenging coalition.

Within the broader movement configuration and wider agrifood sphere, there are *linked* social spaces (Liu 2021), those that are relatively separate in terms of actors and positions but are connected through certain social relations, making them proximate. In this case, based on the degree of heterogeneity of actors and positions between spaces their relationship may be *oppositional*, defined by their conflictual relationship and contributing to the forming of collective identity through contrast or “otherness”, or *symbiotic*, transforming one another through mutual exchange as in the movement ecology view of coalition (Liu 2021). Whereas overlapping spaces and nested spaces are more likely to be either symbiotic or have a *kindred* relationship, feeling like home for the same sets of actors and working together as alliances with common goals. Within the movement, these various nested and overlapping spaces serve important functions and engender different collective identities. In summarising a group discussion at the women and non-binary farm hack about the importance of reaching out to connect with those beyond our bubbles, I wrote,

We still need some bounded spaces so we can feel safe and comfortable around those with similar values and/or identities. We can do this through creating community spaces for eating and organising and developing an ethics of solidarity and collective responsibility (Research journal).

This highlights the importance of diverse home spaces at different levels in providing a strong basis and source of strength to engage in coalition building (Reagon 1983), an important theme in discussions of movement building and theories of change in the LWA as I now explore.

7.5 Movement building and Theories of Change

It is now important to examine how these largely internal organising practices around democracy and collective identity figure in overall LWA movement strategy, theory of change, and wider movement building. In this section, I begin to show how an approach of embracing diversity and complexity shaped by a “principled pragmatism” (Manguashca 2011) can be seen in the development of LWA’s strategic action over recent years. Central to this is the idea that strengthening democratic organising systems and collective identity is a way for LWA to remain anchored in their radical vision of change and prefigurative politics while engaging in broader political action. Manguashca's (2011) concept of principled pragmatism is based on the praxis of feminist anti-globalisation activism. They define it as a logic of action which is prefigurative, involves a complex and nuanced analysis of power relations, and is open-ended, non-linear, and processual. As such, an intentional alignment between means and ends is combined with an openness to diversity, compromise, and flexibility. This recognises the situatedness of strategic knowledge and necessity of engaging diverse knowledges to develop broader resonance and joint mobilisation. Further, a principled pragmatist approach acknowledges “that overcoming oppression involves a complex strategy which combines the immediate targeting of concrete, visible manifestations of power in the present with the more long-term task of slowly chipping away at the structural foundations that sustain them”

(Maiguashca 2011, p.546). This involves an open-ended process of experimentation, navigating between long-term aims and getting things done in the here-and-now. In these ways, principled pragmatism resonates with other framings of prefigurative politics which emphasise open-ended experimental processes and the potential to strategically integrate different tactics as a means of orienting towards utopian futures while addressing concrete political constraints and power inequities in the present (Raekstad and Gradin 2019; Swain 2019; Dinerstein 2022).

The LWA official theory of change statement (LWA 2021b) encompasses multiple theories of change (Chapter 5). It emphasises, in line with the political agroecology approach outlined in Chapter 2 (Mier y Terán et al. 2018; Anderson et al. 2020), bottom-up change through scaling agroecological practice out and deep to prefigure better food systems, in combination with scaling up through advocacy and campaigning work to encourage a facilitative policy environment for change. However, the weighting of these elements has changed over time. As mentioned earlier, Brexit prompted a shift in LWA priorities and led to a deeper engagement with policy, moving away from the earlier days of direct actions like Food Sovereignty Football³⁴ (LWA 2024b). Staff member Sarah commented that this may have meant they lost some members due to the perception that it was less radical and had “kind of sold out”. Mobilisation has continued in some ways in recent years with the Good Food, Good Farming March (LWA 2024c) but staff member Hazel lamented, “it does feel a bit sad that we've lost that sort of edginess of what we did in the early years”. Nevertheless, several key LWA activists asserted that direct engagement with policy was a strategic choice weighing up the gains given the circumstances, rather than a shift away from more oppositional mobilisation and direct action. As the political landscape shifted with DEFRA reversing commitments on post-Brexit farming reform (Horton 2022; The Wildlife Trusts 2022), some staff reflected that engaging with policymakers began to feel like “a waste of time and energy”. This reflects the LWA’s pragmatic and strategic

³⁴ The Food Sovereignty Football action was carried out several times to mark Via Campesina’s annual Global Day of Action. It was a game of football outside parliament aimed at highlighting the “unfair playing field” between industrial and small-scale agroecological agriculture (LWA 2024b).

orientation to identify the best means to create the conditions to progress agroecology in the here-and-now as well as the open-ended and processual nature of that approach.

A few activists took more of a hard line against any engagement with the dominant institutions, however, reflecting a strict anarchist position (Schiller-Merkens 2022b). For instance, one farm hack organiser criticised LWA's media and lobbying tactics arguing that mainstream politics "is a corrupted and compromised playing field", and instead promoting "small-scale organising". However, looking to the broader food sovereignty movement, Wald (2015) argues that while La Via Campesina is not strictly anarchist as it recognises the "legitimacy and role of the state", it is still based on the key pillars of Gordon's (2007) characterisation of "present-day anarchism": *struggle against domination; direct action and prefigurative politics; and diversity and open-endedness* defined by pluralism and solidarity. Thus, while many key LWA activists would consider themselves anarchist, rather than employing a strategy of escaping capitalism (Wright 2010) or anti/non-statist politics, LWA simultaneously engages in both a "politics of demand" that targets the state in the struggle against domination and a "politics of the act" that bypasses it through prefigurative action (Maignashca 2011, p.546), combining a diversity of strategies and visions. Even though the LWA's campaigning work is very visible, some staff reflected, grassroots organising and building alternatives outside of the dominant regime, or "interstitial transformation" (Wright 2010) have always been central to movement strategy and, as highlighted in this chapter, have become more resourced and coordinated in recent years.

This interstitial political action involved both "building alternatives" outside of the system and "personal transformation" of farmers and the general public towards engaging in more agroecological food systems (Ayni Institute [no date]). Both relate to the prefigurative practices described so far, and the latter more so to the idea of educating and reaching out to people beyond the alternative niche to achieve widespread cultural change. This notion of converting people to agroecology frequently came up at member events as an important element of change but, as noted in the previous chapter, within the organisation there was disagreement over whether it was LWA's role to support transition for more

conventional farmers or focus on those who were already on side. This distinction is not often made as clearly in the agroecology literature, though in recent years there has been more consideration of the role of hybrid actors (López-García 2020) and the need to reflexively navigate “ambiguous choices” around “what agroecology is and for whom” (Houde-Tremblay et al. 2023, p.974). While farming organisations in all contexts tend to have their specific constituencies, the difference is particularly pronounced in the UK context because of the landworker-farmer divide presented in the previous chapter.

All of these strategic approaches, both engaging with the state and beyond it, were seen by key organisers as symbiotic and necessary. Sofia believed that the LWA, while having many theories of change that sometimes pulled against each other, managed to bring them together to stop fragmenting as is seen in many movements. She attributed this to the fact that “LWA and agroecological thinkers in general can handle complexity because we're used to thinking in terms of complex systems”. This ties in with the “unity in diversity” organising approach of La Via Campesina (Desmarais 2007) and represents a prefigurative approach to movement building reflecting the agroecological principles of diversity, complexity, synergy, and systems thinking. As coordinating group member Bay comments, this is to some extent “the nature of the chaos” as “everything’s interrelated” and multiple things must be tackled at once in building a movement. Similarly, member organisers at the 2021 organisers’ assembly argued for the importance of “holding the balance of all our different strategies” and not overemphasising any one strand of work, particularly lobbying, but embracing “being a rich and diverse organisation with an ecology of tactics”. This echoes Houde-Tremblay et al.'s (2023, p.974) assertion that practical dilemmas and compromises around issues such as strategy “are crucial in the process of balancing the many goals of holistic projects like agroecology”, and further reflects the movement’s principled pragmatism.

The arguing for a diversity of strategic approaches resonates with the literature on theories of change presented in Chapter 3 and, due to LWA’s grassroots nature and strong prefigurative politics, points to a process view of revolution (Raekstad and Gradin 2019, p.58). That is, revolution as an iterative process of building and growing mass

organisations that both embody and promote alternatives and fight for reforms in the present to enable the replacement of capitalism with egalitarian institutions and practices in the future (p.58-9). This was an ongoing process with ups and downs. As action learning group member Carl comments, you “don't expect a revolution overnight. You keep feeding things”. At the same time, however, an overall view of how different tactics came together as a strategy was not completely clear for all members or staff. For instance, Clare felt that the difference between theories of change underlying action were often not acknowledged explicitly, with “making somebody else make change” through mobilisation and policy work, on the one hand, and “building alternative structures” and “guiding the agroecological transition” for farmers, on the other. There was a sense that as the LWA had grown, there needed to be more coherence and streamlining of strategy in order to be more effective, strengthen the sense of collective identity, and operate as part of a wider movement.

Some staff and members spoke of a lack of strategic coherence because of the wide range of tactics employed, and a need for “strategic pruning” as well as bringing together the different strategic “threads” to see them as connected. The energy of LWA went into lots of “small channels”, commented staff member Clare, and it was hard to identify a strategic focus. This led to an “information overload” for members, said staff member Sofia, and staff were working on ways to better focus communicating their activities to members to make it clearer how and where to engage. Strategic coherence was needed in order to make choices about where to focus energy most effectively and how to manage capacity. Rather than the “young organisation scrabble for everything” that had to some extent shaped previous LWA activities and direction, Clare shared, they needed to get a clearer sense of what they said yes to and what they said no to. This further tied in to understanding the LWA’s role as one part of a wider movement and therefore deciding where was best to focus, complementing the work of others. As Sofia describes,

It's the idea of what's strategic for us to do, what's comradely for us to do in that sense of actually nurturing a healthy, diverse movement, and not just empire

building. What's sustainable for us to do in terms of just people's capacity and so on (Reflective focus group).

This quote highlights the strategic use of resources as well as a cooperative approach to movement building which values diversity.

Developing a more coherent strategic focus, key activists highlighted, ultimately relied on building “really robust democratic structures” so strategy was genuinely informed by members and could be implemented by staff in a more coordinated and connected way. Being “member-led” additionally provides validity to LWA’s claims of representation in their campaigning work (Edelman and Borrás 2016, p.95; Heylen et al. 2020). As well as democratic structures, getting a more coherent idea of strategy across the organisation meant developing shared language and being able to hold complexity and difference (7.4). In practical terms, a critical aspect of holding difference whilst still developing collective strategy and vision was having “decentralised decision-making that is clear and accountable” and feeds into democratic structures which enable members to reach a point of broad agreement on issues whilst acknowledging differences in finer details. Working to strengthen this democratic base and sense of collective identity was seen to enable coalition work while protecting the LWA from dilution and co-optation. Sofia relates this to the case of reaching out to work with conventional farmers,

If we have those mechanisms and that culture and that narrative in place then I think that we're able to really solidly and like really confidently like stand in the [position] of where we are, but also like lean over to meet, you know, conventional farmers where they're at. And I think that's a really important thing to do (Reflective focus group).

Thus, the work of prefiguring democracy and developing a collective identity centred on political agroecology was seen as a means of anchoring the LWA so that they could overcome challenges like the farmer-landworker divide and the need to develop a facilitative policy environment while guarding against depoliticisation.

Returning to Reagon's (1983) notions of home and coalition, while coalition with those who have the potential to harm you and your cause is risky, it is ultimately necessary for social transformation and survival. Home spaces provide not only spaces to experiment with and develop radical alternatives, but a source of strength and grounding in a transformative vision that enables productive engagement in wider struggles. Moreover, as I have shown, prefigurative home spaces develop the powers, drives, and consciousness of their members which make transformative change through collective political action possible. In the LWA's case, developing a strong sense of home is not protective in the sense of seeking to escape from capitalism but empowers and grounds political action to protect the movement's transformative potential. At the same time, their particular prefigurative agroecological approach to this emphasises diversity and complexity, enabling a plurality of positions to come together, through encompassing nested movement spaces for particular groups and building alliances with overlapping movement spaces. While this brings with it challenges of contending interests and positions on strategy, it is the LWA's prefigurative politics that make them able to shift and learn from conflict and use diversity to strengthen their actions and develop their political agroecology vision to bring others along with them, as I explore further in Chapter 9.

7.6 Summary of Chapter

In this chapter, I have focused on the organising practices of the LWA who grew substantially in size and organisational complexity during the research period. I have shown how, despite a continuing emphasis on campaigning and increased focus on lobbying, the LWA has used this period of growth to embed its prefigurative politics. It has done this by deepening its democratic structures and processes in order to address power dynamics and ensure strategy is driven by its grassroots membership. Achieving their democratic ideals is an ongoing and imperfect process for the LWA requiring continuous navigation of challenges and subsequent compromises. Critical reflection has led to organising practices which are increasingly inclusive and support member organising through new staff roles and funding. The latter contributes to literature on

professionalisation in social movements, countering arguments that growth in funding and staffing of movement organisations necessarily leads to depoliticisation and separation from grassroots struggles. Instead, I have argued that the movement's prefigurative politics operate to guard against such risks by developing democratic organising to strengthen member participation. At the same time, the success of LWA in engaging and sustaining members relies heavily on its strong sense of collective identity and community built on principles of solidarity, social justice, and connection with land and the more-than-human. This fosters solidarity and commitment amongst members and reflects the embedding of the principles of political agroecology in the movement's culture, as I began to highlight in the previous chapter.

In the final section of this chapter, I showed how these elements are beginning to be consolidated as part of the LWA movement building efforts. As they adjust to their new size, staff and member organisers reflected on the need to develop and communicate a cohesive shared strategy. This means working towards a collective understanding of where and how to direct strategic action, understanding themselves as one part of a wider movement. Critical to this was the development of strong democratic processes and collective identity described as a means to cohere membership around a strategy and vision. At the same time, their approach to movement building reflected an appreciation for diversity, synergy, and complexity both in terms of strategy and the positions of their membership. This again points to a prefigurative approach, guided by the principles of political agroecology to embrace unity in diversity. I have argued that these various elements of strengthening the home space of LWA provide an anchor, enabling them to engage beyond their boundaries without risking their transformative agroecology vision. This all contributes to the literature on prefigurative politics, particularly supporting arguments for the importance of an open-ended and processual approach to prefiguration able to integrate plural positions and diverse strategic action to address practical and political constraints in the here-and-now while orienting towards utopian futures (Dinerstein 2022; Raekstad and Gradin 2019; Swain 2019). I explore these ideas further in the next chapter to examine how learning practices contribute to developing this home

space as well as their potential to transgress boundaries and bring others in. Whereas in chapter 9 I expand on these ideas to identify an approach to wider movement building, addressing the barriers to transformation highlighted in Chapter 6 by applying and further developing the movement ecology framework introduced in Chapter 3.

8. LEARNING FOR TRANSFORMATION

8.1 Introduction

Drawing on agroecology theory and critical social movement research, collective learning practices in social movements can be seen to perform several crucial functions in transformations. They develop the skills and knowledge to organise effectively to counter existing regimes (Conway 2013; Barbosa 2016; Val et al. 2019) and develop and scale agroecological practices (La Via Campesina 2017b; Rosset and Val 2018). They also shape the movement's cognitive praxis (Eyerman and Jamison 1991; Choudry 2015), developing consciousness of members (McCune and Sánchez 2018; Raekstad and Gradin 2019; De Vita and Vittori 2022), shaping relevant discourses, and contributing to collective identity to strengthen collective action (Kilgore 1999; Val et al. 2019; Dale 2021). This chapter examines the UK political agroecology movement's learning practices and their transformative role, using Anderson et al.'s (2018) Transformative Agroecology Learning framework to identify the strengths and challenges of movement praxis.

Anderson et al. (2018) identify four interdependent “pillars” of transformative agroecology learning (Chapter 2) which connect technical practice with the political project of food sovereignty: *horizontal learning*; *combining the practical and the political*; *diálogo de saberes*; and *building multi-scale social movement networks*. In this chapter, I argue that while movement praxis addresses the first two pillars, the landworker-farmer division highlighted in Chapter 6 limits dialogue between ways of knowing, impacting transformative potential. I therefore propose building multi-scale *and multi-actor* social movement networks through understanding different forms and stages of learning important for fostering transformations. I offer a framework of *entry*, *deepening*, and *transformative-transgressive* learning, in each case exploring the characteristics of movement spaces which could support these, integrating the concepts of home and coalition spaces developed previously.

8.2 Horizontal Learning

The first pillar of transformative agroecology learning I address is horizontal learning, or horizontality. While Anderson et al. (2018) base their framework on European agroecology networks, an emphasis on horizontality over top-down transmission of knowledge is found across the agroecology literature and is central to La Via Campesina's movement praxis (Chapter 2) (Holt-Giménez 2006; LVC 2017; McCune and Sánchez 2018; Val et al. 2019). These horizontal methodologies are grounded in Freirean critical pedagogy and as such, “transformative agroecology learning can be seen to position learners not as the object of teaching, but rather the subjects of their own process of learning, discovery and agency, as well as participants in the joint production of collective knowledge” (Anderson et al. 2018, p.539). As well as strengthening the learning process through building trust and solidarity amongst learners, this represents a profoundly political approach which aims to democratise knowledge, challenge hierarchies, and develop collective political consciousness (Pimbert 2017a; Val et al. 2019; Dale 2021). This relates to the wider practices of horizontality in prefigurative movements (Polletta and Hoban 2016) and arguments that they develop the powers, drives, and consciousness of participants (Maeckelbergh 2011; Raekstad and Gradin 2019; De Vita and Vittori 2022).

In the political agroecology movement, horizontal or peer-to-peer learning practices were a central component of key movement gatherings like the Land Skills Fair (LSF), farm hacks, and Landworkers' Alliance (LWA) gatherings like the Organisers Assembly (OA). Farmer-to-farmer learning was a key strand of LWA strategy and horizontal learning practices of LWA and farm hack are explicitly inspired by those in Global South movements (Farm Hack Guide Project 2023). In this chapter, I focus mainly on intentional, structured, non-formal learning practices³⁵, but as described in previous chapters, learning and consciousness-building occurs as a part of everyday movement praxis, through collective organising, and the socialising, networking, and collective rituals at

³⁵ By this I refer to practices explicitly recognised as learning practices such as workshops, trainings, peer-to-peer learning groups, webinars, farm tours etc. as I detail in this chapter.

events. In movement spaces, participants freely shared their experience and knowledge, emphasising the idea of knowledge commons through cooperation and solidarity as opposed to the proprietary knowledge and competition within industrial farming (Pimbert 2017a; Cox et al. 2023). This decommodification of education “can open new possibilities for solidarity-based and politicized learning programs that are accessible to all” (Anderson et al. 2019, p. 4). The movement’s learning practices move towards democratising learning and supporting people at various levels of agroecological practice to develop and share their knowledge and forge networks of solidarity, echoing Anderson et al. (2018).

The idea of knowledge commons is most explicit in the farm hack ethos, which is fundamentally against privatisation and commercialisation of knowledge, combining critical pedagogy with an open-source approach. This is a way to challenge the power of Agri-tech companies and empower farmers, as farm hack organiser Jack reflects,

I think building grassroots engineering skills is a really important thing for people to be able to fix their own problems and, in a way, decentralise power. [...] It's an empowering thing to be able to make sure we have those skills within the farming community so that there isn't a sort of monopoly control on the ways of doing things. [...] Farm hack brings a lot of the learning and philosophy and capacity of [the open-source] community into the agroecological farming space, and that whole political program of trying to create an alternative to the enclosures of ideas (Interview).

This open-source ethos connects to the DIY and horizontal approaches described in Chapter 6, where everyone is seen as able to valuably contribute to knowledge.

Within the movement, there were many spaces of learning and types of horizontal learning practices. For instance, as well as larger or multi-day events like conferences, festivals/fairs, farm hacks, and organisational gatherings there were standalone farm or site tours, skill shares, and workshops. Larger events tended to involve a mixture of demonstrations (of a technology or approach), problem-solving and experience-sharing sessions, show and tell sessions, farm/site tours and walks, workshops, build projects, or

hands-on crafting/making sessions, as well as peer-led talks and panel discussions. There were also many online spaces of horizontal learning in the movement. Online peer-to-peer groups, such as those within the Your Farming Future programme³⁶ (YFF), provided regular facilitated video-call sessions to discuss issues in their agricultural practice and learn from one another. Less structured formats include online discussion forums, Facebook and WhatsApp groups, and mailing groups which involved more ad hoc seeking of advice and sharing practice. One group mentioned by several participants was the “UK Organic Market Gardeners” Facebook group, an incredibly active group in which growers of all levels, including well-known figures in the movement, asked questions and freely shared advice. These all point to the cooperative nature of the movement and their approach to knowledge. The value of all these horizontal practices for transformation, as Anderson et al. (2018) identify, lies in how they *strengthen learning experiences, build confidence and capacity, and challenge hierarchy*, as I now explore.

8.2.1 Strengthening learning experiences

As many have argued, horizontal learning practices contrasted to top-down transmission models tend to be more effective at supporting the uptake and development of agroecological practices (Holt-Giménez 2006; Khadse et al. 2017; Bernal et al. 2023). This is seen as both due to the democratisation of knowledge, making learning more accessible and generating new knowledge through collaboration, and the trust and solidarity fostered through horizontalism which increases openness to new ideas and provides routes for continued learning through social networks (Pimbert 2017a; Anderson et al. 2018). As emphasised in previous chapters, the sessions at movement events are mainly volunteered by participants with a spirit of solidarity and collaboration. Events like farm hack have a particularly DIY and horizontal ethos, meaning programming was

³⁶ As mentioned in Chapter 5, the Your Farming Future programme was a six-month DEFRA-funded project in 2022-2023 coordinated by Landworkers’ Alliance along with Organic Research Centre and Pasture for Life. It aimed to support farmers to transition to agroecological practices through a programme of peer-to-peer learning include peer-to-peer groups, farm tours, webinars, and mentoring.

collaboratively produced before and during events with ample open space for sessions to be proposed.

In the Leeds farm hack, for instance, some sessions were proposed by participants prior to the event and a live programme outline was shared. During the event, participants gathered in morning and evening plenaries to propose additional sessions or decide on changes to timings. In this way, the programme is responsive to needs that emerge in the margins of events and participants are empowered to contribute to the group's knowledge. For instance, a growers' problem sharing session, Cara argued in an interview, "sprung up out of the course of discussions, that actually it would just be nice to sit down around the fire and have a chance to just chat through specific problems of the season". In this way, many people participate in the production of knowledge and can learn from one another's experiences to identify and address shared challenges, as is highlighted in the literature on peasant-to-peasant processes (Holt-Giménez 2006; Pan Para el Mundo 2006).

Build projects are another example of democratising knowledge to further agroecological practices. These are fairly particular to farm hacks and involve a group of people working together to design and build a 'hack' - an alternative tool or piece of equipment that can be produced at low cost from available materials to meet a certain need. One example is the carrot flame weeder that farm hack organiser Emma brought as an idea to work on. Over the course of several farm hack events, Emma reported in an interview, a group of participants gathered to convert a wheelbarrow into a tool to weed between carrot rows using fire. Such DIY and open-source approaches run counter to the expensive proprietary technology of industrial agriculture and are well suited to support small-scale, labour-intensive agroecological practices. Many movement events included various hands-on skill-sharing and craft sessions, making the learning of new skills (e.g. fruit tree pruning, tool handle carving, and blacksmithing) accessible for those joining the movement as well as providing spaces for contrasting techniques.

Peer-to-peer discussions from formal sessions then continue during breaks and over meals. Participants expressed that the social elements of events were as important as structured learning sessions because they provide further opportunity for networking and

strengthening social bonds, developing the sense of community and collective identity highlighted in the previous chapter. These social connections allow for landworkers to deepen their learning as “embedding this solidarity in social movements [...] helps sustain the practices in which a ‘solidarity economy of education’ can grow” (Anderson 2019 p.4). As staff member Hazel comments, “I think what LWA does allow is for people to pursue that through the relationships we build so that people who do want to learn more from each other can do”. Similarly, regional organiser Chris observes that,

It's nice to visit other people's farms and see what they're doing and just meeting up, so people get a lot out of that. And maybe the actual location isn't so important. But this just being able to network and meet each other people value a lot, I think (Interview).

This supports my own observations of farm tours and workshops, that the event itself in some ways simply provides a framing and focus for conversation, but the interactions between farmers while walking around a farm or sitting around a fire in the evening is where a lot of knowledge is shared. Further, these conversations lead to ongoing collaboration, particularly when farmers are located close to one another. As McCune and Sánchez (2018) found with peasant-to-peasant learning processes in Guatemala, solidarity among participants helps to build critical mass in an area for continued scaling out of practices, facilitating the development of territorial agroecological food systems.

While online events and forums have the potential to foster social bonds and more informal learning, they are limited by the fact that there is less social time beyond sessions (Van Laer and Van Aelst 2010; Shipman and Vogel 2024). As action learning group (AL) member Carl comments, “it's a lot harder online. I do an event every year that's reasonably big, an organic grains event, and for me the lunch, the lunch is IT. Everything else, it's almost packaging”. And while there are benefits to online learning spaces such as accessibility for those who are unable to leave their farms and connecting people across large distances, they are limited by the fact farming practices and tools cannot be experienced or seen directly. This experiential element was really valued by participants -

the “hands-on” and “practical” element and being exposed to different systems and farmers seeing them with their own eyes.

Observing farms in-person allowed for deeper understanding and inquiry, as AL member Andrew attests,

For me, there's an immense value in [in-person farm tours] in that a lot of growers are just doing their thing and they might have seen something somewhere or adapted something on their own and they might have no idea of the value of it...it's the questions you don't know to ask. When you're just talking to someone, you don't know that they've started bird netting their tunnels in the summer to keep the birds out because the birds are eating the beneficial insects that are keeping the aphids down in their tunnels and they've figured that out. But they don't think to say it to anyone, because that's just what they've done for the last six years, and their crops are doing much better for it (Action learning group).

Andrew’s comment highlights the importance of seeing practices in situ to gain deeper understanding of why farmers and growers make different choices and what their impact is. Without these on-farm peer-to-peer experiences, many innovative practices farmers develop may remain hidden.

Participants explained how they were more likely to take on new knowledge that was learnt through practice, and that farmers were far more convinced and inspired by practices seen in person than simply hearing about them. Farm hack organiser Cara gives the example of Iain Tolhurst’s vegan organic farm: “if someone says, ‘you must do vegan organic growing’, I think they'd have far less influence than just being there, having this really, really nice farm where all the vegetables grow amazingly”. This supports the literature on the farmer-to-farmer methodology which emphasises the importance of learning through doing and the persuasive power of seeing alternative practices on other’s farms with one’s own eyes (Holt-Giménez 2006; Pan Para el Mundo 2006), as well as the literature more broadly on farmer learning and motivation (Roesch-McNally et al. 2017; Sutherland and Marchand 2021). While seeing other farms and forming bonds of solidarity with others contributes to

drives to take on new practices, the active participation in collective knowledge production develops the confidence and capacity, or *powers*, of participants to implement practices (Anderson et al. 2018; Raekstad and Gradin 2019), as I now explore.

8.2.2 Building confidence and capacity

As highlighted earlier, horizontal practices have the potential to build confidence by positioning everyone as able to contribute to collective learning and develop the capacity to implement and scale practices through building skills and networks (Holt-Giménez 2006; Pimbert 2017a; Anderson et al. 2018). This reflects what has been found in relation to the peasant-to-peasant methodology; seeing where another farmer in a similar position has successfully implemented an innovation builds confidence to try things, and being able to teach innovations to other farmers builds self-confidence and encourages further innovation, resulting in a multiplier effect (Holt-Giménez 2006; LVC 2017; Bernal et al. 2023). As AL member Anna argued, visiting lots of different projects and discussing practice with others “makes it like a bit less stressful, it's just like okay everyone's trying to figure it out as they go”. This not only broadens the scope of what is possible but provides reassurance through mutual support. Regional LWA and linked groups were able to organise regular farm tours for members to see different projects and share experiences with each other to build capacity and confidence. The South-West Growers' Group was a particularly established example, organising monthly farm tours which included facilitated discussion and a bring-and-share meal. As one group coordinator explains, “just seeing a tool that you didn't know existed or just like one thing, seeing how someone else's irrigation is set up, it's really, really helpful – particularly for trainees, seeing new farms and gaining knowledge and confidence in the network”. These networks provided ongoing support and opportunities to share experiences, building confidence and capacity, and complementing the horizontal learning practices at larger events.

A good example of an experience-sharing session repeated at several farm hacks and a Land Skills Fair was the “favourite hand tools” session. Participants sit in a circle and go round showing or describing their favourite hand tool, how they use it, where they got it

from, and why they like it. This simple format allows many interesting conversations about agricultural practice to arise. Additionally, problem-solving sessions like the growers' problem sharing session mentioned by Cara at the Wales farm hack provided an opportunity for growers to share challenges they encountered during the season and get advice from others, building confidence and capacity to tackle difficulties. Similarly, in the Your Farming Future peer-to-peer groups many discussions arose around developing resilient businesses through diversification, direct selling, and enterprise stacking, with participants sharing models they had experience of and identifying the potential for regional networks to support labour and machinery sharing or joint marketing. Learning practices additionally focused on movement organising (Chapter 7) through opportunities like those at the OA to collectively reflect on challenges in engaging members and organising events, for instance.

Finally, as noted at the start of this section, challenging the dominance of proprietary technology through democratising knowledge was an important way of developing capacity to address farmer needs and build collective power. In this respect, farm hack session organiser Oliver describes himself as a “cooperativist not a capitalist”, working on open-source tools to “provide the infrastructure so people can build tools themselves so they can address all of these things themselves and thrive”. While another farm hack organiser argued that “where people have got more control and better understanding they can't be abused, there can't be as terrible abuses” and pointed to how dominant tractor manufacturers locked farmers in to service contracts, blocking farmers from the “right to repair” their own tractors (Carolan 2018). This crucially connects to the prefigurative nature of horizontal practices and the ways in which they challenge hierarchies, which I explore next.

8.2.3 Challenging hierarchy

In the previous chapter, I demonstrated how facilitation and organising practices in the movement actively challenge hierarchies and seek to address power inequities. As Anderson et al. (2018) argue, the horizontal learning practices in the agroecology

movement prefigure the values of democracy and equity of food sovereignty. This democratisation of knowledge challenges the distinction between educators or experts and learners, creating spaces for everyone to participate in knowledge production and for dialogue between ways of knowing, as I explore later. For instance, in online forums like the UK Organic Market Gardeners Facebook group, growers of all levels ask for and share advice on an equal basis. In event spaces, this was done through facilitation which created spaces for different voices to be heard. However, as with all aspects of prefiguration, this is a “not not, but not yet” utopian praxis. The horizontal pedagogies promoted in the movement run counter to most people’s previous experiences of educational spaces. Thus, creating genuinely non-hierarchical learning spaces requires continued pedagogical training and guidance, much like the facilitation training offered to member organisers by LWA. In the case of farm hack, this was supported with a guide for session leads which highlighted participatory techniques and inclusivity.

In many respects, the solidarity economy of education produced through horizontal practices leads to a rejection of the authority of “experts”, particularly agricultural professionals such as technicians and extension agents, who agroecologists tended to have little interaction with. This emphasises “knowledge learned and produced from the ground up”, challenging dominant hierarchies of knowledge by reasserting “grounded grassroots perspectives, non-Western epistemologies and pedagogies of struggle” (Choudry 2010, p.31-2). Within the movement, however, there are still recognised peer “experts” or “movement intellectuals” (Eyerman and Jamison 1991) who are able to bring a wealth of experience from their own good practice to share their knowledge, often very freely, with others. For instance, people like internationally renowned Vandana Shiva, as well as well-known UK growers Charles Dowding and Iain Tolhurst, all give their time as activists within the movement to share their knowledge at events like LSF and Oxford Real Farming Conference (ORFC). Movement intellectuals also include those driving the movement building aspects of LWA and similar groups, drawing on inspiration and experience in other movements such as La Via Campesina (LVC), and the Kurdish Freedom Movement. In the next section, I further explore how learning is grounded within

movement organising and connected to wider struggles to combine practical agroecological learning with political education.

8.3 Combining Practical with Political

Anderson et al. (2018) highlight the importance of connecting practical learning about agroecological production with the political project of food sovereignty (p.541), recognising practical learning as a strategic way to draw people into political learning. While broader literature on farmer learning and behaviour change has increasingly emphasised social learning and participatory or farmer-to-farmer extension models (O’Kane et al. 2008; Cristóvão et al. 2012; Lubell et al. 2014; Rose et al. 2018; Shaijumon 2018; FAO 2020), such approaches do not in themselves ensure transformative agroecology learning or necessarily challenge hierarchies in agricultural systems (Cornwall and Pratt 2011; Dooley 2020; Hailemichael and Haug 2020). Agroecology represents a transformative and political paradigm for food system change. Thus, as many agroecology scholars have argued, radical pedagogies which combine practical learning with political education are crucial for transformative agroecology learning (LVC 2017; Anderson et al. 2018; McCune and Sánchez 2018; Val et al. 2019; Dale 2021). As McCune and Sánchez (2018) discuss, consciousness-building and skill-formation – developing both the consciousness and powers of members (Raekstad and Gradin 2019) - has “been at the heart of the educational processes of member organizations of La Via Campesina since the 1990s” (p.595). This involves highlighting “that the socio-ecological crises evident within and beyond the food system are driven by the features of capitalism, as opposed to ‘bugs’ in the system that can be fixed by some tweaks and adjustments” (Dale 2021, p.18), combining the demonstration of socio-economic and socio-technical alternatives with explorations of the ways in which these alternatives challenge and are limited by existing structures of domination.

In the UK political agroecology movement, politics was brought into all types of learning practices, whether as more theoretical workshops and talks or in demonstrating different

farming and food system approaches and contrasting them to dominant approaches, examining the underlying logics of them. Farm hack organiser Noah spoke about the value at farm hack events of “combining social and political organising with real practical outcomes, of learning or going home with a piece of technology that's going to improve your work”. He gives the example of a biochar workshop where he found it “really enlightening to see how somebody that's really passionate about a piece of technology can bring in a whole worldview and political position around equity”. This was true also for farm hack organiser Jack who ran a robot weeder session which “kicked off some really interesting discussions” about current use of robotics in large-scale industrial agriculture and the ethics and value of using them in small-scale organic farming to address the labour demands of cultivation. This led to a further critical group discussion session in an LWA Wales event about the role of technology in small-scale agroecological farming.

As well as learning specifically related to technology, there were many movement learning spaces dedicated to exploring broader political issues such as racism, colonialism, international farmer movements, labour struggles, and food sovereignty. For instance, at the women and non-binary farm hack I participated in a session on food justice and reflected,

There was a very strong and critical food system analysis around the current cost of living crisis. People identified that food aid was propping up an unsustainable system and yet they didn't want sustainable and organic food to just be for the rich. The core issue was fundamental systemic inequalities and it was hard for people to feel like they were just 'tinkering at the edges' rather than addressing the root systemic issues. We identified that the dramatic rise in housing costs has been propped up by the availability of cheap food and the real challenge at the moment to the cost of living is low wages, the excessive cost of housing, and high fuel prices (Research Journal).

This demonstrates the critical reflection in movement spaces around implementing agroecological food systems in the context of systemic inequities and structural constraints of the dominant regime. Additionally, as covered in previous chapters,

movement learning included collective critical reflection on organising practices, tactics, and developing shared discourse.

This combination of practical and political learning resonates with the integration of *technical, organisational, and cosmological* dimensions of cognitive praxis in movements proposed by Eyerman and Jamison (1991) and introduced in Chapter 3. In the political agroecology movement, the cosmological dimension is defined by an ecological worldview combined with anti-capitalist and social justice lenses, encapsulated in their food sovereignty approach. These cosmological interests guide the movement's "utopian mission" (Eyerman and Jamison 1991, p.68) or prefigurative politics, which is then expressed in the movement's technological practices, pedagogy, organisational structures, and culture, as I have demonstrated in previous chapters. The movement's cosmology was developed through learning practices such as workshops on food sovereignty or migrant and worker rights, or the anti-racism training all LWA staff undertook. These then inform the technological dimension of learning, focused on small-scale agroecological practices. Examples of topics from events include, mycorrhizal fungi, agroforestry, crop planning, integrative pest management, heritage grains, and small-scale or "people-powered" machinery. The technological dimension further covers business management and food system models aligned with democracy, social justice, and solidarity economy. For instance, cooperative business models, supporting on-farm training of new entrants, community food projects, direct marketing, and farm business diversification. In the previous chapter, I demonstrated the prefigurative nature of the organisational dimension of the LWA's cognitive praxis. In the wider movement, this was encapsulated in sessions such as developing a People's Food Policy at ORFC, as well as many workshops, gatherings, and forums aimed at developing collaboration, cooperation, and grassroots democratic input towards changing the food system.

The integration of these dimensions observed in the movement reflects the intertwined dimensions of a transformative conception of agroecology as defined in Chapter 2: ecological and techno-productive, socioeconomic, and sociopolitical and cultural (Rivera-Ferre 2018). The political agroecology movement creates spaces to experiment with new

ideas, “social laboratories” for alternative socio-cultural, technical, and economic practices (Eyerman and Jamison 1991, p.93). They provide “societal, or cultural, critiques of dominant techno-economic paradigms” which then shape new paradigms and influence change in wider society (p.93). This connects with the idea of prefigurative “free spaces” or transition “niches” as protected spaces for alternative innovations to develop (Törnberg 2021; López-García et al. 2022; Polletta and Kretschmer 2022). While I have highlighted many examples of how political and practical learning were integrated informally or within the same movement learning spaces, there was still further need to develop methods which systematically and explicitly combine these, echoing the findings of Anderson et al. (2018) in other European agroecology projects. However, the critical development of political ideas and the subsequent influence they have on wider society relies on bringing together diverse perspectives and fostering dialogue between knowledges, as I explore in this next section.

8.4 Diálogo de Saberes

The pillar of diálogo de saberes or dialogue between ways of knowing, challenges the “the monopoly of western, corporate and scientific knowledges” (Anderson et al. 2018, p.537), recognising that multiple situated and valid ways of knowing the world exist and can be brought into dialogue without one dominating another (de Sousa Santos 2014). This connects to literature on sustainability transformations which emphasises the importance of plurality of knowledges and pathways (Scoones et al. 2020) and the role of conflict and engaging diverse viewpoints (Wals and Heymann 2004). Anderson et al. (2018) examine this potential for dialogue amongst food producers, food producers and other actors in the food system, and between farmers and research and education institutions. Similar to their findings, the UK agroecology movement managed to bring together food producers using approaches such as organic, biodynamic, community supported agriculture, agroforestry, and permaculture. Movement learning spaces likewise brought together experienced producers and new entrants and connected those within territories sharing biophysical, cultural and political contexts, such as within the LWA Scotland summer

gathering or South-West Growers Group. They connected people across territories and political contexts, both within the UK and around the world, such as from other LVC member organisations.

While there were some movement learning spaces that were more specifically for food producers, most spaces included people working across the food system as activists, environmentalists, engineers, researchers, and those making change in alternative institutions and NGOs. Farm hack was particularly good at engaging people with different skills and backgrounds to work together on problems. This further reflects the transdisciplinary nature of agroecology (Méndez et al. 2013). As farm hack organiser Jack argued,

We managed to get charcoal makers and renewable energy people, and it's I guess because it crosses a lot of different areas. There were programmers and microelectronic and software engineers through to horticulturalists (Interview).

Land Skills Fair was another space that brought together a wide range of people working across the food system, providing a rich space of learning and exchange across experience levels for landworkers, activists, and others.

In recent years, researchers and education institutions have been actively engaged through the Agroecology Research Collaboration (ARC), an initiative developed by LWA, the Community Supported Agriculture Network UK (CSAN), the Ecological Land Cooperative (ELC), the Organic Growers Alliance (OGA) and Pasture for Life (PFL) to support and direct research efforts to ensure they address the needs of agroecological producers. In addition, researchers with more activist engagement in the movement would interact with food producers in general movement spaces. At the same time, there is clear recognition of the power dynamics between researchers and landworkers both epistemically (Coolsaet 2016; Pimbert 2017b) and in terms of funding (Kepkiewicz et al. 2017), and work done to counter these inequities to valorise the knowledge of farmers and value their time participating in projects, for instance through farmer-led field trials. The LWA has further engaged with education institutions, such as Black Mountains College in

South Wales and Apricot Centre in Devon, to influence the development of formal and non-formal courses to support landworkers, particularly new entrants.

These instances provide good examples for how multi-scale movement networks support horizontal dialogue between knowledges. However, returning to the divisions highlighted in Chapter 6, one critical area not highlighted by Anderson et al. (2018) where dialogue was lacking is between agroecological landworkers and mainstream farmers. While movement learning spaces brought together producers with varying levels of experience, contexts, and different approaches like organic and biodynamic, they tended to share a relatively similar culture and worldview. As farm hack organiser Liam commented of participants, “generally it's people very much behind the idea of agroecology and who probably have a reasonable knowledge of that or certainly their outlook would align with that” whereas “it seems very few sort of normal farmers, industrialised farmers, if any, at any of the events”. This lack of opportunity for dialogue between agroecologists and those embedded in more industrial practices clearly limits the potential for scaling out agroecology and was discussed as a challenge by many participants. Regional LWA organiser Emma felt that in movement spaces like the ORFC it often felt like participants were “preaching to the choir” and organisations were “talking to themselves” rather than “talking to the conventional farmers who need to change”. Whereas in countries where the *campesino-a-campesino* methodology has been successful in territorialising agroecology, interactions between farmers with agroecological practices and others in their region who have more conventional practices are central to its transformative potential (Holt-Giménez 2002; Rosset et al. 2011).

For the many farmers who seek to transition from industrial practices, peer-to-peer contact opportunities which expose them to viable alternatives are valuable but scarce (Roesch-McNally et al. 2017; Padel et al. 2020). As arable farmer James shared, when you are “in your own farming bubble that you have around you, you can't, you don't have access to anything else. Like you just see tunnel vision, blinkers”. Without interaction with others who are implementing alternatives, industrial practices may remain relatively unchallenged and be challenging to see beyond (Ingram 2018; Padel et al. 2018). From the

other perspective, agroecological landworkers, particularly new entrants, could benefit from the knowledge and experience of established farmers, even if their current experience is connected to industrial practices. As AL member Beth reflects,

There's opportunities for exchange with people who are in current farms, there's a lot of knowledge with farming communities who do large-scale farming around systems that could be useful for agroecology. I think we get caught in people being good and bad and people being in the right camp and the wrong camp and pitting people against each other. And I think it's more grey and complex and there's room for exchange there, potentially, within this cross-pollination and the different ways of doing things (Action learning group).

As Beth highlights, there is opportunity for mutual learning and “cross-pollination” of ideas if there is openness to engaging rather remaining stuck in adversarial dynamics. Such dialogue can provide opportunities to understand farmer’s needs and reasons for engaging in conventional practices.

Wals and Heymann (2004) speak of grassroots sustainability, contrasted to top-down sustainability, as coming from deep interaction across a broad range of actors and involving active, empowered citizens. This inevitably involves conflict, they argue, but “cultivating these conflicts and making them forces for conceptual change and creative problem-solving” (p.129) will enable solutions that people can identify with and take up as their own. Currently, as agroecological and conventional worlds remain somewhat siloed in the UK there are limited spaces for this mutual exchange and understanding (Ingram 2018). As argued here and in previous chapters, the movement includes many types of prefigurative home spaces which develop critical consciousness and a sense of community for participants. However, to foster wider societal transformations, there is a need for more heterogeneous coalition spaces where contentious politics can arise and be held and navigated well to support horizontal dialogue between conflicting perspectives (Marin et al. 2016; Pereira et al. 2018; van Zwanenberg et al. 2018; Scoones et al. 2020). This supports Skrimizea et al. (2020) who argue, based on extensive literature review and range of case studies, that deeply understanding and proactively addressing

conflicts between goals and actors in agrifood systems is central to achieving a transformed and sustainable agriculture. A good example of this was the Your Farming Future (YFF) programme, which brought together small-scale and medium-scale farmers who were interested in taking on more agroecological practices.

James, who had been a conventional arable producer, spoke about the value of the YFF programme and diversity of participants in exposing him to different approaches he would not have otherwise encountered. A particularly transformative experience for him came through a moment of conflict with an organic farmer in an online peer-to-peer group session:

So, Laura was very much into agri-environment schemes and we had a quite, not heated conversation, but I was going to her, how do you make money? I said, I can't make it add up. If I could make it add up, surely, I would be doing more for nature? But no, I'm farming right up to the hedge and I'm doing everything that you just said a minute ago that you don't like [...] Without that programme there, if I'd seen her in person I'd have walked off. But because we were put then in a breakout room, we actually had a chat about it and we met in the middle. So, it was someone that if I would have heard them speak to me in a webinar, I would have gone and turned it off. Just thought, ah, even though you're a farmer, you're bashing the way I farm, and I don't like it. But to actually have a conversation with them is a lot more valuable than just turning a blind eye to it. So, it was an uncomfortable moment, but I think sometimes it takes that. And it was only like 30 seconds of, oh god, we'd better talk about this, and then we were fine! (Interview).

The experience James describes and his wider participation in the programme can be seen as a “trigger event”, initiating a process of behaviour change towards more sustainable practice (Sutherland et al. 2012). James underwent a big transformation of perspectives within the 6-month programme, which he mainly attributed to the online peer-to-peer groups which I facilitated as a staff member of LWA at the time in line with their peer-to-peer approach. He transitioned to mixed farming, put a field in herbal ley, and moved away from the use of fertilisers. In particular, his experience speaks to the value of facilitated

horizontal dialogue between farmers with conflicting worldviews, the dynamics and conditions of which I further explore in the next section.

Research participants further highlighted the importance of engaging with other food system actors such as those working with industrial farmers or otherwise engaged in the food system. “Because it's not just the farmers”, regional LWA organiser Leah argues, “it's the people who are around the farmers talking about whether a particular strategy for managing a farm is viable or not, right?”. It’s about “what is common sense and what is a reasonable thing to do”, Leah continues, “and I think that they don't see what we do as common sense”. In other words, if the perspectives of agroecological landworkers are lacking in these spaces, then the status quo is less likely to be challenged. This is not to say there is no interaction - for instance, LWA campaigners sit on consultation groups and food system panels – but that these interactions occur mainly within the framing of the dominant regime rather than the movement’s own learning practices, where they could be supported by the horizontality that encourages mutual learning and challenges hierarchies (Anderson et al. 2018).

Developing opportunities for learning between actors in the food system to foster mutual learning and perspective transformation is not simple. Firstly, challenging dominant paradigms and shifting actor’s worldviews often meets resistance, not least in the context of industrial farmers where their livelihoods are at risk, and such dialogues need to be held skilfully (Lotz-Sisitka et al. 2017; Pereira et al. 2018; van Zwanenberg et al. 2018).

Secondly, as Scoones et al. (2020) remind us in relation to sustainability transitions, “engaging with a diversity of contexts or a plurality of perspectives is always deeply political” (p.70). Opening up spaces of learning between agroecological landworkers and others poses risks “as the positionality of different actors implies intersecting and uneven relations of power” (Anderson et al. 2018, p.543). For instance, farmer knowledge is often subjugated by professional academic knowledge (Coolsaet 2016; Pimbert 2017b) and those promoting small-scale agroecological technologies are contending with “conforming” approaches which do little to challenge the dominant regime but have far more financial backing and lobbying power (Vanloqueren and Baret 2009; CIDSE 2020).

Another aspect of power relations is that more conventional farmers were experienced as being less interested in, or even oppositional to, efforts to address social justice issues in the sector (Chapter 6). The dynamics around biocultural and agricultural knowledge are also hugely complex (Shepherd 2010; Coolsaet 2016; Brown et al. 2020). On the one hand, there are differences between long-term place-embedded family farmers and young university-educated incomer new entrants (Willis and Campbell 2004; Hetherington 2006; Calo 2020). On the other hand, there are histories of colonisation and urbanisation which have led to a loss of biocultural knowledge for many and a desire to connect to different ideas of heritage or cultivate sense of place in different ways (McGreevy 2012b; Banton-Heath 2020; Brent 2022). As mentioned already, some movement activists feared diluting the movement's politics through engaging with conventional farmers, though most still acknowledged the necessity of engagement to transform the food system. However, constructing opportunities for dialogue and mutual learning that cross over and span beyond the movement's "bubble" requires further development of multi-scale and multi-actor social movement networks (Anderson et al. 2018), as I consider in this final section.

8.5 Building Multi-Scale Social Movement Networks

While the other pillars of transformative agroecology learning describe key processes by which agroecology can be scaled out, these ultimately rely on the coordinated grassroots action of organisations and networks at different scales bringing people together for collective activities (Anderson et al. 2018, p.542). For transformative agroecology learning to provide the "connective tissue" between food sovereignty and agroecological practice, Anderson et al. (2018) argue, there is a need to embed it in organisational development strategy and resource the systematisation of praxis (p.544). In the LWA, supporting multi-scale farmer-to-farmer learning is explicit in organisational strategy and through the development of member-led groups at different levels. However, in contrast to the large-scale implementation of campesino-a-campesino methodology connecting thousands of farmers across territories in structured learning and experimentation (Rosset et al. 2011; Khadse et al. 2017), these efforts are still relatively haphazard and unstructured. The Your

Farming Future (YFF) programme had the resources and collaboration with other organisations that enabled it to reach out to a wider audience of farmers and deliver a systematised programme of peer-to-peer learning. However, as a six-month pilot project, it had not provided sufficient time to build strong and dense regional networks to ensure learning between farmers with different approaches could scale out across territories.

Just as collaboration with other organisations enabled LWA to broaden its reach to a wider range of farmers, multi-actor networks within the political agroecology movement and beyond it have the potential to create spaces for building solidarity and fostering dialogue between differently positioned actors in the food system. However, countering the potential power inequities in these interactions and facilitating dialogues between contending perspectives relies on establishing “mutually agreed upon protocols and pedagogies based on horizontalism” (Anderson et al. 2018, p.543). The importance of this can be seen in the case of ORFC which brings together a wide range of food system actors and has begun to attract those previously attending Oxford Farming Conference (OFC). Due to the broad range of sessions running concurrently which predominantly take a more top-down learning style despite often being peer-led, several research participants commented that it is easy for attendees to only engage with those sessions they are already interested in and stop listening when they encounter perspectives they do not agree with. As AL member Anna argued, “it was just so clear that people just went for one stream or the other stream”. While there is still huge value in the range of perspectives brought together at ORFC, without a more horizontal pedagogy across the conference and explicit intention towards facilitating challenging dialogues amongst participants, a lot of potential for transformative learning is lost.

As I have argued in Chapters 6 and 7, the different home spaces within the political agroecology movement are incredibly valuable for supporting agroecological innovation and mobilisation. These can be in symbiotic relation to social spaces in the wider movement, interacting to generate various coalitional movement spaces vital for broadening the impact of movement praxis. Thus, in considering learning for agroecology transformations, I wish to highlight the importance of a diversity of learning spaces with

different characteristics. To integrate these in a framework for transformative agroecology learning, I build upon the work of Anderson et al. (2018) by distinguishing types of learning in terms of their role in fostering agroecology transformations and developing agroecological practice at different stages. Within the movement, I identified three main types of learning: *entry*, *deepening*, and *transformative-transgressive* (see Table 5). In the remainder of this section, I outline these in terms of their aims, the types of spaces that best enable them, and dynamics to be considered to facilitate such learning. I highlight resonance with the substantial literature on farmer education and behaviour change (Percy 2005; Sutherland et al. 2012; Ingram 2018; Burton et al. 2020; Cooreman et al. 2021), but I develop this framework to specifically consider collective learning embedded in social movements, engaging with wider sustainability and education literatures.

Table 5. Types of learning for agroecology transformations

	Entry	Deepening	Transformative-Transgressive
<i>Aim</i>	Introduction to practice and ideas, motivating continued participation	Developing practices and ideas, embedding in place and movement culture	Transforming underlying perspectives and transgressing social norms and structures
<i>Spaces</i>	Coalition spaces (large heterogenous spaces) and home spaces (diversity in experience levels)	Home spaces (generally smaller spaces, high degree of commonality, and relevance)	Home and coalition spaces (diversity of perspectives important)
<i>Dynamics</i>	Welcoming Accessible language	Developing peer facilitation skills Shared aims and culture	Developing solidarity, trust, community Brave spaces Skilful facilitation Sufficient commonality and boundary setting

8.5.1 Aim of Learning Practices

Here I outline the aim of each type of learning and explore the ways they contribute to scaling agroecology. The aim of *entry learning* is the introduction of new practices and ideas. It can be most clearly seen with new entrants and others entering the agroecology movement from a place of relative openness to learning new skills and ideas. It does not involve the deep challenging of existing worldviews but can entail exposure to new framings and concepts. Many larger events involved this kind of learning, exposing people to new methods, concepts, projects, and awareness of relevant policies. Facilitating this kind of learning is important so that new people can enter the movement and food system actors are aware of different practices and ideas, feeling inspired and connected to them enough to then want to deepen their understanding. *Deepening learning* entails moving from more basic understanding of practices and approaches to develop the experience and knowledge necessary to implement them effectively. As highlighted earlier, regional farm tours and online peer-to-peer learning groups enable this more in-depth learning to occur, where specific questions can be asked and detailed knowledge shared or developed collectively. However, while deepening learning goes more into the detail and embedded practice of developing alternatives, it is *transformative-transgressive* learning that is critical for progressing an explicitly political agroecology and bridging between different positions through challenging and shifting worldviews.

Transformative learning, introduced in Chapter 2, is an educational theory describing “a deep shift in perspective during which habits of mind become more open, more permeable, and better justified” (Cranton and Taylor 2011, p.194). Transformative learning is brought about when an individual or group encounter a perspective which is at odds with their existing frames of reference, causing these to be unsettled and reconfigured to encompass the new perspective (Mezirow 1997). It relies on critical individual and collective reflection but also engages emotion, imagination, and intuition (Mezirow 1996; Dirkx 2006; Burns 2015). In the context of sustainability transformations, authors have further called for “transgressive learning” which “is about exposing marginalization, exploitation, dehumanization and other forms of systemic unsustainability, and disrupting

the powers and structures that work towards maintaining it” (Peters and Wals 2016, p.185).

Together, transformative-transgressive learning, or T-learning, is defined as “a regenerative, conflictive and hopeful process which involves diversity and drives changes in stubborn cultural practices and identities for sustainability, and triggers change for sustainability in times of (dis)comfort at different levels, scales and in spaces” (James and Macintyre 2017). In the agroecology movement’s context, this is most present in learning practices challenging systems of power, such as workshops on racism and colonialism, and peer-to-peer groups that bring together diverse actors with different agricultural approaches and worldviews. However, once perspectives are transformed, entry and deepening learning are still needed to enable people to translate these into action. This has some resonance with the cycle of farm management decision-making described by Sutherland et al. (2012) whereby farmers experience a “trigger event” involving realisation of the necessity of system change (t-learning), which is then followed by assessment of potential options (entry learning), and implementation and consolidation of new practices (deepening learning).

To further demonstrate the importance of all three types of collective learning within agroecology transformations, I explore their impact in relation to different aspects of scaling agroecology (Mier y Terán et al. 2018; Nicol 2020). Entry learning can drive scaling out by supporting more people to engage with the agroecology movement and broadening awareness of different practices and agroecological experiences. It can contribute to scaling up by creating more entry-level spaces for policy makers, those working in institutions, and a broad range of food system actors to be exposed to agroecological ideas. Deepening learning can contribute to all three dimensions of scaling. It supports scaling out through advancing the practical implementation of agroecology and increasing the complexity of agroecological farm and food systems. These more developed systems provide persuasive examples and concrete models for real institutional and political solutions from the ground up, i.e. scaling up. Deepening learning further develops the strength of grassroots networks and movement organisations through deep organisational

learning, supporting both scaling out and scaling up. Finally, it involves the embedding of practices and ideas in place, rooting them in culture, and thus contributing to scaling deep.

Transformative-transgressive learning, on the other hand, ensures all of scaling processes are carried out in a way which challenges inequities and disrupts dominant systems. It ensures that scaling out is inclusive and done with an awareness of structural barriers and unequal power dynamics which limit broader participation in agroecological systems. For scaling up, it ensures processes of institutionalising agroecology are truly driven by the grassroots, mindful of risks of co-optation and dilution and aware of vested interests of certain actors. In terms of scaling deep, it drives the cultural transformation necessary to unsettle the current industrial food system and replace it with diverse agroecological systems based on fundamentally different values.

As I have discussed, all of these types of learning can be present for the different dimensions (cosmological, technological, organisational) of learning (Eyerman and Jamison 1991). For instance, an example of entry level cosmological learning could be an “Introduction to Agroecology” talk at Land Skills Fair. Whereas deepening learning would likely occur at a workshop amongst LWA Cymru members about the meaning of food sovereignty in the Welsh context. And finally, transformative cosmological learning could be facilitated by a workshop on the history of land justice or a diverse farmer-to-farmer learning group discussing the meaning of the term sustainability and the differences between regenerative and agroecology. While some formats and topics are more likely to foster certain types of learning, it is also quite personal and relational based on the experience and prior worldviews of participants (Kilgore 1999; Illeris 2014; Buechner et al. 2020). It is therefore not just the content, but the setting, group heterogeneity, and socio-cultural dynamics of collective learning practices that determine whether they support or limit the possibility of different types of learning, as I explore across the next two sections.

8.5.2 Characterising Spaces for Learning

As emphasised throughout this chapter, a critical dynamic to consider in understanding the outcome of learning practices is the heterogeneity of participants. Heterogeneity, or diversity, can be considered in multiple interconnected realms, e.g. social location, worldview, agricultural approach, agricultural context and sector, skills, motivation, and experience. These individual dimensions are in constant interplay with social collective dimensions, shaping one another (Kilgore 1999; Blunden 2014). As Blunden (2014) explains in regards to transformative activist learning,

Individuals always act together in pursuit of their common goals, being inescapably bound by communal bonds and resources, yet each individual acts from a unique socio-historical position (standpoint) and with a unique commitment (endpoint), though always coordinated and aligned with the social projects/practices to which this commitment contributes (p.65).

Kilgore (1999) identifies individual components of collective learning as including identity, consciousness, sense of agency, sense of worthiness, and sense of connectedness, whereas group components include collective identity, group consciousness, solidarity and organisation, where organisation refers to features like group size, format, and member roles (p.196-7). I have explored in Chapters 6 and 7 how participation of activists is driven by both individual identities and desires and the prefigurative practices and solidarity they encounter in the movement. Similarly, mainstream farmers consider both their own contexts and values, and are shaped by the norms and practices of their communities (Burton et al. 2020).

To understand collective learning, Kilgore (1999) extends Vygotsky's (1978) concept of Zone of Proximal Development, the space between an individuals' actual and potential developmental level, to groups to examine the role of diversity. Rather than an individual's social interaction with more capable others enabling their development, Kilgore (1999) poses that "each participant has different socioculturally developed understandings to contribute to the collective learning process" and thus collective development is fostered

by diversity of individuals and interaction (p.198). While they argue for the necessity of diversity and conflict for collective learning, they recognise the importance of solidarity amongst group members, as well as explicitly situating learning within a vision of social justice. Thus, there are different types of diversity and also boundaries to establish to ensure diversity and conflict is generative for agroecology transformations. For instance, a degree of commonality and relevance is important for learning to be engaged with and applied by farmers (Dooley 2020; Alexopoulos et al. 2021; Cooreman et al. 2021). These limits are different for the different types of learning I proposed.

For entry learning, participants suggested that it is often valuable for people to learn in settings with others with more experience and knowledge. This is most useful in large heterogenous groups, coalition spaces, where people can be exposed to a wider variety of experiences like Land Skills Fair or ORFC, or in activities that are led by the experience sharing of an individual or group who are recognised to be bringing knowledge on a topic, such as a talk or farm tour. However, a degree of shared values and interests is still important to motivate participation and ensure it is relevant. For instance, YFF participant Olivia expressed that meeting other “like-minded” people on the programme “who wanted to explore in a similar way” had been “fascinating”, despite being at “different stages of this kind of exploration”. This highlights the exploratory nature of entry learning which then leads to deeper learning where relevance is more important.

Entry learning can happen in smaller peer-to-peer groups, i.e. home spaces, if those with less experience and knowledge are few so they can learn from the group’s knowledge without negatively impacting learning of other members. Your Farming Future peer-to-peer group member Paul described how in the horticulture group as there was low turnout and most participants were very new to horticulture, “there was potentially a bit of a divide, in that there were people who had knowledge and there were people who were seeking knowledge and then it became a sort of a free advice session for those who didn’t have knowledge and not that much value to those who have the knowledge”. This detracted from mutual peer-to-peer support for the more experienced grower in the group. Whereas, in James’ experience as an arable farmer in the red meat group, which was predominantly

made up of experienced farmers, he explained how he “didn't know anything about sheep, anything about livestock” and so “it was great to have that access to people I don't know, and I can ask a silly question”, while the peer learning in the group still remained beneficial for others. This raises another issue of feeling comfortable to ask questions without judgement, which I will return to.

Deepening learning on the other hand was seen as mainly supported by having far more commonality in the context and approach of participants, i.e. home spaces, so learning is relevant and specific. This includes having similar values, biophysical and economic contexts (e.g. soil type, weather, local markets and policies), agricultural sector, and scale. For instance, farm hack organisers noted how the technologies developed are usually focused on small-scale horticulture and would not be relevant for larger scale commercial farmers. Whereas farm hack organiser Emma explained the value for herself of brainstorming solutions to problems and getting to “collaborate and geek out on technical fixes for things with other people who also care about that”. Further, YFF peer-to-peer group participants spoke a lot about how “the value is in the relevance of the other people”. This is particularly important around scale and agricultural context as agroecology is so place embedded. For instance, one participant was a highland sheep farmer and found the solutions discussed by other participants who were lowland were not applicable for them.

Generally, smaller peer-to-peer settings such as farm tours, workshops, peer-to-peer groups, and the social interactions surrounding these, provide the opportunities farmers need to explore practices and principles in relation to their own contexts and seek support and advice to further their practice and understanding. However, in some cases larger groups like online forums were valuable for sharing specific advice and exploring challenges. Here, the commonality tended to come through agricultural practice and context. For example, AL member Anna describes the UK Organic Market Gardeners Facebook group as an “expansive community that's really dedicated that you can ask like super minutiae questions, that's like really welcoming of beginners, and that also people who are 15 years into their growing career post questions”. Due to the group's size and

specificity, it is able to be a valuable space for navigating day-to-day production issues for people with varying experience. These deepening learning spaces are generally akin to “free spaces” or “niches” which, as relatively protected and bounded spaces, provide opportunity to develop alternative socio-technical innovations away from the pressure of the dominant system (Törnberg 2021; Polletta and Kretschmer 2022).

Finally, transformative-transgressive learning was seen to occur in both relatively heterogenous or homogenous groups, both home and coalition. What was often important was a sense of connection and trust, as well as a relative degree of openness to change which enable participants to step into the discomfort of challenging their worldviews, as others have highlighted (Percy 2005; Ryman et al. 2009; Buechner et al. 2020). In relatively homogenous groups this can come through the commonality in social locations and/or perspectives. The challenging perspectives are brought to the group either by group members who have already transformed their frames of reference, collective inquiry sometimes using external materials, or intentionally bringing in someone external with a different perspective to facilitate collective learning, for instance in the case of LWA’s anti-racism training for staff. This agrees with literature on the campesino-a-campesino methodology in which farmer-promoters who have developed agroecological practices bring their experience to other farmers in their regions who share similar contexts and challenges and then can learn together (Holt-Giménez 2006; Pan Para el Mundo 2006). There is trust and openness to the farmer-promoter’s example and other peers as they are coming from a similar context. Cooreman et al. (2021) similarly highlights the importance of relevant real-life examples for transformative peer learning. In the UK movement, one example discussed by participants was a well-known arable farmer who had “made the jump” to agroecology from “chasing yield” and was seen to be more relatable and inspiring for other conventional farmers.

In more diverse groups, participants learn often through conflict over different perspectives as “social actors not only stand in opposition to other social actors, but also produce meaning in the face of conflict” (Kilgore 1999, p.199). Having different contexts

and approaches challenges participants perspectives of what is possible YFF participant James explained,

It's just so many different....they're from different walks of life. We had Mark who was a vet which was really interesting to see his point of view and then he was farming on the side and then a vet full time. And then Terry for one with the 20 acres and doing so much on a small plot, and I could not dream of doing that on a 20-acre field that we have because that's....I only know efficiency, efficiency, and big machinery (Interview).

In the context of James' group, participants were diverse in terms of scale, agricultural approach (conventional, organic etc.), and context which provided plenty of opportunities for challenging existing frames of reference, including the conflictual interaction with the organic farmer described earlier. However, participants still held sufficient commonality in that they were all seeking to learn and share practice around livestock farming and they all recognised the need to change practice, despite being at different stages of agroecological transition. Thus, for more heterogenous groups, the dialogue between a diversity of positions and knowledges opens up the possibility for significant shifts in consciousness. In these cases, fostering relationships of trust and solidarity and facilitating critical reflection are particularly crucial, as I explore more in the next section.

8.5.3 Dynamics of Collective Learning

As has been highlighted throughout this chapter, horizontal pedagogies have the potential to strengthen learning processes, support dialogue between diverse perspectives, and empower actors to take individual and joint action. However, facilitating the types of learning outlined involves consideration of group dynamics and organisation, as others have identified (Kilgore 1999; Bos et al. 2013; Buechner et al. 2020; Brookfield 2022). For entry learning, while actors approach with relative openness, this can change if a space is not perceived as welcoming. Spaces with strong collective identity and group culture can be alienating for those coming from outside and there can be a sense of being an

“imposter” or experiencing a group as “cliquey” (Chapter 6). Supporting entry learning thus requires a certain degree of cultivating social connections and inclusion in the collective identity of a space, motivating continued engaged and possibility of deepening learning. Where there are existing social ties or shared language in a group, it is useful to be mindful of how this excludes newcomers and not take key terms or practices for granted. Thus, entry learning was observed in many cases to occur in spaces where there was less of a cohered group identity, strong social connections, and sub(culture) or where actors entering already shared the group’s culture.

For deepening learning, fostered largely in home spaces, it was the collective identity and social connections that were important for facilitating learning. As LWA coordinator commented, it is “forming friendships which then enable the deeper learning” providing networks for joint action and mutual support. In larger spaces, such as online forums, this is encouraged by marking out the group’s boundaries by making it specific to agricultural approaches and contexts and providing a niche space for innovation development (Ingram 2018). Facilitating spaces of deepening learning thus involves the cultivation of shared aims and group culture, as described in Chapter 7. Such learning is supported by having ample time for peer discussion of issues and experience sharing, whether in a farm tour, problem-solving session, or ongoing communication such as WhatsApp groups. As AL member Anna emphasised, farm tours over a “nice, relaxed afternoon” offer the “chance to discuss and to ask questions and to get a sense of the motivations behind things and how people balanced different choices”. Further, due to the commonality of participants these spaces are more likely to be self-managed and peer led. Therefore, as emphasised in section 8.2.3, it is important to develop skills of participants to facilitate participatory and horizontal learning to get the most out of peer-to-peer learning. As I have demonstrated throughout this chapter, this type of learning was particularly strong in the agroecology movement, as was entry learning for new entrants who already have a degree of alignment with movement values, reflecting the strength of prefigurative home spaces. The challenges outlined in Chapter 6 and in relation to diálogo de saberes in this chapter, point to the need for further consideration around how to cultivate movement spaces for

entry and transformative-transgressive learning where cultural norms and perspectives of participants differ more substantially, i.e. relatively coalitional spaces.

For participants to engage in transformative-transgressive learning they need to “overcome learning barriers in the form of defence or resistance” (p.159) and in both more homogenous and more heterogenous groups, they need to be motivated to commit to the work of transforming their frames of references (Illeris 2014). This ties into individual components like sense of identity and agency as well as consciousness, i.e. recognising there are systems of oppression in the food system or acknowledging the limits of industrial farming. These individual components are shaped by and shape the group components through a sense of solidarity and group identity motivating and supporting change, and by being inspired by the example of others (Kilgore 1999; Illeris 2014). Fostering friendships, community, and a sense of belonging is particularly important as the demand of learning is much higher and poses more of a risk to our sense of identities which brings negative and positive social consequences (Illeris 2014; Buechner et al. 2020; Macintyre et al. 2020; Gallegos et al. 2022; Seehawer et al. 2022).

Individuals need to feel valued by other group members and safe to share differing opinions and experiences without judgement (Mudokwani and Mukute 2019). Without this, they can become alienated from the group and collective learning process or resistant to collective learning and changing practice due to loyalty to other groups perceived as in opposition (Kilgore 1999; Illeris 2014). This was recognised by research participants as the social exclusion farmers face when they start to farm differently, or the feeling of being excluded or judged for being seen to have not transformed sexist or racist perspectives, for instance. YFF group member Paul spoke about the “camaraderie” in the group that came from working with others seeking change and recognised that for many farmers, “it can be quite a lonely thing if you're trying to do something that not necessarily everybody around you is doing”. Similarly, James spoke about the importance of meeting people outside of his local area where he had felt more unable to share failures and challenges for fear of judgement or the risk of competition (Padel et al. 2018; Wojtynia et al. 2023), whereas the peer-to-peer group created a safe and open space for him and others to share their

challenges and seek advice. He further spoke about the value of relative anonymity in the online sessions and speaking face-to-face in a sense that felt more exposing to share on the group WhatsApp.

As already emphasised, for such diversity to be generative learning spaces must be facilitated well to create a space for respectful dialogue and openness to different perspectives (Percy 2005; Mudokwani and Mukute 2019; Scoones et al. 2020; Cooreman et al. 2021; Gallegos et al. 2022). Work is needed to create “the conditions and spaces needed for deep engagement across difference, engagement that can lead to transformation in our understandings of our social identities” (Gallegos et al. 2022, p.412). This requires skilful facilitation and container setting to ensure different voices are heard, a “brave space” is fostered, and solidarity is built (Arao and Clemens 2013). The cultural aspect of facilitation and learning spaces demand attention, recognising the cultural differences highlighted in Chapter 6. For instance, when facilitating the YFF peer-to-peer groups and farm tours I quickly realised that there was slight discomfort and resistance to heavily facilitated and structured activities amongst farmers. These were perceived as “too much like school” another LWA organiser commented. In LWA and related movement spaces, on the other hand, participants responded well to strong facilitation, structured participatory activities, and spiritual practices and social justice narratives. In comparison, my facilitation of the YFF groups was more “light touch”, I reflected. It was about creating a structure to guide conversation around farmers’ interests and provide smaller or larger group opportunities for people to share their experiences in a relatively safe environment.

While creating safe and supportive spaces is important there needs to be the recognition that with diversity comes conflict and spaces will feel more or less safe for different people depending on their context. Arao and Clemens (2013) invite us instead to move from safe spaces to “brave spaces” that “emphasize the need for courage rather than the illusion of safety” and “more accurately reflect the nature of genuine dialogue regarding these challenging and controversial topics”. AL member Anna similarly spoke about the “courage” and “collective audaciousness” needed to build relationships with conventional

farmers and have mutual exchange while standing strong in their agroecological position. They acknowledged that they were a bit “scared of conventional farmers” and that within the movement “there's a tendency to be like, ‘I'll just get on with my thing’”. At the same time, group member Andrew highlighted that while “farmers in the UK are very trusting of other farmers, they're not very interested in other folk, especially people who might have come from an urban environment and are 'playing in the countryside’” and that it can be “quite an insular community to gain access to”. Similarly, YFF participant James spoke several times in our interview about pushing through discomfort and a fear of judgement to engage with people with opposing perspectives. This all highlights the important role social movement organisations can have in creating facilitated spaces for these dialogues.

8.5.4 Strategically Building Diverse Learning Networks

Developing spaces within and on the movement peripheries to foster different types of learning requires a strategic consideration of the value of both home and coalition. Creating stronger linkages between these to build diverse multi-scale learning networks can facilitate learning processes for different types of actors that cycle between the entry, deepening, and transformative-transgressive learning needed for agroecology transformations. This means being aware of the role that different movement spaces play in fostering different forms of learning. For instance, LWA staff Divya recognised in our interview that spaces like Groundswell and the Soil Association’s conference provided more opportunity to go into depth on particular practices and everyday farm management, specific to regenerative and organic respectively, whereas ORFC involved more “headline stuff”, introducing participants to different practices, projects, or ideas. Having a diversity of spaces provides opportunities for actors to access learning relevant to them. For instance, Pasture for Life (PfL) provides a home for medium or large-scale livestock farmers while nature friendly farming network is more accessible to farmers whose entry point is around biodiversity but may be put off by the LWA’s culture. As a small-scale organic farmer, YFF participant Olivia felt more drawn to LWA as they “were really looking at the agents of change and being very experimental” whereas she viewed PfL as “too

much orientated towards persuading larger farms to change” and less suited to her. The framework presented here offers an initial tool to assess how transformative agroecology learning (including entry, deepening, and transformative-transgressive learning) is enabled in different movement spaces to develop appreciation of the wider movement ecosystem and identify where there are gaps and opportunities for collaboration.

For change to happen and the dominance of industrial agriculture to be challenged, transformative-transgressive learning in particular is required to bridge between home spaces. This engages “the idea of learning on the edges and associated boundary crossing where diversity becomes generative” (Peters and Wals 2016, p.184). Collaboration between organisations and networks with sufficient shared interests but different cultures and focuses can enable these boundary-crossing learning spaces (Engeström and Sannino 2010; Ingram et al. 2015; Hubeau et al. 2021). For examples, the YFF programme allowed LWA to extend beyond their reach to engage medium-scale livestock and mixed crop-livestock farmers by working with other organisations and through the platform provided by DEFRA funding. A new space was created where learning and culture could be specifically targeted to support the agroecological transition of these farmers without changing or risking the LWA home learning spaces. At the same time, it provided that link which meant participating farmers were then more open to LWA and movement spaces associated with them.

As highlighted in Chapter 3, however, care needs to be taken in coalition building recognising the need “to be acutely sensitive to the political opportunities and costs, social-cultural context and the current state of a particular system” that shape the possibility of such interactions (Scoones et al. 2020, p.70). This will determine the boundaries of different spaces and the breadth of diversity that feels worth it for differently placed movement actors. For instance, just as campesino-a-campesino approaches tend to focus on changing the practice of small-scale family farmers rather than engaging big agri-business, the YFF project reached just beyond the boundaries of the existing organisations’ audience to engage medium-scale farmers with an interest in agroecological transition. Relating this back to Vygostky’s Zone of Proximal Development,

each individual can learn beyond their current development level through interaction with diverse others, but this zone has limits for learning to be supportive. Within the movement, horizontal and political learning processes are supporting more people to step into agriculture and strengthening agroecological practices and movement praxis based on political agroecology. As we create more spaces for diálogo de saberes through coalitional spaces, a broader range of diverse learning processes are made possible supporting both individual farm transitions and collective action to foster agroecology transformations.

8.6 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I used Anderson et al.'s (2018) transformative agroecology learning framework to evaluate the political agroecology movement's collective learning practices. My findings support and extend Anderson et al.'s (2018) framework, contributing further empirical evidence, while pointing to the need to expand and deepen this framework to address the different elements of agroecology transformations. I have argued that the political agroecology movement takes a prefigurative approach to learning and knowledge, emphasising horizontal learning practices and democratisation of knowledge, and combining practical and political learning. This can be seen to strengthen learning processes through building a solidarity economy of education and developing social bonds to enable continued peer-to-peer learning. The autonomy from proprietary knowledge systems and mutual social support developed through these practices builds confidence and capacity of participants and the horizontal and prefigurative nature of these challenges hierarchies in knowledge production by seeing everyone as valuably contributing to learning. The combination of practical and political learning, I argued, particularly speaks to the integration of cosmological, technical, and organisational cognitive praxis in the movement (Eyerman and Jamison 1991) and the ecological and techno-productive, socioeconomic, sociopolitical and cultural dimensions of agroecology (Rivera-Ferre 2018).

Connecting to arguments made in Chapters 6 and 7, I have suggested that while the movement does create opportunities for dialogue between knowledges and actors in some respects, this area needs further development to address agrifood divisions and engage more broadly to build collective power. In this respect, I contribute to Anderson et al. (2018), deepening analysis to distinguish types of learning in relation to their role in agroecology transformations. In particular, I have made explicit the role of transformative-transgressive learning in an overall transformative agroecology learning approach while still acknowledging the importance of learning which introduces people to new concepts and approaches, and learning which deepens and embeds agroecological practice and movement praxis. This framework of entry, deepening, and transformative-transgressive learning contributes to the wider literature on agroecological learning, social learning processes in farming, and sustainability education for transformations. By distinguishing between types of learning and exploring the conditions which facilitate such learning, I have sought to provide a practical framework to encourage the development of diverse learning spaces through multi-actor and multi-scale networks to advance agroecology. This includes appreciating the role of both home and coalition spaces in learning for transformation which I further develop and consolidate in the next chapter in relation to wider movement building efforts.

9. AGROECOLOGY MOVEMENT ECOLOGY

9.1 Introduction

This chapter draws together the previous three chapters to fully develop the concept of social movement ecology in relation to the UK agroecology movement, drawing on ideas around coalitional politics introduced in Chapter 3. I bring to light efforts made within the movement to build bridges to connect different spaces, engage in coalition work, and broaden impact through collaboration with others. This includes movement actors seeking to identify common ground with others, emphasising connection and mutuality, and valuing diversity and complexity in the movement, which I explore in the first half of this chapter.

In section 9.4, I explain how these insights invite the development of an agroecology movement ecology approach which moves beyond the identified key challenges limiting wider transformative change. An ecological approach to movement building reflects the pluriversal and ecological philosophy of political agroecology. It acknowledges the necessity of multiple pathways towards agroecology due to the diverse contexts of actors and the different scales and dimensions of transformations required. Combining this with a coalitional politics inspired by feminists of colour, I extend the concept of social movement ecology. In particular I draw on the writing of Gloria Anzaldúa (2002; 2009; 2022) which, while relating to gender and border violence, provides a valuable critical perspective on coalition and bridge building. The resulting framework highlights the strategic benefit of diverse movement spaces in fostering transformations, some closer to home and some more coalitional. Such an approach involves mapping out the agroecology movement ecosystem to identify linkages and synergies that can foster diverse pathways for agroecology transformation. Within this, the distinction between home and coalition allows for a radical political agroecology vision to remain centred, defending this from co-optation while engaging broader alliances to develop sufficient collective power for systemic change. This includes consideration of appropriate

boundaries for different movement spaces which I illustrate through a brief example from Brazil, the National Agroecology Alliance, to provide a sense of coalition between diverse agroecological perspectives.

9.2 Building Bridges

As argued in previous chapters, addressing limitations of movement praxis in fostering transformations necessitates bridging across differences beyond movement home spaces to develop diverse coalition spaces and collaborations within the wider movement(s) and agri-food sector. In this section, I discuss efforts within the movement to build these bridges, highlighting the importance of identifying common ground, fostering connections across difference, and the roles of bridging organisations and boundary spanners or bridge builders (Anzaldúa 2002; Hahn et al. 2006; Pachucki et al. 2007). While my research focused on Landworkers' Alliance (LWA) as key proponents of political agroecology, the agroecology movement comprises a diverse constellation of actors interconnected in multifaceted ways (Chapter 5). During the research, the LWA engaged in multiple networks and collaborations with various aligned organisations. There were collaborative events such as the LWA Cymru and Paramaethu (Permaculture) Cymru joint summer gathering and collaborative projects like webinar series, field trials, and campaigns. Oxford Real Farming Conference (ORFC) and its offshoots, like Northern Real Farming Conference (NRFC), brought together organisations and networks in the wider movement to collaborate. LWA members were often affiliated with multiple country-wide, regional, and local organisations, networks, and projects, highlighting the movement's porous boundaries and interconnected nature (Funke 2012b). LWA further collaborated with groups like Land In Our Names (LION) and Ubele Initiative to address racial justice in the movement and many members were active in broader movements, creating informal connections and cross-pollination. Finally, as emphasised in the previous chapter, the LWA collaborated with other farming organisations to work with educational institutions and academics to develop agroecological training and shape research.

While collaboration in the agroecology movement was strengthened, there remained relative disconnection from mainstream agrifood networks, organisations, and media, as others have identified (Ingram 2018; Coulson and Milbourne 2021; Lamine and Marsden 2023). Attempts to break down boundaries and build bridges with different groups included the LWA youth branch FLAME collaborative project with The National Federation of Young Farmers' Clubs (NFYFC) and Students Organising for Sustainability (SOS-UK) to create a space for mutual learning over addressing the climate crisis. Staff member Hazel felt that LWA projects like this, as well as Your Farming Future (YFF) and participating in trials for the new Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS), were “incredibly powerful in breaking down those sorts of barriers”. In Wales, some LWA members “spoke passionately about the importance of breaking down barriers and going outside of comfort zones, getting rid of prejudices etc. to speak to neighbouring farmers and local farming groups” (Research journal entry). As LWA Cymru organiser Sandra commented, they are interested in “building a wider and more diverse membership profile and bringing in those people that we aren't yet reaching for whom they might not feel that Landworkers' Alliance is a natural home for them, but actually it really would be”. This reflects the desire from some parts of the movement to broaden out beyond the existing home space, connecting across cultural divides to engage farmers with aligned approaches and support farmer transitions. Some LWA members, organisers, and staff did this outreach through attending mainstream agricultural shows such as county fairs and the Royal Welsh Show.

Work was also needed to connect with other food system actors and wider intersecting social movements, such as climate justice. The LWA managed to engage allied food system actors as LWA “supporters”, but at the Organisers Assembly members spoke about needing to do more to “reach out to connect with the wider food system” and build a “broad-based food system movement”. As Anderson et al. (2018) highlight, it is important to engage other actors such as consumers to expand agroecology from farm-level to the whole food system. Despite efforts like the People's Food Summit coordinated by LWA, staff member Hazel reflected that the Food Sovereignty movement still had a predominantly landworker base. At the local level, several participants commented that

farms and community food projects have potential to provide that link with consumers through direct selling and community engagement, particularly bridging urban and rural divides (Wezel et al. 2018b; Nicol 2020; Mehrabi et al. 2022).

The LWA was relatively well connected to other food sovereignty movements internationally through La Vía Campesina (LVC), but there was a sense from some movement actors that more connections should be fostered with wider social and ecological justice movements and UK trade unions. Staff member Sofia challenged,

Where is agroecology in the climate justice movement, specifically? Because I actually feel like it's weirdly marginalised within the climate justice movement, and people don't see it as a bit of the climate movement (Reflective focus group).

Sofia felt that engaging supporter members who were linked with other struggles could bridge those gaps and make links between the food sovereignty movement and issues like housing, health, and workers' rights. The identity-based LWA groups did some work to connect to broader social justice struggles and activist gatherings like those organised for the Zapatistas 'Journey for Life' UK tour (Wilson 2021) or COP26 in Glasgow were seen by members as key opportunities to strengthen connections to wider movements.

9.2.1 Identifying Common Ground

To build bridges with others, many participants highlighted the importance of identifying common ground (Horizons Project 2022), particularly with conventional farmers. This emphasis in the movement can be seen to be influenced by the movement's feminist values and inspired by Global South movements, contrasting to more adversarial or rigidly radical dynamics which were seen as tendency in the British left (Hewitt 2011; Bergman and Montgomery 2017; Zaremba et al. 2021; A Growing Culture 2024). This was apparent at the women and non-binary farm hack,

We talked about reaching out to all parts of society and challenging the us and them rhetoric that divides us. This meant connecting with conventional farmers to learn from each other and find commonality in our values or aims and moving

towards that, recognising that they are locked into a system that is very difficult and scary to leave (Research Journal).

This excerpt highlights that finding common ground means recognising people's different contexts. Connecting with farmers locally was expressed by multiple participants as particularly valuable as they face similar challenges. As Hazel commented, when people with a "common interest are brought together" they realise that "we're actually all farmers, or all growers, who are dealing with the weather and with climate change, and with weeds, and with market pressure" and can look for common ground "rather than the sort of us and them". This connects to the campesino-a-campesino literature which specifies the importance of identifying shared challenges amongst local farmers to foster dialogue around solutions (Pan Para el Mundo 2006).

Common ground could be, quite literally, the ground. As farm hack participant and conventional farmer Colin shared, "soil is a place where we can all stand" as most farmers recognise the threat of loss of topsoil and importance of healthy soil for their crops (Sullivan et al. 1996; Sutherland 2013). Mainstream farmers were also seen to be more easily engaged around issues like protecting wildlife and fostering biodiversity (Mills et al. 2017; Mills et al. 2018; Palomo-Campesino et al. 2021) as action learning group member Andrew commented, "wildlife is a big plus and a big draw for farmers, that's something that cuts across a lot of lines". As well as connection to nature as the basis for common ground, participants identified the importance of political and economic threats as opportunities for bringing people together. This included the opportunity provided by post-Brexit agricultural subsidy reforms, the threat of post-Brexit trade agreements and regulatory change on access to inputs and quality standards in the market, the threats of climate and ecological crisis, and the increases in input costs like fertiliser due to international wars (Butler 2022; Heron et al. 2023). This echoes the literature on coalitions which highlights such external factors as drivers of coalition building (Staggenborg 2010; Brooker and Meyer 2018) and the agroecology literature which identifies crises as drivers of agroecological scaling (Mier y Terán et al. 2018).

9.2.2 Fostering Connections and Engaging the Land in Between

Another key element of building bridges was connection. Participants emphasised relationship building with other farmers or connecting consumers to food production, mostly at a local level, as a key lever to bring people into the movement and build multi-actor networks. Participants believed that fostering direct relationships with farmers was crucial for breaking down boundaries and developing the trust needed for mutual learning and exchange (Hubeau et al. 2021). For instance, LWA Scotland coordinator Kerry felt that a farmer was more likely to engage with an event if a neighbour or someone they knew invited them. This created the opportunity “to dispel some of the perceptions” and build more relationships. This highlights the importance of community and solidarity in facilitating transformative learning (Chapter 8). As well as connecting with other farmers, activists spoke about fostering cultural transformation through creating opportunities for people to get “more in touch with nature and more in touch with how their food is grown”. This involved connecting to people through good food and creating opportunities through community engagement with agroecological farms to foster “transformative relationships with other species and the land”. Such connections speak to scaling deep through embedding agroecology in culture and place (Guzmán Luna et al. 2019b; Nicol 2020) and, while occurring much more at a personal and local level, can be supported by movement organising efforts to create spaces where such connections can be fostered.

Particularly important in this work of building connection across differences is the role of boundary crossing or bridge building individuals and organisations (Lamont and Molnár 2002; Folke et al. 2005; Pachucki et al. 2007; Horizons Project 2022). This draws on the idea of boundaries as sociocultural differences “leading to discontinuity in action or interaction” (Akkerman and Bakker 2011, p.133) and boundary crossing as instances where individuals or organisations manage to span or bridge these differences (Brown 1991; Smink et al. 2015) by encountering difference and entering into unfamiliar territory (Suchman 1993, p.25). This boundary crossing strengthens linkages between movement spaces and is necessary for engaging in coalition spaces. For instance, a key movement activist and LWA staff member spoke at the Oxford Farming Conference (OFC), doing work

to bridge between this space and the ORFC where there had traditionally been an oppositional relationship. Prominent farmers from more traditional farming backgrounds who had taken up agroecological approaches were viewed by participants as particularly valuable figures: they are able to cross agroecological-conventional boundaries due to garnering legitimacy and trust in both as “hybrid actors” (López-García 2020; Burbach et al. 2023). Additionally, people who attended multistakeholder forums and were able to communicate the movement’s perspectives whilst engaging respectfully with different positions were able to sow seeds of change, as one participant engaging in NFU Organic Forum meetings put it.

Bridging organisations and institutions, on the other hand, were important for providing arenas “for trust-building, vertical and horizontal collaboration, learning, sense-making, identification of common interests, and conflict resolution” (Hahn et al. 2006, p.586). Several LWA Cymru members identified the valuable role Farming Connect, a Welsh Government agriculture advisory programme, could play in bringing together agroecological and conventional farmers through farm events and mentoring. For instance, one member hosted a farm tour with Farming Connect which “brought a load of local conventional farmers to the farm” and enabled mutual learning. More moderate organisations and broad alliances could bridge tensions between movement actors and create spaces of engagement between conventional and agroecological or organic farmers. One participant recognised that the alliance Sustain helped “build bridges” between two organic organisations in tension with one another, while another recognised the impact of the Soil Association’s Innovative Farmers programme in bringing together conventional and organic farmers through knowledge exchange. Similarly, big agricultural events like Groundswell which promoted regenerative agriculture were seen by some participants as reaching “the bit in the middle” between hardline conventional farmers and organic or agroecological farmers. This creates a more neutral space where conventional farmers can feel comfortable to explore their practice “on their own terms” and choose whether to engage with sessions and representatives of organisations like Organic Research Centre (ORC) and LWA amongst other organisations. As Horizons

Project (2022) explain, while bridge building can “be used to build coalitions among allies in the short-term”, it can also begin to develop those relationships with others “not yet ready to come to the table” to enable future coalitions.

However, building bridges is not easy. To provide a critical perspective to bridge building, considering the inherent power dynamics and risks, I draw on the work of Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldúa. Speaking of the divisions between white feminists and feminists of colours, Anzaldúa (2009) echoes sentiments in the movement in saying “the ground of our being is a common ground, la Tierra³⁷” (p.141). In the same text, however, she challenges an overly simplistic assumption of common ground between differently marginalised groups, highlighting the value of heterogeneity. She speaks of the need to “stand together despite, or because of, the huge splits that lie between our legs [...] like the fractures in the earth”, asking us to “not forget la mierda³⁸ between us, a mountain of caca³⁹ that keeps us from ‘seeing’ each other, being with each other” (p.141). Like Reagon (1983) and other feminists of colour in this period (Taylor 2022) she highlights the incredibly political nature of bridge building, the risk of engaging in alliances and coalitional spaces as well as the necessity of such action for survival and transformative change.

Using the Náhuatl word *Nepantla*⁴⁰, Anzaldúa describes this challenging in-between space, naming “those who facilitate passages between worlds as *nepantleras*” (Anzaldúa 2002, p.1).

Transformations occur in this in-between space, an unstable, unpredictable, precarious, always-in-transition space lacking clear boundaries. *Nepantla es tierra desconocida*⁴¹, and living in this liminal zone means being in a constant state of displacement—an uncomfortable, even alarming feeling (p.1).

³⁷ The earth

³⁸ The shit

³⁹ Poop

⁴⁰ Defined as “*tierra entre medio*” or land in between.

⁴¹ *Nepantla* is unknown land

Engaging with this liminal space is destabilising and is associated “with states of mind that question old ideas and beliefs, acquire new perspectives, change worldviews, and shift from one world to another” (Anzaldúa 2002, p.1), reflecting the potential for transformative-transgressive learning (Peters and Wals 2016; Gallegos et al. 2022). I later argue how balancing between different home and coalition spaces (Reagon 1983) and bridging roles can address the complexity of engaging in coalition for differently positioned actors. First, I focus on the sentiment of embracing complexity and diversity present in the political agroecology movement which echoes calls of Anzaldúa and others (Taylor 2022) for bridging that engages rather than erases heterogeneity.

9.3 Holding Complexity and Diversity

The movement worked to encompass diversity in relation to race, gender, and sexuality (Chapters 6 and 7). Additionally, movement actors spoke about the need to hold complexity and diversity between different political positions and agricultural approaches to foster a more expansive view of the movement. Staff member Hazel took a positive ecological framing of the “messiness” of different sustainable agriculture approaches to acknowledge diversity as important to a healthy movement ecosystem.

It may be quite messy with all the talk of agroecology and regenerative agriculture and organics and permaculture and so forth, but, I mean, that's part of the messiness of nature and diversity and, if anything, sums up to me what I've learned about sustainability through my life, it's that diversity is absolutely central to it. So, I think that that messiness is, it might be uncomfortable, but it's also quite healthy. And I think agroecology, it's a bit like if you imagine plants all growing together in a slightly chaotic, weedy mass, I think, agroecology from having been a little tiny seedling about 10 years ago, has grown up and so it's sort of holding its own along with all these other plants now, but in a really good way (LWA Reflective Session).

She highlights agroecology's strengthened position within the broader movement, growing through interaction with other approaches and seeking to flourish while not becoming a dominating monoculture. This particularly speaks to an ecological prefiguration within their movement building approach (Case 2017; Centemeri and Asara 2022).

Activists recognised the need to appreciate the diversity of different positions and contexts in the movement, moving beyond binaries such as agroecological/conventional, large-scale/small-scale, and urban/rural whilst recognising the political nature of such differences (López-García 2020; van der Ploeg 2021). For instance, in a joint LWA and CFGN gathering on urban-rural collaboration I reflected, “there was an awareness of the need to not homogenise the pluralism of urban and rural identities, cultures, knowledges and ways of organising but to come together to learn from each other and think critically about how to equitably share resources and information” (research journal). In coming together through recognising and making space for difference there may be no simple solutions or agreement, but differently positioned actors can still learn from one another and seek ways to connect and collaborate. As Anzaldúa poses the “terms *solution*, *resolution*, *progressing*, and *moving forward* are western-dominant cultural concepts” (2009, p.152). Instead, through “honoring people’s otherness in ways that allow us to be changed by embracing that otherness [...] a diversity of perspectives expands and alters the dialogue, not in an add-on fashion but through a multiplicity that’s transformational, such as in mestiza consciousness⁴²”. This asks us to sit with the discomfort of diversity and find ways to hold complexity while coming together in coalition work, as emphasised in LWA’s organising practices in Chapter 7. In this context, it can be seen to prefigure the ecological, decolonial, and feminist cosmology of the global agroecology movement

⁴² Mestiza (or mestizo) means ‘mixed person’, referring traditionally to those in Abya Yalda (Latin America) of mixed European and Indigenous ancestry. Anzaldúa in her book *Borderlands: La Frontera* coins the term “mestiza consciousness” to describe a worldview that operates at the borders between different paradigms, creating an assembly that “is not one where severed or separated pieces merely come together. Nor is it a balancing of opposing powers” but “a third element which is greater than the sum of its severed parts” (Anzaldúa 2022, p.80).

(Giraldo 2019; Trevilla-Espinal et al. 2021; Giraldo and Rosset 2022), emphasising diálogo de saberes and “unity in diversity” (Desmarais 2007; Martínez-Torres and Rosset 2014).

In relation to movement actors and theories of change, this meant appreciating the valuable role that different actors play in the movement ecosystem rather than “empire building”, as mentioned by Sofia in Chapter 7. Staff member Bay commented that while there is a risk of LWA “thinking that we are the movement”, it’s important to recognise that “we’re a part of the movement” and “hold that sense of like where our place is and understand where our place isn’t”. LWA staff and coordinators in the reflective session discussed identifying when “something needs to be done in the movement” whether LWA should do it or whether they should “hold a separate enterprise to do it or pass it on to a different organisation”. This means acknowledging the different strengths of other organisations in terms of organisational resources, theories of change, and membership reach to identify where they crossover or can complement each other’s work. For instance, staff members recognised that some organisations were better positioned to provide a home for medium or large-scale arable, mixed, or livestock farmers. One role that LWA was seen as playing was in connecting larger-scale farmers with new entrants to develop stacked or joint enterprises and alternative succession arrangements. Recognising the diverse roles movement actors play in supporting agroecology transformations at different stages and for different actors enables LWA to engage across difference whilst maintaining their radical prefigurative home space, as I have argued in Chapters 7 and 8.

Holding complexity and diversity therefore meant being connected within the movement ecosystem and reaching out beyond boundaries whilst at the same time working to maintain important boundaries. As LWA staff member Sofia shared,

There are a lot of conventional farmers who could be, would be agroecological-curious at least, and I think that is an incredibly fertile space that we can actually bring people in. But then also we lean, but then I do think we need to bring people back in here 'cause that's what stops that kind of watering down and co-optation (LWA Reflective Session).

Thus, LWA should seek fertile ground to engage people, reaching out whilst also bringing them back in to consolidate rather than dilute their position. This was largely about political position and values, with participants agreeing that commitment to food sovereignty and political agroecology was important. The politics of land ownership, in contrast, was considered a potential tension with more mainstream farmers, as LWA are “looking at trying to overturn the whole model of land ownership” since “land should be held collectively” rather than owning so much land individually, one staff member comments. In such areas, LWA can engage tactically with larger-scale farmers to seek mutual benefit in the short term, whilst maintaining their own organisational politics which challenge this and seek to shift wider food system politics. This reflects the process view of revolution (Raekstad and Gradin 2019) (Chapter 7), strategically finding openings to successively progress a prefigurative vision through a process of becoming (Dinerstein 2022).

By developing and maintaining a strong sense of home through collective identity and discourse (Chapter 7), there is the potential to not only build bridges without risking co-optation, but to hold a strong position from which to influence the politics of wider agri-food politics. This involves clearly defining key terms like agroecology and food sovereignty in order to defend them from co-optation (Nyéléni 2015; Giraldo and Rosset 2018; Giraldo and Rosset 2018). From this strong base, participants felt that LWA could “lean” out and decide to strategically engage with other less political concepts and organisations without losing hold of their vision. Through such engagement, the overall movement politics were seen to shift, thus creating wider spheres of influence as seen in the example of the ORFC (Chapter 7), where LWA had a disruptive effect in bringing politics of race and colonialism onto the agenda. Over time, more actors in the wider movement adopted the term agroecology and its social and political elements were developed further, as opposed to purely a technical framing.

Holding diversity and complexity in the movement was therefore not a neutral activity but an approach which emphasised synergy and heterogeneity over competition and dominance whilst being led by a long-term commitment to overturning oppressive

systems and bringing about transformative agroecological change. This connects to Anzaldúa's (2009) analysis of the transformative potential and navigation of differences and tensions in coalition or alliance work:

Alliance work is the attempt to shift positions, change positions, reposition ourselves regarding our individual and collective identities. In alliance we are confronted with the problem of how we share or don't share space, how we can position ourselves with individuals or groups who are different from and at odds with each other, how we can reconcile one's love for diverse groups when members of these groups do not love each other, cannot relate to each other, and don't know how to work together (p.153).

Thus, alliance building requires deep consideration of complex power relationships between differently positioned actors and openness to discomfort and conflict, rather than promoting an idealistic, homogenising unity. As Edelman et al. (2014) contend, the “degree of tolerance for pluralism is one of the biggest and most challenging questions confronting food sovereignty practitioners and researchers” (p.922). Drawing on movement perspectives presented so far in this chapter, I provide a means to address this question next, through developing an agroecology movement ecology approach. Bringing together understanding of agroecology transformations and feminist of colour coalitional politics (Chapter 3).

9.4 An Agroecology Movement Ecology Approach

Bringing together the perspectives explored in Chapter 3 leads to an idea of social movement ecology which seeks to encompass diversity in the movement not just in terms of theories of change, but issues, identities and cultures, ideology, movement capabilities, activist roles, and contexts (Ulex Project 2022). This recognises the complex, interconnected, often synergistic nature of the UK agroecology movement. Instead of painting an idyllic picture of actors in a movement ecosystem working together harmoniously, an agroecology movement ecology approach recognises risks, tensions,

and conflicts inherent in seeking to bridge difference to build collective power. It illuminates the ways social movements contain tensions between the commonality of identity which ties together a movement, and the diversity of identities contained within it. As Ulex Project contend,

Thinking in terms of an ecology of movements can help us to conceive of a movement as able to contain non-aligned, antagonistic, and even contradictory identities – and to acknowledge that this diversity is often crucial to the building of the collective agency needed for radical transformation (2022, p.93).

As I began to explore in preceding chapters, this requires a valuing of a movement's home and coalition spaces and their functions in supporting societal transformation. Rather than the dichotomy between broad-based universalising coalition building and insular prefigurative and radical political organising (Smucker 2017), there is a vision of coalition which holds the diversity and complexity of movement actors and sees the generative tension that radical prefigurative politics provide towards realising transformative change at a broader scale. Such an approach recognises the importance of home spaces in fostering particular forms of learning, collective identity, solidarity, and alternative practices and ways of being that prefigure a radical vision of the future. While at the same time recognising that in order to “treat the wounds and mend the rifts” within the movement and society “we must sometimes reject the injunctions of culture, group, family, and ego” and have “the courage to act consciously on our ideas, to exert power in resistance to ideological pressure—to risk leaving home” (Anzaldúa 2002, p.4). In other words, to engage in coalition work.

I explore this now in relation to agroecology transformations, and the tensions present in the UK agroecology movement. As presented in Chapter 2, agroecology can be seen as a process of transition, a journey, rather than an ideal endpoint (Gliessman 2016a; Wise 2016). Agroecology transformations are complex and situated, just as ecosystems. They are made up of diverse trajectories and require multi-scale and multi-level change, going from farm practices up to transformative change of the whole food system (Gliessman 2016b; Barrios et al. 2020; Wezel et al. 2020). This resonates with many participants'

framing of transition. When discussing approaches to engaging with more conventional farmers who were open to change, some participants spoke of step-by-step change “along a pathway of transition” (research journal), changing perspectives and practices “little by little”. This reflects the need for diverse learning processes combining entry, deepening, and transformative-transgressive learning explored in Chapter 8. It points to agroecology’s conceptual advantage in being able to present a process of transition reflecting a process view of revolution, as opposed to the binary produced by organic certification (Wright 2010; Raekstad and Gradin 2019). It also speaks to the idea of prefiguration as a continuous process of “becoming” (Dinerstein 2022) rather than a fully realised state.

Such an approach recognises that both farm transition and wider food system changes are not smooth processes and require time to build up healthy, resilient systems (Edelman et al. 2014; Gliessman 2016a; Padel et al. 2020). As action learning group member Carl comments, “we know that the transition from not doing agroecology to doing it can be a really sweet, brilliant experience but it can also be incredibly bumpy. And how to make that inclusive but not so you bend over too much”. Carl’s comment highlights the need to keep a constant generative tension between leaning to meet people where they are at and challenging them to go beyond their comfort zones. Thus, conflicting narratives like regenerative agriculture (Tittonell et al. 2022) have a place in the wider movement ecosystem but should be generatively challenged by agroecology. Transformations or movements cannot be understood in their entirety or simplified to just consider isolated components (Scoones et al. 2020; Sediri et al. 2020; Ulex Project 2022). But through understanding the interactions between different actions and actors, it is possible to get a sense of how to facilitate transformative change through social movement ecosystems. This is a complex and unfolding process, sensing out opportunities to connect between spaces and engage in coalition work to further transformations at different stages by prefiguring *towards* diverse, yet to be fully determined agroecological food systems, recognising the “not not but not yet” nature of such “ends-effacing” prefiguration (Swain 2019).

In order not to lean too far, it is useful to understand the diversity of movement and food system actors: that is, who are allies, where is there fertile ground for bringing actors closer towards a political agroecology vision in any moment? A useful tool in this respect is “spectrum of allies” (Bloch 2019), which I encountered through the action learning group. It is usually used for single campaigns but can be extended to movement-level and encourages actors to identify *active allies*, *passive allies*, those who are *neutral* to their cause, and those *passively* and *actively opposed* (see Figure 18). In doing so, it is possible to see that rather than aiming to shift all sections to active allies which often leads to despair and a sense of failure (Bloch 2019), bringing each group one section closer to your cause can generate massive change. This suggests activists should focus energy on those who are easier to shift, such as regenerative medium-scale farmers, rather than those in active opposition, such as agrichemical companies.

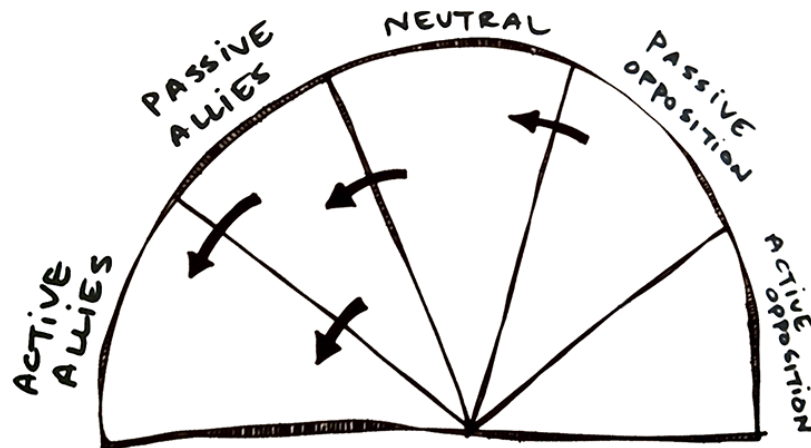


Figure 18. Spectrum of Allies diagram showing shifts of different actors from passive opposition towards active allies. Reproduced from 350.org (2022).

Taking a spectrum approach, provides a means to explore the complexity and diversity of food system actors discussed so strategies can be developed specifically for different positions, i.e. small-scale Welsh hill farmers, large-scale regenerative farmers, or local food organisations. In each case, considering what it might take to move actors along their journey of transition, and thus cumulatively bringing the whole system further on a pathway of transformation.

In this social movement ecology approach, therefore, I am suggesting strategically developing and engaging different movement spaces and actors through considering their role in transformations, extending the argument of Chapter 8 around learning spaces. This includes valuing home spaces both in the political agroecology movement and beyond, to foster the community, collective identity, and solidarity which sustains action and particular types of learning. Farmers who were “on a journey” to reduce their pesticide and fertiliser use and engage in more ecological practices were often “quite ostracised by their neighbours”, LWA staff member Rebecca commented. Organisations and spaces such as Nature Friendly Farming network or Groundswell festival allow them to be supported by others on this journey and find a sense of home. As action learning group member Willow reflected, “different places might connect with different people in different ways, so having that diversity might make a shift for one person, whereas maybe a different site might do something for someone else [...] and the more there are, the better”. However, it is important to recognise that no spaces are truly safe home spaces, but all include an element of coalition (Reagon 1983; Arao and Clemens 2013), even in identity-based groups (Carastathis 2013). Such an approach therefore sees home and coalition as a spectrum in relation to different movement actors. In seeking to bring more people over to political agroecology to ensure transitions do not end up conforming to the dominant regime (Levidow et al. 2014; Rivera-Ferre 2018), activists need to consider who they are able to reach through leaning, bridge building, and facilitating generative challenges in different coalition spaces. Engaging in coalition helps to advance transformative and broad-scale systemic change, while strengthening home spaces ensures a radical political vision influences change through generative tension. Further, as Reagon (1983) asserts, being able to return to home spaces gives people strength and positive grounding to engage in the uncomfortable and dangerous work of coalition.

As I began to explore at the end of the last chapter through examples like the YFF project, collaborating with others can increase the reach and influence of movement organisations like LWA. Depending on how far away other actors are on the spectrum (from passive allies to passive opposition), more or less work is required to create spaces capable of fostering

entry and transformative learning and generating momentum for collective action. Culture is an important consideration for this: What language and images should be used? What kind of facilitation and learning practices are needed? What rituals and other cultural artifacts are included? For instance, Rebecca reflected that there were farmers who were “definitely on side but because of language and cultural things [LWA] haven’t reached”. This represents passive allies who could be engaged through bridge building individuals bringing them in or through creating more targeted events, without cultural elements that deter them. Such spaces can exist on LWA’s periphery without compromising its ideals. Further away on the spectrum, she describes traditional Welsh farmers who are questioning what they are doing but still using pesticides and fertilisers while seeking to reduce them. In this case, Nature Friendly Farming network were seen as a more natural home, whilst LWA could retain influence through working in collaboration with them: “we have slightly different functions and angles, but we’re all part of the broad coalition”. This distinguishes ways of reaching those beyond the political agroecology movement through various forms of coalition spaces.

Similar differentiation and strategic engagement applies to wider food system actors like other political activists, community food organisers, consumers, and policymakers. It requires a careful balancing of the demands of home and coalition spaces, making strategic decisions about which kinds of alliances are productive and where leaning out will require too much of a shift of organisational focus and pose risks to collective identity and legitimacy (Haines 2013; Brooker and Meyer 2018). As well as bridge building, it involves work to challenge power inequities between actors (Horizons Project 2022). Through creating a more strategically networked movement ecology, diverse transition pathways can be facilitated as actors have opportunities to be exposed to different ideas and, hopefully, move towards a more transformative agroecological vision (Chapter 8). Figure 19 simplifies such a process for an actor entering the movement ecosystem; Figure 20 provides a more detailed representation of rhizomatic networks between movement organisations and spaces (Funke 2012b) through which diverse transition pathways could be facilitated. Actors have different starting points and routes, some moving further

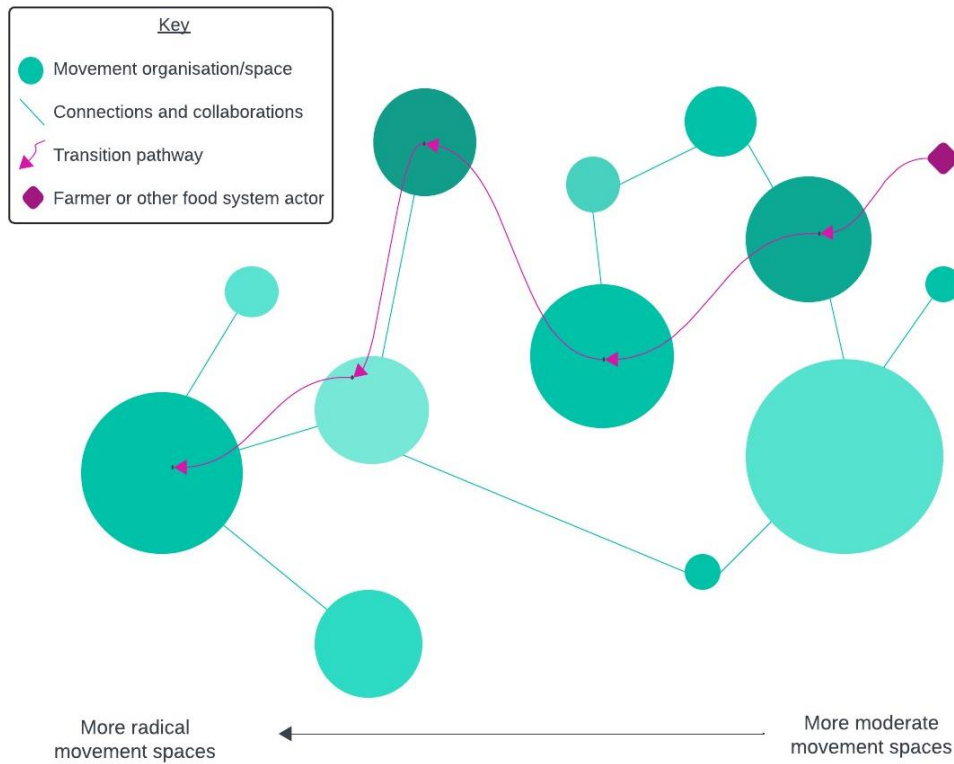


Figure 19. Diagram to show a possible transition pathway of a farmer or other food system actor through the movement ecosystem, facilitated by the connections and collaborations between movement organisations and spaces.



Figure 20. Representation of a movement ecosystem with coloured circles representing movement organisations and spaces and the lines in between representing the rhizomatic connections between these and actors within and beyond them.

through the movement ecosystem to realise political agroecology, others making smaller shifts. While not all pathways converge on the principles of political agroecology, collectively, through strategic boundary crossing and coalition work that respects heterogeneity, these shifts can contribute to transformative change.

To foster such transition pathways, the culture of coalition must be developed to build the collective solidarity and coordination needed to effectively work together (Hubeau et al. 2019; Hubeau et al. 2021; Facchini et al. 2023; Agroecology Summit ‘Outside Empire’ Subgroup 2024). Engaging in coalitional spaces requires mutual respect and commitment to understanding one another, which must be based on understanding inequitable power relations between actors rather than subscribing to a “power-obscuring unity” (Keating 2005). Working to unveil and address these inequities, is what Keating (2005) describes as a building a “coalitional consciousness” which can be achieved through horizontal learning practices based on ideas of consciousness-raising (Keating 2005; Raekstad and Gradin 2019), transformative-transgressive learning (Peters and Wals 2016), and diálogo de saberes (Martínez-Torres and Rosset 2014; Anderson et al. 2018). This entails seeing power and responsibility as things shared within the wider movement ecosystem, requiring appropriate forms of organising that support horizontality and diversity (Anderson et al. 2018; Raekstad and Gradin 2019; Anderson et al. 2020; Sharma and Van Dyke 2021). The cultural work to build strong relationships and foster mutual understanding can be supported through rituals, as Anzaldúa (2009) writes, “breaking bread together, and other group activities that physically and psychically represent the ideals, goals, and attitudes promote a quickening, thickening between us” (p.154). This means extending the political agroecology movement’s prefigurative practices which build solidarity and collective identity to wider spheres, being mindful of which cultural activities alienate and those cultivating common ground.

With boundary crossing and coalition work, however, there is often a trade-off between “depth of challenge” and “breadth of appeal” (Downey and Rohlinger 2008). These tensions must be navigated between more or less radical movement organisations depending on whether strong or weak alliances are sought, both of which can have

valuable functions in fostering agroecology transformations (Guenther 2010). As Holt-Giménez and Shattuck (2011) pose, “the challenge for movement-building is to reach beyond the easily occurring, tactical relationships to forge strategic alliances across the progressive and radical trends” (p.134). This requires an understanding of boundaries and collective identity in coalition spaces, which I now explore further.

9.4.1 Boundaries

As identified in Chapter 3, two connected limitations of the initial social movement ecology framing (Ayni Institute [no date]) were the absence of ideological considerations between movement actors and the need to define boundaries in the ecosystem (Case 2017). Boundaries exist at various levels, across the spectrum of home and coalition spaces where movement actors engage. Based on a space’s function in promoting transformations through collective organising and learning, one can consider what are useful boundaries and how porous they should be. For instance, the boundaries of a BPOC growers’ event, a farmer-to-farmer learning group, LWA membership, an agroecology policy alliance, or a wider coalition of organisations working on a local food campaign all differ. The closer to home those spaces are, the more chance of ideological alignment and shared identity (Diani and Bison 2004; McCammon and Moon 2015). The further from home, the higher likelihood of conflict between ideological positions and identities, and greater need for identifying boundaries to ensure that conflict is generative for transformative change rather than risking co-optation of agroecology or delegitimising member organisations in the eyes of their followers (Downey and Rohlinger 2008; Edelman et al. 2014; Nyéléni 2015; Brooker and Meyer 2018).

Bridge building and boundary work for developing movement linkages and coalition spaces must consider who connections will be made with, under what circumstances. Anzaldúa (2009) usefully provides the analogy of bridging as sandbar, a natural bridge extending from an island, which is sometimes present and sometimes submerged depending on the “high and low tides” of a bridge builders’ life and capacity (p.148). It is necessary, she argues, to know when to draw up one’s bridge “in order to regroup,

recharge our energies, and nourish ourselves before wading back into the frontlines” (p.148). In other words, retreat to home (Reagon 1983). This represents the boundaries that individuals and groups need to maintain between the uncomfortable work of bridge building and the affirming solid ground of home, deciding how far their bridge extends in different cases. It is not necessary for everyone to engage in bridge building or in the same types: “some of us can gather in affinity groups, small grassroots circles and others can bridge more broadly” (Anzaldúa 2009, p.150). For instance, for some BPOC activists, bridge building is done within the political agroecology movement through engaging with white activists. Whereas for an agroecological farmer from a more traditional farming background, bridge building may be between conventional and agroecological farming organisations.

Coalition work from the perspective I have argued for requires consideration of these different positions and power asymmetries between them. It means both holding space for diversity and maintaining a grounding in the “commitment to work toward undermining the variety of interlocking oppressive forces that restrict liberty and justice for so many” (Taylor 2022, p.194). Coalition work in the agroecology movement can be seen as the struggle for liberation for all who are subjugated within the patriarchal, white supremacist, and capitalist industrial food system. This includes the family farmer who feels trapped on the agricultural treadmill (Ward 1993) and experiences high levels of economic precarity, the black grower who is trying to find land and encountering racism in rural spaces (Terry 2023), the working class community food organiser who feels excluded by the movement’s middle-class culture (Nonini 2013; *A Growing Culture* 2021), and the middle-class white activist who seeks out connection to land due to a sense of alienation within capitalist urban life (Galbraith 2011; Taherzadeh 2019). It requires an understanding of power as dispersed throughout society (Raekstad and Gradin 2019) and oppression as intersectional (Ishkanian and Peña Saavedra 2019; Haider 2022). Finally, such a liberatory politics goes beyond the human realm to consider ways the more-than-human world is subjugated within the current system, understanding agroecology as a struggle within and

with territories which seeks to address the climate and ecological emergency (Nyéléni 2015; Giraldo and Rosset 2022; Moore and Moreno 2022).

Reckoning with the complex power dynamics in the movement and wider agrifood system entails breaking down dominant paradigms and binaries through “a massive uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual and collective consciousness” (Anzaldúa 2022, p.80). The controversies and conflict that arise through this can expose “the differences between coalition members [and] might reveal the ways in which certain members are explicitly or implicitly invested in the continued subordination of others” (Taylor 2022, p.199). This helps to “identify who are our allies with whom we have grave differences, and who are our genuine enemies” (Lorde 1981, p.8) and therefore draw up boundaries. Thus, while stepping “across the threshold” into “unfamiliar territory” through bridge building poses the “risk of being wounded” (Anzaldúa 2002, p.3), it should carry the potential for transformation and collective liberation. Attempting to build a base of power with those who are *actively in opposition* to political agroecology or too invested in current systems of domination is unproductive and risks co-optation of the movement.

Identifying suitable boundaries thus involves consideration of shared vision and goals, and their enactment through collective strategy (Anderson et al. 2020; Zajak and Haunss 2022). In chapter 7, I discussed the intention amongst key LWA activists to develop more coherent strategy through strengthening member’s shared language and collective identity. For successful coalition work, a degree of alignment of ideology, identity and goals is needed amongst coalition members (Van Dyke and Amos 2017; Brooker and Meyer 2018). Defining a common basis of struggle is an act of boundary setting, a commitment to working towards a shared vision. If this vision is too narrowly defined it can lead to excessive fracturing and if it is too broad it is unlikely to lead to effective coalitions or contribute to transformative change (Downey and Rohlinger 2008; Case 2017). For instance, LWA staff member Hazel highlighted the tensions some raise between organic certification and non-certified agroecology, arguing that “a lot of energy is being wasted at the moment in creating this conflict” when in fact they are generally working towards very similar goals (LWA reflective session). This conflict between visions for sustainable

agriculture can be generative for transformation if engaged with through coalition work which emphasises the shared principles and challenges different actors can agree on as a basis for their work.

As Swain (2019) argues, taking an end-effacing approach to prefiguring new systems “is capable of bringing together people with relatively (but not infinitely) diverse ends in experimental projects which begin with a rejection of the present rather than the affirmation of a particular future” (p.56). This is where agroecology as a set of principles and as a multi-level, multi-scale process can be valuably employed as a “boundary object” or “bridging concept” (Franco-Torres et al. 2020; Sharma and Van Dyke 2021) to coalesce around, driving transitions “through bridging conflicting logics without constraining their diversity” (Franco-Torres et al. 2020, p.34). This includes strategic choices around narrative’s internal and external dimensions: the stories those within a “narrative boundary” share among themselves versus that which they tell to others outside that boundary (Bell and Bellon 2021, p.304). In this way, LWA can maintain their more radical conception of agroecology, strengthening it through the collective identity of home spaces and using food sovereignty as a basis to define alliances with more closely aligned actors (Myers and Sbicca 2015), while at the same time influencing framing in broader coalitions.

Defining a common basis for coalition work involves discussing tactics and strategy. As described in the social movement ecology approach (Ulex Project 2022; Ayni Institute 2023), this does not mean one approach dominates but recognises the value of diverse theories of change when they are able to work together in realisation of common goals. Strategic alliances may emerge in response to political opportunities and threats, particularly around a specific policy goal (McCammon and Moon 2015). In which case, desired outcome is more specific and coalition members can identify a shared plan and particular tactics to achieve it (Brooker and Meyer 2018). Movement ecosystems and broader “networked” coalitions instead identify a broader cause to work towards and are “more suited to working on longer-term, systemic change, while making it easier for larger diversity of members to get behind the cause” (Blueprints for Change 2019). As highlighted

earlier, this involves work to understand where the strategies employed by different movement actors complement each other and how they can cohere into a collective social change strategy. Within this movement ecosystem, each organisation can consider what tactics are strategic for them to do themselves within their membership, on their peripheries, in alliance with others, or rely on others doing (9.3). More radical movement actors like LWA are a vital part of the ecosystem: they ensure progress in agroecology transformations by developing radical prefigurative innovations and defending agroecology from co-optation. More moderate movement actors are important for bringing in a wider range of people and developing the practices and cultures which help movement actors take steps towards agroecological food systems. By being connected they can strategically support sufficient swathes of the population to engage in transformative pathways.

Such movement-level strategy and convergence of political vision requires collaborative structures and spaces for movement actors to come together (Brooker and Meyer 2018). Within the action learning group and related workshops, there was discussion of the need for higher level strategic coordination. As group member Anna reflected,

I just think there's this opportunity to organise our collective power, that sort of strategy. Should we not try and knock this thing over by you using your fingertip and me using a little elbow and instead just being like okay, we're a body and we're going to work as a body [...] we need to be having those conversations where that breadth of like the Riverford people⁴³ and us can cohere around a strategy. Because we need everyone's power in order to shift what we need to shift (Action learning group).

Anna felt that opportunities like the ORFC could be better utilised to develop movement-level strategy and have such discussions, as one time annually where a broad range of actors in support of agroecology come together. Working together strategically as one

⁴³ Referring to Riverford Organic, a relatively mainstream company producing and delivering organic vegetable boxes.

“body” requires structured gatherings to identify key focuses, shared principles, and how different tactics and spaces can contribute to an overall change strategy.

One valuable international example of such work is the National Agroecology Alliance (*Articulação Nacional de Agroecologia*, ANA) in Brazil, which I came across through participating in the Agroecological Transitions for Territorial Food Systems (ATTER) project (INRAE 2022). ANA have brought together a broad alliance of food system actors including food and land movements, regional agroecology networks, farming associations, researchers, activists, and community food projects (ANA [no date]). While members engage variously with the term agroecology, they can identify a common basis articulated through collectively produced statements and the ANA ‘flags’ which represent their shared agroecology vision (see Figure 21). These flags are displayed at any ANA gathering to cohere membership around a shared vision. Strategic collaboration is enabled by National Agroecology Meetings bringing together several thousand actors from member networks, organisations and movements, and a smaller annual National Plenary.



Figure 21. A photo showing a section of ANA's flags representing key shared principles such as "without feminism there is no agroecology" (*sem feminismo não há agroecologia*) and "agroecology promotes health" (*agroecologia promove saúde*).

ANA's organising structures allow larger-scale action driven by grassroots priorities, similar to how La Via Campesina uses various levels of organising based on horizontality, including global and regional convergences (Rosset and Martínez-Torres 2012; Lag 2023), to bring together farmer and peasant organisations around the world in coordinated action through an approach of “unity in diversity” (Desmarais 2007). Such organising structures

support bottom-up decision-making and enable different organisations and movements to come together behind a cause and collective strategy, coordinating action whilst maintaining their diverse perspectives, positions, and tactics (Anderson et al. 2020). The UK context remains far from realising such complex organising but, just as LWA is developing its own democratic systems inspired by such examples, so too can the wider movement begin to work towards more effective movement-level coordination to foster agroecology transformations. Working more strategically in the movement ecosystem, strengthening linkages, connections, and networks enables a diverse array of movement spaces and collaborative action. Some movement spaces are ideal for nurturing innovations, collective identity, and deepening learning, while others can foster productive conflict, bridging understanding between diverse perspectives to support transformative learning and broader collective action. Through this range of interconnected home and coalition spaces where movement actors adopt different roles, it is possible to facilitate various transitions pathways collectively cohering towards transformative change.

9.5 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I described how LWA and similar actors are addressing divisions (Chapter 6) by building bridges across difference within the wider movement, farming sector, and with non-agrarian actors. They identify common ground between perspectives and foster connections between local actors. Within such boundary crossing, bridge builders and bridging organisations are crucial in creating linkages and dialogue between positions. Appreciation of such hybrid actors and liminal spaces, I argued, connects to the valuing of complexity and diversity in the movement as opposed to a homogenising unity. These movement perspectives inform my construction of an agroecology movement ecology approach which embraces complexity within both the wider movement ecosystem and organisations themselves. Acknowledging potential weaknesses of the movement's prefigurative politics (Chapter 6), this ecological approach combined with the framing of home and coalition outlines how to involve diverse actors. It goes beyond complementarity of different theories of change, opening the possibility for prefiguration of

agroecology as a process and acknowledging diverse transitions pathways needed for various actors in the agrifood system. This considers heterogeneity in culture, identity, experience, and ideology to strategically craft and engage movement spaces. A weak movement ecosystem means fewer connections between home spaces and fewer opportunities for coalition spaces, limiting dialogue between ways of knowing, the possibility of joint action, and the scaling of agroecological practice. A strong movement ecosystem involves identifying suitable boundaries, shared language, and strategies for both home and coalition spaces. Radical prefigurative politics play a guiding role through maintaining generative tension with reformist approaches, demonstrating agroecological alternatives, and inspiring horizontal organising processes for coalition work. Through developing strategic linkages and spaces of convergence within the movement ecosystem from this base, I have argued, it is possible to facilitate diverse pathways of agroecology transformation.

10. CONCLUSION

This conclusion seeks to move from the UK agroecology movement to the world beyond. I begin by outlining the key research findings, relating them back to the research questions. I then explore the wider applications of the movement ecology approach constructed in this thesis, both in relation to other agroecology movements globally and to general social change movements. Next, I examine some research limitations, pointing to fruitful areas for future research. I close this chapter emphasising the potential for prefigurative pathways towards agroecology transformations.

10.1 Transformative Agroecology Movement Praxis

The aim of this research was *to support agroecology transformations in the UK by understanding, developing, and sharing social movement praxis*. Using a participatory activist methodology, this was achieved along multiple fronts. My active participation in the movement and use of methods centring reflexive, collective, and relational learning stimulated collective analysis and development of movement praxis. This occurred through workshops, informal conversations at events, reflective (group) interviews, and the action learning group. This collective inquiry led to the construction of an agroecology movement ecology approach. This built upon existing grassroots' concepts and activist thought, namely social movement ecology and early US feminist of colour coalitional politics, to produce accessible and movement-relevant theory able to contribute to ongoing movement analysis efforts and development of effective praxis. The thesis is one way of sharing movement praxis to support agroecology transformations through increasing understanding and contributing to the body of knowledge on agroecology transformations. However, I also shared movement praxis throughout the research process through workshops, talks, blogs, and more informally through collective organising, as well as through various forms of dissemination such as the farm hack guide and podcast. Through my continued commitment to the agroecology movement, this aim

is ongoing as I look towards ways of further sharing the findings of this research in ways which develop movement praxis and contribute to efforts to transform the food system.

The key findings of this thesis developed across Chapter 6 to 9 were:

1. *The political agroecology movement has a prefigurative politics.* Prefigurative politics are central to the movement's culture and inform its strategic direction, manifesting in four interconnected dimensions: democracy; equity and justice; alternative socio-ecological relationships; and alternative agrifood systems.
2. *The movement's prefigurative politics support agroecology transformations in multiple ways,* fostering the drives, powers, and consciousness of movement members to realise an agroecological future. This supports scaling out by bringing more people into the movement, particularly new entrant farmers, scaling up by providing practical examples of alternatives and strengthening the movement base to forward these, and scaling deep through developing an alternative culture based on transformative socio-ecological relationships.
3. *As well as a strength, the movement's subculture is also a key limitation of its prefigurative praxis as it serves to alienate certain food system actors.* Aspects of the subculture were alienating to BPOC, amongst others, as they were seen to reflect white and middle-class identities. The strong sense of collective identity and community was also experienced by some as cliquey. Prefigurative praxis, particularly around democracy, equity, and justice, was part of a general activist subculture off-putting to those beyond it, particularly more mainstream or traditional farmers.
4. *Division between "landworkers" and "farmers" is a key barrier for agroecology transformations.* The political agroecology movement mainly comprises new entrants, with limited interaction between movement actors and mainstream farmers and organisations. While cultural differences were partly due to differing values underlying agricultural approaches, other subcultural aspects reflecting prefigurative praxis created barriers to engaging farmers with more aligned

agricultural approaches but mainstream farmer identities. This particularly limited the potential to scale out agroecology within territories.

5. *The strengthening of the Landworkers' Alliance (LWA) prefigurative organising practices in recent years offers potential to further embed a political agroecology vision while encompassing a broader diversity of actors and strategic action.* The LWA has worked to develop democratic organising structures, centre equity and justice, and cohere a strong sense of collective identity in its “home” space. These function to anchor it in a transformative prefigurative politics as it grows, making it possible “lean out” to hold a diversity of tactics and positions and connect with wider food system actors through “coalition” without risking co-optation.
6. *The movement's social learning practices are prefigurative and foster agroecology transformations in multiple ways.* The movement's horizontal pedagogies contribute to agroecology transformations through strengthening learning, building confidence, and challenging hierarchies. They combine practical learning with the political learning necessary to connect to the project of food sovereignty.
7. *The transformative potential of learning practices is constrained due to limited dialogue between contending perspectives and diverse actors.* Current social learning practices in the movement predominantly operate in “home” spaces and this particularly impacts scaling out due to limited interaction with more mainstream farmers and food system actors. Agroecology transformations necessitate dialogue between contending positions so that transformation of perspectives can occur.
8. *Transformative agroecology learning must include entry, deepening, and transformative-transgressive learning.* This entails the introduction to new practices and ideas (entry), developing and grounding ideas in practical action (deepening), and transformation of perspectives and challenging of dominant systems (transformative-transgressive). These types of learning are facilitated through

different spaces (both home and coalition) and conditions which necessitate the development of multi-scale and multi-actor networks.

9. *Movement actors seek to build bridges beyond the movement to counter insularity and develop collective power.* While movement actors recognised that movement praxis was often constrained to home spaces, they made efforts to develop networks and bridge with diverse actors to advance coalition spaces. This involved an appreciation of the importance of complexity and diversity in the movement ecosystem, reflecting a prefiguration of agroecological principles in movement building.

10. *An agroecology movement ecology approach provides a model for coalition building and interconnected collective action while retaining a radical and transformative politics.* Building upon a social movement ecology framework by applying a US feminist of colour coalitional politics, this approach argues for the importance of developing diverse interconnected movement spaces, both home and coalition, for advancing agroecology transformations. Importantly, this acknowledges the risks of coalition building and the need therefore to consider appropriate boundaries and forms of collective organising to challenge power inequities and protect agroecology from co-optation.

These findings address my four initial research questions. Relating to RQ1, I have shown how a prefigurative movement praxis drives agroecology transformations in the UK in multiple ways. Considering prefiguration as an experimental and open-ended process of “becoming” (Swain 2019; Dinerstein 2022), I have highlighted how such prefigurative praxis provides a strong basis for movement building, grounding the movement in a political agroecology vision while enabling it to hold a diversity of strategies and actors. This praxis, I have argued, can be expanded in certain ways, such as through horizontal organising and learning practices, to inform the development of multi-scale multi-actor networks to further support transformations. The agroecology movement ecology approach is a way of linking together current movement praxis with what is possible extending these prefigurative principles to build more collective power to address current

barriers to transformations. In considering the limitations of movement praxis in fostering transformations (RQ2), I highlighted how divisions between the movement and wider food system actors represent critical challenges, particularly with regards to territorialising agroecology. The challenge of reaching wider farmers impacts the potential to develop territorial networks and agrifood systems and having a movement largely comprising new entrants impacts the embedding of practices in territories. This connects to the limited dialogue between different perspectives that affects the impact of social learning processes.

Examining the ways in which social learning practices in the movement can support transformations (RQ3), I have emphasised the strength of the horizontal pedagogy and combination of practical and political learning in the movement. Extending this to move beyond the current “home” spaces, I have identified three types of learning critical for fostering transformations: entry, deepening, and transformative-transgressive. Each requires different spaces and conditions and can be fostered through the development of interconnected multi-scale multi-actor networks, taking an agroecology movement ecology approach. Finally, RQ4 is addressed in identifying the challenge of territorialising agroecology in many UK regions due to movement actors being geographically dispersed and lacking connection to other local farmers. New entrants may lack the biocultural knowledge important in scaling agroecology deep and I argue that connecting with other food system actors within territories is crucial for developing agroecological food systems. Moreover, there is a need to connect across rural and urban areas, involving a wide range of actors in transformations. While these concerns are in many ways particular to the UK-context and agrarian nature of the movement, in the next section I consider the relevance of the movement ecology approach first in terms of agroecology movements globally and then broader movements promoting sustainability transformations.

10.2 Extending the Movement Ecology Approach

The social movement ecology framework is broadly applicable to other agroecology movements and complex struggles for system change, highlighting social movements as drivers of sustainability transformations. It addresses the relative lack of attention to social movement dynamics thus far (Hess 2018; Törnberg 2018) and illuminates mechanisms for achieving pluralistic pathways to transformation through grassroots and coalitional action. The challenges of uniting diverse agrifood system actors with different social class positions, social identities, and ideologies, have been addressed with respect to transnational movements like LVC (Desmarais 2007; Edelman and Borras 2016) and national agroecology movements in the Global North (McGreevy 2012a; Levidow 2015; Wezel et al. 2018a; Dale 2020) and Global South (Bhattacharya 2017; Bottazzi and Boillat 2021; Muñoz et al. 2021; Fernández González et al. 2023). However, the divisions and tensions between actors, as well as their wider social and political landscapes, differ in each context (López-García and Cuéllar-Padilla 2018; López-García 2020).

In the Global North, agroecology movements tend to be driven by environmental and anti-capitalist concerns (Rosset and Altieri 2017) and the emergence of “new peasantries” (Willis and Campbell 2004; Calvário 2017). These movements emphasise alliance-building with a wider array of actors, including urban and non-agrarian actors, due to weaker agricultural and rural social fabrics (Holt-Giménez and Shattuck 2011; Levidow 2015; López-García 2020). Hybrid actors, combining conventional and agroecological approaches, play a crucial role as bridge builders in these contexts (López-García and Cuéllar-Padilla 2018). Whereas in Global South movements, peasant protagonism is stronger due to higher social organisation in rural areas (Val et al. 2019) with an emphasis on massification through peasant and rural organisations (Mier y Terán et al. 2018). However, scaling agroecology still requires broad-based inclusive movements connecting with and within metropolitan areas and engaging with external allies in NGOs and institutions (Mier y Terán et al. 2018; Anderson et al. 2019b; López-García 2020). Additionally, the peasantry is diverse, with differences in property control, race, ethnicity,

gender, generation, and ideology (Edelman and Borras 2016, p.41). Thus, movements in all contexts must consider the “plural, heterogeneous and complex subject” of multi-dimensional and multi-scale agroecological transitions (López-García 2020, p.41), whether involving the agroecological peasantry or a mix of agrarian and non-agrarian actors. Therefore, I argue the broad relevance of the agroecology movement ecology approach for contexts, as it entails strengthening linkages between movement actors to strategically foster different levels of home and coalition spaces based on collective identity, language, and strategy to facilitate diverse transitions towards transformative change.

The different forms of learning (entry, deepening, and transformative-transgressive) are likewise applicable but will be emphasised to varying extents. In Global South contexts where peasant and rural social organisation is strong, entry learning may be less important for scaling, but transformative-transgressive learning remains vital to challenge reliance on external inputs or disrupt unequal gender relations (Schwendler and Thompson 2017; Bezner Kerr et al. 2019). However, dynamics of such learning processes are likely to differ due to the societal position of peasants, relying more on critical pedagogical and territorially embedded processes of collective emancipation (McCune and Sánchez 2018; Rosset et al. 2019). In other Global North movements with many new entrants and disconnection from mainstream farming, cultural considerations identified the UK context may be similar. Understanding cultural tensions related to identity and ideology is crucial in fostering diverse movement spaces and coalitions, and particular to each territory and set of actors.

Just as La Vía Campesina navigates competing claims and interests arising from its heterogenous base to seek “unity in diversity”, so too must each territorial context find ways to bridge between conflicting groups to build collective power. This involves identifying a common cause, developing shared language, defining necessary boundaries, and creating horizontal organising structures which support convergence while respecting diversity. These coalitional efforts should aim to overturn oppressive power structures and challenge dominant paradigms through an iterative process where the tension between

more reformist and radical actors directs a pathway of agroecology transformation (Holt-Giménez and Shattuck 2011; Levidow et al. 2014; Dale 2020). Prefigurative politics plays a central role in these transformations, alongside other theories of change, to develop agroecological food systems, shape new ways of relating between humans or over the more-than-human world not based on domination, and create organising structures based on equity, democracy, and pluriversality.

Broadening to other movements struggling for systemic change, the strategic facilitation of transition pathways in a social movement ecology approach is widely applicable, especially for socio-technical transitions. Sustainability transformations literature emphasises the need for dialogue between conflicting actors and alliances of various forms and scales to tackle the “wicked problem” of sustainability (Wals and Heymann 2004; Luederitz et al. 2017; Pereira et al. 2018; Scoones et al. 2020; Sediri et al. 2020). The movement ecology framework provides an approach for developing complex alliances to address different aspects of transformations, while maintaining the centrality of a transformative political vision. The movement learning framework of this approach connects to the emphasis on transformative-transgressive learning in the sustainability education literature (Peters and Wals 2016; Macintyre et al. 2018), while highlighting the importance of prefigurative politics and home or “niche” spaces for deepening technical and political learning to develop socio-technical innovations (Hoogma et al. 2005; Raven et al. 2008; Loorbach et al. 2020). This is particularly relevant for innovations using similar scaling typologies (Lam et al. 2020; Bögel et al. 2022) or spreading through territorialisation (Späth and Rohrer 2012; Binz et al. 2020).

A final consideration is the differing power dynamics between alternative and mainstream actors in other sectors. Farmers are relatively unique as central actors in changing production practices while being heavily impacted by market pressures and the climate crisis (Vermunt et al. 2020). In other sectors, such positions in production may be held by institutions and industries, changing the dynamics regarding bridge building and behaviour change. The configuration of different actors and cultural considerations and power dynamics between them requires further investigation to understand the movement

ecology framework's applicability in different contexts. I now go on to explore other useful areas for future research taking into consideration the research limitations.

10.3 Pathways from here

This research has provided analysis of movement praxis in the UK agroecology movement, particularly focusing on movement organisers. However, other perspectives are less represented. For instance, some studies have suggested that narratives and practices of agroecology movement leaders may not be shared across their membership (Edelman and Borrás 2016; Soper 2020). To address this, I included views from a broader range of activists and participants through participant observation at movement events. Yet, further research is needed to understand the positions and practices of less engaged members such as those “represented” but not “organised” or “mobilised” by the LWA (Chapter 7). While my focus was primarily on national and organisational levels, exploring local food system organising, particularly dynamics between local actors (Sbicca et al. 2019; Hubeau et al. 2021) and their level of integration with wider movements (González De Molina and Lopez-Garcia 2021; Zerbán and López-García 2024), would be beneficial. Although regional group interviews and my involvement in local food networks in Wales provided some insights, a more in-depth analysis of local dynamics was beyond this research's scope. Future research should also examine the dynamics between agroecological entrants and established conventional farmers, including local interpersonal dynamics (Mailfert 2007; McGreevy 2012b) and the role of agroecological lighthouses (McGreevy et al. 2021) and hybrid forums (López-García et al. 2022) as spaces of interaction. I sought to engage some conventional or hybrid actor perspectives through the Your Farming Future participant interviews, but further empirical research is needed to understand perspectives of farmers peripheral to the movement at varying stages of transition. As López-García and Cuéllar-Padilla (2018) reflect, this would require a shift to a less activist and more participatory research approach, being mindful of power dynamics between actors and the necessity of a longer timeframe to support and observe transition processes.

While I focused on LWA and aligned movement spaces as representative of political agroecology, an analysis of coalition dynamics could have been strengthened by more explicitly seeking perspectives of other movement actors through interviews and attending broader movement events. Research into the dynamics of coalition spaces, networks, and alliances in the movement, as well as the perspectives of more moderate movement organisations is needed. Additionally, considering power dynamics and systems of oppression within the movement is crucial. While there exists current research exploring racial dynamics within the LWA (Kamal and Wall 2024), there is opportunity for a deeper class analysis, both within the movement and in relation to wider farming communities. This could have been addressed by raising issues of class more in data collection and identifying particular actors representing distinct class positions. One interesting area for future research would be exploring tensions between landowners and workers in the movement, particularly the new landworker union SALT. At the broader political and economic landscape level, I have touched upon the impact of Brexit and Covid-19 in shaping LWA's organisational growth but further analysis would be valuable to contextualise movement praxis, reflecting political ecology and cognitive praxis approaches (Eyerman and Jamison 1991; González de Molina et al. 2019). A more in-depth examination of coalition dynamics could integrate this to examine the life cycle of coalitions and their impacts on the political system. Finally, research and practical action applying the movement ecology approach is needed to test its relevance in different contexts and deepen understanding of diverse intramovement dynamics.

10.4 Prefiguring Towards Transformative Change

The agroecology movement ecology approach draws together concepts and perspectives relating to social movements, agroecology transformations, and critical adult education. In bridging these fields and incorporating activist theorising on coalitions, I have sought to contribute to each of them, recognising common ground as well as the value such diverse perspectives offer to the challenge of building sufficient collective power for transformative change. Applying this in practice means developing a deeper

understanding of which movement spaces serve as home spaces, and for whom, and where opportunities lie to create more linkages within the movement and develop varying levels of coalition spaces. This requires analysis of the function different spaces could play in fostering transformations, particularly through different types of learning, and the role of culture in facilitating or hindering this. In developing effective movement ecosystems, appropriate boundaries for different spaces and effective and prefigurative forms of governance must be established to ensure collective action is informed by radical and transformative politics, taking inspiration from established alliances and transnational movements like ANA and LVC. This recognises that prefiguring the future we want to see is an imperfect journey, an experimental and open-ended process of becoming. Guided by principles, complex structures of mass organising can be built, strategically engaging different tactics to progress alternatives, transform institutional and structural barriers, and move towards realising pluralistic visions of a sustainable and just world. I, for one, am excited to move forward into this work and have a great belief that, despite the many divisions that plague social movements, there exists a real hunger and opportunity for working together to build the collective power we need for transformative change.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Table of Research Participants

The following table provides brief description of the participants mentioned in Chapters 6-9, including their role(s) and the forms of data they were included in.

Name	Role(s)/involvement in the movement	Data inclusion
Amelia	LWA coordinator and landworker	Participant Observation (Research Journal)
Andrew	Member of the action learning group, farm hack organiser, and landworker	Action Learning Group Sessions
Anna	Member of the action learning group, landworker, and facilitator actively involved in the movement	Action Learning Group Sessions
Bay	LWA coordinator, OOTL member, and landworker	Reflective Focus Group (LWA staff and coordinators)
Beth	Action learning group member, LWA staff member, and landworker	Action Learning Group Sessions
Cara	LWA Cymru member organiser and LWA coordinator	Reflective Focus Groups (LWA staff and coordinators; LWA Cymru)
Carl	Action learning group member and organic farming advocate	Action Learning Group Sessions
Chris	LWA regional member organiser and landworker	Regional Group Interview
Clare	Action learning group member and LWA staff member	Action Learning Group Sessions and Reflective Focus Group (LWA staff and coordinators)
Colin	Farm hack attendee and conventional farmer	Farm Hack Interview
Divya	Action learning group member and LWA staff member	Action Learning Group Sessions and Groundswell Interview
Dom	Farm hack organiser and landworker	Farm Hack Interview
Emma	LWA regional member organiser, landworker, and farm hack organiser	Regional Group Interview and Farm Hack Interview
Fiona	LWA staff member and landworker	Participant Observation (Research Journal)

Hazel	LWA staff member and landworker	Reflective Focus Group (LWA staff and coordinators)
Jack	Farm hack organiser and landworker	Farm Hack Interview
James	Your Farming Future participant, conventional/regenerative farmer	Your Farming Future Interview
Joy	Regional growers group organiser, landworker, and LWA member	Regional Group Interview
Kerry	LWA Scotland branch coordinator and landworker	Regional Group Interview
Leah	LWA regional member organiser and landworker	Regional Group Interview
Liam	Farm hack organiser	Farm Hack Interview
Noah	Farm hack organiser and landworker	Farm Hack Interview
Nora	LWA coordinator, farm hack organiser, and landworker	Participant Observation (Research Journal) and Groundswell Interview
Oliver	Farm hack session organiser and open-source techie	Farm Hack Interview
Olivia	Your Farming Future participant, farmer	Your Farming Future Interview
Paul	Your Farming Future participant, farm manager	Your Farming Future Interview
Rebecca	LWA Cymru member organiser and staff member	Reflective Focus Groups (LWA staff and coordinators; LWA Cymru)
Rob	LWA regional member organiser	Participant Observation (Research Journal)
Sandra	LWA regional member organiser and activist	Reflective Focus Groups (LWA Cymru)
Sarah	LWA staff member and landworker	Participant Observation (Research Journal) and Reflective Focus Group (LWA staff and coordinators)
Sofia	LWA staff member and activist	Participant Observation (Research Journal) and Reflective Focus Group (LWA staff and coordinators)
Tammy	LWA staff member and farmer	Participant Observation (Research Journal)
Willow	Action learning group member, researcher and landworker	Action Learning Group Sessions

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