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Title	Territorializing agroecology in Ireland: a case study of Talamh Beo
Authors	O'Connell, Eoin E.
Publication date	2025-10-03
Original Citation	O'Connell, E. 2025. Territorializing agroecology in Ireland: a case study of Talamh Beo. MPhil Thesis, University College Cork.
Type of publication	Masters thesis (Research)
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Download date	2026-11-16 07:51:02
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/19329



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Territorializing Agroecology in Ireland: A Case Study of Talamh Beo

Thesis presented by

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for the degree of

Master of Philosophy

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Year of submission: 2025

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Declaration

"This is to certify that the work I am submitting is my own and has not been submitted for another degree, either at University College Cork or elsewhere. All external references and sources are clearly acknowledged and identified within the contents. I have read and understood the regulations of University College Cork concerning plagiarism and intellectual property."

Digital signature of the candidate: Eoin O'Connell

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to all those who made this thesis possible.

I am especially grateful to my supervisors, Dr. Liam Coakley and Dr. Denis Linehan, for their guidance, dedicated support, and endless patience, without which I would never have got through my master's degree.

I would also like to thank the Department of Geography in University College Cork and all the members of staff there that have helped me throughout my postgraduate studies.

Finally, I would like to give special thanks to Talamh Beo, particularly to those that I pestered the most, for kindly sharing their lives, knowledge, and experiences with me. I hope that this research, at the very least, highlights the value and significance of their struggle. I wish them every success in their continuing efforts to transform food systems in Ireland.

Abstract

The current operations of the agri-food sector in the Republic of Ireland, despite being hailed for its economic success and its contribution to world food security, are causing numerous, interconnected social, economic, and ecological issues. In contrast, agroecology, as a model of food production, is gaining greater recognition globally for its ability to tackle such challenges while also producing at comparable levels to industrial agriculture. In Ireland, however, "agroecology could be deemed as being nearly non-existent" (Agroecology Europe 2020, p.126). But in spite of its marginal standing there are those in Ireland already implementing agroecology and trying to advance it further.

The aim of this thesis is to examine the process of territorializing agroecology in Ireland. To do so, I conduct a qualitative case study of Talamh Beo—a farmer-led movement struggling for agroecology, food sovereignty, and food system transformation, and Ireland's only member of La Vía Campesina—to learn from their specific experiences of trying to territorialize agroecology in Ireland.

Territorializing agroecology, however, is a complex process, and to navigate such complexity I argue—building on the notion of disputed territories already prominent in agroecology research—for an overlapping understanding of territory and territorialization; which when applied to the territorialization of agroecology emphasises that attempts to territorialize agroecology should not be considered as occurring completely outside of the dominant territorial formations of industrial-capitalist agriculture. Instead they overlap, come into conflict, and become entangled; which can create hybrid territorial formations that are the product of blended practices, relations, institutions, and values.

To mobilize this overlapping conception, and examine the relations, practices, and values that underpin T.Beo's attempts to territorialize agroecology in Ireland, I employ three interconnected framings; moral economy/ecology; everyday resistance; and formal resistance. Through moral economy/ecology, I explore the values, norms, and expectations that T.Beo believe should structure the socioeconomic and socioecological relations of our food systems. While by way of everyday and formal resistance, I look at the actions T.Beo are taking—both as individual members and as a movement—to territorialize agroecology. Individually, I argue, members' daily

farming practices are forms of everyday resistance, and are a potentially powerful method, in and of themselves, for territorializing agroecology. While, formally, as a movement, T.Beo's actions, I argue, are broadly aimed at creating space within an industrial-capitalist dominated agri-food landscape for agroecology to proliferate.

On top of this though, the experiences of T.Beo presented here through these three framings also highlight how difficult, complex and entangled the process of territorializing agroecology is. T.Beo recognise that their attempts to territorialize agroecology are emerging from within the very food systems that they are opposing and trying to provide alternatives to. Throughout the thesis we see how their vision and actions are restricted by, and have to navigate, deep-seated industrial-capitalist structures, practices, relations, and logics which dominate food systems in Ireland.

Overall, this thesis contributes to research on place-specific instances of agroecology territorialization, by shedding light on the prospects of, and difficulties faced by, current attempts at territorializing agroecology in Ireland. Furthermore, this study helps open up Irish agricultural research to agroecology and, more particularly, to the knowledge of those actually implementing agroecology. But in both respects this thesis is only a preliminary inquiry and a lot more work is required to deepen and expand on both of these efforts.

1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Agriculture in the Republic of Ireland[1] is dominated by livestock farming—mainly cattle and dairy (Dillon et al. 2024)—that is carried out nearly exclusively on family farms (Stewart 2023); whose output is mainly produced for export.[2]

Despite being hailed for its economic success (DAFM 2021; Bord Bia 2024), and for its contribution to 'feeding the world' (Sage and Kenny 2017), agriculture in Ireland is currently facing considerable challenges.

Economically, the vast majority of farmers are struggling. Average farm incomes fell sharply in 2023 to just below €20,000 (Dillon et al. 2024)—which is only 44 percent of the average industrial wage (IFA 2024). Relatedly, the economic viability of farms continues to be threatened. In 2023 only 28 percent of all farms are considered viable; the rest are either dependent on off-farm incomes or are operating 'non-viable' farms (Dillon et al. 2024).

Socially, farmers are struggling to stay on the land; a persistent trend in Irish agriculture (CSO 2021). Farmers' wellbeing is suffering; affected particularly by high levels of stress and anxiety (Brennan et al. 2022; van Doorn et al. 2020). And there is severe gender inequality within farming as only around 13 percent of farm holders are female (CSO 2021).

Ecologically, agriculture is having to face up to many of its negative impacts. Agriculture is the largest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions in Ireland; producing 37.8 percent of the country's total (EPA 2024a, p.7). It is also adversely affecting water quality; 42 percent of river sites in Ireland have "unsatisfactory nitrate concentrations" which is mainly driven by agriculture (EPA 2024b, p.9). Furthermore, agriculture is putting pressure on numerous different habitats and species in Ireland;

[1] Ireland here after.

[2] According to Bord Bia (2022 cited in Blaix 2024) Ireland exports over 90 percent of its food and drink. Similarly, the DAFM (2023) *Fact Sheet on Irish Agriculture* asserts that "the Irish agri-food sector is globally orientated, with approximately 90% of Irish beef, sheepmeat and dairy produce exported each year."

with 85 percent of listed habitats considered to be in "unfavourable conservation status" (Wall et al. 2020, p.334).

Globally, agroecology is becoming more widely recognised as a model of food production that can tackle such issues (IPES-Food 2016). A number of assessments suggest that agroecological farming generates superior farm incomes, financial outcomes, and creates more employment compared to conventional farming (van der Ploeg et al. 2019; D'Annolfo et al. 2017). Furthermore, agroecological practices reduce food producers' dependence on external inputs and subsidies (De Schutter 2010), enhances their autonomy, increases their wellbeing, and improves their social connections (Bezner Kerr et al. 2021). Ecologically, agroecological practices support climate change adaptation and mitigation (De Schutter 2010; Snapp et al. 2021), provide greater resistant and resilience in the face of climate disasters (Holt-Gimenez 2002; Rosset et al. 2011; GAFF 2021),[3] and have positive impacts on biodiversity and ecosystem services (GAFF 2021; Palomo-Campesino et al. 2018). On top of all this, there is growing evidence that agroecology can "generate near-comparable yields to the historically unparalleled yields of contemporary extractivist capitalist agriculture" (Akram-Lodhi 2021, pp.709; Pretty et al. 2006; Pretty 2006; D'Annolfo et al. 2017), and is known to improve food security and nutrition at the household level (Bezner Kerr et al. 2021).

Despite these benefits however, agroecology holds a very marginal position within Irish agriculture (Agroecology Europe 2020; Blaix 2024). In spite of this, there are those in Ireland who are attempting to develop agroecology as an alternative method of food production. And it is these efforts that this research is concerned with; particularly the efforts of one group—Talamh Beo (T.Beo).

In this introductory chapter I will provide a brief summary of the thesis that follows. I will begin by defining agroecology. Next, I will outline the main aims of this research. Then, I will introduce the theoretical background of the study. Following that, I will provide some background information on the research setting, by giving an overview

[3] "In agroecology, 'resistance' describes the ability of a farming system to resist the impact of a disturbance, while 'resilience' is the ability to recover from disturbance" (Holt-Gimenez 2002, p.88).

of agricultural development in Ireland over the last fifty years, and introducing T.Beo. Finally, I will provide an outline of the structure of the thesis.

1.2 What is agroecology?

Agroecology is commonly seen as having three main aspects; a science, a practice, and a movement (Wezel et al. 2009). As a science it is often defined as "the science of applying ecological concepts and principles to the design and management of sustainable food systems" (Gliessman 2015, p.345). Originally focusing on the farm level, agroecology has since broadened its analysis to embrace the "entire food system" including its social and economic dimensions (Francis et al. 2003, p.100). Agroecology as a science embraces plural ways of knowing. Actively bringing together "traditional and Indigenous practices and knowledge systems with transdisciplinary sciences" (GAFF 2021, p.13; Martínez-Torres and Rosset 2014; Altieri 1995).

As a practice, agroecology aims to create and manage more sustainable agroecosystems that maintain output for human use while exhibiting "natural ecosystem-like characteristics" (Gliessman 2015, p.27). It must be stressed that agroecological practices are not universally applicable technical prescriptions. Rather they are based on principles that when applied take different forms depending on local conditions. These principles include increasing the recycling of biomass; reducing the loss of water, energy, and nutrients; enhancing soil health; improving the biodiversity of the agroecosystem; and promoting greater synergies between the components of the agroecosystem (Nicholls et al. 2016, Gliessman 2015; Altieri 1995; Rosset et al. 2011).

Finally, as a movement, agroecology has been increasingly integrated by rural social movements into their struggles to defend, contest and reconfigure rural spaces and territories (Rosset and Martínez-Torres 2012). These movements—best exemplified by La Vía Campesina (LVC)—stress that if agroecology is to protect human rights and stave off ecological destruction then it must be political. Agroecology cannot be seen simply as a set of technical practices; it must also involve transforming the power structures and socioeconomic relations that uphold current industrial-capitalist food systems (LVC 2015a: Giraldo and Rosset 2023).

These are the three main aspects of agroecology, but within agroecology—both in agroecology movements and agroecology research—it is widely recognised that only by integrating all three strands can "the momentum for food system transformation" be created (Gliessman 2018, p.600).

One of the main focuses of agroecology research over the last number of years has been trying to understand how exactly this momentum can be built and how agroecology can be 'territorialized'. Territorializing agroecology has been defined 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" (Mier y Terán Giménez Cacho et al. 2018, p.639).[4] This emerging body of work focuses on the constraints blocking the proliferation of agroecological practices, and the strategies, pathways, and drivers to overcome them. These constraints and drivers—much like agroecological practices themselves—are place-specific and very much dependent upon local social, economic, and ecological conditions. This study then seeks to contribute to this growing body of research.

1.3 Aims of this research

The main aim of this study is to gain a greater understanding of the current process of territorializing agroecology in Ireland. To do this, I will employ a qualitative case study that focuses on one particular group's efforts to territorialize agroecology in Ireland—Talamh Beo. T.Beo are one of the main groups in Ireland actively pushing for agroecology and food system change, and this thesis aims to provide a snapshot into T.Beo's experience of trying to develop agroecology from its marginalised

[4] Within the literature the phenomenon I am terming the 'territorialization of agroecology' is more commonly called the 'scaling of agroecology'. The two can be used interchangeably and are ultimately describing the same process (Mier y Terán Giménez Cacho et al. 2018; Ferguson et al. 2019). In this study—as will be detailed below—I am hoping to build upon usages of territory already existing in agroecological research to help shed light on this process. So I use the term 'territorialization of agroecology' here mainly to avoid any confusion that could be caused by shifting between the different terminologies of territory and scale.

position, by investigating the shape their current efforts are taking, as well as their potential.

The rationale behind this study is twofold. Firstly, as is suggested above, agroecology is known to address many of the social, economic, and ecological issues that Irish agriculture is facing. As such, it is important to understand the possibilities and difficulties of trying to establish and develop agroecology in Ireland. However, currently, despite its possible significance, in Ireland agroecology is practically unheard of, and very little research has been conducted into it, its potential, or its development (Agroecology Europe 2020; Blaix 2024). So by investigating the current process of territorializing agroecology in Ireland I hope to help begin filling this gap.

Secondly, I believe such an investigation can add to agroecology research more broadly. Specifically, it can contribute to the growing body of literature on place-specific instances of agroecology territorialization. While there are certain generalizable trends across territorialization attempts, the development of agroecology—the shape it takes and the barriers it faces—depends on the context in which it unfolds. This research agenda then seeks to examine the particularities of territorializing agroecology in specific locations (Brescia 2017; Rosset et al. 2011; Khadse et al. 2018). Deepening understandings of the territorialization process in Ireland then can add to these works; more particularly it can add to the research on 'emerging agroecologies' which "consists of processes that create agroecologies where they did not exist before" (Giraldo 2024; Rivera-Nuñez et al. 2020).

1.4 Theoretical background

This research is positioned within political agroecology; a field of study that brings together agroecology, political ecology, critical agrarian studies, and the experiences of social movements. Taking from these, political agroecology seeks to expose the power relations underpinning current food systems in order to help agroecology proliferate (González de Molina et al. 2020; Giraldo 2019; Anderson et al. 2020).

Within political agroecology the spatial concept of territory is regularly mobilised towards these ends (Wezel et al. 2016; Guzmán Luna et al. 2019); particularly the notion of 'disputed territories'(Fernandes 2023; Rosset and Martínez-Torres 2012). This disputed territories framework considers the struggle for agroecology as a

territorial dispute. A dispute between two competing political projects—between peasants,[5] farmers, and rural social movements and their struggle for agroecology and food sovereignty; and industrial-capitalist agriculture—over both *material* territories—physical features and resources—and *immaterial* territories—values, ideas, and expectations (Fernandes 2023; Rosset and Martínez-Torres 2012; Meek and Simonian 2016; van den Berg et al. 2021; McCune and Sánchez 2018). In this study I intend to extend this disputed territories concept to frame my analysis of T.Beo and their attempts to territorialize agroecology and transform the current Irish food system.

But this framing and agroecological discourse in general is met with a persistent critique. This critique, which is commonly associated with Bernstein (2014), argues that agroecological discourse creates an unhelpful binary that idealises peasants, smallholders, and their practices; ignoring the many ways that these groups can become involved in the production and reproduction of industrial-capitalist food systems, and can actively seek inclusion in such systems.

The development of disputed territories in agroecology research emerged out of engagements with relational understandings of territory from human geography (Fernandes 2023), and to help deal with this critique and to help account for the multiple different ways peasants, smallholders, and rural populations interact with industrial-capitalist food systems (Bernstein 2014; Henderson 2016; Jansen 2015) I suggest deepening these engagements. Particularly, I argue for a greater emphasis on an overlapping understanding of territory; which acknowledges the existence of different types of territory—like the competing agroecological and industrial-capitalist agriculture projects described in the disputed territories framework (Fernandes 2023; Rosset and Martínez-Torres 2012)—but stresses that different types of territory can co-exist, come into conflict, become entangled and blend together (Haesbaert 2013; Halvorsen 2018; Clare et al. 2018).

[5] I use the term peasant here uncritically. I only use it because the agroecological research or movement I am referencing has adopted it. Furthermore, I feel that it is unnecessary to get into the debates surrounding the definition and usage of peasant (van der Ploeg 2010; Bernstein 2014; McMichael, 2015), as it is somewhat tangential to my research, because T.Beo and its members—at least those that I spoke with—do not consider themselves to be peasants. Instead they typically see themselves as farmers, small-scale-producers, growers, or landworkers.

To mobilise this overlapping conception of territory I utilise three distinct but interconnected concepts that are widely used within political ecology, critical agrarian studies, and are slowly becoming more prominent in agroecology. These concepts are; moral economy/ecology (Wolford 2005; Meek 2014), everyday resistance (Rivera-Núñez et al. 2020; Van den Berg et al. 2021), and formal resistance (Giraldo 2024; Brescia 2017; Mier y Terán Giménez Cacho et al. 2018).

Moral economy/ecology looks at the norms, values, and expectations that regulate economic relations (Palomera and Vetta 2016), and relations between humans and non-humans (Hougaard 2023). Everyday resistance describes the low-profile, routine practices of relatively powerless groups through which they attempt to undermine power and assert their own political interests (Johansson and Vinthagen 2020; Scott 1985; 1989; 1990). While formal, collective resistance—which has received the most attention within agroecology research (Giraldo 2024; Brescia 2017; Mier y Terán Giménez Cacho et al. 2018)—looks at the activities of more formally organised social movements. Each of these three concepts taken together can help give a holistic account of T.Beo's struggle, and shed light on the relations, practices, and values that underpin their attempts to territorialize agroecology in Ireland.

1.5 Case study background

1.5.1 Irish agriculture

Ireland's accession into the European Economic Community (EEC)[6] had a profound impact on the structure of Irish agriculture. Joining the EEC, and gaining access to the EEC's Common Agricultural Policy, offered two major advantages to Irish agriculture. Firstly, it shifted the financial burden of price supports to Brussels (Matthews 1982, p.245). Secondly, Irish agriculture gained access to "an unlimited market at favourable prices" (Hennessy and Kinsella 2012, p.8). These changes helped spark a productivist phase in Irish agriculture—where the drive to increase output took precedence over everything else (Tovey 2001; Hennessy and Kinsella 2012; Sage and Kenny 2017; O'Shaughnessy and Sage 2017).

[6] Now known as the European Union.

This productivist drive ebbed and flowed throughout the intervening decades in response to wider economic and environmental conditions (Hennessy and Kinsella 2012; Tovey 2001; Sage and Kenny 2017; Kenny et al. 2018). In spite of these shifts however, throughout this period the main guiding principle behind the development of Ireland's agri-food sector has been the generation of capital accumulation and economic growth (Tovey 2001; O'Shaughnessy and Sage 2017). A focus which has brought about major structural transformations within Irish agriculture; two key aspects of which I want to specifically highlight.

Firstly, following accession to the EEC the food industry became central to the Irish state's economic development goals. The food industry was considered a valuable asset for generating capital accumulation and stimulating economic growth—far more so than agriculture alone. As such, on-farm production became subordinated to the needs of this rapidly growing industry. Instead of producing food for final use farming became about producing inputs for large-scale processors; with production having to become standardised and scaled to meet processors' demands (Tovey 1991; Tovey 2000; Mercier 2020; O'Shaughnessy and Sage 2017).

This subordination has intensified further over the years, as the control of the food industry continues to become concentrated in the hands of fewer and fewer large corporate entities (Commins 1996; Tovey 1991; 2000; Power 2020). While the corporate capture of the food industry in Ireland has also extended further up the supply chain. Particularly in food retail where a handful of corporate retailers now control the majority of the Irish market (Sage and Kenny 2017, Stewart 2023).

The second major change over the last 50 years in Irish agriculture that I want to highlight, is the complete transformation of farming itself. The overarching productivist rationality; the pursuit of economic growth above all else; technological change and farm modernisation; and the reorientation of agricultural production towards the needs of food industry and international markets have pushed farming towards specialisation, concentration, and a constant expansion of scale and intensity (Commins 1996; Lafferty et al. 1999; Ilbery and Bowler 1998). Trends which continue to dominate (CSO 2021; Dillon et al. 2024).

All of these changes have helped produce, what many have termed, a 'dualistic farming system'; characterised by a contracting minority of high-income, competitive

farm enterprises on the one hand, and on the other a majority of low-income, economically vulnerable farms (Tovey 2000; Mercier 2020; O'Shaughnessy and Sage 2017; Hennessy and Kinsella 2012). Although on average farm incomes are very low, and figures on farm viability are quite stark (Dillon et al. 2024), there are wide disparities between sectors; with dairy farming really being the only type of farming that could be deemed financially successful. Dairy farming which makes up only around 18 percent of the overall farming population, accounts for about 45 percent of total farming income (Dillon et al. 2024). In contrast, the vast majority of other types of farms are struggling to "survive the treadmill of commodity agriculture" (Sage and Kenny 2017). And despite receiving considerable support through subsidies, most farms either rely on off-farm income to stay afloat or are still not considered economically viable (Dillon et al. 2024).

1.5.2 Alternative food movements

While the productivist transformation of Irish agriculture over the last half century has been profound, it has not developed without reaction. In the 70s and 80s a whole host of alternative, grassroots food initiatives began to emerge in response to some of the worst excesses of the transforming food system.

These alternative food initiatives as Murtagh (2010) suggests, could be split into two broad categories; alternative food retailing—including farmers markets, farm shops, and Community Supported Agriculture—and community food growing—including allotments, community gardens, and artisan food producers (Sage 2003; Moore 2006a; 2006b; Moore et al. 2014; Murtagh 2015). Most of these initiatives did not emerge from traditional farming populations in Ireland, but from individuals with a diversity of backgrounds, including a large contingent of non-nationals, predominately from the UK and continental Europe, that sought out cheap land to escape urban life and experiment with alternative ways of living (Tovey 2006; Sage 2003; Macken-Walsh, 2009; Murtagh 2015).

Furthermore, these initiatives did not develop in isolation, but are interconnected through individuals, informal groups, and organisations in broader alternative food networks (Tovey 2006; Sage 2003; Moore 2006a; Murtagh 2015). Since their beginnings, most of these networks have remained on the periphery of Irish agriculture; maintaining strong, but typically isolated presence in specific locations—

like West Cork and around the Leitrim/Roscommon border (Sage 2003; Tovey 2006; Läpple and Cullinan 2012; Murtagh 2015).

Probably the most significant actor within these alternative food networks has been the organic movement. Most significant, I suggest, for two main reasons: Firstly, it has had the biggest impact on farming practices over the years; with organic farming growing from between 50 and 70 farmers in the 1980s (Tovey 1999) to around 5000 farmers in 2024 (Teagasc 2024). Secondly, it has been a key 'movement site' for the development of broader alternative food networks; providing a space where like-minded individuals could gather, exchange information, and organize (Tovey 1999).

The organic movement's trajectory and composition followed along similar lines to other alternative food initiatives. Over the years, however, it has become more embedded than other initiatives in mainstream agriculture, as, beginning in the early 90s, the state set about conventionalizing organic farming as a set of techniques that could help address emerging environmental concerns around agriculture, and provide additional market opportunities for economically marginalised farms. The organic movement then gained greater institutional footing through its responsibility for the certification process of organic produce. This development was not without its consequences. The conventionalization process suppressed the movements' more radical aspects, and caused fractures within the movement that led to the formation of additional formal organic organisations, and the emergence of a "post-organic" element that maintains organic principles but shuns its conventionalization (Moore 2006b; Tovey 1999; 2006; Murtagh 2015).

Such tension and diversity are regular features of the organic movement in Ireland (Moore 2006b), but in spite of its conventionalization and internal friction the organic movement remains a central figure in Ireland's alternative food networks (Sage 2003; Tovey 2006; Moore 2006a, Murtagh 2015). Alternative food networks that have played a foundational role in the development of T.Beo, as many of the organisations and initiatives that make up these networks are, as will be seen throughout this thesis, precursors to T.Beo in terms of their underlying practices, values, and organisational forms. On top of this, T.Beo could be described as emerging out of these networks and are still very much a part of them. Their emergence from these networks, as shall be discussed in more depth in the next section, came in response to perceived gaps in the

efforts of these alternative food networks, and, more particularly, failings of the Irish food system more broadly.

1.5.3 Agroecology in Ireland and Talamh Beo

Agroecology holds a very marginal position in Ireland. The number of farms that have adopted agroecological approaches is extremely low. While there has not been any research, to my knowledge, into the exact numbers practicing agroecology in Ireland; organic farming more broadly—if we take it as a proxy—despite growing considerably in the last number of years only accounts for about 5 percent of the total land area farmed in Ireland (Teagasc 2024). Further to this, two recent reports carried out on the state of agroecology in Ireland suggest that "agroecology could be deemed as being nearly non-existent", as farmers, citizens, academia and the government have little to no knowledge of, or engagement with, agroecological concepts and practices (Agroecology Europe 2020, p.126; Blaix 2024).

Despite this seemingly bleak picture, however, there are those within Ireland actively practicing agroecology and agitating for its further development. At the forefront of these efforts are Talamh Beo.

Talamh Beo—which is Irish for 'living land'—is a nation-wide grassroots movement of farmers, landworkers, and concerned citizens that are organising for food system change in Ireland, and is Ireland's only member of the international La Vía Campesina movement.

T.Beo officially launched in 2019, but was initially formed in 2017 during the yearly *Feeding Ourselves* conference held in Cloughjordan, Tipperary—which is an annual gathering of a whole host of producers, organisers, and researchers from across the alternative food landscape in Ireland (Moore 2017; 2024). There, a number of farmers came together to fill a void in Irish agriculture; to create a farmer-led movement that would challenge the current industrial agri-food model, and advocate for agroecology, food sovereignty, and local food production.

T.Beo is still only in its infancy and has around 300 members that are spread throughout Ireland. While T.Beo mainly represents small-scale producers and family farms and advocates for agroecology, its membership is quite diverse; including market gardeners, beef farmers, sheep farmers, and dairy farmers—all of various sizes—whose knowledge and uptake of agroecological practices varies.

Further to this diversity, T.Beo consider themselves to be a farmers' and citizens' organisation, and actively welcome the participation of consumers and concerned citizens, for they realise that everyone is affected by the operations of our food system, and that food system change will require the collective effort of society in general and not just farmers and landworkers.

Organisationally, T.Beo are still trying to work out how best to balance this—to ensure that T.Beo is based directly on the needs, experiences, and concerns of farmers actually trying to implement agroecological practices; while also trying to include and build connections with conventional farmers and wider society. But currently the 'main organisational space'—as one member described it to me—is the core group. This group is made up of the most active members of T.Beo and is composed solely of members who are farmers. This is to ensure that farmers' concerns are at the forefront of everything they do. Another important aspect of this core group is that they try to ensure that it has equal representation of men and women to help address the gender imbalances and patriarchal norms that are so pervasive in agriculture (Document 16; CSO 2021; Zaremba et al. 2021; Trevilla Espinal et al. 2021; Balaine 2019; Cush et al. 2018).

Outside of this core group, T.Beo has various working groups. These working groups were described in T.Beo's *Our Food, Our Future* forum in Carrick-on-Shannon—which I attended—as the "engine" of the organisation, and any member can participate in them. These working groups focus on specific aspects of our food system; for instance their working groups include a local food policy group, a T.Beo women group, and a climate change and biodiversity group. Working groups can be initiated and developed by any member who sees a particular issue that they want to address. So, these groups are constantly evolving and responding to the needs of members.

But while T.Beo is still only finding its feet as a movement—and recognise that their organisational structure is a work-in-progress that will likely change as T.Beo itself, and agroecology in Ireland, develop and grow—T.Beo are firm in their ambitions, purpose, and outlook. They want to create food systems that are democratically controlled by both food producers and consumers; that provide sustainable livelihoods for all food producers; provide people with nutritious, affordable, locally produced food; regenerate rural communities; and restore and protect ecosystems and

biodiversity. Towards these ends they champion agroecology, food sovereignty, local food systems, and the rights of food producers.

This research then aims to explore the values, practices, and relations that underpin their attempts to bring about such a radical transformation and territorialize agroecology in Ireland.

1.6 Structure of the thesis

This thesis will be presented in five main sections. The first section is the literature review which will discuss the key literature relating to this research such as; agroecology and territory; relational territory; moral economy/ecology; everyday resistance; and formal resistance. The second section is the methodology section which will detail the overarching methodological approach I adopted as well as the data collection and analysis methods I used. The next three sections are the main chapters of the thesis where the experiences, knowledge, and practices of T.Beo and its members are discussed in detail. Each of the three chapters are based on one of the three key concepts above—moral economy/ecology (chapter 4), everyday resistance (chapter 5), and formal resistance (chapter 6). The final section will bring these three chapters together and sum up the main outcomes of this research.

2 Literature review

2.1 Introduction

This research is broadly positioned at the confluence of critical agrarian studies and political ecology. Critical agrarian studies is an interdisciplinary field that is "concerned with understanding agrarian life, livelihoods, formations and their processes of change" (Akram-Lodhi et al. 2021, p.1). Political ecology, another interdisciplinary field, over the years has been defined in various ways (Tetreault 2017), but it is generally recognised that works in political ecology "address the condition and change of social/environmental systems, with explicit consideration of relations of power" (Robbins 2012).

The two disciplines overlap in many ways; both involve the study of conflicts over access and control of natural resources (Akram-Lodhi et al. 2021; Robbins 2012); both are politically engaged (Borras 2023) in that they are both critical of, and contest, dominant paradigms (Bridge et al. 2015; Edelman and Wolford 2017); both give primacy to the efforts of resistance 'from below', and work towards "better, less coercive, less exploitative, and more sustainable ways of doing things" (Robbins 2012; Borras 2023); and, finally, uncovering and unravelling unequal, hierarchical power relations is a key aspect of both (Svarstad et al. 2018; Akram-Lodhi et al. 2021). Despite these convergences the two fields have remained somewhat distant, and there have been growing calls to bring the two into more direct dialogue (Dunlap and Jakobsen 2020; Dietz 2021).

Political agroecology seeks to do just that. It explicitly utilises political ecology approaches to deal with socioecological change in specific agroecosystems and food systems more broadly (González de Molina et al. 2020). Taking from political ecology, political agroecology positions itself against 'apolitical' agroecological approaches that consider agroecology as simply a set of practices and techniques that can make current food systems more sustainable (González de Molina et al. 2020; Giraldo 2019; Anderson et al. 2020; Giraldo and Rosset 2018). Political agroecology, in contrast, recognises that society and nature are inseparable; such that agroecosystems and food systems are power laden and upheld by wider social, political, and economic relations (Anderson et al. 2020). Political agroecology then focuses on uncovering and unravelling the power relations of current food systems, for spreading agroecology

and transforming food systems will be impossible without overturning the power relations that maintain them.

Territory is a spatial concept that is regularly utilised to do just that—disentangle how power operates through space, society, and nature. Predominantly developed within human geography, territory is widely used in political ecology (Escobar 2008; Rocheleau 2015) and critical agrarian studies (Shattuck and Peluso 2021) to expose and address power relations underlying socioecological systems. Within political agroecology, and agroecology generally, territory is gaining greater significance, and is widely considered fundamental for understanding and fostering agroecosystem and food system change (Wezel et al. 2016; Guzmán Luna et al. 2019)—particularly the concept of 'disputed territories'(Fernandes 2023; Rosset and Martínez-Torres 2012). It is my intention here to add to these works and build upon the disputed territories framework to help understand T.Beo's attempts to spread agroecology and transform food systems in Ireland.

This chapter then will provide the theoretical background to the thesis by reviewing the current literature on the topics under discussion. The review will be divided into three main sections. Firstly, I will discuss the use of territory within agroecology; particularly focusing on the influential notions of 'disputed territories' and 'material/immaterial territories'. Following this, I will detail a persistent critique of agroecology more broadly, that equally applies to those works in agroecology that utilise territory. This critique argues that agroecology produces an essentialising discourse around peasants, smallholders, Indigenous Peoples and their practices that creates an unhelpful binary between these groups and industrial-capitalist agriculture; which conceals many of the ways these groups can become entangled in the production and reproduction of industrial-capitalist agriculture.

To overcome this, I argue for a deeper engagement with relational approaches to territory from human geography. This will be the focus of the second section. In it I will particularly argue for a greater use of an overlapping understanding of territory which I believe can add greater depth to research on the territorialization of agroecology, and can help deal with the complexity of peasants', smallholders', and rural populations' interactions with the structures of industrial-capitalist agriculture.

Finally, in the last section I will introduce three interconnected, but distinct conceptions that will be used to mobilise my relational, overlapping perspective of territory, and shed light on the relations, practices, and values behind T.Beo's attempts to territorialize agroecology. These three conceptions are; moral economy/ecology; everyday resistance; and bottom-up, formal resistance. While all of these concepts are fundamentally connected, each individually will form the basis for the three main chapters of this thesis.

2.2 Agroecology and disputed territories

Territory is taking on increased importance in agroecology; particularly in works concerned with understanding and fostering an agroecological transformation of food systems. The importance of territory within agroecology takes many distinct, but interconnected, forms. For instance, territory is regarded by many as a crucial locus or 'scale' for enabling agroecology transformations (Wezel et al. 2016; Anderson et al. 2019; González de Molina et al. 2020). Territory is also considered critical by agroecological social movements for preserving the lifeways of peasants, Indigenous Peoples, smallholders, and rural populations (Rosset 2013; LVC 2015a; 2015b; van den Berg et al. 2021: Guzmán Luna et al. 2019). Additionally, territory is regularly used analytically in political agroecology to help uncover the power relations underpinning industrial-capitalist food systems. In this latter regard the concept of 'disputed territories' is particularly prominent (Fernandes 2023; Rosset and Martínez-Torres 2012), and I am hoping to build on this concept here to help understand T.Beo's attempts to territorialize agroecology in Ireland.

This 'disputed territories' framework describes the struggle for agroecological transformation as a dispute over territory (Fernandes 2023; Rosset and Martínez-Torres 2012; van den Berg et al. 2021; Giraldo and Rosset 2018). The dispute over territory is generally described as being fought over the control of both *material* and *immaterial* territories. Material territories are physical features and resources like land, rivers, and infrastructure; whereas immaterial territories are values, norms, and expectations. Despite this distinction, within the literature the two are considered inseparable. Disputes over the control and use of territories always entail disputes over both material and immaterial elements, for our knowledge, understandings, and

representations of the world impacts how we interact with the physical environment, and vice versa (Val et al. 2019; Giraldo and Rosset 2018; Meek 2014; Meek and Simonian 2016; Rosset and Martínez-Torres 2012; Fernandes 2023; Domené-Painenao et al. 2024).

The dispute over territory—both its material and immaterial aspects—is considered as being between two competing 'paradigms'—"the peasant/farmer paradigm and the agribusiness/capitalist paradigm"—that produce different types of territory (Fernandes 2023, p.1455; Rosset and Martínez-Torres 2012; LVC 2015b; van den Berg et al. 2021). Industrial-capitalist agriculture, through various forms of land and resource grabbing (Borras et al. 2012; Neef et al. 2023), *de*-territorializes the lifeways of peasants, farmers, Indigenous Peoples, and rural populations (Giraldo 2019). Uprooting them, the land itself, and other natural resources "from the specificities of local ecosystems and social relations" (Rosset and Martínez-Torres 2012, p.17) and *re*-territorializes them into global circuits of capital accumulation. De/re-territorialization happens physically through violent, direct forms of dispossession such as evictions, enclosures, or exclusions (Neef at al. 2023). But it can also occur through more subtle, 'inclusive' means without physical displacement. Giraldo (2019, pp.45-6) refers to such processes as "in situ deterritorialization" which involves modifying "the being, doing, and knowing…" of farmers and rural populations "…through the creation of populations that learn, think, and act…" according to the logics of industrial-capitalist agriculture. In such instances agro-industry gains control over land and its productive resources by incorporating farmers into industrial-capitalist productive relations through new institutional arrangements; which include, for instance, agro-industry's monopolisation of markets; their monopolisation—through intellectual property rights—of inputs; their monopolisation of agricultural research and development; and farmers' dependency on debt (McKay and Veltmeyer 2021; McKay 2018; McMichael 2013).

On the other hand, peasants, farmers, Indigenous Peoples, and rural social movements mobilise agroecology—both 'as-framing' and 'as-farming'—to create and defend alternative territories that challenge the territorialization of industrial-capitalist agriculture (LVC 2015b, Martínez-Torres and Rosset 2014; Rosset and Martínez-Torres 2012; Giraldo and Rosset 2018). 'Agroecology-as-framing' is used to transform *immaterial* territories by formulating alternative values and understandings of

agriculture, food production and how they interact with the natural world. 'Agroecology-as-farming' then, is used to transform *material* territories. Agroecological practices do so by restoring degraded agroecosystems, and creating more autonomous and resilient food production methods (Meek 2014; van der Ploeg 2012; Rosset and Martínez-Torres 2012; Rosset et al. 2011).

Recently, further complexity has been added to the literature on disputed territories; namely that agroecology itself is a 'territory in dispute.' Agroecological practices can be easily co-opted to maintain the status quo and cover up some of industrial-capitalist agriculture's more destructive elements (Giraldo and Rosset 2018; 2023; Levidow et al. 2014; Holt-Giménez and Altieri 2013). As such, many advocates of agroecology have stressed that for agroecology to be truly transformative it has to be more than a set of technical practices; it must challenge the wider social, political, and economic structures that underpin industrial-capitalist agriculture (Giraldo and Rosset 2023; Giraldo 2019; González de Molina et al. 2020; Montenegro de Wit 2020; LVC 2015a; Trevilla Espinal et al. 2021; Rosset and Martínez-Torres 2012; Holt-Giménez and Altieri 2013; Khadse et al. 2018; Marfurt et al. 2023; Anderson et al. 2020).

2.2.1 Capitalism versus 'its other'

This disputed territories framework is not without its criticism, however. Within works of agroecology and food sovereignty more broadly there is a tendency, some have argued, to essentialise peasants, smallholders, Indigenous Peoples and their practices as intrinsically virtuous, sustainable and ecologically conscious; erecting them as 'capital's other' personified (Bernstein, 2014). However, peasants, smallholders, Indigenous Peoples are not homogenised units, and do not always act agroecologically (Bernstein 2014; Soper 2020; Jansen 2015). Instead they are differentiated by class, ethnicity, gender, and generation; interacting with capitalism, the current agricultural system, and their environments in countless different ways depending on their own particular circumstance (Bernstein, 2014; Henderson 2016). Setting up a binary between these groups and industrial-capitalist agriculture—as the disputed territories framing tends to do—ignores the complexity of the relationship between the two. It overlooks how these groups can be "actively involved in the production and reproduction of capitalist social relations" (Henderson 2016, p.17), and "it also neglects how smallholders actively seek participation in commodity chains not as victims but as agents" (Jansen 2015, p.219). As is the case for the smallholding oil

palm producers in Chiapas, Mexico studied by Castellanos-Navarrete and Jansen (2018), and for the indigenous peasants of the highlands in Ecuador discussed by Soper (2020).

Advocates of food sovereignty and agroecology have, however, offered a number of rejoinders to the arguments put forward by these 'sceptical' accounts (see for instance McMichael's 2015). Many of these responses do not bear directly on this research, but in relation to the criticisms I have laid out in the paragraph above two points are particularly relevant. Firstly, agroecological practices are not considered by agroecology advocates as inherently anti-capitalist or against the industrial food system, and because of this, as I have already detailed in the previous section, many argue that agroecological transformations of food systems must be political and must involve transforming wider social, political, and economic structures.

Secondly, agroecology advocates and movements recognise that peasants, farmers, Indigenous Peoples—the primary actors in agroecological transformations—are not all the same (McMicheal 2015; Nicholson and Borras 2023). This is why agroecology rejects "one-size-fits-all models" (Giraldo and Rosset, 2018). Instead agroecological transformations must be context specific and respond to the ecological, social, political, and economic conditions faced in any given location, and must be driven by social movements and grassroots organisations, led by peasants and farmers, that are directly responding to their own collective realities (LVC 2015a; Rosset et al. 2011; Mier y Terán Giménez Cacho et al. 2018; Brescia 2017; Desmarais and Nicholson 2013)

Nevertheless, despite the inaccuracies of these 'sceptical' accounts regarding the political projects of agroecology and food sovereignty, I believe that their calls to interrogate the multiple and diverse interactions between peasants, farmers, rural populations, and the broader dynamics of industrial-capitalist agriculture serve as an important reminder to those researching the territorialization of agroecology. For such interactions have a major impact on how agroecological transformations are both enacted and understood.

If an agroecological transformation of food systems must be more than a 'one-size-fits-all' blueprint; if it must be context specific, and driven by peasants, smallholders and rural populations; and if it must overturn the wider power structures that underlie

the current industrial-capitalist food system, then it must account for and uncover how such power structures become rooted and reproduced in specific contexts. As Tornaghi and Dehaene (2020, p.600) put it in their analysis of urban agroecological initiatives; "attempts to transform the food system through agroecological means, therefore, need to understand and challenge the profound interconnection between capitalist and neoliberal mechanisms (and values) with the social arrangements for social reproduction." To do this, as Akram-Lodhi (2021) contends, we need to "transcend what appears to be a mutually exclusive emphasis on" either the agency of peasants, smallholders, Indigenous Peoples, and rural social movements on the one hand, or on the underlying structures of the industrial-capitalist food system on the other. For, while structures—like capitalism, the state, racism, and patriarchy—are mutable and can be altered (Montenegro de Wit 2020); neglecting the impacts of such structures, as Meek (2016, p.288) warns, downplays the difficulty of agroecology transitions, and does little to support efforts of grassroot movements.

In order to deal with such challenges—to uncover the power relations underlying current food systems, and to more thoroughly interrogate the complex entanglements between the lifeways of peasants, smallholders, Indigenous Peoples, rural populations, and the dynamics and structures of industrial-capitalist agriculture—I argue for a deeper engagement with relational approaches to territory, and, in particular, an overlapping understanding of territory.

2.3 Relational Territory

The development of disputed territories in agroecology research is a product of close interactions with relational understandings of territory from human geography (Fernandes 2023; Rosset and Martínez-Torres 2012).[7] Emerging out of broader developments in human geography that oppose the separation of space and society, relational territory challenges conventional conceptions that consider territories to be static, "self-evident, quasi-natural 'containers', or compartments within which social life takes place" (Delaney 2009, p.199). Instead, relational territory brings forward a

[7] Bernardo Mançano Fernandes' work is probably the most significant in bringing relational territory and agroecology together, and in developing the disputed territories framework, but, unfortunately, because of my linguistic limitations I am unable to engage with most of his work.

processual, historically contingent understanding of territory that considers territory to be dynamically produced by networked human and nonhuman relations and practices. Thus, territory is not a container in which society takes place, but territory and society are mutually constituted; such that territorial configuration should be understood and analysed through the relations and practices that produce them (Painter 2010; dell'Agnese 2013; Haesbaert 2013; Elden 2010; Escobar 2008; Ince 2012; Halvorsen 2018; Clare et al. 2018: Baletti, 2012; Gonin 2022; Delaney 2009).

As a political concept then, such an interpretation opens up the static, singular conception of the Anglophone tradition, which sees territory as a political technology of modern state sovereignty, to multiple different epistemologies, ontologies, and practices of territory (Haesbaert 2013; Escobar 2016; Halvorsen 2018; Ince 2012; Bryan, 2012; Souza 2015). Following Halvorsen (2018, p.794), territory, in political thought, could be seen "as the appropriation of space in pursuit of political projects". It is important to stress the plural *projects* of this definition, for statist forms of territory are only one specific type of territory involving "the top-down control and regulation of space" (Halvorsen 2018, p.792) constituted through strategies for 'owning, distributing, mapping, calculating, and bordering' (Elden 2010; Halvorsen 2018; Painter 2010). And in recent years, research on territory has sought to expand understandings of alternative, more-than-state forms of territorialization; particularly emphasising the territorialization attempts of political projects 'from below'—such as social movements, grassroot organisations, and everyday politics—that try to resist top-down territorialization attempts, and build alternative territories through relations of reciprocity, mutual-aid, solidarity, and co-operation (Halvorsen et al. 2019; Clare et al. 2018; Baletti, 2012; Zibechi 2012; Escobar 2008; 2016; Grubačić and O'Hearn 2016; Shattuck and Peluso 2021; Ince 2012).

Works on disputed territories in agroecology are an extension of these attempts, as they highlight the alternative territorialization attempts of peasants, smallholders, Indigenous Peoples, and rural social movements. But this alone is insufficient, for, as we have seen above, the multi-territoriality of the disputed territories framework can create a strict separation between peasants, smallholders and rural social movements on one hand, and industrial-capitalist agriculture on the other (Bernstein, 2014). To overcome this potentially obscuring binary, I argue that a greater emphasis should be put on an overlapping understanding of territory.

‘Overlapping territory’ adds further depth to the multi-territorial outlook of the disputed territories framework, by emphasising that multiple types of territory can coexist in any given space. In other words, territories are dynamically reproduced through multiple, overlapping, and competing political projects that are based on different relations, practices, and values (Haesbaert 2013; Halvorsen 2018; Clare et al. 2018). There are two crucial aspects to an overlapping understanding of territory, pointed out by Halvorsen (2018, p.794-5), that have important implications for the territorialization of agroecology. Firstly, territorialization attempts do not take place in a vacuum, but emerge from within existing territorial configurations. Secondly, the territorial attempts of different political projects should not be seen as completely distinct. It is particularly important to recognise that alternative territorialization attempts ‘from below’ are not wholly separate from top-down, state-like territorial processes. Treating the territorialization of top-down relations of domination as completely separate from bottom-up territorialization attempts ignores that in practice these apparently distinct processes can co-exist—in harmony or in tension—within the same space, and can overlap and become entangled producing hybrid territories that are the product of blended relations, practices, and values (Halvorsen 2018; Haesbaert 2013; Clare et al. 2018; Grubačić and O’Hearn 2016; Ince 2012).

Applying an overlapping conception of territory to the territorialization of agroecology would mean acknowledging that attempts at territorializing agroecology are emerging from within existing territorial configurations; which, for the most part, are dominated by industrial-capitalist agriculture. And it would also mean acknowledging that any attempt at territorializing agroecology will necessarily involve interactions with the institutions, relations, practices, and logics of industrial-capitalist agriculture. In sum, when attempting to territorialize agroecology interactions with industrial-capitalist agriculture are unavoidable, and an overlapping understanding of territory—which adds to the multi-territoriality of the disputed territories framework—makes such interactions more visible.

There are some works already in agroecology that have begun to interrogate the interactions between peasants, smallholders, rural populations and the broader dynamics of industrial-capitalist agriculture using a similar relational approach to territory. Two particularly comprehensive accounts in this regard are Fernandes (2023) and Giraldo (2019). Both works consider space and society as inseparable, and, as

such, understand territories not as inert containers but as constituted through relations that are "always co-emerging, co-surfacing, as a result of the constant interaction between peoples and their specific natural environments" (Giraldo 2019, p.46). Both analyse the conflict between different types of territory—through the disputed territories framework—specifically analysing the conflict between peasant configurations of territory and territories driven by industrial-capitalist agriculture. But crucially they recognise that these conflicting territorial projects, while distinct, overlap in many complex ways. Fernandes (2023, p.1450) recognises that contests over territory not only involve "disputes between the peasant class and agribusiness, but also between peasants themselves, between peasants and indigenous people, and between indigenous people and agribusiness". While Giraldo (2019) similarly acknowledges these complex entanglements, he goes further by highlighting how industrial agricultural practices and the "monotonous agro-industrial landscapes" they produce can shape the knowing, being, and doing of peasants, farmers, and rural populations. But, within both of these works specific instances of such interactions are not really considered.

Levidow et al. (2021), is another example of a work that employs territory to analyse the interactions between agroecology and hegemonic food systems, but in contrast to the above works Levidow et al. analyse these interactions in a specific context. Using a case study approach of three agroforestry initiatives in the state of São Paulo, Brazil, they show how agroecological practices can be used to both reinforce, but also create alternatives to existing territorial trajectories of dominant food systems.

Outside of these works there are others within agroecology that deal with these complex interactions more contextually—although they do not explicitly utilise territory. For instance, Wach (2021) shows how capitalist social relations—in particular market dependency—has drastically altered farming in the Scottish Highlands, so much so that livestock farming is perceived to be the only ecologically viable form of agriculture. Similarly, Meek (2016) argues that social processes like public policies, economic incentives, and agrarian violence have created a cattle-dominated agricultural landscape in southern Pará, Brazil; which again is now considered by farmers to be the only viable form of agriculture. While Marfurt et. al. (2023) demonstrate how efforts to promote agroecology in Senegal failed to reach their full emancipatory potential, and left intact colonially embedded power relations,

because development agencies' top-down programmes of technical training overlooked local socioecological and sociopolitical realities.

So to add to this growing body of literature, I build upon the multi-territoriality already well incorporated within agroecology research—through the disputed territories discourse—with an overlapping conception of territory; which, when applied to the territorialization of agroecology, emphasises that the alternative territorialization attempts of agroecological movements should not be considered as occurring completely outside of the dominant territorial formations of industrial-capitalist agriculture. Instead, they overlap, come into conflict, and blend together in numerous ways that can produce many diverse territorial formations.

However, the overlapping notion of territory utilised here has developed predominately out of bottom-up struggles for autonomy in Latin America (Haesbaert 2013; Halvorsen 2018; Bryan 2012; Clare 2018). Similarly, works that mobilize territory in agroecology emanate most commonly from Latin America (Fernandes 2023; Levidow et al. 2021; van den Berg et al. 2021). So, it could be argued that this theoretical framework is not suitable for analysing the struggle for agroecology in Ireland. While I have spent most of this section detailing the value overlapping territory can bring to investigations into place-specific agroecological development, I briefly want to address directly why I believe such a framing is suitable for understanding efforts to territorialize agroecology in Ireland. Firstly, to reiterate what has been said above, one of the main contribution of this body of work on relational territory is to open up understandings of territory to the multiplicity of territorial ideas, practices, and relations that exist in any given geographical context (Halvorsen 2018; Haesbaert 2013; Escobar 2016). So, while T.Beo's efforts here are unlikely to resemble directly the bottom-up territorial struggles in Latin America, given the very different context within which they are unfolding, theirs is a territorial struggle nevertheless, because they are, following Halvorsen's (2018) definition, trying to appropriate space in the pursuit of a political project. Specifically, they are trying to create socio-material spaces within Ireland where agroecological values, practices, and relations come to dominate and flourish. Secondly, to do this T.Beo will have to contest and navigate the territorial configurations of industrial-capitalist agriculture that currently dominate in Ireland; complexities which an overlapping notion of territory can help uncover and comprehend.

2.4 Mobilising 'overlapping territories'

To mobilise this overlapping understanding of territory then, I must, as relational territory suggests, examine the human and nonhuman relations, practices, and values that constitute T.Beo's attempts to territorialize agroecology in Ireland. To do this I will adopt three interconnected, but distinct concepts that are widely used in both political ecology and critical agrarian studies. These concepts are moral economy/ecology; everyday resistance; and formal resistance. In this section I will discuss each concept in some depth. I will detail the main literature surrounding each concept; describe how each concept adds to our understandings of territory and territorialization; and review how each concept has already been used in agroecological research.

2.4.1 Moral economy/ecology

Transforming territories involves struggles over what are often termed immaterial territories—values, meanings, norms, and discourses (Rosset and Martínez-Torres 2012; Fernandes 2023). One fruitful avenue for analysing immaterial territories, which I will employ here, are the parallel concepts of 'moral economy' and 'moral ecology.'[8]

The notion of 'moral economy' was popularised in the 1970s by the works of E.P. Thompson (1971) and James C. Scott (1976), both of whom utilised the concept to understand the normative basis of popular resistance. In his study of the eighteenth-century food riots in England, Thompson (1971) argued that these riots were spurred on as much by rising prices and the resulting deprivation, as they were by the transgression of what he termed "the moral economy of the poor"—"a consistent traditional view of social norms and obligations, of the proper economic functions of several parties within the community" (p.79). A few years later, Scott (1976) would apply the same concept in his study of twentieth-century peasant politics in Southeast Asia. Similar to Thompson, Scott argued that the violation of peasant communities' moral economy—"their notion of economic justice and their working definition of

[8] Despite the significant overlap between the two concepts, and despite the fact that I consider the two concepts to be inseparable, I maintain the distinction between the two in this study to avoid emphasising one over the other.

exploitation" (p.3)—was a key condition for their mobilisation. Scott coins the peasantry's particular moral economy as "the moral economy of the subsistence ethic." While cautioning against romanticism, Scott suggested that peasant societies typically had a wide range of social arrangements to ensure a minimum level of subsistence for all. These social arrangements were "experienced as a pattern of moral rights or expectations" (p.6) which if transgressed could be expected to produce defiance and resistance.

In the decades following these two works the notion of moral economy has been deployed in many different settings and has developed many different strands (Palomera and Vetta 2016; Carrier 2018). Broadly, however, moral economy could be defined as the study of the norms and expectations that regulate economic relations and social reproduction. Moral economy examines the beliefs and standards that underlie a groups conception of economic justice and understanding of how economic relations ought to operate (Palomera and Vetta 2016; Sayer 2007).

'Moral ecology', on the other hand, deals with the "norms, values and practices that govern relations between humans and nonhumans" (Hougaard 2023, p.2; Scaramelli 2019; Jacoby 2003). Moral ecology developed as an expansion or compliment to Thompson's and Scott's original formulation; broadening the analytical scope of moral economy to include examinations of the norms and standards underpinning the socioecological relations with which economic relations and social reproduction are interdependent (Hay 2008; Scaramelli 2019; Dove and Kammen 1997; Baker et al. 2017; Joshi 2024).

From the above we can see that the two concepts are closely related. However, both moral economy and moral ecology have developed their own distinct body of literature; within which there are considerable differentiations regarding the meaning and application of each concept (Palomera and Vetta 2016; Carrier 2018; Scaramelli 2019). Despite their different trajectories and internal debates, there are a number of key features of both moral economy and moral ecology that overlap; three of which are particularly important for the understanding of moral economy/ecology that I want to apply in this research.

Firstly, the notion of moral economy and moral ecology do not merely deal with norms and values that are regarded as wholly positive or those that challenge dominant powers.

In the moral economy literature there has been considerable criticism that the use of moral economy has become synonymous with economic arrangements of groups that sit outside and are resisting dominant economic formations. To counter this many emphasise that "*all* economies are moral economies (Palomera and Vetta 2016, p.419, my emphasis), for "all economic institutions are founded on norms defining rights and responsibilities that have legitimations (whether reasonable or unreasonable), require some moral behaviour of actors, and generate effects that have ethical implications" (Sayer 2007, p.262). This more holistic understanding can overcome uses of moral economy that romanticise certain economic formations, and importantly challenge the pervasive view that naturalises capitalist economic arrangements and treats them as amoral (Palomera and Vetta 2016; Sayer 2007; Jackson et al. 2008; Carrier 2018).

Similarly, as Scaramelli (2019) argues, there is a tendency in the moral ecology literature—which is based heavily on resistance and mobilisation from below (Baker et al. 2017; Martínez-Reyes, 2016; Griffin et al. 2019)—to consider moral ecologies to be those that are based on reciprocal, sustainable human and non-human relations; while the ecological values guiding hegemonic projects such as the state, capitalism, and extractive industries are seen as immoral. Again there are many in moral ecology that try to break down this binary, and argue for an understanding of moral ecology which recognises that all economic arrangements and social formations—even capitalist forms—are guided by moral claims about human and non-human relations whether or not they are just, emancipatory, or sustainable (Scaramelli, 2019; Hougaard 2023).

Secondly, both moral economies and moral ecologies should be understood as dynamic, mutable, historically contingent, and constantly shifting in response to changing circumstances (Palomera and Vetta 2016; Wolford 2005; Konforti 2022; Homs 2022; Chung 2024; Hay 2019; Mehtta 2021). On top of this, they should be understood not as abstract ideas that sit above and shape social formations, but are made and remade through practices and everyday relations (Carrier 2018; Wolford 2005; Joshi 2024; Sayer 2007; Robertson and Macleod Rivett 2019; Scaramelli 2019).

Finally—and crucially in the context of the overlapping understanding of territory I am applying here—multiple economic and ecological rationalities can co-exist, come into conflict and become entangled in the same space and time (Palomera and Vetta 2016; Homs 2022; Walsh-Dilley 2013; Mehtta 2021; Hougaard 2023; Chitata et al. 2022). In fact the two concepts are mainly utilised to analyse the entanglements of competing economic and ecological rationalities; with a particular emphasis in both bodies of research on the impacts of different regimes of capital accumulation on more localised economic and ecological norms (Scott 1976; Edelman 2005; Walsh-Dilley 2013; Dove and Kammen 1997; Chitata et al. 2022; Scaramelli 2019).

These three aspects are crucial to the understanding of moral economy/ecology that I want to utilise here in my examination of T.Beo's attempts to territorialize agroecology. Of course, both concepts have been widely used in research on agrarian settings (Scott 1976; Walsh-Dilley 2013; Konforti 2022; Homs 2022; Nwankwo 2023; Joshi 2024; Dove and Kammen 1997; Chitata et al. 2022). However, within agroecology there has not been any direct use of moral ecology and limited engagement with moral economy. Meek (2014) is the only study that brings together moral economy and agroecology in his study of the Landless Workers Movement of Brazil (MST). While Wolford (2005) and Edelman (2005), although they do not engage directly with agroecology, both use moral economy in their examinations of two movements—MST and LVC—that advocate agroecology.

2.4.2 Everyday resistance

The notion of everyday resistance was popularised, particularly in peasant and agrarian studies, in the mid-80's by James C. Scott (1985; 1989; 1990). Everyday forms of resistance are mundane, low-profile practices through which relatively powerless groups "manifest their political interests" (Scott 1989) and contest the "norms and rules regarding authority over, production of, or allocation of resources" (Kerkvliet 2009, p.232). These everyday forms of resistance are contrasted to the more commonly analysed outbursts of revolutionary movements, rebellions, and protests. Everyday resistance is typically not organised, it involves practices that are purposefully hidden or are not commonly recognised as political, and it is relatively safe in that it elicits little, if any, repercussions (Scott 1985; 1989; Johansson and Vinthagen 2020). By focusing on these everyday actions Scott sought to uncover a

whole world of political action that was ignored or omitted by traditional research into resistance.

In a more recent interrogation of everyday resistance Johansson and Vinthagen (2020, p.5) describe everyday resistance as "basically about how people act in their everyday lives in ways that might undermine power." It is resistance "done routinely (as patterns of acts), but which is not politically articulated in public or formally organized (in that situation)." There are two basic features to their conception of everyday resistance. Firstly, they are repeated social practices or 'patterns of acts' "that have the potential to undermine dominant power relations" (2020, p.7). Secondly, everyday resistance is a counter practice; an oppositional interaction against domination.[9] Accordingly, resistance and domination are unavoidably interrelated, such that resistance cannot be understood without understanding domination. But further to this, Johansson and Vinthagen argue that resistance and domination are not just related but entangled—entangled in two main ways. Firstly, resistance and domination are not simply distinct oppositional relations, but are "mutually constitutive through their constant influence and reaction to each other" (p.79). Dominant powers set the condition that those resisting are acting against. Conditions which are continually changing through various cycles of resistance and reassertion of dominance. As this process develops through time and space it produces unique configurations of this resistance/domination nexus that are historically contingent and context specific. Secondly, there are multiple forms of domination, such as class, gender, and race. Resistance can relate differently to various forms of domination simultaneously. Resistance might tackle one type of domination but can reproduce others.

In sum, for Johansson and Vinthagen everyday forms of resistance are routine social practices—not generally recognised as resistance—that can potentially undermine relations of domination, but are, nevertheless, unavoidably entangled and dynamically co-constituted with domination.

[9] In their work Johansson and Vinthagen's (2020) use 'power' instead of 'domination', but their use of power in this instance solely represents relations of domination such as class, gender, or race. I use domination here instead mainly to avoid confusion, as research on territory tends to use a more plural definition of power—"power might also reflect relations of cooperation, solidarity, protection, and altruism" (Delaney 2009, p.200; Clare et al. 2018; Souza 2015).

This is the understanding of everyday resistance that I will employ in this research; which corresponds well with the overlapping notion of territory that I am trying to bring forward. As I have detailed above, recent works on territory that have sought to expand the concept beyond its statist boundaries have emphasised the role everyday practices have in the production of territory (Halvorsen 2018; Clare et al. 2018; Shattuck and Peluso 2021). This is particularly the case if we understand that top-down territorial formations—of, for instance, the state or industrial-capitalist agriculture—are enacted and reproduced through everyday relations and practices (Painter 2010; Ince 2012). Then it becomes clear that everyday forms of resistance that undermine hierarchical relations and practices can alter top-down territorialization attempts and even produce alternative territories. Everyday forms of resistance, we can say, are attempts to 'stabilize' alternative relations on which those individuals or groups carrying them out depend (Gonin 2022). Such attempts, however, are not outside of top-down territorial formations but inevitably caught up and entangled with them (Grubačić and O'Hearn 2016; Clare et al. 2018).

Given that everyday resistance has its roots in peasant and agrarian studies, it is somewhat surprising that within agroecology research everyday resistance has received very little engagement. Rivera-Núñez et al. (2020) have been quite critical of this; calling for greater engagement with Scott's works which they suggest can expand agroecology transformation research beyond its singular focus on social movements. Van den Berg et al. (2021) is one of the only works within agroecology that deals with everyday resistance in any great depth. Their work draws together agroecology, territory, and everyday resistance to explore how peasants in Minas Gerais, Brazil employ everyday resistance, along with other forms of resistance, to defend and advance their own territories and ways of life from the growing threats of neoliberalism and authoritarian populism.

2.4.3 Formal resistance[10]

Formal, organised resistance in the form of the collective action and self-organisation of bottom-up social movements are widely recognised, across numerous different

[10] It is important to note that although I have treated everyday resistance and formal resistance separately, for ease of analysis, they should not be considered as completely distinct. Rivera-Núñez et al. (2020), in their calls for increased engagement with everyday resistance in agroecology, tend to

studies, as being foundational for spreading agroecology (Anderson et al. 2019; Mier y Terán Giménez Cacho et al. 2018; Giraldo 2024; Brescia 2017; Khadse et al. 2018; Giraldo and McCune 2019).

As many works on territory have stressed, particularly those from Latin America, social movements, through different relations, practices, and ontological commitments, can claim, defend, and create alternative territories (Escobar 2008; 2016; Zibechi 2012; Bryan 2012; Souza 2015; Baletti 2012; Clare et al. 2018; Halvorsen 2018). And "although all social movements, like any social phenomenon, are necessarily constituted in and through space", generally speaking for social movements that have adopted agroecology the appropriation, defence, and creation of territory is a central objective (Halvorsen et al. 2019, p.1456; Rosset 2013). Within the agroecology literature there is already quite a substantial body of work analysing the actions employed by such social movements to territorialize agroecology and defend 'agroecological peasant territories' (van den Berg et al. 2021; Mier y Terán Giménez Cacho et al. 2018; Rosset 2015; McCune et al. 2017). McCune et al. (2017) term these actions 'territorial mediators'—political, cultural, and social factors that can radically transform social relations and root agroecology in territories. Below I will detail three territorial mediators employed by social movements that are widely considered key in the territorialization of agroecology (Mier y Terán Giménez Cacho et al. 2018; Rosset 2015). These territorial mediators are; developing horizontal social organisation—particularly as they relate to educational processes; appropriating and mobilising resources such as land and alternative markets; and forming external allies.

Firstly, social movements' ability to create horizontal social processes, that are collectively constructed and led by farmers themselves, are seen, across numerous different case studies, as critical for territorializing agroecology (Val et al. 2019; Mier y Terán Giménez Cacho et al. 2018; Khadse et al. 2018; Rosset et al. 2011). Through such forms of organisation social movements can create communities and networks

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create an unnecessary separation between the two. But, as Johansson and Vinthagen (2020) stress, both, while distinct, are intimately related. Similarly, Scott (1985) argues that mass movements and more visible, confrontational resistance cannot be fully comprehended without understanding the everyday resistance that underlies them. While Johansson and Vinthagen (2020) criticise Scott for not emphasising this connection enough, the two are, nevertheless, in broad agreement that everyday resistance and formal resistance are intimately connected.

around agroecology that are grounded in specific places; can collectively construct 'agroecological peasant' subjects; and can bring together all aspects of agroecology—agroecology as practices, as a political project; and as a way of living (Val et al. 2019).

The most prominent form of horizontal social organisation utilised by social movements are 'campesino-a-campesino' (farmer-to-farmer) pedagogical processes and peasant agroecology schools. Such educational processes, developed mainly by LVC and its member organisations, have spread throughout the world, and while they take many different forms they are all based on the same main principles—such as the horizontal exchange of knowledge and experiences; collective self-organisation; and an integrated focus on all aspects of agroecology, not just its practical, technical side. These educational processes, particularly when embedded in agroecosystems become a powerful means of territorializing agroecology (Rosset et al. 2019; Rosset et al. 2011; McCune and Sánchez 2018; McCune et al. 2017; McCune et al. 2014; Meek 2015; McGreevy et al. 2021; Martínez-Torres and Rosset 2014; Val et al. 2019)

Secondly, appropriating and mobilising resources are another crucial part of agroecological social movements' attempts to transform territory (Khadse et al. 2018). One resource that is particularly crucial is land. The control of, and relationship to, land is a foundational aspect of territory (Elden 2010; Halvorsen 2018). Peasants' struggle for land, as Fernandes (2023) reminds us, is a struggle for their very existence. Their struggle for land can take many forms but the Brazilian Landless Workers' Movement's (MST) occupation of land is probably one of the most well known in relation to agroecology. Through their occupations the MST form new territories as they rupture existing territorial configurations of industrial-capitalist agriculture, and build alternative relations, practices, and values (Fernandes 2023; Meek and Simonian 2016).

Another resource that is commonly considered crucial for territorializing agroecology is alternative markets (Khadse et al. 2018; Mier y Terán Giménez Cacho et al. 2018; Anderson et al. 2019). Social movements construct their own markets to counteract the perceived failures of capitalist markets (van den Berg et al. 2021; FAO 2018). These markets which are built on and 'thicken' relations of cooperation, solidarity, and reciprocity; create greater autonomy for farmers; reduce farmers' dependency on

agribusiness and capitalist markets; and help form closer entanglements between farmers and consumers (Anderson et al. 2019; FAO 2018).

Finally, social movements' attempts to territorialize agroecology and alternative food systems are aided greatly by the support of external allies. External allies may be other social movements, NGOs, media, academia, or the state. The support they offer social movements are wide and varied (Mier y Terán Giménez Cacho et al. 2018). Of these however, allying with the state is a particularly contentious topic. Favourable public policies can have a powerful impact on social movements' ability to territorialize agroecology, like in Cuba during the food crisis in the 1990s following the collapse of the Soviet Union (Giraldo and McCune 2019; Rosset et al. 2011). But in many other cases recognition and support from the state can capture, blunt, or co-opt agroecology and social movements' efforts (Giraldo and McCune 2019; Ajates Gonzalez et al. 2018). So while external allies can enhance agroecological social movements' territorial projects, allying with external actors is not without its risks.

2.5 Summary

Territory is gaining greater prominence in agroecology research particularly in those works examining how to advance agroecological transformations of food systems. An important conceptualisation that has emerged from this literature is the notion of disputed territories; which argues that the struggle for agroecological transformations can be valuably understood as a dispute over territory. This dispute is considered to be between two competing paradigms—peasants, farmers, Indigenous Peoples, and rural populations on the one hand, versus industrial-capitalist agriculture on the other. Both of these paradigms are competing over material territories—land, infrastructure and other physical resources—as well as immaterial territories— ideas, norms, and values. This framework goes a long way in uncovering the power relations that underlie food systems. But it is not without its criticism. One major criticism, predominantly associated with Bernstein (2014), argues that such discourse produces an unnecessary dichotomy which essentialises peasants, smallholders, and their practices; and ultimately disregards the roles played by peasants, smallholders, and rural populations in producing and reproducing industrial-capitalist agriculture.

To account for such criticism and interrogate the complex interactions between peasants, smallholders, rural populations and the dynamics of industrial-capitalist agriculture I argue that an even deeper engagement with relational territory is necessary; particularly an overlapping understanding of territory. To apply this approach to my analysis of T.Beo and their attempts to territorialize agroecology in Ireland I will employ three interconnected conceptions that are commonly used in both political ecology and critical agrarian studies, but less so in agroecology—moral economy/ecology; everyday resistance; and formal resistance. All three of these are intimately interconnected and taken together will help centre the values, practices, and relations that T.Beo and its members are trying to territorialize within Irish agriculture.

3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will lay out in detail the steps that I have taken to achieve the two main aims of this research. To reiterate, these aims are; 1) to gain a greater understanding of the process of territorializing agroecology in Ireland, and 2) to help open up knowledge systems in Ireland to the knowledge, experiences, and practices of those actually trying to implement agroecology.

This chapter will be structured as follows: Firstly, I will describe the overarching methodological approach I have taken, and the reasons for adopting such an approach. The second section will detail the data collection methods that I have employed throughout the research process. Thirdly, I will outline the data analysis procedure I followed to interpret the data I collected. In the fourth section, I will describe the impacts that my own motivations and subjectivities have had on this research. While I will also detail the methods that I have used to account for them and ensure my interpretations are based on an accurate, credible representation of T.Beo's experiences and knowledge. Finally, I will highlight the most significant limitations of this study.

3.2 Methodological Approach

The methodological framework that I employ in this research is a qualitative case study. A case study "involves the study of a single instance or small number of instances of a phenomenon in order to explore in-depth nuances of the phenomenon and the contextual influences on and explanations of that phenomenon" (Baxter, 2021, p.109). The phenomenon that this study is concerned with is the territorialization of agroecology to transform food systems (Ferguson et al. 2019; Mier y Terán Giménez Cacho et al. 2018). The particular case I will be exploring is the territorialization of agroecology within Ireland; focusing specifically on the attempts of one group—T.Beo.

I chose to adopt a case study methodology for three main reasons. Firstly, they are a highly valuable approach for providing deep contextualised understandings of a phenomenon as it occurs in a specific setting (Baxter 2021). As such, case study approaches are very suitable for researching the territorialization of agroecology,

because territorializing agroecology is not a process of transposing a single blueprint from place to place, but will be context dependent and will differ depending on the local realities faced in each specific setting—local realities that are not just biophysical but social, economic, and political as well (Ferguson et al. 2019; Nicholls et al. 2016; Gliessman 2015; Rosset and Altieri 2017).

Secondly, case studies are already widely used in research on the territorialization of agroecology (Brescia 2017; Mier y Terán Giménez Cacho et al. 2018), and in other closely related disciplines like political ecology; where case studies have proven to be very useful for gaining "empirical insights into the social relations and power hierarchies that have shaped environmental change" (Helmcke, 2022).

Finally, a case study approach fits quite well with my understanding of knowledge and is useful for dealing with the type of experiential and context specific knowledge that this study is trying to bring forward. My understanding of knowledge closely follows the feminist notion of situated knowledge which argues that knowledge is only ever partial and is inseparable from the context from which it emerges (Haraway 1988; Rose 1997; Kobayashi 2009). Such an understanding of knowledge is quite prominent in agroecology where it is widely argued that territorializing agroecology and transforming food systems will require democratising agricultural knowledge systems. Dominant knowledge systems—which produce reductionist, universally applicable knowledge that serve to legitimise and maintain industrial-capitalist food systems—will have to be transcended, and will have to be opened up to different ways of knowing that include the bottom-up, contextualised knowledge of peasants, farmers, Indigenous Peoples, and other citizens (Martínez-Torres and Rosset 2014; GAFF 2021; Altieri 1995; Pimbert 2018; Coolsaet 2016). My research has a similar aim in that I hope it can contribute to democratising knowledge systems around agriculture in Ireland by elevating the knowledge and experiences of those already implementing agroecology and actively trying to territorialize it. And qualitative case studies are particularly suitable for these ends, as they are commonly mobilised to deal with context-specific and experiential knowledge (Simons 2014; Baxter 2021).

In applying case study methodology to my research then, one of the most crucial aspects is setting the boundaries of the case being studied (Simons 2014). I chose to analyse the territorialization of agroecology in Ireland for two reasons. Firstly, it is

where I am from and live, so I am necessarily more concerned about the prospects of agroecology proliferating here. Secondly, it is an example of, and can add to the growing research on, what Rivera-Nuñez et al. (2020) and Giraldo (2024) term 'emerging agroecologies'; which are agroecology initiatives that are developing in places where previously they had not existed. However, for research purposes I felt that analysing the territorialization of agroecology in Ireland was far too broad. To sharpen my focus I decided to concentrate my attention on the efforts of one particular group—T.Beo. I chose to focus on T.Beo as I considered them a key actor in the territorialization of agroecology in Ireland. While T.Beo are not the only group within Ireland working towards spreading agroecology and creating a more sustainable food system (Blaix 2024), they are, however, the only organisation in Ireland, to my knowledge, that is driven solely by those actively practicing agroecology, and embody all three aspects of agroecology—a science, a practice, and a movement (Wezel et al. 2009).[11]

This case study then will involve a detailed examination of T.Beo's experiences trying to territorialize agroecology and transform food systems in Ireland. Ultimately, this case study could be classified as being predominantly illustrative, as the examination of T.Beo's struggle is used to gain insight into the territorialization of agroecology within Ireland. But there is also an element of theory building, or more accurately theory expansion (Baxter 2021), as this study will hope to add to the rapidly growing knowledge base on agroecology territorialization. However, there is an intrinsic element to this case study as well, as I believe that bringing forward the experiences

[11] The five-prong categorisation used by Blaix's (2024) does not consider T.Beo to be engaging in science. Instead T.Beo have been categorised as engaging in 'living labs' which are defined in the methodology section of the edited volume as "transdisciplinary approaches which involve farmers, scientists and other interested partners in the co-design, monitoring and evaluation of new and existing agricultural practices and technologies on working landscapes to improve their effectiveness and early adoption" (Wezel et al. 2024, p.8). As discussed by Wezel et al. (2024, p.8), their five-prong categorisation builds on the three core elements of agroecology—a science, movement, and practices—and the additional categories are introduced to add more nuance. The living lab category is positioned somewhere in between a practice and a science. As such, I do not believe it contradicts my claim that T.Beo embody all of the three core aspects of agroecology; the report is just using a narrower definition of science than the original conception of the three core aspects.

of T.Beo is highly valuable in and of itself; particularly to help open up agricultural knowledge systems in Ireland to alternative forms of knowledge.

3.3 Data collection methods

Fieldwork was conducted over a period of about twenty-two months; from May 2023 right up until the completion of the final draft of the thesis. Throughout that period, I utilised a number of different methods to gather data. One of the main advantages of a case study approach is that it is very flexible when it comes to data collection and analysis as it is not tied to any specific methods (Simons 2014). The particular methods of data collection that I employed were, informal conversations, unstructured interviews, document analysis, and participant observation. I will detail each below in turn.

3.3.1 Informal conversations

Informal conversations are gaining greater recognition as an important method for data collection in qualitative research. They are seen as a flexible method that can promote ease of conversation, can reduce power imbalances between researcher and participants, and can produce rich, naturalistic data that involves less performativity from both researcher and participants (Swain and King 2022; Davis and Brown 2024).

Informal conversations play a crucial role in my research, however, in contrast to the advocacies of Swain and King (2022) and Davis and Brown (2024), I have not included any data gathered from informal conversations in this final thesis; for two main reasons. Firstly, I felt uncomfortable directly using information from those that I spoke with informally, as I had not gained their prior consent whether they wanted their information to be used in the final product. Secondly, I was also concerned about the accuracy and representativeness of the data. Generally, during conversations I only took brief notes at most, and I was concerned whether I would remain faithful to what the person was trying to convey if I was to reproduce the interactions in more detail from memory.

But despite not including any data from informal conversations in my final analysis, I have included it here as a central method of data collection, because they are nevertheless fundamental to the entire research process. They formed the bulk of my

engagements with T.Beo and served multiple crucial functions throughout the research process—I will mention four in particular here.

Firstly, informal conversations, along with online research of T.Beo's website and social media pages, were my main source for background information on T.Beo. Secondly, informal conversations were critical in developing rapport with T.Beo members. Both of these functions were particularly important given that prior to beginning this research I had had no previous engagements with T.Beo. I only became aware of the group the year before commencing this research during my undergraduate studies. As such, gaining background information, establishing contact, and building relations with the group were crucial preliminary steps without which my research could not have begun. Thirdly, informal conversations helped form, enrich, and clarify my understandings of T.Beo and their struggle. Finally, they helped generate ideas that could be explored further through the other, more formal data collection methods I adopted.

In practice then, these informal conversations took four different forms; in-person conversations, phone calls, online video calls, and emails. Each conversation varied greatly in depth, detail, and length, and involved people who had varying levels of awareness of my research aims—although all that I spoke with were aware that I was conducting research into T.Beo. During these conversations, as already mentioned, I only took brief notes when possible. These notes were predominantly words or phrases to remind myself of important points or moments in those conversations. Of course such note taking was not as necessary when conversing through email, as I had a written record of the conversation, and was not feasible during in-person conversations, so I took notes on important points as soon as possible after the conversation ended.

These conversations took place constantly throughout the research process. They did not just occur at the beginning, but were used to deepen my understanding and gain different perspectives on information gained through more formal methods, and were

used to help validate and cross check the significance and accuracy of the conclusions I had drawn.[12]

3.3.2 Unstructured interviews

One of the primary methods of data collection that I utilised were relatively unstructured interviews.[13] Unstructured interviews involve little predetermined structure. Instead they are more conversational in tone, and involve much less intervention from the interviewer. Unstructured interviews treat participants as valuable partners in knowledge production, and give them greater control over the direction of the interview (Dunn 2021). And they are predominantly used to gain an understanding of participants' social reality from the participant's own perspective (Morse 2012; Dunn 2021; Brinkman 2014).

All of these aspects of unstructured interviews made them eminently suitable for my research purposes. After all, it was the knowledge and experiences of T.Beo and its members that I was trying to understand and portray. On top of this, I considered those that I interviewed to be key informants, as they are the ones actively trying to develop agroecology in Ireland. So, it was important to give participants enough time and space to 'tell their story' (Morse 2012) in relation to farming, agroecology, and T.Beo; and to give them as much leeway as possible to lead the conversations where they deemed significant.

I carried out eight relatively unstructured interviews with five members of T.Beo.[14] All of those that I interviewed were members of the core group,[15] which consisted of

[12] I also engaged in a number of formal methods to ensure that my findings gave an accurate and credible representation of T.Beo's experiences. These methods were triangulation, member checking, and thick description—all of which will be discussed in more detail further on.

[13] I stress *relatively* unstructured, as during the interviews I used a loose guide to give the conversation some general order. I will discuss this in greater detail further on. But for now I just want to highlight that the interviews were not completely unstructured.

[14] Unfortunately, due to technical issues one of the follow-up interviews did not record.

[15] Unfortunately, I was unable to meet all members of the core group as attempts to get in contact with three members of the group proved unsuccessful. I will discuss this in more detail in the limitations section (section 3.6).

eight people.[16] This was a conscious decision for two reasons. Firstly, these members were most involved in the day-to-day organising of T.Beo and would be, I felt, more keenly aware of T.Beo and its actions. Secondly, there was considerable diversity among the five interviewees alone. Of the five interviewees, three were part of the original group that formed T.Beo, and the other two were only after joining within the last two years. Furthermore, there was considerable variety among the interviewees with regard to the type of farming they were engaged in—from a one-hundred-and-eighty-acre beef farmer to a single acre market gardener. The intensity of each interviewees' engagements with agroecological practices also differed greatly. Some have only recently converted to organic; while others are closer to completely redesigning their agroecosystem, and are attempting to establish more direct connections between themselves and consumers (Gliessman 2016).

On top of these five interviews, I also conducted three follow up interviews. The reason I only had follow up interviews with three of the participants, and not the others, was that I wanted to find out more about a particular aspect of T.Beo that those specific participants were involved in. In one instance, I wanted to discuss a particular document that the interviewee was involved in drafting,[17] and in the other two instances, I wanted to talk about two T.Beo events I attended which the participants were involved in organising. In these follow up interviews I employed a similar unstructured approach, but the overall topic of the interview was just more focused.

All of the eight interviews were approximately forty minutes in duration. All of the interviews were conducted online through Zoom. I felt online interviews were most suitable as they offered greater flexibility to participants. The T.Beo members I interviewed are spread all over Ireland, and are all very busy with their own farm work, and their commitments with T.Beo and the other organisations they are involved in. It was easier then for participants to fit the online format into their busy schedules, and if anything did come up interviews could easily be rearranged.

[16] The number of people involved in the core group has fluctuated over the course of my research, and currently it has six members. All of the five that I interviewed are still in the core group.

[17] I will not disclose exactly what document we discussed as it could infringe on that person's anonymity.

Turning our attention to how I actually conducted the interviews, the first thing to note is that despite having little predetermined structure, unstructured interviews require a lot of preparation. In order to obtain deep insight unstructured interviews require a strong background understanding (Dunn 2021). The informal conversations, discussed above, were invaluable in this regard, as they gave me great insight into T.Beo—its history, aspirations, and actions; the individual participants themselves; and agroecology in Ireland.

In practice then, when carrying out the interviews, as is quite common with unstructured interviews, I prepared a broad guide of five questions or areas of discussion. The guide's function was to help generate discussion and ensure that participants' narratives were, for the most part, addressing the topics and issues I was interested in. The interview guide I used for the first interview with each participant was as follows;

1) What was their own individual background, and how did they get involved in farming?

2) Why did they form/get involved in T.Beo?

3) What is their understanding of/engagement with agroecology?

4) What has their experience of being involved in T.Beo been like so far?

5) Why, for them, is T.Beo so important?

The questions progressed from looking at their own individual background and farming practices to discussing their views on broader issues like agroecology and T.Beo's efforts. This was intentional as I felt talking about their own background would be a good place to start, as they would be more straightforward for participants to respond to before the conversation could flow to the more complex topics that might require more consideration. The guide remained unaltered for all five interviews as I was quite happy with how the interviews went. However, I did not have to bring up all of these areas directly in each interview. In some interviews, after the first few prompts the conversation naturally flowed to cover all of these main topics.

For the three follow-up interviews, the guides I used were considerably different. For the interviews concerning the two events, I used my own comments and experience of

these events as prompts for our conversation. While in relation to the document, to provoke the discussion I used the main points I took from analysing the document. It is important to note that in all of these three follow-up interviews I did not force the participant to stick strictly to the event or document in question. And in all three we covered a range of other topics which the participant had steered the conversation towards.

3.3.3 Document Analysis

Document analysis is "a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents" which involves "finding, selecting, appraising (making sense of), and synthesising data contained in documents" (Bowen 2009, pp.27-8). Documents can take many forms (Morgan 2022; Bowen 2009); in my case the documents that I analysed were T.Beo's own written material that they have published on their website. Through these documents T.Beo communicate their values and understandings of agriculture and food production; their issues with the current food system; and their ideas of how to transform it.

I felt that analysing such documents would add greatly to the data gained from the interviews (Bowen 2009), as these documents could provide insight into T.Beo's collective vision and understandings that would add further depth to the individual experiences of those I interviewed. Furthermore, in contrast to the interviews that are more spontaneous, reactive, and conversational the documents are produced by T.Beo in a purposeful manner to convey their values and aims to the wider public. Bringing both of these types of data together I felt would add greater richness and complexity to my understandings and findings.

One crucial, but often complicated aspect of document analysis is selecting what documents to include in the analysis (Morgan 2022). My decision in this regard was more straightforward. All of the written material T.Beo produces is up on their website. While they have produced a considerable body of potential documents that could be included it was not insurmountable, so I was able to include the vast majority of their research, policy proposals, explainers and articles—eighteen documents in total. The only documents I excluded from my analysis were articles announcing upcoming events, as I felt they were simply publicising details of the events in question. The full list of documents I analysed are listed below in Table 1.

Another critical aspect of document analysis is deciding how to analyse the documents. I will discuss my approach to this in detail below in section 3.4.

Table 1: List of documents used in document analysis

Type of document	Name of document	In text citation
Articles	The EU Nature Restoration Law: moving forward	Document 1
	Where's the Beef?	Document 2
	La Via Campesina, calls on the CFS to take immediate measures to fulfil its institutional mandate as Gaza faces an imminent risk of starvation	Document 3
	Delegation from Colombian government and Indigenous communities travel to Ireland in early 2024 in a quest to buy back their territory from Irish multinational Smurfit Kappa	Document 4
	8th International LVC Conference	Document 5
Explainers	Agroecology – beginner	Document 6
	Agroecology – advanced	Document 7
	Food sovereignty – beginner	Document 8
	Food sovereignty – advanced	Document 9
	Climate change and biodiversity	Document 10
	Seed Sovereignty	Document 11
	Common Agricultural Policy – beginner	Document 12
	Common Agricultural Policy – advanced	Document 13
	Local Food Policy – beginner	Document 14
	Local Food Policy – advanced	Document 15
Research	Gender mainstreaming	Document 16
Policies	Common Agricultural Policy Strategic Plan 2023-2027 Submission	Document 17
	Local Food Policy Framework	Document 18

3.3.4 Participant observation

"Participant observation is a method whereby the researchers themselves are the instrument processing and recording observations directly as data, with the researcher(s) participating in daily life while observing (and writing down) those practices" Watson (2021, p.125).

I decided to adopt this method during my field work primarily as a means of triangulation. Triangulation is the use of multiple methods to study the same phenomenon (Houghton et al. 2013). While triangulation is often used to cross-check data between methods to add greater validity to findings, I use it here, following Hesse-Biber (2012), not to check if what T.Beo members told me during conversations were accurate, but to add greater depth, richness, and complexity to my interpretations and descriptions. For instance, after conversations with T.Beo members—both informal and in interview settings—I came to understand that engaging people outside of T.Beo—both farmers and non-farmers—was a vital aspect of T.Beo's efforts. So I decided to employ participant observation in a limited capacity to explore this in more depth.

In practice, my use of participant observation involved attending two events that were organised to disseminate agroecological practices and alternative understandings of agriculture. These two events were a public forum in Carrick-on-Shannon entitled '*Our Food, Our Future*' which was organised by T.Beo, and a farm walk hosted by a T.Beo member I interviewed. In both cases I asked permission before attending. In the case of the public forum I asked my main contact from T.Beo, and for the farm walk I asked the specific T.Beo member organising the farm walk. Both events lasted approximately 3 hours.

During the farm walk I chose not to take notes as I did not want to make other attendees uncomfortable. It involved a small group and no one else was taking notes, so I felt that it was not suitable. I did, however, manage to make more notes at the public forum as a lot of attendees were jotting things down with pen and paper. However, the event involved a good deal of active participation in smaller groups where again I felt note taking was not suitable.

Throughout both events I followed Watson's (2021 p.140-141) advice and decided to focus my observations on a particular purpose. Specifically, I focused on the interactions between the T.Beo members organising the events and the attendees.[18] Focusing on the information the T.Beo members were trying to convey, how they were trying to convey it, and the questions and reactions of attendees. I think this was

[18] Of course some of the attendees were T.Beo members themselves. Although organisers told me after both events that most were not.

particularly useful given that I employed limited note taking, and this was my first time conducting participant observation, so it prevented me from getting overwhelmed by trying to take in and retain too much information.

3.4 Data analysis methods

The main method I adopted for analysing and interpreting the data I collected was thematic analysis. "Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data"; themes or patterns that ultimately capture something important about the phenomenon or subject being studied (Braun and Clarke 2006; Boyatzis, 1998).

A crucial step in thematic analysis is coding. Coding is used to systematically organise and refine raw data by assigning a word or phrase to a section of data to summarise and classify its main attributes (Saldaña 2013). These codes are the "micro-level ideas" that will be later worked on to develop broader, more complex themes (Peterson 2017).

After ensuring all data was converted to written text—which involved manually transcribing, on Microsoft Word,[19] all of the audio recordings from the interviews—I conducted, as is typical, two main coding cycles (Saldaña 2013).[20] The first cycle of coding was used to initially order the raw data and make it more manageable. Generally, I adopted an inductive approach to thematic analysis; meaning that the themes, or codes, are developed out of the collected data as opposed to being imposed on the data (Braun and Clarke 2006; Peterson 2017). Because of the aims of the research and my understanding that territorializing agroecology must be context specific, I wanted to ensure that my final interpretations were based as much as

[19] A word on data protection: All of the interview transcripts and audios were held on my laptop and backed up on a memory stick. Both of which, when I was not using them, were stored in my home in a locked drawer. I intentionally avoid saving both of these to cloud storage because ultimately, if I did, I would be handing over the data to a third party.

[20] In what follows, for ease of description and brevity, I discuss the coding and theme forming processes as if I had completed them all in one chunk, but I actually engaged in both first and second cycle coding—tentatively—throughout the data collection process; mainly to get a feel for the data but also to remain aware of themes that were beginning to develop.

possible on the direct experiences and perspectives of T.Beo members, thus, an inductive approach was most appropriate.

The method of coding I applied was what Saldaña (2013) termed eclectic coding. Eclectic in the sense that multiple distinct types of coding are applied to the same data set simultaneously. The use of multiple methods was particularly advantageous as I was dealing with different types of data—interview transcripts, documents, and field notes—and I felt that the data—especially the interviews—had too much detail to be dealt with through the use of a single method. This was something I decided upon after trying to code the first couple of interviews.[21] The specific coding methods I combined were; structural, in vivo, value, and versus coding (Saldaña 2013).

The second cycle was used to refine the data further by thematically organising the codes conceived in the first cycle. This cycle is about working with and analysing the codes; combining and condensing them to produce overarching themes that say something meaningful about the phenomena being studied in relation to the main research questions (Saldaña 2013; Braun and Clarke 2006). Again this cycle was done manually. I did not necessarily follow any strict coding method, but because I had used a mix of coding methods in the first cycle, I initially followed Miles et al. (2020) suggestion to group them by code type.[22] Within the structural codes clear patterns emerged. These patterns gave insight into what were commonly recurring topics throughout all methods of data collection. Examples of such commonly recurring topics include discussions around the different actions T.Beo were engaged in—like farm walks—or issues with the current food system. However, these patterns were not in and of themselves analytically or theoretically that deep or discerning. There was a lot of cross over between the codes derived from the other coding methods—in vivo, value, and versus coding—so I decided to consider all three of these methods together and group codes that dealt with similar issues. For instance, codes connecting to the

[21] I transcribed and coded interviews as I went. I found this useful as coding brought up some patterns that I could enquire about in later interviews.

[22] i.e. I grouped all the structural codes, in vivo codes, value codes, and versus codes generated in the first cycle of coding separately.

importance of community building were prominent in all three of these coding methods.[23]

Once I had this completed and had managed to categorise the vast majority of the codes, I started to refine the categories that emerged from this process. I did this, following Braun and Clarke (2006), by returning again to the raw data to see firstly was there any overlap between categories that might be potentially collapsed together and re-categorised. And secondly, to see if the categories actually fit the raw data. After this, I proceeded to group similar categories together, much like I had originally done for the individual codes, to produce a smaller number of major themes that I felt could best encapsulate the data and satisfy the research aims.

At the culmination of this process I had three overarching themes—values underpinning T.Beo's understanding of agriculture and food systems; individual members' farming practices and experiences; and T.Beo's collective practices and experiences. All these three themes were interconnected in many ways but retained enough uniqueness to have important things to say individually about the research aims, and ultimately formed the basis for the three main chapters of this thesis.

However, prior to completing my thesis I took steps to assess how significant, representative, and accurate these themes were in depicting the experiences of T.Beo and its members. To do this, I employed participant checking which "involves checking the adequacy of analytic categories/constructs/hypotheses with members of the group(s) from which the data were obtained" (Baxter and Eyles 1997). Participant checking was important for two major reasons. Firstly, it enhanced the accuracy of my research. As I am trying to detail the experiences of T.Beo in its attempts to develop agroecology in Ireland, if the T.Beo members themselves did not agree with the way their experiences had been represented then it would be hard to claim that my research was credible. Secondly, it gave the T.Beo members I spoke with greater control over the outcome of the research.

[23] Examples of codes relating to the importance of community building; in vivo—"connecting with like-minded people"; value—strengthen community ties ; versus—profit vs community.

In practice then, I utilised participant checking formally only once throughout the research process, and that was prior to the completion of the final draft.[24] The reason for this was the time constraints faced by participants. They are all full-time farmers; on top of that, their work with T.Beo takes up a great deal of their time; and they also have a lot of other commitments in their lives. The participant checking protocol I chose then, was less burdensome on T.Beo members, but still ensured that participants felt my final interpretations were representative of their experience. It is also important to note that this was not a decision I took from the very outset of the project. I did offer to share certain aspects of my research process like interview transcripts, but participants were okay for me to proceed without them checking; often citing their time constraints as reasons for this.

Again due to time constraints members did not read all of the draft thesis back-to-front, instead I created a separate Microsoft Word document for each participant that included all the sections from the thesis that related to them, along with sections of context to show how I interpreted the information they gave me. Afterwards we met online through Zoom to discuss what I had written about them. At the start of each of these meetings I also gave an overview of the whole thesis and its arguments. Then they gave me their feedback; letting me know if they had any issues with my interpretation, if they wanted any parts edited, or if they wanted any parts omitted altogether. Thankfully there were no major issues with what I had written. There was only one instance where a participant sought to alter what I had produced. The participant wanted to slightly edit one of their own quotes that I had directly included in the text. Overall they agreed with my interpretations and could see why given the context the quote was valuable, but they were just somewhat uncomfortable with the amount of potentially identifiable personal information in the quote.

[24] I say formally here because I ran certain aspects of the research by them during the numerous informal conversations I had with members to ensure that the interpretations I was drawing from the data were accurate.

3.5 Researcher's role

In this section, I want to briefly discuss the effects my own actions and beliefs have had on this research, and outline the methods I have employed to mitigate, as best as possible, their impact.

My main motivation for taking on this research came from a normative position that food systems need to be transformed, and that agroecology is a potentially powerful approach to do just that. However, my understanding of agroecology, and agriculture more broadly, comes from a different place compared to those in T.Beo that I engaged with. My interest in, and understanding of, agroecology came from my undergraduate studies. Prior to that I had never heard of agroecology. On top of this I am not a member of T.Beo, and before I began this research I had never engaged with, and had very little knowledge of T.Beo. And unlike those that I interacted with, I am not a farmer, nor have I ever been. Although, I have lived all of my life in rural Ireland, so I am directly impacted by a lot of the issues T.Beo are trying to address.

I highlight all of this because I think it is important to stress that my desire to understand the prospects of agroecology in Ireland stems from my own belief in the importance of agroecology; a belief that, although all of those I interacted with in T.Beo share, comes from a different place. So, while I am trying to elevate the knowledge and experiences of T.Beo, as feminist understandings of situated knowledge stress, my own motivations, and subjectivities will be impossible to disentangle from the research process and its final outcomes (Haraway 1988; Rose 1997; Kobayashi 2009).

Furthermore, as the researcher, I hold a privileged position in that I have ultimate control over the research process and the production of the final thesis. But similar to the impacts of my own subjectivities, the power inherent in knowledge production is never static, never fully knowable, and can never really be eliminated. Research is messy and full of uncertainty that can never be completely cleared up, because, as Rose (1997) argues, researchers are not all-knowing actors who are fully aware of all aspects of their own agency and the power dynamics of the research process—knowledge of such dynamics is only ever partial.

While acknowledging that such efforts are bound to be incomplete and open to alternative interpretations, I have employed a number of methods to try to navigate

this messiness and try to ensure that I have produced an accurate representation of T.Beo's experiences. As has been described above, unstructured interviews and participant checking were used to give greater control to participants over the research's general direction and outcomes, while triangulation was employed to add greater depth and richness to my understanding of their struggle. Furthermore, to help account for my own impact on the research, and to ensure richness and accuracy in my interpretations, I have also utilised thick description by providing, in this chapter, a detail description of the steps that I have taken to produce this research, and, in the main body of the thesis, by including as much direct testimony from T.Beo and its members as possible (Houghton et al. 2013).

3.6 Limitations

It is important to note, however, that this research has a number of limitations, and in this section I will discuss five limitations that I consider to be the most significant.

Firstly, although T.Beo are the only group in Ireland that embody all aspects of agroecology—a science, a practice, and a movement (Wezel et al. 2009)—the territorialization of agroecology in Ireland will require the efforts of a whole host of groups and actors. As such, my research does not give a complete view of the process of territorializing agroecology in Ireland. This research only focuses on the experiences of T.Beo as an instance of the broader phenomenon of territorializing agroecology in Ireland. And while social movements like T.Beo are fundamental to this process (Anderson et al. 2019; Mier y Terán Giménez Cacho et al. 2018; Rosset et al. 2011), I must caution against overgeneralising from their experiences, as presented here, to the broader process of territorializing agroecology in Ireland.

Secondly, this case study is only a snapshot of T.Beo's experiences. T.Beo is only in its early stages, so as it, and agroecology in Ireland, grow and evolve these experiences and actions will likely develop and change. Thus, this research is not a timeless, definitive description of T.Beo, but only captures a specific moment in T.Beo's development.

Thirdly, in relation to data collection, and specifically to the unstructured interviews, my decision to only interview members of the core group most certainly impacted the

research's outcomes. As explained, this was a conscious choice, for, considering that the core group are the most active members of T.Beo, I felt that they would be the best place to detail the efforts and directions T.Beo are taking to advance agroecology. Nevertheless, if I had focused my efforts on members outside of the core group then the outcomes of this research may have been different. It would be impossible, however, to cover all aspects of T.Beo in this thesis alone. So while this is necessarily a limitation of this study, the choices I made were taken to best achieve the aims of the research.

Fourthly, another limitation of the unstructured interviews was the gender imbalance among the participants, as only one of the five participants was a woman. The lack of women's perspectives certainly negatively impacted the potential depth and detail of my research; especially considering T.Beo places great importance on addressing gender inequality in Irish farming, and ensures a 50/50 gender split on the core group. But my efforts to get in contact with the other women members of the core group proved unsuccessful. As such, it was a limitation that I could not overcome and must necessarily be taken into consideration.

Finally, my own inexperience as a researcher should, I feel, be considered a limitation. I felt the impact of this inexperience most prominently when conducting participant observations, as I found the whole process, from participating at the events to processing and recording my observations afterward, quite challenging. Unfortunately, I had little chance to refine my participant observation skills, for during my period of field work there were only two events put on by T.Beo and its members that I was able to attend. But if I had more experience of participant observation particularly, but all other data collection methods as well, I feel I could have gleaned more valuable insight from my field work. As such, my inexperience should be considered a weakness of this research.

3.7 Summary

In the above chapter, I have laid out in considerable detail the steps I have taken to achieve the aims of this research. I have presented the overarching methodological approach of this study; I have comprehensively detailed the methods used to both collect and analyse data; I have highlighted the methods that I have adopted to account

for my own influence on the research process, and to ensure that my interpretations are an accurate representation of T.Beo's experiences; and finally I have outlined the main limitations of this research.

4 T.Beo's moral economy/ecology

4.1 Introduction

T.Beo are trying to bring about food system change in Ireland. As I have laid out in the preceding chapters, and following existing research in agroecology (Wezel et al. 2016; Anderson et al. 2019; Rosset 2013), I argue these attempts can be fruitfully understood as a form of territorialization. T.Beo's efforts involve "appropriating space for a political project" (Halvorsen 2018, p.795; Halvorsen et al. 2019); a political project that is trying to stabilize alternative relations and practices (Gonin 2022) of producing, distributing, and consuming food. Such territorial struggles involve more than just struggles over material resources, but involve struggles over values, norms, and discourses as well (Nwankwo 2023; Konforti 2022)—what are often termed immaterial territories (Rosset and Martínez-Torres 2012; Fernandes 2023). This chapter then, will look at the norms, values, and expectations underpinning T.Beo's attempts to territorialize an alternative food system in Ireland.

To do this, I will employ the parallel notions of moral economy and moral ecology. Moral economy explores the norms and values that structure economic practices and relations (Sayer 2007). Whereas moral ecology looks at the norms and values that structure human-nature relations (Hougaard 2023). Of course, the two concepts are inseparable as all economic arrangements are founded upon specific socioecological interactions (Hay 2008). However, I use the two concepts together not to separate them, but to avoid emphasising one over the other.

A crucial thing to note about both concepts is that neither is used only to study values that are believed to be wholly good. All economic arrangements and all human-nature interactions are inevitably structured by certain norms and expectations regardless of the values we attribute to them (Palomera and Vetta 2016; Scaramelli, 2019).

In this regard, the industrial-capitalist food system and its productivist imperative, currently dominant in Ireland, is based on its own specific set of moral claims. It is seen as the most efficient way of producing and distributing food, and as the only type of system that can 'feed the world' (Sage and Kenny 2017). It is also lauded for its economic performance. As Ireland's "largest indigenous industry" it provides significant employment; continues to drive economic growth (DAFM 2021, p.11;

2023; Bord Bia 2024); and is regarded as the social and economic bedrock of rural communities throughout the country (Hennessy et al. 2018).

The current Irish food system is also based on its own distinct set of ecological rationalities and understandings of what constitutes just socioecological relations. In particular, through "the knowledge-interest nexus of scientific research, state power and corporate elites", agriculture in Ireland has been constructed around the 'inevitability' and 'naturalness' of a grass-covered landscape (Ó Murchú 2023, p.111) and livestock farming—particularly cattle (Shanagher and Brereton 2020) and large-scale dairy (Ó Murchú 2023).

T.Beo, who specifically position themselves against this dominant model of agriculture, have their own distinct understanding of the norms and sentiments that should structure the economic and ecological relations and practices of our food systems. In the chapter that follows, I have distilled their moral economy/ecology into three overarching norms. Firstly, T.Beo believe that our food systems should ensure that farmers have 'the right to continue being agriculturalists and remain on the land' (Edelman 2005). Secondly, they should be based on socioeconomic relations of reciprocity, cooperation, and community. Thirdly, they should be based on reciprocal, sustainable human-nature relations. I will discuss each of these overarching norms in turn below, before detailing, in the last section, some of the difficulties T.Beo face in trying to overturn the immaterial territories of industrial-capitalist agriculture that dominate in Ireland currently.

4.2 Right to continue being agriculturalists

A central part of T.Beo's moral economy is similar, I argue, to what Edelman (2005 p.332) terms 'the right to continue being agriculturalists'. This claim, for Edelman, is a broader, contemporary version of Scott's (1976) 'subsistence ethic'. Scott describes this subsistence ethic as the socially and culturally determined understandings of minimal subsistence rights that peasants were entitled to—owed to them by landlords and local elites—which if infringed upon would lead to dissent, resistance, and even open rebellion. For Edelman then, the right to continue being agriculturalists and continue living from the land holds a similar position for peasants and farmers nowadays. And the fact that such rights are being regularly threatened by the

operations of industrial-capitalist food systems is a significant driving force behind much of the agrarian activism we are witnessing around the world currently.

The right to continue being agriculturalists and remain on the land is equally crucial to T.Beo's understanding of how food systems should operate. T.Beo believes that at a bare minimum, food systems should protect land-based livelihoods and ensure that farmers, particularly smallholders, can continue living from the land.

> Essentially what we are trying to do is build local livelihoods, trying to rebuild within our communities the ability to feed our communities, and also ensure people can make a living off of the land, and make a decent living off the land because it's hard to do that now. (Member 1)

In this brief summary of T.Beo's aims, member 1 describes how protecting farmers' livelihoods is a central element of their struggle. Currently though, making a living off the land in Ireland is very difficult. The blame for such difficulties T.Beo place squarely on the structure of the current food system. Specifically, T.Beo, like many (Edelman 2005; McMicheal 2009; LVC 2015a), highlight the detrimental consequences of the corporate control of food systems which are "producing social, material and biophysical conditions that are not conducive to the reproduction of agrarian and land-based livelihoods" (Hebinck 2018).

> Agribusiness has been the force that's driving everything. So, with agribusiness it's really first about business and secondly about the farm. The farmer is often seen as kind of a host which they [agribusiness] feed off. And now we want to change it around and say actually the farmer should be the primary […] But more and more it's about… you know… agribusiness interest winning and the farmers… you know… very much getting the crumbs. (Member 5)

For member 5 above, how our food system operates is driven nearly exclusively by corporate interests; with the activities and needs of farmers very much subservient to their demands. In fact, he describes agribusiness as being parasitic on farmers. The impacts of the corporate dominance of the Irish agri-food sector and the subordinate role of farmers—who have become increasingly integrated into agro-industrial production processes—have been well documented (Tovey 1991; 2000; Commins 1996; Mercier 2020; O'Shaughnessy and Sage 2017). And this subordinate position has left a significant number of farmers 'very much getting the crumbs'. In general,

incomes from farming are very low—on average farmers are earning less than half the average industrial wage (IFA 2024)—with the exception of dairy farmers, who only represent a fraction of Ireland's farming population (Dillon et al. 2024). On top of this, the majority of farms are considered either to be "operating non-viable farm businesses" or are dependent on off-farm income (Dillon et al. 2024, p.33). Unsurprisingly then, given this precarious economic environment, the number of people farming continues to fall; which is a long-term trend in Irish agriculture (CSO 2021), and a trend that T.Beo are struggling against.

But it is not just economic precarity that is threatening farmers' right to continue living from the land, T.Beo also struggle against the commodification and privatisation of the knowledge and resources farmers need to reproduce themselves.

> Farmers are not encouraged to think as such. They are encouraged to buy things… new products… you know… 'okay this plant is sick what do I need? What is the spray I need to make it better?' Which actually disables farmers' ability to think for themselves. It doesn't encourage them to solve problems themselves. And you know the outreach services have also done this over the years; telling farmers 'now you need to do this, or today you can't do that, you can't do this.' That's not encouraging farmers to have agency in the system… you know what I mean. And I think we need to reclaim that, because ultimately a farmer thinking proactively and critically about their own land is 100 percent the best person to make good choices about that land. It's about putting a bit of trust and capacity back into the hands of the farmer. (Member 2)

The subordination of agriculture to corporate interests and the integration of farmers into agro-industrial production processes have increased farmers' dependency on industrial and chemical inputs and methods; which, as member 2 above describes, has eroded farmers' autonomy and their ability to engage with the land independently. Separating them from locally situated knowledge of agricultural practices and ecosystems—that are critical to farmers ability to reproduce themselves (Schneider and McMichael 2010)—and shifting the "being, doing, and knowing of farmers" closer in line with the rationalities of industrial-capitalist agriculture (Giraldo 2019, p.45).

On top of this, the current food system inhibits farmers' access to and control over resources that are essential to their livelihoods (Neef at al. 2023). Seeds are one example of this which T.Beo are particularly vocal on.

> When I started looking at agriculture, and the food system and then the seed system, I realised that pretty much the vast majority of independent seed companies in the last fifty years have been closed down and bought up by the likes of Monsanto. All of these industrial and chemical companies… these are very scary people to be holding the seeds because seeds are very valuable… the seeds don't belong to them… they try to patent them… but the seeds came from millennia of evolution of farmers holding those seeds and growing them in their land and then passing them on to the next generation. (Member 1)

The member above describes how, through intellectual property rights, seeds are being enclosed in the hands of large transnational corporations (Montenegro de Wit 2017). It is clear from this passage that the member believes this to be a transgression of how food systems should operate. Farmers ought to have access to, and control over, the resources they need to continue living from the land.

So, the right to remain on the land and continue being agriculturalists is, I argue, a central aspect of T.Beo's moral economy; which the operations of industrial-capitalist food systems—through economic insecurity, and by separating farmers from knowledge of their own agroecosystems and from the resources they need to reproduce themselves—directly threatens. However, T.Beo recognise that protecting this right cannot be dealt with in isolation, and in the next sections, we will see that T.Beo's moral economy is far more holistic; recognising that protecting farmers' livelihoods mutually depends on wider social, economic, and ecological relations.

4.3 Socioeconomic relations: Reciprocity, cooperation and community

T.Beo's beliefs about how food systems should operate go beyond the confines of the farm, for they realise that food systems, like all economic arrangements, are the product of social relations.[25] How food is produced, distributed, exchanged, and consumed shapes and reshapes specific social relations (Figueroa 2015). T.Beo's

[25] They are also the product of ecological relations, but this will be discussed later in section 4.4.

beliefs and expectations about how such relations ought to function revolve around the intertwined norms of reciprocity, cooperation, and community. Each of these norms are known to be quite prevalent as guiding principles for socioeconomic arrangements in many agrarian societies, both historical and contemporary (Scott 1976; Walsh-Dilley 2013; Grubačić and O'Hearn 2016), and for many agroecological movements (van den Berg 2021; LVC 2015a; Wolford 2005).

Relations of cooperation have been historically widespread within farming communities in Ireland (Cush and Macken-Walsh 2016). However, as has been the overarching trend throughout the world, industrialisation and the development of capitalism have weakened and transformed many of these connections (Scott 1976; Bernstein 2014). While such processes have not completely eradicated such relations, the general development in Ireland has been one of transitioning from farming communities to 'one-man-farms' (Macken-Walsh 2010). Whereby the atomised individualistic tendencies of capitalist social relations have transformed farming into an individual endeavour that is thought to be independent of anyone or anything (Cush and Macken-Walsh 2016).

The importance of reciprocity, cooperation, and community for T.Beo emerges from their recognition of the mutually dependent relationships that exists between what happens on the farm and the social, economic, and ecological issues faced by communities—particularly rural communities—throughout Ireland. T.Beo's understanding is that food producers and their wider communities are interdependent. As one member told me; "it's [the workings of our current food system] a societal problem and ultimately it's going to have to be addressed by society at large" (Member 2).

But in industrial-capitalist food systems—with its moral economy of atomised individual autonomy and choice—most of these interdependencies are hidden; with its operations concealing the unequal, exploitative relations and dependencies on which it is based, and actively eroding the dependencies on which alternatives can be built and maintained (Homs 2022). We have already seen in the last section that for T.Beo industrial-capitalist food systems are dependent upon parasitic relations between agribusiness and farmers that threatens farmers' ability to remain on the land. On top of this, there are two other relations which T.Beo consider central to the

operations of food systems that industrial-capitalist food systems are detrimental towards—gendered labour and the relationship between farmers and their wider community. I will discuss each of these in turn.

Firstly, T.Beo recognise, much like Joshi (2024), that food production and farmers' ability to continue being agriculturalists is greatly dependent on gendered labour. Such labour does not just include work carried out by women on the farm, but also domestic work which is crucial to the reproduction of farming households. This work is more often than not invisible, unpaid, and is heavily exploited in industrial-capitalist food systems (Joshi 2024; Zaremba et al. 2021; Trevilla Espinal et al. 2021). T.Beo then, through their own research (Document 16), highlight the experiences of women in agriculture in Ireland, and are agitating to transform gendered relations within Irish agriculture.

> Women have been making incredible contributions to society, farming and feeding families and communities for centuries, but they and their roles have been undervalued or not valued and unrecognized. This is especially true under patriarchy, capitalism, colonialism and other systems that exploit and extract. (Document 16)

In the above, T.Beo stress the importance of gendered work, not just in maintaining land-based livelihoods, but also in reproducing rural communities. But women's work in all its forms—be it on the farm; their care work in the home; or their off-farm employment which currently preserves the economic viability of many farms in Ireland (Dillon et al. 2024)—are either undervalued or ignored altogether. T.Beo stress that we must alter this. Food systems should value and empower women and other marginalised groups who are crucial to sustaining those very food systems, farming households, and rural communities.

Secondly, T.Beo—much like the organic movement in Ireland during the 90's that Tovey (1997; 2002) describes—consider what happens on the farm to be inseparable from the social and economic issues faced by rural communities. For T.Beo farming is about more than just food production; it is seen as integral to the reproduction of life in rural communities. As such, they consider strengthening and maintaining community connections to be a fundamental function of farming.

> It's important to have an organisation that's not simply following the conventional ideas; that we have someone who's taking a new view of where farming is… that farming can again be at the basis of a community, it can strengthen community ties. (Member 5)

For member 5, a crucial aspect of farming is creating local interactions, and helping to bind people and communities together. Farming should be the foundation of communities, and to assert this he stresses the need to shift from conventional thinking and establish alternative understandings of what farming can be, for, as is clear from the above quote, he does not believe that our current food systems are doing this. For instance, as member 1 points out below, current food systems, at a very basic level, are undermining the quality of food communities have access to.

> Our modern food system isn't working for the farmer or the community. It's pretty much driven by external shareholders outside of the environment. The system is always being undermined and the quality [of food] lowered and lowered for the profits of external shareholders, and it has nothing to do with what is being produced on the farm or whether the community can benefit. (Member 1)

As we saw in the last section, T.Beo believe that in our current food systems agri-food corporations are benefiting unjustly from the labour of farmers—whose ability to remain agriculturalists is under constant threat. Above member 1 extends this analysis to the wider community who are similarly seeing very little upside from the operations of current food systems. The benefits from which, again, are very much unidirectional; flowing towards agribusiness and their shareholders. In particular, member 1 highlights how the quality of food people have access to is increasingly being lowered to facilitate agri-food corporations' pursuit of capital accumulation. A process that is having widespread negative impacts on people and communities across Ireland, especially in relation to health and wellbeing (Sage and Kenny 2017; Kenny et al. 2018).

But providing quality food locally, protecting farmers livelihoods, and strengthening rural communities are all, for T.Beo, interconnected struggles. This is illustrated below in the motivations driving member 1's farming practices.

> You just have no control over the food you produce… and again we want to feed our community and build a long-term relationship with the people we're providing food to… and all of that is kind of lost in our current food system. (Member 1)

We can see here for member 1, gaining autonomy over on farm production, and building lasting relationships with the people around him are equally important. Both are crucial to what he is trying to do on his farm. Furthermore, both are reciprocally related. Building long-term relationships are dependent on member 1 benefiting his community by providing them with high-quality food. In return, through the support from those he supplies food to, he can maintain control over what he does on the farm and ultimately remain on the land. The significance of this type of reciprocal relationship is stressed again in T.Beo's explainer pamphlet on food sovereignty.

> It is about ensuring that all people living in Ireland have access to the best quality food, produced locally by farmers earning a fair wage and price for their production. (Document 9)

Again we see from this document that for T.Beo the needs of farmers and those of the wider community are inseparable. They are mutually dependent. Producing quality food locally is reciprocally related to farmers maintaining a livelihood and remaining on the land.

In sum, we have seen here that for T.Beo crucial dependencies and relationships on which food systems are, or should be, based—like food production's dependency on gendered labour, and the interdependency between farmers' livelihoods, the supply of affordable, nutritious food locally, and the prospects of rural communities—are either being exploited or actively eroded in industrial-capitalist food systems.

This then is why the norms of reciprocity, cooperation, and community are so central to T.Beo's vision for how food systems should operate; as it is only through fostering alternative relations based on reciprocity, cooperation, and community that the intertwined social and economic issues faced by farmers, women, and rural communities, due to the operations of current food systems, can be overcome. Building relations of reciprocity, cooperation, and community, in this sense, are not just ends, but are also means through which food systems can be transformed. This will be visible throughout the chapters that follow, but for now we can see the

significance of these norms in T.Beo's advocacy for localisation which, as member 4 told me, is;

> […] fundamental to everything. Very simply, if we can localise our food systems then a lot of things can tick into place […] I think that's the most fundamentally effective thing we can do to return society to a little bit of balance; where our value system returns to a place that's actually going to support sustainable living. (Member 4)

T.Beo, as highlighted by member 4 above, believe that localisation is one of the most effective strategies for transforming food systems and reorientating how rural communities are reproduced. And for T.Beo, its primary strength—as laid out in their Local Food Policy (Document 18)—lies in its ability to reinvigorate and strengthen community connections:

> Short supply chains are built on trust and citizen participation – bringing people closer to where their food comes from and a deeper awareness of how it is produced. Short supply chains offer multiple social, environmental and economic benefits while building community cohesion, stimulating rural networks, reducing isolation and above all providing high-quality, nutritious food to communities, towns and cities across the country. (Document 18)

Localisation establishes relations of reciprocity and cooperation between food producers and their wider communities. Creating direct face-to-face relationships between producers and consumers which builds the type of 'community cohesion' and 'rural networks' that can undermine the power corporations have over food systems, and can establish and strengthen alternative ways of producing, processing, distributing, and consuming food (van der Ploeg 2010).

In sum, I have argued above that reciprocity, cooperation, and community are central to T.Beo's moral economy. Not only are they desired ends—in that they are the norms and values T.Beo believe food systems should operate by—but they are also means to achieve these desired aims, as they are considered by T.Beo to be the type of relations needed to create food systems that works for farmers, consumers, and wider society.

4.4 Socioecological relations: Reciprocity and sustainability

The interdependence that T.Beo emphasise between agriculture and wider society, spoken about above, extends to the natural world as well. T.Beo recognise that the prospects of farmers and communities are inseparable from the natural worlds they inhabit. Identifying this mutual dependency, T.Beo hold a distinct moral *ecology*, or view of the norms that should guide human-nature relations particularly as they relate to agriculture. I argue that this moral ecology centres around reciprocity and sustainability (Dove and Kammen 1997; Baker et al. 2017; Hay 2019; Hougaard 2023).

Again, like in the last sections, the foundations of T.Beo's moral ecology—reciprocity and sustainability—are clearly visible in their critiques of the current food system.

> We cannot continue with a business-as-usual approach. We must lay the groundwork now for a properly sustainable Irish food system, which works within the ecological carrying capacity of the land. Arguing to continue to farm as we do now is just an argument which supports the role of fertiliser companies, agrochemical companies, feed processors, supermarkets and other agribusiness firms which profit from farmer's labour, and whose products are largely responsible for most of the environmental impacts we see in our lakes and rivers, as well as in our atmosphere. (Document 1)

In the above extract from Document 1, T.Beo are heavily critical of the destructive ecological impacts of our current food system. Similar to the last section, the blame for such damage is placed on the corporate control of agriculture. Agri-food corporations are again described above as reaping all the benefits from how our food systems are currently organised, and they are benefiting at the expense of nature. They are described above as pushing ecosystems beyond their limits and causing much of the environmental damage we are experiencing. Member 1 below reiterates this criticism;

> We are reliant on big business and all the inputs that come with it. So our resilience and sustainability are gone because over the last thirty or forty years they ['big business'] have conditioned us into thinking that the only way of farming is putting out nitrogen, external inputs that are poisoning the ground. If we do all those things, then we have broken the cycles of nature that provide

> its bounty for free. So, if we don't do all those things and we learn how soil biology works, how plants work, how to rotate our animals through the landscape, about diverse pastures, we have trees integrated… then there is huge amounts of photosynthesis… the plants are doing the work that they have done for millennia apart from the last hundred years of industrial agriculture and we can bounty off of that. (Member 1)

Again, according to member 1 our 'resilience and sustainability are gone'. Instead agriculture has become dependent on ecologically damaging chemical and industrial inputs and practices that are threatening the long-term health of the ecosystems we depend on for both food production, and social reproduction (Wolford 2005; Joshi 2024).

On top of this, such practices have completely transformed farmers' relationships to land and nature. Farmers, of course, have deep connections with the land they work. As von Redecker and Herzig (2020, p.665) argue, "the farming identity as a whole cannot be understood separately from the so-called "environment" which surrounds it […] farmers are who they are through and with their land and their daily work, their practice." This is similarly the case for Irish farmers (O'Rourke 2019; Hammersley et al. 2023). However, connections between farmers and land, while constant, are never static; they are historically contingent, constantly evolving, and are shaped by their wider social, economic, and cultural context (Chitata et al. 2022; Scaramelli 2019; Giraldo 2019). And as many have pointed out, farmers' connections with land can be, and have been—whether complete or partial; whether willingly, through force, or deception—transformed by capitalist and industrial practices and logics (Castellanos-Navarrete and Jansen 2018; Bernstein 2014; Soper 2020; Jansen 2015; Giraldo 2019; Homs 2022; Nwankwo 2023). This is what member 1 is describing above. He describes how the broader development of industrial-capitalist agriculture has utterly reconfigured relations between farmers and their land. Uprooting farming practices from their biological foundations and breaking natural cycles that farmers have traditionally worked with and benefited from. Rupturing farmer-nature relations that were based on reciprocity, care, and mutuality—like those described in the latter half of member 1's quote above—to create a food system that readily exploits both farmers and nature.

But the negative impacts of industrial-capitalist agricultures' destructive practices, and its reconfiguration of human-nature relations are not just confined to the farm, they also have ramifications for wider society's understandings of, and interactions with, nature as well.

> The modern industrial food system, with its monoculture production, globalised trade, and centralised processing has created an almost total disconnect between citizens and the origins of their food. This means we largely make choices about what we eat at a distance from the realities and impacts of how it is produced. (Document 15)

In the above quote, T.Beo highlight how the current food system has alienated people from their food, and has largely separated them from the socioecological impacts of how it is produced, processed, exchanged and distributed. Severing what T.Beo consider to be crucial links between farmers, communities, and nature. Maintaining these links, for T.Beo, was always an important function of farming but this again has been eroded by the current food system.

> The role that farmers have always played in linking their communities to land and place, providing healthy and nutritious food, and maintaining a balance with the ecosystems and habitats in which they farm has been eroded. (Document 8)

Farmers by protecting ecosystems and providing nutritious food locally played a crucial role connecting communities to nature, but the 'monoculture production, globalised trade, and centralised processing' of the current food system has undercut this aspect of farming. Ultimately 'unmooring' the social and economic lives of communities from nature (Val et al. 2019).

In sharp contrast to industrial-capitalist food systems, T.Beo wants to create food systems that are based on reciprocal and sustainable human-nature relations (Dove and Kammen 1997; Baker et al. 2017; Hougaard 2023); and to do this they advocate for and mobilise agroecology.

> Agroecology is a wider perspective of growing food and dealing with the land, nature, and the environment that you're in. It is a very important tool when you're dealing with food sovereignty because agroecology is dealing with

> natural processes, but it is bringing independence back to farmers as well, and building more resilience and sustainability. It includes organics, permaculture, agroforestry and all of these things that go with it, but agroecology is the best umbrella to cover all of that. Systems thinking is what it is; knowing that you're living in a natural environment… what can you do within that natural environment to enhance it, and then how can you take a surplus from the environment without damaging the environment itself. (Member 1)

Agroecological practices, for the farmer above, are based on reciprocal and sustainable socioecological relations. Agroecology, which recognises our dependence on the natural world, treats the protection of ecosystems as inseparable from food production. And we can see this above, as member 1 considers the work of enhancing and caring for ecosystems as a precursor to taking a surplus from it. In essence agroecology considers agriculture as co-production between farmers and nature (van der Ploeg 2010). Requiring socioecological relations, between farmers and their land, of care, reciprocity, and cooperation; that does away with dependence on external inputs and re-roots farming in natural cycles and the specificities of local ecosystems.

But to create food systems based on reciprocal and sustainable socioecological relations, and heal the multiple rifts that exists between humans and the natural world, as a consequence of the way agriculture is currently organised (Wittman 2009; Schneider and McMichael 2010; Montenegro de Wit 2020), will require more than just transforming farming practices. This understanding is well integrated into T.Beo's conception and implementation of agroecology, as highlighted by member 4 below.

> As far as I can see, there isn't another umbrella in Ireland that is going to encompass... you know… the political, the social… all the principles of agroecology which as we've said is not just about food it's about society, it's about politics, it's a way of life—a different way of living your life. (Member 4)

In describing why an organisation like T.Beo is so important in the Irish context, member 4 emphasises T.Beo's holistic understanding of how food systems should operate. Such that their notions of just socioecological relations of reciprocity and sustainability are inseparable from their notions of just socioeconomic relations. Creating closer, more sustainable human-nature relations; regenerating ecosystems;

reestablishing and protecting land-based livelihoods; empowering food producers, women, and other marginalised groups; and revitalising communities are, for T.Beo, all connected struggles.

4.5 Dominance of industrial-capitalist rationalities

What I have described thus far is the vision for food systems that T.Beo are trying to territorialize. They are the immaterial territories T.Beo are fighting for through agroecology, food sovereignty, and localisation. However, T.Beo are quite aware that the process of territorializing such values and norms is anything but straightforward.

They recognise that the values, expectations, and understandings of farmers, consumers, and rural communities have been shaped by and are actively entangled, in multiple complex ways, with the practices and logics of the dominant industrial-capitalist food system (Castellanos-Navarrete and Jansen 2018; Chitata et al. 2022; Scaramelli, 2019); which will ultimately be very hard to unravel.

> To me… it's just… the more I learn about food and farming the more I sort of… I won't say despair but… we've kind of gone down—a long way down—a road which is a dead end. And it's going to be very hard for some farmers to turn around and say 'oh I've been going the wrong way for 20 or 30 years'—that's the reality. The potential of using agroecological production systems; using all the stuff we know about soil biology, fungi, mycorrhiza… you know… the other direction we could have taken. If we were traveling down that road for 30 or 40 years it would be incredible to see where we could be. And I mean there's great hope in that potential but there's also an awful lot of vested interests that want to keep us on the road we're on until the bitter end. (Member 2)

T.Beo recognise, as highlighted by member 2 above, that farmers' current expectations, beliefs, and practices—which have been, over the course of a number of decades, transformed by the capitalist and industrial development of agriculture—are, to a certain extent, deeply entrenched. For instance, Tovey (2000, p.62) discusses how the "professionalisation", "technicisation" and "scientisation" of farming has transformed dairy farmers into "small business entrepreneurs" who have become

detached from other farmers and "the rest of rural society", and "now have more in common with food industry and other business groups". This is only one broad example, and there is, of course, a huge amount of differentiation among the values and rationalities that underpin farmers' relations, practices, and behaviours. But it does highlight just how entrenched, in some cases, the entanglements between the rationalities and values of farmers and those of industrial-capitalist agriculture have become.

Another major obstacle to T.Beo's attempts to territorialize their vision, emphasised by member 2 above, is that there are broad networks of, often quite powerful, stakeholders that are keen to 'keep us on the road we're on'. The state and agri-food corporations are crucial actors in these networks, and their joint influence is clearly visible in some of the more recent strategic plans for the development of the agri-food sector published by the Irish government—Food Harvest 2020 (DAFF 2010) and Food Wise 2025 (DAFM 2015). While these strategic plans were portrayed as industry led, Kenny et al. (2018, p.99) suggest "it would be more accurate to label it as a joint government and industry-led initiative" as "the state was a key player in the decision-making process but with goals strongly aligned with industry interests."[26] These plans then adopted a "business as usual approach", with a continued emphasis on specialisation, intensification, and concentration, that aimed to increase agricultural production, increase the value of primary outputs, and increase exports (Kenny et al. 2018, p.101). And while the latest iteration of these strategic plans—Food Vision 2030 (DAFM 2021)—has, as Ó Murchú (2023, p.115) argues, greater potential, particularly in relation to tackling the environmental and ecological impacts of agriculture, it will prove ineffective unless the Irish government can unravel "themselves from the knowledge-interest nexus with corporate and private interests"

Other important actors that have become entangled in these networks, that must be mentioned here, are farmers representative bodies. Particularly the Irish Farmers Association; who, after Ireland joined the EEC, became "firmly established in the 'inner' circle" of the Irish agricultural policy community (Adshead 1996), and now

[26] Kenny et al. (2018) only analyse Food Harvest 2020, but I believe that their arguments I am referencing here equally apply to Food Wise 2025.

readily embrace the economic and ecological rationalities of industrial-capitalist food systems (Tovey 2000).

To add to all of this—the deep-seated entanglements, that have developed over the last number of decades, between the rationalities of farmers and of industrial-capitalist agriculture, and the networks of powerful actors that are aligned in protecting and expanding the agricultural status-quo—T.Beo must also struggle against the fact that the principles and practices of food sovereignty and agroecology are "nearly non-existent" in Ireland (Agroecology Europe 2020; Blaix 2024). This is something T.Beo are well aware of, as even some of their own members—as was the case for some of the members I spoke with—only became fully aware of agroecology and food sovereignty after joining T.Beo. Which is why, as member 1 told me, T.Beo will work with all farmers.

> We work with all kinds of farmers. We do. It's just we're very strong on our position and understandings of what the issues are, and we're not afraid to stand up and say it. And we have no vested interest; our interest is ensuring that there is something there for future generations and that we can make a livelihood out of it at the moment. (Member 1)

While T.Beo have a strong vision of how our food systems should operate, and have means to get there—agroecology, food sovereignty, and localisation—they recognise that this vision is not readily accepted by all farmers, but they believe that there is enough common ground to build from.

4.6 Discussion and conclusion

T.Beo, as they state themselves, are trying to create food systems that work for 'land, people, and community', and, in this chapter, I have brought together the parallel notions of moral economy and moral ecology to help comprehend the norms, expectations, and values that T.Beo believe ought to structure the economic and ecological relations of our food systems. Above, I have distilled T.Beo's moral economy/ecology into three overarching, but interconnected, strands. Fundamentally, T.Beo believe that food systems should; 1) protect food producers livelihoods—ensuring that they remain on the land and continue farming; 2) they should be built on

socioeconomic relations of reciprocity, cooperation, and community in order to care for and strengthen the essential dependencies that industrial-capitalist food systems are either exploiting or actively eroding—such as food productions dependency on women, and the interdependency between farmers' livelihoods, needs of consumers, and the prospects of rural communities; and 3) they should be built on reciprocal and sustainable human-nature relations that protect and enhance land and nature which both farmers and wider society are reliant on for food production and social reproduction more broadly.

These three norms are central to the moral economy/ecology of most social movements that adopt agroecology (LVC 2015a; Rosset and Martínez-Torres 2012; Wolford 2005; Meek 2014). But as we saw in section 4.5, territorializing these values in Ireland will be difficult to say the least. Industrial-capitalist rationalities are dominant; networks of powerful actors are working to ensure that this remains the case; and agroecology is practically unheard of.

Despite all this, the values underpinning T.Beo's efforts, while marginal, are not necessarily that novel, as a lot of them have precedent in Irish agriculture. The protection of food producers, for instance, is a central motive to practically all collective mobilizations of farmers in Ireland. The beef farmer protests of 2019/20 are one of the more recent examples of this (Murphy et al. 2022). Connection to the land is another critical value held by most farmers (O'Rourke 2019; Hammersley et al. 2023). While, the norms of cooperation and community, although currently in a weakened state, have historically been quite prominent in Ireland (Cush and Macken-Walsh 2016; Macken-Walsh 2010).

So, these norms in a very broad sense are common in Irish agriculture, however, in a narrower sense they are not that unique either, and are quite comparable to many other alternative food initiatives. This is particularly the case with the organic movement who have a very similar holistic understanding of agriculture. Protecting farming livelihoods, particularly small-scale, local food producers; producing healthy, high-quality produce; rural development and community wellbeing; and protecting and connecting with nature, are all valued by the organic movement and are considered by them to be fundamentally connected issues (Tovey 1997; 2002).

While I have highlighted the organic movement here, similar values and ethics are shared by most individuals, groups, and organisations involved in Ireland's alternative farming networks (Sage 2003, Murtagh 2013; McMahon 2005; Moore 2006a; 2006b); which, given how integrated these networks are, is unsurprising.

One aspect of T.Beo's outlook that possibly sets it apart from other alternative initiatives in Ireland, however, is the political intent inherent in their values. While the norms guiding most of these alternative food initiatives explicitly contradict many of the norms of industrial-capitalist agriculture (Tovey 1997; Murtagh 2013), agroecology in its most complete, radical form must be political. The need to contest and transform industrial-capitalist agriculture and its underlying power structures is an integral part of agroecology's value system (LVC 2015a: Giraldo and Rosset 2023). This political element, I would argue, is prominent in T.Beo's vision as well. For instance if we consider some of the key political elements of a radical, 'emancipatory' agroecology, as categorized by Giraldo and Rosset (2023), a lot of these elements—such as challenging dominant power structures like capitalism and patriarchy; fighting for land; and building alliances between farmers, consumers, rural communities and wider society—are all clearly present in the above discussion of T.Beo's moral economy/ecology.

5 T.Beo's everyday resistance

5.1 Introduction

After looking in the last chapter at the values and norms that T.Beo believe should structure the operations of Ireland's food system, I will now turn my attention towards the actions T.Beo are taking to try to territorialize such a food system. I will begin in this chapter by analysing the individual farming practices of T.Beo members. I consider these practices to be forms of 'everyday resistance' as they are routine activities through which T.Beo members try to undermine the power relations of the current food system (Johansson and Vinthagen 2020), by contesting the "norms and rules regarding authority over, production of, or allocation of resources" (Kerkvliet 2009, p.232), and prefiguring alternative forms of food production (Tornaghi and Dehaene 2020).

Everyday resistance is increasingly being recognised as a potentially powerful means through which subordinate groups can reconfigure territories (Halvorsen 2018; Clare et al. 2018). Notably for the purposes of this research, they are seen as an important means of creating and protecting alternative agrarian territories (Shattuck and Peluso 2021) like those based on agroecology (van den Berg et al. 2021; Rivera-Núñez et al. 2020).

In this chapter then, I will detail why T.Beo members' daily farming practices should be considered as forms of everyday resistance. And will look at the difficulties T.Beo members face in trying to implement them. To do this, and examine the everyday resistance of T.Beo members, I have made two major operational decisions that I want to make clear from the outset. Firstly, my analysis here centres on the intentions behind T.Beo members' farming practices rather than the practices themselves. The main reason for this is, as Scott (1985) acknowledges, understanding the intentions behind the acts gives a much stronger basis to claims of resistance. Basing our understandings of resistance solely on the impact of practices is potentially less robust, as the outcome of any act may betray the desired aim.

However, this approach is not without its weaknesses. As Johansson and Vinthagen (2020) argue, by only focusing on intentions we can omit many actions that should be considered as everyday resistance. Mainly because, as both Scott (1985) and Johansson and Vinthagen (2020) agree on, intentions can be hard to ascertain; in most

instances of everyday resistance intentions, and even the acts themselves, are purposefully hidden—their success often depends on concealment. Fortunately, T.Beo are not trying to conceal their endeavours or their intentions. They are in fact quite open about what they are doing, and why they are doing it. So this principal weakness of focusing on intentions is of lesser concern here.

The second major decision I had to make was how to distil the diversity of T.Beo members' daily farming practices—which varies greatly in the size and type of farm they operate; in their agroecological intensity; in their experience of farming; and in the distribution methods they employ—into one coherent analysis that is faithful to this diversity while also sufficiently detailed enough to provide valuable insight into their individual practices. To do this, I have chosen to conduct an in-depth examination of the experiences, practices, and intentions of three specific T.Beo members. These three farmers are sufficiently diverse—in all the areas mentioned above—to provide a detailed snapshot of the type of everyday resistance I am arguing that T.Beo members, through their daily farming practices, are engaging in.

The chapter will be divided into two main sections. The first section will look at the daily farming practices of three T.Beo members, paying specific attention, as I say, to the reasons why they are doing what they are doing. What we will see is that in all three cases—while some are more explicit about their intentions than others—they are all, through their daily farming practices, trying to establish alternative values, relations, and practices around how food is produced, distributed, exchanged and consumed.

The second section will highlight that everyday resistance does not take place in isolation. The practices of the three T.Beo members discussed here are all emerging from within an industrial-capitalist agricultural landscape which can limit and frustrate their potential. In this section, I will look in detail at one specific economic relation that is foundational to industrial-capitalist agriculture and is known to stifle agroecology—market dependency (Wach 2021). And I will analyse how it impacts the three T.Beo members' practices as well as how they try to deal with it.

5.2 T.Beo members' everyday resistance

As I say, to examine the impact of T.Beo members' daily farming practices I will detail in some depth the practices, and more particularly the intentions behind such practices, of three specific members. The first member I want to look at is member 1; who has transformed twenty-five-acres of marginal land of ryegrass and docks into multiple different agroecosystems—four acres of horticulture, four acres of permaculture, including an orchard and other fruit and nut plants; four acres of agroforestry; and thirteen acres of native Irish woodland. Member 1 was raised in a pub and spent a good part of his life running it. His only engagement with farming growing up were trips to his grandfather's farm. But as he became more aware about his food, how it was produced, and the systems surrounding it, he decided, about fifteen years ago, to take the plunge and start farming.

> I knew [before he started farming] that there were issues there; that there were issues around our food system, and the quality of food. I knew that we had and have a very unjust agricultural system. (Member 1)

The issues with our food system, his awareness of them, and his desire to provide alternatives, were some of the main reasons that drove him to take up farming in the first place. And for him agroecological methods in particular were a means through which he could contest the operations of the current food system and prefigure the type of relations, practices, and values that he believes our food systems should be based on (Dale 2023; Tornaghi and Dehaene 2020). So, by transforming marginal land predominantly used for grazing sheep into multiple different agroecosystems, member 1 is shifting resources away from the conventional system and putting them towards alternative ends; something he intended to do from the very outset.

Furthermore, the adoption of agroecological practices was also a means through which member 1 could create the type of life and livelihood that he desired and felt was worthwhile.

> So, for me it was important first of all to feed myself well, so I can be healthy, and make conscious decisions [about his food]. But then also, to have the strength to turn around and stand up for what I believe in and provide that [healthy, quality food] for my community. (Member 1)

Clearly moving from working in a pub to developing an agroecological farm on marginal land was quite a substantial change, but this is obviously a change he sought. As he details above, he wanted to produce food, for both himself and his surrounding community. As such, farming agroecologically for member 1 is a desirable way of living that suits his beliefs and values. This is, of course, a crucial part of agroecology; it is more than just a set of practices but a way of life (LVC 2015a). And, as Johansson and Vinthagen (2020) highlight, the political intent of such activities is often unduly disregarded, because the desire to create a way of life that is counter to mainstream norms and practices can prefigure alternative ways of organising society. So in this case, even if member 1 did not intend to challenge current food systems through his farming practices, by adopting agroecology not just as a set of farming techniques but as a way of life he is nevertheless challenging the norms, relations, and practices underpinning the current food system, and prefiguring alternative ways of producing, distributing, exchanging, and consuming food.

The second farmer I want to look at is member 3, who has recently converted his one-hundred-and-eighty-acre family farm of suckler beef to organic. Member 3 considers himself as a bit of an outlier within T.Beo because of the size and type of farm he has. But he joined T.Beo because its values chimed a lot with his own beliefs and practices—"for me it [T.Beo] just matched up with the way we would farm here."

But member 3 would not really consider his practices as resistance. Converting the farm to fully organic was a way of deepening or substantiating the type of farming his father had always done. He recognises, however, that his farming practices, and the values and norms behind them, deviate considerably from mainstream approaches to agriculture.

> I felt T.Beo has a wider outlook… in terms of… it's not just about monetary stuff, but about nature and your impact on nature. You know that sort of stuff is not really engaged with in a lot of other farming organisations… in my experience. (Member 3)

Member 3's daily farming practices are not just focused on output or economic considerations; protecting and working with nature is a central part of what he does on the farm. Concerns which he feels are not really considered by most farming organisations in Ireland. So while member 3's farming practices are not really intended

to resist or contest the current industrial-capitalist food system, his practices of working the land are based on norms and understandings that deviate considerably from conventional approaches.

Finally then there is member 4, who has a one-acre organic market garden which she has been operating since 2016. Much like member 1, member 4 has only taken up farming within the last fifteen years after she settled "on seeing food production, particularly small-scale food production, particularly horticulture as a valuable way to contribute to society." In slight contrast with member 1, and in sharp contrast with member 3, member 4 is more explicit about the political intentions behind her farming practices.

> Without knowing an awful lot about… just having a broad understanding of food sovereignty and agroecology… even though they wouldn't have been in my vocabulary… like I wouldn't have been aware of LVC; I would just have known that the principles of local, small-scale, very nature-sensitive production models would have been something that aligned with my value system. And here I am year on year doing this thing—being 'political through action' is how I describe what I do. I didn't come into this type of work because I thought it was a great way to make money. I started this type of work for ideological reasons. (Member 4)

As she describes above, "ideological reasons" were the main motivation behind her getting into farming in the first place, and behind the type of farming practices she chose to adopt. The values of "local, small-scale, very nature-sensitive production" are at the heart of what member 4 does. These values contrast sharply with the current system. She is of course quite aware of this, which is why she considers her daily farming practices as being 'political through action'—they are a means through which she challenges the workings of current food systems and prefigures viable alternatives.

I enquired further on her idea of being 'political through action'; specifically I asked if she sees her farming practices as innately political. She responded:

> Exactly. I would consider it extremely political. I would consider it activism. I would consider it the most genuine form of activism because nobody could do this type of work if they didn't fully believe in it. You know very often people can talk about what they believe in but if you're actually demonstrating that

> year-on-year I think that's the most genuine, authentic form of activism that you can be involved in. (Member 4)

Member 4 here is being quite clear and overt about the intentions behind her farming practices. She is not engaging in organic, non-intensive, nature-sensitive practices—practices which, since joining T.Beo, she has come to recognise as agroecological—for economic reasons or, as she put it, because she thought it was "a great way to make money". She does what she does because she believes in it. Producing food locally through agroecological methods is—similar to member 1 and 3—a way of life she desires and wants to pursue. But she realises that it is a way of life that is inherently 'political'. What she does on the farm on a daily basis is an 'authentic form of activism', because through her farming practices she is enacting the changes she wants to see in the wider food system.

While not all of the farmers discussed are as explicit as member 4 about the political motivations behind what they do on the farm, nevertheless I believe that the case for considering all three members' individual farming methods as being forms of everyday resistance is quite strong. T.Beo members' farming methods are, to paraphrase Johansson and Vinthagen (2020), 'patterns of practices' that have the potential—and in some cases are intended—to 'undermine' the power relations of the current food systems and authority over how food is produced, distributed, exchanged, and consumed—like the practices of member 1 and 4. They are also, for all three members discussed, a means of creating ways of living on the land that are counter to mainstream understandings and practices of agriculture, and that prefigure alternative ways of producing, exchanging, distributing and consuming food (Dale 2023; Tornaghi and Dehaene 2020).

On top of this, there are other key aspects commonly associated with everyday resistance (Scott 1985, p.29; Johansson and Vinthagen 2020, p.183; Kerkvliet 2009) that apply to the three members' farming practices as well. Firstly, we can say that all three T.Beo members' farming activities are individual endeavours, and are carried out predominantly to benefit the farmer and their families. These benefits are not necessarily economic, but offer all three a means of creating a desired way of living. Secondly, their daily farming activities do not, in and of themselves, directly confront the dominant food system or its superordinate actors like large agri-food corporations.

Agroecology in general is not inherently a threat to the current system and can in fact augment it (Giraldo and Rosset 2018; 2023; Levidow et al. 2014; Holt-Giménez and Altieri 2013). Finally, one of the few ways T.Beo members' practices differ from more typical forms of everyday resistance—particularly the many veiled actions discussed by Scott (1985)—is that they do not try to conceal what they are doing or why they are doing it. But this is not that surprising; agroecological practices are practically unheard of in Ireland (Agroecology Europe 2020), so are unlikely to be widely considered as forms of resistance. Even member 3, as I suggest above, would not consider what he does on the farm as resistance. So why would they hide what they are doing? But as Johansson and Vinthagen (2020) argue everyday resistance does not necessarily have to be acts that are concealed but can include routine actions that are simply not generally considered political.

5.3 T.Beo's everyday resistance and its wider socioeconomic context

I've argued so far that T.Beo members' farming methods should be considered as forms of everyday resistance. It is crucial to stress, however, that these practices do not take place in isolation, but are embedded within the wider structures that they are trying to resist and depart from. Resistance and domination are not distinct oppositional categories but are mutually constitutive. Resistance can only be fully understood when analysed in terms of its constant struggle against, and relationship to, domination (Johansson and Vinthagen 2020). In other words, T.Beo members' practices do not exist completely outside of the workings of the capitalist economy (Grubačić and O'Hearn 2016), the state (Scott 2009), or conventional agriculture (Castellanos-Navarrete and Jansen 2018), but are in constant interaction with them. T.Beo members' agroecological and alternative farming practices are trying to emerge from within a well-developed industrial-capitalist food system, and must necessarily navigate the everyday power relations of such a system.

One obstacle that can constrain T.Beo members' efforts to realise their agroecological and alternative farming methods is what Scott (1985)—borrowing from Karl Marx—terms "the dull compulsion of economic relations"; which T.Beo members must negotiate in order to ensure that they can make a living and remain on the land (Calvário 2017). Private property (Kepkiewicz and Dale 2019; Trauger 2014; Calo et

al. 2021) and market dependency (Wach 2021) are specific examples of such economic relations that are foundational features of capitalist economies and are known to frustrate and weaken the implementation of truly transformative agroecological practices.

In the section that follows, I will pay particular attention to the 'dull compulsion' of market dependency and its impact on the three T.Beo members' daily farming practices as they struggle to maintain economic viability and remain on the land.

5.3.1 T.Beo's everyday resistance and the 'dull compulsion' of market dependency

Market dependency describes how social reproduction becomes reliant on market-based relations. For agricultural producers they become dependent on markets for access to inputs and to sell and distribute their outputs. This dependency subjects producers to the imperatives of capitalist logics—competition, profit maximisation, commodification, and productivism (Wood 2002; Wach 2021). Wach (2021, p.5) argues that this dependency, through "downward pressure on the costs of production, and a prioritisation of products with high economic returns", can cause practices to deviate significantly from the principles of agroecology, as they force farmers to simplify their farms and focus on a smaller number of more economically viable crops.

In the Irish context, like in many other parts of the world, the markets that farmers are dependent upon are monopolised by a small number of large corporations. These corporations control most of the supply chain from inputs through to processing and retail (Commins 1996; Tovey 1991; 2000; Sage and Kenny 2017, Stewart 2023). Here then, I will look at the impact of market dependency on T.Beo members, how it influences what they do, and how they try to deal with it. As agroecological practices in general lessen dependency on inputs (Gliessman 2015), my main focus here will be on how T.Beo farmers deal with downstream market dependency when selling their produce.

Returning first then to member 1. Member 1 grows a whole host of produce like fruit, vegetables, salad leaves, and mushrooms; all of which he sells through his own organic shop. This organic shop is crucial economically for member 1, because currently without it he would be struggling to earn a living.

> Can I make a living from the farm? I was depressed last year when I saw how much I took off the farm after a full year of work. But like any good farmer my outside business is our shop; our shop supports keeping our farm. Our farm in itself for just the produce I was producing off it, even though I give it the amount of time I do, wouldn't actually pay me to do it. But the fact that I'm bringing our produce into the shop, and that we have a good solid retail business, we can support the two [farm and shop]. But I have hope that as we move further down the road that I can generate more income from the farm. (Member 1)

Member 1's farm alone would not pay him, but by blending it with the shop, it ensures the viability of his farming practices. This would be considered a form of 'pluriactivity'. Pluriactivity involves generating off-farm income to supplement what is earned on the farm. Pluriactivity is regarded as an important mechanism that helps farmers turn towards agroecology, as it ensures farmers can earn enough to remain on the land and continue engaging in agroecological practices (van der Ploeg 2012; Meek 2014). It is, of course, a means through which agroecological farms survive in, and adapt to the demands of, capitalist economies. In member 1's case, it allows him to evade most of the negative aspects of downstream dependence on large retailers. The power large retailers have over price-setting and the downward pressure they can exert over farmers' incomes is one of the main consequences of market dependency identified by Wach (2021), and is a major concern for most farmers in Ireland (Stewart 2023). This is particularly acute in horticulture, as growers "shoulder the consequences of special promotions and discounts ('buy one, get one free')", and below-cost-selling as retailers wrangle over market share (Sage and Kenny 2017, p.17). So, by selling through his own shop, member 1 can deal directly with customers and avoid these large retailers and their power over pricing altogether.

On top of this, without the shop member 1 would struggle to make a living or would have to alter his farming methods drastically. The off-farm economic support of the shop means member 1 does not need to concentrate his efforts on products with high economic returns, and does not have to compromise on his agroecological practices—which is the second major consequence of market dependency highlighted by Wach (2021). Taking all of this together then we can see that the shop gives member 1 greater autonomy over the food he produces and how he produces it.

The shop, however, is not outside the dictates of the market and will have to remain economically viable. Which again speaks to the difficulty of existing outside of the capitalist economy. But for member 1 an important aspect of operating the shop is that it helps him establish lasting connections with the people he supplies food to. In the last chapter we saw how important socioeconomic relations of reciprocity, cooperation, and community were for T.Beo, and the shop offers member 1 a vital means for developing such relations with those around him. So, although the operations of the shop are not immune from the 'dull compulsion' of capitalist economic relations, it gives member 1, in spite of these constraints, some breathing room to develop his agroecological practices and helps him prefigure the type of relations he wants to establish with his local community. Breathing room though, is hard to find in Irish agriculture. Member 3's experience testifies to this.

Member 3, as we've seen, is an organic beef farmer who has just recently converted his family farm. We have already seen how, through his daily farming practices, member 3 is trying to assert alternative values that are counter to mainstream understandings of agriculture;

> It's not just about output. There needs to be a balance between nature and what we're producing on the farm… and both are important… obviously you need to live… you need an income. (Member 3)

For member 3, farming must be about more than just output. It must also care for and work with nature—beliefs which are embedded in his daily work on the farm. But as he says above, these beliefs cannot be separated from the need to make a living, and even for member 3, who by his own admission has quite a large farm, making a living is difficult.

> Our farm is like one-hundred-and-eighty-acres and we—well my parents are probably bigger worriers than I am—but we regularly have this conversation; 'God, can it [the farm] support two families?' And like it's quite a large amount of land. Definitely when my dad was my age it would have been considered a big farm, and I would still when I look at the work to be done… it is a big farm. But in the grand scheme of things it's middling. (Member 3)

Maintaining economic viability is a struggle for member 3, and to make a living, at the scale he is operating at, he has very little choice but to sell his produce to processing plants.

The beef processing industry is known for high levels of concentration. According to a report commissioned by the Irish Farmers Association (IFA), in 2018 the big three players ABP, Kepak, and Dawn controlled an estimated 65 percent of the market (Power 2020). The downward pressures that these processors can exert on prices and farm incomes is widely recognised by farmers. In 2019, for instance, protests by beef farmers took place outside processing plants throughout Ireland specifically to challenge what they perceived to be unfair pricing (Javornicky et al. 2021). But avoiding the few big processors that monopolise the sector, is difficult to say the least. And member 3 found that switching to organic reduced his options further:

> Yeah so [market concentration in] organic then is probably even more extreme [than conventional]. When we were conventional there were three big players but there were other independent operators as well, like Kildare Chilling. But with organic we can either go to Slaney Meats which is owned by ABP—which is Larry Goodman— or we can go to Good Herdsman—which is John Purcell, but Larry Goodman owns 51 percent of the company. And that's it, that's it for our area anyway. (Member 3)

Since converting to organic, member 3 has only two options for processors that he can sell to, and both companies share a common ownership. So as member 3 has begun to develop his nature-sensitive farming practices, he has found that the options for what he can do with his produce have been restricted further by the dynamics of the beef processing industry.

Dependency on large processors, as member 3 acknowledges below, has become institutionally and culturally embedded, and, as such, are very hard to avoid. The industrialisation of Irish agriculture over the last fifty years, and its obsession with productivism, has left farmers little other options but to 'get big or get out' (Sage and Kenny 2017).

> So really at our scale you're feeding into the bigger factories. The logistics of making that work with local butchers with that many animals is not really… well it's not really a done thing now. There's a certain part of it that often going

> to the bigger operators can be easy. You load them on the lorry and the next thing you know you get a check in the post and that's it. I suppose most farmers aren't sellers, so that's the cleanest way for them. I can get a lorry load of them a way and get my check and that's it and I don't have to worry about… a lot of farmers aren't overly worried about where it goes as long as they get the price for it. (Member 3)

Market dependency, and dependence on large-scale processors in particular, as member 3 describes above, has become the norm for beef farmers. Large-scale processors are better equipped to deal with the greater quantities of animals coming from beef farms. On top of this, he suggests, for farmers they are quite easy to deal with. All of which strengthens the dominance of such processors. But the relationship between farms and processing plants, he continues, cannot be looked at in isolation:

> People will talk about direct selling and looking for local butchers, but farming doesn't operate in a vacuum to the rest of society. How many local butchers are left? This is all in the context of the supermarket set up as a one stop shop, and if they're sourcing meat then they're going to have to go to a massive supplier to fill that order consistently. So, if people aren't shopping in their local butcher where is the competitive edge for small-scale? So, the meat factories aren't in isolation. They're tied up with the supermarket, and the supermarket is attractive because of the predominance of the car. So, it's all interlinked. There's no real bad actor. I mean people want to go to one shop and get everything, and I'm no different […] But it means that the default is the large-scale industrial way. (Member 3)

As large processors have become the norm for beef farmers, so too, as member 3 suggests above, have large retailers for consumers. Agribusinesses' monopolisation of the food system leaves little room for alternatives. Dealing with them has become, borrowing member 3's phrase, 'the done thing' for farmers and consumers and both are now predominantly reliant on them for social reproduction. So, for the most part individual farmers have little choice or ability to avoid market dependency. And for member 3, who is trying to create alternative farming practices based on values that sit outside conventional approaches, it is incredibly difficult to disentangle himself

from these deep-seated economic relations. No matter how uneasy such economic relations sit with him, he is, out of economic necessity, dependent on them.

This, of course, is not just the case for beef farmers, and member 4—a market gardener—has quite a similar experience as she sells mainly through large retailers.

> I sell my produce in supermarkets, so I'm certainly not on the complete fringe. I'm not doing a veg box or CSA [community-supported agriculture]or have people coming to my door. So, I'm definitely still in the system in that sense. It [selling to supermarkets] is the only model that would work in the part of the country that I live in. I did try a veg box, but I wouldn't be able to make a living off it… yeah that is out of the question […] For whatever reason the sector isn't that well developed here, the food scene is growing but it's not very well developed. So what works for us, the only thing that we can do that would pay the bills, is selling salad bags primarily, but we have some other products as well, through supermarkets. And you know what, I don't knock it at all. They are very easy clients to deal with and can be a good avenue for people on my scale. I feel that the notion that agroecology farmers don't sell to supermarkets is too black and white. In Ireland most people do their shopping in the supermarkets. So it's meeting people where they're at. It's practical in short. (Member 4)

Member 4's farming practices and reasons for taking up farming, as we have already seen, are driven by ideological motives above all else. So she is well aware that by selling through supermarkets, she remains, to a certain extent, within the capitalist economy and the conventional food system. For her, much like member 3, it is difficult to avoid market dependency and large retailers; it is the only thing, as she said above, "that would pay the bills". She has tried alternative methods like direct selling, but economically they were non-runners. Direct selling where she lives is not 'the done thing'. Shopping in supermarkets is the norm and member 4 has to respond to that. Highlighting again, as member 3 pointed out, that farming, including agroecology, does not exist in a vacuum. It is constrained and affected by its surrounding economic and social context.

Member 4 has, however, managed mainly to avoid the negative impacts of market dependency on her practices that Wach (2021) warns of. She has retained autonomy

over what she produces and how she produces it. Even though she is dependent on large retailers, she has never really needed to adapt the farm to their demands; "we haven't really deviated terribly from the original concept or plan. We haven't scaled up really either." Overall, as member 4 states above, she finds it easy to deal with supermarkets, they do not impact on her farming methods and provide a reliable stream of income that supports the farm.

Member 4, as a result, is frustrated with the uncompromising view that agroecological farmers do not deal with supermarkets, as it disregards her own practices because of constraints imposed on her by her wider economic and agricultural context. Member 4's frustrations have a lot in common with the works that criticises the essentialising of peasants' and smallholders' practices (Bernstein 2014; Jansen 2015; Castellanos-Navarrete and Jansen 2016; Soper 2020). Unlike these, however, it cannot be said that member 4, or anyone else I spoke with, 'prefers' being incorporated into the market and tied to large agribusiness. Dependency on the market and large corporations might be necessary, and might currently be the best choice for these farmers—in some cases it is their only choice—but this speaks more than anything else to the difficulty of pursuing alternative farming methods in an agricultural system that is so thoroughly shaped by capitalist and industrial logics.

5.4 Discussion and conclusion

This chapter has looked at the individual farming practices of T.Beo members, by analysing in some detail the practices of three specific members, and more particularly the intentions motivating their practices. Throughout the chapter I have argued that T.Beo members' daily farming practices are forms of everyday resistance. Ultimately though, what does this mean for the prospects of territorializing agroecology in Ireland? Well, in many places everyday resistance has been found to be a potent force for establishing alternative territories (Halvorsen 2018; Clare et al. 2018; Shattuck and Peluso 2021) and, more particularly, for territorializing agroecology (Rivera-Núñez et al. 2020; Van den Berg et al. 2021; Giraldo 2024). But in our case how does the everyday resistance of T.Beo members described here help territorialize agroecology in Ireland? Its transformative potential, I believe, lies in the fact that these practices are working examples that another way is possible (Tovey 2006; Dale, 2023; Tornaghi

and Dehaene 2020). While members 1 and 4 are more explicit about the political intentions motivating their farming practices, all of the three members discussed here—in their attempts to create their desired way of living on the land—are challenging the norms of industrial-capitalist food systems and are prefiguring the type of values, practices and relations on which agroecological food systems are based.

The territorialization of agroecology, however, must emerge from within current food systems, and given the dominance of industrial-capitalist agriculture in Ireland, such everyday resistance may not be sufficient in-and-of-itself to bring about a widespread adoption of agroecological practices. We have already seen, in the second half of this chapter, just how difficult it has been for these three T.Beo members to develop their own agroecological practices within Ireland's current agricultural landscape. Specifically, we saw the difficulties they face trying to navigate the 'dull compulsion' of capitalist economic relations in order to make a living and remain on the land. In particular, I detailed the impact of one such economic relation—market dependency—and examined how the three members in question have tried to deal with it.

To conclude this chapter then, I want to extrapolate what these three experiences mean for the prospects of territorializing agroecology in Ireland, for I believe that the discussion above, particularly section 5.3.1 on market dependency, points towards some more 'systematic' constraints to the territorialization of agroecology in Ireland which will be difficult to overcome through everyday resistance alone.

Firstly there are technical constraints; by this I mean that there are specific features of certain types of farming that inherently make transitioning to agroecology unworkable without a radical overhaul of the farms' farming practices and the supply chains they are embedded in. We can see this in the discussion above. While all three members are caught up in market dependency to some extent, it is easier for some of them to disentangle themselves from their reliance on capitalist market relations than it is for others based solely on the type of farming they are engaged in. This point becomes clearer if we compare the three T.Beo members' farming practices along the lines of Gliessman's (2016) four levels of agroecological development.[27]

[27] Gliessman's framework has five levels of development but I compare the members on the basis of the first four as they relate more closely to the individual farm level, and are levels of agroecological development that farmers can work toward individually.

Members 1 and 4 are agroecologically quite developed and would currently be categorized in level 4 of Gliessman's framework, as they are trying to build and maintain direct relations with the people that are consuming their produce. But as we have seen above they are unable to loosen themselves completely from the dynamics of the current food system and are both still, to varying degrees, dependent on capitalist market relations to maintain economic viability. However, because they are small in scale, have diversified produce, and focus exclusively on supplying produce locally, they are both nimble enough to respond to more favourable circumstances if they were to arise. For instance, member 4, as we saw, actively tried to establish direct selling in the form of a veg box, but the demand was not there locally for it to be successful. In this instance it is clear that operating a veg box scheme for member 4 is technically feasible, and would allow her to avoid corporate retailers altogether. So her ability to develop further agroecologically is not restricted by technical limitations but is instead hindered by her local context.

Member 3, on the other hand, is different, and his experience is far more indicative of what will be necessary to bring about the widespread adoption of agroecology as his farm—suckler beef—is much more typical of farming in Ireland. In relation to Gliessman's framework, member 3 is in the process of developing towards level 3—"redesign the agroecosystem so that it functions on the basis of a new set of ecological processes" (Gliessman 2016, p.188). He is only at the early stages of this process, and is weighing up the potential of agroforestry on his farm, but unlike members 1 and 4, for member 3 market dependency sets far more rigid technical limitations on his farms agroecological development, for, as we have seen, to maintain the economic viability of his farm member 3 has to operate at a certain scale, and at that scale he has no other option but to depend on large corporate processors. While this dependency has not hindered him from converting to organic—level 2 of Gliessman's framework—is further agroecological development possible at the scale he has to operate at?

It is feasible, of course, that member 3 finds some way of making this work, but it is clear that deepening his practices agroecologically is technically far more difficult—because of the current structures of beef farming in Ireland and in particular his dependence on corporate processors—than it is for members 1 and 4. This then raises concerns of how complicated transitioning to agroecology will be for most of Ireland's farming population. While converting to organic, despite its low uptake, is relatively

straightforward technically for most farmers (Läpple and Kelley 2013), judging by member 3's experience, a deeper agroecological transformation would appear to be fraught with difficulty, as capitalist relations like market dependency, which are currently nearly impossible to avoid, impose certain technical constraints on some of the most dominant farming practices in Ireland, like beef and dairy. Constraints that will be difficult to circumvent without widespread, radical change to the current food system; and it is hard to envisage how such change can be brought about through everyday resistance alone.

Secondly, there are social and cultural issues that impact farmers' willingness to change their practices and transition towards agroecology. While it is hard to disentangle farmers attitudes from the technical and economic limitations imposed by the relations and structures of the current food system, there is a large portion of the Irish farming population, despite being aware of the current food system's power imbalances (Murphy et al. 2022), that are reluctant, for social and cultural reasons, to transition towards more sustainable alternatives. For instance, Läpple and Kelley (2013), have found that one of the major barriers to organic conversion—which again is only level 2 of Gliessman's framework—in drystock farming, even though conversion for most of these farms is relatively straightforward and inexpensive, is the attitudes of individual farmers and those of their wider farming community towards organics. Furthermore, farmers in Ireland tend to have negative perceptions of, or are disinclined to engage in, practices that are associated with agroecological production such as short supply chains, like direct selling and farmers markets (Macken-Walsh 2009; Moroney et al. 2013), and diversification (Moroney et al. 2016; O'Shaughnessy and Sage 2017).

On top of this, as member 3 points out above, the operations of the industrial-capitalist food system are considered by most people, not just farmers, to be normal. Specifically in relation to market dependency, dealing with large-scale processors and corporate retailers, for both farmers and consumers is seen as 'easy' and 'the done thing'. So, given how entangled most people's everyday engagements with food in Ireland are with the logics, relations, and practices of industrial-capitalist agriculture, it is difficult to see how everyday resistance alone can bring about the major shift in social and cultural values necessary for agroecological practices to be adopted more widely.

The final constraint I want to discuss, which is closely connected to, and arguably exasperates both of the other constraints above, is the lack of alternative economic and social infrastructure. If we look at other instances where everyday resistance has contributed to the territorialization of agroecology, in most cases strong territorial structures and networks with often deep historical ties to agroecological practices—even though they might not be referred to as such—already existed (Rivera-Núñez et al. 2020; Van den Berg et al. 2021; Giraldo 2024). This is not the case in Ireland. While alternative food infrastructure and social networks exist and have done for some time (Murtagh 2015; Tovey 2006; Sage 2003; Moroney et al. 2013), those that do exist "are quite disconnected regionally and nationally" (Murtagh 2015, p.345), and ultimately "Ireland is without a strong local food culture" and has a weak local food economy (Macken-Walsh 2009, p.98; Fonte 2008; Moore 2025).

The lack of such economic and social infrastructure severely hampers the development of agroecological practices. This is clearly visible in the experience of the T.Beo members above. Particularly members 3 and 4, whose dependence on large-scale processors and corporate retailers is due predominately to the lack of alternative options. Member 3's distribution options are restricted by the loss of local processing facilities like butchers and independent processors. While member 4's options are limited by an underdeveloped local food scene. Once again it is difficult to envisage how such infrastructural constraints can be overcome through individual T.Beo members' everyday resistance alone.

These three constraints severely restrict the development of agroecological practices and will have to be overcome if agroecology is to be more widely territorialized in Ireland. By highlighting these three constraints, I do not mean to dismiss the significance of T.Beo member's everyday resistance and their agricultural practices. The presence of working examples of agroecology, whether or not they are described as everyday resistance, will always be foundational to any attempt at territorializing agroecology (Rosset 2015; McCune et al. 2017; McGreevy et al. 2021). However, the above does indicate that within the Irish context there are constraints to the territorialization of agroecology that are unlikely to be overcome through everyday resistance alone.

6 T.Beo's formal resistance

6.1 Introduction

Building on the analysis in the last chapter of T.Beo members' individual farming practices, which I argued are forms of everyday resistance, this chapter will focus on the formal, organised resistance of T.Beo as a movement**.**

The efforts of social movements and grassroots organisations are considered essential for territorializing agroecology. And the literature is ever-expanding with works researching social movements from all over the world, as they attempt to navigate their own unique socioeconomic and socioecological context to territorialize agroecology (Mier y Terán Giménez Cacho et al. 2018; Giraldo 2024; Brescia 2017; Rosset et al. 2011; Khadse et al. 2018; Fernandes 2023).

This chapter then will analyse some of the main actions undertaken by T.Beo as they try to territorialize agroecology and transform food systems in Ireland. Broadly, all of these actions are centred around creating political, social, and economic space from which agroecological practices can develop and proliferate. There are four specific actions that I will analyse here: (1) T.Beo's attempts to influence public policy; (2) farm walks; (3) public forums; and (4) their lighthouse farms/water catchment areas (lighthouse/WCA) initiative. I will discuss each below in turn.

But before turning our attention to these actions, I first want to make explicit the connection between T.Beo members' everyday resistance and the more formal, organised resistance of T.Beo itself. Although most of the literature has tended to concentrate on recognised social movements, there have been growing calls to expand research into more informal attempts at territorializing agroecology (Rivera-Núñez et al. 2020; van den Berg et al. 2021). While there is considerable merit in shedding light on informal attempts at territorializing agroecology—something which I have attempted to do in the last chapter—formal and informal resistance should not be considered as completely separate categories. While they are both different types of resistance, they are intimately related (Johansson and Vinthagen 2020; Scott 1990; Kerkvliet 2009). And in the next section I want to explore the relationship between the two in the case of T.Beo.

6.2 Connecting everyday resistance with formal resistance

I think it is important at the outset of this chapter to make explicit the connection between the everyday, informal resistance of T.Beo members detailed in the previous chapter and the organised, formal resistance of T.Beo as a movement that will be discussed below. For although I deal with each type of resistance separately for the most part, to fully understand T.Beo, I believe, the two must be seen as thoroughly interrelated.[28]

This is an important argument that runs through a lot of the everyday resistance literature. For instance, Johansson and Vinthagen (2020, p.28) maintain that everyday resistance is "an initial, off-stage, or later stage activity in relation to other more sustained, organized and conventional political forms of resistance". Similarly, Scott argues that everyday resistance—while often derided as not 'real' resistance (1985, p.292)—is the "cultural and structural underpinning of the more visible political action on which our attention has generally been focused" (1990, p.184), and claims that in most instances mass social movements and forms of open resistance cannot be fully comprehended without understanding the everyday resistance that underlies them (Scott 1985; 1993).

Likewise here, I believe that it is difficult to fully grasp T.Beo and what they are trying to do without connecting it to the everyday resistance of its members' individual farming practices—the two are thoroughly entangled. Entanglements which are, I believe, quite visible in the motivations behind farmers forming T.Beo in the first place.

> What we realised was that what we didn't have at the table [of discussion around agroecology and food sovereignty]—which was probably the most important factor—were farmers who are actively engaged in these things [agroecology and food sovereignty]. You had NGO's, environmental groups, but the stakeholder section for farmers was weak. There didn't seem to be a political movement in Ireland that was talking about food sovereignty, talking about agroecology that was coming from farmers. (Member 2)

[28] I have dealt with them separately mainly for ease of explanation.

T.Beo, as member 2 describes it here, sprang from the impulses of farmers already engaging in agroecology every day; who felt that their experiences and struggles were not being directly represented or heard in Irish agriculture, or within existing circles advocating for agroecology and food sovereignty in Ireland. So T.Beo arose to fill this gap;

> What we're trying to fill is this space where… obviously there's no other organisation in Ireland talking about those two things [agroecology and food sovereignty] from a farming perspective. So yeah… I think the key thing now is for us to grow the organisation, as best we can, into something more. (Member 2)

It is of course unsurprising that those already engaging in agroecology were concerned with the development of agroecology in Ireland and the dynamics of the Irish food system more broadly. For as we saw in the last chapter, T.Beo members' reasons for adopting agroecological practices were based heavily on what they perceived to be the failings of the dominant food system in Ireland, and their desire to prefigure alternatives to it. As such, the formation of T.Beo, I believe, could be seen as an outgrowth of these aspirations.

Member 4's experience is quite illustrative here, as she considers her involvement in T.Beo as an extension of her own farming practices, and had been contemplating getting involved in such a movement for some time.

> I suppose for quite a while I had been thinking; while I do enjoy the day-to-day and I think that has to be the backbone—that you are working the land; that you're walking the talk or whatever—I felt that I wanted to get involved in more of a community sense, a political sense and contribute in a more coherent sense really. (Member 4)

> […] is there something more that can be done to amplify that [her farm work] considering the needs of society as a result of climate change, etcetera. All the various crises that we're facing are so great that I feel a sense of personal urgency to do something. And this is what I was thinking, so instead of me just quietly tipping away here […] if I was to join forces with similar people, will we be able to have a much louder voice and have more influence? (Member 4)

Joining T.Beo and getting involved in such a movement is a way of extending what she does on the farm. We have already seen in the last chapter that member 4 considers what she does on her farm to be political. Joining T.Beo is a way of amplifying the political aspirations of her farming practices. Above she contrasts 'quietly' working on her own farm with the 'louder', organised work of T.Beo. While they are, in her eyes, distinct forms of politics, they are complementary. For member 4, her everyday practices and the work of T.Beo are both aimed at creating alternative ways of producing, distributing, exchanging, and consuming food. So while her individual farming must remain the 'backbone'—or, in Scott's (1990, p.184) terms, the 'structural underpinnings'—of her political actions; she considers joining the more organised, conventional resistance of T.Beo as a way of magnifying the transformative impact of her everyday practices.

And this is one of the main reasons people join T.Beo, as member 2 suggests below, they want political and social change, and believe joining T.Beo can further those ends;

> I think people come to T.Beo for different reasons. Some people come because they want social change, political change, and some people get involved because they want to connect with other people who are doing similar things. It [farming] is a bit of a lonely job. It can be challenging work particularly if you're doing it on your own, and I think it's really important to have that link to other people who are doing similar things, and to be able to learn from them. (Member 2)

Along with the desire for social and political transformation, another main reason people join T.Beo, as member 2 describes above, is that they want to connect with others who have similar farming practices and values. Connecting with others eases the burden of farming agroecologically which, as member 2 acknowledges above, can be challenging particularly if you are trying to do it on your own. By joining T.Beo, farmers can build relations with like-minded people which can help them strengthen and develop their own agroecological practices.

So in either case—whether they join T.Beo to push for widespread food system change, or to build relationships with other agroecological farmers—their desire to become part of T.Beo fundamentally stems from their daily farming activities. Joining T.Beo is either a means to amplify the transformative potential of their daily farming

activities, or to become part of a community that can help deepen their own agroecological practices. Both of these purposes heavily influence the actions T.Beo as an organisation are taking to territorialize agroecology, and it is to these actions I will now turn.

6.3 Creating space for agroecology in Ireland

In this section I will look at four specific actions T.Beo are taking to territorialize agroecology in Ireland: (1) influencing public policy; (2) farm walks; (3) public forums; and (4) lighthouse/WCA initiative.

These are by no means the only actions T.Beo are engaging in, but they do capture the main aspects of what T.Beo are currently attempting to do; which, I argue, is predominantly centred around creating space within the current agricultural landscape of Ireland for agroecology to develop and spread. In most cases they are directly trying to create this space themselves, as is the case with farm walks, public forums, and their lighthouse/WCA initiative. But firstly, I want to consider a less direct method they employ—influencing public policy.

6.3.1 Influencing public policy

T.Beo use their collective voice to push for changes to the Irish government's agricultural policies. Currently agroecological production receives very little support or recognition in agricultural policy, and T.Beo are trying to change this. This is a common strategy of agroecology movements, as favourable public policies are seen as an important mechanism for territorializing agroecology. Within the literature it is understood that a combination of policies, which consider entire food systems, will be required to territorialize agroecology. Such policies generally have two main goals; to withdraw support from industrial-capitalist agriculture; and to create and strengthen relations, practices, and infrastructure that are based on the principles of agroecology (Mier y Terán Giménez Cacho et al. 2018; González de Molina et al. 2020; Parmentier, 2014; van den Berg et al. 2021).

T.Beo has produced a number of policy documents which set out the type of policies and supports that are needed in Ireland to protect existing agroecology and other

alternative, small-scale farming practices; foster food sovereignty; and spread agroecology further.

One such document is their Local Food Policy (LFP). T.Beo's LFP involves a comprehensive combination of measures that are aimed at refashioning all areas of the Irish food system; including production, distribution, exchange, and consumption. But given the marginal position of agroecology, and the dominance of industrial-capitalist agriculture in Ireland, I argue that the main function of their LFP is to give 'breathing room' to agroecological farming and local food systems. The policy is, "aimed at levelling the playing field between local food producers and a highly subsidised cheap food import/export model" (Document 18). Their LFP is pushing for measures that create the necessary socioeconomic conditions that make agroecological practices and local food production easier to maintain and develop, while also making it easier and more enticing for greater numbers of people and producers to engage in both. Their LFP, taken as a whole, creates this 'breathing room', I argue, in two main ways; by mobilising resources and mobilising discourse.

One of the main aims of their LFP is to mobilise resources (Khadse et al. 2018) towards agroecology and local food systems. It includes a concentration of measures that are aimed at easing the economic burden on agroecological food producers; such as direct income supports that can protect the economic viability of agroecological farming; and access to low interest credit which can help agroecological farmers finance their production and distribution practices.

T.Beo also call for supports that would help existing and prospective agroecological producers access the physical resources they require. Their LFP proposes a host of measures to curb land hoarding, and make land more accessible to young farmers and new entrants. On top of this, T.Beo want the government to help create local distribution infrastructure which can help connect agroecological producers with consumers. Specifically, the LFP calls on the government to establish and fund 'Community Food Hubs' that would set up, facilitate, and support short supply chains, and would organise public procurement from agroecological and local food producers.

The second main aspect of their LFP is that it attempts to mobilise discourse (Mier y Terán Giménez Cacho et al. 2018). Through their LFP—which seeks to establish institutional recognition for 'local food producers'—T.Beo aim to build a sense of

legitimacy around agroecology and local food production. Member 5, one of the original founders of T.Beo, emphasises below the importance of changing current perceptions around agroecological, small-scale, and local food production:

> Once there is a recognition that agroecological producers have a right to be there, and should be supported, that can change the discourse between ourselves and the department of agriculture and other bodies. You know it's not just all about export-driven and export-led farming; there is another internal market that needs to be developed. The idea of having small farmers on four to six acres in the countryside… there's nothing negative about that… in fact they can even be more important. (Member 5)

For decades, small-scale farming has been disregarded, undervalued, and actively discouraged in Irish agriculture (Commins 1996; Tovey 2000; O'Shaughnessy and Sage 2017). But T.Beo, through their LFP, are trying to assert the value of agroecological and small-scale production, which, for T.Beo, goes far beyond agriculture and food production alone. Agroecology and local food production, as laid out in their LFP, offer "multiple social, economic and environmental benefits" (Document 18). They can potentially;

> Give both farmers and citizens greater control over what they produce and consume […] Reconnect people and place, building a greater respect for environment and ecosystems and support agroecological farming practices […] Revitalise rural areas and urban hinterlands […] Create food systems that are more resilient to climate and geopolitical shocks/crises. (Document 15)

The LFP—by pushing for measures that free up resources for, and create a sense of legitimacy around, agroecology and local food production—can, I argue, be seen as an attempt by T.Beo to create the necessary 'breathing room' that will allow agroecology develop and spread.

Influencing public policy, however, is not the only way T.Beo are trying to open up space for agroecology; in fact most of their efforts are put into creating such space directly themselves. And the rest of this chapter will focus on three of these more direct methods; starting in the next section with farm walks.

6.3.2 Farm walks

Farm walks are guided farm visits, conducted by the farmer themselves, where attendees—who are predominantly farmers—are introduced to the specificities of the farm's agroecosystems and the farmers' own farming practices. These farm walks are a form of farmer-to-farmer (FTF) methodology, which are known to be a fundamental pedagogical tool for territorializing agroecology. FTF are informal, horizontal, collective educational methods, where farmers themselves come together to share knowledge and learn from one another. In FTF, farmers are the protagonists; empowering farmers to build their own collective capacity and act for themselves. This contrasts sharply with top-down, conventional education methods that treat farmers as passive recipients of information (Rosset et al. 2011; Mier y Terán Giménez Cacho et al. 2018; Val et al. 2019).

The analysis presented here of T.Beo's farm walks and their role in territorializing agroecology is based predominantly on my own experience of a farm walk, hosted by member 1, which I attended in the autumn of 2023,[29] and the conversations I had with member 1 about the farm walk both immediately afterwards and in the months following the farm walk.[30]

Ultimately in this section, I argue that farm walks have two valuable functions for T.Beo. Firstly, they are valuable educational spaces where T.Beo can disseminate knowledge mainly of the practical, but also the political side of agroecology (Rosset et al. 2011; Val et al. 2019; Dale 2023; Mier y Terán Giménez Cacho et al. 2018; Meek 2015). Secondly, they are a space that can help establish social organisation around

[29] The farm walk I attended was being put on by member 1 for another farming organisation that he is involved with. Unfortunately, at the time I was conducting my field work T.Beo were not directly organising farm walks, so I was unable to attend farm walks specifically organised for T.Beo, and was unable to attend farm walks organised by other T.Beo members.

As it was not necessarily a T.Beo organised event my experience may not be fully representative of farm walks specifically organised by T.Beo. Although conversations with member 1 afterwards assured me that the general gist of his farm walks are all fairly similar; they just have different focuses depending on the group he is organising them for. On a positive note it did provide valuable insight into how T.Beo members communicate with non-T.Beo members.

[30] My analysis here is also informed by the many informal conversations I had with other T.Beo members as well.

agroecology, by helping connect like-minded farmers and by introducing people to T.Beo. I will elaborate on each of these functions below.

Farm walks are an important educational space for T.Beo. They are a space where T.Beo members can share their knowledge and experiences of agroecology—a space which is currently non-existent within the Irish agricultural education system.

> All our existing educational systems around agriculture are pretty much blinkered. It's blinkered by an industrial and chemical mindset. So when you go and study your four-year degree in agriculture, you're going to be taught about industrial and commodity agriculture. You're not going to be taught about sustainability, or organics, or agroecology, or the environment. (Member 1)

As member 1 describes above, agriculture education in Ireland focuses nearly exclusively on "industrial and commodity agriculture". Through farm walks then, T.Beo are trying to provide space, outside of mainstream education systems, for accessing and sharing information about agroecology.

> What we want to do is; we want to create a space where we can share the knowledge and information with people that's already there […] You can learn a lot from a book and the internet and all the rest of that, but for farmers particularly it's about going out to a farm where all these things are implemented and seeing them working […] they need to see a model and a practice actually working. (Member 1)

Farm walks then, according to member 1 above, are a particularly suitable type of educational space for disseminating agroecology, because, he argues, farmers are more open to ideas and practices that they see being implemented successfully first-hand. This is a common assumption underpinning most forms of FTF (Rosset et al. 2011).

But looking a bit deeper, I argue, T.Beo's farm walks—as educational spaces—have a dual focus. While T.Beo predominantly use farm walks to share knowledge about agroecological practices; they are also a space for introducing people to the political side of agroecology. More particularly they are a way of introducing people to critiques of the ongoing dynamics of industrial-capitalist food systems (Meek 2015). This is an important part of any FTF methodology, as agroecology is more than just a

set of practices; it is tied to wider social, economic, and ecological goals as well (Mier y Terán Giménez Cacho et al. 2018).

This dual practical and political focus was quite evident in member 1's farm walk. While the political side was much more subtle, as we wandered through his twenty-five-acre farm, he made constant connections between what he is doing on the farm and why he is doing it with critiques of the destructive impacts of our current food system. For instance, his demonstration of air grafting apple trees was swiftly followed by discussions on seed sovereignty and the threats posed by large corporations' monopoly over seeds. While speaking on his self-confessed obsession with mushrooms and mycelium, he interspersed descriptions of the techniques he uses to propagate garden giants with condemnations of conventional agricultural practices—like fungicide use—that have severely damaged most of the mycelium in the land. These discussions at times became quite lengthy and more than once his wife had to interject to keep the walk moving so as not to keep us there all day. But, despite the time constraints, the connections between his work on the farm and critiques of industrial-capitalist agriculture were evident throughout, and for him to convey this to participants appeared to be quite important.

For the most part however, questions and interactions from participants centred on the 'how to' of his methods. So, I asked member 1 are those who come to his farm walks aware or concerned about the broader failings of the current agricultural system. Jokingly he responded, "well they're definitely more aware of it after they finish a farm walk with me…". Generally though, each individual's receptiveness to, and awareness of, these connections greatly depend on their own individual circumstances. Member 1 holds a lot of farm walks for various different organisations, so he engages with farmers of all different experiences and backgrounds—for instance member 1 gave me the following example;

> Through a university I get farmers coming out to me. They're in the fourth year of their training. They come out—there might be 40 of them on the bus—and the first thing I ask them is 'how many of ye consume your own food, the stuff that ye produce on the farm', and generally only 4 to 5 people will put up their hand. (Member 1)

He gave this as an example of a group that he hosts farm walks for that have very different experiences, and understandings of agriculture than his own. And he understands that they are likely to respond very differently to his farm walk than, for instance, a member of T.Beo would.

So, although he does try to give a holistic account of the practical and political aspects of his farming practices on all of his farm walks, he is keen not to overburden people with information. He recognises that he cannot successfully share all that he would like with participants during a single farm walk. Instead he sees farm walks—particularly for those unfamiliar with agroecology—as a means to "spark their imagination" as he put it.

> It [the farm walk] puts them in a space where they are more open to information so that's why the pamphlets and other stuff are there. All I am doing is sparking their imagination; taking them out of their normal perspective of things and letting them think a little bit. (Member 1)

Thus these farm walks—as educational spaces—may be fruitfully understood as 'spaces of encounter' (Meek and Simonian 2016) or 'communicative spaces' (Fernandes 2023)—spaces to introduce people to the practices and politics of agroecology. They are spaces where those already inclined towards agroecological practices can encounter new types of practices, meet other like-minded farmers, or encounter T.Beo for the first time. While for more conventional farmers they can encounter a whole array of ideas, practices, and people that they may not have been exposed to before.

This then leads on to the second main function of T.Beo's farm walks—their importance for building community and strengthening T.Beo as a movement. "Social organization is the culture medium upon which agroecology grows" and is crucial for territorializing agroecology (Rosset 2015, p.304; Mier y Terán Giménez Cacho et al. 2018; Val et al. 2019; Khadse et al. 2018). And farm walks help T.Beo create such social organisation around agroecology, and help develop T.Beo as a social movement.

As already mentioned above, farm walks help farmers connect with other like-minded individuals who are similarly trying to develop their own agroecological farming methods. But more than just connecting farmers, through the horizontal sharing of knowledge, farm walks—like all forms of FTF—can help foster relations of

cooperation and reciprocity between participants which can form the basis of the type of communities T.Beo want to create (Val et al. 2019; Giraldo and Rosset 2023 p.836). And T.Beo consider the formation of such communities to be fundamental in developing agroecology in Ireland. For instance, they see community as playing a crucial role in transitioning individual farmers towards agroecology, because, as member 1 emphasises below, community provides vital social and technical support which is often a significant stumbling block to the uptake of agroecology.

> It's about community because you can have the information, you can know in the back of your head what you need to do but sometimes you need a bit of motivation, a bit of coaxing, and a bit of help along the way. (Member 1)

Related to building community, farm walks are also a space where people can encounter T.Beo for the first time. This is particularly important for strengthening T.Beo as a movement. However, throughout the farm walk I attended T.Beo was rarely, if ever, mentioned. In fact the only references to T.Beo I can remember were in a selection of T.Beo pamphlets—which included information on their own research, projects, policy documents, and introductions into concepts like agroecology and food sovereignty—that were neatly arranged on a table in a small, covered courtyard—along with tea, coffee, biscuits, and a selection of second-hand books free to a good home—where the walk began and ended. The lack of references to T.Beo on the walk is not because T.Beo is unimportant, but again it is because member 1 does not want to overload participants with information.

> You can't give them all the information—and I do give people a lot of information when I'm walking around the farm—but the idea with all those pamphlets is to let them know that there's a larger community there if they want to take a step afterwards. You can't force anybody to do anything but if people are willing to go out of their way to find information it's a good opportunity to point them in different directions. (Member 1)

As the IALA Mesoamérica in Nicaragua understand, becoming involved in a community or social movement is an educational process itself (McCune et al. 2014). As member 1 acknowledges above, you cannot compel people to get involved in T.Beo, so he tries not to be too forceful or overbearing with information about T.Beo. But the very fact that they have attended his farm walk suggests that it could be a

"good opportunity to point them in different directions". And that's why the pamphlets are so important; they let participants know about the larger movement that exists, for those that might want to take a further step and get involved in agroecology and T.Beo more deeply.

6.3.3 Public forums

Public forums are another type of space organised by T.Beo to disseminate agroecology, food sovereignty, and their vision for food system transformation in Ireland. These public forums can take many forms, and are a space that allows people from all parts of society to come together to discuss topics related to agriculture and food. While T.Beo do not organise these forums as regularly as their farm walks they nevertheless have an important function for T.Beo.[31]

My interpretation of T.Beo's public forums and their importance relies heavily on my own experience of one specific public forum which I attended in October 2023 in Carrick-on-Shannon entitled *Our Food, Our Future—Agroecology NOT Agribusiness*.

The theme of the forum was quite broad; discussing the future of food, agriculture, and land use in Ireland. It started with a panel discussion between four speakers from T.Beo; each of whom specialised in a specific topic—topics which included agroecology, local food systems, food sovereignty and trade, and agribusiness in Ireland. Following a brief recess, the rest of the event was much more participatory. Initially, we broke-out into smaller groups where we deliberated over a range of questions—like what can, and should T.Beo be doing to further food system change? and what can we as individuals contribute to T.Beo? The forum ended with a roundtable discussion that brought together the reactions from each break-out group and developed into an open-floor conversation among all that were there.

Afterwards, speaking with some of the T.Beo members that organised the forum, they all seemed quite pleased. They were particularly delighted with the turnout; especially the number of non-members which accounted for more than half of all attendees. For many that I spoke with, this is the major aim of forums like this; to engage more

[31] The regularity of these forums is not due to their lack of importance, but is mainly due to the time constraints faced by T.Beo members as they try to balance their own farm work with T.Beo organising.

people; bring more people into the conversation about agroecology, food sovereignty, and food system change; and bring more people into the T.Beo community.

These forums then, like farm walks, can be understood, I suggest, as another space of encounter, and have most of the same advantages that farm walks have. They are a space where T.Beo can disseminate the practical and political principles of agroecology; they help establish communities around agroecology; and they help strengthen T.Beo as a movement. But in contrast with farm walks they are aimed at drawing in a wider pool of people. Member 1 below, expands on the differences between farm walks and public forums;

> You're gathering people at different levels, different intensities, and different perspectives. So, like the farm walk—again it depends on [the focus of] the farm walk—but they're more hands on. Whereas at the forum there's people from different sectors of society that know and understand the importance of good quality food, and the environment; and they want to help support farmers, but they don't know how to do it. (Member 1)

In this sense, the forum could be considered as a form of 'diálogo de saberes'—which is often translated as "dialog among different knowledges and ways of knowing" (Martínez-Torres and Rosset 2014, p.980; Meek and Simonian 2016). Forums are a space that bring together people from all different backgrounds to discuss, and share their own experiences, ideas, and hopes; and find common ground from which they can collectively construct constantly evolving understandings, framings, and courses of action to create a food system that works for all (Martínez-Torres and Rosset 2014).

On top of this, fostering such dialogue between diverse sections of society can play a crucial role in community building and growing T.Beo—which, as we saw in the last section, is key to territorializing agroecology. As member 1 discusses above, there are a lot of people who want to support farmers and want to support alternative ways of producing outside of the mainstream food system, but do not know how to. These forums provide spaces that help bridge this gap between farmers and the rest of society; which can help create the type of connections that can support stronger, more resilient communities around agroecology.

Relatedly, T.Beo, as member 1 stresses above, recognise that bringing together people with different perspectives and different engagements with our current food system—

as these forums do—can create a much more powerful movement. That is after all why they are a farmer and citizen organisation; T.Beo realise that constructing food systems based on agroecology will require "building a movement based on community, solidarity, and knowledge-sharing, and working for food sovereignty; this includes farmers, land workers, citizens, educators, policymakers and academia" (Document 6). And these forums provide a valuable entry point into the T.Beo movement for many of these groups.

6.3.4 Lighthouse farms and water catchment areas

The final method that T.Beo are pursuing to open up space for agroecology that I want to look at is what I will refer to as their lighthouse/WCA initiative. This initiative aims to establish lighthouse farms in all of the water catchment areas (WCAs) in Ireland; from which they hope to establish local T.Beo groups.

Lighthouse farms are farms that have successfully adopted agroecological practices and serve as an example from which such practices can 'radiate' out to other farmers in their locality. Again lighthouse farms are known to be a valuable method for territorializing agroecology (McGreevy et al. 2021; Nicholls and Altieri 2018). T.Beo have already managed to establish sixteen of such lighthouse farms through their *Soil Biodiversity Literacy and Enhancement EIP Project*—which began in the early winter of 2021 with funding it received as an EIP Agri project.[32] This research project focused on improving sixteen participating farmers' knowledge and skills to enhance soil biodiversity. And one of the project's main aims was to turn the participating farms into lighthouse farms (EU CAP Network 2022).

Building on this success, T.Beo are trying to develop more lighthouse farms and are specifically trying to anchor them within their WCA. A WCA is "defined as an area of land that drains into a river, lake or other body of water". There are forty-six WCAs in Ireland (EPA 2025), and T.Beo are hoping to have at least one lighthouse farm in each WCA that can act as hubs for local T.Beo groups.

This lighthouse/WCA initiative has, I believe, two significant functions; they are a valuable educational method, and they are an important means of building community and strengthening T.Beo. These functions are, of course, similar to those of farm walks

[32] European Innovation Partnership for Agriculture Productivity and Sustainability.

and public forums discussed above. However, what is unique about their lighthouse/WCA initiative is that it ties both of these functions to specific places; which is crucial for territorializing agroecology given that the development of agroecology is a place-specific endeavour that is dependent on the social, political, economic, and ecological context in which it is unfolding (Ferguson et al. 2019; Rosset and Altieri 2017). I will discuss each of these functions in turn below.

T.Beo are hoping to mobilise lighthouse farms to provide permanent educational spaces outside of the conventional system, where agroecological knowledge can be exchanged directly from farmer-to-farmer. These lighthouse farms, as member 1 told me, would be;

> a place where the community and T.Beo members can come together, either through farm walks or general discussions, around agriculture and agroecology. (Member 1)

> […] essentially become hubs for the local community. You know a lighthouse farm is essentially someone who has done enough stuff, that they have the practical experience to be able to talk about it and is willing to hold a space for other people to come and chat. (Member 1)

Lighthouse farms are intended as a way to share knowledge with farmers and the wider community in the farms immediate vicinity, and, as such, are, in and of themselves, a useful method for rooting education in specific local settings (McGreevy et al. 2021; Nicholls and Altieri 2018). T.Beo, according to member 1 above, are trying to take advantage of such placed-based pedagogy as they seek to create knowledge sharing 'hubs for the local community'. But by anchoring lighthouse farms to their WCA, T.Beo are trying to amplify this further, and are trying to make clear the connections between what happens on the farm and the dynamics of its surrounding territory (McCune et al. 2017; McCune and Sánchez 2018; Meek 2015).

> The idea of focusing on water catchment areas is that water connects the community. It's a very neutral way to engage with other people in your community that are like-minded. And sometimes it is good to break how we frame ourselves around the place. (Member 1)

Their lighthouse/WCA initiative aims to create alternative immaterial territories (McCune and Sánchez 2018; Meek 2015) and transform understandings of space—particularly as they relate to agriculture, food, and nature (Meek 2016; Wolford 2004). Our current food system has separated agriculture from its biological foundations; consumers from producers; and consumers from the impacts of how food is produced (Wittman 2009; Schneider and McMichael 2010). By focusing on WCAs T.Beo are trying to reframe our perceptions of the places we inhabit. Water, as member 1, says above is a neutral way of engaging communities. Within a WCA everyone depends on the same water source and, as such, it implicitly "connects the community". By positioning WCAs at the centre of their educational efforts, T.Beo are trying to make this interdependence explicit and are trying to make people aware of the impacts our current ways of producing, distributing, exchanging, and consuming food are having on our surrounding ecosystems.

On top of this, as we have already seen with farm walks and public forums, a large part of T.Beo's educational efforts revolve around trying to build community and grow T.Beo as a movement. Their lighthouse/WCA initiative has a similar impact but goes further by embedding such community building in specific places. Again, lighthouse farms, by themselves, are seen as a valuable method for establishing relationships between local actors (McGreevy et al. 2021). And again, WCAs augment this further, by extending the emphasis of community building to include the natural worlds we inhabit. By re-embedding people within their physical and social surroundings, and reasserting the inseparability of society and nature, T.Beo's lighthouse/WCA initiative can create common ground that can connect agroecological farmers with conventional farmers; farmers with their local communities; and people with their surrounding environment. Which can ultimately create the type of communities and the type of socioecological relations necessary for territorializing agroecology.

Relatedly, their lighthouse/WCA initiative is not only valuable for building community but also for strengthening T.Beo itself.

> On a water catchment basis you have all these local groups so that people can come together. There can be great cohesion then when all that feeds back into a central organisation. Obviously, the challenge here then is to get to that point, and branch out in that way, because we are still small in numbers. But that

> would be our plan for this year… and it will take a couple of years… but all of our actions in the coming months, in the coming years will be about building the organisation. (Member 4)

Establishing groups in WCAs around lighthouse farms, will give T.Beo a more permanent, placed-based presence throughout the country. Which is crucial for T.Beo, as currently its membership is quite small and is dispersed widely around Ireland. While member 4 is under no illusions about how difficult it will be to realise, embedding T.Beo's actions in specific places, as their lighthouse/WCA initiative is trying to do, has the potential to build and strengthen the organisation as a whole.

6.4 Discussion and conclusion

This chapter has looked at the collective, formal resistance of T.Beo, as they try to territorialize agroecology and transform the food system in Ireland. I began the chapter by explicitly connecting these more formal efforts with the everyday resistance carried out by individual members discussed in chapter 5, because although they are different forms of resistance both are inseparable and must be understood as such to fully comprehend T.Beo's attempts to territorialize agroecology in Ireland.

While T.Beo members' everyday resistance is, and must necessarily remain the 'backbone' of their attempts at territorializing agroecology and transforming food systems in Ireland, there are, as discussed in chapter 5, owing to the dominance of industrial-capitalist agriculture, major 'structural' limitations to the potential impact that such everyday resistance can have in territorializing agroecology in Ireland. The formal, collective actions I have detailed in this chapter then, are broadly aimed at overcoming these limitations. The four actions I have looked at—influencing public policy; farm walks; public forums; and their lighthouse/WCA initiative—while not an exhaustive list of actions T.Beo engage in, are all in their own way attempts to create the necessary economic, political, social and technical conditions, currently absent in Ireland, for agroecology to proliferate.

But ultimately how successful can these actions be? In this concluding section I want to move towards answering that question. To do that I am going to separate the actions into two categories. Actions that create the necessary conditions for territorializing

agroecology either directly through their own efforts or through working with the state. Both categories are, I would argue, sufficiently distinct to warrant separate interrogations, and doing so will hopefully shed greater light on the potential of T.Beo's actions.

6.4.1 Creating change directly themselves

T.Beo are trying to create the necessary conditions for territorializing agroecology directly themselves predominately by developing their own forms of social organisation and infrastructure. We can see this in three of the actions discussed above—farm walks; public forums; and their lighthouse/WCA initiative. These three actions broadly share two key functions; they are educational spaces where agroecological knowledge can be shared horizontally, and they are spaces that can bring people together, build community, and grow T.Beo as a movement.

But how successful are these efforts likely to be? Well, agroecological movements developing their own forms of social organisation and infrastructure have been fundamental to some of the most successful instances of territorializing agroecology (Val et al. 2019; Mier y Terán Giménez Cacho et al. 2018; Rosset and Altieri 2017; McCune et al. 2017). These cases, however, have nearly always occurred in places and communities "that already had a rich organizational fabric" (Mier y Terán Giménez Cacho et al. 2018). T.Beo's attempts, in contrast, are trying to create this organisational fabric from within a food system dominated by industrial-capitalist values, relations, and practices. While currently T.Beo's efforts may not be as extensive as some of the more successful instances of agroecology territorialization, they are, nevertheless, creating vital "spaces of hope" (Murtagh 2013) that give agroecology breathing room to take root and grow in Ireland. While crucial in-and-of-itself, to territorialize agroecology these spaces will need to be expanded. So, what is the potential of this happening?

Well, other agricultural initiatives in Ireland have similarly sought to develop social organisation and infrastructure around alternative ways of producing, consuming, and distributing food directly themselves. However, for the most part, these movements have struggled to challenge the dominance of the industrial-capitalist food system. Since the historically significant cooperative movement eventually became incorporated into this system (Murtagh 2015), most other movement have either

become blunted, like the organic movement (Tovey 1999; 2006; Moore 2006b), or have become stagnant, like farmers' markets (Murtagh 2015).[33]

However, I believe that there are three aspects of T.Beo which may help them avoid suffering similar faiths to these other initiatives. These aspects are not silver bullets, and individually are not necessarily unique to T.Beo, but when taken together, I believe, are significant enough that a different trajectory from other initiatives may be possible.

Firstly, T.Beo, I would argue, are a more fully formed, 'mobilized' (Tovey 2006) social movement that are agitating for, as we saw in chapter 4, a coherent vision for Irish food system transformation. This is in contrast with other alternative food initiatives, particularly contemporary ones, that, while creating spaces for alternatives to flourish, are only "seeds" of social movements, and lack a clear unifying vision for change (Murtagh 2015). T.Beo was formed in order to enact their collective vision for food system change. This vision for change and their intent to realize it is inherent in everything T.Beo do. We can see this particularly in their farm walks. While the focus of such walks is to disseminate the practical knowledge of agroecology, such knowledge is never abstracted from wider systemic issues. For T.Beo the two are inseparable. This may help prevent their efforts from becoming incorporated into the dominant food system, as their attempts to develop their own social organisation and infrastructure around agroecology are directed towards a larger vision for change.

Secondly, T.Beo actively seek the participation of wider rural society in their movement. The public forums discussed above are a perfect illustration of this, as they are aimed at bringing the wider public into the conversation and struggle for agroecology and food system change. As Murtagh (2015) argues, if alternative food initiatives are to create widespread food system change—like territorializing agroecology—movements need a broad support base. But attempts to engage wider rural society are commonly lacking in many alternative food initiatives in Ireland (Murtagh 2015; McMahon 2005). Thus T.Beo, by extending the scope of their

[33] Farmers Markets have even seen a fall in numbers over the last decade. Murtagh (2015) states that "In November 2012 there were 163 farmers' markets listed on the Bord Bia farmers' markets list and in 2014 around 150 existed". However, on Bord Bia's (2026) website currently they list only 110 'food markets' of which only 99 are categorised as farmers' markets.

organisational efforts are giving themselves a greater chance to grow and avoid stagnation.

Finally, as stressed throughout the thesis, T.Beo bring together individual and collective agitation for food system change. While the political impact of individually motivated action should not be underestimated, in some instances in Ireland the transformative impact of food initiatives has been limited by individualistic tendencies (Murtagh 2015). In contrast T.Beo, as I have stressed throughout, quite seamlessly blend individual and collective action. For most of those I engaged with, the collective action of T.Beo is a way of extending the transformative aspirations and potential of their daily farming practices. While they are distinct types of political action, both are part of the same ultimate goal—transforming food systems.

6.4.2 Agitating for change through the state

While most of the actions discussed in this chapter are efforts by T.Beo to create the necessary conditions for territorializing agroecology themselves, they are also agitating for change through the state. Working through the state and mobilizing public policy has powerful potential for territorializing agroecology; particularly policies that can undo the power relations of industrial-capitalist agriculture (Giraldo and McCune 2019; Mier y Terán Giménez Cacho et al. 2018). T.Beo are similarly trying to take advantage of this powerful potential. They have already gained funding through the state to help establish their *Soil Biodiversity Literacy and Enhancement Project*, and by pressurising state agencies and policy makers are, as we have seen with their LFP, hoping to mobilize resources towards agroecological farming and mobilize discourse to create a greater sense of legitimacy around agroecology. But how successful can these attempts at territorializing agroecology be?

To address this question in a meaningful way, I think it is crucial to deal directly with the relationship between the state and T.Beo, which in the above chapter is only touched on implicitly. I believe this relationship could be best described as quite tenuous; primarily because the Irish state and T.Beo, as discussed in detail in chapter 4, have dramatically opposing visions for how the Irish food systems should operate. The state has been instrumental in establishing and maintaining the industrial-capitalist food system that T.Beo are contesting and trying to transform (Ó Murchú 2023; Tovey 2001; Sage and Kenny 2017; O'Shaughnessy and Sage 2017). T.Beo of

course are keenly aware of this, and are often heavily critical, even in their own publications, of the state for not doing right by people, community and land when it comes to our food system. Why then are T.Beo engaging with the state?

Well, despite their opposing positions, ostensibly the state and T.Beo have some areas of common ground, such as supporting primary producers, tackling environmental issues, and improving the economic and social wellbeing of rural communities (DAFM 2021), and it would seem that T.Beo are trying to leverage these common concerns to gain support for its cause. For instance their LFP, which aims to gain greater support for local, agroecological food production, stresses the importance of such production for improving rural economic and social activity, increasing employment, and protecting the environment and biodiversity; which are all supposedly, as I say, primary concerns for the state, and have been for quite some time (DAFF 2010; DAFM 2015; Hennessy and Kinsella 2012).

Ultimately, however, the Irish state has rarely, if ever, shown signs of wavering in its commitment to industrial-capitalist agriculture (Ó Murchú 2023; Tovey 1999; 2001; Sage and Kenny 2017; O'Shaughnessy and Sage 2017). In other contexts similar state commitments have often led to negative outcomes for agroecological movements from their engagements with the state, as their transformative vision of agroecology and agrarian reform has been either ignored completely, or blunted to fit into the "accepted ideologies, and established institutional functioning and persisting power relations" of the dominant food system (Ajates Gonzalez et al. 2018; Vergara-Camus and Kay 2017; Giraldo and McCune 2019). On top of this, closer entanglements with the state have often led to the deradicalization and demobilization of agrarian social movements (Clark 2016, Vergara-Camus and Kay 2017).

Food movements in Ireland have had similar experiences. The organic movement's engagements with the state are probably the most notable in this regard. These engagements were controlled by the state, as it sought to support and institutionalize organic farming solely as a set of production and marketing techniques that could augment conventional farming and food production (Tovey 1999). On the whole the institutionalization process has only led to modest gains in the uptake of organic farming (Läpple and Kelley 2013; Duram 2010), while at the same time it has had quite harmful effects on the movement itself; like suppressing its most radical and

transformative aspects, and causing fractures and tension within the movement (Tovey 1999; Moore 2006)

In sum, what all this suggests is that while the state may be somewhat responsive, in terms of policy support and funding, to T.Beo's demands, it is likely that such support will only ever extend as far as T.Beo's actions align with the state's vision for agricultural development.

In spite of this, however, the successful territorialization of agroecology has nearly always been aided to some degree by the state and favourable public policies (Mier y Terán Giménez Cacho et al. 2018). So, while the discussion above does not present much hope for the potential of territorializing agroecology through the state in Ireland, one thing I think that T.Beo can take from these more positive cases is that the social movements involved typically gained access to state supports only after they had already managed to rapidly and extensively diffuse agroecology themselves; most notably through farmer-to-farmer methodology (Rosset et al. 2011; Khadse et al. 2018), but also through other actions like land occupations (Fernandes 2023).

6.4.3 Concluding remarks

This then is where I think we can bring back together the two strands of T.Beo's actions, for it appears from the above discussion that currently for T.Beo the greatest potential for territorializing agroecology lies in continuing to straddle both approaches. This type of an approach has been adopted by many other agroecological movements (Giraldo 2019; Mier y Terán Giménez Cacho et al. 2018; Rosset 2015). In T.Beo's case the two approaches have a somewhat circular or reinforcing effect on each other; for the state to act in agroecology's favour, it will require the presence of a robust movement that has already managed independently to diffuse agroecological practices and ideas widely. In other words, T.Beo will have to be in a position to force the state into action. But given how marginal agroecology currently is in Ireland, for T.Beo to spread agroecological practices those practices will have to become more economically and socially viable, which is something that state supports, like those recommended by T.Beo in their LFP, can potentially help address quite effectively and quite rapidly.

So while engaging with the state can certainly help increase the adoption of agroecology, maintaining the most transformative, radical elements of agroecology

and T.Beo's vision more broadly, will require a strong social movement that can take the lead and create the necessary conditions to realize that vision directly themselves.

7 Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

The overall aim of this research was to advance an understanding of the territorialization of agroecology in Ireland. To do this, I chose to conduct a qualitative case study of one particular group in Ireland that are trying to do just that; T.Beo. I chose T.Beo because they are the only organisation in Ireland, that I am aware of, that embody the three main aspects of agroecology—a science, a practice, and a movement (Wezel et al. 2009). And during twenty-two months of field work—that involved informal conversations, semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and participant observation—I tried to gain an in-depth understanding of T.Beo's experiences, practices, and values as they struggle for agroecology and food system transformation in Ireland.

To help frame T.Beo's experience, I chose to extend the disputed territories framework that is commonly mobilised in political agroecology research (Fernandes 2023; Rosset and Martínez-Torres 2012; Giraldo and Rosset 2018). I felt that the disputed territories framework and territory more broadly were particularly valuable for understanding T.Beo's attempts to advance agroecology for two main reasons.

Firstly, territory is already regularly mobilised in agroecological research. It is considered fundamental in understanding and fostering agroecological transformations (Wezel et al. 2016; Guzmán Luna et al. 2019), and for agroecological social movements, like T.Beo, creating, defending, and contesting territories is a central objective (Halvorsen et al. 2019, p.1456; Rosset 2013; LVC 2015a; van den Berg et al. 2021; Fernandes 2023). So, despite the fact that T.Beo's efforts are emerging in a place where agroecology is practically unknown (Agroecology Europe 2020, p.126, Rivera-Nuñez et al. 2020; Giraldo 2024), that T.Beo itself is still only in its early stages, and that T.Beo does not yet have well-established territorial structures like most social movements studied in existing research on territorializing agroecology (Mier y Terán Giménez Cacho et al. 2018), I still argue that T.Beo's struggle, like other agroecological social movements, should be understood as a form of territorialization, because they are, like all forms of territorialization, trying to appropriate space in the pursuit of a political project (Halvorsen 2018; Halvorsen et al. 2019)—a political project of agroecology and food system transformation—and are trying to 'stabilize'

the type of socioecological relations and practices upon which agroecological food systems depend (Gonin 2022).

Secondly and connectedly, as the disputed territories framework suggests, T.Beo's attempts to territorialize agroecology will necessarily have to contest both the material and immaterial territories of the current industrial-capitalist food system which is dominant in Ireland (Fernandes 2023; Rosset and Martínez-Torres 2012; Meek and Simonian 2016).

But while I believe this disputed territories framework is valuable for understanding T.Beo's struggle, I have sought to extend it by emphasising an overlapping understanding of territory to stress that the territorialization attempts of agroecological movements, like T.Beo, do not take place outside of the hegemonic territorial configurations of industrial-capitalist agriculture. Instead, the two overlap, compete, and interact within the same space which can create diverse, hybrid territorial formations (Haesbaert 2013; Halvorsen 2018; Clare et al. 2018).

To mobilise this overlapping understanding of territory and examine T.Beo's specific attempts at territorializing agroecology I utilised three interrelated concepts that emerged as much out of my engagements with T.Beo as they have from existing research on agroecology—moral economy/ecology; everyday resistance; and formal resistance. Each of these concepts deal with a different aspect of T.Beo's struggle for agroecology and food system change. Through moral economy/ecology I considered the values and norms that are foundational to T.Beo's understanding of how food systems should operate. Additionally, through the lens of everyday resistance and formal resistance I looked at the specific actions T.Beo are taking to territorialize their vision for an agroecological transformation of Ireland's food systems.

In what follows, I will sum up the key aspects of the research. Firstly, I will rearticulate the main outcomes of this study and position these findings in relation to existing research. Secondly, I will sum up the main contributions of this research and make a number of recommendations regarding the direction future research into agroecology in Ireland should take. I will then conclude this thesis with some final remarks.

7.2 Territorializing agroecology in Ireland; current state of play.

To reiterate, the main aim of this thesis was to gain a greater understanding of the process of territorializing agroecology in Ireland. I have not sought to examine the progress of the territorialization of agroecology over the years, but rather provide a snapshot into the current state of play of territorializing agroecology in Ireland. There were two aspects to this investigation; 1) what shape are current efforts to territorialize agroecology in Ireland taking, and 2) what are the prospects of these efforts. In this section I will detail the main outcomes of the thesis as they relate to both of these aspects in turn.

7.2.1 What shape are current efforts to territorialize agroecology in Ireland taking?

7.2.1.1 Moral economy/ecology

In chapter 4, through the lens of moral economy/ecology, we saw the norms and values underpinning T.Beo's attempts to territorialize agroecology; most of which run counter to the values and imaginaries that currently dominate Ireland's food system (Ó Murchú 2023). I distilled T.Beo's moral economy/ecology into three overarching aspects.

Firstly, T.Beo believe, like many agrarian movements worldwide (Edelman 2005), that the operations of food systems should, at minimum, ensure that farmers can continue making a living from the land. T.Beo consider the current industrial-capitalist food system to be failing in this regard, as it threatens the economic viability of farmers, particularly smallholders—something which has been extensively documented in Ireland (Tovey 1991; Commins 1996; Lafferty et al. 1999; Hennessy and Kinsella 2012; O'Shaughnessy and Sage 2017; CSO 2021); and strips farmers of access to the resources (Neef at al. 2023; Montenegro de Wit 2017) and knowledge (Schneider and McMichael 2010) that they need to reproduce themselves on the land.

Secondly, T.Beo believe that the socioeconomic relations and practices that underlie food systems should be based on reciprocity, cooperation, and community in order to enhance and protect the mutual dependencies upon which food systems are, and should be, built—such as food productions dependency on gendered labour; and the interdependency between farming livelihoods, consumers' needs for affordable, nutritious food, and the reproduction of rural communities—and which T.Beo believe current industrial-capitalist food systems are either exploiting or actively eroding.

Reciprocity, cooperation, and community are all norms that have been shown to exist in many agrarian societies (Scott 1976; Walsh-Dilley 2013; Grubačić and O'Hearn 2016), and are known to be important for agroecological movements as well (van den Berg 2021; LVC 2015a; Wolford 2005). But unlike these other cases where such norms are deeply rooted in the practices, relations, and traditions of such groups, in T.Beo's case they are trying to reassert these values and relations which, while historically quite prominent in farming communities throughout Ireland (Cush and Macken-Walsh 2016), have been undercut by decades of industrial-capitalist development of agriculture (Macken-Walsh 2010).

Finally, T.Beo have a distinct set of norms that they believe should govern the socioecological relations underpinning our food systems. In contrast to current industrial-capitalist food systems—which for T.Beo separates humans from nature, and produces a whole host of negative ecological and environmental impacts—T.Beo recognise our interdependence with nature, and believe that our food systems should be based on relations with nature that are reciprocal and sustainable. These values and norms are quite prominent across many groups and communities examined in existing moral ecology research (Dove and Kammen 1997; Baker et al. 2017; Hay 2019; Hougaard 2023). And such values, for T.Beo, are embodied in agroecological practices which treats farming as a co-production between humans and nature, and considers protecting and sustaining ecosystems and the resource bases we depend on to be a crucial part of farming (van der Ploeg 2010; Palomo-Campesino et al. 2018; GAFF 2021).

Ultimately, we saw that T.Beo's outlook on how the Irish food system should operate is not that distinct from the many other individual, organisations, and initiatives that form part of Ireland's alternative food networks (Tovey 2002; Sage 2003, Murtagh 2013). We also saw, however, that the one potentially distinguishing feature of T.Beo's moral economy/ecology compared to other alternative food initiatives in Ireland is its inherent political content. While most alternative food initiatives' values directly oppose the norms of industrial-capitalist agriculture (Tovey 1997; Murtagh 2013), T.Beo's outlook differs to a certain extent. Taking from more radical aspects of agroecology (LVC 2015a: Giraldo and Rosset 2023), T.Beo's vision is political, and the need to challenge and transform industrial-capitalist agriculture and its power structure is a crucial part of their moral economy/ecology.

7.2.1.2 Everyday resistance

Leading on from this, the next two chapters looked at the practices T.Beo are engaging in to enact the above norms and territorialize agroecological food systems.

In chapter 5, I looked at the individual farming practices of T.Beo members through a detailed examination of the practices—and more particularly the intentions motivating such practices—of three specific T.Beo members. Through this analysis, I argued that their farming practices should be considered as forms of everyday resistance, as they have the potential to undermine the operations of the current industrial-capitalist food system, and prefigure alternative ways of producing, distributing, exchanging, and consuming food (Scott 1985; 1989; 1990; Johansson and Vinthagen 2020; Kerkvliet 2009). As we saw, members 1 and 4 are quite clear that the farming practices they have adopted are intended to challenge and provide alternatives to the current system. While member 3, though less explicit about his intentions, is still trying to farm in ways that are counter to the norms and practices of industrial-capitalist agriculture.

T.Beo members' efforts, in this regard, highlight the importance of everyday resistance for creating agroecological territories (van den Berg et al. 2021). While all attempts at territorializing agroecology—whether explicitly acknowledged or not—are based upon the successful adoption of agroecological practices (Rosset 2015) and require farmers with previous positive experiences with agroecology (McCune et al. 2017; McGreevy et al. 2021); direct engagements with the transformative impact and political content of the informal, everyday resistance of agroecological farmers' daily activities is quite sparse (Rivera-Nuñez et al. 2020).

But, as we have seen, for T.Beo their individual farming practices are the 'backbone' of their attempts at territorializing agroecology. This echoes much of the recent theorizations on territory which emphasises the impact everyday actions can have on the production and reproduction of territory (Halvorsen 2018; Clare et al. 2018). Specifically, in relation to territorializing agroecology, T.Beo's experience highlights that everyday resistance—particularly farmers daily practices—are a potentially powerful way, in-and-of-themselves, of prefiguring the type of values, practices, and relations on which agroecological food systems can be built (Tornaghi and Dehaene 2020; Dale 2023; Tovey 2006), and of 'nudging' agrarian change (Shattuck and Peluso 2021) in an agroecological direction.

7.2.1.3 Formal resistance

In chapter 6, I looked at some of T.Beo's formal efforts, as an organisation, to territorialize agroecology. Of course, formal and everyday resistance are intimately related, and, as many have stressed, formal resistance cannot be fully understood without reference to the everyday resistance that underpins it (Scott 1990; Johansson and Vinthagen 2020; Kerkvliet 2009). This, as we have seen, is similarly the case for T.Beo, as, for those that I spoke with, the more formal efforts of T.Beo are seen as an extension of their own daily farming activities.

The specific actions of T.Beo that I considered were; influencing public policy, farm walks, public forums, and their lighthouse/WCA initiative. Formal resistance of social movements has received considerable attention in agroecology research (Giraldo 2024; Brescia 2017; Mier y Terán Giménez Cacho et al. 2018), and the aims of these T.Beo actions are broadly consistent with other social movements' attempts to territorialize agroecology that have already been examined in the literature (McCune et al. 2017; Mier y Terán Giménez Cacho et al. 2018).

Influencing public policy is a common method adopted by agroecological movements (Mier y Terán Giménez Cacho et al. 2018; González de Molina et al. 2020; Parmentier 2014). And similar to most of these, T.Beo are engaging in it to try to mobilise resources **(**Khadse et al. 2018)—like land (Fernandes 2023; Meek and Simonian 2016) and alternative distribution channels (Anderson et al. 2019; FAO 2018)—and mobilise discourse (Mier y Terán Giménez Cacho et al. 2018) to create more suitable socioeconomic conditions that will allow agroecology spread.

While farm walks, public forums, and their lighthouse/WCA initiative are all forms of horizontal social processes which are known to be crucial for territorializing agroecology (Mier y Terán Giménez Cacho et al. 2018; Rosset 2015). In particular, these three actions are all forms of horizontal educational processes through which T.Beo can share knowledge of agroecological practices and principles—something which is severely lacking in Irish agriculture currently. Furthermore, like the various horizontal pedagogical methodologies adopted by many agroecological social movements, these actions can also help bring people together, create community around agroecology—which includes both farmers and wider society—and strengthen T.Beo as a movement (Val et al. 2019; Rosset et al. 2019; Martínez-Torres and Rosset

2014; Rosset et al. 2011; McCune and Sánchez 2018; McCune et al. 2017; McCune et al. 2014; Meek 2015; Khadse et al. 2018; McGreevy et al. 2021).

Overall, I suggest that the actions considered here are predominantly aimed at opening up space in a landscape dominated by industrial-capitalist agriculture from which the relations, practices, and values of agroecology can spread and flourish. Through farm walks, public forums, and their lighthouse/WCA initiative T.Beo are trying to carve out this space directly. While influencing public policy is a more indirect method of creating such space, as T.Beo pressure policymakers to create more favourable economic and social conditions for agroecology.

7.2.2 What are the prospects of these efforts?

Above I have summarised the main outcomes of the thesis with regards to the values, relations, and practices that underpin T.Beo's attempts to territorialize agroecology and transform food systems in Ireland. But, as I have stressed from the very outset, it is crucial that the process of territorializing agroecology is understood as overlapping. It is particularly important for understanding the potential of territorialization attempts. T.Beo's experiences here highlights how complex and entangled the process of territorializing agroecology is. Their attempts to territorialize agroecology are emerging from within, and, as such, will necessarily be restricted by, and have to interact with, existing food systems which are thoroughly dominated by industrial-capitalist structures, practices, relations, and logics. Throughout the thesis we saw how these complex entanglements can constrain the potential of their attempts to territorialize agroecology.

7.2.2.1 Everyday Resistance

With regards T.Beo's everyday resistance its transformative potential lies in its ability to prefigure alternatives and provide working examples that another form of agriculture is possible (Tovey 2006; Dale, 2023; Tornaghi and Dehaene 2020). However, everyday resistance does not take place in isolation. T.Beo members are trying to build their agroecological farming practices from within the very industrial-capitalist food system that they are trying to contest; which can impede their practices from developing fully, and ultimately limit their transformative potential. Specifically in section 5.3, I examined the difficulty faced by T.Beo members in navigating the 'dull compulsion' of capitalist economic relations in order to make a living and remain

on the land (Scott 1985; Calvário 2017). In particular, I detailed the impact of one such economic relation—market dependency—and examined how the three members in question have tried to deal with it.

This discussion made visible broader issues for the prospects of territorializing agroecology; namely that the relations, practices, and logics of industrial-capitalist agriculture are so pervasive in Ireland that they have produced what could only be described as 'structural' constrains to the territorialization of agroecology. Three such constraints were particularly prominent in the discussion, all of which will be difficult to overcome through everyday resistance alone.

Firstly, the industrial-capitalist development of agriculture over the last half century has meant that the most typical forms of farming in Ireland, such as beef and dairy, will find transitioning to agroecology technically infeasible—due to their size, focus on commodity production for export, and dependence on corporate processors and retailers—without widespread, radical change to the whole food system. This became particularly visible in chapter 5 when comparing the three T.Beo members' farming practices. Member 3's efforts to deepen his agroecological practices are far more problematic when compared with members 1 and 4, because of the demands placed on his farming practices by the beef industry.

Secondly, most people's everyday interactions with food are so thoroughly dominated by industrial-capitalist logics, relations, and practices that they have come to be considered normal or 'the done thing'. Because of this, making agroecology more socially acceptable will be very challenging for T.Beo, as most aspects of agroecological food systems depart drastically from the perceived normality of the current food system. It will be particularly challenging amongst traditional farming populations who in general have quite negative attitudes towards alternative farming initiatives that are associated with agroecology—like organic farming (Läpple and Kelley 2013), short supply chains (Macken-Walsh 2009; Moroney et al. 2013) and diversification (Moroney et al. 2016; O'Shaughnessy and Sage 2017).

Finally, in Ireland, due to the dominance of industrial-capitalist agriculture there is a lack of alternative food infrastructure. While instances of such infrastructure have had consistent presence in Ireland over the last number of decades, they have generally been geographically dispersed and disconnected, and recently, in some cases, have

become quite stagnant (Murtagh 2015; Tovey 2006; Sage 2003; Moroney et al. 2013). This greatly limits the proliferation of agroecological practices. We saw instances of this again in chapter 5 with members 3 and 4; who, because of the lack of alternative infrastructure, must depend on corporate retailers and processors to distribute their produce, despite this relationship not sitting too comfortably with either of them.

All of these three constraints limit the potential of territorializing agroecology in Ireland, and while everyday resistance will have to be the 'backbone' of any attempt at territorializing agroecology—both from the perspective of T.Beo members themselves and the existing research on agroecology (Rosset 2015; McCune et al. 2017)—it is unlikely to be able to overcome such constraints on its own.

7.2.2.2 Formal Resistance

This then leads on to T.Beo's formal resistance which is aimed at overcoming these constraints and creating the necessary conditions for agroecology to proliferate. In chapter 6, I split these formal efforts into two strands; their own direct efforts and those that involve working with the state. Both strands are distinct in their attempts to overcome these constraints, but, as I argued, the greatest potential for territorializing agroecology lies in straddling both, because, as I highlighted, each independently suffers from certain limitations, predominately caused by the dominance of industrial-capitalist agriculture, that can be strengthened by the other.

With regards their own direct efforts, its main weakness lies in the precedent set by other alternative food initiatives. While these initiatives have directly themselves created vital spaces for alternative agricultural practices to flourish, few if any have managed, through these efforts, to undercut industrial-capitalist agricultures dominance in Ireland (Murtagh 2010; 2015; Tovey 1999). Although, I highlighted several reasons why T.Beo's efforts might lead to more positive outcomes—they are a more fully formed, mobilised social movement with a clear political vision; they seek participation of wider rural communities; and they effectively blend individual and collective action—it is still difficult to foresee how T.Beo's efforts can produce the type of change needed to territorialize agroecology and transform food systems given agroecology and T.Beo's current marginal position in Irish agriculture.

Similarly, working through the state is fraught with difficulty. Most particularly, working through the state involves working with an actor that has been crucial in

establishing and maintaining the current system that T.Beo are opposing and trying to transform. Despite having some supposedly common objectives, given the experience of agroecological movements internationally and other alternative food initiatives in Ireland, it is very hard to envisage how T.Beo can shift the state from its well-established ideological position on agriculture and rural development. A more likely outcome is that the state will either ignore, or deradicalize T.Beo and it's vision for agroecology and absorb it into the dominant system as yet another technical innovation.

This then is why I have suggested that the complimentary approach T.Beo are currently taking appears to hold the most potential for territorializing agroecology in Ireland, because the weakness of one strand can potentially be reinforced by the other. If T.Beo can develop into a strong social movement with its own widespread infrastructure and networks, they will be in a better position to force the state to act and resist any of the state's attempts to blunt or suppress their efforts. While greater state support can make agroecological farming more viable which in turn would help strengthen T.Beo as a movement.

While this approach may have the most potential, this does not mean, however, that the widespread territorialization of agroecology in Ireland will be straightforward or imminent. It is hard to overstate just how arduous and uncertain this process will be. However, from the analysis above one thing T.Beo will need to do is extend their organisation and infrastructure building efforts beyond education. This is not to downplay the importance of such efforts, but if T.Beo are to successfully challenge the dominant food system they will have to create viable alternatives to its economic structures and relations, for such alternatives will be crucial in extending the impact and effectiveness of all of their actions detailed above. It will make members' everyday resistance more effective by helping them avoid the 'dull compulsion' of capitalist economic relations like market dependency. It will help T.Beo spread agroecology practices directly themselves, as such alternative infrastructure make agroecological production more economically viable. Finally, by successfully developing and spreading such alternative infrastructure, it makes it harder for the state to ignore or dilute their efforts. T.Beo is only in its formative stage, so they may yet develop such actions. Furthermore, most of its members, in some form or another, are already involved in other initiatives—like farmers markets, cooperatives, and CSA—so they

may not need to create these alternatives from scratch, but help extend already existing initiatives. Whatever the case may be, such structures will be needed if agroecology is to be successfully territorialized in Ireland (Murtagh 2015; Giraldo and Rosset 2023; Mier y Terán Giménez Cacho et al. 2018; Gliessman 2015).

7.3 Contribution and recommendations

After summing up the main outcomes of this research and placing them within the existing literature, in this section, I want to outline the main contributions of this research to the knowledge base of both agroecology and agriculture in Ireland, as well as making some recommendations regarding future research.

I believe that this study—despite its limitations which mainly relate to the design of the research and data collection, and which I have already detailed in section 3.6—has contributed to existing research in two main ways. Firstly, this work adds to the research on alternative food initiatives in Ireland, and more particularly to the limited research on agroecology in Ireland. Agroecology, as a science, practice and movement, has the potential of dealing with many of the ecological, economic, and social issues currently faced by Irish farmers and rural communities, yet it has received minimal research attention in Ireland. In particular, research into agroecology as a movement and into agroecology's development is practically non-existent (Agroecology Europe 2020; Blaix 2024). The analysis presented here of T.Beo's experience contributes towards rectifying this neglect.

But my work here is by no means a complete study of the development of agroecology in Ireland; there are still a lot of aspects of its development that need to be investigated in more depth. Specifically, building on the experiences of T.Beo and the difficulties they face developing agroecology from within the current Irish food system, I suggest a greater focus should be placed on the barriers that impede the development of agroecology in Ireland. Particularly—adding to existing works in Irish agriculture that interrogate the underlying power structures of current food systems (Stewart 2023; Ó Murchú 2023; Kenny et al. 2018)—future research should analyse the actors, institutional arrangements, and power relations, which, in the words of member 2,

‘keep us on the road we’re on’, and prevent the territorialization of agroecological alternatives in Ireland.

To further these efforts I would suggest that future research should engage in more participatory forms of research that would actively involve those practicing, and trying to territorialize agroecology in all stages of the research process. Such an approach would help open up Irish agricultural research further to agroecology and, more particularly, to the knowledge, experiences, and practices of those actually trying to territorialize agroecology. It would also give such groups greater control over the knowledge production process, and ensure that research is meaningful and relevant to their struggle (Pimbert 2018; GAFF 2021; Levidow 2014).

Secondly, this study, contributes to agroecology research. Mainly, it has added to the growing body of knowledge on place-specific examples of territorializing agroecology (Mier y Terán Giménez Cacho et al. 2018); particularly adding to those works on ‘emerging agroecologies’ which detail attempts to develop agroecology in places where it had not previously existed (Giraldo 2024; Rivera-Nuñez et al. 2020).

Additionally, by advancing an overlapping understanding of territory, this thesis makes a theoretical contribution to agroecology research. Overlapping territory addresses one of the main criticisms of agroecology discourse (Castellanos-Navarrete and Jansen 2018; Bernstein 2014), by emphasizing that territorializing agroecology is not a strict, clean process of agroecology versus industrial-capitalist agriculture, but instead involves multiple complex entanglements between the two competing political projects; which can produce hybrid territorial formations that are the product of blended practices, relations, institutions, and values. Furthermore, this work has shown that overlapping territory is also a useful theoretical framing for interrogating the complex interactions between agroecology and existing power structures, and as such adds to the many works in agroecology that have already sought to uncover the extent of such interactions and their impact on the development of agroecology (Akram-Lodhi 2021; Marfurt et al. 2023; Wach 2021; Fernandes 2023; Giraldo 2019; Levidow et al. 2021; Meek 2016; Calvário 2017; Tornaghi and Dehaene 2020).

7.4 Final remarks

The current operations of the Irish food system are producing many significant interconnected social, economic, and ecological issues. Agroecology is gaining greater recognition around the world for its ability to tackle such challenges (IPES-Food 2016). In Ireland, however, agroecology has received very little attention to date (Agroecology Europe 2020; Blaix 2024), but despite its marginal position there are those within Ireland who are already implementing agroecological practices and who are actively trying to advance agroecology further. In an attempt to shed some light on agroecology in Ireland and its prospects this study has examined the experiences of one such group—Talamh Beo. As we have seen, T.Beo, through their own individual farming practices and their formal, collective efforts as an organisation, are trying to territorialize agroecology and ultimately create a better food system in Ireland for, in their own words, 'people, communities, and land'.

After all my interactions with T.Beo over nearly two years, my own view on the prospects of agroecology in Ireland—which reiterates many other works on agroecology throughout the world (Giraldo and McCune 2019; Mier y Terán Giménez Cacho et al. 2018; Rosset et al. 2011)—is that, despite the difficulties they face, the efforts of grassroot organisations like T.Beo will be fundamental in bringing about widespread agroecological food system change in Ireland.

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