

Against the Grain

**The transformative qualities of small-scale farming communities
in Scotland in the context of the crises of capitalism.**

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Steven Speed

School of Social Sciences
Sociology Department

Table of Contents

List of Maps	6
Abstract	7
Declaration	8
Copyright Statement	8
Acknowledgements	9
1. Introduction	10
2. Small-scale Food Producers in Scotland	16
2.1 Crofting: An Historical Context	16
2.2 The Current Demand for Crofts and How it is Being Regulated	17
2.3 Land Rights and Community Ownership	19
2.4 An Increased Demand for Direct Sales from Small-Scale Farms	20
2.5 Contemporary Social Movements Organisations Working with Crofters and Small-scale Food Producers	21
2.5 Summary	23
3. An Alternative to Capitalism	25
3.1 Transformation and an Alternative	25
3.2 The Production of Space	29
3.3 Summary	33

4. Understanding Social Transformation in Small-scale Farming Communities	35
4.1 Theories of Transformation	36
4.2 Gaps, Contradictions and Unintended Change	40
4.3 Transformative Strategies of Small-scale Food Producers	45
4.4 Social Reproduction and its Relationship to Peasant Farming	54
4.5 Understanding Transformation for Small-scale Food Producers in Scotland	61
5. Methodology	64
5.1 The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic	64
5.2 Research Process	65
5.3 Research Approach	67
5.4 Research Methods	69
5.5 Ethical Statement	74
5.6 Summary	78
6. The Trajectories of Change that have Emerged from the Crisis of Capitalism	79
6.1 The Highland Clearances	79
6.2 Crofting after the Clearances	81
6.3 The Introduction of Tourism	86
6.4 Land Ownership in Scotland	93
6.5 Overfishing and its Impact on Fish stocks	98

6.6 The Rise of Direct Sales	103
6.7 Unintended Trajectories of Change	107
7. COVID-19, Brexit, and the Contradictions Exposed by Capitalism's Crises for Small-scale Food Producers in Scotland	111
7.1 The Covid-19 Pandemic	112
7.2 Brexit	125
7.3 Gaps and Contradictions through the Crises of Capitalism	131
8. Transformative Strategies Employed by Small-scale Food Producers in Scotland	133
8.1 Political Agroecology	134
8.2 Food Sovereignty	143
8.3 Land Sovereignty	152
8.3.1 Community Land Trusts	154
8.3.2 Crofts and Common Grazings	159
8.4 Transformative Strategies for Small-scale Food Producers in Scotland	163
9. The Sustainability of Small-scale Food Producers in Scotland	167
9.1 Reproducing Capitalism	168
9.1.1 Scaling up	169
9.1.2 Subsidies and Regulations	176
9.1.3 New Industries	182
9.2 Reproducing a Different Moral Economy	190

9.2.1 Shared Territories	190
9.2.2 Shared Knowledge	194
9.2.3 Shared Responsibilities	196
9.3 Sustaining a Different Moral Economy and the Reproduction of Capitalism	204
10. The Transformative Qualities of Small-Scale Farming Communities in Scotland	207
10.1 The Trajectories of Unintended Social Change	208
10.2 Recent Crises of Capitalism and the Gaps and Contradictions Revealed	210
10.3 Transformative Strategies Employed by Small-scale Farming Communities	211
10.4 The Reproduction of Capitalism and an Alternative	213
10.5 The Transformative Qualities of Small-scale Farming Communities in Scotland	215
11. Bibliography	220
12. Appendix	237
12.1 Appendix 1 - Research Questions for Participants	237
Word Count: 84,512 (main text: 80,871)	

List of Maps

- | | | |
|----|--|----|
| 1. | Map of Scotland divided into six regions | 77 |
|----|--|----|

Abstract

Small-scale farming communities in Scotland engaged in a combination of food sovereignty, agroecology, or land sovereignty have not only made themselves more resilient to the crises of capitalism but have done so by reducing their dependency upon it. What is more, during the recent crises caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and Brexit they were not only more able to sustain themselves when long food supply chains collapsed but were also able to increase their autonomy and sustainability through an increased demand for local food networks. Also, in certain areas, these strategies have transformed social relations and, at times, revealed alternative economic practices.

The research for this thesis was conducted over a 15 month period and primarily consisted of seasonal interviews with 14 small-scale food producers in Scotland. It has examined the transformative qualities of these communities through an adaptation of Erik Olin Wright's theory of transformation (Wright 2010) by drawing on David Harvey and John Holloway's analyses of capitalism and of strategies for social transformation. Through this framework the research has examined the unintended trajectories of change that emerge from the crisis of capitalism, the gaps and contradictions these crises have revealed, the relationships these strategies have with these crises as they reveal alternative economic practices, and the sustainability of these practices in the face of capitalism's ability to reproduce itself.

The research found that the transformative qualities of small-scale farming communities in Scotland are the ways in which these communities resist and, at times, reverse the reproduction of capitalism through their demand for autonomy and self-subsistence, particularly during crises. Ultimately, these are moments of withdrawal from, and non-participation in, capitalist social relations that are made possible, in the first instance, by access to land. In their entirety they should be thought of as being transformative towards an alternative rather than as an alternative themselves, but they do offer a glimpse of how an alternative might be achieved.

Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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1. Introduction

Small-scale farming communities in Scotland have developed a number of strategies that have not only made them more resilient to the crises of capitalism but have done so by reducing their dependency upon it. This thesis looks at the transformative qualities of small-scale food producers in Scotland where they have moved away from this dependency through their demand for greater autonomy and self-subsistence. It analyses their relationship to social and economic crises and the historical trajectory of these conditions to gain a better understanding of the context within which they appear. It also looks at the strategies that have been employed by small-scale food producers in response to these crises, and considers the sustainability of their practices in the face of capital's ability to reproduce itself.

Since the economic crisis of 2007 there has been an epidemic of food poverty which has been exacerbated during recent crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic and Brexit. One of the responses to this has been a rise in subsistence and semi-subsistence agriculture, as it offers the prospect of greater autonomy, particularly in a context of austerity-driven welfare policies, high unemployment and in-work poverty. In Europe during this period there has been a rapid rise in subsistence farming that has been coupled with the emergence of agroecology in EU states such as Italy, Greece, and Spain (Migliorini, Gkissakis, Gonzalvez, Raigón & Bàrberi 2018). This is not simply a crisis of capital but a crisis of capital's ability to reproduce itself. A demand for economic autonomy is an unintended outcome of these crises which is also being used as a part of a series of transformative strategies that appear to be reproducing a different set of social, economic and cultural ideals.

During the COVID-19 pandemic there was a significant increase in direct sales amongst small-scale farming communities in Scotland. Prior to this, between 2013 and 2019¹, Scotland has seen a 10% increase in registered crofts, a type of small-scale food production typically between 2 and 5 hectares. There has also been a significant increase of land being taken into common ownership over the last 30 years. An example of this is the Assynt

¹ www.crofting.scotland.gov.uk/crofting-census

Crofters Trust. Located in one of the former Highland Clearance areas in Sutherland², the Assynt Crofters' Trust took 21000 acres of land into community ownership in 1993.

This rise in subsistence and semi-subsistence agriculture is a global phenomenon. Small-scale farms now produce a third of the world's food and over 80% of farms are now less than two hectares (Lowder, Sánchez, Bertini 2021). Whilst this is generally expected in countries with lower national incomes there has also been increases in small-scale farms in agricultural powerhouses such as Brazil and the United States of America (FAO 2021). Alongside these quantitative increases in small-scale farms there is also an increase in farms shifting production towards subsistence and semi-subsistence agriculture through greater autonomy by distancing themselves from external markets (Jansen, Vicol & Nikol 2022). Alongside this, La Via Campesina, a global movement of peasant farmers representing over 200 million small-scale farmers, formed in 1992 to unify the struggle of small-scale farmers against neo-liberal policies on agriculture. In Scotland, two member organisations of La Via Campesina, The Scottish Crofting Federation and The Land Workers' Alliance, have been set up to represent small-scale farming communities there.

These examples suggest there is a growing demand for autonomy through people entering small-scale farming and from their communities. This thesis will analyse this transformation as it happens, in and through small-scale farming communities. Alternative small-scale farming practices, such as those employed by Scottish crofters, are not only providing communities with subsistence, they are also offering greater autonomy and are transforming relationships with social and physical environments (Ewing 2018). In the context of the increased demand for crofting land³, the rise of community land ownership⁴, and an increase in direct sales from small-scale farmers (LWA 2020), this thesis will examine the nature of these crises, the transformative strategies being employed and their sustainability.

Using ethnographic case studies, it will investigate the characteristics of these farms and their communities, their position in wider policy and food networks, the motivations and

² <http://www.theassyntcrofters.co.uk>

³ <http://www.crofting.scotland.gov.uk>

⁴ <https://www.communitylandscotland.org.uk/>

lifestyles of participants, and will attempt to answer the central question; *what are the transformative qualities of small-scale Scottish farming communities in the context of the crises of capitalism?* It will reveal the socio-cultural, political and economic roots of this phenomenon and thus speak to a wider theoretical perspective drawn from John Holloway and David Harvey through a framework adapted from Erik Olin Wright (2010) concerning strategies for social transformation. Four research questions for this thesis have been developed to align with this framework in context of small-scale Scottish farming communities. To do this, I employed the four components of Wright's theory of social transformation to structure the research through the following four research questions.

1. What are the trajectories of unintended social change that have emerged from the crisis of capitalism in the context of small-scale farming communities in Scotland?
2. How have the recent crises of capitalism affected small-scale farming communities in Scotland and what gaps and contradictions have they revealed?
3. What are the transformative strategies being employed by small-scale farming communities in Scotland?
4. How is capitalism being reproduced in small-scale farming communities in Scotland and are the transformative strategies employed there reproducing alternative economic practices?

Firstly, in chapter two, the thesis will look at the background to the transformative qualities of small-scale food producers in Scotland. Starting with the increased demand for crofts, the rise of community land ownership in Scotland, and an increase in direct sales for small scale farms, I will argue these all represent a demand for greater autonomy at times of economic crisis. Chapter two will examine the nature and scale of this demand from both an historical and contemporary perspective with the emergence of land rights campaigns, the establishment of community land ownership, and the rise of direct sales. It will also introduce the social movement organisations working with crofters and other small-scale farmers to help them harness these demands.

Chapter three will utilise the work of David Harvey and John Holloway to analyse the nature of an alternative to capitalism that is relevant for small scale farming communities. It will be used to shape any understanding of what transformative strategies might be trying to achieve and help underpin the analysis during the empirical chapters. It will analyse the difference between small-scale and peasant like farming practices and capitalist agriculture, how capitalist agriculture appears and is reproduced, and the social, ethical and economic differences between the two approaches. It will then turn to the methods employed to resist and reverse the reproduction of capitalist social relations in this context.

Chapter four will explore social transformation as it is relevant to small-scale farming communities struggling for subsistence and autonomy in the context of the crises of capitalism. It will start with Erik Olin Wright's four theories of transformation (Wright 2010) and will develop an understanding of each so that they are applicable to small-scale farming practices. It will look at unintended trajectories of change that are emerging from the crises of capital in the context of small-scale food producers. It will also consider the transformative strategies employed by small-scale food producers globally in response to these crises such as political agroecology, land sovereignty and food sovereignty, and consider how they relate to small-scale food producers in Scotland. Finally, it will examine social reproduction and its relationship to small-scale food producers. It will also look at the crisis in the reproduction of capital and how certain practices within small-scale agriculture appear to be reproducing an alternative economy.

While the methodologies that have been utilised for the thesis will be examined in chapter five, chapters six to nine will focus on the empirical research: the first of which will look at unintended trajectories of change that have emerged from the crisis of capitalism in the context of small-scale food producers in Scotland. This relates to research question one and will examine the extent to which obstacles and opportunities for alternative economic practices have appeared over time as a result of these crises and what this has meant for small-scale food producers. It will also offer an account of the dynamic tendencies of capitalism that have pushed communities along a particular trajectory of unintended change. This begins with the impact and legacy of the Highland Clearances and leads up to the recent crises caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and Brexit.

Chapter seven relates to the second research question and will focus primarily on crises and the gaps that they reveal. These were typically the most recent crises experienced by participants such as the COVID-19 pandemic and Brexit but has also covered other significant issues such as the decline in fish stocks, bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), and depopulation. The chapter also focuses on the ways in which crises have been shaped by the geographical location of participants, mainly due to their proximity to, and reliance on, infrastructure. This is mainly through the affects of crises on supply chains, with small-scale food producers less dependent on long supply chains as they are more likely to engage in direct sales, making them less vulnerable to crises of this nature.

Chapter eight relates to the third research question and considers strategies that relate to food production, food supply chains and access to natural resources. This chapter analyses the transformative qualities of these strategies looking at how they resist the extraction of value by external forces through more restorative farming practices, short food supply chains, and common ownership of natural resources. It will also look at how these strategies are, to some extent, emerging from the crises of capitalism and are being used to resist and reverse its conditions. The chapter will examine how each strategy has emerged, how they are being employed by small-scale food producers in Scotland, and what have been their benefits and consequences.

The final empirical chapter, chapter nine, relates to the fourth research question and will look at social reproduction as it affects small-scale food producers in Scotland. The chapter will begin by looking at the mechanisms that reproduce capitalism, analysing the impact this has on food producers and the practices that it leads to. This will be followed by a section that looks at how certain strategies employed by small-scale food producers have not only defended them against the conditions of capitalism but, to some extent, have reproduced an alternative economic reality. The first section looks at how dependencies have been created through the introduction of infrastructure that pressure small-scale food producers to either scale-up or go out of business. This is further enforced through regulations and subsidies that are designed to improve the sustainability of large-scale farming practices. It also looks at how capital has introduced new industries to boost the local economy but has, in turn, forced many small-scale food producers out, by changing the way land is both

valued and afforded. The second section details the methods of resistance employed by small-scale food producers and examines to what extent these methods reproduce an alternative. It does this by focusing on how this occurs through land ownership and land access, agriculture, supply chains, and culture, and how the identities and economic realities being reproduced are, in some respects, contrary to the logic of capitalism. This all begins in the context of a demand for greater autonomy by small-scale food producers and their communities in Scotland, and so it is here that we must begin.

2. Small-scale Food Producers in Scotland

This research began in the context of an increased demand for crofts, the rise of community land ownership in Scotland, and an increase in direct sales for small-scale farms. I will argue that such trends reflect a call for greater autonomy that have come at a time of economic crisis. This chapter examines the nature and scale of the demand for crofting land and direct sales and the rise of community land ownership in Scotland. This will include details about the nature of crofting from both an historical and contemporary perspective, the emergence of land rights campaigns, the establishment of community land ownership, and the rise of direct sales. It also details the Social Movement Organisations (SMOs) working with crofters to harness these demands and how this is transforming the social, cultural, economic and environmental fabric of communities to meet the challenges of ecological and economic crises.

2.1 Crofting: An Historical Context

Crofting is a type of tenancy and small-scale food production. The legal framework for the tenancy is the result of resistance to the Highland Clearances during the late 18th and early 19th Century (Devine 1994). It forms a unique and strictly regulated tenure system that supports ecologically responsible land management with similar principles to agroecology.

The Highland Clearances saw significant numbers of land workers evicted from their land between 1750 and 1860. There were numerous acts of resistance to these clearances that culminated in the Crofters' War of the 1880s. These included the Dudgeonite agitation in 1819-20, the clearance of Strathnaver in 1812-14, and the 'Year of the Sheep' in 1792 that ended with the 'Ross-shire Sheep Riot'. The Highland Land League achieved land reform with the Crofters Holdings Act of 1886 that put an end to The Clearances by securing tenure for crofters. The Clearances left most of the Highlands in the hands of a small number of landowners. Crofters often relied on additional sources of income as landlords deliberately kept them below self-sufficiency through high rents in what has been seen as an attempt to force tenants into tied labour. As a result, there have been frequent land struggles

throughout the last century that has led to the creation of various advocacy groups such as The Scottish Crofting Federation.

2.2 The Current Demand for Crofts and How it is Being Regulated

Crofts are mostly found in the former traditional crofting counties in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. Crofting now represents around 30% of households in the Highlands and up to 65% in Shetland, the Western Isles, and Skye. Between 2013 and 2019 the number of crofts on the Register of Crofts increased by 10% and there has been an almost yearly increase in the occupancy of crofts⁵. In 2019 there were 20,867 crofts in Scotland with over 33,000 people living in them.

Each croft is a small unit of land of which a crofter is normally the tenant. The crofter will only pay rent for the land as any buildings and other infrastructure are to be provided by themselves. A crofter can own their own croft but it will still remain in crofting tenure giving them wide-ranging rights, such as the:

Security of tenure; fair rents; compensation for permanent improvements; to pass on their tenancies to members of their families or; to pass their tenancy to other third parties (with the approval of the Crofting Commission); to purchase either, their house site or, if they wish their croft as a whole, at a fixed price⁶.

Crofting communities have the right to acquire and control the croft land where they live and work, and to acquire the interest of the tenant in tenanted land. Most crofting land is severely disadvantaged and so crofters have had to develop a sustainable, biodiverse, commons approach towards managing their lands.

Alongside crofting some also engage in small-scale fishing practices like creel fishing. This is a traditional method of sea fishing in the Scottish Highlands that usually uses creel pots to target specific species that are brought to the surface alive and undamaged. It is seen as a sustainable method of fishing due to having little environmental impact. It is usually carried

⁵ www.crofting.scotland.gov.uk/crofting-census

⁶ Agricultural holdings including crofting and small landholdings policies. Available online: www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/farmingrural/Rural/crofting-policy (Accessed on 18th September 2022)

out on small boats (under 10 meters) that are staffed manned by only one or two people and is represented by the Scottish Creel Fishermen's Federation. Sustain⁷, an alliance of over 100 non-profit national organisations working to develop and promote sustainable food production and consumption, actively promote creel fishing alongside agroecological farming practices.

As well as crofts there are over 800 collectively managed, communal grazing areas in the crofting counties that are accountable to the Crofting Commission⁸. This is often a substantial area of unimproved upland grazing land. These areas, along with related crofts, are known as crofting townships. The Crofting Commission has the capacity to change croft boundaries, distribute common grazings, enlarge townships, admit new crofters, and create new crofting land within a township. The size of each township usually depends on its quality of land, which can range from a few hundred to a few thousand hectares.

The Crofting Commission⁹ is under the responsibility of the Scottish Government but acts as an independent Non-Departmental Public Body. It was created through *The Crofting Reform (Scotland) Act 2010* and came into being on 1 April 2012, taking over from the Crofters' Commission. The Commission is made up of six commissioners elected by the crofting counties and three appointed by the Scottish Government, with one of the six commissioners appointed by Scottish Minister as the Convener. Its role is to: regulate and re-organise crofting, promote the interests of crofting, and conduct reviews of matters relating to crofting. Its wider aims are to "enhance the social, cultural, economic and environmental fabric of the crofting areas".

The Crofting Commission is also responsible for managing Scotland's Register of Crofts¹⁰ which is freely accessible to the public due to *The Crofters (Scotland) Act 1993*. This register contains basic information on each croft, although it does not contain boundary information or maps, but this can be found in the Registers of Scotland¹¹.

⁷ <https://www.sustainweb.org>

⁸ SB 10-01 Crofting Reform (Scotland) Bill. Available online:

<https://archive2021.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/15196.aspx> (Accessed on September 18th 2022)

⁹ <http://www.crofting.scotland.gov.uk/>

¹⁰ <http://www.crofting.scotland.gov.uk/register-of-crofts-roc>

¹¹ <http://www.crofts.ros.gov.uk/register/home>

2.3 Land Rights and Community Ownership

It is claimed that Scotland has the most unequal land ownership in the western world (Carroll 2019) with over 50% of the land owned by just 432 landowners. But, in the last 15 years there has been a significant increase in the amount of land under community ownership, rising from 1% to 3% of the total land area with over 550,000 acres of land under community ownership in 2020 (Picken & Nicolson 2019).

Land reform has been a key policy agenda for the Scottish government and, though they have faced criticism of their policies from community and social movement organisations trying to get greater access to land, there have been some significant pieces of legislation around this issue. These include:

The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015¹² that introduced a new community right to buy land that is abandoned, neglected, or causing harm to the environmental well-being of the community. This differs from the 2003 crofters right to buy in that it does not require a willing seller.

Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2016¹³ that has led to the establishment of the Scottish Land Commission and has increased regulations for landowners and brought new protections for tenant farmers against eviction.

This rise in community ownership has seen a network of community landowners emerge. In 2010, Community Land Scotland (a member of the International Land Coalition) was established to represent Scotland's community landowners. Its vision is for "community ownership of land and buildings to be a significant driver of sustainable development across the whole of Scotland". Its key objectives are listed as being:

- To be the representative voice for Scotland's community landowners

¹² Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015. Available online: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2015/6/contents/enacted> (accessed on 18 September 2022).

¹³ Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2016. Available online: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2016/18/contents/enacted> (accessed on 18 September 2022).

- To promote the sustainable development benefits of community landownership and encourage more community ownership of land and buildings throughout Scotland
- To facilitate networking, mutual support and knowledge exchange between community landowners
- To collaborate with other organisations to ensure that community landowners can access the support they need

2.4 An Increased Demand for Direct Sales from Small-Scale Farms

For many small-scale farmers, direct sales and short supply chains are a desired route to greater levels of economic autonomy for themselves and their communities. There has been an increase in these systems for a number of years (Hemken 2021). Many farmers have turned to them as they offer a more economically sustainable alternative to long supply chains in the face of falling prices, unpredictable trade arrangements and a loss of subsidies. Direct sales and short supply chains includes approaches such as farmers markets, farm open days, box schemes, Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs), pick your own, food networks and farm shops. These models mainly focus on increasing margins for food producers and creating food security in their communities through direct relationships with customers.

When the COVID-19 pandemic led to food shortages for supermarkets in early 2020 there was a sudden increase in demand for direct sales from small-scale farms. And while many changed their existing models to meet this demand, most were unable to expand sufficiently to do so (LWA 2020). As a result, instead of scaling up, they offered training for new growers to help meet the needs of their communities. The Food Foundation produced a report on the increase in direct box sales in April 2020. During the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic the number of veg boxes being sold each week by small-scale farmers more than doubled as a result of the pandemic (Wheeler 2020). The report goes on to state that over 80% of box schemes now had long waiting lists. A residual benefit of these schemes is that producers were able to adjust their approach to meet the needs of the most

vulnerable in their communities such as offering cheaper boxes to those struggling financially.

In this period, food producers saw a 30% increase in all models of direct food sales as a result of the pandemic. They have aimed to maintain this type of business by increasing their direct marketing through word of mouth, social media, an increased local presence and, where possible, food hubs and farmers markets (Hemken 2021).

2.5 Contemporary Social Movements Organisations Working with Crofters and Small-scale Food Producers

La Via Campesina (LVC) is an international peasant movement with member organisations in the UK whose aims are to defend peasant agriculture, land rights, and food sovereignty, and promote social justice. It was formed in 1992, when eight farm organisations from around the world came together to form the *Managua Declaration* (Rosset and Martínez-Torres 2012) in response to WTO's neo-liberal policies on agriculture. The *Managua Declaration* evolved through the strategies they had developed for countering the 'neo-liberal invasion in agriculture'. With food sovereignty as its motto, LVC identifies as a radical anti-capitalist and anti-corporate organisation that has built solidarity between the peasants of the North and South. It comprises 182 local and national organisations and claims to represent around 200 million farmers worldwide¹⁴. In the UK it has two member organisations, The Scottish Crofting Federation and The Land Workers' Alliance.

LVC utilises the transformative qualities of practices such as agroecology with the aim of achieving a radical alternative future. These practices, along with the desire for greater autonomy, have helped small-scale farming and peasant communities to flourish. LVC opposes industrial agriculture as something that is destroying social relations and nature, and sees itself as an autonomous, pluralist, multicultural movement. It has demands for social justice and identifies three struggles as part of its movement. They are:

- Defending food sovereignty, struggle for land and agrarian reforms

¹⁴ www.viacampesina.org/en/

- Promoting agroecology and defending local seeds
- Promoting peasant rights and the struggle against criminalisation of peasants

The Scottish Crofting Federation (SCF), a member of LVC, campaigns for crofters and the future of crofting with the aim of safeguarding and promoting the “rights, livelihoods, and culture of crofters and their communities”¹⁵. It is a charity and independent NGO whose participatory organisational structure includes area and regional branches. They work at a grassroots level and campaign on behalf of its members at local, national, and international levels. The SCF has five aims for crofting: to protect heritable tenure; enable viability; encourage new entrants; protect the arable in-bye; and create defined boundaries.

The Land Workers’ Alliance (LWA), also a member of LVC, is a union of land-based workers in the UK that sets out a vision for “a food and land-use system based on agroecology, food sovereignty, land rights, and sustainable forestry that furthers social and environmental justice”.¹⁶ It also works with its members in a participatory approach through area and regional branches. Sharing the same vision of agroecology, food sovereignty, land rights, and sustainable forestry as LVC, it has the explicit aim of putting power “back in the hands of producers and communities rather than supermarkets and industrial processors”. It has established ‘farmer-to-farmer’ groups in the UK and developed political training for movement building to help communities organise politically and collectively at a local level.

All of these groups share the aim of promoting agroecology, and participated in the Nyeleni Forum on Food Sovereignty in Mali in 2015. At this event, small-scale farmers from across the world created the Agroecology Declaration. This advocates knowledge sharing through exchanges between generations and across different traditions (Butterly 2019). This aims to put the communal knowledge of land-based workers at its centre and bears a strong resemblance to LVCs *diálogo de saberes*. It is used as a method for building alliances between social movements and farming networks, and builds on approaches to learning that peasants, indigenous communities and farmers have developed historically to promote collective learning and mutual understanding.

¹⁵ www.crofting.org

¹⁶ www.landworkersalliance.org.uk

As has already been mentioned, many crofters and small-scale farmers in Scotland also still engage in traditional fishing practices such as creel fishing. Creel fishers are represented by a national trade association called Scottish Creel Fisherman's Federation (SCFF) which aims to represent creel fishers at a national level and influence policy decisions affecting them. It is made up of ten local associations in Scotland and so, while not working to the same aims as SCF and TLA, it does have a similar organisational structure and the practices they support bring similar benefits.

Alongside SCF and LWA there are numerous other grassroots organisations in the UK that are supporting agroecology in this context: the Organic Growers Alliance, the Community Supported Agriculture Network, the Soil Association, The Biodynamic Agriculture College, The Community Food Growers Network, The Kindling Trust, Organiclea, Biodynamic Agriculture College and Nourish Scotland. These groups have developed a range of agroecological educational processes and programmes with the aim of building a movement. These include: Farmer to Farmer exchange groups; a traineeship network; mentoring programmes; a farm start network; accredited on-farm training; farm hacks, teaching days and skill shares; and seed sovereignty.

2.6 Summary

This chapter has given a brief depiction of the phenomenon at the heart of this thesis. Crofting is a long-established and rather unusual form of ownership of rural land, which encourages community engagement in agriculture for subsistence and for small-scale sales. While the legal form reflects a nineteenth century conflict between land owners and peasants, today crofts have become increasingly popular and are shaped in response to global crises of, first, finance, and then public health.

Crofting appears to offer potential for the production of subsistence needs and a community-centred way of life that is an alternative to the dominant patterns of production in 21st Century global capitalism, with autonomy from the power of capital. This thesis examines the characteristics of this alternative to explore the degree to which it does, in fact, offer an autonomous, sustainable mode of social reproduction with transformative potential. To address such questions, we will need - as presented in the next chapter - a

theoretical approach to capitalism that is able to highlight the transformative potential of alternatives that exist within the wider capitalist system.

3. An Alternative to Capitalism

A revolution that does not produce a new space has not realized its full potential; indeed, it has failed in that it has not changed life itself, but has merely changed ideological superstructures, institutions or political apparatuses. A social transformation, to be truly revolutionary in character, must manifest a creative capacity in its effects on daily life, on language and on space (Lefebvre 1974:54)

This chapter will develop an understanding of an alternative to capitalism in the context of small-scale food producers. This will be used to guide any understanding of what transformation may be trying to achieve that will underpin the analysis during the empirical chapters. This will be drawn from David Harvey and John Holloway using their analysis of capitalism and strategies for social transformation in response to social, ecological, and economic crises. The chapter will start with an exploration of an alternative to capitalism described by David Harvey and John Holloway that is relevant to this research. Both Harvey and Holloway define this through an alternative relationship to time and space. The chapter will then consider what transformation might look like in the context of small-scale farming. It will analyse the difference between peasant-like farming practices and capitalist agriculture, how capitalist agriculture appears, and how it is reproduced. It will consider the social, ethical and economic differences between the two approaches and the struggle between them. It will then turn to the methods that can be employed to resist and reverse the reproduction of capitalist social relations.

3.1 Transformation and an Alternative

This section will develop a theoretical underpinning to the thesis through the works of David Harvey and John Holloway. It will do this firstly by establishing the characteristics and consequences of capitalism's relationship to time and space, its evolution, and the purpose this serves. It will then look at alternative relationships to time and space with an emphasis on what Harvey calls rootedness which is present amongst small-scale and peasant-like farming communities. Building on this, the section will focus on the construction of place in capitalism and its alternative, and how this works to reproduce each system. The chapter

moves on to consider the struggle between both approaches, their impacts on one another, and what this means for their communities. Finally, it looks at the nature of the strategies employed by small-scale farming communities to resist the pressures to transition to capitalist modes of production and to reverse this process where it has already happened. Finally, it will consider the potential for these strategies to reproduce an alternative.

In *Justice, Nature & the Geography of Difference*, David Harvey explores how, during the transition from feudalism to capitalism, concepts of space and time changed in order to serve a new set of social principles that had very little in common with how they were perceived in earlier periods. This included an increased use of hours, minutes, and seconds to meet a growing demand for efficiency, and the refinement of spatial measurements for cartography to fulfil the needs of trade and commerce in the assertion of property and territorial rights (Harvey 1996). The compression of time and space is enabled by these new concepts, and has helped expand the scale of production and consumption. Compressing distances, as Harvey points out, does not mean we understand more or are able to appreciate or appropriate a 'thing' or 'person' properly. What it means is that relations are alienated and commodified. Objectified in this way, transport and communications infrastructure has increased the scale of interaction that can now span the planet. But the result of this is that these relations are increasingly mediated rather than immediate.

Compression of time and space does not make things that are distant present: it does not make us close. Indeed, it can even make us less connected and further apart. These shifts in social relations are a direct result of the commodification that attempts to pervade all things (Harvey 1996). So, whilst the world may seem smaller, and the things and places in it may seem nearer when we are buying produce that has arrived from a place that we have never been to ourselves, we are further away from being able to know them. This extends to being able to understand the implications of our relationship with them or, indeed, our responsibility to them.

Due to these processes that enable consumption, we have no sense of the reality from which the things we consume come from. Consider the journey much our food takes to get to us. Long food supply chains mean we consume items from all across the globe. These distances mean that we understand little of how our food came into being, how it was

distributed to the supermarkets and shops that supply us, the social and environmental impact of their existence as produce, or of the various relationships these items have had through time and space as they are transported to us. We know them merely at the end of their journey to us and only understand them in this moment. Our responsibility to them is only at the point of arrival, alienated. Any understanding of them outside of this moment is mediated, controlled and often manipulated.

Harvey deftly redefines the Heideggerian concept of 'dwelling' to offer it as an alternative relationship to time and space, where dwelling is, instead, understood as the capacity to create unity between people and with things. While many, such as Faye, Watson, and Golsan (2006), have rejected Heidegger's work due to his support for Nazism, and have critiqued the Nazi foundations of his work, here, Harvey reappropriates the concept of dwelling in an approach not dissimilar to Levinas. Levinas rejects Heidegger's Cartesian dualism and subsequent existential crisis through his assertion that consciousness is incarnated in the material world, "the subject contemplating a world presupposes the event of dwelling" (Levinas 1971:153).

For Harvey, the absence of dwelling in the modern world has led to many people becoming rootless. "If we lose the capacity to dwell then we lose our roots and find ourselves cut off from all sources of spiritual nourishment" (Harvey 1996:301). An alternative must seek to recover from this loss and re-establish meaningful roots through place construction. This transformation, it is suggested, takes place through unmediated relationships, that bears resemblance to the Levinasian concept of *proximity* where sensibility, the ability to sense things, binds us to others before our own bodies. Here, the sensible "binds the node of incarnation into a plot larger than the appreciation of self." This sensibility signifies a "denouement of being", but also contains "a passage to the physicochemical-physiological meanings of the body" which consequently signifies, "in nourishing, clothing, lodging, in maternal relations, in which matter shows itself for the first time in its materiality" (Levinas 1980:77). This sensibility through proximity is lost to our alienation and the commodification of social relations and its return is only possible through a reversal of this process. This is the transformation that is sought. A reconnection, a sense-able life, where the impact of our

existence is experienced more directly. To experience things in and through time and space rather than through mediation.

Dwelling, in this sense, is where “place experiences are necessarily time-deepened and memory-qualified” and “love of place and the earth are scarcely sentimental extras to be indulged only when all technical and material problems have been resolved. They are part of being in the world and prior, therefore, to all technical matters” (Relph 1989:26-29 [as cited in Harvey 1996]). This question of rootedness through place experiences is, for Harvey, a question of authenticity. He suggests that this question of authenticity is a particularly modern problem. “Only as modern industrialisation separates us from the process of production and we encounter the environment as a finished commodity does it emerge” (Harvey 1996:301). Contemporary placemaking attempts to address this alienation through deliberate and conscious efforts to either reconstruct or preserve places artificially through invented traditions, commercialised heritage culture, and visitor attractions which only serve to commodify relations further. The places we visit, we do so because of an identity constructed to encourage us, often bears little resemblance to the identity of the place as understood by its residents. As we will see in chapters 6 and 9 this is particularly relevant in The Highlands where the area is being marketed as a romantic, barren and isolated place for tourists to explore that makes no reference to the communities that live there.

The destruction of rootedness and the authenticity of dwelling by the “sheer organisational power and depth of penetration of the market” needs a response that “constructs a politics of place which is held up as the political way forward to the promised land of an authentic existence” (Harvey 1996:302). Harvey’s demand is that this political vision must be based on an understanding of rootedness and an alternative that resists or rejects any “simple capitalist (or modernist) logic of place construction.” This vision, that responds to the spread of market forces into every aspect of social life and the increase of time-space compression, is, he claims, present among many radical and ecological movements. These movements demand more than a further regulated market, they demand a retreat of the market through their desire for an unalienated alternative.

3.2 The Production of Space

Henri Lefebvre offers some insight into what this might look like through his analysis of a peasant dwelling in *The Production of Space*. Lefebvre explores the manner in which new forms are introduced to dominate space, such as concrete, steel and glass in the shape of transport infrastructure and industrial landscapes. These spaces contain and conceal social relations that are reified under capitalism. In these dominated spaces all relations transformed in this way are mediated by technology and practice and are usually closed, sterilized and emptied out (Lefebvre 1974). According to Lefebvre, the peasant dwelling offers an alternative where social relations belong to a particular site. Though still signified as a 'type' this place acts as an intermediary between work and product that is both natural and cultural, immediate and mediated, in the same way as time and the products that are found there.

When dominated by capital these spaces begin to create social relations that reproduce itself. In *The Limits to Capital*, David Harvey looks at how traditional peasant-based societies are converted into "realms of formal rather than real subsumption under capital" through, though subtle differences exist from site to site, a framework of primitive accumulation (Harvey 1982:437). Primitive accumulation is initially understood as the, often violent, enclosures of common lands and its entry into private ownership for wealthy landowners to begin the process of capital accumulation, usually through capitalist agriculture (Harvey 2003:179).

A more nuanced understanding of it has developed, that goes beyond enclosures of common lands, showing how peripheral areas become tied to exploitative relationships with imperial centres (Subrahmanyam 2006). This emerges from the "takeover of territory, appropriation of material resources, exploitation of labour and interference with political and cultural structures of another territory or nation," (Loomba 2005:11). This restructuring of economies in peripheral areas locks them into dependencies through politico-legal formations creating a unified yet heterogeneous system. This process does not necessarily involve the dispossession of producers and the accumulation of land as capital but forces producers into dependencies upon market logic and an imperative to generate surplus value as a means of securing their own subsistence. This transformation from "independent

producer to contract farmer to labourer involves rapid rural proletarianization” (Hall 2011:206). In this form of capitalist transformation people are not driven from their land but become displaced socioeconomically through appropriation (Moore 2015:175). Through this their livelihoods become increasingly precarious “due to the loss or diminution of entitlements and resources” (Ince 2014:126). With this, primitive accumulation involves both spatial and socioeconomic displacement of its residents that leads to the creation of a working class who are dependent on the commodification of their labour to meet their own subsistence needs.

In what Marx calls formal subsumption (Marx 1973), the first stages of capitalism being established involves labour processes continuing as before. Here though, capital monopolises the means of production and workers’ means of subsistence, compelling the worker to engage in wage-labour, and enables capital accumulation. Capitalism cannot develop through these existing processes so transforms social relations until they become entirely infected with the needs and nature of capital reproduction, which he calls “real subsumption”. Many peasant and small-scale farming communities exist in this first stage of formal subsumption where the struggle is to gain/regain sustainable access to land to meet their subsistence needs.

In the Scottish Highlands, primitive accumulation was realised during the Highland Clearances (See chapter 6). But this is not as clear an example of primitive accumulation as can be seen elsewhere due to the existing relationship the communities of the Highlands had with England and the lowlands of Scotland where capitalism already dominated economic relations. Despite this, Marx makes reference to The Clearances as an example of what primitive accumulation looks like in *The Expropriation of the Agricultural Population from the Land* in Capital Volume 1. The Clearances were not essential to the establishment of capitalism in Britain (Davidson 2001) but they did exist to bring capitalism into the Highlands. The peripheral nature of the Highlands and its relative insignificance in the establishment of capitalism in Britain had long delayed its introduction. As a result, it happened at a slightly different stage in the development of capitalism than was experienced in the rest of Britain. It still involved enclosures of common lands and enforced migrations, but, as some have suggested (McFadyen 2019), had more in common with the

colonial experience of the introduction of capitalism than was experienced by rural communities in England and Western Europe.

This is significant to this research for a variety of reasons. Firstly, The Highlands peripheral nature still exists today and, as this research will show, the conditions this creates means that capitalism is less developed and its processes less present than in other areas of the UK. We will see how in many instances real subsumption has not taken place. Of how the land rights struggles that have happened in the context of formal subsumption have taken some communities into a different relationship where capital no longer completely monopolises the means of subsistence, though certain capitalist social relations such as private property still exist. This offers an interesting understanding of the both the nature of capitalism (as a process that affects social relations) and its development. It will also offer insights into some of the reasons for the relative success of its population to resist its processes and manage to maintain the means of their own subsistence (see chapter 8). Why is it that in these peripheral spaces the resistance to the advance of capitalism has been more effective and what does this tell us about the strategies that have been, and still need to be, employed to achieve this? If the purpose of those employing these strategies is to peel back market forces to reveal an unalienated alternative, how should they act and how can their actions be sustainable in the face of the dependencies that are forced upon us all?

The delayed introduction of capitalism in the Highlands led to debates amongst socialist scholars about the necessity of The Highland Clearance, as without primitive accumulation there can be no working class movement. But, as Davidson (2001) points out, the working class movement had already begun in Scotland at the time of The Clearances. Perhaps more significantly though, is that the need for a working class movement is outweighed by a need to have access to the means of their own subsistence. Indeed, John Holloway (as we will see below), frames this struggle towards gaining or maintaining control over the means of producing their own subsistence, through resisting reification, as being the direction of this movement. Holloway frames it as a movement away from being working class, away from the subjugation this entails. Any struggle against the conditions of being working class is also against the conditions created by capitalism, and is, then, a movement against capitalism.

This can only be realised by breaking the dependencies created by primitive accumulation. This is what transformation must look like.

The reasons behind the spatial expansion of capitalist commodity relations in the Scottish Highlands were largely due to the demands of the cotton industries that were emerging in northern England (see chapter 6) and had some parallels with colonial expansions. Here, primitive accumulation was used as a tool for the spatial expansion of capitalist commodity relations. Even early farming colonists were subjected to it as, despite taking their own capital with them, the main object of their work was to produce their own subsistence. Due to this, many were seen as competitors of farmers who did produce capitalistically and were pressured out of their practices.

Spatial expansions only occur if the necessary infrastructure is in place to allow for the compression of space by time (Harvey 1982:373-439). This infrastructure leads to 'outer transformations' that expand production and consumption and often has the aim of resolving internal crises. But their result is to merely transfer internal contradictions to peripheral spaces as, in the long run, there is no resolution to the internal contradictions of capitalism (Harvey 1985:60). For Harvey, an internal transformation that shifts society away from accumulation for accumulation's sake is the only solution. These external, peripheral, places are often in a state of flux between capitalism and its alternatives. Here, where in some instances alternative economic methods are still being practiced, these places are more vulnerable to a transformation away from capitalism.

At this point Harvey turns to *Capital, Vol. 1* to explore the struggle between these two opposing systems as capital attempts to remove, by force, any alternative social formation that does not produce for the benefit of the capitalist. "There the capitalist regime everywhere comes into collision with the resistance of the producer, who, as owner of his own conditions of labour, employs that labour to enrich himself, instead of the capitalist" (Marx 1967:765 [as cited in Harvey 1982]). Even in these 'outer transformations' labour is subjugated to capital when it moves in. This rests on primitive accumulation and the expropriation of the peasant labourer. Until this happens, and the labourer still possesses their means of production and is able to produce his own subsistence, "capitalist accumulation and the capitalist mode of production are impossible" (Harvey 1982:413).

John Holloway's analysis of the transformative qualities of the Zapatista movement shares this idea of what resistance to the capitalist mode of production looks like in this context. He identifies how capital is reproduced through the "transformation of 'doing' into labour, the simultaneous de-subjectification of the subject, the dehumanisation of humanity" (Holloway 2002:148). This transformation is commodification, it objectifies our subjectivity. It turns our subjective doing into objectified labour so that it can be sold and surplus value can be extracted to enrich the capitalist instead of ourselves. Labour, in this sense, is a mode of existence that is contradictory in that the potential for resistance to the objectification that creates it, is inherent in the 'doing' that is being commodified. Labour's most powerful and transformative tool, for example, is its ability to strike. But it is always at risk of being 'starved out' if it is not able to produce its own subsistence. This foundational contradiction is the driver of capitalism and a primary source of its crises. It also relates to the formation of a working class, and, for Holloway, the direction of a working class movement.

To say that doing exists as labour means that it exists also as anti-labour. To say that humanity exists as subordination means that it exists also as insubordination. The production of class is the suppression (and reproduction) of insubordination. Exploitation is the suppression (and reproduction) of insubordinate creativity. The suppression of creativity does not just take place in the process of production, as usually understood, but in the whole separating of doing and done that constitutes capitalist society. (Holloway 2002:149)

3.3 Summary

According to Holloway, crisis is not a collapse to be exploited but the, often unintended, reassertion of subjectivity and humanity. This desire of capital to capture all human activity includes attempting to recapture any activity that resists this commodification through co-option and, to a lesser extent, appropriation. It is this production and reproduction of labour through the commodification of social relations that starts with primitive accumulation and the subsequent control over the means of survival, that sustains capitalism. This was through the enclosures of lands that were used by people for the subsistence and the subsequent forced migration of its residents and the resulting creation of a working class. Capital becomes more extreme in its efforts to reproduce itself in the face of resistance.

“More and more, it drives us to flee. But flight seems hopeless, unless it is more than flight. The scream of refusal must also be a reaffirmation of doing, an emancipation of power-to” (Holloway 2002:208). Re-socialising means of survival is a reassertion of subjectivity against its objectification and of ‘doing’ against its reification. It needs to resist commodification through strategies that not only resist but also reproduce alternatives to capitalist social relations. For, in the end, a workers’ right to withdraw their labour may be their most transformative tool, but they will always be unable to sustain this if they have no other means of providing their own subsistence. As we will see in chapters 8 and 9, the various strategies employed by small-scale farming communities in Scotland and the appearance of gift economies appear to work in this way.

Whilst Harvey and Holloway identify alternatives and processes of social transformation, these tend to be abstract and unstructured. For this reason, I will turn to Erik Olin Wright to develop a clearer structure to this process. Harvey and Holloway focus on a more holistic perspective on transformation, whilst Wright considers this through four separate stages - social reproduction, gaps and contradictions, unintended change, and transformative strategies. Much of Harvey and Holloway’s discussions on social transformation can be distilled to these elements though not always explicitly. With this in mind the next chapter will look at Erik Olin Wright’s four theories of transformation in more detail and develop an understanding of them that is relevant to this research.

4. Understanding Social Transformation in Small-scale Farming Communities

This chapter develops an understanding of what social transformation might mean for small-scale farming communities and provides a review of literature that exists in relation to the transformative qualities of communities struggling for subsistence and autonomy in the context of the crises of capitalism. It has been structured through four sections: theories of transformation; gaps, contradictions and unintended change; transformative strategies of small-scale food producers; and social reproduction and its relationship to small-scale farming.

The first section examines Erik Olin Wright's four theories of transformation (Wright 2010) to develop an understanding of each component part so they can be applicable to small-scale farming practices. The second section looks at unintended trajectories of change that are emerging from the crises of capital and how this relates to small-scale food producers or peasant communities. It will examine the extent to which people have been entering small-scale farming and peasant agriculture as a response to the crises of capitalism, and the ways in which they have achieved greater autonomy. The third section will look at the transformative strategies employed by small-scale food producers, such as political agroecology, land sovereignty, food sovereignty, and radical approaches to community development and education. It will look at both global and European iterations of these strategies and consider how they relate to small-scale food producers in Scotland. The fourth section will look at social reproduction and its relationship to small-scale food producers. Its focus will be on the crisis in the reproduction of capital as it is occurring amongst small-scale food producers and their communities. It will consider co-option and techniques for the resistance to co-option and will also look at how certain practices within small-scale agriculture appear to be reproducing an alternative economy.

Throughout, the chapter will consider the relationship between Scottish crofting and examples of small-scale farming and peasant agriculture from around the globe. As former SCF Parliamentary Spokesman, Norman Leask, claimed, crofting needs to be understood

both in its own local context and as a part of a more global set of demands relating to small-scale food production.

The struggle for the rights of the small-scale food producers, or peasants, is something going on all around the world and is something everyone should be concerned about. Crofters are part of this struggle, striving to get a fair deal for their efforts and way of life. Peasants throughout the world are the backbone of rural economies and communities and today is their day. (Leask 2009)

There are two SMOs that work with Scottish crofters, The Land Workers' Alliance (LWA) and The Scottish Crofting Federation (SCF), that are members of the global peasant movement La Via Campesina (LVC). These organisations work with crofters and utilise transformative strategies such as political agroecology and food sovereignty and help communities gain subsistence, build greater autonomy, and develop alternative economic practices that offer greater environmental responsibility.

4.1 Theories of Transformation

In *Real Utopias*, Erik Olin Wright develops four theories of social transformation. Whilst this research does not aim to question if practices such as Scottish crofting are a 'real utopia', its aims will be shaped by the theoretical structure developed by Wright to understand social transformation. These will then be employed in the context of small-scale farming in Scotland.

This approach to 'real utopias' uses this structure as blueprint for analysing transformations rather than constructing 'vague utopian fantasies' (Wright 2010). Additionally, the term real utopia is possibly not appropriate to the context explored here. Many participants took issue with the term as it is often associated with the marketing of these areas as tourist destinations that construct identities, bearing little resemblance to the experiences of crofters expressed during this research. For them, utopian is something romantic, ideal, unrealistic, bountiful and perfect. In the Highlands people talk about their difficult and imperfect environments and their perpetual endeavour and struggle to maintain what they have. They are guided by their lived experience rather than ideals. Indeed, as we will see

later in the thesis, it is their proximity to this real environment and their struggle to maintain what they have, that reproduces the alternative moral economies that exist there (see chapter 9).

This chapter uses ideas such as the compression of time and space, proximity, and the production of space that were explored in the previous chapter to develop an understanding of the component parts of Erik Olin Wright's Theory of Transformation so that it will be applicable to small-scale farming practices. Wright's aim in *Real Utopias* is to "provide empirical and theoretical grounding for radical democratic egalitarian visions of an alternative social world" (Wright 2010:4). He investigates various institutions and social relations that could advance democratic egalitarian goals associated with socialism through examples such as: Participatory Budgeting, Wikipedia, The Mondragon Worker-Owned Cooperatives, and Unconditional Basic Income, to develop a theory of social transformation.

Though clearly empowering, on closer examination these examples appear to still reproduce capitalism. Participatory budgets were a success in Port Alegre for a period, with up to 20,000 people engaged in it. It was a model that cities around the world tried to replicate with little success. This was mainly due to the fact that they only work under pre-existing rules and regulations that restricted their possibilities at best, and made certain decisions illegal at worst (Kingston 2007). More significantly to this research is that participatory budgets are established to manage the tax take of an existing economy more effectively, rather than creating or maintaining an alternative. Greater control over these budgets is a significant gain for the communities involved as it redistributes accumulated wealth more equitably. But, as with worker owned co-operatives, it still operates within the existing, though more managed, economic system. As a result, it is questionable that these examples are transformative towards an alternative system. This definition of transformation as a movement away from dependency on the capitalist economy will be applied throughout but will be particularly pertinent in chapters 8 and 9. It will use as a starting point the four central components to Wright's theory of social transformation. They are:

- (1). *A theory of social reproduction.*
- (2). *A theory of the gaps and contradictions within the process of reproduction.*
- (3). *A theory of the underlying dynamics and trajectory of unintended social change.*

(4). A theory of collective actors, strategies, and struggles.

With social reproduction, Wright means a theory of the interconnected mechanisms which block or contain any challenge to the continuation of capital accumulation. Within this there are gaps and contradictions that when exposed can lead to crises and open up spaces for alternatives to emerge. Both social reproduction and its gaps and contradictions have developed since the introduction of capitalism on a dynamic trajectory of unintended social change. This trajectory is an unintended by-product of people pursuing their goals within the structure of capitalist social relations. A coherent account of these dynamic tendencies inside of capitalism and how they are likely to evolve over time is clearly crucial when trying to develop transformative strategies as they will help identify any obstacles and opportunities. Social movements, at times, try to harness these by utilising transformative strategies to realise more egalitarian alternatives (Wright 2010), but, according to Wright, ultimately these are not realised as the processes of social reproduction draws people back into a system of dependency and exploitation.

Wright's diagnosis leaves us with an overbearing sense of capitalism's pervasiveness. As a result, it should be no surprise that the examples that he explores do not appear to offer alternatives, and in fact appear out of an attempt to reform it. However, if we follow his process and consider the question – during crises, what are these gaps that appear in the contradictions of social reproduction? – the sequence reveals a completely different movement to it. If, rather than gaps, we think of them as openings to an alternative that already exists and through which we are drawn during crises, we start to see capitalism as a veil over an alternative way of living. Think of the experiences in Greece after the financial crisis of 2008 when the response to the crisis, and the subsequent rise of unemployment, was to turn to subsistence agriculture as a means of survival. This is not an absence of anything, it is a withdrawal of capitalism that revealed an alternative to it out of people's need for subsistence. The rise of direct sales during the COVID-19 pandemic followed a similar movement (see chapter 7). In this instance though, the withdrawal of capitalism is less noticeable as social relations are still subjected to commodification, just not to the same degree and with less extraction, if any, of surplus value.

Suddenly, in these moments of crisis, capitalist social relations become less present and alienation starts to be reversed. In these gaps, what we see is not an absence of anything, merely an absence of capitalism. That is not an absence of capitalism from all elements of social life, only some. What we are seeing here, rather than crises simply being a weakness to be exploited or something that will potentially leave a void in the absence of what was previously reproduced, is an alternative being revealed from behind the veil of capitalism. An alternative that is being produced or, perhaps, reproduced. A different set of ideals shaped by the need for subsistence and a desire for autonomy where relations are understood more through proximity rather than mediation. A set of ideals where access to land, work and markets are increasingly addressed by non-monetary ties limiting the capacity for the reproduction of capital to penetrate these communities. A set of ideals where dependencies are not hierarchical but are upon one another and upon a shared environment. For van der Ploeg (2010) it is this type of resistance that is driving different forms of endogenous rural development in Europe.

With this in mind, if the order in which Wright's four components are addressed is changed, the sequence becomes more coherent as way of analysing transformation towards an alternative. It should start with emphasis on how gaps occur and finish by considering how they are either closed, maintained, or even increased. To do this we must begin with the context in which crises occur by analysing the trajectory of unintended change caused by the introduction of capitalism. This should be followed with an analysis of the gaps and contradictions in social reproduction that these crises reveal. Next, we examine the potential of strategies to realise an alternative. Finally, we finish by placing emphasis on the significance of social reproduction for maintaining capitalism and the potential for reproducing an alternative. The point here is that the need for transformation is surely a response to the trajectory of capitalism and its crises. This is especially so if, according to Wright, social reproduction is so pervasive that the only possibility of change for any deliberate strategies is when gaps and contradictions are exposed during crises. If this is so, then strategies must be understood through their relationship to these crises and must move in an alternative trajectory to capitalism and in a manner that maintains and even increases these gaps. To understand them in this way, it makes sense to consider strategies subsequently to our analysis of crises. Finally, how these strategies resist the power of

capitalism to reproduce itself is essential for understanding their sustainability. Significantly, their ability to reveal, reproduce or maintain the presence of an alternative, offers a movement in a different direction to the one desired by capital. This should be their entire purpose. It is important then to end on this point as it is in this analysis that we can see if there are any signs of a divergence. This is the new sequence for these four theories:

- (1). *A theory of the underlying dynamics and trajectory of unintended social change.*
- (2). *A theory of the gaps and contradictions within the process of reproduction.*
- (3). *A theory of collective actors, strategies, and struggles.*
- (4). *A theory of social reproduction.*

Using this adaptation as a framework I will now develop an understanding of each component through some of the ideas explored in the last chapter. This chapter will also identify and assess a range of examples where transformative strategies are being employed to enable small-scale farming communities to achieve greater autonomy through the context of each component. It will raise the question of if the demand for autonomy and self-subsistence, and the strategies used to meet this (land sovereignty, food sovereignty, political agroecology) reproduces an alternative. It will do this by looking at how these strategies are being employed and what is driving the desire to achieve greater autonomy.

4.2 Gaps, Contradictions and Unintended Change

This section looks at how the crises of capital are exposing gaps and contradictions that are changing the way communities view peasant-like farming practices. It considers how these crises are leading to significant increases in the number of small-scale farms, which are securing the autonomy of families and individuals through greater self-provisioning with practices that are more ecologically responsible.

Even when the reproduction of capital is so pervasive that any act of resistance seems to merely reinforce its systems of domination, the failures of capital still create spaces for new possibilities. Here social transformation can only happen as the result of unintended trajectories of change with no guarantee of emancipation (Wright 2010). In this context the

search for gaps and contradictions is central to any emancipatory agenda to, in the very least, shape the direction of change itself.

The central thrust of historical materialism is to propose a systematic account of capitalism along a trajectory of unintended social change (Wright 2010). It is desirable for any emancipatory project to understand how the obstacles and opportunities in front of it are likely to develop over time. This trajectory, not willed by anyone, is a by-product of the existing structure of social relations that could helpfully give any emancipatory movement a sense of how its obstacles and opportunities evolve over time. Any plausible process of transformation must be thought of over a long period of time. Wright demonstrates the challenge of this, given our limited ability to create scientifically credible knowledge about social conditions in the distant future. There are however knowledges, such as models for the economic impact of climate change, that are proving to be the exception to this rule.

According to Wright, a theory of social transformation must also examine the gaps and contradictions in the process of social reproduction, its failures, and the way it creates openings where new possibilities can be realised. There are views of social reproduction, where domination is so pervasive and coherent that any act of resistance merely reinforces the system of control. Here there is little possibility for strategies of social transformation, as change can only happen as a result of crises with no guarantee of emancipation. In this context the search for the gaps and contradictions that lead to crises is central to any emancipatory agenda to, in the very least, understand the direction of change itself. We will now look at some examples of how these crises, contradictions and unintended change have occurred in small-scale farming communities.

Levidow (2015) uses the *food regime* concept to analyse transitions from industrial corporate farming during crises to alternative variations with greening strategies that are destabilising corporate power. Analysing two policy initiatives, the bioeconomy and the sustainable intensification agenda, he considers the roles of agroecological practices in elaborating and/or resisting the corporate-environmental regime. He assesses the way capital accumulation is produced and reproduced within food production in the context of historical contradictions and how this can lead to crisis, transformation and transition. He critiques these crises as being created by industrial monoculture systems incentivised by

profit that are undermining farmers knowledge and making them dependent on external inputs that distances consumers from producers.

Holt-Gimenez (2009) looks at the stubborn persistence of the peasantry and its relationship to these food crises. Whether it's new family farms continually replacing those lost through industrialisation, or because farming is the only option for much of the world's poor, the numbers in the Global South have remained stable for the last forty years. The peasant condition is characterized by the constant struggle to build autonomy in a world characterized by dependency and deprivation (van der Ploeg 2008). This autonomy forms a co-production of man and nature where patterns of cooperation regulate and strengthen these interrelations. Agroecology, a farming practice promoted by SCF and LWA, enables the strengthening of their resource base so they can be freed from input and credit markets. This, along with defending and recapturing peasant territories through land reform, land occupations, or other mechanisms, forms what van der Ploeg (2008) calls repeasantization. In making a distinction between the wasteland of agribusiness and the ecologically farmed land recovered by peasants, they are also re-peasanting territories.

Small-scale farming in Scotland reflects this wider process of unintended change in food production that has been summarised by van der Ploeg (2009) as repeasantization. This process is driven by the ecological crisis and caused by the industrialisation and financialisation of agriculture. Capital is reproduced by forcing dependencies on capitalistic food systems but ecological crises force farmers to consider the sustainability of industrialised farming practices. The high level of financialisation of both agricultural production and its supply chains are the cause of the disconnection between production, processing, distribution and consumption of food experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic that, in some ways, lead to these ecological crises (van der Ploeg 2020). Here, financial capital acts as a paralysing force. This was particularly the case during the pandemic. In this context strategies such as food sovereignty, political agroecology and land sovereignty emerge (see chapter 8).

Based on both economic and ecological exchange, the more farming is grounded on ecological capital, typical of agroecology, the lower the input costs will be. This leads to greater levels of autonomy. Additionally, comparative research in seven European countries

showed that sixty percent of farmers are engaged in increased levels of self-provisioning to reduce costs (van der Ploeg, 2010). Whilst this builds autonomy, scaling up tightens dependency. Economies of scale mean more land must be bought (or rented) and ceases to be a source of autonomy; as when land is converted into a commodity it becomes a peasant's main collateral for credit and this risks them losing their land.

The costs of fertile lands mean that often small-scale farms are in remote and inhospitable areas unattractive to industrial farms. This means they are often more resilient and capable of providing food security (van der Ploeg 2014). The mixed cropping of these farms achieves higher levels of land productivity than the monocultures of capitalist farms. Unlike capitalist agriculture, where all resources are commodified, peasant agriculture is grounded on low levels of commoditisation due to being smaller in scale and of a different internal logic. These are typical of the experiences of crofters who, historically, have only had access to some of the most remote and inhospitable lands in the UK.

Van der Ploeg develops the concept of repeasantization through the contradiction between use value and exchange value. He looks at how the squeeze on use values within farming, that have occurred over the last 40 years, has led to three seemingly unintended developments; industrialisation, deactivation, and repeasantization. This squeeze causes downward pressures on local and regional food production systems that leads to increased marginalisation and dependency and triggers repeasantization. According to van der Ploeg (2019:112) repeasantization is the "fight for autonomy and survival in a context of deprivation and dependency". This can be seen in Scotland with the increase in demand for crofts and community land ownership. Repeasantization involves an increase in numbers from both outside of agriculture and through the conversion of entrepreneurial farmers into peasants. It also involves an increase in financial autonomy and a distancing from markets.

Van der Ploeg (2010:01) examines the re-emergence of the peasantry, arguing that "farming is increasingly being restructured in a peasant-like way". As a result of economic crises "relatively small scale, peasant-like farms are generating incomes that are often superior to those of far larger, entrepreneurial farms". This has been developing for a long time and moves farmers "away from the entrepreneurial trajectory and into the re-creation of a peasant trajectory".

Far from being a remnant of the past, peasant agriculture offers sturdy and sustainable growth (van der Ploeg 2014). Developing out of a desire for emancipation that is induced among the peasantries by the poverty and insecurity caused by capital, peasant agriculture demands strategies to effectively counter it. Augmenting production, increasing resilience and re-inventing themselves are all responses to crises caused by capital. The effects of practices such as extraction and land grabbing are countered through the logic of securing subsistence rather than maximizing returns, and disassembling their resource base is countered by rebuilding agriculture with nature.

When market conditions fluctuate, and the income from crops drop relative to the value of production of subsistence, peasant families will shift their land use towards subsistence crops (Sesia 2003). This struggle for autonomy is not only a clear step towards repeasantization it is increasingly leading to the recreation of peasant territories. That this repeasanting occurs in the context of market-driven exclusion and increased debt is why groups such as The Zero, Nourish Scotland and The Land Workers' Alliance have emerged (van der Ploeg 2008, 2010).

Taking all this into account it can be seen how the people involved redefine themselves, their activities, and their social relations and, in turn, reshape the way food is produced, processed, distributed and consumed (van der Ploeg 2016). This methodological shift that appears in the interstices of social reproduction can lead to solutions that differ radically from market led paradigms, where markets are arenas grounded in their own territory rather than abstract systems. An analysis of interstices shows why dominant food systems create new agri-food economies. Globalization and de-regulation have caused structural holes; "the framing of food, the enlargement of value chains (both geographically and economically), a fear of renewal, a re-ordering of the social organisation of time and space (that enlarge distances) and/or voracious competition that pushes quality products out of the market" (van der Ploeg 2016:08). These interstices are the moments where dominant systems stall, and frictions and contradictions emerge from which alternatives can appear or be strengthened.

Van der Ploeg proposes that peasantries should be understood in terms of resistance that includes:

The construction of autonomy in order to resist subordination, dependency, and deprivation; the creation, reproduction and development of a self-controlled resource base that allows for co-production; the multiple interactions with down-stream markets that aim to secure survival and which facilitate reproduction of the resource-base (van der Ploeg 2010:22)

These multiple forms of resistance reduce short-term vulnerability to turbulence in markets, meaning peasant farms are better equipped to survive the externally induced crises than capitalist and entrepreneurial farms. What we have in repeasantization, then, is a process of social transformation that appears to draw farming further away from profit-driven capitalist production and, in doing so, offers autonomy for those farmers who gain a degree of control over provisioning their own subsistence needs. This process will be further explored in the empirical material presented in later chapters.

4.3 Transformative Strategies of Small-scale Food Producers

Any emancipatory alternatives will be the result of strategies by “people committed to democratic egalitarian values” (Wright 2010:19). This section will explore the strategies employed by small-scale farming and peasant communities and the organisations that work with them to gain autonomy, build responsible farming practices and resist the reproduction of capital. It starts with an analysis of the context of small-scale farming and peasant communities as a site for social change and then looks at strategies employed by SMOs from around the globe such as political agroecology and food sovereignty. The focus then moves on to how some of these strategies have worked in a European context

There is much reluctance to the idea of small-scale farming and peasant agriculture being sites of anti-capitalist resistance. Van der Ploeg (2013) addresses the divide amongst the radical left around this question by exploring the writing of Alexander Chayanov. For van der Ploeg, peasant agriculture may be part of capitalism, but it does not sit easily as it creates interstices within it. It is a site of resistance that generates alternatives and provides a permanent critique of its dominant patterns. According to van der Ploeg, Chayanov came close to the peasant movement detailed in Karl Marx’s letter dated March 8, 1881 (Marx and Engels 1975:346) that claimed the Russian peasants’ communes had the capacity to

proceed directly toward communism. He suggests this could happen once peasants can communicate and share a joint political project to transform the countryside. Van der Ploeg argues that this is what is currently happening through transnational peasant movements such as La Via Campesina. He discusses how peasant agriculture can survive without a profit motive that corporate agriculture so badly needs. But being part of capitalism, several of its main contradictions still penetrate and as a result there are still struggles both within the peasant family as well as in the peasantry as a whole.

There are numerous such transformative strategies employed by small-scale farming communities as they strive for economic autonomy. These include political agroecology, food sovereignty and land sovereignty. These strategies include a wide range of actions that connect them with their lands. They involve using local knowledges to revitalise remote and inhospitable lands, horizontal localised education networks, regenerative agriculture, community land ownership, short food supply chains, occupations and land rights campaigns.

Small-scale farming communities, guided by autonomy and self-sufficiency, push against the logic of neoliberal globalisation. Through these strategies peasant movements challenge the way international organisations, NGOs and governments reproduce capitalism through development projects and programmes. Caoette and Kapoor (2016) attempt to move beyond the ideas of mainstream international development towards a post-development critique. They refer to these as *beyond development* and *grassroots radical pluralism* that rely on repetitive processes for social change. These are characterised by bottom up and open-ended views that try to avoid grand narratives and examine local and rooted experiments and experiences. The idea that global thinking and cross-border activism run the danger of being separated from the daily practices of resistance for both development and globalisation projects are some of the authors' key arguments. They believe that change needs to occur at a local level where resistance is experienced as a need for greater autonomy and self-sufficiency. Through this, the logic and values of neoliberal globalisation are challenged through strategies that can only appear from the local level. We can see these as evidencing the existence of social transformation in the here and now without the need to classify them as capitalist or not. While these processes are inevitably surrounded

by capitalism, it is sufficient to examine strategies of transformation with reference to their egalitarian and democratic possibilities. At the same time, we can identify the kinds of obstacles faced by these strategies, through the conditions in which they take place, to identify the degree of struggle necessary for them to succeed. With this in mind we will now look at how each strategy has been utilised in small-scale farming communities.

Food Sovereignty

Food sovereignty, a concept developed by La Via Campesina, was defined during the Forum for Food Sovereignty in 2007 and then adopted by representatives from peasant groups and organisations from 80 countries through the Declaration of Nyéléni as being:

the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations. (LVC 2007:01)

Anderson, Maughan and Pimbert (2019) see food sovereignty as a transformative project, employed by social movements to contest and challenge neoliberal development that involves conceptualising food systems on a participative basis. These work through learning processes that rupture conventional ideas about farming practices. Here, the abstract political objectives of food sovereignty are complemented by the capacity of political agroecology to resist corporate takeover. Together they have values flexible enough to allow site specific implementation that reflects local social, political and ecological perspectives. Their programmes of learning and knowledge helps people learn to see and understand systemic contradictions and to take action against this oppressive reality. It works to resist the cultural and technical hegemony of mainstream agricultural education and achieve sustainable and just food systems.

Heller (2011) explores the rise of Paysans (peasants) from France's second largest union, the Confederation Paysanne (CP), to challenge the industrial model of agriculture with food sovereignty and a solidarity-based production. CP was formed in 1987 on the back of a

decade of paysan movements and in 1992 helped co-found La Via Campesina. Despite grassroots movements such as this being something of an anomaly in France, CP employed various innovative strategies for civil-society engagement. In 2004 they established the Faucheurs Volontaires (Voluntary Reapers), an organisation of paysans and food activists who participated in *crop-pulls* in which they uproot plots of open-air GM field trials. CP, LVC, and the World Social Forum claim that Western society has normalised capitalist accumulation, individualism and productivist hegemony so much it has become dangerous and oppressive to most of the world's inhabitants. For Heller, capital-driven crises, such as the last global recession, may lead to unintended change that would set the stage for a new regime enabled by food sovereignty.

Political Agroecology

Agroecology is understood as a co-production with nature that serves to strengthen the resource base of small-scale food producers and reduces their dependency on external inputs (Rosset & Martinez-Torres 2013). It relies on land reform that gives small-scale farming communities greater access to land on which they apply principles to the design and management of agroecosystems, such as building biodiversity whilst adapting to local environments, building and conserving healthy soils and water rich in organic matter, and minimising external inputs and resources (Anderson et al 2021).

Political agroecology brings together social, political and ecological perspectives to form a transformative strategy to address multiple systemic crises and develop alternative and sustainable practices. Gonzalez de Molina (2013) considers to what extent these collective, localised, and everyday practices are experienced through political agroecology in pursuit of sustainability. He gives social movements a prominent role in the struggle for sustainability, proposing that agroecology considers environmental conflict a driver for socio-ecological change and that political agroecology works as a strategy to achieve this change. He examines the many instances that peasant communities have defended their natural resources against overexploitation by the state and corporations. For Gonzalez de Molina, sustainability is something that we cannot achieve individually but only through collective action and/or public policies. The global agri-food system has made little progress in eradicating rural poverty and has also seen a marked loss of profitability which has led to

emigration and increased poverty in poor countries. To compound matters, food prices rose significantly in the years following the financial crisis. This structural crisis in the global agri-food system can be seen in the increased consumption of rice and meat, the rise in oil prices, and the scarcity of land caused by the expansion of agro-fuel cultivation. Speculative practices have taken further risks with this growing scarcity and led to further inflationary tensions. The environmental damage caused by the chemical agriculture of the global agri-food system is damaging agroecosystems' ability to produce food and raw materials. In this context, the role of the state and social movements becomes fundamental as it raises the problem of how to persuade administrations, individually or collectively, to develop policies that support rural sustainability.

Global peasant movements adopting agroecology have a shared goal of autonomy and resilience in the face of the social and economic crises of capital. Peter Rosset (2011) argues that a shift to food sovereignty through agrarian reform and sustainable peasant agriculture is the only way to address multiple systemic crises. This gives priority of market access to local producers, unlike liberalised agriculture that prioritises global market influences and subsidised prices that undercuts local and regional economic development. Raising the issue of land rights and looking at examples in Bolivia, Brazil, Cuba, Indonesia, Mexico and Thailand, he shows market-based 'solutions' leading to crisis, depoliticizing the problems, and causing a landlessness that it cannot resolve. He also points to historical examples in Japan, South Korean, Taiwan, Cuba, and China where quality land was properly redistributed and led to poverty reduction and an improvement in human welfare.

Agroecology, as adopted by many small-scale farmers, is recognised as the most effective strategy to end rural poverty and hunger and establishing food security (Holt-Gimenez 2009). The integration of agroecology into new agrarian movements has helped develop forms of production that sit alongside food sovereignty (Holt-Gimenez 2009). These highly productive, equitable and sustainable alternatives to corporate industrial farming aim to transform and democratize food systems. Movements such as Campesino a Campesino of Latin America, Participatory Land Use Management of Africa, and Farmer Field Schools of Asia have "restored exhausted soils, raised yields, and preserved the environment using highly effective agroecological management practices" (Holt-Gimenez 2009:146). Whilst

gaining autonomy these practices also increase environmental and economic resiliency. Confronting neoliberalism and the expansion of industrial agrifood, these movements work on a global scale and “integrate social, environmental, economic, and cultural concerns with demands for land reform”.

Land Sovereignty

Land sovereignty is a strategy that aims to help people gain access to use and control land (Franco & Borras 2012). This also aims to shift policy debates away from pro-market arguments to a common ownership model. At the turn of the century, in response to the neo-liberal model, La Via Campesina launched its *Global Campaign for Agrarian Reform* (Via Campesina 2000a). The argument propelling this campaign was that market led agrarian reform had led to the monopolisation of resources critical to small-scale farmers by the landed classes (Borras 2008).

Land sovereignty goes beyond viewing land as a resource, seeing it as a territory that embraces the struggles of social movements. There are several other strands to this strategy which include: “the right for people to have access, use and control over land and its benefits, where land is understood as a resource, territory, and landscape”, and a “call to action against a renewed corporate push to enclose the commons and the assertion of the need for a people’s enclosure to support the above point” (Franco & Borras Jr 2012:06-7).

Strategies such as this have been employed by the Landless Workers’ Movement (MST) in Brazil. They begin by reaching out to rural day labourers, urban homeless, the unemployed, rural slum dwellers and landless peasant farmers through community centres and other public forums to sign up for a land occupation. After which they move into rural ‘camps’ for sometimes up to five years. This key step demands a camp discipline that is communally imposed on its members and prohibits violence and ‘anti-social behaviour’. Learning to live cooperatively becomes an imperative, and people receive intensive training in everything from public health to farming to help make their future farm communities successful. As a result, 90 percent stay on their land after occupation. The land occupation involves anywhere from dozens to thousands of families rapidly moving on to the land and immediately planting crops, setting up non-violent defence teams, communal kitchens,

schools and clinics. This leads to negotiations with local authorities with various outcomes; expropriation of the property, the exchange of land; or expulsion of the occupiers (typically they return until accommodation is reached). People in these settlements earn more, eat better, have greater educational opportunities, and are less likely to lose family members to migration. This is a powerful argument for land reform. It is good for local economic development providing protection from predatory land speculators. It is also seen as an effective way of surviving, and even mitigating against, climate, economic and food crises.

Radical Approaches to Education and Community Development

The flexible and horizontal approach to learning employed by SMOs utilising political agroecology lends itself to bringing farmers together with diverse approaches and worldviews with commonly held values of autonomy, localising food systems and collective knowledges. Less hierarchical than the mainstream, it works to empower its learners to be collaborative producers of knowledge within their own networks. Whilst agricultural training is already happening in rural communities, agroecology training also develops skills to help communities achieve their own political aims. From this, learners develop what Mansbridge and Morris (2001) call *collective oppositional consciousness* and begin to link with global debates of food sovereignty and agroecology enabling participation with social movements. These learning initiatives, like the Land Base and Farm Hack in the UK, aids the development of regional and national political networks such as the Land Workers' Alliance (a UK member of LVC).

McCune and Sánchez (2019) trace the development of both the peasant-to-peasant horizontal pedagogy dominant in Mesoamerica and the Caribbean, and the political-agroecological training schools typical of organisations such as LVC. Peasant-to-peasant is a Freirian style of learning, promoting sustainable agriculture and agroecology among small farmers. Agroecology is seen as a politicised science, practice and movement, but some institutions have an apolitical version merely focusing on the application of ecological theory.

A network of agroecology schools, where agroecology cannot be separated from political conflict, exists across Latin America. These autonomous educational methods are happening

in a process of sociocultural production and reproduction that are embedded within their patterns of labour and food systems through seasonal and daily farming tasks (Giroux 1985). Developing critical thinkers in this way means that people understand the ethical and political underpinning of agroecology that helps people become collective actors working to an agenda of structural change.

Learning projects such as this are fairly new to Europe but have seen great success elsewhere, with projects such as Campesino-to-Campesino in Cuba, where they reached 50% of all the peasant families (Rosset et al. 2011). This has been enabled by denser peasant networks and a much stronger tradition of popular education in Latin America, something that has been weakened in Europe during the neoliberal period. It is also through the established relationship between agroecology and anti-capitalist peasant movements that have only recently been embraced in Europe.

Strategies in Europe

Whilst many of these strategies are being developed in southern countries, small-scale farmers in northern countries are also adopting them through the influence of global movements such as La Via Campesina. This section will examine the nature of them in a European context.

Migliorini, Gkisakis, Gonzalvez, Raigón & Bàrberi (2018) detail the role of state and various NGOs in enabling the emergence of agroecology in Italy, Greece, and Spain. In Italy the demand for food sovereignty, driven by various seed associations, is seen as being central to the emergence of agroecological political action. Alongside various regional associations, particularly in central Italy, the national seed savers association *Civiltà Contadina* protects agricultural biodiversity through conserving local species of seeds.

There is an increasing adaptation of agroecology in Greece through the foundation of *Agroecopolis* in 2017 and *Agroecology Greece* in 2016. *Agroecology Greece* promote agroecology as a “science, practice, and movement” through building a network of agricultural scientists and trainers. *Agroecopolis* is part of the European Food Sovereignty Movement and the Nyeleni Forum. In Spain there are many different environmental and

social movements that have embraced agroecology because of its potential to build new social models. The Spanish Rural Platform, farmers unions, the Alliance for Food Sovereignty and L'Espai Recursos Agroecològics at the Agricultural Training Centre of Manresa in Catalonia.

Stassart, Crivits, Hermesse, Tessier & Dressein (2018:01) trace the dynamics of Belgium agroecology in the context of the “food crises that swept across Europe at the turn of this century”. Exploring how the link between “consumption and production was being dissolved by the specialisation of agri-food value chains”, they also looked at how certain strategies work to reconstruct it. They describe three instances of agroecology in Belgium: Radical (Agro) Ecology, Strong Ecological Modernization and Narrow Ecological Modernization. Radical (Agro)Ecology, critical of these other forms as they perpetuate principles that it contests, is what Martinez Alier called the *Environmentalism of the poor*. It captures a range of anti-capitalist positions and feeds *repeasantisation* with access and depletion of resources high on its agenda.

In Wallonia, Mouvement d'Actions Paysannes took up the position of LVC with its core members attending international meetings. It participates in the *peasant struggle day* and held three Symposia for Small Farmers challenging the Federal Agency for Food Chain Security. In 2010, ReSAP, a small farmers' network arose with a range of political demands and actions. *Access to land* became its main mobilizing theme. Its land occupations included a festive potato-planting day on a meadow that was set to become a new prison on the edge of Brussels. It had participation from 70 organizations and is now an annual event.

Calvario (2017:404) examines the radical and progressive strands of alternative food movements struggling for food sovereignty in the Basque territory. He looks at how they converge in their critique of contemporary capitalism creating inequalities in the agro-food system and their vision of “alternative models based on peasant farming”; and how they diverge in “determining what pathways are best for advancing food sovereignty”. Calvario demonstrates how radical food movements, such as LVC, combine practical alternatives and local reforms with a social movement approach to resist being co-opted by neoliberalism. He goes on to show how this convergence of radical and progressive strands makes it possible to pressure the state for implementation of “re-distributive land reform, social

protections, and safety nets”, while at the same time trying to “challenge and transcend” it through re-peasantization and social mobilization.

He shows how the economic crisis increased interest in agriculture amongst young people and ex-industrial workers in the Basque territory, and documents the importance of agroecology in building a movement around food sovereignty. He also demonstrates how its “low dependency on investment, technology and external inputs” proved particularly desirable in the context of the economic crisis because of “alternative supply chains that could reduce market uncertainties” (Calvário 2017:409-10). And cites Karriem’s (2013) study of the Brazilian *Landless Workers Movement* to show how agroecology works to raise the consciousness of individuals in relation to their environment that also feed into a movement’s struggles. Through a series of interviews, he shows how the *baserritarras* are fulfilled with their new agrarian lifestyle and see it as a viable alternative to wage labour, with most arguing they would not return to well-paid stable employment if given the opportunity. Most of the *baserritarras* interviewed did not think of themselves as being politically active or organized and saw their main challenge as gaining access to land.

4.4 Social Reproduction and its Relationship to Peasant Farming

This next section looks at how international markets attempt to co-opt small-scale and peasant farms under the guise of international development and economic resilience. It looks at some of the methods of resistance to this, many of which are seemingly implicit to their everyday practices. It is, for example, the very nature of peasant and small-scale agriculture, in the process of seeking autonomy and self-sufficiency, to resist the reproduction of capital. Indeed, some of the literature goes as far as to suggest that the demands of subsistence amongst small-scale and peasant farmers reproduces a completely different set of behaviours.

This section starts by looking at the reproduction of capitalism in the context of small-scale farming, and how social reproduction can sustain a system even when it is not in the interest of its people. It may exist as the result of specific institutions and structures, or in the mundane routines of everyday life normalised by its own processes in a kind of self-sustaining equilibrium. It refers to processes that reproduce the underlying structure of

social relations that interact in important ways, stabilising the routines of everyday life and normalising its own processes.

Here, social reproduction refers to these processes that reproduce the institutions of a society and its underlying structures (Wright 2010). Passive reproduction exists in the routines of everyday life and is normalised by its own processes in a kind of self-sustaining equilibrium, whilst active social reproduction is the result of specific institutions and structures. The reproduction of capital through these institutions and structures are the focus of Wright's work. He argues that if institutions responsible for social reproduction are disrupted so will the passive reproductions. But, taking Wright's own case studies as an example, targeting institutions appears to merely reform capitalism rather than realising an alternative.

Instead, we should consider its relationship to the commodification of space and time, as this not only shapes capitalist social relations but reproduces its conditions. New definitions, concepts and measurements of time and space are not only a source of power and control, they are implicit in the processes of social reproduction (Harvey 1996). Methods of organising time and space form a hierarchical order through allocating people, things and activities to specific times and places to create social units and structures. Their representations appear from the world of social practices but, in turn, these regulate and reproduce identities and modes of production and consumption. If we step away from our focus on production, additional circumstances gain influence. The demands of consumers have implications for commodified labour when the cost of its own reproduction is sensitive to these demands. This may include transport costs, living in favourable locations for access to work, their own subsistence, or services that enable their access to work. To some extent the value of labour is set against these demands, but this is its vulnerability. When the labourer becomes dependent upon them to meet their own subsistence, any damage to their supply will hamper their reproduction as commodified labour, and crises become more prominent. It is in this context that people seek alternatives.

The financial crisis in 2008 was a crisis in capitalism's ability to reproduce itself, as the circuits of capital that workers had become dependent on to meet their own subsistence collapsed. During this period there was a steep rise in the number of subsistence farms; this

was particularly so in Spain, Portugal, Italy and Greece. Amongst this phenomenon was also an emergence of eco communities, where people experimented with socially just and ecologically sustainable modes of production and consumption. In Greece employment in the agricultural sector rose for the first time in over 20 years. According to a report by the Greek Statistical Service, almost half of all new farmers came from cities. Unemployment rates for people under the age of 25 was at 48% in the aftermath of the crisis. And, according to figures provided by the Association of Young Farmers, there was a 15% increase in farmers between the ages of 18 and 40. During the pandemic, in Scotland there was also an increase in subsistence farming (see chapter 7), though nothing on the scale seen in Greece. However, there was also steep rise in demand for direct sales which, alongside this rise in subsistence farming, shows a change in direction in the nature of the food system.

Social Reproduction and Resistance

Torrez (2011) examines agrarian reform dating back to the 18th Century. He looks at one strand that creates internal markets for industrial development turning landless farmers into entrepreneurs. Promoted by the World Bank, this has resulted in the privatisation of natural resources and a concentration of land ownership. It creates economic conditions for small-scale farmers that leads to massive distress sales to the wealthy, and credit programmes encouraging them to buy land. These leave them with either heavy debt burdens or inflated prices for low quality land and a subsequent downward spiral of land loss and debt.

When most governments seek agrarian reform, they prefer to support these credit schemes rather than community land occupations. This creates the concentration of land ownership that is having disastrous consequences for both small-scale farmers and the environment. Breaking out of this model needs a rethinking of the entire property regime. Some movements, such as the Global Campaign for Agrarian Reform and The Emergency Network and Investigative Missions, have built on the knowledges and experiences of peasant communities in developing forms of action for a different grassroots model of agrarian reform.

As we have seen, there are many initiatives that seek to reproduce the underlying structures of capitalism by appropriating alternative practices. The Life Sciences ('bioeconomy') agenda sidelines agroecological practices, while 'sustainable intensification' tries to incorporate them within a sustainability 'toolkit' that includes GM crops, no-till, etc (Levidow 2015). This attempted divergence with agroecology is most pronounced in France but is used to highlight how, rather than be appropriated, an agroecological agenda for small-scale and peasant farms must challenge this move towards a corporate-environmental food regime. Inspired by agroecological initiatives in the Global South, European farmer networks have linked agroecology with food sovereignty bringing together ecological aspects with socio-political ones. Based on shared ownership and environmental responsibility, as a social movement, these challenge corporate control over resources and markets.

There is a neoliberal attempt to appropriate or co-opt agroecology within 'climate smart agriculture' that allows large corporate polluters to offset their emissions against the soil carbon in their 'peasant fields' and by promoting monoculture-based organic exports for niche markets. For LVC, agroecology is a heritage of rural peoples that they defend from all attempts at co-option. This shared vision has emerged through its *Diálogo de Saberes* (dialog among different knowledges and ways of knowing) and is making agroecology into "a socially activating tool for the transformation of rural realities through collective action; and is a key building block in the construction of food sovereignty" (van der Ploeg 2010:26).

LVC works with small-scale farming communities through its member organisations such as SCF and LWA to develop various strategies to resist co-option. These strategies, including food sovereignty and political agroecology, recognise and respect local knowledges as a method of resistance. Caouette and Kapoor (2016:222-4) argue that the pursuit of cognitive justice serves peasant objectives of constant struggle for autonomy and resistance against the neoliberalisation of the agri-food system. They consider the relevance of this in a European context and develop a concept for the *agroecology of knowledges* to help "understand the role of knowledge in the recognition of peasant farmers and communities." They then look at how industrial agriculture utilizes its cultural and legal domination to deny the emergence of collective identities and alternative practices, and to further a dependency on industrial farming. Agroecology aims at rebuilding collective identities and

reclaiming autonomy through recognition in small-scale farming. Engaging with decolonial thought in the context of European agriculture, they show how “environment-specific and inclusive solutions within the industrial model” fail to meet the aspirations of Europe’s peasant communities caused by a “misrecognition of peasants and their ways of knowing agriculture”.

It is the demands for autonomy and self-subsistence that exists within these communities that appears to be the key to their strategy for resisting their appropriation. But this is not simply a strategy for resistance, it is also a common element of the trajectories of social change that are being witnessed as communities respond to the crises of capital. With origins in the Mayan campesino-to-campesino (Farmer-to-Farmer) movement, LVCs *Diálogo de Saberes* (DS) (LVC 2000) is based on a process that builds unity. This happens through formal and informal education spaces and is revealing commonality across LVCs network of organisations. It is more than a set of ecological and productive principles as it promotes “the emancipation of workers, peasants, indigenous peoples and afro-descendants”. It has an emphasis on the struggle for autonomy through agroecology that is part of what van der Ploeg (2008, 2010) calls *repeasantization*. This approach has helped Cuba’s National Association of Small Farmers build a movement that has enabled half of the nations’ peasants to move into agroecology. The cause for Cuba’s transition to agroecological farming was the early 1990s when imports from the Soviet Union suddenly stopped and farmers were forced to make do without them. The peasant sector thrived in this environment with the application of ecological principles through the widespread agroecological learning processes of *Movimiento Agroecológico Campesino-a-Campesino*

Rosset and Martínez-Torres (2014:982-983) argue that the process DS is key to the resilience of LVC as it respects local knowledges in the resistance to neoliberalisation. DS brings different world views together on a horizontal basis and an equal-footing and is seen as a way of solving conflicts as one knowledge is not imposed on others. This Freirian approach to learning recognises local and/or traditional knowledges, that have been left out of the dominant monoculture. It is a collective construction based on dialogue around differences and cooperative reflection to re-contextualize knowledge and understanding related to “histories, traditions, territorialities, experiences, processes and actions”. This

forms the basis for collective actions and new processes exploring “development, biodiversity, territory, and autonomy” creating mobilizing strategies that recognise and strengthen collective identities.

Reproducing a Different Moral Economy

This final section looks at how small-scale farming practices not only resist the reproduction of capitalism, but are also capable of reproducing an alternative. The central argument in Scott (1976) builds on the economic dilemma faced by most peasant households. Due to the demands of subsistence, the peasant family will seek to reduce risks as they could lead to a fatal failure. He sees peasant households, living so close to the margins, as having little scope for the profit maximisation calculus of capitalist agriculture. This need for a reliable subsistence as the primary goal of the peasant family is the starting point of his examination of the relationship they have with their neighbours, their resources, elites, and the state (in terms of whether they aid or hinder them in meeting that need) that transforms many aspects of peasant communities.

He resists romanticising these social arrangements that distinguish peasant society by showing that their actions are not radically egalitarian but merely work on the assumption that the abandoned poor are likely to be a real and present danger to better off villagers. This need to maintain the community means that all are entitled to have access to the resources of a village but often at the cost of a loss of status and individual autonomy for the autonomy of the community. It is these redistributive mechanisms that provide a minimal subsistence insurance for villagers and the shared responsibility for their resources that form the basis of his critique of the moral economy of the peasant.

This alternative method of valuing social relations appears to reproduce something different to capital. In capitalism, labour-power is a commodity that is sold to the capitalist by its possessor in order to live (Marx 1902). Social reproduction theory considers the processes that reproduces the workforce to be compliant wage workers (Bhattacharya 2017). These processes can be social, cultural and economic (Bourdieu 1986). Economically, workers must abstract their labour in order to sell their capacity to work to be able to buy the commodities needed for their own subsistence. Noncommodified labour, or concrete labour

as it is sometimes referred to, is not free of this process as it is still subjugated to the demands of abstract labour. But concrete labour can be resistant to this process by opening every moment and filling it “with an activity that does not contribute to the reproduction of capital” (Holloway 2010:254). The point at which one characteristic gives way to the other would be significant in understanding social transformation in this context.

For Holloway, whose work is closely associated with the Zapatista movement and its use of agroecological practices, the fetishism that takes place in the relationship between use values and exchange values ruptures the “sociality of doing and [...] the process of mutual recognition and social validation” (Holloway 2002:46). It is at this point that money becomes the measure of the social utility of what you do. Holloway goes on to develop the concept of anti-fetishism. A process that sees fetishization as something that happens in the present rather than as an historical genesis. A process that asks, “How do value, money, state arise as forms of social relations? How are these forms disrupted and re-created each day? How do we disrupt and recreate these forms each day?” (Holloway 2002:115). A process that ruptures the sense of fixedness by showing all phenomena to be forms that are unstable, disrupted, challenged and reformed. A process that recovers ‘doing’, not an individual doing but a social doing, and not only stops reproducing capital but starts reproducing a social doing. He explores this through the relationship between abstract labour and concrete labour as a strategy to recover the act of social doing, something he relates to the revolutionary practices of the Zapatista.

The commodification of social relations reproduces capital. This deepens commodity relations within the cycle of social reproduction where households become increasingly dependent on commodity relations for their own survival. This commoditisation can be resisted through self-provisioning when “access to land, labour, credit, and product markets” is mediated by nonmonetary ties, limiting the ability to penetrate the cycle of reproduction. This method of resistance drives “many forms of endogenous rural development being witnessed in Europe” (van der Ploeg 2010:102) and can be found in a wide range of interlinked practices distinctively different from entrepreneurial and capitalist agriculture.

Peasant-like farming communities are increasingly seen as an alternative that appear as a response to the destructive impacts of corporate food systems that de-link production and consumption. They are reproducing these alternatives based on the benefits of small-scale agroecological farming (Rosset and Martínez-Torres 2012). They attempt to reconfigure these immaterial territories to defend the material territories of small-scale farming communities against corporate land grabbing. In a constant struggle against co-option, rural social movements are forced to draw finer distinctions between agroecology and 'corporate greenwashing' by contrasting the ecological and social wasteland of corporate plantations with agroecologically farmed peasant lands.

Since the 1960s corporate agri-food economies have progressively been disconnected from its various component elements. Natural resources are subjected to modification to fit demands for production, processing, storage and distribution, and relations to these resources are mediated in a way that clearly affects their consumption and consumers. Van der Ploeg (2016) compares this to peasant agri-food economies and how they link natural resources to their wider communities whilst at the same time being crucially dependent on the reproduction of natural resources, the labour force, and the institutional frameworks that govern them.

A new generation of agri-food economies are emerging with strategies that are developed to both aid resistance and reproduce new practices (van der Ploeg 2016). These new agri-food economies are being structured to be resilient from co-option with shared learning networks, resources and markets that are commonly owned and not for sale. Even though the total turnover is modest in these new agri-food economies, what is made can no longer feed the process of capital accumulation which implies a slow-down of the dominant food system. With this emerges new interstices, structural holes and institutional voids producing yet further crises in the reproduction of capital.

4.5 Understanding Transformation for Small-scale Food Producers in Scotland

The ideas explored in this chapter will be used to analyse the transformative qualities of Scottish small-scale farming communities in the context of the crises of capitalism. Whilst

this is informed by the work of David Harvey and John Holloway the structure to this analysis will, to a large extent, follow Erik Olin Wright's four theories of transformation.

A theory of unintended social change aims to not only understand the obstacles and opportunities offered by social reproduction and its contradictions but to also understand their historical trajectory. This is particularly relevant in Scotland (see chapter 6) as, in the peripheral areas of the Highlands, its slow creep is less advanced and these 'obstacles and opportunities' are at a different moment in their trajectory than we might find elsewhere.

A theory of gaps and contradictions relates to the failures within social reproduction and the openings this creates for new possibilities to be realised. In Scotland during the pandemic, as supply chains collapsed, people were suddenly unable to sustain themselves in the same way that they had been used to and so turned to sourcing their produce directly from small-scale food producers (see chapter 7).

A theory of transformative strategies identifies both the obstacles of social reproduction and the opportunities derived from its contradictions. This is so that strategies can be developed that both exploit these opportunities and achieve their desired goals. In Scotland (see chapter 8) these have taken shape in the form of food sovereignty, land sovereignty and political agroecology.

A theory of social reproduction relates to the cultural and structural mechanisms that lead to and perpetuate the reproduction of capitalism. In a process that started with The Clearances, Scotland has experienced this through forced evictions of small-scale farming communities to create a new working class, and the introduction of infrastructure that both opened up new markets to producers and created dependencies upon them. Recently this has been developed further with the rebranding of road networks in the Highlands as the North Coast 500 to both entice visitors and develop a new tourism industry (see chapter 9). In Scotland, the presence of gift economies offers an alternative to capitalism (see chapter 9), this is not to say that capital does not exist there, its processes are simply less present. Alternatives such as these are reproduced structurally and culturally, as the need to engage in them becomes integral to small-scale farming communities sustaining themselves.

With all this in mind, this thesis will attempt to answer the central question; *what are the transformative qualities of small-scale Scottish farming communities in the context of the crises of capitalism?* Wright's four theories of transformation offer different routes into understanding social transformation in this context. Consequently, the research questions have been closely aligned to these four components in Wright's theory of transformation and have drawn on Harvey and Holloway's analysis of social change, reflecting on the demand for subsistence and autonomy in context of small-scale Scottish farming communities. The four research questions are:

1. What are the trajectories of unintended social change that have emerged from the crisis of capitalism in the context of small-scale farming communities in Scotland?
2. How have the recent crises of capitalism affected small-scale farming communities in Scotland, and what gaps and contradictions have they revealed?
3. What are the transformative strategies being employed by small-scale farming communities in Scotland?
4. How is capitalism being reproduced in small-scale farming communities in Scotland, and are the transformative strategies employed there reproducing alternative economic practices?

5. Methodology

As we will see, the struggle for financial autonomy that is leading crofting communities to take ownership of their land also seems to be leading to an increase in demand for food sovereignty and agroecology. The primary aim of this research was to study the transformative qualities of small-scale Scottish farming communities fighting for subsistence and autonomy in the context of the crises of capitalism through the four research questions that have been identified.

The previous chapters have developed an understanding of the context in which this phenomenon is occurring and created a model for analysing social transformation utilising the four components identified by Erik Olin Wright: a theory of the trajectories of unintended social change, a theory of the gaps and contradictions within the process of reproduction, a theory of transformative strategies, and a theory of social reproduction. This chapter will layout the methods that have been used to conduct this research.

5.1 The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Since the start of this research, Scottish small-scale food producers experienced two economic crises, Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic. As these communities faced uncertain times during the initial outbreaks of COVID-19 and 'lockdowns' continued throughout my fieldwork period to protect people from the virus, it was clearly not possible to continue with the research in exactly the same manner as I had originally planned.

Though these crises have had some impact on the delivery of the research this has been limited. One area that it has impacted is the nature and quality of the data that is being captured. This chapter will start by discussing the changes that have been made and the impact of these crises on the research itself.

Changes to the Research

I have largely followed the research plan set out in the research design document that was completed in the first year of this study. The changes I have made are:

- Methods have changed slightly as I have not been able to attend the events listed in the research plan in person. I had to engage with them through online platforms such as Zoom due to the restrictions that were introduced as a result the pandemic.
- All the field trips were also cancelled and I was unable to conduct any participant observations. In their place I conducted seasonal interviews with all my participants via Zoom. This offered an excellent alternative as I was able to gain a more temporal perspective of the impact of these crises and the changing nature of the small-scale practices that participants were engaged in.

Both Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic had impact on the small-scale food producers that has proved to be significant for the research. In several instances the transformations that are happening are a direct result of the contradictions that these crises have exposed and so has had an effect on the quality of the data I have been able to capture.

5.2 The Research Process

The research was conducted over a 15 month period and followed three strands: Official Statistics, Social Movement Organisations and Community Organisations, and small-scale food producers. Each strand focused on different groups related to small-scale food producers in Scotland and were analysed through the stated research questions. This started with an analysis of the data on crofting collected by government organisations such as the Crofting Commission (CC). Crofting is a heavily regulated practice with rights and expectations of crofters monitored through the CC and there is a large set of data on each farm that is collected annually through the CC census. The crofting census alone collects the following data: owner occupier or tenant, use, area (acres), name, address, township, registration number and ID. In addition to this, the Crofting Commission regulates the use of all crofting land. These records are published in annual contingency tables and cover all 21,000 crofts in Scotland. This gave some insight to the scale of individual crofts and helped determine the suitability of this study. This data, along with data collected by other government and non-government organisations, also helped with sampling for the project. These official statistics provided context for the main study.

The next strand of the research examined the two Social Movement Organisations working with crofters, the Scottish Crofting Federation (SCF) and the Land Workers' Alliance (LWA), and the work of the community organisation, Community Land Scotland (CLS). Both the SCF and the LWA are participatory organisations that are structured into National, Regional and Branch offices, whilst CLS is a representative organisation that works to support communities that have, or are trying to, gain shared ownership of land. The research involved interviews, analysis of official statistics and observations of online events. This happened at the beginning of the research to develop an understanding of these organisations and how they relate to crofting, and continued for the duration of the research with my attendance at various events throughout the year. The first part of this stage helped to develop my understanding of the work they do and the relationships they have with crofters and other small-scale farmers and food producers. It also helped to identify small-scale food producers who were willing to participate with the project.

The next strand looked at the practices of small-scale food producers and how their practices relate to the four research questions that I have identified. This formed the central element of this research. The communities and participants of the research were identified during earlier stages of the research. An example of this is the community of Assynt in Sutherland. Assynt includes a collective of townships that have taken community ownership of a large area of crofting land in Sutherland through the Assynt Crofters' Trust (ACT). As well as the ACT, I also worked with North Harris Trust and the Fernaig Community Trust. ACT is a member of CLS and was established in 1992. After an initial online meeting with a director of CLS, the first phase involved approaching community organisations such as ACT to arrange either telephone or Skype interviews with their organisers. The next phase involved making contact with crofters or small-scale food producers in the community and arranging to work with them over a twelve-month period through seasonal online video calls. In addition, I engaged with events and activities organised by SCF, LWA and other relevant community organisations to observe the relationships they have with the community and how they are organised. I gained contact details for each of these organisations from their websites (www.crofting.org / www.landworkersalliance.org.uk / www.communitylandscotland.org.uk).

The timetable for the research process was as follows:

Strand	One	Two	Three
Month	Official Statistics	SMOs and COs	Small-scale food producers
July 2020	Analysis of Crofting Census since 2007 (+other data set)	Interviews with officers at National and Regional levels + data analysis where possible - first 4 months	
August			
September			
October		Engagement with community organisations associated with crofting such as Land Workers Alliance, Community Land Scotland, and Scottish Crofting Federation. This included participating with online events and interviews with staff and organisers. These were throughout the year	Engagement with individual small-scale food producers through seasonal online video interviews, each with a duration of no more than 1 hour. These focused specifically on the research questions as they are being experienced at that time of year.
November			
December			
Jan 2021	2020 Census		
February			
March			
April			
May			
June			
July			
August			
September			

SMOs – Social Movement Organisations COs – Community Organisations PO – Participant Observation

5.3 Research Approach

I have taken an organic approach to studying the transformative practices associated with Scottish small-scale food producers, reflecting on each stage of research before moving on

to the next. The research was initially developed through my engagement with organisations that work with crofters, Community Organisations (COs) and the Social Movement Organisations (SMOs). The interviews that have been conducted have been used to analyse the daily practices of crofters through each season, with a focus on how these are shaped through the processes referenced in the research aims. The participants have been identified with geographical variations to offer different distances from infrastructure to try to understand the spatial and temporal dimensions of these theories of transformation.

A qualitative research strategy was particularly applicable for the purpose of this research. This included structured and semi-structured interviews, informal interviews and official statistics. Official statistics were, in the first instance, used for developing community profiles and sampling. They were also used to give context to the research and to answer some of the broader dimensions of the research questions. The seasonal interviews with producers followed a research cycle that reflected on the data captured after each interview. These were recorded using field notes and sound recordings. Interview transcripts, field notes and additional documentary sources were archived for each stage. During these interviews, universal themes were identified through the research questions and thematic coding was then used to analyse the data at each stage.

The project followed a research cycle where I gathered data, created an inventory of the data, analysed it and then started again. The process continued for fifteen months as I moved through three different strands of data collection: official statistics, social movement organisations and community organisations, and small-scale food producers.

Through each strand a period of analysis was used to help to refine the research questions. This involved categorising data through domain and taxonomic analysis that was useful for identifying if social, environmental, cultural and economic relationships changed over time. It is for this reason that I sought out people who had been engaged in small-scale farming for various lengths of time. The analysis was also thematic, using the research questions I have developed through Wright's Theory of Social Transformation to scrutinise data. At the beginning of the fieldwork, I made an inventory for all the data to be collected and listed these through the research questions and various themes that emerged.

Official Statistics

The first strand of data collection started with the official statistics captured by the Crofting Commission (CC), Scottish Crofting Federation (SCF), Land Workers Alliance (LWA), Community Land Scotland (CLS) and other relevant organisations. This stage had a dual purpose, one of selecting people and organisations, and one of developing an understanding of the context that relates to the four research questions. The phase of selecting individuals began by identifying food producers from the CC, CLS, SCF and LWA data that fits the following criteria: are they engaged with small scale food production that follows the principles of one or more of the following – political agroecology, food sovereignty, land sovereignty?

Social Movement Organisations and Community Organisations

The data collection phase involved interviews with members of SCF, CLS and LWA at national and regional levels. It also involved interviews with members of organisations such as ACT. These were semi-structured interviews that followed the enquiry set by the research questions. As with the official statistics, I used these to identify relevant individual food producers and analysed the data to develop an understanding of the broader context of the four research questions.

Individual Food Producers

This phase involved predominantly informal interviews with participating food producers, though at the end of the research I also conduct a semi-structured formal interview with them. Each participant was engaged with small scale food production and were recruited through SCF and/or LA and/or CLS. The specific questions for this can be seen in appendix 1.

5.4 Research Methods

For the purposes of this research, I have used a number of research methods – interviews, official statistics, and visual methods (Winchester, 1999; Sarantakos, 2013; Silverman, 2004; Greenfield, 2002; Levitas & Guy, 1996; Spradley, 1980; Knowles & Sweetman 2004). I had intended on using a participant observation method but due to the COVID-19 pandemic was

unable to do so. In its place I have adapted a seasonal approach to interviewing participants engaged with small-scale farming, as has already been mentioned, to capture a more in-depth and temporal understanding of these practices.

The project followed a Research Cycle (Spradley, 1980) where I selected a topic (the transformative qualities of small-scale food producers in Scotland), asked questions of participants, collected and recorded data, and then analysed it. This process was repeated seasonally throughout the fieldwork until the project was completed.

I identified a sample of organisations that work with small-scale food producers through which I recruited a list of fourteen participants that meet the criteria for this study. Initial communications with participants, both organisations and food producers, took place via email. I emailed a short document with an explanation of the research to each organisation. I interviewed members of these organisations asking questions about the research. From this I identified individuals suitable for the study whom I contacted through the organisations identified with their permission. For confidentiality, contacts have not been disclosed, though I have identified the areas of Scotland where they are from.

I was unable to conduct interviews with organisations face to face but was able to conduct them over the phone/Skype depending on their preferences. They were recorded using sound recording equipment and were completed by the end of September 2021.

Sampling

The following criteria was used for creating a sample for this research: are participants engaged with small scale food production that follows the principles of one or more of the following – political agroecology, food sovereignty, land sovereignty. These criteria inevitably played into the ‘what’ of ‘what is discovered’ for this research and so the criteria have been carefully chosen so that the sample fits the framework established through the research questions. Organisations have been selected because they work with small-scale farms and farming communities. This was deliberate to ensure they meet the criteria of the research, rather than being representative of them.

This 'purposive sampling' (Sarantakos 1998) picked a sub-set of small-scale farmers for the non-statistical purpose of identifying people who are engaged in these types of practices to try to understand their transformative qualities. For example, I deliberately selected individuals who are engaged in practices that can be considered to be agroecological because not only is this closely aligned to the principles of farming practices that are dominant in Scotland, such as crofting, but its aims are to help farmers achieve greater autonomy. Also, agroecology, as it is defined by La Via Campesina (SCF and LWA are member organisations of LVC), has a social and political dimension to it that it is the aim of this research to understand. This approach used Grounded Theory, where theoretical concepts, Wright's Theory of Social Transformation, have been tested against the conditions created when people engaged in them experience various crises of capitalism. Such 'theoretical sampling' is selective and not representative.

Interviews

Interviews with organisations served a dual purpose. In the first instance they were used to help develop a sample of crofts, but they also worked to build an understanding of the broader context of small-scale farming in Scotland. I used semi-structured interviews following the four broad research questions. More detailed questions were given to participants ahead of their interviews. These semi-structured interviews allowed the opportunity for a more in-depth, open discussion, and more informal, free interaction between myself and the interviewee (Potter, 2002; Winchester, 1999; Sarantakos, 2013).

These interviews revealed the nuances of the research that enabled me to develop the project in a more organic manner exploring the themes as they appeared. The results from the interviews were not particularly generalizable, because of the subjectivity of data, but their flexibility helped develop a deeper understanding of the transformative qualities of small-scale farming. The interview scripts for each organisation consist of four broad and open questions. The questions for these organisations were designed to discuss in detail their relationships with small-scale farming communities in Scotland and the transformative potential of their practices.

The questions for the food producers themselves were both semi-structured and informal discussions. These were designed to reflect their experience of small-scale farming and the changes in their lives that they have encountered during the recent crises of capitalism. They also addressed specific elements such as production, consumption, representation, regulation and identity that have been drawn from Stuart Hall and Paul de Gay's Circuit of Culture (Hall & de Gay 1996). These informal interviews were recorded using sound recording equipment and their full scripts can be made available.

Official Statistics

In Britain, government departments routinely collect and publish quantitative socio-economic information covering England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. In addition, the Scottish Government also collects data of this nature. Some of these data sets are byproducts of administrative procedures whilst others are based on large-scale social surveys covering a range of subjects such as food consumption and production, housing, employment and social issues. There are various government and non-government organisations collecting data on small-scale farming in Scotland such as The Crofting Commission and the Scottish Rural Development Agency.

The Crofting Census records the following through its Crofting Register: owner occupier or tenant, use, area (acres), name, address, township, registration number and ID. In addition to this, the Crofting Commission records details of land use for each croft. These records are published in annual contingency tables and cover all 21,000 crofts in Scotland. These datasets served several purposes. Initially they give context to the phenomenon with insights into how crofts are being used in each area and the scale of each individual croft.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the results of the interviews has been through a thematic analysis. The results from the official statistics and interviews were analysed manually through a series of common themes and concepts that were in line with the four research questions listed above. These were then grouped together, in order to be able to determine trends and tendencies that related to the wider research themes of the project.

The analysis was coded in line with the research questions discussed above. These have been developed through a reading of Wright's Theory of Social Transformation that works as a framework for the whole project. Using a deductive framework (Allen 2003), I started with Wright's Theory of Social Transformation and then collected data to test it. From the outset I started creating a sample by engaging with organisations that will typically work with small-scale food producers in a context that the themes of the study are likely to present themselves. Though I have used little of the data collected through interviews with these organisations, they enabled me to develop an understanding of the context for the study and to create a sample of small-scale producers from whom the data I have gathered has been used extensively in this study. During that stage of the fieldwork, I also kept the data collection as unconstrained as possible to enable discovery of emerging themes.

During this phase I processed the data by applying open coding (Wicks, 2009; Simmons, 2017) listing the information (interviews, official statistics, photographs, field notes) both in sequence, and groupings. Whilst doing this I was writing annotations to record initial interpretations of the information and highlighting important items. Initially the coding was open but progressively developed into identifying concepts.

The next stage, axial coding (Wicks, 2009; Simmons, 2017) is a purposive sampling technique. It involved re-labelling data under thematic headings. These were developed along the lines of the broad research questions identified. These headings enabled the exploration of relevant ideas or themes and were developed using the annotated notes. Ideas originally developed were explored using the empirical data captured during the research. This process of re-testing evolving ideas, to prove or disprove them, is a distinctive feature of this approach and has been used to assess the reliability of the data.

The final stage, selective coding (Wicks, 2009; Simmons, 2017) refined the categories and the themes that shape the project. The final categories are compatible with the data and are logically consistent with all variabilities explored and gaps identified. This is supported with discriminate sampling, with a careful selection of people and situations identified to fill the gaps. Throughout, the sampling has been developed through the emerging themes and categories (Devine and Heath 1999:56–60). The results of this are the following categories that will be explored through the empirical chapters (chapters 6 – 9). Chapter six will

address the first research question; chapter seven will address the second research question; chapter eight will address the third research question; and chapter nine will address the fourth research question. The categories that will be addressed through each chapter are as follows:

- Chapter 6 (Research Question 1) – Themes: Direct Sales, Food Supply Chains, Job Markets, Tourism
- Chapter 7 (Research Question 2) – Themes: COVID-19 Pandemic, Brexit, BSE (Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy)
- Chapter 8 (Research Question 3) – Themes: Political Agroecology, Food Sovereignty, Land Sovereignty
- Chapter 9 (Research Question 4) – Themes: Food Supply Chains, Tourism, Food standards, Land Access/Ownership, Agriculture, Culture

5.5 Ethical Statement

This research was conducted with two groups of participants – individuals from Social Movement Organisations (SMOs) and Community Organisations (COs), and individual small-scale food producers. The SMOs and COs that have been represented were The Land Workers' Alliance, The Scottish Crofting Federation, and Community Land Scotland. These interviews were used to develop further understanding of their organisations and helped the recruitment process for individual small-scale food producers. This second group of participants were carefully targeted and recruited through multi-layered sampling technique. It is the data captured from these interviews that have been used for the empirical chapters.

This research project has been conducted in full accordance with the University of Manchester Research Ethics Policy. The research involved human participants, conducting formal and informal interviews with the researcher. In accordance with the University's policy on research ethics, I produced a participant information sheet approved by the School of Social Sciences' Ethical Committee aimed at small-scale food producers participating in recorded interviews. This sheet provided information to participants about the nature of the research, its scope, and the protection of their data that was collected. Initial

communications aimed at gaining consent and gave an estimate for the time each interview would take.

Participants were assured that no personal information that could be used to directly identify them would be published or disclosed. They were also informed how the recordings or transcribed quotes may be used in the thesis and other publications, that they had the right to withdraw from the study during the data collection period, and were reminded that they could choose to omit statements during the interviews. To ensure that their privacy was guaranteed, interviews have only been published in quotes and not full transcriptions. Each interviewee has been anonymised with a pseudonym and the broad region of Scotland where they live (see map1). The areas are defined as North West [NW], Central West [CW], South West [SW], North East [NE], Central East [CE], and South West [SW]. The anonymised names of these participants are as follows:

Beth [CW] – Their small croft is south of Loch Ness and they have had it for over 10 years. They sell direct to their customers and produce for themselves.

Kay [NW] – They have a small croft in the Hebrides and have been involved in crofting their entire life. They produce mainly for themselves but do still sell some produce. They are part of a crofting township and a member of a community land trust.

Drew [CW] – They live just inland from the Isle of Skye and for over 10 years they have been running a single person creel boat from which they catch langoustine prawns.

Jan [CW] – They have a small croft just south of Loch Ness. They have had the croft for less than 10 years and produce for their own subsistence and sell direct to local customers.

Cat [NW] – They have had their small croft in the North West of Scotland for over 10 years and only grow for personal use. They are part of a crofting township and work as an administrator for a crofter's trust.

Jo [CW] – They have had their small croft for 3 years and produce mainly for their own use but also sell a surplus to the local community. They are a part of a crofting township.

John [NE] – They have had their croft for just over 10 years and though it is only small in size they have developed a successful agroecological farming business that relies on direct sales. They produce £140,000 worth of vegetables a year from approximately three hectares of land.

Bet [CW] – They have a small holding inland from the Isle of Skye and only grow for personal use. They have been a member of a community land trust since the community bought the land together in the 1990s. The trust has 110 acres, 15 of which is croft land with six crofts in total.

Hugh [NE] - Their background is in scallop diving from creel boats and they distribute live stock for creel fishers which they have been doing since the 1990s. They live north of Inverness.

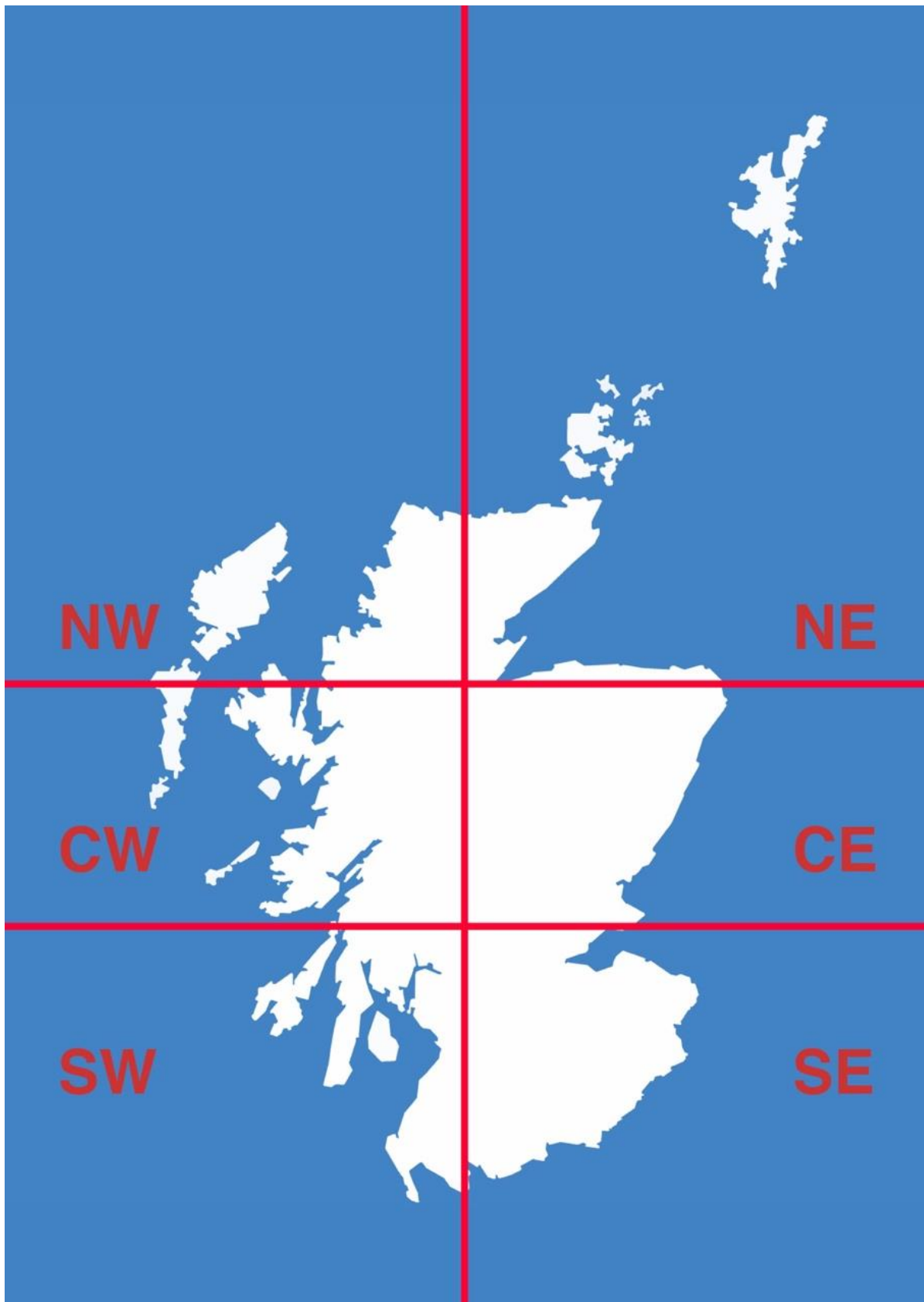
Nia [CE] – They have a small farm north of Aberdeen which they have had for less than 10 years. They are engaged in agroecological practices such as mob grazing and produce food for themselves but mainly for their customers through direct sales.

Ann [NE] – They have had their small croft since the financial crisis in 2008 and grow their produce to sell direct to the local community but also use this produce for personal use. They also support their local community delivering small-scale agricultural workshops.

Mac [NW] – They have had their small croft in the north west corner of the Highlands for over 10 years. They produce for themselves and sell a small amount to the local community. They are part of a community land trust and a crofting township.

Cory [SW] – Is part of a cooperative in an urban area in the south of Scotland that shares a small area of land for growing food that they sell to the local community. They have been there for less than 10 years and are engaged in agroecology and food sovereignty.

Val [CW] – Has a small croft on the west coast of Scotland where they have lived their entire life. They produce for themselves and for the wider community and they are part of a crofting township. They are also a member of a sheep stock club.



Map1: Map of Scotland divided into six regions

5.6 Summary

The purpose of this chapter has been to outline and justify the research methodology that I have used for this project. Because of the nature of the research, I have opted to use qualitative strategies. The key research tools are official statistics, semi-structured interviews, and informal interviews. I was unable to conduct any participant observations as was originally intended but this was compensated with the new approach to doing seasonal online video interviews with each participant. There have been approximately 24 hours of interviews across 14 participants, with 48 interviews in total. The results and findings of this research have been documented in the following four chapters.

6. The Trajectories of Change That Have Emerged from the Crisis of Capitalism

This chapter looks at unintended trajectories of change that have emerged from the crisis of capitalism in the context of small-scale food producers in Scotland and relates to the first research question - *What are the trajectories of unintended social change that have emerged from the crisis of capitalism in the context of small-scale farming communities in Scotland?* It will examine the extent to which obstacles and opportunities for alternative economic practices have appeared over time as a result of these crises and what this has meant for small-scale food producers.

Erik Olin Wright calls for a “theory of the dynamic trajectory of unintended social change”, to understand the obstacles and opportunities for transformative strategies both in the present and how these are likely to develop over time (Wright 2010:18). This chapter aims to offer an account of the dynamic tendencies inside capitalism that have propelled communities in the Highlands and Islands along a particular trajectory of unintended social change.

Starting with discussions about the legacy of the Highland Clearances, this chapter will work through and up to the recent crises caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and Brexit.

Participants of this research have often reflected on the legacy of the Highland Clearances, the changes that it has led to, the obstacles created by it, and crofting’s resistance as an alternative means of providing sustenance despite the damage it caused. Many of the subsequent crises that participants have discussed relate directly to the conditions created by The Clearances and so the chapter will start with what happened during that period.

6.1 The Highland Clearances

The failure of the Jacobite rebellion of 1745 is seen as the starting gun for The Clearances, with most evictions taking place between 1780 and 1815 (Richards 2007). Initially people were relocated to new areas and activities, often on the coasts of large estates. In later phases “people were simply ousted without regard to alternative accommodation [...] The

most infamous clearances entailed the wholesale displacement of traditional communities in sudden evacuations” (Richards 2007:54). Alongside the forceful evictions of The Clearances, other methods of coercion were employed to pressure people to move away. As crofting communities were introduced to national markets, mechanisms were set in motion that promoted changes in land use. Practices such as sheep farming brought in larger incomes that could afford larger rents which, in turn, forced out subsistence farmers (Richards 1985).

In Scotland, the Jacobite’s defeat meant the removal of obstacles that were hindering capitalism becoming a dominant mode of production (Davidson 2003). Unlike the long and revolutionary process from feudalism to capitalism that had taken place in England, the transformation that took place in Scotland was less than 100 years and reformist in nature, where landowners replaced feudal methods of exploitation with those of capitalism (Davidson 2003). After the suppression of the Jacobites, a shift to capitalist agriculture was seen as a precondition for transforming the wider economy to capitalism and The Clearances enabled this. During this period, previously feudal landowners transformed themselves into large capitalist landowners with many turning to sheep farming to provide wool for cities in northern England, something Marx referred to in *The Poverty of Philosophy*:

It is a fact that in Scotland, landed property acquired a new value through the development of English industry... By successive transformation, landed property in Scotland has resulted in men being driven off by sheep. Now say that the providential aim of the institution of landed property in Scotland was to have men driven out by sheep, and you will have made providential history. (Marx 1936:134)

To enable capitalist agriculture to emerge, landowners stifled the development of the peasant economy in the Highlands (Davidson 2003). The main mechanism they used for this was increasing rents. Between 1660 and 1740 the national average of rent doubled, by 1770 it had tripled, and then by 1815 it had increased 15.6 times compared to 1660 (Timperley 1980). Alongside this, infrastructure such as harbours, canals and roads were built to enable the transportation of their produce, peaking between 1770 and 1800. This infrastructure

also connected estates to the outside world in a way that further aided the transformation from a feudal society.

The Clearances were a brutal process of removing subsistence farming so it could be replaced by capitalist agriculture. Alongside violent evictions, new infrastructure opened up markets to these new industrial farms that aided capital accumulation and wealth extraction. This perpetuated and exacerbated inequalities and drove uneven geographical development. The tendencies for increased mobilities, introducing new markets and capital accumulation have continued to cause the same problems for small-scale food producers in Scotland, something that participants of this research have discussed at length.

6.2 Crofting after the Clearances

After The Clearances there are three phases in the shift in land ownership in Scotland (Bryden and Geisler, 2007). The first was the period following the introduction of the Crofters Holdings (Scotland) Act of 1886 which reversed some of the legislation that had enabled landowners to monopolise the land. While crofters were agitating in the Highlands (Giradet, 1976; Bronstein, 1999), Chartists were demanding parish-based land reform in England. Parishes were to be divided into 4-acre farms and parishioners were to be landlords as part of a 'commonwealth' of 600 parishes called the Chartist Co-operative Land Society. The success of the Chartists push for land reform was short lived compared to Scotland where its impact is still seen today. Despite this, little of the land ownership structure in the Highlands changed until 20th century (Wightman, 1996) when the British Government promised enlisting soldiers access to 'homesteads' during the 1st World War. This proved to be the start of the second phase.

The homestead offer was particularly popular in Scotland, due to the not-too-distant memory of The Clearances. It was complimented with the Land Settlement (Scotland) Act of 1919 which included powers to compulsory purchase land from private estates (Mather, 1978). These promises were not kept, which caused significant dissent. On the Isle of Lewis, Lord Leverhulme was forced to give the estate there to the local community in 1923 (Abercombie, 1981). After this, approximately 2000 new holdings were created over the next 15 years. There were numerous other changes during this phase such as an increase in

public ownership of lands through organisations such as the Agricultural Department, the Forestry Commission, and the Ministry of Defence (Wightman, 1996). Despite this though, small-scale farms continued to be seen as undesirable by the UK Government which maintained and prioritised the importance of large-scale landowners and industrial farms until the 1970s.

In 1969, as a result of lobbying by the Crofters Commission, a White Paper was produced calling for the abolition of feudal land laws that were still prioritising large landowners. This point marked the start of the third and final phase, and led to the Land Tenure Reform (Scotland) Act being passed a few years later prohibiting any new feu duties (Wightman, 1996). By the beginning of the 1990s these new laws were leading to the reversal of land ownership for local communities triggered by the government handing over ownership of its own crofting estates to their communities (Bryden et al., 1990).

Despite the changes that The Clearances brought to the Highlands and Islands, crofting has survived as a method of subsistence farming long after it ended. Today many still operate as semi-subsistence farms. Indeed, the tendency for uneven development left opportunities for crofting communities to continue, maintain and develop their practices. Whereas on the east coast, infrastructure brought with it a dependency on capitalist social relations, on the west coast this did not happen to anywhere near the same extent. In its absence, the demands for traditional methods of subsistence were strong and a motivation for many of the land rights struggles that took place.

The introduction of crofting tenancies, along with the structure of crofting communities, have helped maintain this alternative way of life in the Highlands and Islands as one participant of this research, Kay, explained. "If you have a large farm, for example, you don't need a big population, you only have a farmer and family. Whilst in a Township with about 20-30 crofts you are keeping a population in a rural area" (Kay [NW] 2nd April 2021). For Kay, this was a means of keeping a rural population there and was one of the reasons crofting had been supported so much. But he suspected that things were changing as there is more diversification on the crofts nowadays. "A lot are working in tourism, expanding their house for a B&B. Some plant trees, some work from home. People do a whole variety of things on their croft" (Kay [NW] 2nd April 2021). Whilst the crofting lifestyle survives, it has done so

through crofters having to engage in other economic activity that has, to some degree, changed the economic nature of crofting itself. This has brought benefits but it is also creating obstacles for the future of crofting.

Many participants spoke about diversification and crofters moving away from what they traditionally did. And whilst the benefits of this have been acknowledged, something Kay spoke about was the concern for how this will impact crofting communities in the long term.

Crofting was a bit more than just agriculture [...] It was a way of life rather than simply an agricultural occupation. Crofting was not originally intended as a means of a way of providing produce into the food chain in general. It was intended to provide the tenant with a piece of land to grow crops for their own use. It was to give them self-sufficiency (Kay [NW] May 18th 2021).

Though crofting has helped maintain communities in the Highlands and Islands, the population is still sparse. Kay explained the impact of this for businesses. “If there is a business here and it doesn’t have a pool of people to take up the jobs, some jobs don’t get filled and they lapse. A variety of jobs, builders for example, can’t get staff” (Kay [NW] May 18th 2021). There are also employment issues on the east coast despite the discovery of a large oil field in the North Sea in 1970. Ann, who lives on the Shetland Isles explained why this was.

A lot of the jobs in the oil industry are well paid but you need an appropriate education for it [...] A lot of the money that is earned here is going straight back out. So much of our economy is about export and only makes money for the bigger companies (Ann [NE] 19th May 2021).

Oil industries arrived on the east coast and brought with it an increased demand for infrastructure. The east coast already had more infrastructure than the west coast but “when the oil came in the 1970s then there was a whole upsurge of stuff coming in”, said Ann. She sees this as being due to the expectations of people who were moving to the island rather than the expectations of people already living there.

Generally, in my observation, there was a sudden need for the Shetlanders to have what people on the mainland had [...] And then supermarkets started coming in and providing that in a limited fashion and everything started coming in on the boat. There was an expectation that we had less because we were so remote and rural. (Ann [NE] 19th May 2021).

Whilst communities and individuals have identified a need for income diversity in the Highlands and Islands, how this is being delivered neither seems to be meeting their needs or even being for their benefit.

John, who sells his produce directly to his customers in the Highlands, also recognised this difference between the east and west coast. He explained that there had been approximately an 80% drop in the number of petrol stations there over the last thirty years and that this had happened for two reasons. “The first is that the larger distributors no longer want to go out to those locations and then the supermarkets were built in the towns on the east coast and they have cheaper petrol.” On the west coast, communities have continued to provide food for themselves, either through subsistence farming or by sourcing their produce directly from crofters like John. His strongest customer base is on the west coast, in areas like Ullapool and Gaeloc, where he does a weekly delivery. “It is worth me driving for an hour to drop off. We have 90 customers over there and we have a waiting list of people wanting a delivery from us” (John [NE] 27th March 2021). For John it is not just about the scale of demand, he is also getting a different type of customer on the west coast.

People on the east coast - we delivered north of Inverness and on to the Black Isle and up - have supermarkets so our clientele is different, they tend to be people who want organic food and healthier food. On the west coast they are just looking for fresh food (John [NE] 27th March 2021).

John also discussed how expectations were different between his customers on either coast. On the east coast he does house to house deliveries to keep up with the service expectation that has been created by the Tesco delivery service. On the west coast he drops off at different pick-up points such as community places, community halls, and doctors’ surgeries. The changes that have occurred on the east coast since the arrival of the oil industries are

an echo of the market mechanisms that were introduced during The Clearances that promoted land change. Enabled by the infrastructure that had been developed for early capitalist agriculture, such as ports and railways, this infrastructure, though developed further, enabled access to national and international markets and led to the cost of land increasing. They still serve the same purpose, but, as we will see later, it is the resulting dependencies on them that have made communities vulnerable to the crises of capitalism. During these crises (see chapter 7) there is a tendency for communities to move towards traditional methods of sustaining themselves.

After The Clearances there was a steep decline in population but during the last 20-25 years the population has started to rise again¹⁷. Cat, who lives in Assynt, reflected on how this related to her own community. “There is less than 1000 people living in the area. The number has stayed fairly steady but we don’t have many young families” (Cat [NW] 11th March 2021). Cat also spoke about the need for crofters to diversify, “you must do something else, almost everybody has got another job. You can’t live off crofting alone these days” (Cat [NW] 24th Nov 2020). Mac, another resident of Assynt, also discussed the impacts of diversification in both tourism and farming:

I do think the government, through the crofting commission, is trying its best to make [crofting] attractive by offering different possibilities. For example, accepting tourism and pods can now be part of a crofting lifestyle [...] I can see there are possibilities, but it will change, I think crofts will be very different. There will be poultry and polytunnels and that kind of thing, not so much the hundreds and hundreds of sheep that people used to have. When we came to this place 25 years ago there were lots and lots of sheep and very few trees. Then the local crofter who had hundreds of sheep got rid of them [...] The result was lots of trees came and now lots of deer have come and it provides shelter for cattle, it is a great thing (Mac [NW] 18th January 2021).

The east and west coasts of the Highlands have seen very different development trajectories. This is historically due to the emergence of the fishing merchants on the east coast after the introduction of industrial scale sheep farming. The infrastructure that came

¹⁷ Highland Council Area Profile report 2021. Available online: <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/files/statistics/council-area-data-sheets/highland-council-profile.html> (accessed on 18 September 2022).

with these fishing merchants increased rents and land values. This process has been furthered with the development of the oil industries in the last 50 years and its subsequent urban development, new income opportunities and facilities such as supermarkets. The different trajectories of development on the east and west coast are somewhat typical of what Harvey calls, uneven geographical development (Harvey 2005). This systematic process is the result of capital's attempts to resolve the social and economic contradictions born of its division of labour by moving these contradictions into new geographical areas. This creates a tendency for the development of an area to be followed by its underdevelopment which creates conditions for future redevelopment.

In areas like Assynt where traditional crofting communities still operate, their resistance to these crises of capitalism has been greater. During recent crises, communities on the east coast have moved closer to the economic model of the west coast with an increase in short food supply chains and subsistence farming (see below). But despite its benefits, crofting communities on the west coast are under increasing pressure to change due to the shifting nature of tourism.

6.3 The Introduction of Tourism

The trajectory that has emerged since the introduction of capitalist agriculture needs to constantly expand to meet its need for increased accumulation. When this expansion slows, a need for new types of consumption emerge for capitalism to be able to reproduce itself (Marx 1973). These new types of consumption are varied but one that is common in peripheral areas like the Highlands of Scotland is tourism. Whilst new industries such as this bring with it economic benefits, the influx of people place significant demands on the communities there.

In Scotland, the increase in the number of tourists has created demand for accommodation and other facilities which, in turn, has led to inflation, particularly with the cost of housing. These economic pressures mean that crofters have to engage in additional economic activities to meet the increased cost of living. And while traditional crofting life still remains at the heart of Highland and Island communities, this diversification is having an impact on it. Ann reflected on what she thought was driving this. "There is a general move for faraway

places that don't have much economic stuff happening, that [tourism] is the way to go" (Ann [NE] 19th May 2021). Many peripheral areas of Europe have turned to tourism as an alternative development strategy in recent years (Kneafsey 2001). In an area like the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, tourism is used as a means of promoting economic activity through the commodification of local cultural resources (Jenkins et al 1998). There, an idealised countryside is an image that is central to the production and consumption of rural tourism (Hopkins 1998). According to Kneafsey "representations of idealized, symbolic, cultural landscapes" are used to promote areas as tourist destinations that are then bound up in modern image markets and subjected to a "constant flux of production, consumption, reproduction, representation, commodification, manipulation and so on" (Kneafsey 2001:762-763).

For many, the most significant reason for the increase in tourism in the Highlands has been the North Coast 500 (NC500) initiative launched in 2015 by the Tourism Project Board of the North Highland Initiative (NHI). The NC500 is a rebranding of the road networks in The Highlands aimed at attracting more visitors. This marketing strategy has led to an increase in demand for accommodation. It has encouraged some to give up parts of their crofting land for tourism as Mac explained. "A lot of crofters don't have animals. It is much easier just building some pods and renting them out to tourists. Especially because we are in the North Coast 500 circuit which has dramatically increased the number of people coming through the parish of Assynt" (Mac [NW] 18th January 2021). This appears to be a growing phenomenon, particularly since the introduction of the NC500.

Alongside building camping pods on crofting land, some croft houses have been turned into holiday homes. Bet claimed that in her local village "over 50% were now non-residential" (Bet [CW] 25th November 2020). This is having an impact on house prices as a lot of crofts have been bought up and turned into Airbnb's, as Val explained. "We want to try and stop that, we want people to be able to buy houses but not to this level, it is exploitative. It stops young local families, or indeed any families, from getting a house on a croft" (Val 11th July 2021). The NC500 has been introduced to drive the economy in the Highlands. Similar to the introduction of sheep farming pushing rents up during The Clearances, the effects of this are making crofting less economically sustainable and harder to get into.

There is a fear that tourism will change crofting communities for the worse, but some are managing to find a way to balance the two, with many young crofters setting up B&Bs. Mac spoke about a young couple starting out in his community:

They are in a big residential caravan and they are just about getting ready to get a house organised. They have already got a cow that is in calf and it is running with our cattle at the moment. They have had pigs and they are thinking of other kinds of livestock but mainly they are thinking of tourism (Mac [NW] 18th January 2021).

Most people who participated in the research have some income from tourism. This has included selling eggs and other produce direct to tourists, working in arts and crafts shops and being a cleaner for a B&B. And whilst everyone spoke about the benefits of tourism, there was more discussion about the problems it was causing. This was, in part, due to levels of people visiting, as Mac pointed out. “The number of people coming through has changed the economy” (Mac [NW] 18th January 2021). It was also down to the levels of engagement with the existing community from the different types of tourism. Mac explained that there are two types of tourists that visit. “There are people who come in their camper vans and normally stock up in the big centres; Inverness or Dingwall [east coast]. They go to a big Tesco’s, Aldi or Lidl.” The others are those that spend more time in one place and interact with the local community. “They buy coffee and they go into the shops and buy bread and milk [...] We can sell some vegetables and some eggs and that covers some of our costs. And it is an easy option” (Mac [NW] 18th January 2021). Whilst Mac recognised that the increase in tourism has changed things, he also acknowledged that it had given them a new way of sustaining themselves. The issue for most crofters is the way tourism engages with their crofting lifestyle. What is significant here is those ‘passing through’ are engaging with these communities through the mechanisms that have emerged since The Clearances. They were established to give food producers access to national markets but encouraged changes in land use and commodified and mediated relations between consumers and producers.

Cat also spoke about these two different types of tourism, “Normally the tourists are really nice folk but not this year”, she said. “It has been a bit of a double-edged sword [...] we had a lot of dirty campers and people who didn’t really care about the place” (Cat [NW] 24th Nov

2020). She described the impact of people trying to travel the whole route as quickly as they could, which has increased since the introduction of the NC500.

It is not doing anything for the local shops as people used to stay longer and do all the walks, go to the beaches, buy in the local shops, and would really fall in love with the place [...] But these folks are doing it so fast they are not even seeing half the things (Cat [NW] 24th Nov 2020).

Another participant who spoke about the negative impacts of the NC500 was Bet:

Since it started, we have just been inundated with camper vans and wild camping. They have just come in hordes. It has been awful! Most of them are coming and they are spending nothing. There are no facilities for getting rid of their waste, so every layby is polluted (Bet [CW] 28th October 2020).

Whilst the increase in tourism has been noticeable due to the NC500, there has been an even greater increase since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic as overseas travel was restricted and many turned to the Highlands for their holidays. Most communities in these areas did not have sufficient facilities or infrastructure to support the levels of tourism they were seeing before COVID-19, so when the pandemic started it caused even bigger problems, as Bet explained. “We go hundreds of miles without any petrol stations or facilities [...] A lot of people who came to the Highlands didn’t know anything about the area they were coming too [...] With what little infrastructure there is, they just weren’t prepared for that.” (Bet [CW] 25th November 2020). This point was reinforced by Mac. “They were everywhere and they became a health hazard”, he said. “They were emptying their toilets and the like when they were full in a convenient ditch” (Mac [NW] 18th January 2021).

There was a sense of dismay at the problems this was causing, as Cat explained. “It is mayhem, no positives all negatives. People in camper vans who bring everything with them so aren’t spending money. They come in, go to the pie shop and they are away again” (Cat [NW] 22nd July 2021). Mac was equally alarmed by what was happening. “It has been a perfect storm of tourism with COVID and the NC500” (Mac [NW] 27th July 2021). The increase in tourism has meant that he has had to change the way he works, he has put signs

up to stop people parking on his track and he regularly has to move his sheep away from people with their dogs.

There is a shortage of grazing because we can't use the good land with nice long grass on it because there are too many people on there with dogs off their leads [...] At the moment there are young lambs who go completely crazy at the sight of this and there have been sheep that have aborted, it has been terrible (Mac [NW] 27th July 2021).

Cat spoke of one crofter losing twenty two sheep because someone had let their dogs run off the lead and had chased them over a cliff. Mac mentioned other problems that have occurred like scorch marks on the land where people have had bonfires. Most problems are caused by there being more tourists than the area can cater for, and many of them show little care for the local communities and their environment, as he explained. "There is a small beach down from the house and there is a cave there and you can tell people have been using it as a toilet" (Mac [NW] 27th July 2021).

What is causing the most frustration amongst crofters is they feel that the money coming in from the tourism created by the NC500 is not going to the communities it passes through. "The money coming in is going to people who are not from here [...] It was conceived as an idea without any forethought whatsoever. They said, 'yeah, we will rename this road to get the tourists here' but there is nothing in place to handle the excess tourism" (Cat [NW] 22nd July 2021). Whilst a small number of people have benefited from this, for many crofting communities the NC500 has created more barriers than it has opened up opportunities.

The NC500 was established as a new marketing initiative for Scotland. The idealised images of the Highlands that are being used to promote it as a tourist destination are changing the way the land is being valued. One example of this is the concept of rewilding, as Mac explained. "It is one of the bug bears of many of the crofters that live here", he said while discussing the difference between how tourists from an urban area and local crofters view the Highlands. To someone from an urban area "this is just empty wilderness", he said. "That concept feeds into a kind of desire for people to have this kind of land. It is seen as a resource, it is seen as a therapy, good for the soul and all of that kind of thing." This concept has led to an increase in pursuits such wild swimming, wild walking, and wild camping.

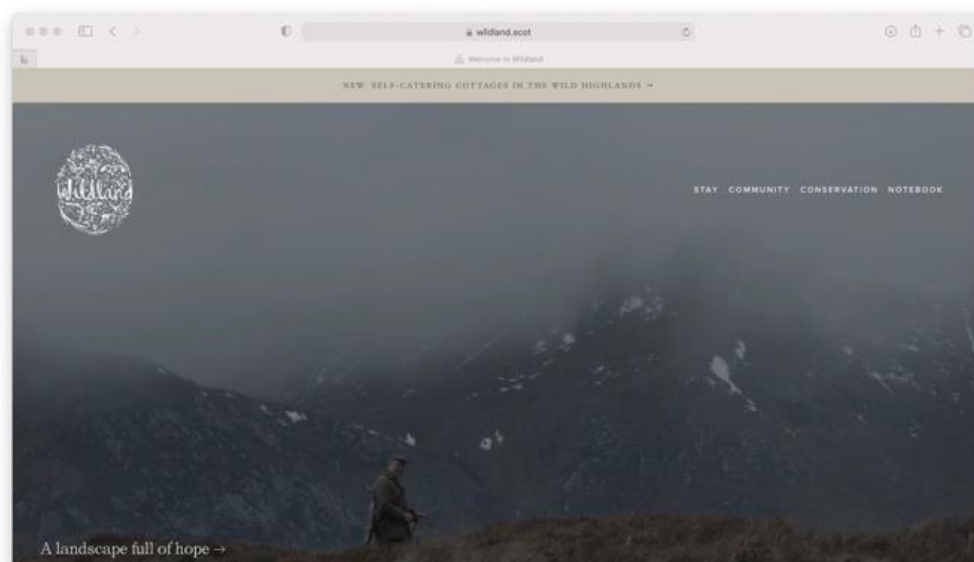
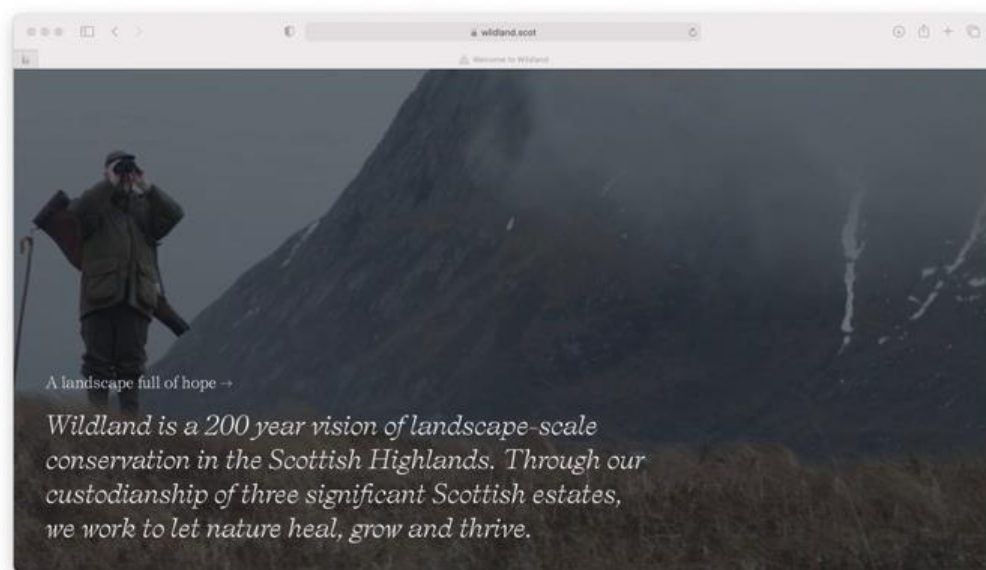
“What people don’t realise is that this is our workshop” stated Mac. “We are out there putting up fences and out with quad bikes and pulling deer off the hill and trying to find sheep with dogs. For us it is not wilderness it is where we work” (Mac [NW] 18th January 2021). This clash of ideologies has led to conflict between the needs of the local community and the needs of the tourism industry, as Mac explained. “If there is a development like a hydro scheme or something that is generated locally there is a huge objection to it by bodies such as the ramblers’ association, Scottish Nature, John Muir Trust” (Mac [NW] 18th January 2021). Mac spoke about how these bodies block anything that will have any impact on ‘the wilderness.’ But as Mac points out, this is not considering the needs of the local community as it “detracts from the possibility of local jobs for local people for the future”, and will make it very difficult for crofting to remain sustainable. Ann also spoke about the needs of tourism being prioritised over the needs of the local community. “They think the wind farms will spoil the skyline and the natural look of Shetland and that might put people off coming” (Ann [NE] 19th May 2021). So, whilst tourism is seen as being a tool for developing an economy in the Highlands, its effect is proving to be an obstacle to the practices that have sustained communities there for centuries.

The idealised image of the Highlands has commodified it as a destination for tourists, changing the way the land is valued. But this is not a recent phenomenon, in *Capital Volume 1*, Marx referred to these ideals when talking about the clearances:

What ‘clearing of estates’ really and properly signifies, we only learn in the promised land of modern romance, the Highlands of Scotland. There the process is distinguished by its systematic character, by the magnitude of the scale on which it is carried out at one blow (Marx 1967:512).

Using tourism to drive the economy in this way is being perceived as not being in the interest of local communities and for the benefit of people from outside of the area. A report by a director of NC500 Ltd detailing its ‘benefits’, claimed that camper van rental firms and tour operators saw an average yearly growth of 16% between 2014 and 2016, and paid visitor attractions saw a 41.7% boost in visitor numbers (Lennon & Harris 2020). But as we have seen, crofting communities see these things as a problem and gain no direct benefit themselves.

The NC500 was set up in 2015 by Prince Charles' North Highland Initiative¹⁸ whose aim is to “develop economic growth in the North Highlands”. It was then bought by Anders Holch Povlsen (Scotland's largest landowner) in 2019 through his organisation, Wildland Ventures. Their homepage leads with the statement, “Wildland is a 200 year vision of landscape-scale conservation in the Scottish Highlands”. Littered with images (see below¹⁹) of rugged landscapes and a lone hunter stuck somewhere between reality and illusion on a foggy hillside, it is referential of the romantics that Marx mentioned.



¹⁸ <http://www.northernhighlandinitiative.co.uk>

¹⁹ Screen grabs taken online from <https://wildland.scot> on 4th January 2022

These images, noticeable for their absence of crofters, try to mimic paintings from the period. They are relics caught in a 200-year-old cycle of production, consumption, representation, commodification... Perpetuating ideals where crofting communities have been cleared from its land. Relations, commodified and mediated in this way, lack any sense of responsibility to the lives that are lived there. Perhaps we should not be surprised that some 'didn't really care' about the places where crofters live. The main beneficiaries of the NC500 are not from these communities as Cat said. They are some of the largest private landowners in the Highlands but they do not have to live with the abject consequences of the types of tourism they have encouraged. Not only that, their 200-year vision does not seem to include the crofting communities at all.

6.4 Land Ownership in Scotland

The uneven geographical development trajectories we have seen in Scotland mean peripheral areas are left without easy access to infrastructure and land is often underused. Alongside this, Scotland now has one of the most unequal distributions of land ownership in the western world (Picken & Nicolson 2019), with about 57% of rural land being privately owned. The result of this is vast areas of land not being managed for the benefit of the wider public²⁰ and becoming less productive and even more inaccessible. This means that large private land owners, at times, struggle to find value in it, creating a number of opportunities for alternative practices such as crofting to gain access.

One opportunity is land going back into community ownership through community land trusts. In the last 15 years there has been a significant increase in the amount of land under community ownership, rising from 1% to 3% of the total land area, with over 550,000 acres of land now under community ownership (Picken & Nicolson 2019). These buyouts are often the results of community campaigns such as the one led by the Assynt branch of the Scottish Crofters Union that resulted in the buyout of 21,000 acres of land in 1993 (MacKenzie 1998).

²⁰ Scottish land rights and responsibilities statement - Available online: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-land-rights-responsibilities-statement/pages/4/> Accessed 18th September 2022

Usually, the land becomes available because it is deemed unprofitable, unmanageable or unusable. The North Harris Trust came in to being in a similar fashion to Assynt. In 2003 Islanders bought land and put it into community ownership through a Community Land Trust. “Previously it was owned by people from England and Europe. You never saw them! The last person to own it was Jonathon Bulmer of Bulmer’s Cider”, explained Kay, a member of the Trust. The land was bought for a relatively small amount due to it not being particularly productive, and the environment not being conducive to growing crops, something Kay was able to explain. “The land is not very fertile. It is largely just heather and moor”, he said. “There isn’t a huge amount of growing crops here [...] There isn’t enough flat land to use a tractor, there are barely any tractors in North Harris. The ground here is so uneven” (Kay [NW] 2nd April 2021). Despite this, community ownership has given the crofters of North Harris the opportunity of greater autonomy. Kay explained why this was:

There are over 200 crofters on the land in something like 16 Townships. That gives the community and the crofters greater ownership over what happens. Instead of whatever money is generated going into the pockets of some guy that you are never going to see, all the money goes back into the community (Kay [NW] 2nd April 2021).

As well as greater economic control they have also gained more control over how the land is managed. “Crofters also like it because they know who they are dealing with”, said Kay, “they are dealing with themselves! Or their own representatives” (Kay [NW] 2nd April 2021).

Cat, a member of the Assynt Crofters’ Trust also spoke about the quality of the land in their community. “Obviously it is not your typical farm land, most of it you cannot grow fruit, veg or anything like that”, she said. “A lot of the time it is a question of trying to manage the land rather than cultivate it. You do what you can with it and try and make it better” (Cat [NW] 11th March 2021). Despite this, crofters in Assynt have managed to live off the land for centuries through local knowledges:

It is not the easiest land to work, a lot of it is just a few inches of soil on top of rock [...] There is a lot of knowledge going back a lot of years that helps with this. It is knowledge that is passed down from generation to generation, I think it is just in peoples’ bones round here! (Cat [NW] 11th March 2021).

Small-scale farmers are priced out of fertile lands so it is common for them to be found in remote and often inhospitable areas unattractive to industrial farms. This means they are more resilient, motivated and capable of providing food security than industrial farms (van der Ploeg 2014).

The Fernaig Community Trust is another Community Land Trust that is now in control of land previously under private ownership. In 1998, Fernaig became one of the earliest community land buyouts. Bet, a member of the Trust, was involved when the community bought the land from the Fernaig Estate. The community wanted to buy land on the coast but ended up with 110 acres further inland, “that was not what we wanted”, she explained. “We didn’t want that amount of land [and] we haven’t got access to the sea” (Bet [CW] 28th October 2020). Fernaig is more productive and profitable land than Assynt and North Harris, which may explain the difficulties they had getting the land they wanted. Bet spoke about the quality of land on the estate and how it is used. “Our land is more farming land. The thing up here is the hill ground was sold off and just planted out with trees. This was all managed by Tillhill, who do a lot of land management in Scotland” (Bet [CW] 28th October 2020). According to Bet, the relationship the Trust has with Tillhill has not been ‘that harmonious’, and she described why this was. “Some of the people at Tillhill came into our valley about 10-12 years ago to manage the land and they just went around and stuck-up names on gates of the patches of land which did not relate to our Valley” (Bet [CW] 28th October 2020).

There are no crofting townships in Fernaig, but some families are crofters, as Bet explained:

We have 50 families who currently own the land but working on the land, there is not more than 5 or 6 [...] Farming is not a full-time occupation for any of them. Some people are working at the MOD base in Kyle. Some do security work there, then they come home and work on their crofts. Some maybe farming the land but do fishing as well (Bet [CW] 28th October 2020).

There are six crofts in Fernaig being used by two families, with one family using five of them. Bet explained that the rest of the land is mostly used for grazing sheep. The Trust does not own any livestock itself so they invite crofters from a nearby crofting township to graze their

livestock on their land. The Trusts' responsibility is to maintain the infrastructure, "all the fencing and draining and that sort of stuff and keeping the soil up to agricultural standards" (Bet [CW] 28th October 2020).

The Fernaig Trust owns 110 acres, 15 acres of this is the six crofts and there are no townships on their land. This has meant the relationship the local community has with the land is quite different from Assynt and North Harris and managing it has been less of a priority. Bet described how they operate. "They do general run of the mill stuff such as the rent setting for the fields, advertising fields that are empty, trying to get people to take up the allotments" (Bet [CW] 29th March 2021). Once this work is done, Bet explained, there is not much of an overarching strategy of what they want to achieve. "Once something is broken, they will fix it", she said. "The land doesn't make enough income to make it worthwhile perhaps" (Bet [CW] 29th March 2021). The Fernaig Trust owns a small part of what was a larger estate. When they bought the land, the estate was being sold in four areas and the estate kept approximately 2000 acres for themselves. The rest of the estate is now owned by a variety of different landowners according to Bet. "All the hill ground is owned by people who don't live here and it is a bit of an investment for them, they plant trees and get all the grants to do that and there are good tax breaks for planting trees" (Bet [CW] 29th March 2021). Bet described one landowner who is typical of this. "He has bought all the hill ground around here and it is all deer fenced, and he has planted trees and the fact that he is looking after the land will be offset within their tax portfolio. There is a lot of that sort of thing in Scotland" (Bet [CW] 29th March 2021).

There has been a significant increase in community land buyouts in the last 15 years but this hasn't been the only way small-scale food producers have been able to gain access to land. There has also been a rise in using mob grazing to help increase biodiversity and land quality. According to the Soil Association Scotland, mob grazing is short duration, high density grazing with a longer than usual grass recovery period that leads to hugely improved soil, healthier cattle and lower costs (Chapman 2019). One small-scale food producer who has built a business using this approach is Nia; she described how these arrangements work. "The land we have access to is through a mutually beneficial arrangement", she said. The landowner they have been working with owns a 150-acre farm but only has ten sheep.

“They needed someone to come in and give them some support”, she explained. “We asked, ‘what kind of environment do you want here?’ And they wanted it to be more diverse and didn’t know how to get that, and we were like ‘cattle will do a great job’” (Nia [CE] 11th December 2020). The landowner did not want to buy cattle as it was too much of a commitment, so asked Nia if she would graze her cattle there. Nia gets the benefit of grass and fodder and they get the benefit of this ecosystem engineering. Nia reflected on why the landowner wanted this relationship, “I think for them it is more about they just don’t know what to do”, she said. “There are some tenuous links to farming but not enough that gives them a solid knowledge base. But they bought the place because they wanted somewhere rural” (Nia [CE] 11th December 2020).

The success of this initiative has led to Nia and her partner being approached by other landowners who want to increase the quality and diversity of their land. The contractual relationship is the same again, she does not have to pay to get access to the land and the landowner gets the benefit of the land being managed for them. “Think of them as golden hoofs!” exclaimed Nia as she described how grazing livestock in this manner improves the quality of the land. “You will see that the ground will change if you are grazing in a way that creates rest time after you graze. High impact with long rest periods” (Nia [CE] 11th December 2020). Nia describes her approach as regenerative farming, something that shares similar principles to agroecology (see chapter 8). She spoke about this being a more environmentally responsible method that has a different relationship to time and space:

If you switch your thinking to a more ecologically attuned approach which considers that there doesn’t have to be a finite resource on that land if you build time in, and then you start to think of time as a resource as well and you think of the ground being more productive (Nia [CE] 11th December 2020).

The relationships here and, as we will see later, in other aspects of small-scale food production in The Highlands, are at odds with how capitalism produces value. Rather than the tendency for an annihilation of time and space so value can be extracted, space is constituted through time. This happens through a rich and dynamic understanding of the spaces she is working in and the processes that bring it into being, where time is seen as a resource. The opportunity occurred as a result of overaccumulation, where land had been

left redundant. And whilst this arrangement is still creating value for the landowner it is a more mutually beneficial relationship. Nia gains access to land and her methods result in more fertile spaces being created where things start to be understood through the production and reproduction of these relations going unbroken rather than torn from their context and fetishized as things (Lukács 1972). This is a process similar to the one referred to in Penny McCall Howard's *Environment, Labour and Capital at Sea*. She looks at how people's subjectivities and social environments are constituted through sensuous activity and social practices. Her focus is in on how the sensual nature of small-scale fishing in the west coast of Scotland has developed its fishing grounds there, but they have been subjected the structural violence of market economies.

6.5 Overfishing and its Impact on Fish Stocks

The introduction of sheep farming brought market forces into the Highlands during The Clearances, pushing up land rents and forcing out most subsistence farming. Many crofters who were cleared got redeployed to the coast lines of the estates to participate in another emerging organised industry, fishing (Cregeen 1970; Smout 1970). Prior to this, fishing boats were owned by landlords and fishers gave a proportion of their catch (and sometimes labour or money) to the landlord for the use of the boat, house and in many cases land (Coull 1996). These new fishing villages saw uneven development between east and west coasts, with west coast fishers largely consisting of subsistence fishing and a small amount of market selling, and east coast fishers quickly upscaling their businesses and investing in increased infrastructure. As land rents started to rise, many west coast fishers had to migrate to the east coast to find work due to the economic pressures this caused (Nadel-Klein 2003).

On the west coast, fishers built and bought small boats with family and neighbours, and fished as part of a mixed crofting livelihood (Howard 2012). Many of the labourers who were migrating to the east coast supported the 1880s land reform movement that led to the establishment of current crofting tenancies, as they saw their lack of access to land as being the reason they were locked into migrant labour (Grigor 2000). These labour relations meant that landowners and the newly established herring merchants on the east coast were able to re-invest the profits they had captured to expand their industry, leading to further

uneven development (Howard 2012). This included building infrastructure such as roads, railways, canals and harbours, giving villages access to national and eventually international fish markets (Smith 2006).

In the 1960's, boat ownership began to expand on the west coast. This was partly due to investment from the Highlands and Islands Development Board but continued along shared ownership lines, something that has been linked to the sense of egalitarianism amongst west coast fishing villages (Nadel-Klein 2003). Alongside this, prawns became a valuable commodity in the 1950's (Howard 2018) resulting in increases of boat ownership on the west coast. The UK Government removed the three-mile limit on bottom trawling around the country's coastline in 1984 (Driver 2019). This was a significant issue for small-scale fishers as it led to overfishing and the resulting fish stock crisis of the late 1980s. When their usual fish stocks disappeared from the coastline, fishers turned to shell fish as alternative source of income and demand was high. Prior to this the only markets for shell fish were overseas, as Hugh recalled

The majority of scallops will have gone abroad, it was the same with langoustines [...] Before then they were a pain in the arse for fishermen because they would be towing their nets across the bottom trying to catch fish and their nets would be all stuffed full and blocked up with prawns and they would be cursing them (Hugh [NE] 13th January 2021).

When the restrictions around fishing in UK waters were lifted in 1984 this quickly changed. "Within two or three years they had wiped out the fish stock completely", said Hugh. There were shortages of traditional fish stocks but the demand for fish still remained, so fishers turned to an alternative to meet this demand. "Suddenly there was a market for fish stock such as crabs and prawns that were fresh", explained Hugh. "From that developed a higher demand for a live market that people aren't trawling for" (Hugh [NE] 13th January 2021). The market then opened up for creel fishers due to their methods of fishing which involves using creel boats to "catch live langoustines in perfect condition" (Hugh [NE] 13th January 2021). Shell fish are then transported live across the UK and the EU using sophisticated distribution methods. "We get them live and we ship them live. Hopefully they arrive at the customer live" (Hugh [NE] 13th January 2021).

Today, Scotland produces about 70% of the world's langoustine prawns (Bryce 2020). Of the prawn fishing in Scotland, creel boats amount for about 10% of everything that is landed. How this is accounted for, is each week a creel fisher declares how much they have sold to their buyer who also reports how much they have bought to Marine Scotland. They then ensure both quantities match. Whilst regulations have been put in place since the late 1980s to maintain levels of fish stock, this has not been without its problems. Each trawler is given a quota of fish it can catch. Creel boats don't have a quota as they can't overfish due to the methods they employ. "Creel boats are non-quota", said Drew. "Because we are small boats we can't physically overfish" (Drew [CW] 14th December 2020). The methods that trawlers use means that overfishing is still a concern and as a result they are given a quota of fish they can catch. Just over ten years ago widespread illegal fishing practices started to emerge that became known as black fish (BSF 2012) "Black fish was a big, big, problem" explained Drew. "Say, you are getting a quota for £200,000 worth of cod but they were catching £400,000 worth. What they were doing is declaring £200,000 and in cahoots with the merchants they were putting the rest of it through the back door" (Drew [CW] 14th December 2020). According to Drew this meant that there was not a record of how much they were catching which again put pressure on fish stock levels.

These issues around fish stocks continue to today with many issues coming to the surface as a result of Brexit. Currently trawlers are only allowed within British waters if they either have a British quota or there is an agreement between the UK and the country where they reside. This causes a great deal of consternation amongst creel fishers as a small number of people have accumulated most of the UK quota, something Drew was keen to point out. "In Scotland, 80% of the fish quota is owned by five multimillionaire families", he claimed. "You used to be able to buy quota [...] What happened about 20 years ago is individual fisherman were given quota but what they did is, they sold it for high prices" (Drew [CW] 14th December 2020). Market forces meant that quota was sold to the highest bidder, with those who have access to the most capital being able to accumulate the largest quotas. "The quota has ended up in a very small number of hands", said Drew. "It is as much about quota as it is about the right to fish" (Drew [CW] 14th December 2020). Whilst many sold their boats and left the fishing industry, the quotas that had been assigned to the UK are now predominately under the ownership of a small minority.

Brexit appears to be exacerbating these issues around mobilities and accumulation, and is leading to even greater consolidation of resources in the hands of a few. Hugh explained why this was. “This will make creel fishing less profitable and people will wonder if it is worth the hassle”, he claimed. “Only some companies will survive this, and it will be down to scale” (Hugh [NE] 11th March 2021). For Hugh, the sustainability of creel fishing is being brought in to question by Brexit with small-scale creel fishers struggling and large trawlers managing much better. “Large Atlantic vessels that are fishing for herring or maceral, it is probably not too much of an effect on them because they can just steam over to Denmark, Norway or Sweden land their catches there without all the hassle, and get good prices for them” (Hugh [NE] 11th March 2021).

The results of this, Hugh speculated, will be further consolidation of the industry. “Smaller firms will go out of business and their work will be bought out by larger firms”, he said. “That will be either directly through buy ins or buy outs, or they will be allowed to go to the wall and larger firms just pick up the trade” (Hugh [NE] 11th March 2021). This will likely lead to a decrease in small-scale fishing and an increase in the types of practices that have led to the depletion of fish stocks. Either way, it is large scale fisheries that are going to benefit, as Hugh explained. “I would imagine consolidation will be a positive thing for them but I imagine for the independents it will be a very bad thing” (Hugh [NE] 11th March 2021).

Consolidation is not a recent phenomenon; it is merely being exacerbated by Brexit. Hugh spoke about how it was developing prior to Brexit. “We already have a situation in Scotland where some of the bigger shellfish processing firms have bought up fishing licences in the last few years” (Hugh [NE] 11th March 2021). He explained how people entering the industry are being persuaded by these firms. “They have been offering boats to people and saying, ‘we will give you a fishing boat, we will give you all your creel pots, and your license’ [...] what is that if not consolidation” (Hugh [NE] 11th March 2021). The problem he foresees with this is the impact it is having, and will continue to have, on local communities. “You are then losing that small scale community identity of the fishery”, he pointed out. “It is a big part of people’s lives. People who are working for a large company, do they make the same effort as somebody who has their own boat?” (Hugh [NE] 11th March 2021).

Hugh suggested small-scale fishers catching crabs and lobsters will be under the most pressure to stop:

I am aware of some of the bigger vivier crab boats that have a haul with water in the tank where you put crabs and lobster in to keep them alive. Some of these boats are steaming and landing their catch in Denmark. That comes back to the thing I was saying about the larger boats circumnavigating the UK completely, with processing and transport missing out completely on this side (Hugh [NE] 11th March 2021).

Whilst, the larger fisheries seem to be able to afford solutions, small-scale fishers such as Drew are being hit hard by the obstacles Brexit has caused. “Overall, my fish landing was down 24% in January. You can attribute almost all of that to Brexit”, he said. “Most of the market is still Europe but the problem is getting it there” (Drew [CW] 12th March 2021).

It was the innovation of using a *plastic prawn tube* in the late 1980s that enabled fishers to keep captive prawns alive for several days while they were exported in a tank of seawater to France and Spain. As demand for live prawns grew in Europe, prices started to rise steeply increasing the viability for creel boats. Creel boats have become dependent on this relatively new market, as without it they cannot compete with the trawlers on price (Howard 2017). The effects of this have been exacerbated by Brexit and this is leading to further consolidation of resources. According to Howard, market forces are continuing to affect fisheries in Scotland. Large fisheries are able to invest in ever more sophisticated technologies that leads to increasingly consolidated quotas and being able to purchase licenses from the smaller boats being squeezed out by the process. In commercial fisheries, the pressures created by distant markets define what is prioritised or developed. (Howard 2017). The types of practices that are benefiting from this are forcing many small-scale fishers out of the industry completely. Somewhat ironically, their boats “catch large quantities of small, low-value prawns”, through a strategy “that was enabled by hiring migrant workers” on very low incomes (Howard 2017:152). Market forces are driving these practices and forcing out more socially and environmentally sustainable approaches to fishing.

Despite all this one of the positive changes for small-scale food producers that has emerged out of recent crises has been the increase in direct sales, something Drew has tried to pursue. “There is something of an increased market in the UK”, he claimed whilst discussing his direct sales. “There is an initiative in Edinburgh called Edinburgh Edible and my buyer thinks they will do quite well in the UK this summer” (Drew [CW] 12th March 2021). Though there has been an increase in direct sales for fishers, this has not been on the scale that small-scale farmers have experienced during COVID-19 and Brexit. Unlike the fishers that have participated in this research, many farmers suspect that the changes that have occurred around direct sales are here to stay.

6.6 The Rise of Direct Sales

This chapter has looked at the trajectories of unintended changes in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland and the dynamic tendencies of capitalism. As we will see in chapter 7, Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic have not only revealed the vulnerabilities of some of these tendencies, they have also led to structural changes that, to some extent, run counter to the logic of capitalism. It is difficult to tell if these are permanent changes but one of them, the increased demand for direct sales, has been referenced by each participant. It has been experienced differently between fishers and crofters, and its sustainability has often related to their proximity to urban centres. Small-scale food producers in peripheral areas, seemingly victims of uneven development, appear to be more able to sustain it.

Cory witnessed this change happening across Scotland, “most of the farms I have been speaking too this summer have had an increase in interest, things like having waiting lists for their veg boxes” (Cory [SW] 10th October 2020). John is another participant to experience this; “COVID has been a silver lining on the demand side” (John [NE] 27th March 2021). The scale of change has been so great that he has been unable to meet demand so far. “We could take on 50% more customers but we don’t have enough veg in the ground for this season.” (John [NE] 28th July 2021). Before COVID-19 John would do between 60 and 70 farmers markets a year but has not been able to since the outbreak of the pandemic. As a result, John has completely reorientated the marketing of his croft, “we have basically just focused on veg boxes in the last 18months. We are probably not going to go back to the farmers markets.” (John [NE] 27th March 2021). Cory has also seen this amongst the farmers

in her networks, with many “shifting some of the business, that may have been wholesale, to other kinds of outputs like veg boxes” (Cory [SW] 10th October 2020). Where people have not seen an increase in direct sales this has largely been because they could not meet the demand, as Ann explained. “We have probably seen a different reaction from people down south. We have had an increase in sales in our farm gate sales but because we are at capacity in terms of our production we haven’t seen as much of a difference”, she said (Ann [NE] 23rd July 2021).

Even in the more remote areas of the Highlands and Islands, where direct sales were already popular, there has been an increase. Kay, who lives on North Harris, spoke about this. “There is more selling of croft produce than there was”, he said. One of the differences in these areas is that there has also been an increase in subsistence farming, “there is a greater degree of crofters and small holdings producing produce for their own use [...] There are local growing clubs springing up in the islands.”, said Kay. He also suggested why this might be, “It is partly because they have more time on their hands due to working from home. There has also been what you could call a multiplier effect, if people see other people do it, they are more inclined to do it themselves” (Kay [NW] 3rd August 2021). Alongside this he also spoke about how access to land had enabled this to happen. “Many people on the island have access to a bit of land but they haven’t been taking the opportunity, but more people are doing it now” (Kay [NW] 3rd August 2021).

One reason given for this shift to subsistence farming and direct sales is people recognising certain benefits from their methods. “In terms of people realising that long distance supply chains are unreliable and that local is better, it is a positive thing”, said John. “It has taken people back to thinking about what is essential in their lives. (John [NE] 28th July 2021). The other reason has been a need, with many individuals and families turning to crofters like John because they had nowhere else to go. John said many of his new customers are not typical of his usual customer base. “The new customers aren’t the usual people, they are not the ‘greens’, or people concerned with their health”, he said. According to John they tend to be “a slightly different customer base who are just looking for family food” (John [NE] 27th March 2021). John described his new customers as people who “would normally just go to the supermarket, but they have tried something different and they have

surprisingly stuck with us. It was something unusual to do and now it seems to have become something normal” (John [NE] 27th March 2021).

Ann also spoke about the increase in people growing for their own use. She had not seen an increase in direct sales during COVID-19 as her croft was already at full capacity. Despite this the local community still came to her for support. “What we did see was an increase in people asking for help and support to grow their own stuff” (Ann [NE] 23rd July 2021). The enthusiasm that producers have seen from their local communities for their produce has been encouraging for crofters and many, like John, have continued to get their custom. “Very few people trailed off, they have stuck with us for the year”, he said. “All the signs are that people will stay” (John [NE] 28th July 2021).

This has been enabled in the more remote areas where people have greater access to land through crofting legislation and established community land trusts. Farms in and around urban areas have faced barriers to this development as Cory explained. “Being limited to what they can do with the capacity of the land [...] it is kind of interesting as I don’t know how far some of these farms can expand any further.” (Cory [SW] 10th October 2020).

Where access to land is limited, many farmers are now offering training opportunities to the wider community to help them grow food to meet their own needs. “There is that demand”, Cory claimed, “but it is difficult and slow to set up a new farm compared to other types of businesses. There is a huge land access challenge.” This is more difficult the closer to urban areas you get because land is more expensive and there are not the same opportunities for access. Despite this she has had requests from land owners in the less remote rural areas since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. “This year some landowners have contacted us, one on a large estate contacted us and was like ‘I want to set up a market garden like I saw in the film about Tap’ o’ noth’” (Cory [SW] 10th October 2020).

In Scotland there is a growing interest in setting up new farms or crofts and, given the increase in demand for direct sales, there seems to be an opportunity for them. With many small-scale farmers at full capacity, they are offering training to those who are setting up in their local areas, but this is not without its obstacles. “The challenges are still the same when it comes to setting up a new farm. Access to land, initial capital finance and some skills. I don’t think very much has changed” (Cory [SW] 07th December 2020). Small-scale

farmers are struggling to meet demand for direct sales and local communities are trying to grow their own produce. While land access is still an issue there is a growing movement in Scotland that is trying to enable the transformative qualities of this change to the supply chains.

Crofters hinted at the permanence of these changes, but for fishers it seemed less certain. “I think it is too early to tell if the structural changes we have seen will be permanent”, said Drew as he discussed the rise in direct sales. “We have tried to push the home delivery, fresh, local produce, thing [...] So, there has been more exposure but the problem with our stuff is the price of it” (Drew [CW] 23rd July 2021). Quayside sales are an established practice for creel fishers and when trade routes closed, they turned to this to try and increase their income. Because income had been so low, Drew put a notice up in a shop window saying “come and buy some prawns”. As restrictions became stricter, he started to deliver his produce.

I didn’t want people coming down to the boat, as much for their own health as mine [...] I would take orders and get to whatever amount I needed and then I would go out and haul as much gear as I need to get it. It wasn’t huge amounts, it was 20-25kilos, it was about 20% of what I would normally land. What it did was it paid most of the bills on the boat, it covered the fuel and whatever, it gave me something to do (Drew [CW] 14th December 2020).

Whilst this helped him keep afloat for a while, it was not a long-term solution. “That lasted from the start of Lockdown to the third or fourth week in May when a small market started to open up again in France in the supermarkets”, he said. “It didn’t really earn me much money. But it was a worthwhile exercise” (Drew [CW] 14th December 2020).

By autumn the local sales had tailed off, and with the exception of a week at Christmas he had very little custom of this nature. Even if there had been, Drew did not seem convinced that it was a viable way for fishers to operate. “It’s a lot of work doing local sales so I will have to balance it”, he said. “This is a really bad way to go about it but there is probably an opportunity there to develop a new market” (Drew [CW] 12th March 2021). Hugh reiterated this point, “the online sales are very much just a sticking plaster.” Despite seeing a big rise in

direct sales, managing this was not sustainable for Hugh either. “They are all small orders”, he explained. “A lot of effort has to go in to service them from the admin” (Hugh [NE] 11th March 2021). In the past they would have a small number of large orders but during lockdown they had a large number of small orders, which impacted the time they had to fish. “If fishermen are doing it direct it has a big impact on their normal routine”, he said. “We can do it, but it takes a lot more time” (Hugh [NE] 11th March 2021).

During the COVID-19 pandemic there has been a significant shift to direct sales in Scotland. Whilst this is not seen as being sustainable amongst fishers, crofters and small-scale farmers believe it is. Additionally, in areas where access to land is more readily available, there has been a visible increase in self-subsistence farming (see chapter 7). Here, what we are seeing are opportunities for alternative economic practices to grow as a result of crises and uneven geographical development.

6.7 Unintended Trajectories of Change

We have seen a clear contrast between the development trajectories of the east and west coasts of the Highlands. Initially through the rise of the fishing merchants on the east coast and then through the rise of the oil industries in the 1970s due to the infrastructure that already existed there. On the west coast the resistance to these developments has been effective with several gains such as crofting tenancies and community land trusts. These have been key to the persistence of this alternative way of life. Interestingly, on the east coast there has been a shift towards these alternatives as a result of recent crises with an increase in short food supply chains and subsistence farming.

On the west coast there has, however, been an increased pressure on crofting communities to develop their economies along similar lines as on the east coast through different industries such as tourism. This has caused high levels of inflation, particularly around assets such as land and housing, that has forced many crofters to diversify their working practices to include tourism. The concern for many is the impact this diversification is having on the sustainability of the crofting system. An idealised image of the Highlands is being used to commodify it as a destination and develop its economy which is being perceived as not

being in the interests of local communities but rather large landowners that have monopolised the land despite not even living there.

The problem of the unequal distribution of land ownership in Scotland is well documented. As we have heard, one of the impacts of this is that vast areas of land have not been properly managed and has brought little, if any, benefit to the wider population, with much of it becoming less productive and inaccessible. This overaccumulation of land is leading to a crisis in its value which, in turn, is creating opportunities for alternative practices such as those employed by crofters to gain access and start to flourish. This has been through various initiatives such as community land buyouts and practices such as mob grazing which have seen the biodiversity and quality of land start to improve again. This has led to alternative economic practices emerging in spaces such as Assynt where various strategies have been employed (see chapter 8) that are at odds with how capitalism produces value. What has also been seen in many of these spaces is, rather than the tendency for an annihilation of time and space so value can be extracted, space being constituted through time, utilising a rich and dynamic understanding of the land through local knowledges.

What we have seen in this chapter is that capital's increased capacity for time-space compression has led to multiple spatio-temporal contradictions that have pushed tendencies for uneven geographical development (Jessop, 2003). During the COVID-19 pandemic, globalised capitalism has been interrupted, with the annihilation of space through time being, to some extent, put into reverse (Ward, 2020). In Scotland this has caused structural changes such as the sharp increase in direct sales from small-scale farms. This collapse of supply chains has been felt less but sustained longer in the more remote and inaccessible areas, exposing gaps and contradictions that are changing the way communities are viewing small-scale farming practices.

This chapter has examined the trajectories of unintended changes in Scotland and looked at the impact of crises along this trajectory up to and including Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic (these will be explored in greater depth in chapter 7). It has explored how crises have not only revealed some contradictions of capitalism but have led to structural changes that, to some extent, run counter to the logic of capitalism. What has been notable is that the proximity to infrastructure and urban centres has affected the impact of these crises

and the sustainability of any alternatives that appear. The closer communities are to infrastructure, the more dependent upon them they are and the more likely they are to feel the impact of their crises. Equally the closer to urban centres they are, the more likely they are to return to these industrialised methods of subsistence after the impact of the crisis has subsided.

The historical trajectory of unintended social change in the Highlands of Scotland, since the introduction of capitalism during The Clearances, has seen increased mobilities that have introduced food producers to new markets. This has created vulnerabilities which have opened opportunities for alternative practices to grow. The capitalist mode of production still exists here but its processes are less present. Access to land (or sea) and the dependency on infrastructure for both consumers and producers are the key issues to reflect on here. The latter of these is somewhat counter intuitive. Rather than access to infrastructure offering greater opportunities for small-scale food producers, it creates dependencies, tying them to mechanisms that forces them to increase production and speed up distribution to meet the demands of a free market. One of the characteristics of the crisis created by the COVID-19 pandemic is how it changed our relationship to time and space. This is particularly significant where it relates to the increased demand for direct sales.

Historical materialism suggests that capitalism can be understood through certain regularities referred to as the laws of motion of capitalist development (Marx 1867). These refer to a regular but contradictory pattern with periodic crises that have a tendency to increase in intensity over time. One of the defining characteristics of this is capital's relationship to land. Primitive accumulation and capital's need to open up the land to the free market, reduces landownership to "the holding of a pure financial asset" and means that "traditional forms of rural exploitation (the absolute surplus value extracted from the peasantry) can no longer meet the needs of capital" (Harvey 1982:348). As we have seen, when capitalism fails to meet the demands of these dependencies, through anything from the collapse of supply chains, to underconsumption, or uneven geographical development, this results in crisis (Holloway 2002).

Locked into a trajectory of increased accumulation, capital responds to crises with spatial expansions of production and consumption. For small-scale farming communities this is, again, experienced through forms of real subsumption, the introduction of new industries, reduced access to land, and the subjugation of labour. If this does not happen, they are able to produce their own subsistence, rendering the capitalist mode of production unviable. This expansion happens through an annihilation of space through time and is driven by the need to increase the circulation of capital. Ultimately this merely transfers its contradictions into these peripheral spaces and fails to resolve them. (Harvey 1982). The next chapter will look at the nature of these crises as they have been experienced in Scotland and what this tells us about the transformative potential of the small-scale farming communities.

7. COVID-19, Brexit, and the Contradictions Exposed by Capitalism's Crises for Small-scale Food Producers in Scotland

This chapter relates to the second research question - *How have the recent crises of capitalism affected small-scale farming communities in Scotland and what gaps and contradictions have they revealed?* While it will focus primarily on crises and the gaps that they reveal, it will also touch on the structural contradictions that relate to these crises that were introduced in chapter 6.

Participants of this research were questioned about the types of crises that they have experienced and the extent to which these have affected their practices. Participants typically responded to this with discussions about the most recent crises, the COVID-19 pandemic and Brexit. Alongside this there were discussions about the decline in fish stocks, bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), and depopulation. These were not always seen as crises, and due to being historical were discussed through their legacy rather than the structural gaps they revealed. What also came through in the interviews was the way crises have been shaped by their geographical location (this usually related to their proximity to, and reliance on, infrastructure). The focus of this chapter will be the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and then the effects of Brexit for small-scale food producers.

Whilst there are a number of other crises that have been discussed during the fieldwork, they have all been historical crises and have focused on their legacy rather than the gaps that they revealed. This has, in part, been due to those crises predating most participants entrance into small-scale food production. This included the depletion of fish stocks in the late 1980s and early 1990s as a result of the North Sea being heavily over fished (Philp 2021). Fisherman, Hugh, spoke of how, “within two or three years they [trawl fishers] had wiped out the fish stock completely” (Hugh [NE] 13th January 2021) after the 3-mile limit was removed in 1984. During the interviews, Hugh’s focus was on the changes that came out of this crisis, as suddenly there was a market for fish stock such as fresh crabs and prawns. In the absence of their usual catch, demand for shell fish increased, particularly

from restaurants in Western Europe. What enabled this market were trade routes that had already been established through technological innovations that meant shell fish could be transported across long distances still alive. Recollections of the fish stock crisis have been similar to those about BSE and depopulation in that they have focused on the changes caused by them rather than the crises themselves.

More recently, the dual crises of the COVID-19 pandemic and Brexit have had varied affects for small-scale food producers in Scotland. The variance of these affects has mainly been due to the collapse of long supply chains and restricted access to infrastructure caused by each crisis. What has been notable is that small-scale food producers, who are less reliant on long supply chains and/or infrastructure, have been more resilient to these crises. Furthermore, in a manner that highlights contradictions around uneven geographical development and its spatio-temporal fixes, small-scale food producers in peripheral areas that are seemingly a victim of uneven geographical development are those that have been more resilient to these crises. We will now look at this in greater detail.

7.1 The Covid-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic started in January 2020. To control the spread of the virus the Scottish Parliament imposed a number restrictions such as social distancing and the closure of a number of businesses and services. Participants in the more peripheral areas largely felt untouched by the virus due to their remote locations. These restrictions had the most significant impact on small-scale food producers where it affected their access to supply chains and infrastructure. This section will look at the effects of the pandemic on farming practices, sales of produce, supply chains, and services such as abattoirs and livestock markets. It will also consider the consequences the pandemic has had on local culture and tourism, and the knock-on effects this has had on small-scale food producers. This section is split into two parts that focus on small-scale farming and small-scale fishing.

Small-scale Farming

Many of the participants live in remote rural locations where the impact of the virus has been less visible, as Mac explained. “We live in an area that is quite remote from big centres

of population so we can go about our normal business without any let or hindrance" (Mac [NW] 18th January 2021). Mac has a small croft in North West of Scotland where he keeps poultry, sheep and cattle. "In a sense COVID hasn't impacted us at all," he continued, "the only thing we have noticed was in the spring, in March and April, when lockdown happened and there were fewer tourists to disturb our sheep... which was positive." During these periods residents were able to go about their daily lives relatively uninterrupted, and many have commented on how they would speak to more people from their local community; something Mac reflected on when recalling a conversation with another crofter from his community. "I remember meeting a fellow crofter and he said he remembered as a child in the late 1950s, and that was what it was like now. No planes in the sky, no traffic on the roads, people walking and speaking to one another" (Mac [NW] 18th January 2021).

Most participants supported the idea that being in an isolated area helped insulate them from the crisis caused by the pandemic. "The offices and shops have not opened, and it is Easter this weekend" said Mac, "but otherwise, it is just the same as it always was, it's a rural area and there is very little difference. It's only if I go to Inverness that you really realise there is a pandemic going on" (Bet [CW] 29th March 2021). Val talked about how the COVID-19 pandemic had not had much of an effect, "being in a rural setting the day-to-day crofting duty did not change" she said, "crofting was still there and could be done within the COVID guidelines" (Val [CW] 11th July 2021). But away from the day to day running of a croft there have been some activities that have been impacted by the pandemic such as access to abattoirs and livestock markets. Val discussed having to get approval from the government to be able to transport animals to markets but was not allowed in on arrival. This did not affect her too badly though as buyers were still able to go.

During the lockdowns many people had more spare time, either due to not being able to engage in their usual leisure activities or because they had been furloughed from work. The restrictions that were introduced meant that a number of events that usually take place in rural communities had to be cancelled. Some of these were traditional cultural events, such as ceilidhs, that would have taken place in the local village hall. For some, the effect of this meant they had more time for activities such as growing. "We just had no social life!" said Jo. "So, possibly because of COVID, we were able to do it more thoroughly... I couldn't do

anything else other than work on the croft” (Jo [CW] 18th May 2021). Even some of the things that were lost during lockdowns brought some positive outcomes for Jo.

We haven’t had the market but, in some ways, it has been easier to sell things. People were wanting fresh and local and there has been more interest in having food that is more environmentally friendly [...] due to there being less food miles. Plus, we don’t use pesticides (Jo [CW] 26th July 2021).

Restriction also gave more time to crofters such as Ann, but for quite different reasons. Prior to the pandemic Ann would take on volunteers to help her and her husband on their croft. This was delivered in a community development context and had been done in this way for many years. During the pandemic they could not have many volunteers on their farm which meant this aspect of their work disappeared. For Ann this was not detrimental to the running of their croft though. “We had to shift our practice which revealed something to us about how much energy we were putting into working with our volunteers” (Ann [NE] 23rd July 2021). This did not affect the productivity of their croft at all and, as a result, they decided to permanently change their practice and now take on fewer volunteers.

In urban areas the pandemic affected people’s opportunities to grow in different ways. Cory is a member of a grower’s collective in Glasgow that had struggled to find a secure site prior to the pandemic. That changed when a community project, set up to help people learn how to grow food, was unable to operate due to COVID-19 restrictions. It happened quickly so they had to act fast and meant they had to start the season quite late. The demand was there from the start, as Cory explained. “We advertised on Facebook to see if anyone wanted a Veg box and we got 15 customers in 2 hours [...] we couldn’t meet the demand” (Cory [SW] 07th December 2020). The agility of small-scale food producers has provided resilience for their communities during the pandemic. As gaps in supply chains appeared and supermarket shelves ran empty, they were able to supply food directly to customers.

In less remote rural areas, the experience of the pandemic has been different again. Nia, who lives close to a small market town between Aberdeen and Inverness, saw a real shift in engagement when the first lockdown happened:

People are more aware of what we are doing [...] and more interested because they are walking past our fields, seeing our cows and having a chat with us, and we can tell them 'We are going to have some beef available' and they get excited about that. (Nia [CE] 30th October 2020)

They saw an increase in demand for direct sales but, unlike in the more remote areas where this level of interest was a given before, during and after first lockdown, being closer to an urban area this interest disappeared after the first lockdown:

I think there was something about people being aware of short food supply chains. [...] But the minute the lockdown ended that went out of the window. Unless you have a deep soul commitment and you are buying veg from CSA or you are growing it yourself, I think most people, if you weren't doing that already, are back at the supermarkets as soon as they are open. (Nia [CE] 30th October 2020)

Alongside this there have been other negative impacts on their ability to farm, such as specialist training for driving animals being cancelled and not being able to travel with people who were moving their animals for them, due to social distancing. "It was a real impact for us at a moment when we are trying to grow our business as we have only been doing this for a few years", she explained. "We could only have half the number of cows that we wanted to get and moving our animals around became really difficult for us" (Nia [CE] 30th October 2020).

During the pandemic there has been a sharp increase in consumers sourcing their food directly from small-scale local producers. The Food Foundation, CSA Network UK and Better Food Traders produced a report (Wheeler 2020) in April 2020 that documented this increase in direct sales. It surveyed 101 veg box schemes across the UK and found that they had doubled the number of veg boxes being sold weekly as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, sales increased by 111% between the end of February and mid-April with even higher increases seen by smaller schemes which grew by 134%. Much of this is due to the gaps left by the collapse of long supply chains forcing consumers to look locally for sustenance as many participants recalled.

John, saw a 20% increase in the first six weeks of the pandemic, but only because that was all he could take on. “We had to put out Facebook messages and website messages, we have an online ordering system that we had to suspend. I was getting 20 phone calls a day from people looking for deliveries. We had people turning up in tears, wanting to get access to food” (John [NE] 27th March 2021). In the early period of the pandemic when supply chains started to fail and gaps started to appear, supermarkets started to run out of food and panic buying set in, as John recalled:

It was crazy [...] people were driving from as far away as Glasgow and Edinburgh to come up to Inverness and even as far as Ullapool to stock up on fresh food because they were spreading out to try and get what they needed. During that period there was a panic. People were asking would the supermarket system be able to cope with the interruption. People were very nervous about that (John [NE] 27th March 2021).

In this context people turned to crofters as an alternative approach to sourcing their food when normal food supply systems failed, and discovered this option through a variety of methods. Jo was one participant who saw an increase. Some of her sales came through an advert she posted on the local Facebook page, whilst others bought from her after seeing her farm. “I was surprised by the demand,” she said, “they came to us because they have been going down the road and seen the fruit cages”. (Jo [CW] 18th May 2021). Val had a similar experience with seeing an increase in demand without any advertising. For Val they were repeat customers but they were buying more produce than usual:

It was the same customers but they just wanted more. I don’t know why, maybe they were worried about shortages in the supermarkets, or the prices going up [...] they all took double the amount. 100% of my customers took double the amount and I couldn’t keep up with demand. If I had another customer, I wouldn’t have been able to offer it. (Val [CW] 26th January 2021)

Jan saw her sales increase too. She could not keep up with sales after quickly selling her meat and eggs so bought fifty new hens. “There was an increase in new customers, and they have been coming back to us, little and often” (Jan [CW] 29th July 2021). The increase in demand for direct sales from both new and existing customers has strengthened the links

many crofters have with their community. This, in turn, has strengthened their businesses as it has helped them retain many of their new customers.

Despite losing some sales that she would usually make through family in Edinburgh because of travel restrictions, Beth had an increase in the number of customers during the pandemic. These were mostly local, which she defined as being within a 14-mile radius, a definition that was shared with other crofters. She reflected on why this increase happened. “With some they liked the convenience of being able to say ‘I am going to get food; can I come and collect a couple of steaks?’” Others were worried about food shortages as she explained. “I had another one that went ‘hang on, food supply has been affected, where am I going to get it from?’” Some though, she suggested, wanted high quality locally sourced produce as a substitute for dining out. “They would normally be going out to eat frequently, so now they have the money they would have spent on that and they would say ‘I am going to spend it on certain meat’” (Beth [CW] 14th Oct 2020).

Nia, Jo, Kay, Mac, and Jan all mentioned this increased sense of a local community during lockdowns. Jo spoke about an increased visibility as people spent more time in their local community and could see the work they were doing on their croft, “I think people up here do like the idea of being able to buy fresh local stuff” (Jo [CW] 18th May 2021), she said as she reflected on the way the community had come together during the pandemic. Kay also discussed ways in which the community had come together to grow. “There are local growing clubs springing up in the islands. Many people on this island have access to a bit of land but they hadn’t been taking the opportunity, but there are now more people doing it” (Kay [NW] 3rd August 2021). For many people, COVID-19 made the world a smaller place where time stretched and a sense of place was created once again. It should be no surprise to see this happen during a time when the infrastructure and technologies that are designed to compress time and space are no longer accessible. In this moment people have turned to local producers for their food but this has not always led to an increase in customers.

The only participants that did not see much of an increase in direct sales were those who were already at capacity, such as Ann. “We have had an increase in our farm gate sales but because we are at capacity in terms of our production, we haven’t seen as much of a difference.” For Ann, the demand also came from local shops and requests for help from

people wanting to grow their own produce. “We did see an increase in people asking for help and support to grow their own stuff, at least 50% of it was for their own entertainment” (Ann [NE] 23rd July 2021). Perhaps the most universal experience of crofters during the pandemic has been this increase in direct sales. It has helped sustain and strengthen communities when long supply chains failed them and has helped build more resilient local food systems.

The sharp increase in direct sales we have seen during the COVID-19 pandemic is, in itself, transformative. The reason for this is twofold: firstly, it simply represents a shift from one method of sourcing food to another; secondly, and more significantly for this study, it is a shift that reduces how much surplus value is extracted from small-scale food producers by large supermarkets and/or distributors. This means that producers are able to keep more of the income from each sale.

What we are seeing here is a contradiction of capitalism where the technologies and infrastructure that it has developed to ‘annihilate space through time’ are both its strength and its weakness. These mechanisms serve to increase the accumulation of capital but, when they fail, accumulation is not simply reduced, in this instance, people are forced to seek out alternatives.

Downward pressure on food prices also pushes down the costs of reproducing labour. This helps to reproduce workers who are more able to consume goods that are not necessary for their subsistence which, in turn, furthers the accumulation of capital. Again, it is these mechanisms that enable this. As a result, this contradiction between being able to create more able consumers and being able to extract value from compliant workers is forced out into peripheral areas (Marx 1990). The conditions that this creates in these peripheral areas are often intangible, abstract, and mediated from consumers who become unaware of the externalities of their consumption (Dauvergne 2010). In this context consumers have no responsibility in their consumption as, in these circumstances, there is no proximity to the production of these goods.

This is not to say that small-scale farmers are not vulnerable to these supply chain shocks. They still have certain dependencies on long supply chains as some local infrastructure has

been lost to economies of scale, and regulations force them to engage with distant services, infrastructure (such as livestock markets, abattoirs, and market stalls), and supply chains. Losing access to these is, perhaps, the most significant negative impact of the pandemic for small-scale farmers.

Whilst buying and selling livestock at markets was still possible, there were restrictions to how this worked that made things more difficult. Kay explained how sellers were unable to attend markets but people who were buying had special dispensation to attend. For Kay, this was the same for all supply chains: “Obviously, people couldn’t travel in the same way [...] it was the same with buying or selling anything. Things like farm equipment, you just couldn’t travel to do these activities” (Kay [NW] 3rd August 2021).

Aside from this Kay felt relatively unaffected by the pandemic. “People can still tend to their animals every day, you don’t need to travel far to do that,” he said. But when it came to sales, the process was much slower and crofters could not attend in person. “The animals were lifted from the croft or from the farm and taken to Stornoway and you could watch the sale online.” The sales of some livestock at markets, such as rams, stopped altogether. “You had to do your ram sales directly [...] Most would only use 2—3 rams so you would put an advert in the local paper if you wanted to sell some” (Kay [NW] 2nd April 2021). During this crisis access to infrastructure and technologies that exist to shorten the time it takes to distribute goods across long distances have been restricted. This has led to a collapse of supply chains that have caused many issues around food security. In remote rural areas this has been less of an issue as here alternatives to these methods of distribution already exist through local food systems which rely on local knowledges and interactions. Despite experiencing reduced access to these facilities, crofters were able to find alternatives as their reliance on them was less.

This was a common experience of most crofters, even those in the more remote areas. Cat, who lives in the North West of the Highlands reiterated the point. “I would say the main problem crofters have had is trying to get their animals to the market [...] We are so remote up here we have not been touched by it that badly.” The number of abattoirs in the Highlands has reduced dramatically over the last 20-30 years, something that will be covered further in chapter 9. Cat’s nearest livestock market is 80 miles away and so, like

many crofters in her community with livestock, they waited and let their animals get a little older. This would normally mean the price they get would depreciate, but not this time.

“The weird thing is, when they did take their livestock to market when the lockdown eased, the prices had gone up so they did quite well from it.” There is only one abattoir and market in the Highlands, and so it is the same one that almost all farmers use. “That is basically the only place anyone from here goes to, though there are a few people locally that keep rare breeds, so they have to go further” (Cat [NW] 24th Nov 2020).

The main issue for crofters selling livestock in this way was ensuring that they got a fair price as Mac explained. “Unless you are at a sale at the time and you get a sense of what the prices are it is very difficult to know in advance what sort of price you are going to get for the animal. You’ve just got to hope that the prices are good.” Like Cat, Mac’s experience had been that prices had stayed high. “I really don’t know why; it could be because there is a shortage of produce from elsewhere.” It is not unusual for Highland sheep to sell well as they are more likely to be in a good condition. “If they make it as far as the market, then the guys who are going to buy them know that they are fairly healthy animals” (Mac [NW] 18th January 2021).

The livestock markets are not the only ones that have been impacted, many local farmers markets have not been able to run either. Beth described her experience of trying to attend one, “the local hotel was hoping to do a food market this weekend. They had minimised it to just four stalls and we were going to be one of them, they had it all very strict” (Beth [CW] 12th March 2021). Unfortunately, the market did not happen as the local council closed it down due to COVID-19 restrictions. After this the markets that would usually run in her area decided to wait it out. Beth resorted to selling her produce direct to her customers instead. Jan had a similar experience when her local farmers market had to close. “We have a once-a-year market in our community hall but that couldn’t happen this year because of COVID, the hall was being kept empty as an emergency space” (Jan [CW] 30th October 2020).

Other gaps that have been exposed during COVID-19 are around farming supply chains. At the height of lockdown there was high demand for certain feeds, something Mac experienced. “There were, several times, runs on particular feed stuffs. When people thought that life was going to get particularly tricky” (Mac [NW] 18th January 2021). For

Mac, the nearest place to get crofting supplies such as feed was approximately 50 miles away. Though this is not considered 'too far' in the Highlands it does give some context to the reliance on scarce infrastructure in these more remote areas. Not only was the availability of feed scarce but access to the stores became more difficult due to social distancing:

It used to be you would reverse your trailer in, get out of the car, help yourself to stuff, and help people load your trailer and get some ewes. But that is no longer possible. You now wait outside, you are masked and gloved, and the folks come and there is very little social interaction (Mac [NW] 18th January 2021).

As well as not being able to get livestock to markets, many crofters struggled with access to butchers and abattoirs. During this period abattoirs saw an increase in the number of private kills (where an individual has a small number of animals to be slaughtered). Beth had problems with this herself, but good planning helped avert any major issues. "Dingwall were not taking any private work because the abattoir is run by a company called John Munroe," she said. They have about five butchers' shops in the Highlands according to Beth, and prioritised the slaughter of their own animals so they could continue to supply meat to their butchers. Fortunately for Beth she was able to use the Grantown Abattoir, which is further south in Moray, as their business caters more for hotels and restaurants rather than butchers. "They had a bit of a lull as suddenly the restaurants didn't need them. So, we were able to quickly get the beast to Grantown" (Beth [CW] 14th Oct 2020). Another participant, Jan, also had problems with access to butchery. "Our main problem this year has been butchery" she explained, "during COVID, the local butcher in Inverness has not been taking private work as they have been so inundated, they can't cope with it all [...] now they have got a back log" (Jan [CW] 30th October 2020). This left Jan unable to get any butchery work done, though fortunately she had sufficient meat stored from the butchery work they had done just before lockdown.

Many of the resources, such as technologies and infrastructure, that small scale food producers have struggled to get access to primarily exist to support large industrial farms. As a result of this, they are managed and regulated to meet the needs and concerns of large industrial farms, often at the expense of small-scale food producers.

There is clear evidence of small-scale farming being able to offer an alternative economic model to capitalism. But that is not to say that it does. Indeed, as we have seen, in some instances it is still forced into dependencies on capitalist infrastructure. It appears to suggest that some are caught between stages of real and formal subsumption, though (as we will see in chapters 8 & 9) the appearance of community land ownership in some crofting communities suggests it might be something slightly different to either. These dependencies have come through regulations established in response to practices employed by large industrial farms, such as those that were implemented on the back of the BSE crisis. Abattoirs and livestock markets are geared up to meet these regulations at the expense of small-scale producers who feel forced to scale up to meet the costs of using these services and infrastructure. While the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed input supply chain vulnerabilities for small-scale farming, access to markets have been an even more significant issue for small-scale fishers.

Small-scale Fishing

In the Highlands and Islands small-scale fishing, such as creel fishing, has also been impacted by the pandemic. In some instances, creel fishers have stopped fishing completely as they rely heavily on national and international distribution networks to get their produce to market. For one fisher, Drew, 60% of his produce is sold to restaurants and supermarkets in Western Europe, with the majority of that being sold in France. This meant 'lockdown' came earlier for fishers than other small-scale food producers as he explained. "Our market closed about 10 days before [the UK] lockdown because the French market shut and effectively everything was closing down" (Drew [CW] 14th December 2020). With so much of his sales dependant on the effective distribution of his produce, he was told to stop fishing, which meant instantly he had no wages. "The buyer said, 'don't bother going to sea because I can't get rid of any of it'". There were no other alternatives as the only other buyers in Scotland also sends their produce to Europe. "All the buyers are in exactly the same position, pretty much all their stock [...] had nowhere to go. What they do then is tell fishermen to stop fishing, because if they can't sell it, we are stuffed" (Drew [CW] 14th December 2020).

At the end of May when restrictions started to ease, Drew's buyer told him to start fishing again but only two days a week. 'There is a small market, fish a couple of days this week, we

will put the stuff out and see what we get paid for it', he was told. Drew got paid a small amount and did the same the following week. Then the market slowly started to come back as everyone, once lockdown ended, started to go out to restaurants again. By the end of July, sales had started to return to normal and this lasted for 3 or 4 weeks until European markets started to close down again. This caused problems for Drew which lasted until December. "Normally what happens from September onwards is the prices slowly rise as you get towards Christmas," he said. "But because everyone went back into Lockdown again the prices just stayed flat at a low price" (Drew [CW] 14th December 2020).

Hugh is another creel fisherman; his background is working as a scallop diver. Like Drew he is a member of the Scottish Creel Fishermen's Federation but also works as a director of a distribution company that provides service for just over 30 creel boats. Their UK sales are mainly direct to over 200 top restaurants in the UK. When COVID-19 restrictions closed down the entire hospitality sector they lost almost all of their customers. "When they shut down it's obvious, we have no customers. Only one or two have been brave enough to carry on with doing take aways and home deliveries. The COVID impact is quite obvious" (Hugh [NE] 13th January 2021). His role with this business has given him a wider perspective of how the pandemic has impacted small-scale fishers with much of what he had to say echoing Drew:

It has come and gone in fits and starts this year depending on the levels of control from COVID. It depends on what kind of fishing they do for what they have managed to do in lockdown. The langoustine prawns, crab and lobster guys, they were closed down pretty much for five or six weeks at the beginning of lockdown in March. So, most of those guys would have eventually got a living (Hugh [NE] 13th January 2021).

The story for scallop divers was different though. They got a burst of activity from the end of August through to October, and then, as soon as the restaurants closed down in November, they were tied up again. "We got a few days in December and then they put the whole country back in lockdown. From our perspective, of scallop diving, it has been absolutely disastrous" (Hugh [NE] 13th January 2021).

Much of the produce that is caught on creel boats is comparatively expensive to catch compared to the same produce that has been caught on either trawlers or through dredging. As a result, the market for them is smaller. Creel fishing appears economically unviable without international markets as this gives them access to a larger number of people who can afford their produce.

Whilst there has been an increase in direct local sales during the pandemic this has not been at a scale that could replace their dependency on international markets. Indeed, the markets that sustain creel fishing in Scotland exist entirely due to the technology and infrastructure that reduces the time it takes to distribute their produce across long distances, enabling their produce to reach markets in Western Europe. Interestingly, as we saw in chapter 6, these markets appeared as an outcome of the fish stock crises in the late 1980s that occurred when the UK Government removed the three-mile limit for bottom trawling. The result was a shortage of traditional fish stocks, so fishers turned to shell fish to meet the still existing demand for fish. This was enabled by the invention of *plastic prawn tube* in the late 1980s that were designed to keep captive prawns alive while they were distributed to western Europe. It is this market that fishers on the west coast have become dependent on.

This swing between crisis and expansion and crisis again reveals contradictions at the heart of capitalism's relationship to mobility. Capital attempts to mitigate against the conditions that are created as a result of its need to reproduce able consumers and extracting value from compliant workers through this expansion. The increasing growth in infrastructure projects and technological innovations to reduce distances aims to open up new markets and make global supply chains more efficient to aid the accumulation of capital. It also serves to force these conditions out into peripheral areas in an attempt to resolve this contradiction. Its effects are to create ever increasing dependencies on mobilities that leaves consumers and producers vulnerable to supply chain shocks.

As we have seen with the COVID-19 pandemic, when these shocks happen, people turn to alternatives. These alternatives are in proximity rather than distant, and this points to an ethical dimension to this contradiction where mobilities, which are growing at unprecedented levels globally, are appearing at the same time as the concern about the

impact they are having on both people and the environment (Essebo & Baeten 2012). The technological fixes that serve to push the productivity of capitalist agriculture relies heavily on cheap oil. They are leading to increased volatility in food prices and is simply unsustainable (Weis 2010). Oil, a perfect metaphor for capitalism's ethical vacuum, is itself the result of the compression of space through time where the social cost of time is unaccounted for. This is driving these expansions and causes an uneven responsibility for, and uneven vulnerability to, climate change (Weis 2010).

7.2 Brexit

Another crisis discussed during the fieldwork was the one caused by Brexit. The fieldwork was conducted between July 2020 and September 2021 and Brexit only came into effect on January 1st 2021. With this in mind much of what participants discussed was in anticipation of the impact Brexit would have and how that was affecting their farming. When Brexit came into force, the impact was felt more acutely by fishers as they were more reliant on trade with the EU. For this reason, this section will be split into two parts: one looking at the impact for farmers and crofters and the other looking at the impact for fishers. As with COVID-19, the most telling issues concerned access to resources such as technology and infrastructure that enabled produce and goods to move across long distances in short times.

Small-scale Farming

For most crofters the issue with Brexit was the anticipation of the effect it would have. Kay was one crofter who was concerned about this:

With Brexit there is a huge amount of uncertainty about it. Such as where the markets are going to be. At the moment we have the Australia trade deal controversy and we are going to see an increase in cheaper meats being imported and potentially a reduction in the price that crofters get for the produce as a result of this (Kay [NW] 3rd August 2021).

The reason for concern about Brexit in this instance relates to competition and deregulation. Much of this is down to the lower costs of producing meat in certain locations

and the low costs of distributing these goods over large distances in fast times. However, as we will see, these supply chains have shown vulnerabilities too.

Many crofters are also concerned about how the subsidies that they are currently able to get access to would be affected. Val spoke about the loss of income from the EU's Common Agricultural Policy due to Brexit: "It has had a negative impact on crofting and will continue to have a negative effect in the sense that there was money coming into the Highlands and Islands through CAP for rural development and for small businesses and communities" (Val [CW] 11th July 2021).

Whilst the Scottish Government has committed to maintain much of the CAP system until 2024, in August 2020 the Scottish Parliament passed the Agriculture (Retained EU Law and Data) (Scotland) Act²¹ which gave ministers the power to alter the CAP. Val speculated on the impact of this. "In the Highland region alone, that was about £20Million pounds [CAP rural development payments] and a significant amount of that went into crofting" she claimed as she listed the residual affects this would have. "It could be used to build or renovate a local hall or other community facilities. That has been cut off and there is no replacement of that money" (Val [CW] 11th July 2021). She also expressed her fear of what might happen in its place:

In the medium to long term, the government have struck an atrocious deal with Australia and that will be replicated and that will undermine the livestock part of crofting, and obviously that is across all of the UK. That is because of the price and quality of the produce coming in (Val [CW] 11th July 2021).

Alongside this, inflation through supply chains has also caused problems. "Anything you buy, such as animal feed, to get it in to the country or past customs all those things need haulage costs that will have negative impact" (Val [CW] 11th July 2021). Val had already experienced issues with supply chains as a result of Brexit, particularly things that come in from Ireland such as animal medication, and vitamins and minerals. On top of this she was concerned about the impact of now having to pay VAT on imported medication for her livestock and

²¹ Agriculture (Retained EU Law and Data) (Scotland) Bill 2019. Available online: <https://archive2021.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/currentcommittees/113567.aspx> (accessed on 18 September 2022).

being able to get access to this medication. The possibility of these indirect impacts is a real cause for concern. When discussing her feed suppliers, she reflected on the impact of this on their farming. “Our concern on this is later on because they use fertiliser for growing the hay. If that increases the costs, and they import that, the costs will be put on down the line and the costs to crofters will become too much” (Val [CW] 26th January 2021).

The impact Brexit is having on supply chains for crofters is something Ann has experienced too, “Brexit it is more about accessing the seeds for us. They are more difficult to get hold of because of Brexit but they are also more difficult to get hold of because of COVID and the amount of people that are actually buying them” (Ann [NE] 23rd July 2021). Ann suggested the reason for this may be due to distribution, as the process of actually getting them in to the country is more complicated now. As a result of this Ann has not been able to get all of her usual seeds and had to change the varieties she was growing. Whilst many crofters are able to access seeds locally this is not an option for Ann due to the conditions on Shetland. “It is impossible to get those seeds from Shetland”, she claimed while discussing the problems she has with access to certain varieties of seeds. She described growing leek seeds as an example of the problems she faces:

You would grow them first (that’s biannual). They would have to grow for the first year then you need to get the seeds dry and ripe before the end of the season because of our British climate, and Shetland is even worse. [...] That is why a lot of seeds are grown in Europe. The conditions there are better for organic seeds, the seeds mature at a faster rate. (Ann [NE] 23rd July 2021)

Ann has plans to move towards her own seed production. “There is more of a move for seed saving, there is a seed sovereignty thing going on. We buy some stuff from Real Seeds” (Ann [NE] 23rd July 2021). As well as this she also grows her own and seed saves tomatoes, chillies, kale, parsnips and even things like flowers. But this is not an option for all the seeds she needs and so still sources some seeds from France. For example, her garlic comes from Taimoor Organics in France. “We had a panic that we wouldn’t be able to get hold of it,” she recollected. “But they seem to have ironed everything out. I think it is still coming from the same place but there is less of it.” There have also been issues with getting certain seeds from Ireland because of Brexit, with some seed companies stating that they will not deal

with her because of it. This, it appears, has been down to new boarder checks, but Ann has managed to get round by growing different varieties. Whilst some crofters have been able to find solutions to the gaps left by Brexit, creel fishers have found no easy way to solve the problems it has caused.

Small-scale Fishing

For fishers, the impact of Brexit was immediate and far more damaging. “Brexit has absolutely hammered us” recalled Drew, a creel fisherman from the West Coast of the Scottish Highlands:

The exports just stopped overnight on the 1st January and my buyer tried to get stuff out on the 5th January. That failed, he tried again on the 13th and that failed. We were tied up for the whole of January, we went back for two days at the end of the month and then got told don’t work next week” (Drew [CW] 12th March 2021).

Fishers have continued to struggle with this collapse of their supply chains. This has been caused by changes to customs checks as the customs officers now need to be able to see the produce before it is transported overseas. Whilst the distributor has been able to address this through a different method of packing, the costs of this have been passed on to the fishers themselves. Drew explained the financial implications of this:

The biggest knock-on effect is we have had a 25% drop off in price! That is 25% on all export sales and is directly attributable to Brexit. The price at market in Europe will still be the same and everyone in between is still making what they will normally make” (Drew [CW] 12th March 2021).

Similar to the experience fishers have had with COVID-19, their dependence on international markets have left them vulnerable to crises of this nature. Not only has the cost of distribution increased due to Brexit but the demand has dropped too.

The amount of produce being exported fell, with their fish landings down 24% in January 2021. “You can attribute almost all of that to Brexit because the fishing was quite good in January”, Drew revealed. “We are trying not to do as much as we would normally as the

market simply isn't there" (Drew [CW] 12th March 2021). Most of their market is still in Europe but their problem was getting it there. COVID-19 support initiatives such as The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (furlough) helped protect fishers from this to some extent. "The buyer has been able to put staff on furlough, so they haven't lost their jobs yet. But they will at some point because furlough isn't for Brexit" (Drew [CW] 12th March 2021). There was less produce being transported on the lorries in each direction which, along with other additional costs, increase the cost of distribution per item. "You also have to pay for things like vet certificates which are about £350 per lorry and there are other costs too", said Drew. "The costs between landing and the sale have increased but the only people who have been badly affected are the fishermen" (Drew [CW] 12th March 2021).

The distribution issues caused by Brexit do not stop there. Seafood sales in the UK often get to their customers via the same transport routes as those going to the EU, a problem Hugh was able to describe. "A lot of our UK product actually piggy backs on transport routes running into the EU," he said. This has meant that Hugh has had to deliver produce himself, resulting in yet higher costs of transportation. "I have had to take a van and drive product down through the country today because our normal transport routes to London are not available" (Hugh [NE] 13th January 2021). Hugh had first-hand experience of what was causing the hold ups. "Last Tuesday there was an artic lorry primed ready to go for Boulogne with two pallets of live langoustines on it just as a tester. They never even got through the first stage of the export health system" (Hugh [NE] 13th January 2021). There was no feedback about what they were doing wrong, but a week later they tried again. "They got past the stage that they were at the previous week and they thought that they were going to get it away, but then they then came to login to TRACES..."

TRACES is a registration system that needs to be completed before their produce can board a ferry in Dover. It was only at this point that they found out that they needed a pin code which had to be issued by HMRC. "You need HMRC authorisation", said Hugh, "but HMRC had failed to tell anyone that they needed this pin number. So, we got in touch with HMRC yesterday to say we desperately need this pin to get into TRACES. They said 'oh, we're sorry, that is a 120-day process to issue that!'" (Hugh [NE] 13th January 2021). The difference between the impact these crises have had for crofters and creel fishers is telling. Whilst

fishers are largely dependent on trade routes, crofters are very much a part of a local food system. This is due in part to fishers being priced out of local fish markets by the trawl industry in the 1970s and 80s, something that was covered in chapter 6.

These delays have caused additional costs as this meant that some of Hugh's live produce had to be killed during its distribution. At this point "it becomes fresh rather than live seafood," Hugh explained, "which attracts a lower premium" (Hugh [NE] 13th January 2021). By the middle of March fishers were able to get their produce to markets in Europe but the costs were having a severe impact. "Boats are losing 25% of their income" explained Hugh. This loss of income was due to the changes to distribution. Instead of being sent on the back of a seven-tonne artic lorry in boxes, their produce is being transported in water tanks and taken to France alive and held in France alive. The scale of the financial impact was reinforced by Drew who had been told to "expect a reduction in income of between 20-30% for the foreseeable future" (Drew [CW] 23rd July 2021). Again, there was a feeling that it would be fishers who took the brunt of the financial cost. "The buyers at the end of the chain won't pay more" Drew reflected, "the losses will get passed down and the only people that really lose out in that chain is the guy at the bottom" (Drew [CW] 23rd July 2021). How to maintain a living in these circumstances is not straight forward for fishers as the relationship between supply and demand is so variable as Drew explained:

My biggest problem is balancing how much I work to how much I lose. Normally when the fishing is good, I work harder and when it is not good, I don't work so hard. But now that has to be flipped a bit because when the fishing is poor the prices won't go up, so you need to work harder then, for less product, but to get paid more for it. It could be like this for another couple of years (Drew [CW] 23rd July 2021).

Here, the gaps exposed by Brexit have revealed contradictions around accumulation caused by tensions between supply and demand. This is something that will be discussed at greater length in chapter 8. Again, as with the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the contradiction lies in long supply chains being both a strength and a weakness of capitalism. Here, though, there is greater emphasis on access to markets for fishers. What has been evident is that not only are they dependent on these markets, but small-scale fishers have little control over access to them, and the additional costs passed down on to fishers are

making their work less viable. Fishers have attempted to grapple for more control over their income by managing the supply to maintain prices but this has not unhooked them from this dependency.

7.3 Gaps and Contradictions Through the Crises of Capitalism

Both Brexit and COVID-19 have revealed gaps in supply chains. In both instances this has led to an increase in demand for locally sourced produce. The distance from urban centres of each participant has seemingly been relative to the manner in which they have responded to these crises and, for crofters, the impact it has had on them. Additionally, creel fishers have felt these issues more so than crofters due to their dependency on distant markets for income. During these crises, capitalism's ability to compress time and space has been compromised. In these circumstances it is to be expected that supply chains will become more localised. What is less expected is the degree to which this has been seen as a benefit to crofters as it has led to a substantial increase in direct sales.

According to Wright, a theory of social transformation must examine the gaps and contradictions in the process of social reproduction, its failures, and the way it creates openings where new possibilities can be realised. In this context the search for the gaps and contradictions that lead to crises is central to any emancipatory agenda to, in the very least, understand the direction of change itself.

Capital is perpetually caught in the contradiction between reproducing able consumers and extracting value from compliant workers (Marx 1990). Subject is turned into object in a process of commodity fetishism so that workers can put things, such as labour, to market. As we have seen, this process then enables value to be extracted but results in various contradictions both ethical and economic. Capitalism is forced to manage this balancing act between reproducing able consumers and compliant workers, and when it fails to hold them in equilibrium this results in crises.

Contemporary crises, caused by capital's need to extract value through low wages, debt, and an increasing need for cheap food, are leading to a demand for financial autonomy from small-scale food producers who seek this through strategies such as food sovereignty,

political agroecology and land sovereignty (as we will see in chapter 8). The need to extract value from commodified labour that drives these crises is, at the same time, leading to an increased demand for autonomy amongst rural communities. This contradiction, one of several that has been explored in this chapter, is foundational to capital's crises (Harvey 2015) and is leading to the emergence and strengthening of alternative economic practices.

Harvey maps these internal contradictions of capital as it flows through different moments of production, realization, distribution and reinvestment (Harvey 2020). During crises, such as those associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and Brexit, economic effects spiral out of control across the globe. The effects of this during the pandemic led to a shortening and diversification of supply chains, disruption to production chains, increased unemployment, furloughing of workers, remote working and a subsequent diminishing of demand. This crash in demand was most noticeable in types of consumerism that relied on reducing turnover time as close as possible to zero (Harvey 2020). Modes of production dependent on this infrastructure suffered the most and resulted in consumers looking for alternatives such as short chain supplies and direct sales. In the Highlands, small-scale farms saw dramatic increases in direct sales as supermarket shelves failed to be replenished.

John Holloway suggests that understanding the mechanisms of capitalism in this way is not simply a theory of dominations, but a theory of the vulnerability and crises of this domination as an expression of what he calls anti-power (Holloway 2002). For Holloway, if crises such as this are the separation of social relations, then any transformative movement must, in some respects, involve the intensification of crisis (Holloway 2002). Holloway explains crisis as the collapse of the social relations of capitalism and any struggle must be through strategies that both intensify this process and fight against its restructuring. The demand for direct sales that were seen during the pandemic was a product of the crisis of capitalism at this time. But it was also an element of food sovereignty, a strategy employed by small-scale farming communities (see chapter 8) which aims to peel back market forces to create a more responsible food system. With this in mind we will now turn our focus to the transformative strategies employed by small-scale food producers.

8. Transformative Strategies Employed by Small-scale Food Producers in Scotland

This chapter relates to the third research question - *What are the transformative strategies being employed by small-scale farming communities in Scotland?* It will consider strategies that relate to food production, food supply chains and access to natural resources. It will analyse the transformative qualities of these strategies and will look at how they resist the extraction of value by external forces through more restorative farming practices, short food supply chains and common ownership of natural resources. While the last two chapters looked at the unintended trajectories of change caused by the introduction of capitalism into the Highlands and the resulting crises as they have been experienced in Scotland, this chapter looks at how strategies being employed by small-scale food producers are, to some extent, emerging in the context of the crises of capitalism and being used to resist and/or reverse the conditions that it has introduced.

According to Wright, a theory of strategies and struggles is a central component to any theory of social transformation (Wright 2010). This chapter will explore the strategies employed by small-scale farming communities in Scotland and the organisations that work with them to gain collective autonomy, develop alternative sustainable farming practices, and resist the reproduction of capital. It starts with an analysis of the strategies that have been identified by social movement organisations working with small-scale farming communities. This will include land sovereignty, political agroecology and food sovereignty. It then focuses on these strategies as they have been utilised by individuals, families and communities in Scotland and analyse their transformative qualities in relation to three stages; access to natural resources, farming practices, and food supply chains.

Each strategy will be addressed through considering how they have emerged, what they have involved and what has been their benefits and consequences. The aims of each strategy are clearly laid out as we will see. Political agroecology aims to address systemic crises through localised, everyday, alternative, and sustainable practices that defend against the overexploitation of natural resources by corporations and the state (Gonzalez de Molina

2013). Food sovereignty aims to protect the rights of small-scale farming communities to define their own sustainable and culturally appropriate food and agriculture systems. It places localised producers and consumers at the centre of decision making for food systems rather than at the demands of international markets and corporations (LVC Declaration of Nyéléni 2007). Land sovereignty aims to address the monopolisation of natural resources essential to small-scale farming communities through the assertion of common ownership and a process of territorialisation (Franco & Borras Jr 2012). The question we now turn to is, how are these strategies being employed by small-scale food producers in Scotland?

8.1 Political Agroecology

The first strategy is political agroecology. Rosset & Martinez-Torres (2013) define this through two characteristics. The first is small-scale farmers engaging with nature through what they call co-production to strengthen their resource base. The second is the struggle for collective autonomy by small-scale farmers and their communities by reducing dependencies on circuits of capital that cause inequality and unequal exchange. This shift from dependency to relative autonomy often involves land reform where small-scale farming communities regain access to land from large landowners through various strategies such as land-rights based approach to tenancies, land occupations, or community land buyouts. These will be covered in greater depth in the section on land sovereignty.

The first characteristic requires applying the following principles to the design and management of agroecosystems (Anderson et al 2021):

- Adapting to the local environment
- Building healthy soils rich in organic matter
- Conserving soil and water
- Diversifying species, crop varieties and livestock breeds in the agroecosystem over time and space from a landscape perspective
- Enhancing biological interactions and productivity throughout the system rather than focusing on individual species and single genetic varieties

- Minimising the use of external resources and inputs (e.g. for nutrients and pest management)

Many of these principles are counter to the logic of capitalism. Here space is constructed through time to help retain value, rather than annihilated by it to allow value to be extracted. This can be through developing local environmental knowledges that enable food producers to work with nature, through rest time used to develop biodiversity and foster ecosystems, or reducing external dependencies through localised networks and skills that rely on local knowledges of the environment. Much of this is enabled by the second characteristic, the struggle for collective autonomy. Again, this runs counter to the demands of capitalism with natural assets being in common ownership.

Political agroecology brings together social, political and ecological perspectives into a single strategy alongside the principles of agroecology to address multiple systemic crises and develop alternative and sustainable practices. Gonzalez de Molina (2013) considers to what extent are these collective, localised and everyday practices experienced through political agroecology in pursuit of sustainability. Agroecology takes a prominent role in the struggle for sustainability in Scotland, where small-scale farming communities have defended their natural resources against overexploitation and enclosure. Both crofting tenancies and community land ownerships are the manifestation of struggles of this nature, with the crofting system itself a legislative achievement of land right struggles during the Highland Clearances (Devine 1994).

How it has Emerged

In Scotland, small-scale farmers adopt agroecological approaches to food production that offer an alternative to industrial farming. While some do this to address the environmental crisis, others utilise this approach out of need. Many crofters, who have found themselves in remote areas of the Highlands with poor quality soils, have had to develop their land through traditional localised techniques. Cat lives in North Assynt, where crofters have been producing food for their communities for centuries. Like most crofting land, it is in an isolated area unpopular with entrepreneurial and industrial farms. Here the land is covered in a thin layer of earth, as she explained. “With crofting you get more of a sense of it not just

working the land but is managing the land and making it more sustainable. It is not the easiest land to work, a lot of it is just a few inches of soil on top of rock" (Cat [NW] 11th March 2021). According to Cat, there is a lot of local knowledge that is passed down from generation to generation. "I think it is just in people's bones round here", she said (Cat [NW] 11th March 2021). For crofters like Cat, being sustainable is not about a global environmental movement, it is a way of life, "people don't make a big deal about being sustainable. But they need to do it as they need the land to work for them in that way (Cat [NW] 22nd July 2021).

Kay, who lives in North Harris, also spoke about a culture of sustainability where knowledge is passed on from generation to generation. "Many people involved in agriculture will tell you that it is something that you are born into", he said. "They acquire knowledge as they go along. Crofting was a bit more than just agriculture. It was a way of life rather than simply an agricultural occupation" (Kay [NW] May 18th 2021). Crofting was not originally intended as a way of providing produce into the food supply chain in general. It was intended to provide the tenant with a piece of land to grow crops for their own use and to give them self-sufficiency. Localised knowledges have helped crofters sustain themselves for centuries. These knowledges are not specific to the whole of Scotland but to its regions, as Kay explained:

If it is done properly, it includes doing particular cropping at the right time, growing various types of crops. It depends on where you are. A croft here will demand a certain use that may be different to elsewhere [...] The first thing is that it is actually used and then maintained properly. If not, it just turns to bracken. But it should be used in a more sustainable way (Kay [NW] 3rd August 2021).

Val described her croft as being, "small-scale, environmentally friendly, sustainable, extensive as opposed to intensive". She also spoke of how, for many crofters, being sustainable means not being reliant on external inputs like fertilisers and antibiotics, "I can't remember the last time an antibiotic was used, you don't need to use them. Even going back to when my uncle was doing it, I can't remember" (Val [CW] 11th July 2021). Her attitude towards using fertilizer is similar, as she explained. "The land is poor here and by just throwing on tonnes of fertiliser just to get animal feed, I really don't think that is

sustainable. We have never done that". One of the issues she has faced with animal feed though is that there have been times when the land has not been able to provide and they have had to buy in feed from elsewhere. "There used to be patterns of weather which enabled you to cut hay and you knew you had a week or so to dry it. But now you don't know because the weather is so changeable, so we buy in hay from Stirlingshire" (Val [CW] 11th July 2021).

Nia discussed how, despite there still being many large-scale industrial farms in Scotland, the culture of small-scale farming is starting to attract people there who want to farm in a more sustainable manner

Crofting quite often attracts people who want to do things in a different way. They maybe have different priorities in their lives, and they are less focused on a capitalist mindset [...] I think externally people look at Scotland and think it's amazing and it's at the forefront of shifting land practices, but it doesn't always feel like this here (Nia [CE] 30th October 2020).

Some, like Nia, work in the way they do so that they can affect change in the food system through agroecology. These sustainable practices, that are restorative rather than extractive, are common place amongst small-scale farmers in Scotland. Ann, started her croft 13 years ago with a view to trying to reduce Shetland's carbon footprint. She had moved there from Edinburgh but was struggling to sell her house because of the financial crash and so did not have any money and had to build it up slowly. "That was a great thing to do at the time because if we had a lot of money to put into it, we would probably have gone too big too quickly and would have struggled to manage it" (Ann [NE] 15th March 2021). On the back of this they were able to build a reputation for provision of fresh produce without ever advertising their veg box scheme.

When Jo started to work on her croft, which had been left empty for over 20 years, she also adopted a similar approach. "It is all grassland, so we need to tame it to make it more productive", she said. "We are trying to do it in a wildlife friendly way. The soil is actually quite poor, it is very acidic. So, we have also been digging in horse manure and seaweed to beef it up" (Jo [CW] 18th May 2021). When she took on the croft, she was informed of her

responsibilities for maintaining the land by the Scottish Crofting Federation. “We were told that we had to keep it productive which was alright because that was why we wanted it” (Jo [CW] 18th May 2021).

When John took on his croft 10 years ago the land had been used for sheep farming for the previous 30 years leaving it with low levels of nutrition. It took the best part of 10 years to build the soil up and said that he lost money during the first four or five years whilst its productivity was still low. He does annual soil analyses and found that it was at the five-year mark that he started to see a net increase in organic matter in his soils. This continued to grow and has a negative CO₂ output as a result.

What it Involves

To develop a more restorative practice, John divided up one of his large fields in to seven smaller fields. The aim is to create a structure for a six-year rotation for his crops. He produces on only 25% of his productive area in a year but has a large area for building fertility rather than using synthetic fertilisers. He has a composting scheme which brings waste in from neighbouring farms to produce the compost he needs that follows an organic production system (no chemical fertilisers). He uses pigs and chickens within that rotation as well. The pigs are used to eat the leftover veg and then manure it for the next season. Using his time in this way has helped John to build a productive space, “that is how we get the value in what we are doing, it is unusual” (John [NE] 27th March 2021). His yields are now double of what they were but it has taken over five years to build that up.

Ann and her partner did a number of things to build up their soil. It is a balancing act though, and Ann spoke about the difficulty in deciding if the soils have been built up enough. “If you put too much nutrient on you can have soil obesity”, she explained. “You can’t keep throwing stuff at the soil and it keeps getting better, it’s an equilibrium” (Ann [NE] 15th March 2021). Ann’s tries to put more back into the soil than they are taking out of it. “It is about keeping the balance of nature and not destroying it to achieve our aims. In that sense it should be sustainable, we shouldn’t be impacting on nature” (Ann [NE] 23rd July 2021)

Nia is in Aberdeenshire where people grow barley for whisky and farm cattle. The practices being used to grow barley are extractive, as Nia explains. “It degenerates soils and creates nutrients run off”, she said, “it is definitely not restoring the ground and the soils health, it’s still extractive”, (Nia [CE] 30th October 2020). For Nia, it is how farmers think about time that is key. “You will see that the ground will change if you are grazing in a way that creates rest time after you graze. High impact with long rest periods”, she explained. “The common paradigm about farming which is extractive is about resource utilisation” (Nia [CE] 11th December 2020). Nia has switched to a more ecologically attuned approach which sees time as a resource. The ‘rest time’ she uses means that the land is no longer seen as a finite resource itself. For Nia, when you start engaging with agroecological practices, “it becomes far more about observation and working with nature and not against nature” (Nia [CE] 11th December 2020). Her practice runs counter to the logic of capitalist agriculture, nothing is surplus and nothing is wasted as she works with nature. “In nature there is no such thing as waste”, she said. “And yet we waste a third of our food” (Nia [CE] 11th December 2020).

Many of the practices that crofters have discussed are agroecological, particularly in crofting townships. There are also initiatives such as regenerative agriculture and mob grazing that have clear links with agroecology. Mob grazing is employed by several participants and is the practice of using local knowledge about the impact livestock has in certain environments for the creation of productive spaces. This has been used for the benefit of farmers, communities, and the environment. Farmers have discussed how grazing their livestock in this manner in spaces such as woodlands and moorlands makes them more accessible to people and increases their biodiversity.

It is common for crofters to use livestock to cultivate land. Some, like Beth, have used pigs for this. “We try to put the pigs on a different spot each time we have them and put them on a spot that we want to dig up. They are pretty good at digging up for you” (Beth [CW] 12th March 2021). Beth then uses this area to grow grasses for feed. “It did take a few attempts to get it there. It also can depend on what grass you plant, and we tend to use one that is a long-term grass”, she said. “That should mean that we will have better grass that will feed the cows more and we will get more hay from it” (Beth [CW] 12th March 2021).

Understanding the advantages of certain types of livestock to help develop the land is

resulting in a shift in the types of livestock being reared, as Jan explained. “We want to up our number of pigs and reduce the number of sheep”, she said. “The pigs don’t need as much area but need to be rotated to keep them on fresh ground every couple of months” (Jan [CW] 29th July 2021). Jan went on to explained that despite this being time intensive, the benefits it brings to the land make it worthwhile. “Pigs are very good at churning up the land so you need to rotate them as much as you can and to make sure they get as much nutrition that they can get from this”, (Jan [CW] 29th July 2021). Jan tries not to over work the land, “it is not just, put a pig on a piece of land and then leave it there for their entire life. It needs fresh grass to thrive”, she explained. “They can still do the rooting up on fresh grass, so we just keep moving them on in a managed process” (Jan [CW] 29th July 2021).

Capital’s relationship to nature and the tension between nature’s reproduction requirements and capital’s need to appropriate it without regard for these long-term needs due to its emphasis on short-term profits is the antithesis of these regenerative practices. The examples seen in this chapter offer an alternative relationship to time and space than through capitalism. Here rest time is used to restore lands, develop its biodiversity and regenerate its fertility. Capitalist farming uses time to produce goods and so develops its capacity for time-space compression. This leads to spacio-temporal contradictions and the degradation of land as an inevitable outcome of it (Amin 2012). Through a desire to displace this, capitalism helps free the extraction of surplus value from extra-economic and spatio-temporal constraints (Jessop 2003). This acceleration in the flows of capital has many disruptive effects that intensifies these spatio-temporal contradictions and reinforces its tendencies for uneven geographical development. As we have seen, in these peripheral places, alternatives appear out of need when labour’s dependency on the market leaves it in a precarious position. This generates political pressures to reclaim the land that is produced through an interaction with land sovereignty, as has already been mentioned. In these agroecological practices, capitalism has, to some extent, been interrupted, with the annihilation of space through time being put into reverse (Ward 2020).

The Benefits and Consequences

The benefits of these types of practices are being seen by farmers who are adopting them to bring previously unusable lands back into use. Nia, who sees her farming practice as being

agroecological, has set up a grazier business that involves restoring lands in this way. She has a small 18-acre farm but works with landowners who do not have cattle in what is seen as a mutually beneficial relationship. This means that she gets access to land at no cost. “We graze our cattle on there to restore some of the habitat because it has just been left for 30 years and has got matted with really acidic looking grasses which are smothering out any diversity. So, they have asked us to graze up there” (Nia [CE] 30th October 2020). Being able to work in this way does not just provide space on which to graze her cattle, there are numerous environmental benefits to it too, “I firmly believe that the way that we are farming, or the way we are trying to farm, is beneficial to the ground that we access. We are increasing biodiversity, increasing water retention, we ensure that we have ground cover much of the year round” (Nia [CE] 30th October 2020).

Ann and her partner use a similar approach to Nia with a four-year rotation. They build up the soil using organic matter to create a new surface. They also seed save potatoes and kale which are the lowest impact produce to grow in Shetland. “We just try to keep those inputs as low as possible and recycle as much as possible” (Ann [NE] 23rd July 2021). The result is the land they have been working for the last ten years is now markedly improved and their productivity per square meter has increased significantly. Ann uses time as a resource to build up the productivity of the soil, “we would argue that, to get Shetland’s soil good for growing, it takes at least four years, probably more like 7 or 8” (Ann [NE] 15th March 2021).

Many participants have utilised agroecological methods to address the poor quality of land in their communities by building up the soil and even adding additional layers. This not only impacts on the productivity of the land but also increases the levels of energy absorption. It is a process that takes at least four to five years before farmers see any net increases but beyond that point the benefits have been significant. John, who has both livestock and runs a veg box scheme, has been documenting the process:

We do annual soil analysis that has shown that it is only after about 5 years that you actually start to see a net increase in organic matter, [...] now our soils organic matter levels are growing steadily, and we have an annual carbon budget, which is this year, negative 110 tonnes of CO₂ equivalent. We omit about 80 tonnes of carbon and we soak up almost 200 tonnes of organic matter. (John [NE] 27th March 2021)

John provides food with a high nutritional value for 180 families and soaks up 110 tonnes of carbon in the process. But there are no economic incentives to adopt these practices as he points out:

We don't get paid for any of that by either the market or by the agricultural support system. Until you change that reward mechanism it is not going to be something that attracts people into the industry [...] I wish I could pay my electricity or insurance bill with carbon credits. I have to pay for everything in cash, I have to pay pounds for every input to the farm (John [NE] 27th March 2021).

In Scotland, political agroecology has emerged through practices that have adapted to local environments. Crofters and small-scale farmers have been building and conserving healthy soils rich in organic matter. They have done this through enhancing biological interactions and productivity throughout the system and diversifying species, crop varieties and livestock breeds over time and space minimising the use of external resources and inputs such as fertilisers and antibiotics.

Small-scale farmers in Scotland have adapted agroecological practices to become more autonomous of input and credit markets through strengthening their resources (van der Ploeg 2010). This section has, to some extent, focused narrowly on a technical aspect of agroecology that is centred on production practices. It is important to note that its political dimensions are not excluded here, but are merely present in other sections within the chapter. The interrelationship between agroecology, food sovereignty and land sovereignty, is essential when trying to understand the transformative potential of these strategies that seek collective autonomy and empowerment for small-scale food producers (Anderson et al 2021).

Social movements adopting agroecology have developed values flexible enough to allow regional implementation as they are able to reflect social, political, and ecological perspectives in each of their diverse communities. They have a shared goal of collective autonomy and resilience in the face of the social, environmental and economic crises of capital. In this context, a shift, through food sovereignty, land sovereignty and political agroecology, is being seen as the only way to address multiple systemic crises (Rosset 2011).

This, unlike liberalised agriculture that prioritises global market influences and subsidised prices to undercut local and regional economic development, gives priority of market access to local producers. Market-based 'solutions' have led to crises for rural communities, depoliticizing the problems and causing landlessness (Rosset 2011). Agroecology empowers these communities using local and traditional knowledges and through creating stronger links with consumers in what has been seen as a re-territorialization and democratization of food systems (Anderson et al 2021).

8.2 Food Sovereignty

The second strategy is food sovereignty. This was defined during the Forum for Food Sovereignty in 2007 and then adopted by over 80 countries through the Declaration of Nyéléni as being:

The right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations. (LVC 2007)

Anderson, Maughan and Pimbert (2019) see food sovereignty as a transformative strategy, employed by social movements to contest and challenge neoliberal development that involves re-thinking food systems on participative grounds. These work through learning processes that ruptures conventional thinking and practice. The abstract political objectives of food sovereignty are complemented by the capacity of agroecology to resist corporate capture and containment. The Nyéléni Declaration of Food Sovereignty stated the six pillars of food sovereignty as being that it:

- Focuses on the right to food for all people and rejects the proposition that food is just another commodity or component for international agri-business
- Values small-scale food providers and rejects policies, actions and programmes that undervalue them, threaten their livelihoods and eliminate them

- Localises food systems to bring food providers and consumers closer together and resists governance structures, agreements and practices that depend on and promote unsustainable and inequitable international trade that benefit remote and unaccountable corporations
- Places control over territory, land, grazing, water, seeds, livestock and fish populations with local food providers so they can use and share them in socially and environmentally sustainable ways and rejects the privatisation of natural resources
- Builds on the skills and local knowledges of food providers that conserve, develop and manage localised food production and rejects technologies that undermine, threaten or contaminate these
- Works with Nature in low external input and agroecological methods and rejects methods that that depend on energy intensive monocultures and other industrialised production methods which harm beneficial ecosystem function

Food sovereignty, as adopted by the Land Workers' Alliance²² and the Scottish Crofting Federation (SCF 2011), was first presented by La Vía Campesina at the UN Food and Agriculture Organization's World Food Summit in 1996 (Desmarais, 2007; Desmarais and Nicholson, 2013). Its plan aims to "guarantee and protect people's space, ability and right to define their own models of production, food distribution and consumption patterns in rural and urban contexts" (Pimbert 2018:03). To do this it seeks to reorganise food trade so that it prioritises local food production and self-sufficiency, and ensures, that food imports do not displace local supply chains. Central to it is the principle that food is a source of nutrition first, and secondly an item of trade. This section will focus on how small-scale farming communities have defined their own models of food distribution and consumption in this context but will not look at food production as this has already been covered in the previous two sections.

During the COVID-19 pandemic many small-scale food producers, saw a dramatic increase in direct sales as long food supply chains collapsed. During this period demand for food

²² The Land Workers' Alliance *Theory of Change* document. Available online: <https://landworkersalliance.org.uk/theory-of-change/> (accessed on 18 September 2022).

systems to become more localised created a space for movements utilising food sovereignty to build. This brought food providers and consumers closer together and strengthened their communities as they dealt with the impact of the pandemic. For many participants, such as Cory, food sovereignty is “a farm model that is more resilient” (Cory [SW] 7th December 2020) and schemes such as direct sales have been one of the ways small-scale farmers have been able to deliver it.

How it has Emerged

In Shetland, direct sales have given residents access to fresh produce as imported food does not usually come directly to the Island and tends to arrive via Aberdeen. Ann runs her croft with the aim of addressing the islands dependency on imports. “If people didn’t shop with us, they went to the supermarket”, she said. “There are no green grocers. There is a veg wholesalers, the ships and restaurants buy from them. That creates a dependency on bringing food into Shetland” (Ann [NE] 19th May 2021). Prior to the arrival of the oil industries in the 1970s the island imported less of its food (Coull 1996). Ann reflected on how things changed during that period. “In my observation, there was a sudden need for the Shetlanders to have what people on the mainland had. And then supermarkets started coming in and providing that in a limited fashion, and everything started coming in on the boat” (Ann [NE] 19th May 2021). This is not typical of how practices like this have appeared in Scotland. On the west coast there has been a very different set of circumstances that have led to a demand for direct sales.

John, who has a croft on the Black Isle, distributes his veg boxes across the Highlands but his strongest customer base is on the west coast. This extra demand on the west coast is from a need for fresh produce, as he explained:

The market has retreated for the supply of fresh food and very local production has stopped largely because of the age of the population. It is worth me driving over for an hour to drop off and we have 90 customers over there and we have a waiting list of people wanting a delivery from us. (John [NE] 27th March 2021)

John explained that this is a result of the withdrawal of markets on the west coast, as “people are more willing to enter into a different arrangement for getting their foods.” He also delivers North of Inverness, on to the Black Isle, and up the east coast. “There they have supermarkets so tend to be people who want organic food and healthier food whilst on the west coast they are just looking for fresh food” (John [NE] 27th March 2021). John explained that this is, to some extent, due to supply chains with larger distributors no longer wanting to go to those locations. “The supermarkets were built in the towns on the east coast and they have cheaper petrol”, he said. (John [NE] 27th March 2021). The level and impact of infrastructure has led to the emergence of these alternatives, demands for direct sales, and also different methods of meeting these needs.

What it Involves

Jan, who lives in a remote community just south of Loch Ness, supplies food to her local community which she defines as being within 20-mile radius. Jan built up her customer base through word of mouth amongst the local community. “At first, they just didn’t want to go to the supermarket, but once they found the quality of meat was so superior, they are coming back and sales have increased” (Jan [CW] 30th October 2020). To help with this she does an Open Farm Sunday every June. This is a national event where they open up their croft so the public can see how they farm. They get relevant organisations delivering talks and demonstrations, it is very popular as she explained. “Our community around here is only about 400 people and we had over 200 people here last year” (Jan [CW] 30th October 2020). This is a national event and is popular with many crofters. In some of the remote areas of the highlands there is little infrastructure and crofters, like Jan, are the nearest food supplier for many people. “Where we are is 25 miles from any main food shop” said Jan as she reflected on why people were coming to her for food. “Basically, it is people not wanting to travel to the big shops” (Jan [CW] 30th October 2020). She also cited the quality of her produce as another reason why people were sourcing their food from her.

Beth lives in a neighbouring village to Jan and also sells her produce directly to customers from the local community. She defines the area she serves as being within a 14-mile radius because that is how far she can travel on her bike. “I can cycle fourteen miles on a bike with two chairs on it, with my two boys in, to do meat deliveries to a lot of people” (Beth [CW]

Wednesday 14th Oct 2020). Again, this has been beneficial to the local community during the COVID-19 pandemic when many new customers were trying to get more local produce. “One of them, the last time they were here, were like, ‘I’ve not bought any meat from the supermarket since I have started coming here’” (Beth [CW] Wednesday 14th Oct 2020).

John sells his produce through a subscription scheme which is structured like Community Supported Agriculture (CSA). His customers have to be a subscriber to get a delivery. The success of this model has led to John focusing on direct sales rather than farmers markets, local suppliers, and the wholesale markets in London that he used to supply. John stopped doing wholesale markets because of price pressure and because there was a stronger market on his doorstep. “We decided we would refocus and sell all of our produce direct to all of our customers so that we capture all of the sale value. We try to do that locally within an hour of our croft” (John [NE] 28th July 2021). There is more work involved with his box scheme as he has to do all the picking, packing, ordering and distribution. But, because his customers cannot just order when they want too, the model is more reliable, as he pointed out. “That [the subscription] makes it much easier to plan our production for the year”, he said. “We over produce to fulfil that, and then we sell the surplus to the wholesalers or to other box schemes” (John [NE] 28th July 2021).

Unlike John, most crofters depend on a more localised market and much of their custom comes from being visible to the local community. Crofters, like Kay, use methods such as open farm days and local farmers markets. “We are seeing more outlets where people can sell their own produce”, explained Kay. “You keep seeing signs saying we have eggs, or we have vegetables for sale. Some sales are done informally in Harris, though there may be small market groups” (Kay [NW] 3rd August 2021).

Informal economies are quite common in remote rural areas, especially in places like North Harris and Assynt. There a gift economy exists where, for example, one person may help a neighbour shearing and their neighbour will help them in return by fixing a fence. “That goes on all the time and always has”, said Cat. “There are lots of things that work like that, especially in winter when we have heavy snow” (Cat [NW] 22nd July 2021). Mac spoke about this too. One example he gave was that he had exchanged mutton for a yearlong supply of prawns. “It is very informal”, he said. “It is for people in friendships groups who will do that

kind of thing” (Mac [NW] 18th January 2021). Other examples have included supplying beef to a plumber who fixed a boiler, and taking photographs in exchange for a cut of venison. “We feel more connected for it”, said Mac as he described how a friendship group works. “There is more than a dozen but less than two dozen of us”, he explained, “if somebody isn’t doing very well, if they are ill or they have an accident or something then you might put a haunch of venison their way just to help them out” (Mac [NW] 18th January 2021).

While this sort of gift economy is common in rural areas, in Assynt it is seen as being “just how we do things round here”, according to Mac. “I think it is kind of embedded in the nature of the community itself”. Mac described how at times people do not even know who the ‘gift’ is from.

We feel more connected for it. It is lovely to come back... we have a sink by the back door, it is a kind of orning that covers the back of the house and from time to time you come back and there will be crabs in the sink or prawns and sometimes you don’t even know who it is from (Mac [NW] 18th Jan 2021).

The need for this type of social relation is important to the residents of Assynt. “You quickly come to realise that it is handy to have informal help on occasion”, said Mac, “for most people it is almost a pleasure being able to do something that doesn’t involve money, even if you have money in the bank to do it” (Mac [NW] 29th March 2021). It is part of the nature of this economy that it extends to an informal welfare system too and it is precious to the people of Assynt who want to keep it going. “To help out or to be helped out”, said Mac as he reflected on why it was so important to the community. “A combination of need and the enjoyment of these types of interaction” is what Mac thinks is keeping it alive.

Food sovereignty has been developed to address negative impacts for small-scale farmers and develop sustainable ecosystems (Chappell et al 2013). It has also been linked to greater levels of economic stability in the wake of crises and natural disasters (Holt-Gimenez 2002, Pimentel 2005). In contrast, global industrialised agribusiness threatens both biodiversity and the health and livelihoods of small-scale farmers (Foley et al 2011, Jones and Eyzaguirre 2007, Burlingame & Dernini 2010). Direct sales reduce the extraction of surplus value from these communities. It keeps more of the exchange from each sale in the farmer’s pocket

meaning that this income can now circulate within the community rather than be taken out. The type of gift economy that exists in Assynt goes a step further. Social relations are, in some instances, no longer commodified. Rather than turning subject into object, subjectivity is retained, recuperated or recaptured in a process that resembles John Holloway's anti-fetishisation (Holloway 2010). Here the 'social flow of doing' returns, no longer ruptured by reification. Cat and Mac feel that they have something precious that they benefit from, something they need and enjoy, but also, something that is embedded in the nature of the community itself.

The Benefits and Consequences

In Scotland there are numerous distribution initiatives being employed that relate to food sovereignty such as box schemes and direct sales. The relationships between farmer and consumer that are being developed through these initiatives is seen as an important part of their benefits. Whether through open farm days, customers collecting their produce direct from farms or simply having a visible presence in the community, there is an ethical imperative to tell the story of where their food comes from, as crofter Jan discussed:

We do offer to open it [the croft] to families with children, we are happy for them to come and meet the animals that way. It also teaches the children where their meat comes from [...] Even when it comes down to how was the pig slaughtered, we don't beat around the bush because I think they need to know. (Jan [CW] 30th Oct 2020)

For Jan, one of the most significant benefits has been the social interaction when customers come to the croft, "the kids love it but also the parents love it", she said. "I had a vegan turn up and she was so impressed with how we look after the animals she bought eggs. And she has been vegan since she was 12 years old!" (Jan [CW] 29th July 2021). Building a network of customers in this way has helped Jan's croft to become more sustainable. Like Jan, Beth also spoke about the benefits of people coming to collect produce from the croft and seeing how they work. "They can come here and see the place. It is then when you get into a discussion with them and say 'these are the cows... and here is their field...' This goes back to this whole concept that we have that it is *from the field to the fork*" (Beth [CW] Wednesday 14th Oct 2020).

Many participants talked about the distance between consumers and producers and wanting to reduce that gap. Cory, spoke about her customers reconnecting with their food and what is involved in producing it. She said this made her feel “more valued because they understand it and appreciate it” (Cory [SW], 23rd Dec 2020). Cory runs a veg box scheme for local customers where they pack and collect their own boxes from the farm. This approach brings a number of benefits. First is the time saved from not having to pack for customers and more time spent growing. For Cory, the more important benefit is people spending time at the farm, as usually people are removed from how their food is produced. For her, this connects them and helps them improve what they do. “We can see that people are eating the food and enjoying it and really value it and say it’s so much better than buying it from a supermarket.” She also discussed other benefits including farmers “being able to catch more in the pound from each food sale,” as this goes a long way to ensuring that farmers are not experiencing poverty (Cory [SW] 7th December 2020).

Like many crofters, the strategy for Ann is to get customers on the croft so they can see how things are done so they have confidence in where their food was coming from. Ann turned their veg box scheme into a Community Supported Agricultural model to bring people on to their croft and show them what was involved in growing food. Ann has open days, works with schools, and delivers training courses on where food comes from and the benefits of their methods. Financially, this is not an easy approach for her to take. “Our society is set up in a way that it is very difficult to make these choices”, she said. “It needs to be about sourcing your produce locally” (Ann [NE] 19th May 2021). Her approach has helped her pick up a loyal core of customers as she explained, “they have been with us from the start. They won’t let it go even if they are starting to produce their own stuff [...] because they know how difficult it is to get hold of” (Ann [NE] 15th March 2021).

John also runs open days and sees this as an important way to develop relationships with his customers. “I think that is really important to them”, he said. “I know all of my customers to speak to, I know their names, we talk about families, they know who our kids are, we let them know how we are getting on” (John [NE] 27th March 2021). The significance of this for John is, again, down to showing his customers where their food comes from and what is involved in producing it.

John also talks to his customers about the food they get from the supermarkets. One story is of his recent visit to a large vegetable processing area in southern Spain:

Their workforce is made up of illegal immigrants from North Africa living under plastic sheets earning two Euros an hour. It is normalised into our food supply [...] That is where the lowest production costs of vegetables are. That is the level of exploitation. When you are buying cheap food, you are participating in that level of exploitation (John [NE] 27th March 2021).

Supermarket prices are set by production costs at these industrial farms. Small-scale farmers find it difficult to invest time into developing the fertility of their land as they are competing on price with farms that operate in this way. John explained how this had affected local farmers who specialise in barley. “The price for barley is the same as it was in 1984 but their costs have gone up, tractors, diesel, insurance, packaging.” The consequence of this is that they have decreased the number of staff, bought large machinery and have applied fertilisers to increase productivity. “That is not an investment strategy that is a survival strategy”, John claimed. “They are basically just trying to stay in farming by making those choices” (John [NE] 27th March 2021).

Much of the food eaten in the UK is imported; it is currently 60% self-sufficient, a drop from 78% in 1984 (NFU 2021). Consumers do not experience this as a problem, as Nia explained. “The supermarket shelves don’t reflect that, they continue to say, ‘look at how much food there is!’” (Nia [CE] 11th December 2020). This disconnection from the reality of where our food comes from is something that crofters are trying to address through strategies such as food sovereignty. Closing the gap between consumers and producers is essential to creating responsibility for the impact of the food we eat. For Nia, the experience of buying food from a supermarket is an offsetting of our conscience. “We don’t have to worry that the blueberries we are eating in December have come from somewhere that has been levelled and trashed for greenhouses to be put up that are really high energy consumption” (Nia [CE] 11th December 2020).

As consumers, we rarely go near the life cycles of the produce we eat. When our food reaches us via the supermarket it is usually after so much processing that its origins are

obscured (Wurgaft 2019). This distance disconnects us from the ecosystems that sustains us. Our relationship to them is, at best, mediated, and our ability to respond to their conditions are diminished. This is, in the first instance, a question of distance. Long chain food supplies exist to create demand for producers on an industrial scale. But they serve to put distance between us. Response-ability increases with closeness, or, in a Levinasian sense, through proximity (Levinas 1981). This is what many crofters see as the benefit of food sovereignty. The implication is that not only does distance curb our sense of responsibility, but that these senses are evoked by proximity in the first place. Food sovereignty is the struggle to bring our food practices within a distance and scale that enables this response.

The challenge then is to close the gap. But this is no easy task in a globalised economy where labour is dependent on its markets for survival as a result of the enclosure of lands. We have seen that time is precious but not expensive until it is commodified. Distance increases the size of markets to create wealth through the extraction of surplus value but loses the proximity needed to create responsibility. The annihilation of space by time (Marx 1993) allows for this expansion but the time taken to cross these distances restricts this accumulation of wealth. Somewhat paradoxically the drive for accumulation has to compress both time and space (Harvey 1991) and so, in turn, proximity and the social value that it offers. Agroecology offers a different relationship to time and space, where time is used as a resource to allow rest time to restore the fertility of land and increase its productivity. Food sovereignty reduces the distance between producers and consumers to increase a sense of responsibility and localise the economy. As we will see next, land sovereignty asserts the need for a people's enclosure to break from this dependency. Independently these strategies all offer transformative potential but seem to depend on each other for an alternative to be realised and reproduced, something that chapter 9 will look at.

8.3 Land Sovereignty

The final strategy is land sovereignty and its demand for people to have access, use and control over land and its benefits (Franco & Borras 2012). At the turn of the century, land policy debates were being dominated by pro-market arguments. In this context, La Via Campesina launched its *Global Campaign for Agrarian Reform* (Via Campesina 2000a) in a

direct reaction to this neo-liberal model which included a demand to drop Market Led Agrarian Reform (MLAR). Their argument was that MLAR led to the landed classes monopolising resources that were critical to the livelihoods of small-scale farmers and peasants (Borras 2008). Agrarian reforms of this nature have developed unique characteristics specific to each country and region through “a process of democratisation of land and a reduction of rural poverty and inequality” (LVC 2000). The Transnational Institute identified the following strands for land sovereignty (Borras & Franco 2012).

- The right for people to have access, use and control over land and its benefits, where land is understood as a resource, territory and landscape.
- A call to action against a renewed corporate push to enclose the commons and the assertion of the need for a people’s enclosure to support the above point
- Goes beyond viewing land as a resource, to also consider it as a territory embracing struggles of social movements North and South who have at times been excluded by traditional land reform campaigns.
- Privileging the commons without romanticising it and recognising the importance of state property while confronting the contradictory role of the state in land conflicts.
- Goes beyond redistributive land reform by supporting land redistribution for people who have been displaced and dispossessed, and by supporting land policies whose redistributive content can be shaped through mass struggles such as tenure reform and leasehold reform
- Connects with the demand and movements for food sovereignty for a mutually reinforcing, synergistic interaction between them

In Scotland there is a long history of land reform initiatives such as crofting tenancies and common grazings, and more recently community land trusts. Unlike the previous strategies that have been examined, this section will look at two strands of land sovereignty; community land trusts, and crofts and common grazings. This is partially due to the different periods in which these have emerged but also the distinct character of each. This section will conclude by looking at how these have both worked, and the benefits they have

brought to communities.

8.3.1 Community Land Trusts

Community land buyouts have been a feature of the Scottish Highlands and Islands since the crofting communities in North West Skye bought the Glendale Estate in 1908. Between then and 1993 when the Assynt Crofters' Trust bought part of the North Assynt Estate the only other community buyout was the Stornoway Estate on the Isle of Lewis in 1923. While community land buyouts have taken place throughout the twentieth century, there has been a steep increase in them since the early 1990's in the guise of community land trusts. Inspired by the success of in Assynt, this has also been enabled by:

- The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003²³ which helps communities to have the first option to buy land when it is offered for sale by a 'willing seller'
- The establishment of Community Land Scotland in 2010 that works to support communities to establish community land trusts (CLTs) and buy land.

Since then, amendments have been made to the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 which mean that if land is now deemed abandoned, neglected, or causing a detriment to the community, they do not require the consent of the owner. Or, if a constituted community group identifies a piece of land suitable for further sustainable development it can apply to buy it and the owner's consent is not needed, though they may appeal.

How it Emerged

In February 1993 the Assynt Crofters' Trust took ownership of 21,000 acres of the North Assynt Estate. After numerous changes of ownership in 1992 the land was set to be broken up into seven lots with no consultation or concern for the impact this would have on the crofting communities that lived there (MacKenzie 1998). At the end of a six-month campaign led by the Assynt branch of the Scottish Crofters' Union the Trust took ownership. They gained a national profile for their cause which enabled them to raise enough funds to buy

²³ Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003. Available online: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2003/2> (Accessed 18th September 2022)

the land. Their strategy became a template for community land buyouts and its organising committee became the structure for the trust that would eventually buy the land, and indeed for many of the other community land trusts that are now a feature of the Scottish crofting communities.

One of the first to follow Assynt was the Fernaig Community Trust in 1998. Bet, a member of the Trust, recalled how it came into being. “We were buying Fernaig in 1998 as the estate was being spilt up and hence this was the start of the Fernaig Community Trust.” She went on to explain how a shift in policy around land reform enabled the buyout, “The Labour Party came to power in 1997 and said there will be devolution and more independence for Scotland (...) That was when they started passing the laws so that communities could start buying out land” (Bet [CW] 28th October 2020). Unlike Assynt, Fernaig was not a traditional crofting community. Though there are crofts on the land, there is no township or common grazings and the community’s relationship to the land is different. They have allotments and let some of the land to a nearby crofting township, and have recently gained funding to build a footpath on it. Another CLT that is owned by a crofting community is the North Harris Trust. The North Harris Trust bought the land, a former estate, in 2003. Kay, a member of the Trust, explained that the quality of the land was one of the reasons why it became available, “the land is not very fertile. It is largely just heather and moor”, (Kay [NW] 2nd April 2021).

What it Involves

In North Harris, the trust is managed along democratic lines. It has about 70000 acres and approximately half is under crofting legislation (this is for crofting tenancies and common grazings) while the remainder is open moorland. It has approximately 200 crofts across 16 townships. The trust operates as a landlord, receiving a modest annual rent for each croft. In exchange for this the crofter has the right to a croft which they can use for agricultural activity. The trust is run as a business with a board of directors who are appointed on an annual basis and spread geographically. It has at least one director representing each township and typically it employs; a manager, project development officers and an administrator, who meet once a month with the directors. The trust also runs a local

recycling facility that employs two staff and they employ a ranger who is designated as a Gaelic Ranger to encourage the promotion of Gaelic at a local level.

The Assynt Crofters' Trust is run along similar lines. There are approximately 200 crofting tenants and 18 townships and again they would normally have one director for each. If one becomes vacant, until a new director is appointed, a director from another township will be responsible for representing that area. The directors meet every two months to oversee its responsibilities, some of which are devolved to their sub-committees. One of these is a hydro project that they have developed which generates income for the Trust by selling electricity to the national grid. The Trust is responsible for managing fishing licenses in the local lochs and monitoring stocks. They also have a contract with Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) as custodians of the land which includes managing the deer population, but this has led to some conflict between the Trust and SNH (MacKay 2017). The directors also discuss the work of the crofting administrator who deals with any applications for crofts.

The Fernaig Trust operates on a smaller scale to North Harris and Assynt, there are no townships and it covers 110 acres. It is set up as a charity and is still managed on a democratic basis with a locally elected committee that is comprised of directors and a chairperson. "People who are elected to it are usually people who utilise the land, that have a croft or allotment", said Bet who is on the community council. "We have lots of meetings" she explained, "but they have not done much" (Bet [CW] 29th March 2021). There are annual general meetings and they are responsible for things such as rent setting, advertising fields that are empty, and renting out the allotments. But, according to Bet, "once they have allotted the fields and done the basic maintenance there isn't much of an overarching strategy of what they want to produce [...] or what the maintenance should be" (Bet [CW] 29th March 2021). This is in contrast to the experience of North Harris and Assynt. There, the community land trust owns crofting land, meaning individuals and families also have access to crofts and common grazings.

The Benefits and Consequences

The Assynt Crofters' Trust runs its own hydro-electricity scheme. They originally wanted to start a wind farm but discovered that the elevation of their lochs meant a hydro-electric

scheme would be more beneficial, so they got a loan to build it (this has now been paid off). “It doesn’t need an awful lot of maintenance”, said Cat when she spoke about how the Trust maintains the scheme. “Someone goes up once a week just to check that everything is working and gives the reading for water purity and all the rest of it to make sure it isn’t upsetting the natural environment” (Cat [NW] 11th March 2021). A local electrician is responsible for maintenance and a director from the trust leads with the management of it. The scheme has been a big success for the community and it has provided them with financial security.

The money that the trust generates goes straight back into the community and it is the role of the directors to decide how to redistribute the income it generates through various initiatives, as Mac explained. “Kids who leave school and go on to further or higher education can apply for a bursary. That started about four or five years ago” (Mac [NW] 29th March 2021). Cat gave examples of how the trust has helped people. “Somebody died, quite young and unexpectedly, leaving a young family. So, we helped with the funeral and a few other things” (Cat [NW] 11th March 2021).

As well as bursaries for young residents going to university, they also offer grants for apprenticeships, or training for costs for things like HGV licenses, or funding for community projects and initiatives. Additionally, if someone has financial problems, they will offer support. According to Cat this is because the whole of North Assynt is owned by the community. “That is where we all live so we have a vested interest in the land” (Cat [NW] 22nd July 2021). Before the community bought the land, if the landowner wanted to do anything the community had no say in it. But, as Cat explained, community land ownership had given them a say in their own economic future. “You don’t have to go cap in hand with the landowner, you are the landowner! It gives you more stability” (Cat [NW] 11th March 2021)

Kay from the North Harris Trust also spoke about community ownership giving them greater control over what happens. Any money that is generated goes to the community rather than an individual landowner. “Crofters also like it because they know who they are dealing with, they are dealing with themselves! Or their own representatives” (Kay [NW] 2nd April 2021). The estate was previously owned by people who did not live in Harris, or even

Scotland. “You never saw them!”, he claimed. “The last person to own it was Jonathon Bulmer of Bulmer’s Cider” (Kay [NW] 2nd April 2021).

In North Harris, whatever money is generated is redistributed to the local community. For example, they have built new housing stock, some of which is for social rent. They generated income from improved tourist visitor centres and parking and camper van facilities. “We have made major improvement to the paths going into the hills, erecting more deer fencing and various forestry plantations”, said Kay. “All these things probably would not have happened in the way they have if it were a private landlord” (Kay [NW] 2nd April 2021).

Fernaig Trust has seen similar benefits but, due to the different relationship its residents have to the land compared to the North Harris and Assynt crofters, they have not been able to build on them to the same degree. “One of the benefits of community land ownership is that psychologically people believe that access to land helps them”, said Bet from the Fernaig Trust. The Trust has been able to gain funding for community projects. An example of this is a grant of £100,000 to build a new footpath along the river that flows through their land. “That has made a huge difference”, she said. “But, again, no-one is maintaining it so by next year the path is just going to be grass [...] People are good at acquiring funding to do things, but they are not understanding how much effort goes into managing land” (Bet [CW] 28th October 2020).

In Fernaig, community land ownership has given individuals access to land without having to buy it. And whilst it is not a traditional crofting community some still use the land for farming. This has been seen as significant benefit, as Bet explained. “One man who has come up from Yorkshire. It has given him the opportunity to work for the fish farm company and then to pursue his interest and hobby in looking after sheep and pigs. It gives people like this access to land without having to buy land” (Bet [CW] 28th October 2020). Though there are clear benefits for the community here, there are significant differences to the benefits being experienced in traditional crofting communities such as Assynt and North Harris where community land ownership goes hand in hand with other initiatives such as access to crofts and common grazings.

8.3.2 Crofts and Common Grazings

The Crofters Holdings (Scotland) Act was established in 1886. It protected crofters and townships access to land tenure and common grazings at a fair rent and established the first Crofters Commission (now the Crofting Commission) which acts as a regulator and rules on disputes between landlords and crofters. To become a crofter, someone must approach a landlord about gaining access. The landlord must then get permission from the Crofters Commission before it can let. The new tenant must live within 20 miles of the croft and normally must not already have a croft. The Commission is also concerned with how a tenant plans to use the croft and contribute to the local community, and what relevant skills and experience they have. Tenancies can also be passed on to a family member automatically, providing the Crofting Commission is informed, as Val explained:

The croft has been in my family for a long time. My family have been crofting, on my mother's side, on Skye for over 400 years. Then they would have still been known as crofters, but they would have been tied to the land more, then it would have been a feudal system (Val [CW] 11th July 2021).

What it Involves

Townships are formal communities that are established around common grazings (a Highland equivalent of the Commons). They all have a Grazings Committee and are also managed along democratic lines. They have responsibility for ensuring that the common grazings are maintained and fenced, and everyone who has a croft can be on a committee. There is a Grazings Clerk whose responsibility is to the Crofting Commission which ensures that crofts and common grazings are being used and maintained properly. Whilst each township is supported by their CLT, each township has responsibility for what goes on in their area. This ensures that the land is managed sustainably, as Kay explained. "Crofting is also regulated in a greater way than farming because there is an onus on the crofter to maintain the land properly and look after it and so on" (Kay [NW] 2nd April 2021).

This idea of greater shared responsibility for the land is common amongst crofters. A townships Grazings Committee will collectively manage the land and the livestock ensuring

the land is not over grazed and actively plan environmental schemes to support its sustainability. Val lives in a township on the Isle of Skye where they have seven crofts and a large common grazings. She described how they organise themselves to sustain the land:

We discuss buying lambs or any environmental schemes on there, we discuss opportunity for hydro schemes. We also discuss if we have too many animals on there [...] Your focus is totally on crofting and the local environment rather than external stuff (Val [CW] 11th July 2021).

It is usual practice for everyone in a township with a croft to be on the Grazings Committee. They meet regularly, everyone is invited and minutes are distributed to all members. Part of its role is to agree the numbers of livestock allowed on the common grazing which follows a set of rules as Mac explained. “That again is set down in law. 1 cow equals 7 sheep which equals 1/8th of a horse. It is called souming” (Mac [NW] 29th March 2021). Each common grazing will have a souming of a certain number of sheep. If it is one hundred and twenty sheep and there are ten crofts in a township then it is twelve sheep per croft. There are some issues with how this is then distributed as some crofts do not have livestock, but this is all addressed through the Grazings Committee.

A Grazings Committee will have a Clerk and a Chair who work together on administration and organisation and report back to the committee at regular meetings. Though there is this formal structure, much of their activity is more informal and is a collaborative endeavour as Val explained. “Even though there are warring factions we all help each other out when we need to, that is the same with all of them [Grazing Committees]”, (Val [CW] 26th January 2021). Jo moved to South Skye three years ago and got to know the community through the Grazings Committee. “My husband and I were invited to get involved a year or so ago. We went along and I ended up volunteering to be the Grazings Clerk” (Jo [CW] 18th May 2021). For Jo, as well as taking minutes and organising meetings, this also involved dealing with queries about decrofting and developing plans for the common grazings that were not being used as not many crofters in her community have livestock.

The Benefits and Consequences

What has been common amongst participants who live within crofting townships is the sense of community support, as Val explained. “Crofters will help each other, especially at certain times of year when they are gathering sheep for worming and dozing and stuff. All the people who have sheep, gather together to share the workload. They tend to work within townships, but they also help in other townships” (Val [CW], 11th March 2021). While some of the benefits of being part of a township are through its formal structures, there is also a sense of being ‘in it together’ as Cat explained:

Because it is such a small community everyone knows everyone, so everyone knows when someone has a problem. I am not sure the trust has made this easier but I think the nature of crofting has. Crofting has always been a case of everyone helps everyone else because you have had too. There has always been a sort of barter system going on as well, you know the sort of ‘you come and help me with your sheep, and I’ll help you with your fencing’ (Cat [NW] 11th March 2021).

Working in this way is something that crofters have been doing for generations. According to Cat, everyone in her community has an emotional connection to crofting. But, despite this, some parties do not get on with one another and this leads to conflict. At one point this was so severe Val thought it would close but members were reluctant to see this happen. “I underestimated the level of emotions”, said Val. “I think it was because their predecessors and ancestors had been crofters” (Val [CW] 26th January 2021)

Like many common grazings, Val’s has a sheep stock club. This is where flocks of sheep are held in common ownership for collective benefit and are mainly found on the west coast. “There is a sheep stock club which formed in about the 1920s”, said Val. “I think it came about from people returning from the First World War and the health of the nation, which was pretty dire, and to try and raise agricultural workers out of bad living conditions” (Val [CW] 26th January 2021). Val described how members of the club meet regularly to manage their stock. “We go gathering together and one organises the shearers, and we have discussions about the vitamins and their health, and working together dipping sheep and dozing them”, (Val [CW] 26th January 2021).

Land reform movements in Scotland have a long history of successful actions against the enclosure of commons and the establishment of people's enclosure. The Ross-shire Sheep Riot in 1792 that halted the emergence of industrial scale sheep farms; the establishment of the Crofters Holdings Act of 1886 that put an end to the Clearances by securing tenure for crofters; the first community land buyout in 1908; and the campaigns that led to the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003.

In Scotland land sovereignty has given people the right to have access, use and control over land and its benefits through crofting tenancies, common grazings and community land buyouts. In traditional crofting communities, many participants of this research understood the land as both a resource and a territory. There is a pragmatism to the methods that crofters have employed to manage and maintain their commons. This happens through democratic structures that have emerged out of the campaigns that won them access to the land. This has been particularly evident in crofting townships where the land is under community ownership. In these communities, identities are formed around access to natural resources and mutual benefits have led to the redistribution of income generated through the formation of local welfare systems.

Whilst this offers, to some degree, an alternative to neo-liberalism, it is worth noting the contradictory role of the state in enabling it to emerge. Crofting tenancies, common grazings and community land buyouts are all policy reforms that are the result of struggle amongst crofting communities. The combination of these gains goes beyond redistributive land reform though, as collectively they have created a space where alternatives can emerge. Though it does this through an interaction with food sovereignty and political agroecology, which was explored in the previous sections, this only happens once access to land and the means of production are readily available. Here the state is complicit in maintaining neo-liberalism and yet subversive of it. Tilzey (2018) identifies this contradiction through La Via Campesinas' call for the suppression of market dependence and a problematisation of the 'state'. Market dependency is generated through restricted access to land and the means of production, and is fundamental to the reproduction of capital. This has led to the degradation of land as an inevitable outcome of industrial agriculture (Amin 2012). Labour's dependency on these markets leave it in a precarious position which, in

turn, generates political pressures to reclaim the land. This is what has happened in Scotland. Here, in certain circumstances, as a result of these reforms, these alternative practices have emerged.

8.4 Transformative Strategies for Small-scale Food Producers in Scotland

Wright sees strategies as central to any theory of social transformation (Wright 2010). He states that they must respond to the obstacles faced as a result of social reproduction; utilise the opportunities that exist in the gaps and contradictions of social reproduction that reinforces the system of domination; and understand how these obstacles and opportunities may evolve over time.

There are numerous such transformative strategies employed by small-scale farming communities as they strive for economic autonomy: political agroecology, food sovereignty and land sovereignty. As we have seen, these strategies include a wide range of actions that connect them with their lands. They include using local knowledges to revitalise remote and inhospitable lands, horizontal localised education networks, regenerative agriculture, community land ownership, short food supply chains and land rights campaigns. These strategies do not exist in isolation. Understanding the relationship between them is key to realising their transformative potential.

Some participants of this research have spoken about turning to crofting during the financial crisis and having to work at a small-scale as a result of it. Others have spoken about people coming to Scotland as they have desired an alternative to capitalism and see the crofting system as offering some hope of this. In peripheral areas these alternatives appear when markets have failed to meet labour's subsistence needs and its dependency upon markets has ceased to function. This has, in some instances, led to communities demanding to reclaim lands.

These peripheral areas have a tendency for poor quality lands that in turn demand more restorative agricultural practices which are ultimately more sustainable. We have seen, as a result of these practices, capitalism being interrupted through a reversal of its tendency for the annihilation of space through time. Instead, these agroecological practices have used

time to create space. They are restorative rather than extractive and use time as a resource to create fertile lands through rest. As a result, they are not reliant on external inputs and so are more sustainable. Whereas extractive practices are about resource utilisation which degenerate soils and cause the depletion of nutrients, restorative practices use time as a resource to regenerate lands, which in turn means that land is no longer seen as a finite resource. In a process of territorialisation, agroecological practices have empowered communities through locally sensitive and at times traditional knowledges, collective action, and more responsible relationships with consumers.

These improved relationships with consumers are what many crofters have seen as being the main benefit of food sovereignty. They have expressed the ethical importance of consumers knowing where their food comes from which happens through direct farm sales, open days, and workshops. These reduce the distance between consumer and producer which in turn increases their sense of responsibility. The distances involved in long food supply chains curb our sense of responsibility. But, significantly, proximity to our food sources is where this sense of responsibility can be found. Food sovereignty aims to bring food production within a distance and scale that enables this response.

In the more peripheral locations on the west coast of Scotland there is a greater sense of the market having retreated. It should be no surprise then to find informal gift economies existing in these areas where goods and services are offered with no demand of exchange. In Assynt, participants spoke about this being “embedded in the nature of the community”, where at times recipients will not know who the ‘gift’ is even from! This cultural practice is the antithesis of capitalist social relations through which the separation of subject and object takes place in the production of the commodity so that surplus value can be appropriated.

In producing commodities in this way, the labourer is separated from the object produced and is only brought back together with it as alienated subject and object. For Holloway the constitution of these alienated social relations is class struggle. In other words, class struggle is the struggle against the conditions that constitute the working class. It is the “unceasing daily antagonism (whether it be perceived or not) between alienation and disalienation, between definition and anti-definition, between fetishisation and de-fetishisation”

(Holloway 2002:143). Holloway explores this through the experience of the Zapatistas struggle against capitalist classification. Their struggle is one that stands against their own alienation using strategies that both resist their separation from their product, their producing, and their identities that are rooted in place, and also reverse it. This is a struggle that refuses to participate in the processes that turns their subjectivity into object and alienates them from it. As we have seen this relates, to some extent, with the way political agroecology and food sovereignty is being employed by small-scale farming communities in Scotland.

Meeting the aims of land sovereignty enables these practices to flourish. Initiatives such as community land trusts, crofts, sheep stock clubs, and common grazings/townships have given communities the control over their lives to be able to achieve this. They are models of collective ownership and are run democratically. They have been seen to build strong bonds within their communities where residents support one another through a sense of need. Any money that these initiatives generate is redistributed for community benefit and individual welfare to alleviate poverty, build housing stock for social rent, or support individuals with bursaries for training. It is significant to note, though, that it is when all elements exist that these practices are most successful. The successes in Assynt and North Harris were not replicated in the same way as in Fernaig where the land was not utilised for the same purpose.

For many small-scale farming communities, being robbed of land is comparable to losing their identity. Their rootedness is lost to capital accumulation and its reconstruction is an “active moment in the passage from memory to hope, from past to future” (Harvey 1996:306). The capacity for dwelling is considered a root for any resistance to commodification and alienation as it transforms “the social processes constructing space-time to a radically different purpose” where time “takes on its spatial meaning through the practices of place construction in the imagination, in discourse, as well as in material, social, and institutional forms”. Strategies that enable small-scale farming communities to reappropriate land are a starting point for this process. This reversal of primitive accumulation can lead to the reconstruction of an alternative space.

As has been mentioned, there is a contradictory role for the state in allowing these alternatives to emerge as it is complicit in reproducing capitalism whilst at the same time being subversive of it. Since The Clearances, crofting communities have fought for policy reforms such as community land buyouts, common grazings and crofting tenancies. These successes go beyond redistributive land reform, though, as they have created territories where alternative economic practices can emerge through an interaction with food sovereignty and political agroecology, and appear to reproduce an alternative. This only happens once access to land and the means of producing their own subsistence is readily available, the significance of which cannot be understated.

9. The Sustainability of Small-scale Food Producers in Scotland

This chapter will look at social reproduction as it affects small-scale food producers in Scotland. It relates to the fourth research question - *How is capitalism being reproduced in small-scale farming communities in Scotland and are the transformative strategies employed there reproducing alternative economic practices?* The chapter will begin by looking at various mechanisms that reproduce capitalism, both economic and political, and analyse both the impact this has on food producers and the practices that it leads to. This will be followed by a section that looks at how certain strategies employed by small-scale food producers have not only defended them against the conditions of capitalism but, to some extent, have reproduced an alternative economic reality.

As we saw in chapter 4, social reproduction involves various mechanisms to sustain a system even when it is not working for the interests of its people (Wright 2010). This can occur through either its structures, its institutions or the routines of everyday life that have been influenced by its demands. It maintains the underlying structure of social relations and normalises the processes it employs to achieve this. In Scotland this has been experienced through the legacy of The Highland Clearances where forced evictions of small-scale farming communities and the subsequent introduction of capitalist agriculture has created dependencies on national and international markets. This chapter is split into two sections. The first addresses the reproduction of capitalism and the mechanisms that have been utilised to achieve this. The second looks at how alternative economic practices are reproduced and what, if anything, has created the conditions for this to occur.

The first section begins by looking at how infrastructure, designed for the benefit of large-scale industrial farming, creates conditions that both encourage small-scale food producers to 'scale-up' and creates dependencies that in turn forces them to engage in practices that are not in their interests. This section then turns its focus to how international markets attempt to co-opt small-scale food producers under a guise of economic development but then creates dependencies that they are unable to break. The chapter then moves on to

look at how policies that have been developed to regulate industrial farming, due to the harms it has caused, have inadvertently damaged the sustainability of small-scale farming. This section also questions the impact of subsidies on small-scale food producers and the types of practices they reproduce. Finally, it also looks at how new industries have been introduced to boost the local economy and build resilience but have, in turn, started to force small-scale food producers out by changing the way land is both valued and afforded.

The second section looks at some of the methods of resistance to the reproduction of capitalism employed by small-scale food producers, and to what extent these methods reproduce alternatives. It will focus on how this occurs through land ownership and land access, agriculture, supply chains and culture. The identities and economic realities they are reproducing are, in some respects, contrary to the logic of capitalism. The alternatives being reproduced appear to have a different relationship to time and space with respect to both production and consumption. Firstly, this section will look at how community land ownership unhooks communities from dependencies on external markets and will look at how, in these communities, informal gift economies have emerged. Next it will analyse the nature of regenerative farming practices, such as mob grazing, and how this appears to be leading to a different relationship to time and space, where land is valued differently and time is seen as a resource used to generate more fertile spaces.

9.1 Reproducing Capitalism

Primitive accumulation and the establishment of capitalist agriculture is seen as the precondition of the ongoing accumulation of capital (Thomson 1990). This happened through the enclosures of the commons and the consolidation of small farms into larger ones engaged in specialisations. This was enabled by the local power of landlords and the centralised power of the state (Tawney 1912). It has not only shaped the social relations of production but also the processes of social reproduction (Roberts 2008). Roberts argues that during the neoliberal period the expansion of markets has led to increasing levels of capital accumulation. David Harvey develops the concept of primitive accumulation using the term 'accumulation by dispossession' (Harvey 2003 & 2005) to establish it as an ongoing process, where the state continues to redistribute wealth to the elite, rather than from a primitive past. Massimo De Angelis (2001 & 2004) argues that this continuous process, that

is established in this separation between independent producers and the means of production, occurs through two instances. One is the expansion of capital through new spheres of life and the other is the continued enclosure of social spaces. Smith (2006) argues that under capitalism social reproduction increasingly depends on the imperatives of the market. This is particularly the case with the social reproduction of nature where its value starts to be expressed in terms of exchange value rather than use value (Smith 1990).

In Scotland the enclosures of land have made it difficult for crofters to survive as independent producers providing for themselves and their local community. These dispossessions, along with numerous incentives, have created a constant need for expansion to meet the demands that survival requires in a capitalist landscape. This has been felt keenly by some crofters as they are pressured to 'scale up' their production, seek more land, and specialise their practices. It has also led to numerous attempts to introduce capital through new industries such as tourism and drilling for oil which have, to varying degrees, created increasing dependencies on these industries at the expense of small-scale sustainable farming practices.

9.1.1 Scaling Up

Whilst some small-scale food producers have resisted the temptation to expand their operations despite the many initiatives encouraging it, others see it as the only way to survive. Some crofters spoke about pressure to 'scale up' their operations as a result of the Scottish Government's Ambition 2030 agenda (Scottish Food & Drink 2017), as John explained. "I am critical of this 2030 thing but then I think I might try to increase scale myself", he said. "I sometimes have to remind myself to resist that urge" (John [NE] 28th July 2021). John has felt direct pressure to get involved in things that would have caused them to upscale but he walked away because they were different to what they are trying to do. The Scottish Government's Ambition 2030 policy document, which aims to double the turnover of all food production in Scotland in the next decade, does not fit with the perspective of many crofters like John. "It all comes down to 'let's get bigger at everything' and that just isn't what we are about. It is not sustainable" (John [NE] 28th July 2021). John feels that this policy is aimed at larger industrial farms which are both willing and able to meet these expectations. But, as John explains, this will have consequences for environmental health

and consumers. “It should not be our chief priority”, he stated, “the chief priority should be feeding people in Scotland and cutting carbon emissions to zero” (John [NE] 28th July 2021). John’s actions are counter intuitive; rather than take on more land and increase the scale of his operation exponentially he has maintained a size that he can sustain and resisted specialisations. But he constantly feels an expectation to do this.

Another crofter, Mac, also discussed the economic pressures to scale up. Mac has five cattle in his herd but had to have one put down because it had broken its leg. Mac had spent a whole day with fellow crofters trying to save the steer. “It was awful,” he said. This meant Mac had lost 20% of his herd so was both an economic and emotional blow for him. Circumstances like this, as Mac pointed out, can be mitigated by scaling up. “If you have 100 of them, you have only lost 1%. It is a huge economic blow to us and that is the problem facing small-scale crofting. (Mac [NW] 27th July 2021). The cost of property and the access to the necessary infrastructure to maintain a small farm requires a certain level of income that often pushes crofters to scale up. However, in crofting communities like Assynt, access to land means it is less costly than in other areas of the UK and this has helped sustain this model of food production.

Scaling up in this way often leads to farmers specialising, and when they do, they find that the local market does not have enough demand for their produce, as Kay explained when he spoke about their three Autumn lamb sales. “Some of it is sold locally”, he said, “and they will sell between 2 and 3000 lambs at each sale. But most of the lambs are bought by people from the mainland” (Kay [NW] 2nd April 2021). Sheep farming of this scale was introduced to the Highlands during The Clearances. Why they do not operate in any other markets and how this has persisted is something John reflected on. “They haven’t chosen that market because they want to go into a specialist area of sheep. It is basically because it is pretty much all that is left for them” (John [NE] 27th March 2021). The shift away from more diverse farming practices was an outcome of The Clearances. The enclosures created capitalist agriculture to meet a demand from national markets for wool, particularly in the north of England. The legacy of this is still felt in many parts of the Highlands. But additionally, small-scale farms cannot compete with industrial farms on the cost of food

production. A combination of economies of scale and the economic efficiencies of monoculture farming practices will always reduce costs.

As we have seen, the costs of small-scale food production can be prohibitive. Why these costs are not being met by consumers is something both John and Nia discussed. “There is an expectation that the public don’t spend their money on food”, said John. He compared what people spent on food a hundred years ago to now, when the majority of our income goes on “housing, buying all the things to go with it, cars, and the rest is on leisure. That whole thing seems upside down” (John [NE] 28th July 2021). Nia also reflected on the economic conditions that mean people are not being able to buy food from small-scale producers that is leading to less sustainable approaches to food production. “Food poverty isn’t about expensive food it is about rent prices and Universal Credit being shit” she said whilst comparing the situation in the UK and America. “Their financial sectors are the biggest part of their economy, they have expensive housing, and a vested interest in energy and housing” (Nia [CE] 11th December 2020).

Conditions such as this make it more difficult for small-scale producers to be able to survive. As well as these economic pressures to scale up, crofters also spoke about cultural pressures. This included the perception of crofting being ‘hobby farming’ discouraging people from starting up. It also included the status of being able to buy your food rather than grow it yourself, as Ann explained. “People wanted to move away from growing their own stuff. Being able to buy it had a bit of status elevation, you could afford not to labour in the field.”, she said. “If you work in an office, you pay people to do that for you” (Ann [NE] 23rd July 2021). Ann felt that there was a growing movement away from this but that perceptions across the rest of society still needed to change if there is to be a shift from the big producers and the monocropping corporation farms, to the “local food producers who would be more likely to identify with peasants” (Ann [NE] 23rd July 2021).

The need to scale up is also being pressured through the development of infrastructure to support large scale farming. The lack of a suitable abattoir was cited as one of the biggest barriers for small-scale sustainable farming in Scotland (Farming UK 2021). There has been a steady decline in abattoirs in the Highlands since 1984 (They Work for You 2004). Aside from specialist abattoirs that deal with rare breeds there is only one abattoir in the Highlands

now. Crofters identified this as being one of the key barriers to being able to shift the supply of fresh meat away from the supermarkets due to high levels of regulations, lack of infrastructure, and long distances to those that exist. Again, economies of scale and the economic efficiencies of this type of infrastructure being housed on a large site in one area is the only way to make abattoirs viable in meeting the demands for cheap food.

Whilst there has been a decline in the number of abattoirs, the demand for direct sales from crofters has increased. “The problem is the investments and overheads for meeting the regulatory requirements are big [...] it is a huge investment and is prohibitive” (John [NE] 28th July 2021). One reason for Highland abattoirs and butchers closing is new hygiene regulations designed to address animal welfare problems caused by large scale farming practices and long-distance supply chains. “These regulations weren’t intended to make things harder for small scale farmers, that is an unintended consequence”, claimed John whilst explaining how it had affected his croft:

We have a bacon slicer that we use for slicing cooked ham first and then slice bacon afterwards. But they have turned round and said to us that we have to have two slicers, one for each. For a small producer like us it just isn’t viable, so we have stopped selling ham and just do bacon. Every big butcher will have two bacon slicers but not every small farm (John [NE] 28th July 2021).

Regulations, infrastructure and market expectations all demand large-scale industrial farming practices that are widely recognised as being environmentally unsustainable. The cost of transporting one animal at a time to the abattoir compared to taking one hundred incentivises scaling up when there is only one abattoir covering such a large area. The health problems that are a result of this scaling up leads to regulations that are not necessary for the regenerative practices of small-scale farms (see chapter 8) and merely adds to the costs of production for them.

This causes issues with supply chains for crofters, that were exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic (see chapter 7). With only one abattoir in the highlands servicing most crofters, when the restrictions caused by the lockdowns hit, they were unable to take on as much work. The only abattoir is owned by chain of butchers called John Munro whose

priority was to supply their own shops and their larger clients. This caused concern for many crofters and raised awareness of their dependency on this one abattoir as Beth explained. “There is concern amongst some of the Shetland cattle breeders and others in the crofting community that we might get to a stage where we can’t send our animals off [to the abattoir]” (Beth [CW] 24th November 2020). The problems tend to relate to larger breeds of animals such as sheep and cattle, so has led to some crofters, like Jan, shifting to other breeds that they are able to slaughter themselves. “The last couple of years we have got into turkeys”, said Jan who has recently been trained and is now licensed to slaughter her own turkeys up to a limited number. “This year we will be slaughtering and plucking ourselves” (Jan [CW] 30th October 2020). Another issue is the cost of travel as Val explained. “It is also to do with the distance from markets, we are three hours from an abattoir and the further away from the centre you are the higher the cost” (Val [CW] 11th July 2021). This often leads to crofters feeling they need to increase the numbers of livestock they take to make the journey financially worthwhile which in turn feeds into the need to scale up their whole operation.

Alongside facilities that service food producers, the infrastructure that gets their produce to national and international markets have also led to dependencies. This has been particularly so amongst creel fishers who have very little demand from local communities for the species that they specialise in, such as langoustine prawns and crabs. They cannot compete with the prices that trawl fishers can offer due to their methods, as Hugh explained. “It is hard to sell our fish to local communities. It is expensive to produce and isn’t eaten by most people in the UK” (Hugh [NE] 13th January 2021). This is down to the cost of licenses to gain access to waters but is also down to the method of fishing that they use. They place creel pots on the sea bed that causes very little damage to the environment compared to trawlers. This is far more labour intensive than trawling and cannot compete with the costs as a result. It is common for small-scale food producers not to be able to compete on price with industrial methods whilst offering far more sustainable practices. This is because the environmental costs of these industrial methods are not being priced into their produce, and the greater demand is still for cheap food rather than sustainably produced food.

They also cannot compete with the prices due to economies of scale with distribution due to the time that goes into servicing local sales. “They are all small orders, a lot of effort has to go in to service them from the admin”, said Hugh. “If fishermen are doing it direct it has a big impact on their normal routine. Us doing it, we can do it, but it takes a lot more time” (Hugh [NE] 11th March 2021). It is also harder for creel fishers to maintain their local sales as their work is less visible in the local community than crofters. According to Drew, spending time on this type of activity does not seem sustainable. “The main thing will be how do we keep the profile with these people up. This is a really bad way to go about it but there is probably an opportunity there to develop a market” (Drew [CW] 12th March 2021). Whilst there was a large increase in direct sales during the COVID-19 pandemic, fishers have not been able to maintain this and sales have dropped back to pre-pandemic levels. Centralising the sales of their produce reduces the labour time involved which keeps the costs down. But this creates distance between production and consumption which obscures its origins and much of the processing from consumers (Wurgraft 2019). It is only through proximity that a sense of responsibility for these practices can be returned (Levinas 1981).

This demand for live shellfish such as langoustine prawns rose during the fish stock crisis of the 1980s. Fishers cannot trawl for them as only creels pots can catch live langoustines in perfect condition. Once caught, langoustines are packed live in protective cases for transportation to keep them in this condition. If they are left in these boxes for too long, they have to be killed and have to be marketed as *fresh* rather than *live* which attracts a lower premium. If they need to be stored even longer, they will be frozen, and this brings an even lower price. All this puts pressure on the time taken to get their produce to market. Longer distribution times not only costs more but reduces the price that fishers get for their produce. These demands for supply side reforms lead to a constant push to reduce the time taken to cover ever larger distances. This has led to ever more sophisticated distribution methods and infrastructure being developed to open up larger markets. In turn this has made creel fishers increasingly vulnerable to supply chain crises such as those seen during the COVID-19 pandemic and Brexit.

The cost of transportation has also been squeezed through sharing distribution routes with other goods. Prawns, crabs, and langoustines are taken on lorries to Boulogne which then

returns with other goods such as dairy or flowers offsetting the overall cost for fishers to some extent. These complex systems have made their produce affordable for markets in Western Europe where 40% of Hugh and Drew's produce ends up. On route to the EU some of their produce will be delivered to markets in London. Most of it will eventually be sold to expensive restaurants as they are the only customers that can meet the production and distribution costs of their catch. When these supply chains were hit by both Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic fishers were unable to send as much of their produce at any one time increasing their costs. And, as we have already heard, for Drew the only people who seem to have been badly affected are the fishermen. Fishers have looked at options for reducing their dependency on EU markets. They tried increasing direct sales but this proved to be unsustainable. They have also been looking at the potential to get their produce to China. Whilst this was seen as a viable option, the problems caused by Brexit demanded their time and meant they had to pull out of this for the time being.

The vulnerabilities caused by dependencies on long distance supply chains are leading to several outcomes. The first is some larger Atlantic vessels, that are trawling, have been sailing to places like Denmark, Norway, or Sweden to land their catches and bypassing the UK transport system altogether. The second is that the economic shocks caused by Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic has led to many fishers leaving the profession. The final outcome is that large processing firms are buying fishing licenses from people leaving the industry and then letting them out with boats and creel pots to people entering the industry. As Hugh pointed out, "what is that if not consolidation" (Hugh [NE] 11th March 2021). The impact of this is being felt in local communities as independent boats start to disappear. "You are then losing that small-scale community identity of the fishery", said Hugh. Small-scale fishers have been going out of business and their work is being bought out by larger firms. This will sometimes be through buy-ins and buy-outs. Other times larger firms wait until they go out of business before taking over. Either way this is leading to increased consolidation of the trade. Whilst this will likely be a very positive outcome for these larger firms, as Hugh points out, "for the independents it will be a very bad thing" (Hugh [NE] 11th March 2021).

Dependencies on infrastructure and the demand for cheap food are reproducing environmentally unsustainable large-scale practices. These fail to meet the aspirations of small-scale farming communities because they do not recognise their practices and ways of knowing agriculture (Coolsaet 2016). In some instances, food producers have become dependent on sophisticated distribution methods and infrastructure. Here, space is annihilated by time to expand markets but creates distance between consumers and producers. In these circumstances consumers have little if any relationship with the life cycles of the produce they eat and their ability to respond to their conditions are diminished. For many crofters this is the benefit of direct sales. Rather than our sense of responsibility being curbed by distances covered by long supply chains, they are evoked by proximity (Levinas 1981). But the labour time involved in producing food and supplying it directly to consumers is expensive when scales are small. The question is who is able to pay for this.

The drive for capital accumulation creates a need to compress both time and space (Harvey 1991). In doing this it reduces proximity and the social value this offers. In the absence of proximity for consumers, farming regulations are established and enforced in its place as large-scale practices begin to degrade health and environmental conditions. But these are blanket regulations that are being applied to all, no matter what their practices involve or how distant their markets are.

9.1.2 Subsidies and Regulations

Numerous subsidies and regulations have been developed in response to the industrial farming sector that have consequently discouraged people from engaging in small-scale practices. This includes policies that have been developed to regulate industrial farming, due to health and environmental concerns, which have inadvertently damaged the sustainability of small-scale farming. It also includes the impact of subsidies on small-scale food producers and the types of practices they reproduce.

Many subsidies in Scotland have led to greater consolidation of land ownership. Land reform often creates internal markets for industrial development turning landless farmers into entrepreneurs (Torrez 2011). This approach has resulted in the privatization of natural

resources and a concentration of land ownership. It has created economic conditions for small food producers that leads to massive distress sales to the large corporate interests, similar to what has been seen with creel fishers. Various schemes have been developed to establish, support, and maintain these conditions. They leave small-scale food producers with either large debt burdens or inflated prices for renting or buying low quality land and a subsequent downward spiral of land loss and debt. When most governments seek agrarian reform, they prefer to support these schemes rather than community land ownership. This creates a concentration of private land ownership that is having dire consequences for both small-scale farmers and the environment (Torrez 2011).

In Scotland, schemes such as the UK Governments Basic Payments Scheme (BPS) incentivise industrial monocultural farming at the expense of more environmentally sustainable, biodiverse practices. Under the BPS, Scottish farms received £92 an acre in 2020. One participant, who was producing enough food to support 180 regular veg box customers with a negative carbon output on three hectares of land, received less than £1500 a year. At the same time, a large neighbouring estate running an intensive barley system was in receipt of over £500,000 despite emitting, he estimated, 2-3000 tonnes of carbon. The scheme motivates a drive for economic growth where land is valued as a commodity rather than a territory that sustains its communities.

If a farmer rents the land from a landowner, the subsidy still goes to the landowner. This is despite the aim of the subsidy being to support farmers and food producers. One crofter, who rented land, spoke about how this benefits the landowner:

The landowner gets the subsidy even though they aren't producing any food [...] that farm is a huge country estate, they have 1000s of acres. They can make more money by renting it out at £100 an acre or whatever. They also then get the benefit of the subsidy for that field (Nia [CE] 11th December 2020).

For Nia, this contradicts the reason the subsidy exists, which is to support farmers and food producers. To make matters worse she claimed that landowners “put the land to auction and the push the rents up as there is so much demand” (Nia [CE] 11th December 2020).

As Nia pointed out, rather than these subsidies being used to increase the income of landowners, they should be used to make sustainably farmed produce affordable, but the system is not set up to enable this. “We want people from any income bracket to be able to access our food. We are trying to find out how to proportion our subsidy payment [...] so that we can ensure that someone on a low income can buy it” (Nia [CE] 11th December 2020). But this is not how the subsidy is set up and as a result it is a challenge to make it happen. As well as subsidies for the amount of land, there were also subsidies for the number of livestock under the EUs Common Agricultural Policy. This has led to land being over grazed, as Val explained. “That has come about through greed and I think through the EU agricultural policy which was based for many years on a headage payment” (Val [CW] 11th July 2021). This then leads to a deterioration of the land both in terms of its productivity and its carbon emissions.

When John started his croft 10 years ago the land had been degraded through over grazing. It took him about 5 years to build the land up again and now the carbon emissions for his croft are negative 110 tonnes of CO₂ a year. But this is not incentivised by the subsidy system and he sees this as a problem. “There is a market failure” he claimed. “We provide healthy food for 180 families; we provide four jobs, and we soak up 110 tonnes of carbon, but we don’t get paid for any of that” (John [NE] 27th March 2021).

Green thinkers like John are willing to approach things in this way, but there is nothing else incentivising this sort of sustainable practice. This has made the whole process more difficult for John because he has not felt an economic benefit for his work as it just is not valued by the market. “I can’t give or trade any of the social good that we have created and that is a failure” (John [NE] 27th March 2021). John has measured these social benefits through soil analyses and carbon audits but this is not valued economically. He sees this as being prohibitive to attracting new people into this way of farming. “Until you change that reward mechanism it is not going to be something that attracts people into the industry” (John [NE] 27th March 2021).

The perception amongst many crofters is that big farms are getting financial support for just being big. And whilst there are now incentives for farms to engage in sustainable practices, as John explained, these tend to be tokenistic and do not stop them continuing with

environmentally degrading practices on other areas of their land.

You get a big farm that says, 'ok, I will need to put this portion over to environmental benefits, so therefore I am going to rewild it' [...] If we are not careful, we are going to end up with wild areas with barbed wire around it; one area that is urban and another that is 'wild' (John [NE] 28th July 2021).

Subsidies such as these create the concentration of land ownership that is having terrible consequences for both small-scale farmers and the environment. There is an attempt to co-opt agroecological practices with *climate smart agriculture* that allows large corporate polluters to offset their emissions against the soil carbon in their environmentally sustainable fields by promoting monoculture-based organic exports for niche markets. Moving away from this approach needs a transformation of the entire system. In Scotland a number of initiatives have been developed to try to address this but Scotland still has one of the most unequal distributions of land in the world. As John pointed out, other initiatives such as the 'bioeconomy' side-lines agroecological practices, while sustainable intensification attempts to co-opt them (Levidow 2015). This has been used to highlight how an agroecology agenda of small-scale and peasant farms needs to contest co-option by capitalist agriculture. Inspired by initiatives developed by La Via Campesina, UK farmer networks such as the Land Workers' Alliance and the Scottish Crofting Federation have linked agroecology with food sovereignty, bringing together ecological aspects with socio-political ones.

Large scale farms are seeing incentives for carbon reduction as an opportunity to diversify their income. John spoke about one farm near him that has done just this. The farm has set up an Anaerobic Digestion (AD) plant and use 1/3 of their arable area to feed it. They produce gas by sweating green matter which they then get a feed-in tariff for because it is seen as a renewable energy source. There are several farms in Scotland doing this now but John expressed his concerns about its sustainability and how it is taking land away from food production. "If you really want to get farmers to do something about climate change then they need to adopt a farming system that is going to soak up a lot of organic matter and store it in their soils" (John [NE] 28th July 2021)

These schemes encourage small-scale farmers to increase the scale of their production and reduce the amount of time they spend cultivating the biodiversity of their farms. This attempted divergence with agroecology has been used to show how an agroecology agenda for small-scale farming communities needs to challenge any shift towards a corporate-environmental food regime so that it is not appropriated (Levidow 2015). This must be based on shared ownership, a responsibility for the environment, and, as a social movement, challenging the corporate control of resources and markets.

As well as subsidies, there are food regulations that have been designed for corporate farming that also appear to be discouraging small-scale practices. There is a sense amongst crofters that food regulations are designed for the benefit of large-scale industrial farms and are often to their detriment. An example often referred to was the regulations that were designed in response to the bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) crisis that means cattle have to be slaughtered under 30 months of age. BSE is a fatal neurodegenerative disease of cattle that is thought to have been spread by cattle being fed meat-and-bone-meal, a practice common on large-scale farms. The BSE crisis happened in the UK in 1996 and saw the disease spread to the human population as the variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob (vCJD) disease from eating food contaminated with the brain, spinal cord, or digestive tract on animals infected with BSE. To prevent this, the UK Government introduced regulations that meant animals older than 30 months were not allowed to enter the human or animal food supply chain.

Animals that are over thirty months must have costly additional work done to remove the spinal cord and other tissues to reduce the risk of the causing vCJD in humans. Some abattoirs will only slaughter cattle under thirty months because of the additional work that they have to put in which restricts access to abattoirs for many small-scale farmers. This is an issue if a farmer is trying to raise small numbers of native breed cattle in a less intensive way. The consequences are that farmers always try to beat the 30-month deadline.

The National Beef Association recently proposed a 'carbon tax' on farmers who send their cattle to slaughter later than 27 months old. This included a £100 per head levy to deter producers from retaining older cattle with the aim of cutting the sector's carbon footprint. Some crofters, such as Nia, think this will have the opposite effect and encourage

large scale farming to offset the costs with farmers replacing their animals more quickly. “This may push more people into intensive farming”, she said. “We are becoming obsessed with applying financial accounting rules to natural processes, it’s the language of dodging our taxes and finding loopholes” (Nia [CE] 11th December 2020).

Health problems with livestock are less common on small-scale farms and crofts due to the way they graze their animals rather than having to rely on feeds. These are reduced even more with methods such as mob grazing, as Nia pointed out. “Your animals are going to be in better condition if they are eating better quality grasses every day” (Nia [CE] 30th October 2020). If animals are kept in the same place for long periods there is more chance that they will ingest parasites living on faeces. If they are in a single field for a long period of time then the nutrients in the grasses will be reduced. Also, animals that have been housed in a barn for long periods can get pleurisy or pneumonia. The benefits of methods such as mob grazing are that animals are healthier and less likely to contract diseases. There are also benefits from these approaches as they mean animals can live longer and bigger and so bring more value for little additional costs. As has already been mentioned, time here is a resource as, when grazing in this way, feed grows naturally with rest times for the land.

The other problem for crofters is that the 30-month deadline reduces the income they could get from their healthy livestock. Beth explained that penalties discourage them from keeping their animals longer. “We would hold on to it for longer than 30 months if they didn’t have such a big charge for it”, she said. “If you have to hold the beast back beyond the 30 month mark you have to pay extra because they have to get boned out because of BSE” (Beth [CW] Wednesday 14th Oct 2020). This is despite livestock being reared in a way that means they are healthy. If this happens, not only do they have to pay an additional cost but the price per kilo goes down because they cannot sell it on the bone, which brings a higher overall price. “That impacts the amount of money we get for each beast we sell which can get low compared to what we are putting into it” (Beth [CW] Wednesday 14th Oct 2020). This in turn pushes crofters to increase the numbers of livestock they need to make a living from, it and inevitably results in poorer living conditions for the animals and all the subsequent animal welfare issues.

Whilst subsidies and regulations are being developed in response to the industrial farming

sector, they will inevitably not be in the interests, or for the benefit of, small-scale farms. Many crofters have gone further to suggest they are prohibiting people entering and remaining in crofting. Industrial agriculture has utilized its cultural and legal domination here to deny or restrict the emergence of alternative practices and further the dependency on industrial farming for communities (Coolsaet 2016). What has proven to be most galling for crofters is the manner in which policies are incentivising unsustainable monocultural extractive practices rather than biodiverse regenerative ones. The economic logic that underpins these policies and the practices they aim to regulate are, to a large degree, in opposition to these alternatives. Later in this chapter we will ask, how can these alternatives resist these pressures and what conditions need to occur for them to be reproduced?

9.1.3 New Industries

Marx claims that the capitalist mode of production requires the development of new consumption to be able to reproduce itself. This happens, alongside the expansion of existing consumption, through the development of new needs and the innovation of new use values (Marx 1973). New industries have been introduced to rural communities in the Highlands of Scotland with the claim that it will boost the local economy and develop economic resilience. The consequences of this are that it has forced some small-scale food producers out of their livelihoods and has, in some instances, changed the way land is both valued and afforded. An example of this was the discovery of oil in the North Sea in the 1960s that led to a boom in the industry during the 1970s all the way up the east coast of Scotland to the Shetland Islands. While Aberdeen was the epicentre of this due to its existing infrastructure, large terminals were also built up the coastline from there.

The introduction of the oil industries during this period brought many changes to the Highlands and Islands of Scotland as Ann explained. “There was a sudden need for the Shetlanders to have what people on the mainland had”, said Ann. “There was an expectation that we had less because we were so remote and rural. The desire to have it is there” (Ann [NE] 19th May 2021). As well as changing the nature of supply chains in Shetland, with more produce being imported, this created an economic dependency on the oil industries that has had an effect on policy making. According to Ann they have had problems introducing climate change strategies because so much of the island’s economic

activity is dependent on oil, “there is some resistance to that”, she said. “Every family seems to have some link to the oil industry” (Ann [NE] 19th May 2021). Another issue caused by this dependency on the oil industries is that much of the work in the oil industry is contracted to people who do not live on the island as people do not have the relevant skills on Shetland. As a result, a lot of the money earned there is going out of the community. As Ann claims, much of their economy is about “making money for the bigger companies” (Ann [NE] 19th May 2021).

Whilst the oil industry had an enormous impact on the east coast of the Highlands during the 1970s, the effects of the recent increases in tourism are being felt more acutely by people in the Highlands now, particularly on the west coast. The global tourism industry has grown exponentially since the 1950s with the number of global international tourist arrivals rising from 25 million in 1950 to 1.46 billion in 2019 (UNWTO 2020). This has brought with it huge increases in revenue from tourism, rising from US\$ 2 million in 1950 to US\$ 1.48 Trillion in 2019. Tourism is now promoted as a key to sustainable development (UNWTO 2020), offering opportunities for employment and income in underdeveloped areas with claims of benefits for other sectors such as construction, transportation, and agriculture (Liodakis 2019). These claims are often disputed due to tourism’s contradictory relation with these sectors, particularly agriculture, around the use of land and water (Liodakis 2019). Bianchi (2011) goes further by showing how agriculture is often, over time, replaced by tourism as the main source of revenue for many communities. Other claims about the potential for tourism to pull communities out of deep economic crises have also led to the drive for tourism to be a key to sustainable development. In the context of these claims, tourism is frequently presented as an opportunity for investment. As a result, it has become a major avenue of capital accumulation driven by free market enterprises that range from independent travel firms to large multinational airlines and tour operators (Bianchi 2009).

Crofters have seen a marked increase in tourism in the last 10 years. It has become one of the main sources of employment, with people working in a large range of jobs such as cleaners, shop assistants and hospitality. It has been introduced to increase the population in the Highlands by providing jobs to persuade people to stay and attract new people in. Many crofters have started using their land for tourism by building camping pods and

chalets, setting up camp sites and starting Bed and Breakfast accommodation. This has been supported by the crofting commission and it has increased the income of crofters, particularly amongst younger residents who tend to go into tourism for their main income whilst continuing with traditional crofting activities.

Mac spoke about one young couple who were doing exactly that. They are starting up a B&B and are living in a caravan while their house is built. They will then use the caravan as a tourist accommodation, and may even build a small bothy or log cabin. One of them works as an assistant harbour master and the other is a teacher. They have cattle and are thinking of other kinds of livestock, “but mainly they are thinking of tourism” (Mac [NW] 18th January 2021). There is a sense amongst crofters that economic pressures are eroding the traditional crofting way of life and, as a result, many crofters are going into tourism to help sustain it in some way.

One of the things that has led to an increase in tourism is that in recent years a number of high-profile films and TV shows such as *Shetland* have been made there, according to Ann. “Since that happened, we get people who turn up and wiz round the Island and don’t really care about it” (Ann [NE] 19th May 2021). One of the other reasons for this increase is the rise in demand for things like wild swimming, wild camping and wild walking, and the wider agenda of rewilding. Mac explained that many crofters had taken issue with this: “It is one of the bug bears of many of the crofters that live here [...] That concept feeds into a kind of desire for people to have this kind of land. It is seen as a resource, it is seen as a therapy, good for the soul and all of that kind of thing” (Mac [NW] 18th January 2021).

This idealised image of the Highlands has commodified it as a destination for tourism to drive the local economy. This has been perceived by many participants of this research as not being in the interest of local people. Organisations such as Wildland Ventures, who are owned by Scotland’s largest landowner, Anders Holch Povlsen, and heavily invested in the North Coast 500 initiative, perpetuate these ideals. Their marketing promotes Scotland as a wilderness with no reference to the crofting communities that live there. The identity they have created advances a particular type of place-myth (Urry 1995) about the Highlands being a barren and inhospitable place. But this does not match the reality of those who live there. These social spaces, that are perhaps peripheral, are being developed to be

dependent on visitors attracted by their place-myth is characteristic of modernity (Lash and Urry 1994). But such myths can change if too many visitors arrive, particularly if their characteristics are inconsistent with its particular place-image. These ideals have created a desire for a private, quasi-spiritual relationship with nature through a romantic tourist gaze (Urry 1995). But this image is not a place that crofters, who frequently refer to the land as their workshop, recognise. For them it is not wilderness it is where they work.

Tourism is seen as one of the drivers in the push towards rewilding and is leading to a shift in the way land is valued. This is having a detrimental effect on the sustainability of these communities and also policy decisions at local and national levels. Mac explained that if there is a local development, such as the hydro scheme they have in Assynt, there are bodies that will strongly object to it on the grounds of it having any impact on 'the wilderness'. For Mac, this detracts from the possibility of local jobs for local people and for their futures. Ann also spoke about this clash between local renewable energy schemes, such as wind farms, and tourism businesses who thought they would put people off visiting Shetland. Despite this, the type of tourism they are getting on Shetland are bringing limited benefits according to Ann. "We get people who turn up and wiz round the Island and don't really care about it, but we haven't got many hotels here" (Ann [NE] 19th May 2021). This marketisation of tourism means that local politics increasingly prioritises the needs of tourists and tourism organizations (Kulusjärvi 2020). The costs of this are most evident in tourist destinations where the cultural and physical environment is commodified (Bianchi 2009 & Laudati 2010). Kulusjärvi (2020) highlights the inability of this type of economy to serve communities as, instead, it merely furthers injustice and inequality.

It is not only Shetland that experiences this, though, as since the introduction of the North Coast 500 (NC500) the Highlands have experienced something similar. The NC500 is a 516-mile route around the north coast of Scotland and was launched in 2015. The route is along existing roads that have been rebadged as the NC500 with the aim of attracting more tourists to the area. Whilst the increase in traffic has put a strain on local infrastructure there has been an increase in demand for accommodation, self-catering and camping pods as a result of it. Despite this, all the crofters interviewed for this research spoke about the route attracting tourists who just 'pass through' rather than staying there. "There isn't a

two-way exchange”, said Bet who lives just south of the route. “In the past when there weren’t as many, there was more interaction with the locals, but now it is the opposite” (Bet [CW] 25th November 2020). The aim of the NC500 has been to ‘grow’ the economy in the Highlands. It has attracted tourers who travel the route in camper vans or even in specialist car clubs. It goes through very small communities and at times along single-track roads that have not been built for this type of traffic and have deteriorated dramatically as a result.

Bet explained some of the problems caused by this marketing strategy. “Since it started, we have just been inundated with camper vans... wild camping... they have come in hordes. It has been awful!” (Bet [CW] 28th October). Many who travel the route do not stop and are not spending anything in the local community. “They are wild camping which means they can just camp in your driveway”, said Bet. “There are no facilities for getting rid of the waste, so every layby is polluted. It’s a fantastic marketing idea but the infrastructure for it just isn’t there” (Bet [CW] 28th October). Bet explained how people visiting just have not been prepared for the lack of infrastructure or aware of the impact they have on the environment and people’s livelihoods. Every area along the route appears to have been negatively impacted by this. In Plockton, a small fishing village near Skye, there has been a significant rise in tourism and particularly wild camping. Drew explained what is driving the problems experienced by local residents. “Tourism is absolutely chaos at the moment”, he said. “It gets in the way, they drive you nuts, but they don’t realise they are doing it” (Drew [CW] 23rd July 2021). This has been to such an extent that Forestry Rangers have been employed to move people on who have been wild camping. This lack of awareness and responsibility has been repeated again and again. Further up the west coast, residents in places such as Applecroft have been so badly affected by it they have been actively seeking to be taken off the NC500.

These place-myths, constructed for the Highlands and perpetuated through the NC500, have led to huge numbers of visitors. Overtourism (Diaz-Parra & Jover 2021) has left many places overwhelmed on occasion. This has not simply been about the number of tourists; it is more about the stress on destinations and its residents through the social injustices that this leads to (Butler 2018). It can include rising rents, the displacement of locals (Capocchi et

al 2019) and affects the quality of life for local residents through the disturbances it causes (Diaz-Parra & Jover 2021). In Scotland, overtourism through idealised place-myths has led to what could be considered 'place alienation' (Hummon 1992) where residents feel their environment has been reproduced in a different image.

The identities of these place-myths are in stark contrast to the identities that have grown through the crofting communities that can be found there. Many participants have spoken about what it means to be a crofter. For some it was something they were born into; growing up on a croft they would have developed skills as they went along. Whilst it was the crofting system that has maintained the population in these peripheral areas of the Highlands, Kay also spoke about the significance of the Gaelic language and culture for both developing and maintaining these identities.

There is a fair amount of reference to crofting in Gaelic culture, there are a number of songs for example that relates to everyday work on the croft [...] There are songs that men would sing when they were rowing a boat to maintain a rhythm while they row; there are milking songs that women would sing while milking the cattle; there are weaving songs for while they worked the tweed; when they were shrinking the tweed there were songs that they would sing to help them to shrink the tweed. They would have a particular rhythm and a particular beat to help with these jobs (Kay [NW] May 18th 2021).

These songs are now sung out of that context for entertainment at local ceilidh's and other such events. But songs and stories are still passed on from generation to generation. There are many variations of each song with stories that relates to each crofting community and often will speak of a specific event that happened there. A result of this is there is often no one definitive version. This means identities that have been developed through this culture are deeply rooted to both place and the work of the crofter. But, subjectivities such as these, constructed over centuries through social relations born of relationships with these territories, have been displaced. New place identities have been commodified and not only revalued but valued for a completely different purpose. This has also been through a completely different method that is neither desired, in their interests, or belonging to them.

One area of the Highlands that seems to have been impacted more than most is Assynt. Cat talked about their experience of the NC500. “We are right in the middle of it”, she said. “We had a lot of dirty campers and people who didn’t really care about the place” (Cat [NW] 24th Nov 2020). Cat explained the difference between tourists that have visited for the NC500 and the type of tourists they used to get. “One of the problems with the NC500 is a lot of people are just doing it as fast as they can”, (Cat [NW] 24th Nov 2020). Cat explained that before the roads were rebranded in this way tourists, would normally stay for a week or more and “do all the walks, go to the beaches, buy in the local shops, and would really fall in love with the place” (Cat [NW] 24th Nov 2020). It is in the very nature of what is attracting people to the Highlands through the NC500 that they will just pass through, turning communities into non-places, villages into terminals, and driveways into laybys for camper vans and wild camping. It does not create relationships, it maintains distance, and it mediates the relationship that tourists have with the communities in the Highlands. This is creating a schism between the identity that tourists see and the reality of the people who live there.

The identity of the Highlands that the NC500 offers fails to match the lived reality of the communities that live there, and is creating pressure for local communities to change. This is also a direct result of the way it is marketed, as Cat explained. “They are not respecting the land, they don’t see it as a working environment, they don’t see it as a place where people live” (Cat [NW] 22nd July 2021). The way that the NC500 is promoted is creating an alternative identity to the one that is experienced by people who live and stay there according to Cat. “It is because of the way it is branded... ‘Visit Scotland, come to the wild Highlands, there is nothing there. You will go miles and miles and you won’t see a soul!’ It is all nonsense; it is a working environment” (Cat [NW] 22nd July 2021). There is much frustration at being misrepresented in this way for people living in the Highlands. Cat pointed out that at no time has life there matched the way it is being portrayed:

It has never been a wild and crazy landscape where people weren’t welcome, where the poets were all ‘oh it’s wonderful, there is no one there.’ It is not like that at all [...] People coming up here visiting don’t appreciate that we are trying to earn a living from it. We don’t earn all our income from tourism! (Cat [NW] 22nd July 2021).

Mac, who lives in Assynt, also spoke about the impact of tourism. “The number of people coming through has changed the economy”, he said. “It is much easier just building some pods and renting them out to tourists”, (Mac [NW] 18th January 2021). But whilst tourism can be an easier way for an individual to earn more income, the impact of the NC500 is making life there more difficult. According to Mac, people who travel the NC500 route in camper vans tend to buy all their provisions from supermarkets in the south before they start their journey and so make very little contribution to the local economy. For Mac this is in stark contrast to the type of tourism they were experiencing before the NC500. Then they were more likely to interact with the local community, buy bread and milk from the local shop or get a coffee at a café. As with Cat, for Mac it was not just that they were not contributing to the local economy though. The tourists doing the NC500 put a strain on local infrastructure and had no responsibility to the communities they passed through. “They became a health hazard”, he said. “They were emptying their toilets and the like when they were full in a convenient ditch” (Mac [NW] 18th January 2021).

The strategy behind the NC500 seems to be to create new infrastructure by merely renaming and repurposing old infrastructure. The importance of transport innovations and new infrastructure for the expansion and growth of tourism is to enable the annihilation of space by time (Liodakis 2019). And whilst this is still being enabled by the NC500, the infrastructure has not been designed for this purpose and is leading to its deterioration, particularly the roads. Visitors have followed its lead by repurposing the environment to meet their own needs in a dirty downward spiral of filth and excrement. They have been drawn by a mediated reality and encouraged to pass through it on a road trip. There is no time for connections and building relationships. Adopted by the Scottish Government, it has supported the wealthy beneficiaries of the NC500 marketing campaign by increasing the number of tourist arrivals in The Highlands with no planning for the problems it has dumped on its communities.

In this section we have seen the pressure on crofters to scale up their production through needing to gain more land and specialise their practices. There have also been regulations that have been devised specifically for the damaging methods of large-scale farming that, ironically, put pressure on small-scale producers to adopt these same industrial practices.

On top of this, subsidy payments have been seen to incentivise large-scale farming and have had the outcome of consolidating land ownership. Finally, we have seen how new industries have been introduced at the expense of small-scale sustainable farming practices that have, in turn, created dependencies on infrastructure and external markets. The question this leaves is, how are small-scale farming communities trying to resist this and how are they attempting to reproduce an alternative?

9.2 Reproducing a Different Moral Economy

This section looks at the methods of resistance employed by small-scale food producers that defend against the reproduction of capital, and questions to what extent these methods reproduce an alternative. Examining land ownership and land access, agriculture, supply chains and culture, it will focus on the processes that reproduce identities and economic realities that are, to a degree, contrary to the logic of capitalism. These appear to be less likely to lead to the extraction of surplus value and capital accumulation, and happen through a different relationship to time and space with respect to both production and consumption, where time is used as a resource to create space and markets are created in proximity.

Firstly, this section will look at how community land ownership unhooks communities from dependencies on external markets for production, and will look at how informal gift economies have emerged and are sustained there. Next it will analyse regenerative farming practices such as mob grazing, and analyse how this appears to be resulting in a different relationship to time and space, where land is valued differently and time is seen as a resource used to generate more fertile spaces.

9.2.1 Shared Territories

Crofting has worked to keep people in rural communities, enabling them to be more self-sufficient. This desire for their economic autonomy has been enabled by various processes resulting in shared access to land, and other resources being managed both locally and democratically. This has also demanded more restorative farming practices that are necessary for them to build fertility on otherwise barren lands. “You are part of a

community and the satisfaction of growing things and making it work and having control over yourself, you are not working for someone else”, said Kay as he explained some of the benefits of these processes. “I also think it helps people to be more able to feed themselves” (Kay [NW] May 18th 2021). This all happens through a variety of land access initiatives such as common grazings, community land trusts, and crofting tenancies that have been born of various land rights movements.

These initiatives construct, maintain and defend small-scale farming territories. “Crofting was one of the main things that sustained the population in these areas”, said Kay. “If the crofting system hadn’t existed, you probably wouldn’t have had such a large population living in the more remote areas of the Highlands and Islands” (Kay [NW] May 18th 2021). This has seen the indigenous Gaelic language and culture, to some extent, being maintained in these areas. As a result of this, shared identities have been formed through its associated language, literature, songs and culture. These bonds have formed the backbone of these communities as they have fought to maintain their way of life. The result of this is that social relations are valued differently to other areas of the UK. This defending of material and immaterial territories, as has been seen in Assynt, is a process of territorialization where these processes have created movement-places (see chapter 4) and the reproduction of the territory is more important than production (Gramsci 2011). The interaction between places and their people and this flow of social reproduction, seems important for enabling these territories to flourish.

The Assynt Crofters’ Trust took ownership of a large area of the North Assynt Estate in February 1993. The land was due to be divided into seven smaller areas with no engagement with the crofting communities that lived there or concern for how it would affect them (Assynt Crofters’ Trust 1998). The Trust took ownership of the land at the end of a six-month campaign led by the Assynt branch of the Scottish Crofters’ Union. The campaign gave them national publicity and helped them raise the money needed to buy the land. The campaign became a model for community land buyouts with its organising committee evolving to become the board of directors for the Trust when it bought the land. This process has been adopted by many of the other community land trusts that are now a feature of the Highlands. Each township in the estate has an elected representative on the

trusts board of directors. They have a Grazings Committee, also managed along democratic lines. This has responsibility for ensuring that the common grazings (a Highland equivalent of the Commons) are maintained, fenced, and used appropriately; everyone who has a croft can be on the committee. There is a Grazings Clerk whose responsibility is to the Crofting Commission which ensures that crofts are being used and maintained properly. What has been common amongst participants who live within crofting townships is the sense of community support, as Cat explained:

Crofters will help each other, especially at certain times of year when they are gathering sheep for worming and dosing and stuff. All the people who have sheep, gather together to share the workload. They tend to work within townships, but they also help in other townships (Cat [NW] 11th March 2021).

The primary goals of community land ownership in Scotland are to address the unequal distribution of land ownership and to give communities greater economic control (Scottish Land Commission 2017). Cat spoke about the difference between community ownership and having a private landlord. “The fact that it was a private landowner meant that if they wanted something then obviously you had to say yes”, she said. But now that the community owns the land through the Trust, it gives them more economic control and stability.

Community land trusts manage their land democratically. In crofting communities, representatives from each township will sit on a board of directors. Responsibilities are then devolved to sub-groups to manage various aspects such as access to land, overseeing its use, or managing the environment. In Assynt they also have a sub-group that manages a Hydro-scheme they have there. The Hydro scheme has been a major success for the Trust and has now started to generate a surplus income. The Trusts board of directors manage the income created from schemes such as this and use the money for the benefit of local people including bursaries for young people going on to further or higher education. This is not just unique to Assynt; in North Harris they have other schemes that have emerged from the benefits of community land ownership, as Kay explained. “Whatever money is generated is redistributed to the local community. For example, we have increased the housing stock that we have built, and we have built some for rent” (Kay [NW] 2nd April

2021). As well as this they have spent money on local infrastructure, such as footpaths, deer fencing and forestry plantations. “The main benefits have been greater local control, greater benefits to the local community [...] and all these things probably wouldn’t have happened in the way they have if it was a private landlord. (Kay [NW] 2nd April 2021).

As well as community land trusts, another type of shared ownership in the Highlands are common grazings (CG). Each township will have a CG which is a shared piece of land where everyone in that township can graze their animals. For many crofters this is what binds their communities together. Everyone in the township will contribute to the management of the CG, sheering, dipping, lambing, maintenance. “Everyone works together to get the costs down’, said Cat. “It is an old-fashioned way, not a very 21st Century way where it’s my land and it is my way [...] With crofting everything you do impacts on everyone else, we all share the same land in each township” (Cat [NW] 22nd July 2021). The CG is also managed on democratic lines through a Grazings Committee (GC). It is usual practice for everyone with a croft in a township to be on the GC. “That is the best way to make sure there aren’t any problems and no one feels disenfranchised and everyone is invited”, said Mac. “Even though a lot of people don’t come, everyone is sent the minutes” (Mac [NW] 29th March 2021). The GC is responsible for managing how the CG is used. This includes deciding on the numbers of livestock allowed on the land at any one time. Each CG has a souming of so many sheep, if they have a total of 120 sheep in a township and 10 crofts then it is 12 sheep per croft. They also have an equation for other types of animals. Mac explained how this works in his township. “That again is set down in law, one cow equals seven sheep which equals 1/8th of a horse” (Mac [NW] 29th March 2021). This does not always run smoothly though as not everyone has an equal number of livestock. Each GC will appoint a Grazings Clerk who reports to the crofting commission and the landlord, which in North Harris and Assynt is the Trust. They have responsibility to ensure the land is maintained and properly used. These structures are set up to ensure land is not over grazed and the crofting commission can act if it is.

Many common grazings on the west coast of the Highlands have sheep stock clubs (SSC) which is where flocks of sheep are held in common ownership for collective benefit. This is the case in the Township where Val lives. The SSC was formed in the 1920s and was seen as

a way to increase the number of agricultural workers and to help people living under difficult conditions after the First World War. Val, along with seven other crofters, are members of their SSC. They herd and gather together; they plan their dietary needs as a group, and they also medicate and shear them collectively. The SSC has been passed down from one generation to the next for many of the crofters and there was a strong desire to keep it going when it nearly closed recently. “The people who were at war with one another were the ones that were strongest for keeping it!”, she said. “I underestimated the level of emotions because their predecessors and ancestors had been crofters” (Val [CW] 26th January 2021). Working together and helping each other out in this way is common in crofting communities. “It’s not that you need to but that it is traditional”, she said. “The nature of it encourages working together, especially if you have sheep stock clubs and the common grazings, it’s a great facilitator for us working together” (Val [CW] 11th July 2021).

In Scotland, crofting tenancies, common grazings, and community land ownership has helped small-scale food producers resist economic pressure to ‘scale up’ and these local knowledges and practices have enabled them to both maintain and support one another and their way of life. The Land Reform (Scotland) Act, has given small-scale farming communities the chance to not only resist this but to start reversing it to some degree. Crofting communities have used this legislation effectively, but it is a history of legislative gains, coupled with a tradition of shared ownership and responsibility that has helped maintain their collective identities and, to some extent, reclaim their autonomy.

9.2.2 Shared Knowledge

These methods of shared ownership have, over time, resulted in a culture of collaboration and cooperation. Much of this has developed informally through the relationships that are created by shared ownership itself but there are also organisations that have been established to maintain these structures and to resist the pressure of scaling up, consolidation, and the industrialisation of their practices. La Via Campesina (LVC) and its member organisations, such as The Land Workers’ Alliance (LWA) and The Scottish Crofting Federation (SCF) in Scotland, defend rural peoples from all these attempts at co-option. This shared vision has emerged in Latin America through its *Diálogo de Saberes* (dialog among different knowledges and ways of knowing) and is making agroecology into a strategy for

transforming rural lives “through collective action” (van der Ploeg 2010:104). SCF and LWA have worked with small-scale farming communities to develop various strategies to resist co-option. As we have seen, their strategies recognise and respect local knowledges as a method of resistance, and serves their objectives of autonomy and resistance against the neoliberalisation of the agri-food system.

The flexible and horizontal approach to learning employed by LVC and its member organisations, utilising political agroecology, lends itself to bringing farmers together with diverse approaches and worldviews with commonly held values of autonomy, localised food systems, and collective knowledges. Less hierarchical than the mainstream, it works to empower its learners to be collaborative producers of knowledge within their own networks. Whilst agricultural training is already happening in rural communities, it also develops skills to help communities achieve their own political aims. From this, learners can also develop a collective oppositional consciousness (Mansbridge and Morris 2001) and begin to link with global debates of food sovereignty and agroecology, and enable participation with social movements. These learning initiatives, like the Land Base and Farm Hack in the UK, aids the development of regional and national political networks such as the LWA.

In Scotland, LWA have established a farmer-to-farmer group that aims to create opportunities for peer-to-peer exchange (Land Workers Alliance 2019) where groups meet at different LWA members farms each month to share experience and drive innovation and cooperation. It also offers agroecology training, political and movement training, and various network groups such as those focusing on seed sovereignty. The SCF offers similar training and network opportunities, whilst CLS offers tools to help communities both buy land and maintain the community around it (Community Land Scotland 2017).

Projects such as Grow Shetland attempt to replicate this type of activity. It works with individuals, communities and groups struggling with various issues, and enables them to grow their own food on publicly owned land with the aim of supporting themselves and their communities by providing fresh food. It also works with individuals to help them gain access to land provided by Shetland Council through the Community Empowerment Act (CEA). The CEA ensures that councils are obliged to offer land if people are requesting it to

grow on. Grow Shetland teaches agroecological methods to build the productivity of land and to reduce its carbon footprint in what is a very difficult growing environment due to the quality of soils and climate. They also work with schools and community groups, and have recently started offering training courses. Ann states that the main aim of Grow Shetland is getting residents on Shetland to question where their food comes from. “Grow Shetland is about getting everyone to think about how we grow stuff” (Ann [NE] 19th May 2021). But, as Ann explains, this is not easy. “Our culture, our society, is set up in a way that it is very difficult to make these choices” (Ann [NE] 19th May 2021). For Ann, it is about involving the community in food production. “There is definitely a social aspect to that too and there is a community bond”, she said. “But it doesn’t pay though does it, and the whole world revolves around making money” (Ann [NE] 23rd July 2021).

Grow Shetland is aiming to cultivate an alternative culture through formal methods such as training and various community projects. A culture that is more aware of where its food comes from, that is more localised, and is adopting more sustainable practices. Many crofting communities are also engaged in these types of practices and have been for centuries. According to Kay, these have been maintained through a variety of different methods including oral histories, songs and other cultural activities. For some it is just “something that you are born into”, he said. “They acquire knowledge as they go along” (Kay [NW] May 18th 2021). Crofting was intended to provide a tenant with a piece of land to grow crops for their own use. “It was to give them self-sufficiency”, said Kay. “Crofting was not originally intended as a means of a way of providing produce into the food chain in general” (Kay [NW] May 18th 2021). This is becoming an increasingly attractive way of life as more people start to look for alternatives. “Crofting quite often attracts people who want to do things in a different way”, said Nia. “They maybe have different priorities in their lives, and they are less focused on a capitalist mindset” (Nia [CE] 30th October 2020).

9.2.3 Shared Responsibilities

Much of what has been discussed about shared resources bares resemblance to what is covered in James C. Scott’s *The Moral Economy of the Peasant*. Scott places the secure subsistence of the peasant family as the basis of his study of peasant politics and rebellion, where the fear of a dearth constructs the technical, social, and moral arrangements in a

peasant society (Scott 1976). It creates a risk averse identity that has an adverse effect for capital accumulation. This is the very reason for the need for primitive accumulation and the introduction of capitalist agriculture. As we have seen, this undermined the stability of small-scale farming communities such as crofting townships and is why there was so much resistance to it during The Clearances. Not only does Scott emphasise the motives for peasant rebellions, he also emphasises the moral imperative of subsistence for them.

Scott achieves this through building on the economic dilemma faced by most small-scale farming households. Due to the demands of subsistence, the family will seek to reduce risks as they could lead to a fatal failure. He sees these households, living so close to the margins, as having little scope for neoclassical economics “profit maximisation calculus”. This need for a reliable subsistence as the primary goal of these families is the starting point of his examination of the relationship they have with their neighbours, their resources, elites, and the state, in terms of whether they aid or hinder them in meeting that need. It is this that transforms many aspects of peasant communities.

Scott resists romanticising these social arrangements that distinguish small-scale farming communities by showing that their actions are not radically egalitarian but merely work on the assumption that those abandoned are likely to create a challenge to those who remain. This need to maintain the community means that all are entitled to have access to its resources but often at the cost of a loss of status and individual autonomy for the autonomy of the community. It is these ‘critical redistributive mechanisms’ that provide a minimal subsistence insurance for villagers and the shared responsibility for their resources that form the basis of his critique of the moral economy of the peasant.

This idea of shared responsibility is common in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland with community land ownership, sheep stock clubs and common grazings. Organisations such as the Assynt Crofters’ Trust and the North Harris Trust have given crofters greater economic control, as one participant explained:

That [The Community Land Trust] gives the community and crofters greater ownership over what happens. Instead of whatever money being generated going into the pockets of some guy that you are never going to see, all the money goes back into the

community (Kay [NW] 2nd April 2021).

This ethos extends with community land trusts which redistributes the income it generates through various initiatives, as Cat explained. “The trust has helped people, for example somebody died quite young and unexpectedly leaving a young family so we helped with the funeral and a few other things” (Cat [NW] 11th March 2021). Whilst shared ownership and responsibility does not create great amounts of wealth, it does protect people from poverty, as Cat explained. “People can still be poor around here, but no one is desperate” (Cat [NW] 22nd July 2021).

Mac expanded on this point. “If there are any problems in any township the whole trust looks into the problem to see what they can do” (Mac [NW] 29th March 2021). Whilst each township has certain established responsibilities for its area, that are addressed through their Grazings Committee, a trust has the capacity to oversee this and can intervene or help. But it is crofting itself that is seen as being the key driver for this sense of responsibility as she explains:

Crofters will help each other, especially at certain times of year, [...] we are a nice place for that sort of thing. A couple of years ago we had a massive amount of snowfall and some people got trapped in their cars, and there were a few guys in big 4x4s just going round making sure people got home [...] Also, because it is such a small community everyone knows everyone, so everyone knows when someone has a problem. I am not sure this is made easier by the trust, but I think the nature of crofting has. Crofting has always been a case of everyone helps everyone else because you have had to. There was always a sort of barter system going on as well, you know the sort of ‘if you come and help me with my sheep, I’ll help you with your fencing’ thing (Cat [NW] 11th March 2021).

The experience of this type of economy is reinforced by several participants. One discussed exchanging prawns for mutton in this way. “I will probably get prawns over the course of the year in exchange for the mutton that he will get in a couple of weeks. It is very informal, but it is still a lovely system.” This system is not just an exchange of produce, it also includes services, as he explained. “We had help from a plumber in the past who didn’t charge us to

replace heaters in an emersion tank and he got a huge amount of beef” (Mac [NW] 18th Jan 2021). The benefits that are felt are not simply ease of transaction, there is also a sense that it fosters stronger relationships, which sometimes help form what one participant called *friendship groups*. As has been previously noted, this often involves anonymous gifts such as fish, meat, or vegetables. “We feel more connected for it”, said Mac. “It is lovely” (Mac [NW] 18th Jan 2021).

Within this group there are between a dozen and two dozen people. The group is not simply about the exchange of produce or services, there is also a strong sense of support within the group with various types of help offered if a member of the group is struggling in some way. Like most crofters, Mac grows vegetables. This appears to be increasing as a phenomenon in Assynt. “There is a move towards it”, said Mac, “we barter them, friends get them, and we get something in return” (Mac [NW] 27th July 2021). Mac tends to trade eggs and vegetables for prawns and fish. “They are never stated as a trade though”, as he explained. “I’ll say, ‘do you want some eggs’ and they say, ‘I would love some eggs!’ and then a month later I have some prawns at my back door” (Mac [NW] 27th July 2021). According to Mac, most people in Assynt get a lot of pleasure from being able to “do something that doesn’t involve money even if you have the money in the bank to do it [...] It is precious and they want to keep it” (Mac [NW] 29th March 2021).

These alternative methods of valuing social relations appear to reproduce something different to capital. In capitalism “labour-power is a commodity which its possessor, the waged worker, sells to the capitalist. Why does he sell it? It is in order to live” (Marx 1902:09). As we have seen, workers must abstract their labour in order to sell it so they are able to buy the commodities needed for their own subsistence. With this gift economy, we are seeing a different set of processes than the social, cultural, and economic processes that reproduce the workforce to be compliant wage workers. These alternative processes do not contribute to the reproduction of capital, but instead reproduce a ‘social doing’ (Holloway 2002). This noncommodified labour is not completely free of this process though as, to some extent, it is still subjugated to the demands of abstract labour. The processes that reproduce capitalism still exist in the context discussed, they are just less pervasive. The point at which one characteristic gives way to the other would be significant in

understanding social transformation in this context.

Economies of this nature are not uncommon in small-scale farming communities, as one participant explained:

The sort of barter economy we have around here is fairly common in most rural areas. It is very much the sort of thing of 'that's just how we do things round here'. If anyone needs something there is a message that goes round that asks for things. And it works on that level. I think it is kind of embedded in the nature of the community itself. So, people who choose to come and live in a place like this quickly come to realise that it is handy to have informal help on occasion. You gather these links, you have conversations and establish some friendships and then you speak to someone who will say 'oh, you should speak to such and such who can help you with such and such' and that is how it starts (Mac [NW] 29th March 2021).

The commodification of social relations produces capital. This deepens commodity relations within the cycle of social reproduction where households become increasingly dependent on commodity relations for their own survival. What we have seen in Assynt is how this commoditisation can be resisted through self-provisioning when access to land, labour and markets is mediated by nonmonetary ties limiting the cycle of reproduction. This method of resistance, that is being experienced in areas of the Highlands, is a rising phenomenon in Europe (van der Ploeg 2010) and can be found in a wide range of interlinked practices distinctively different from entrepreneurial and capitalist agriculture.

In Assynt, as we have seen, there are numerous instances where social relations have not been commodified. This is through the exchange of products and services and appears to resist commodity fetishism in a way that resembles what John Holloway calls anti-fetishism. According to Holloway, the fetishism that takes place in the relationship between use values and exchange values ruptures the "sociality of doing and... the process of mutual recognition and social validation" (Holloway 2002:46). It is at this point that money becomes the measure of the social utility of what you do.

According to Holloway, anti-fetishism is a process that ruptures the sense of value, money,

state, and all other processes that reproduce capital, as being fixed by exposing them as unstable, disrupted, or challenged. It is an alternative process that recovers 'doing', not an individual doing but a 'social doing', and not only stops reproducing capital but starts reproducing this social doing (Holloway 2002). Holloway explores this through the relationship between abstract labour and concrete labour as a strategy to recover this act of social doing, and can be related to the practices that have been discussed in Assynt.

What Mac has described in Assynt is not simply an informal economy. Trade is not the aim; exchange is not valued individually but is seen as an experience of their 'social doing'. This shatters the normalising of fetishization that would usually disrupt this activity, and clearly recovers, to some degree, social doing. Here, some aspects of social relations and the subsistence needs of crofters have remained uncommodified in crofting communities. This is clearly different from the norm in the rest of the UK. It is important to note though that people living here are still involved in commodified activities, which in turn raises a question of what is the balance between these different economic practices, and what is the sustainability of each and the current balance between the two.

Whilst it is clear, in the example we have just looked at, that capital is not being produced, it is less clear the extent to which it is reproducing a social doing. The question is not simply, 'Has social doing been recovered to some degree', but in doing so 'Has it started to reproduce social doing'? Capital accumulation still exists in these geographical areas so perhaps not. However, there are other processes that appear in this context that suggest it is to some extent. This includes the informal welfare that Cat, Mac, and Kay have all spoken about. But this is still not clear, as the understanding developed from the interviews does not offer a substantive argument. The question it leaves is, 'Is this informal welfare system still subjugated to the reproduction of capital?' And 'Is it a response to the crises of capitalism or is it born of these alternative relations?' The answer is, perhaps, both. Whilst many of these collective, collaborative and social practices are a product of the culture that is created by shared access to resources, there can be no doubt that the income that is generated is the product of capital flows, and are being used to mitigate against the damage caused by uneven geographical development.

The story of the Assynt Crofters' Trust offers an alternative to conventional approaches to

development and capitalist farming. Here the appearance of gift economies and their informal welfare systems are, to some extent, a product of the rights, identities and political infrastructure constructed through the formation of crofting regulation, crofting townships and community land trusts. The nature of these initiatives means that the practices that emerge through them start to relink production and consumption. In Scotland, this is not exclusive to communities of this nature, there are numerous small-scale farmer cooperatives like the Transition Black Isle group, or schemes such as Transition Turriefield, that are attempting to bridge this gap, as John explained. “Most of the markets up here are run by community groups, they are activities essentially put on by organisations like community halls. They are the types of organisations that are trying to bridge the gap between consumers and producers” (John [NE] 27th March 2021). This is an attempt to change the way social relations are valued, so it should be no surprise to see localised benefits as there is a reduction in their commodification. Where commodification still occurs, the surplus value created is often staying in the community. This can be through democratic organisations such as the Assynt Crofters’ Trust which redistributes it, or through direct sales schemes that help farmers retain and capture “more of the food pound that also enables them to be able to offer *pay it forward* schemes or supply *community kitchens* at lower costs” (Cory [SW] 23rd Dec 2020).

Industrialised agri-food economies have become disconnected. Natural resources have become mediated in a way that clearly affects consumption and creates distance with consumers. By comparison, small-scale agri-food economies link natural resources with their communities at the same time as being dependent on their reproduction (van der Ploeg 2016). As we have seen, some of the literature suggests that the demands of subsistence amongst small-scale and peasant farmers reproduces a completely different set of behaviours. It is the very nature of small-scale agriculture, in the process of seeking autonomy and self-sufficiency, to resist the reproduction of capital which attempts to co-opt small-scale farms under the guise of international development and economic resilience. There appears to be two motivations for this.

Firstly, motivations are borne of crofting traditions, townships and community land trusts, and the introduction of crofting legislation that have protected these rights to subsistence.

Here, this autonomy is implicit in these rights, identities and political infrastructure as they have been established through resistance, and continue as resistance to the conditions created by The Clearances as the moment of primitive accumulation. Their existence is, to some extent, a resistance to the extraction of surplus value and the accumulation of capital. Motivations may arise from a sense of belonging to these traditions, but the traditions themselves have been maintained as a resistance to the introduction of capitalist agriculture.

Secondly, as we have seen with John and Nia, motivations are associated with a critique of agri-business. Their motivations appear as being more explicit. There is a stated need and desire to do things differently from the models of food production being employed by industrial farms. In these areas small-scale farmer cooperatives have been established to 'bridge the gap between consumers and producers' for economic and ethical reasons. These aim to stop value being extracted and create a greater sense of responsibility amongst consumers for the produce that they consume. Unlike the examples of gift economies that we have seen elsewhere, commodification still takes place in these circumstances but the value created from this is staying in these communities to a greater extent.

The existence of an element of non-commodified subsistence provision, such as gift economies, can be understood as an act of resistance to the social reproduction of capitalism. The question here is not simply, 'Is this act of non-participation a moment of resistance in and of itself?' It clearly is. The question is how effective is it. As an isolated moment it can still be seen as being subjugated to the reproduction of capitalism, a moment established merely to maintain a worker as they grapple with the conditions created by capitalism. In Assynt, what we have seen is more than a single moment. Here, there is a culture of this type of exchange but capitalism is still present, just less so. This has brought numerous benefits for these communities and, in order to sustain it, they have had to demand numerous legislative rights to both maintain this method of small-scale farming and restrict the desire to scale-up.

These alternative agri-food economies that are commonly owned and not for sale are structured in a way that makes them more resilient to co-option. They have strategies that are developed to both aid resistance and reproduce these practices (van der Ploeg 2016).

Their total turnover may be modest but they feed the process of capital accumulation to a lesser extent which, in these areas, suggest a slow-down of the dominant agri-food economy. With this emerges the potential for new interstices, structural holes and institutional voids producing yet further crises in the reproduction of capitalism.

9.3 Sustaining a Different Moral Economy and the Reproduction of Capitalism

This chapter has shown how capitalism is reproduced in the Scottish Highlands and the potential for economic alternatives found there to be produced and sustained. The first section examined the reproduction of capitalism. Here the introduction of transport infrastructure to reduce the costs of time used to expand markets has created dependencies for many of its residents. The most pertinent recent example of this amongst small-scale food producers has been the plight of creel fishers during the crisis caused by Brexit. The collapse of the supply chains they have been reliant on has caused a great deal of harm for both individual fishers and their surrounding communities. The introduction of new infrastructure that has been designed to aid capital flows for large industrial farms through access to external markets or services, such as large abattoirs, has been seen to encourage an economy of scale, where small-scale producers are encouraged to 'scale-up'. This demand to scale-up has, in many instances, held back alternatives and made them less sustainable.

New industries have appeared, often on the back of this infrastructure, with the aim of creating a more 'resilient economy'. The truth seems more that it is aiming to develop resilience for the capitalist economy by creating new needs and new use values that aid its reproduction. This has included the introduction of both oil and tourism industries. In Shetland this has led to the surplus value generated by the oil industry being exported off the island. Tourism has also been introduced to 'develop' the local economy through an idealised image of the Highlands, commodifying it as a destination. Many participants have claimed this process has not been in the interest of local people. It has created pressures on local communities to change and fit these new identities, forcing some small-scale food producers out of their livelihoods. Here, tourism is changing the way that land (space) is both valued and afforded, commodified for the benefit of tour companies and, in some instances, alienating communities from their own territories.

Additionally, this section has looked at the impact of policies designed to regulate poor practices amongst large-scale farms on small-scale food producers. In some instances, such as policies developed in response to the BSE crisis, these have had an inadvertently detrimental impact on small-scale farms. This is despite the fact that, by the very nature of them being small-scale, they do not operate in the conditions that led to this crisis. It has also happened directly through the subsidies that have been introduced to incentivise scaling-up such as the UK Governments Basic Payment Scheme. It must be noted, though, that there have been several positive policy innovations for small-scale farmers in Scotland, such as crofting legislation and community land buyouts, that have been the result of many decades of land rights struggle.

The second section of this chapter looked at the sustainability of alternative economic practices. Underpinning this has been a series of land rights initiatives that have served, to some extent, to reverse the effects of primitive accumulation. Alongside this there have been shifts in both the way supply chains have worked, and towards more restorative methods of producing food. Both appear to move towards an alternative to capitalist agriculture. These have limited the extraction of surplus value by businesses outside of these communities. What has been interesting to observe is that these practices appear to offer a different relationship to time and space, where rest time becomes a resource that creates space and markets emerge in proximity rather than over long distances. Both of which appear to have positive ethical consequences.

This section looked at how community land trusts, common grazings and crofting legislation have given communities more control over their economy and made them less dependent on external markets. These initiatives have helped small-scale food producers resist the economic pressure to scale up. These gains, along with a tradition of shared ownership and responsibility, have helped maintain collective identities and a level of economic autonomy. The ideas and principles of shared ownership is common in the Highlands and have been reinforced through the establishment of organisations such as the Assynt Crofters' Trust and the North Harris Trust. They have given crofters greater economic control and have, in turn, led to the development of informal welfare systems that support their communities.

The result of this is that social relations here are valued differently to most other areas of the UK. These informal gift economies appear to be a growing phenomenon and resist commodity fetishism in a way that resembles what John Holloway calls anti-fetishism. In these arrangements, trade is not the aim and exchanges are not valued individually. It is experienced through collective identities, as a 'social doing', that is resisting the normalising of fetishization. While it is important to note that people here are still involved in commodified activities, this demonstrates how commoditisation and its resulting extraction of surplus value can be resisted through collective self-provisioning when land is accessed through shared ownership. Here, non-commodified subsistence provision acts as resistance to the social reproduction of capitalism. The question of how effective this is still remains, though. In places such as Assynt, the need to engage in these alternatives has been normalised as they have become integral to both individuals and the wider communities' approach to sustaining themselves. But this is not to say that capitalism does not exist there, it is merely less present.

If we look at these alternatives alongside regenerative farming practices that have been employed in these areas, we can see how land is valued differently and time is a resource that is freely available, rather than a commodity to be afforded, and is used to generate more fertile spaces. If the desired outcome of the transformation we are seeking is the creation of such an alternative, these different relationships to time and space are definitive to understanding what this alternative may be. To achieve this, the strategies employed must be designed to reproduce these relationships. Strategies such as food sovereignty, land sovereignty and political agroecology, offer many benefits individually but are only truly effective in reproducing an alternative when employed collectively (see chapter 8). Finally, as has already been mentioned, in areas such as Assynt, people here are still involved in commodified activities. The question that remains is 'What is the relationship between these two different economic practices found in this context?' and 'Is there a point in which the balance tips from one to the other?'

10. The Transformative Qualities of Small-Scale Farming Communities in Scotland

As we have seen, the transformative qualities of small-scale farming communities in Scotland are the ways in which these communities resist and, at times, reverse the reproduction of capitalism through their demand for autonomy and self-subsistence, particularly at times of crisis. These qualities appear through a range of strategies that must run counter to the historical trajectories of unintended social change that have emerged from the crisis of capitalism since its introduction during the Highland Clearances.

Ultimately, they are moments of withdrawal from, and non-participation in, capitalist social relations that are made possible, in the first instance, by easy access to land. They are not a singular defining characteristic and, as a result, their outcomes and consequences are varied. In their entirety they should be thought of as being transformative towards an alternative rather than as an alternative themselves, but they do offer a glimpse of what an alternative might look like.

This thesis has looked at these transformative qualities through a framework developed from Erik Olin Wright's four theories of social transformation (Wright 2010). It has analysed the relationship of small-scale food producers to social and economic crises to gain a better understanding of the context within which they have appeared. It explored the trajectory of change in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland caused by capitalism, and examined the extent to which obstacles and opportunities for alternative economic practices have developed over time in light of its crises, and what this has meant for small-scale food producers. The thesis has engaged in discussions about the legacy of the Highland Clearances and examined changes that have appeared during the recent crises caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and Brexit. It has also looked at strategies that have been employed by small-scale food producers as they aim to develop alternative economic practices. Finally, it considered the sustainability of these practices in the face of capital's ability to reproduce itself.

In doing this, the research has aimed to answer the following four research questions:

1. What are the trajectories of unintended social change that have emerged from the crisis of capitalism in the context of small-scale farming communities in Scotland?
2. How have the recent crises of capitalism affected small-scale farming communities in Scotland, and what gaps and contradictions have they revealed?
3. What are the transformative strategies being employed by small-scale farming communities in Scotland?
4. How is capitalism being reproduced in small-scale farming communities in Scotland, and are the transformative strategies employed there reproducing alternative economic practices?

The following is a summary of the findings of this research in response to each of these questions.

10.1 The Trajectories of Unintended Social Change

It is clear that there is a contrast between the development trajectories of the east and west coasts of the Highlands of Scotland. Initially this was through the emergence of fishing merchants on the east coast. More recently it has been as a result of the rise of the oil industries there in the 1970s. This, notably, was enabled by the existing infrastructure that had been introduced to aid the fishing merchants. On the west coast, resistance to these developments has been more effective. There have been several significant victories, such as the introduction of crofting tenancies and community land trusts. These have had a significant impact on the sustainability of this alternative way of life. There has been a shift towards these alternatives on the east coast more recently as a result of recent crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic and Brexit. This has happened through an increase in direct sales, short food supply chains and subsistence farming.

Though this contrast between the east and west coasts is clear, this does not mean that crofting communities on the west coast have not been subjected to any pressure to develop

their economies along similar lines to those on the east coast. There have been numerous attempts to introduce and develop industries, such as tourism, that have caused high levels of inflation to assets such as land and housing. This has led to concern amongst these communities for the sustainability of the crofting system. Idealised images of the Highlands being used to promote the area as a tourist destination are not seen as being representative of their communities. The perception is, rather than serve the interests of local people they are there to serve large landowners who have monopolised the land despite not even living in the Highlands.

One of the impacts of the unequal distribution of land ownership in Scotland is that vast areas of land are not properly managed and bring little benefit to the wider population. This overaccumulation is leading to a land crisis where under used lands are becoming less productive and inaccessible. This is creating opportunities for small-scale food producers such as crofters to be able to gain access to land through various initiatives such as community land buyouts and mob grazing.

What we have seen is that the unintended trajectory of change since the introduction of capitalism has led to an increase in mobilities through new infrastructure. These have initially been developed to give food producers access to new markets, but they have also aided the introduction and development of new industries. This, though, has created vulnerabilities in the system which in turn opens up opportunities for alternative practices to appear/reappear. Their appearance does not mean that the capitalist mode of production stops, more that its processes are less present.

Access to land (or sea) and the dependency on infrastructure for both consumers and producers are the key issues to understand *the trajectories of unintended social change that have emerged from the crisis of capitalism in the context of small-scale farming communities in Scotland*. The understanding of this dependency on infrastructure is somewhat counter intuitive. Rather than being seen as offering greater opportunities, it creates dependencies that tie small-scale food producers to mechanisms that forces them to increase production and speed up distribution to meet the demands of a free market. Equally, it is access to land that can unhook this dependency. This is a significant point to take away when trying to understand social transformation in this context.

10.2 The Recent Crises of Capitalism and the Gaps and Contradictions they have Revealed

Recent crises such as Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic have not only revealed some of the contradictions of capitalism but have also led to structural changes that, to some extent, run counter to the logic of capitalism. Building from the response to the previous question, what has been notable during these crises is that the proximity to infrastructure has affected the impact of these crises. Communities that are closer to infrastructure are more dependent upon them and so more likely to feel the impact of the crisis. Equally, as we have seen with the pandemic, the closer people are to urban centres, the more likely they were to return to industrialised methods of subsistence once the crisis subsided.

The COVID-19 pandemic and Brexit both revealed gaps in supply chains that led to an increase in demand for locally sourced produce. Creel fishers experienced this more acutely than crofters due to their dependency on distant markets for income. Supply chains became more localised during both crises as capitalism's ability to compress time and space was compromised. This should be expected, but the surprise is the degree to which this has been a benefit to crofters with its resulting increase in direct sales.

What we are seeing here is the contradiction between capitalism reproducing able consumers and extracting value from compliant workers (Marx 1990). It is its failure to hold them in equilibrium that results in these crises. Capital attempts to extract value through low wages, debt and an increasing demand for cheap food. This, in turn, has led to a demand for financial autonomy from small-scale food producers. Extracting value from commodified labour in this way leads to these crises but, at the same time, this has also led to an increased demand for autonomy amongst rural communities. This contradiction is leading to the emergence and strengthening of alternative economic practices.

During the COVID-19 pandemic and Brexit crises, economic effects spiralled out of control across the globe. The effects of this during the pandemic led to a shortening and diversification of supply chains, disruption to production chains, increased unemployment, furloughing of workers, remote working and a subsequent diminishing of demand (Harvey 2020). Industries that are dependent on infrastructure suffered the most and resulted in

people looking for alternatives such as short chain supplies and direct sales. In Scotland, when supermarket shelves failed to be replenished as a result of these supply chain shocks, small-scale farms saw dramatic increases in direct sales.

As John Holloway explains, crisis is the collapse of capitalist social relations (Holloway 2002). The demand that we have seen for direct sales during these crises were a product of these crises. Significantly, this outcome is also an essential component of food sovereignty, which aims to peel back market forces and create a more equitable food system. Here, as Holloway demands, struggle is through a strategy that both intensifies the crisis of capitalism and fights against its restructuring.

10.3 The Transformative Strategies Being Employed by Small-scale Farming Communities

The transformative strategies being employed by small-scale farming communities in Scotland that have been explored during this thesis have been broadly defined as: political agroecology, food sovereignty and land sovereignty. These have been understood through a wide range of actions that connect individuals with their lands such as; local knowledges to revitalise remote and inhospitable lands, horizontal localised education networks, regenerative agriculture, community land ownership, short food supply chains and land rights campaigns. Each action has its own merits but it is the relationships between them that have been key to realising their transformative potential.

Participants have spoken about their reasons for entering crofting. For some it was a result of the financial crisis in 2008, for others it was something they were born into. There were those who did so because of its ethical and environmental benefits, and others who entered it as they saw it as an alternative to capitalism. In peripheral areas, when markets have failed to meet people's subsistence needs, these alternatives appeared. In these contexts, communities have developed strategies to reclaim lands that can provide them with the sustenance they need for their own survival. These peripheral areas tend to have poor quality land, which is partly the reason why they are still underdeveloped. This land demands more restorative (rather than extractive) agricultural practices for them to be

productive and as a result the practices being employed there are ultimately more sustainable.

We have seen how these agroecological practices use time restoratively to create more fertile spaces. This is a reversal of capitalism's tendency for the annihilation of space through time. Using time in this way means they are not so reliant on external inputs and are subsequently more sustainable. Extractive practices are more about resource utilisation that degenerates soils and causes the depletion of nutrients, while restorative practices use time as a resource to regenerate lands meaning that land is no longer seen as a finite resource. These agroecological practices have enabled communities to become more sustainable through the use of these locally sensitive and, at times, traditional agricultural knowledges.

One of the main benefits of food sovereignty for small-scale food producers is that it has helped them develop stronger relationships with consumers. This strategy involves a variety of activities such as; direct on the farm sales, open days and workshops, that all reduce the distance between consumer and producer. This, in turn, increases their sense of responsibility to their food. Long food supply chains cover great distances that, in turn, curbs this sense of responsibility. But, as has been mentioned, in the more peripheral locations on the west coast of Scotland there is a sense of markets having retreated which has caused an increase in these activities.

In these areas, informal gift economies appear where goods and services are offered with no demand of exchange. Participants from Assynt spoke about this being 'embedded in the nature of the community' where, at times, recipients will not know who the 'gift' is even from! This is the antithesis of capitalist social relations where the separation of subject and object produces commodities explicitly for transaction so that surplus value can be appropriated. When food sovereignty leads to practices such as gift economies what we are seeing is people standing against their own alienation through a strategy that both resists this separation and creates identities that are rooted in a place. This refusal to participate reverses, to some extent, the process that would lead to their alienation.

The key to enabling these practices to emerge is land sovereignty. Communities have gained more control over their lives through Initiatives such as community land trusts, crofts, sheep stock clubs and common grazings/townships. These models of collective ownership are run democratically and build strong bonds within their communities. Here, people support one another through a sense of need and any income they generate is redistributed to alleviate poverty and enable their sustainability. This has included building housing stock for social rent and supporting individuals with bursaries for training.

The strategies that have enabled small-scale farming communities to reappropriate land are a starting point for reversing this process and enabling their communities to be more self-sustaining. It is significant to note, though, that it is when all three strategies are employed that these practices are most successful. For instance, the successes in Assynt and North Harris were not replicated to the same degree in Fernaig where the land has not been utilised to the same purpose. Where this reversal has led to alternative economic practices emerging, each strategy has not only been employed but has proven to be at odds with how capitalism produces value, with a greater emphasis placed on its social value rather than its financial value.

10.4 The Reproduction of Capitalism and an Alternative

During this thesis we have seen how *capitalism is being reproduced in small-scale farming communities in Scotland and how the transformative strategies employed there are reproducing alternative economic practices*. The introduction of transport infrastructure to expand markets has created dependencies on these markets for many of its residents. Creel fishers have felt this most keenly during the crisis caused by Brexit where the collapse of supply chains has decimated their income. The cost of access to much of the infrastructure that has been established for agricultural industries, such as transport links and abattoirs, has pressured many small-scale farmers to scale-up their production. Alongside this, the regulations that have been enforced to mitigate against the harms of these industrial practices have also brought with them cost implications that somewhat paradoxically encourage small-scale farmers to adopt these larger, more industrial scale, practices that cause these animal and environments harms in the first place.

Transport infrastructure has created opportunities for new industries to emerge with the aim of creating a more 'resilient economy'. This aim is perhaps a bit misleading as it actually works to create resilience for the capitalist economy by creating new needs and new use values that aid its reproduction. This does not necessarily make for a more resilient local economy; there is ample evidence to suggest it is more vulnerable as a result. But not only has it become more vulnerable to crises; it has also led to much of the surplus value that these industries have created being exported. This has particularly been the case with aspects of the oil and tourism industries.

On top of this, tourism has also been introduced to 'develop' the local economy through an idealised image of the Highlands that is used to market it as a destination and is not seen as being in the interest of local people. On the back of this, the recent rapid increase in tourism has created pressures on local communities to change to meet the expectations of these new identities, forcing some small-scale food producers out of their livelihoods. This is changing the way that land is both valued and afforded. Land is commodified for the benefit of tour companies which, in certain circumstance, has alienated some communities from their own territories.

This thesis has also looked at the potential for alternative economic practices to reproduce themselves. As has already been mentioned, the key to this seems to be some of the land rights initiatives that have served, to some extent, to reverse the effects of primitive accumulation. There have also been the localising of supply chains and the more restorative methods of producing food that, to some degree, offer an alternative to capitalist agriculture. This has included limiting the extraction of surplus value by external businesses as markets have emerged in proximity rather than over long distances.

Some of the more restorative farming practices that have been employed in these areas value land differently and see time as a resource. Rather than time being a commodity to be afforded, it is freely available to generate more fertile spaces. These different relationships to time and space are definitive to understanding the nature of this alternative. To achieve this, strategies, such as food sovereignty, land sovereignty and political agroecology have been designed to produce these relationships but are only truly effective in reproducing an alternative when they are employed collectively.

Initiatives such as community land trusts, common grazings and legislation for crofting tenancies have given communities more control over their economy, made them less dependent on external markets, and helped them resist the economic pressure to scale up. They have helped maintain collective identities and a level of economic autonomy through the principles of shared ownership which is common in the Highlands. This has also led to the appearance of the informal welfare systems that have given support to members of these communities.

Here, social relations are valued differently to other areas of the UK. These informal gift economies resist commodity fetishism in a way that resembles what John Holloway calls *anti-fetishism* (Holloway 2010). Trade is not the aim in this instance, and exchanges are not valued individually but through collective identities, as a *social doing*, that resist the normalising of fetishization. This does not mean that people are no longer involved in commodified activities. It does, though, demonstrate how commoditisation and the extraction of surplus value can be resisted through collective self-provisioning when land is accessed through shared ownership. This non-commodified subsistence provision not only resists the social reproduction of capitalism but reproduces an alternative. As we have seen, in places such as Assynt, the need to engage in these alternative practices have been normalised. The problem of how sustainable this is still remains as capitalism continues to be present in these areas and continues to pressure communities to adopt its methods. In this context the key question is: 'at what point does this balance tip from one to the other?' An answer to this could lead to "a politics dense with the dream of creating a world of mutual respect and dignity" (Holloway 2002:154).

10.5 The Transformative Qualities of Small-scale Farming Communities in Scotland

There are two strands to the central question of what are the transformative qualities of small-scale farming communities in Scotland. The first is what might a transformation away from the capitalist mode of production look like, and the second is how this relates to Scottish small-scale farming communities. We have seen trajectories away from the capitalist mode of production appear during the recent crises of capitalism that have given

some clues as to what this transformation would look like. Movements towards the shortening of food supply chains may not be an alternative but they are heading in an alternative direction to that which is desired by a capitalist food system. Understanding this as a movement away from the conditions that create so much inequality is crucial to understanding its transformative qualities. This movement away from these conditions is a struggle against the alienation of social relations and against the conditions that constitute a working class.

With this understanding we can see that a perspective on what an alternative might be does not need to exclude things that are not an alternative, providing they offer a tangible movement towards it. After all, transformation is a process not a destination. We have been able to see these connections through the broad scope of this thesis. The varying nature of the practices that have been examined have allowed for this wider perspective. Having said this, a closer examination of the communities where alternative economic practices appear would be a sensible future development for this research.

Through this thesis we have examined transformation in this context utilising Erik Olin Wright's four theories of transformation; a theory of the trajectories of unintended social change, a theory of the gaps and contradictions of reproduction, a theory of transformative strategies, and a theory of social reproduction. What we have seen is not only the significance of each, but also the significance of the link between them all. Unintended social change follows the trajectory of the conditions created by the introduction of capitalism. During the Highland Clearances subsistence agriculture was replaced by industrial scale sheep farming to provide cotton for the mills in northern England. Infrastructure was developed to aid this industry that created conditions for new industries to emerge, such as the fishing merchants on the east coast. In this process there is a shift from formal subsumption to real subsumption and a normalising of the dependencies upon this infrastructure for subsistence.

Crisis happens when these conditions fail to sustain communities due to the structural gaps and contradictions of capitalism. During the COVID-19 pandemic this happened with the collapse of long food supply chains. People looked for alternative means of sustaining themselves and employed various strategies to do so. This, then, led to a massive increase in

direct sales from small-scale farms. Whilst this alternative has tended to still be capitalistic, there is a shift in direction towards something smaller in scale and hints at a move away from that mode of production. There, small farms are selling directly to consumers, cutting out the suppliers and keeping more of the pound from each sale. In this instance subject is still turned in to object so that it can be sold as a commodity, but the value that this creates is retained rather than extracted further down the chain.

An extending of this movement can be found in areas such as Assynt and North Harris where gift economies are found. These exchanges are not valued individually but through collective identities, as a 'social doing' (Holloway 2010). The key to transformative change in this sense is that transformative strategies must be designed to also move in this same direction. When utilising food sovereignty, the movement is through shorter supply chains that: reduces the extraction of surplus value by external actors, gives greater control over food systems to local communities, and increases the responsibility of consumers by placing them in proximity to food production. With political agroecology, the movement is through fewer external inputs that: reduces dependencies on external actors who profit from this, creates greater levels of economic and social autonomy for communities, and increases their environmental sustainability. Finally, land sovereignty is a movement through greater access to commonly owned lands that: reduces dependencies on land owners, gives greater control over how the lands that they use are managed, increases the economic viability of small-scale farming, and leads to shared responsibility for natural resources. While each strategy has clear benefits, what we have seen is that in areas where all three are present something truly alternative exists. That is not to say that in these areas capitalist social relations disappear. But the combination of all three strategies clearly has created a space where these alternative practices can survive.

It is in this context that an understanding of social reproduction is so important. What we can see in places like Assynt is a fault line across which the capitalist economy and practices such as gift economies exist. We have seen clear tensions across this fault line which pulls from both directions, and access to community owned land is essential for an alternative to survive. Further understanding of the conditions that have enabled this will help us better understand what is needed for any alternative to succeed. Being in a peripheral area is

significant for this, as the lack of infrastructure causes conditions that creates demand for an alternative in the first place. The contradictory role of the state in allowing them to emerge is also significant. As we have seen, the state is complicit in maintaining capitalism whilst being subversive of it. Since the Highland Clearances, crofting communities have fought for policy reforms such as community land buyouts and crofting tenancies. These successes go beyond redistributive land reform as they have created territories where alternative economic practices emerge through an interaction with food sovereignty and political agroecology. This only happens, though, once access to land and the means of producing their own subsistence is easily available, the significance of which cannot be understated.

The demand for this alternative is both ethical and political. The alternative relationships to time and space that we have seen are, ultimately, about increased responsibilities or response-abilities. It is only through proximity with their production that we can gain a sense of responsibility for the social and environmental impact of our produce. Without this proximity we only experience our produce at its point of arrival, alienated from its environment, where any understanding of it outside of this moment is mediated, controlled, and often manipulated. It is only through this proximity that we can reconnect with things, people, and territories, through a sense-able life experienced in and through time and space rather than through mediation. Here, territories or dwellings are constructed through place experiences and being in the world. Whilst this may seem like a simple act of non-participation with the processes that cause our own alienation, dependencies have made this impossible for many. Indeed, we can see how these unfulfilled dependencies, where there is no chance of escape, might constitute a working class. It is for this reason that strategies that break these dependencies are so crucial.

Breaking this dependency is the site of class struggle. A struggle against, in a movement away from, the conditions that constitute a working class. Against the vulnerability created by the commodification of our labour and away from the dependencies that these conditions both create and consistently fail to fulfil. In these small-scale farming communities this has been attempted with a reversal of the effects of primitive accumulation through legislative gains such as crofting tenancies and community land

ownership. This is what transformation must look like, a space where our labour can be employed to enrich ourselves rather than those who command and control our dependencies.

Capital builds infrastructure which in turn creates these dependencies. What we have seen is that during crises access to this infrastructure is restricted. This, in turn, creates a crisis in the reproduction of capitalism. In these moments gaps or openings have appeared, where an alternative to capitalism has become more visible, and towards which many have been drawn. These gaps have not revealed an absence of anything, they reveal an alternative. Rather than simply a gap, this should be understood as a withdrawal of capitalism that opens the opportunity to move towards an alternative that appears out of a community's need for subsistence. The strategies that have been employed to move in this direction have included land sovereignty, food sovereignty and political agroecology, the effectiveness of which can be understood through their relationship to crises and their ability to reproduce and maintain the alternative and resist the power of capitalism to reproduce itself.

In this moment, in places such as Assynt, there appears to be signs of a divergence in the form of gift economies and informal welfare systems. When people offer service or goods without expectation of exchange or transaction it is because they can do so in the knowledge that their subsistence can be met without it. But it is also because shared ownership is already common, and the act of sharing has been normalised. Instead of individuals taking things as their own, even when they source them alone, they are experienced as being shared. How, and if, this is sustainable, though, can only be answered through further study. It is hard to say quite how common this is from the research that has been conducted, but the opportunity to conduct more participatory research in these areas would certainly help to understand it in greater depth. With this in mind the next stage for this research should be an ethnographic study of these ways of being.

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12. Appendix

12.1 Appendix 1 - Questions for Participants

Research Question	1	2	3	4
Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What were you doing before you started crofting/small-scale farming? - What circumstances led to you entering crofting? - What did you do for income before you started crofting? - What encouraged you to enter crofting? - Before you started crofting where did you get your food provisions from? - Historically, what have been the issues that have affected the sustainability of your croft/small-scale farm? - Do you feel there is a demand for you to scale up the production on your croft/small-scale farm? - Do you feel there is a demand to diversify your income and why? - What other economic activities do you engage in? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How have you been affected by some of the recent crises that have happened? - How have these crises affected production? - How have these crises affected consumption? - Why do you think these crises have affected production and consumption in these ways? - Do you feel that your farming practices have protected you/made you more vulnerable from these crises in any way? - How have these crises affected the wider community and what has been your experience of this? - In what ways have access to infrastructure affected your experience of these crises? - Have there been any positive outcomes from these crises? - What has been the most significant impact of these crises? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How does agroecology relate to your daily farming practices? - Where are your customers from and do individuals get their produce from you directly? - How do you feel your approach to sales relates to food sovereignty. - How do you get access to land and what are the issues/benefits of this? - In what ways are you responsible for land management? - Do you have shared needs and demands with your community/township? - To what extent do you participate in SCF or LA training events? - What sort of campaigning and broader political engagement have you engaged with? - In what ways has the biodiversity of your croft increased and what has caused it? - Is there a sense of collective responsibilities within your community/crofting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What economic pressures do you have? - Where does this come from? - What do you see as being the means for you to relieve yourself of these pressures? - Do you feel any social and cultural pressures from outside of your community? - What impact do regulations have on the ecological and economic resilience of your croft/small-scale farm? - Do the regulations on farming and crofting put you under pressure to engage with national and international markets? - What sort of resistance have you seen or been engaged with that relates to this? - Are you part of a township/common grazing? - What are your townships cultural relationships with the wider community? - How socially/ culturally/ economically sustainable is your