IT IS ABOUT POWER!

Unveiling power and empowerment in grassroots agri-food initiatives

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Het is een kwestie van macht!
Onthulling van macht en empowerment in agrifoodinitiatieven
(met een samenvatting in het Nederlands)

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Abbreviations

CSA   Community-supported agriculture
CSAs   Community-supported agriculture initiatives

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

This PhD thesis aims to elucidate the role of power and empowerment in the sustainability transformation of agri-food systems. I focus on agri-food transformation within grassroots agri-food initiatives, which serve as spaces for realising sustainable alternatives in agri-food systems. The primary contribution of this research lies in expanding the concepts of power and empowerment to capture how they emerge from micro-politics and collective identity formation and shape prefiguration within grassroots initiatives. For this purpose, I integrate different conceptualisations of power and empowerment with theories of sustainability transformation in novel ways and empirically investigate how power and empowerment shape the structuring of work relations, the inclusion of queer people, and the creation of leadership roles for women farmers in a specific type of grassroots agri-food initiative, namely community-supported agriculture (CSA), in Italy and Portugal.

1.1. Problem statement

1.1.1. Power in capitalist agri-food systems

Agri-food systems are a set of food provisioning activities that span from production to disposal, orchestrated by a network of actors whose interests and relationships influence the outputs of agri-food activities, including socioeconomic and environmental outcomes (IPES-Food, 2015, p.3). There is a growing realisation that industrial agri-food systems are no longer fit for purpose (Maye & Duncan, 2017). Ample evidence demonstrates the linkages between industrial agri-food systems and environmental degradation, biodiversity loss, soil degradation, and substantial greenhouse gas emissions (Ripple et al., 2014; Tilman et al., 2011; Tittonell et al., 2016), as well as increasing social inequalities, restricted access to food, peasant communities' socioeconomic marginalisation, and power consolidation among large agribusiness firms (De Schutter, 2017; FAO, 2021, 2022; IPES-Food, 2023a; Marsden, 2012).

Political economy scholars have examined agri-food systems' problematic ecological and social outcomes and related power imbalances, making use of the notion of a 'food regime'. They have developed historical accounts of the changing dynamics within global capital and agricultural property arrangements shaped by the ongoing and unequal negotiations among actors with different power positions, such as the state, capitalist corporations, and social movements (Bernstein, 2016; Friedmann, 2016; McMichael, 2016). The dominance of industrial agri-food systems reflects and reproduces the capitalist logics of accumulation and growth, and these systems are fully embedded in the contemporary circuits of capital (Bernstein, 2016). Notably, McMichael (2006) referred to these capitalist agri-food systems as the 'corporate food regime'. Capitalist corporations, driven by the pursuit of profit

expansion and diversification through food and farming, have gained increasing dominance within the political architecture of agri-food systems.

The expansion of capitalist agri-food systems is driven by 'accumulation by dispossession', which relies on the appropriation of labour, land, and resources from, for example, small-scale producers, peasant communities, and subsistence farmers to foster capital accumulation and deepen commodified relations (McMichael, 2006, p.270). As such, the increasingly powerful position of agri-food corporations is deeply relational: their dominance is contingent on the undervaluation, invisibilisation, and marginalisation of agri-food identities, operations, and relations that deviate from the logics of appropriation, capital accumulation, and economic growth. These power imbalances have spurred contestation by various scholars, activists, and practitioners who, in turn, have called for a sustainability transformation of agri-food systems (El Bilali, 2019; IPES-Food, 2023b; Thompson et al., 2007).

1.1.2. Sustainability transformation of agri-food systems

The notion of sustainability transformation[1] has informed proposals for 'major, fundamental change, as opposed to minor, marginal, or incremental change' (Feola, 2015, p.377). Notably, it envisions pathways to social and ecologically sustainable societies, which imply 'dismissing obsolete knowledge and ceasing obsolete action while developing new paradigms, assumptions, models, methods and practices' (Duncan et al., 2022, p.183).

Within the context of agri-food systems, proposals for sustainability transformation often address the unsustainable dimensions of food provisioning and their inherited problematic power relations while envisioning possible alternatives based on experiences on the ground. Examples can be found in studies at the intersection of agri-food systems and degrowth (Gerber, 2020; Guerrero Lara et al., 2023; Nelson & Edwards, 2020) and diverse/ community economies (Moragues-Faus et al., 2020; Morrow & Dombroski, 2015; Vincent & Feola, 2020). As one delves deeper into the dynamics of sustainability transformation in agri-food systems (hereinafter 'agri-food transformation'), it becomes increasingly clear that transformation is intrinsically tied to the abovementioned power imbalances accentuated by the capitalist agri-food system. To counter growing corporate influence, it is crucial to create autonomous spaces for empowering affected communities to voice their demands (IPES-Food, 2023b), explore local democratic agri-food governance spaces

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1   I use the terms 'sustainability transformation' and 'sustainability transitions' interchangeably in various chapters of the thesis. The choice of the term in each chapter aligns with the targeted scientific community.

and how they take form through interactions with dominant agri-food systems (Rossi et al., 2019), and acknowledge the complexities of alternative agri-food approaches, reflecting on their implications for transformation goals (El Bilali, 2019).

To gain deeper insights into the power dynamics that shape agri-food transformation, researchers have turned to collectives that advocate for greater visibility and value towards the marginalised corners of capitalist agri-food systems. These collectives are perceived as key endeavours for autonomous and democratic agri-food governance, as they facilitate various experiments with alternative agri-food approaches. Examples include food sovereignty movements (McMichael, 2006), environmental justice groups (Friedmann, 2006), alternative food networks (Goodman et al., 2012), and grassroots agri-food initiatives (De Schutter, 2017). For instance, these collectives often engage with small-scale producers who play a crucial role in providing food crops 'to feed local communities and to serve local markets' (De Schutter, 2017, p.10) and 'in many contexts engage in food production that contributes less but is also more resilient to global climate and environmental change' (FAO, 2022, p. vi). This PhD thesis focuses on the case of grassroots agri-food initiatives that hold the potential to create autonomous food spaces (Wilson, 2013). It experiments with alternative and non-capitalist approaches to agri-food practices, relations, and identities while operating within the complex web of power dynamics prescribed by capitalist agri-food systems – a theme I explore in the next section.

1.1.3. Power in grassroots agri-food initiatives

Grassroots initiatives, also called grassroots movements, grassroots innovations, and grassroots organisations across the social and social sustainability sciences, create solutions for sustainability that prioritise the values and beliefs of local communities involved over profit—a core element of conventional innovation models (Seyfang & Smith, 2007). They also 'challenge inherited modes of organising, planning, consuming and living' (Håkansson, 2018, p.34). In particular, grassroots initiatives 'arise in reaction to perceived social injustices and environmental problems' (Smith et al., 2014, p.115). These community-based solutions aim to address local needs while potentially influencing broader societal change from the bottom up (Leach et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2014).

Ample evidence showcases the impact of grassroots initiatives on agri-food transformation. Well-known examples of grassroots agri-food initiatives are community-supported agriculture (CSA; Galt et al., 2019; Pole & Gray, 2013), community gardens (Celata & Coletti, 2018; Souza et al., 2020), farmers' markets (Hoey & Sponseller, 2018; Laforge et al., 2017), and permaculture (Ferguson & Lovell, 2015; Ulbrich & Pahl-Wost, 2019). These initiatives develop sustainable food production and consumption practices, provide support for

disadvantaged actors to articulate their needs and expand their skills, negotiate the impact of policies and regulations on agri-food sustainability in practice, and create coalitions to advance political support for agri-food transformation (e.g., Anderson et al., 2019; Celata & Coletti, 2018; Ely et al., 2013; Hermans et al., 2016; Laforge et al., 2017; Michel-Villarreal et al., 2019; Rossi et al., 2019).

Nevertheless, understanding how power dynamics enable or constrain the contribution of grassroots initiatives to agri-food transformation and, in turn, whether grassroots-led transformation reconfigures power imbalances remains uncertain, leading to an evolving area of study. This PhD thesis addresses the following two critical gaps in existing research on power and empowerment within grassroots initiatives: (1) while grassroots initiatives contribute to agri-food transformation by prefiguring sustainable agri-food systems, the role of power shaping prefiguration remains unclear; and (2) studies have predominantly investigated power and empowerment as overt, instrumental, and strategic exercises, thus failing to capture their diverse manifestations within grassroots initiatives.

Research gap 1: One crucial contribution of grassroots initiatives to the sustainability transformation of agri-food systems is their prefigurative capacity. The concept of prefiguration draws attention to grassroots attempts to disengage from the state and its institutions and to create autonomous spaces (Avelino et al., 2019; de Geus et al., 2023). Within these spaces, they embody a 'vision of a future society through their ongoing social practices, social relations, decision-making philosophy and culture' (Monticelli 2018, 509). Regarding agri-food systems, prefiguration entails performing an approach to food production and consumption in the present that is envisioned for the future (Hoey & Sponseller, 2018). Examples include the experimentation with non-alienated work relations and alternatives to the capitalist market economy (Galt, 2013; Watson, 2020), the creation of a community economy that shields small-scale producers from market competition (Flora et al., 2012; Fremstad & Paul, 2020), and engagement with care approaches to agriculture in opposition to productivist and commodity-driven techniques (Pungas, 2020).

Prefiguration within grassroots initiatives involves partial, tentative, precarious, and conflicting transformation processes, primarily because these initiatives exist in, against, and beyond hegemonic capitalism (Chatterton & Pusey, 2020; Feola, 2019; Smessaert & Feola, 2023; Temper et al., 2018). Grassroots-led prefiguration unfolds within capitalism (i.e., these initiatives operate within its rules and configuration) while simultaneously struggling against it (i.e., they create strategies to resist and reconfigure its configurations); furthermore, it proposes alternative configurations that go beyond capitalism (i.e., these initiatives experiment with postcapitalist operations and relations). Accordingly, agri-food transformation as prefiguration is an always ongoing process that generates ambivalent

effects; in turn, these effects also reflect contrasting power dynamics within grassroots initiatives. For instance, prefiguration may deliberately aim at decentralising power by removing hierarchies and fostering diversity and participation; however, covert hierarchies and similar power imbalances inherited from capitalist systems may persist (e.g., gender-based or socioeconomic discrimination; de Geus et al., 2023; Maeckelbergh, 2011; Pickerill & Chatterton, 2006). Despite the growing attention to prefiguration, the ways in which power dynamics influence this specific agri-food transformation within grassroots agri-food initiatives require further exploration. Understanding these power dynamics could shed light on how injustices and inequalities stemming from capitalist structures can be challenged within these spaces and which alternatives ensue (Gabriel & Sarmiento, 2020). Such an exploration could also provide novel perspectives on the ways in which grassroots initiatives counter the dominance of capitalist agri-food systems (Morrow & Davies, 2022; Turker & Murphy, 2021).

Research gap 2: Research on grassroots initiatives has primarily explored power and empowerment as overt, instrumental, and strategic exercises, which mean purposeful action to mobilise resources in a competitive environment (Lai, 2023; Schmid & Smith, 2020; Welch & Yates, 2018). This approach views grassroots initiatives as actors who exercise power strategically to access key resources, seize opportunities to achieve their goals, and interact with other influential actors involved in transformations (Gregg et al., 2020; Hess, 2013; Smith & Ely, 2015). Arguably, this emphasis is consistent with the growing debate on the politics of sustainability transformation more broadly, which is usually centred on the questions of who steers these processes and in what ways, and also who the winners and losers of the achieved outcomes are (Köhler et al., 2019).

While the focus on strategic power is essential for understanding the impact of grassroots initiatives on agri-food transformation, the sole emphasis on this conceptualisation presents the following limitations: (i) it fails to stimulate the conceptual development of the full range of forms of power and empowerment, and (ii) it overshadows alternative manifestations of power and empowerment that diverge from this dominant conceptualisation, yet which are potentially crucial for understanding how agri-food transformation unfolds within these initiatives. Therefore, further explorations of power and empowerment beyond strategic exercises can enrich the understanding of these phenomena in their full diversity, shaping the prefiguration of sustainable agri-food systems within grassroots initiatives.

In sum, this PhD thesis delves into the role of power and empowerment in shaping prefiguration within grassroots agri-food initiatives (**research gap 1**), engaging specifically with the issues of micro-politics and identity formation; thus, it contributes to the literature on the sustainability transformation of agri-food systems. To do so, it

elucidates manifestations of power and empowerment beyond strategic exercises, thus also broadening the conceptualisations of power and empowerment beyond strategic exercises (**research gap 2**) and in ways that are important for understanding the unfolding of agri-food transformation within these initiatives.

1.2. Aim and research question

This PhD thesis aims to elucidate the role of power and empowerment in the sustainability transformation of agri-food systems, focusing on grassroots agri-food initiatives. It examines how power and empowerment shape prefiguration within these initiatives.

This research focuses on grassroots agri-food initiatives as spaces for prefiguring sustainable agri-food systems. Drawing from previous studies on transformative (Schmid & Smith, 2020) and autonomous (Pickerill & Chatterton, 2006) geographies, grassroots initiatives are understood as spaces for transformation 'where there is a questioning of the laws and social norms of society and a creative desire to constitute non-capitalist, collective forms of politics, identity, and citizenship' (Chatterton & Pickerill, 2010, p. 476). Approaching grassroots agri-food initiatives as transformative spaces rather than actors who steer transformation reveals an unexplored terrain in terms of power and empowerment. This perspective sheds light on how injustices and inequalities that stem from capitalist structures can be challenged within these spaces as well as what alternatives ensue; thus, it offers novel insights into how these initiatives create political spaces for countering the dominance of capitalist agri-food systems

By zooming in on these transformative spaces' micro-politics, through which their strategic power is constituted in the first place, it is possible to analyse how the abilities that emerge from them are negotiated and conceived as well as how they become constituted through interactions between members and, among them, their natural and material surroundings and social context (Allen, 2021). Finally, drawing from Cohen (1985), doing so allows the examination of processes of collective identity formation within grassroots spaces when other forms of power become apparent. These include reflexive, contesting, and discursive aspects of power and empowerment that shape grassroots' capacities to perceive, signify, and articulate the social practices, hierarchies, and structures that influence their collective identity and actions. This research explores these aspects of power and empowerment, seeking new insights that may contrast their prevailing overt, instrumental, and strategic conceptualisations. Engaging with issues of everyday relationships and identity opens up new possibilities to investigate the power and empowerment that emerge from micro-politics and collective identity formation and shape prefiguration within grassroots agri-food initiatives.

The following research question guides this PhD thesis:

How do power and empowerment shape prefiguration within grassroots agri-food initiatives?

To navigate the dynamics and nuances of power and empowerment that influence prefiguration as well as to structure the theoretical and empirical components of this inquiry, the research question is broken down into the following two sub-questions:

Sub-question 1: How can power and empowerment be conceptualised to move analyses of power and empowerment beyond strategic exercises?

Sub-question 2: How do power and empowerment shape prefiguration in grassroots agri-food initiatives in regard to

a. the development of postcapitalist work relations?
b. the inclusion of queer people?
c. the creation of leadership roles for women farmers?

Each sub-question is further explored in the different chapters of this thesis:

- **Chapter 2** Power and empowerment beyond strategic exercises (**sub-question 1**);
- **Chapter 3** Postcapitalist work relations (**sub-questions 1 & 2a**);
- **Chapter 4** Inclusion of queer people (**sub-question 2b**);
- **Chapter 5** Leadership roles for women farmers (**sub-questions 1 & 2c**).

The following sections delve deeper into the conceptual approach to sustainability transformation and power adopted in this PhD thesis (Section 1.3.) and introduce the focus of the empirical investigation, highlighting the three prefigurative areas explored in sub-question 2 (Section 1.4.).

1.3. Conceptual approach

This PhD thesis gives centre stage to the notions of sustainability transformation and power. These notions have been explored across the social and political sciences in various forms; therefore, it is crucial to describe how this research conceptually approaches sustainability transformation and power.

1.3.1. Sustainability transformation

This thesis engages with an understanding of sustainability transformation as a process that includes the destruction of, resistance against, and disengagement from unsustainable capitalist practices and relations, as well as the creation of alternatives compatible with socially just and ecologically sound agri-food systems. These dynamics have been explored, for instance, through the lens of the destabilisation of unsustainable socio-technical regimes (Frank & Schanz, 2022; Turnheim & Geels, 2012; van Oers et al., 2021), and that of the exnovation or phasing-out practices and technologies that are no longer fit for purpose (Davidson, 2019).

This research adopts a specific approach to sustainability transformation, focusing on the unmaking of capitalism. This framework views transformations as the entanglement of unmaking capitalism and the making of postcapitalist alternatives. Feola (2019, p.922) introduced the concept of 'unmaking capitalism' to analyse the 'multilevel (individual, social, socio-ecological) and multidimensional (temporal, spatial, symbolic, and material) range of situated processes that can be used strategically [by grassroots initiatives] to make space for sustainable alternatives'. This conceptual approach adds to the analysis of prefiguration in grassroots initiatives in two complementary ways: First, it shifts attention to collective strategies for deconstructing, resisting, and disengaging from unsustainable capitalist structures entangled in creating alternatives; and second, it enables an exploration of the tensions between 'destruction and construction, resistance and experimentations, refusal and proposition' (Feola, 2019, p. 992). As such, this concept foregrounds sustainability transformation by emphasising that it 'necessarily rests on challenging and transforming capitalist institutions, and their cultural, social and political architecture' (Feola, 2020, p.246).

Feola et al. (2021) introduced an inventory of possible processes of unmaking discussed across the social sciences, including destabilisation, exnovation, unlearning, sacrifice, crack capitalism, everyday resistance, resistance, refusal, delinking, decolonisation of the imaginary, and delegitimisation. This inventory includes unmaking processes that refer to concrete acts (e.g., refusal, sacrifice, and unlearning) and discursive and envisioning practices (e.g., crack capitalism and decolonisation of the imaginary). This thesis focuses on the first batch of unmaking processes as they illuminate real-life and concrete acts that can be more easily traced in light of the methodological approach, as explained in Section 1.5.

1.3.2. Power

Sociology and political science aggregate an extensive and diversified debate on what power is and is not, when and how it manifests, and what the consequences are (Morriss,

2002; Lukes, 2004; Allen, 2021). These disciplines have produced various approaches for conceptually and empirically examining power and empowerment (Allen, 2021). As such, power cannot be understood by means of 'one all-encompassing theory that applies to each context' (Avelino & Rotmans, 2009, p.544); rather, it 'requires different conceptualisations depending on the empirical phenomena and analytical and political interests of the investigator' (Ahlborg, 2017, p.123).

This research employs a relational conceptualisation of power to inquire into the phenomenon of prefiguration within grassroots agri-food initiatives. Debates on the meaning of power across the political sciences tend to conflate it either as forces of domination and oppression or empowerment (Schmid & Smith, 2020). However, researchers working with a relational understanding of power argue that, in effect, domination and empowerment cannot be understood in isolation from one another. Allen (2008, p.165) explains this as follows:

> Given that these different kinds of power relations [empowerment and domination] do not occur in a vacuum, they must be theorised in relation to one another. Thus, for example, the possibilities for individual and collective empowerment in a particular society will be shaped in large part by the specific relations of domination and oppression within which they arise.

Therefore, a relational approach to power views manifestations of empowerment and domination as mutually constitutive. Such a conceptualisation shifts attention to the emerging and productive nature of power relations contingent on the social, cultural, economic, and political context within which they are embedded (Allen, 2008). Once one understands power not as a fixed category or a resource owned by a particular person *independently* from the broader context but rather as mutually constitutive power relations that emerge *contingent on* the specificities of a particular context, then one increasingly observes power as a social phenomenon that produces ambivalent effects within the same actions. This allows for the examination of nuances and contradictions inherent in power relations, enriching our understanding of the diverse ways power operates within sustainability transformation. These different dimensions of power are captured in the definition proposed by Ahlborg and Nightingale (2018, p. 382) as a 'relational, productive force that generates contradictory effects within the same actions', which serves as the central definition of relational power for this PhD thesis.

A significant contribution made by the relational conceptualisation of power to the political sciences is a shift in the analytical focus from *who* exercises power to *the conditions under which what types of power are manifested by whom* (Ahlborg & Nightingale, 2018). This analytical shift enlarges the scope of analysis and deviates power from the human realm.

Accordingly, power relations emerge through human interactions between them and the non-human world. In this sense, one can analyse the constitution of and attribute meaning to power relations (e.g., more closely aligned with dominance or empowerment) within the scope of discourses and the cultural and legal norms within which they arise (Ahlborg, 2017; Ahlborg & Nightingale, 2018).

The relational approach to power has informed some studies of sustainability transformation. These analyses have explored actors' abilities to draw on resources and restructure the energy and agri-food sectors towards sustainability (Hoffman, 2016); examined the interactions among human agents and between them and nonhuman agents who influenced the results of a community-led renewable energy project (Ahlborg, 2017); analysed the everyday interactions between human actors and materials in open workshops and the implications for postcapitalist transformation (Schmid & Smith, 2020); and investigated how power relations within an industry-led electronic waste association variously influenced the type of participation, levels of support, and management solutions (Lawhon, 2012).

Of particular relevance for this PhD thesis is the attention that these studies have given to manifestations of the power to deconstruct and destabilise unsustainable social structures, relationships, and practices within sustainability transformation. This approach aligns with understanding agri-food transformation as the entanglement of the unmaking of capitalism and the making of postcapitalist alternatives. Therefore, this PhD thesis views relational power as a suitable framework for addressing the calls for theorisations of power to destabilise unsustainable social structures within structural change for sustainability (Avelino, 2011; Hoffman, 2013; Hoffman & Loeber, 2015; Ahlborg, 2017). On the one hand, it helps to identify various manifestations of power and empowerment. On the other hand, it enables an examination of how they affect one another, what forms of domination and empowerment emerge, and under which circumstances they stabilise or shift unsustainable structures, relations, and practices.

1.4. Empirical investigation: Community-supported agriculture

To explore the role of power and empowerment in shaping prefiguration in real-life grassroots agri-food initiatives, this PhD thesis turns to the case of CSA. CSA is a well-known example of a grassroots agri-food initiative in the literature on agri-food transformation (Guerrero Lara et al., 2023; Nelson & Edwards, 2020). It is an agri-food provisioning scheme based on a partnership between a farmer and local consumers, where local consumers

pre-finance the costs of a harvest season in exchange for a weekly basket of fresh produce from the farm (Galt et al., 2019). In doing so, these initiatives conceive of an alternative approach to farming, where farmers and consumers share the risks and benefits of small-scale agriculture, as opposed to isolating them and attributing unequal responsibilities and roles as reproduced by the mainstream market economy (Flora et al., 2012). Different CSA arrangements exist, some of which encompass shared accountability for work duties among CSA members next to the financial partnership (Feagan & Henderson, 2009; Pole & Gray, 2013).

The case of CSA is particularly pertinent to this study for several reasons. Its position within the capitalist agri-food system is a subject of debate (Bonfert, 2022; Jarosz, 2011; Spanier-Guerrero Lara & Feola, 2023). While paying for a crop in advance may be viewed as part of conventional capitalist operations, providing direct capital to farmers and operating outside of industrial agriculture illustrate relevant alternatives to capitalism (Jarosz, 2011; Spanier-Guerrero Lara & Feola, 2023). However, a consensus exists regarding the potential of these initiatives to pave the way for postcapitalist alternatives in the agri-food system and the transformative changes required to do so (Bonfert, 2022; Guerrero Lara et al., 2023; Rossi et al., 2023; Smessaert and Feola, 2023b; Watson, 2020).

Some of the core prefigurative examples of CSA found in the literature include the following: reallocating decision-making authority to small-scale farmers and local consumers (De Schutter, 2017; Flora et al., 2012; Paul, 2019); protecting small-scale farming from market pressures and fostering the decommodification of food (Bonfert, 2022; Spanier-Guerrero Lara & Feola, 2023); enabling experimentation with agriculture operations and relations that prioritise care (between humans, and between humans and nature), such as food sovereignty, food as a commons, and agroecology over exploitative approaches to food production (Jarosz, 2011; Wells & Gradwell, 2001); and empowering small-scale women farmers in a male-dominated agri-food system (Delind & Ferguson, 1999; Fremstad & Paul, 2020; Jarosz, 2011).

This PhD thesis delves into the following three areas of prefiguration in CSA and investigates how power and empowerment shape them: (i) the structuring of postcapitalist work relations; (ii) the inclusion of queer people; and (iii) the creation of leadership roles for women farmers. As I discuss later in more detail, the existing literature on CSA and grassroots agri-food initiatives more broadly discusses these themes to different extents (see **Chapters 3, 4, and 5).** Their relevance to the main research question concerning how power and empowerment shape prefiguration within grassroots agri-food initiatives became evident through my empirical observations and personal experiences with small-scale agriculture and CSA initiatives during my exploratory fieldwork. Three particular

observations and experiences stood out as crucial and factored into the choice of these three empirical foci. First, while participating in voluntary work on small-scale organic farms in preparation for my PhD, I became aware of the ambiguous position of volunteers, which represents solidarity with the reality of small-scale organic farmers in the face of an expanding industrial agriculture sector as well as economic precarity, as an appropriate workforce was unaffordable. Second, my first visit to a CSA initiative composed of queer participants had an impact on my own gender and sexuality expressions during the fieldwork and stimulated my interest in investigating the interplay between rural queer empowerment and CSA. Third, an interview with CSA farmers imbued with implicit heterosexist acts and remarks raised questions about gender relations and inequalities in CSA initiatives and how the personal experiences of women farmers in the face of hegemonic masculinity in agriculture influenced the micro-politics of CSA, and vice versa. I explain how these themes emerged during my exploratory fieldwork in more detail in the positionality section (Section 1.7).

1.5. Research approach

1.5.1. Methods

This thesis is based on four articles, which are presented in **Chapters 2–5**. A detailed description of the methodological approach is outlined in the respective chapter. **Chapter 2** employs a systematic approach to review the literature on the power and empowerment of grassroots innovations, as they are commonly called in sustainability transitions research. **Chapters 3–5** are empirical and qualitative studies based on single- and multiple-case studies.

Case studies are the preferred methodological strategies for research that poses questions of 'how' and 'why', research on events that are difficult to control, and research about contemporary social phenomena embedded in real-life contexts (Yin, 2014). Case studies are therefore an appropriate approach to investigating real-life power dynamics. This is because they are social phenomena that are challenging to grasp, as they are largely invisible and elusive manifestations, and which require a high level of familiarisation with the research participants and the context being studied to be interpreted and understood. This PhD thesis uses case studies to conduct in-depth analyses of oscillations between static and shifting power relations, enabling or constraining prefiguration in CSA initiatives. While some historical analysis is required to understand the degree and magnitude of changing dynamics in the selected case studies, this research focuses on contemporary manifestations of power and empowerment.

Chapters 3 and 5 employ a comparative case study approach. Comparing the similarities, differences, and patterns across various CSAs enables the documentation and analysis of many power manifestations that influence agri-food transformations. It highlights the nuances, particularities, and contradictions found across different cases, which, in turn, contributes to a more accurate and detailed explanation of real-life manifestations of power dynamics and their implications for the CSA initiatives and agri-food transformation. **Chapter 4** uses a single case study method, given the particular relevance of the case to the research topic.

1.5.2. Case selection

A selection of CSA initiatives in Portugal and Italy provides the empirical basis for this thesis. In total, four CSA initiatives—three cases in Portugal and one in Italy—comprise the sample. A detailed description of the case studies is outlined in **Chapters 3–5**.

The justification for the choice of these two geographical locations is twofold: First, this PhD thesis is part of a broader research project,[2] and it was initially designed to contribute to the project's overall outcomes with insights from Italian grassroots initiatives. The project's original plan viewed Italy as a fertile ground for the diffusion of CSA and other agri-food grassroots initiatives based on grey and scientific literature. Italy has been an epicentre of the degrowth debate, with strong participation of grassroots movements. Moreover, it represents a particular type of capitalism (state-led), which was believed to provide a basis for a fruitful comparison with other case studies across Europe that were sampled in the research project and face distinct contexts. Second, the COVID-19 pandemic and related restrictions caused several difficulties in conducting fieldwork in Italy, including the impossibility of conducting data collection in the field as Italy was considered unsafe for travel by Utrecht University and the Dutch Government when the fieldwork campaigns were initially planned; furthermore, difficulties were experienced in establishing contact with and to secure participation of research subjects only through online contact. As an alternative, the geographical scope of the research was expanded to include case studies in Portugal, which was considered safe for travel by the Dutch authorities before Italy was. Portugal shares several similarities with the Italian context (e.g., state-led capitalism and the diffusion of CSA initiatives); thus, it required few adjustments in the initial plan. Moreover, Portuguese is my native language and I had contact with some agri-food grassroots initiatives in Portugal, which were factors that helped me considerably in identifying and sampling novel case studies.

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2   The unmaking research project: https://unmaking.sites.uu.nl

While the chosen cases offer concrete insights into power and empowerment's shaping of prefiguration in grassroots agri-food initiatives, the findings may not be broadly generalisable. The small sample size and the specific contexts studied may limit the direct transferability of the findings to other CSA initiatives and grassroots agri-food initiatives more generally. Instead, this PhD thesis focuses on providing a detailed, context-specific understanding of the power dynamics that underlie specific grassroots initiatives' attempts to prefigure sustainable and just agri-food systems.

1.5.3. Data collection and analysis

Various qualitative tools were applied to collect data and provide a detailed and nuanced account of the different case studies and manifestations of power relations that affect the transformative dynamics within them. The first step was the selection of potential case studies through desk research. The websites and social media accounts of the Italian and Portuguese CSA networks helped me to identify active initiatives that had existed for a minimum of two years, a period that I considered long enough to observe past and ongoing changing dynamics; moreover, it enabled me to create an account of the transformation unfolding in the CSAs and the extent to which they were formed in response to the influence of shifting power relations.

Primarily, ethnographic methods for data collection were applied in combination with the case study approach (Yin, 2014). The ethnographic methods included long-term fieldwork in Portugal and Italy (April 2021–July 2022), which employed participant observation and semi-structured interviews in different formats and at distinct moments throughout the year. In total, 45 respondents participated in the data collection. To start the fieldwork, I volunteered at the selected CSA initiatives for three to four consecutive weeks. This allowed me to follow their everyday operations and the power relations between their participants. I also participated in the weekly CSA gatherings to assemble and distribute fresh produce, CSA assemblies, and other social events and celebrations organised by the group. These moments allowed me to follow the participants' everyday experiences inside and outside of the CSA. They also enriched my understanding of whether and how the CSA affected the participants' lives as well as how their lives had, in turn, affected the CSA.

Furthermore, during the CSA visits, I conducted semi-structured interviews with at least 10 members of each CSA in Portugal and five members of the CSA in Italy. Such a disparity in numbers was due to the difficulties in establishing trust with the members of the Italian CSA (which is explained in more detail in **Chapter 5**). Alternatively, data collection in the Italian case relied to a greater extent on several informal conversations with members of the collective, fieldwork notes, and participant observation at different events organised

by the group. Most semi-structured interviews were conducted in-person, while some were conducted online due to COVID-19-related restrictions. The first people interviewed in each initiative were the farm owners, who had an overall view of the different farm operations and CSA members. The co-producers and employees interviewed were selected through snowball sampling. Interviews were conducted in Portuguese, Italian, or English, according to the interviewee's preference. The interviews were transcribed with the support of an assistant researcher[3].

Additionally, in **Chapter 4**, a focus group was used to spur a collective discussion on the topics of gender and sexuality that were previously discussed informally between members; however, this was never an agenda point of their internal deliberations.

To ensure confidentiality, I have assigned participants and the CSA initiatives fictitious names in the chapters. All participants mentioned in this study provided informed consent before the start of the interview and were given a copy of the audio file or the transcription.

1.5.4. Epistemological considerations for research with gender and sexually underrepresented communities

A core and novel contribution of this PhD thesis is the analysis of power and empowerment's shaping of prefiguration based on the perspectives and lived experiences of women farmers and queer participants in CSA. Their experiences with domination and marginalisation, empowerment, and agency represent an epistemic advantage in exploring the complex web of power relations in grassroots-led transformation. Grounded in feminist standpoint theory (Harding, 1993), this research embraces the production of knowledge from the standpoint of these individuals while critically examining the complexities and contradictions that shape their marginalised perspectives.

Feminist standpoint theory emphasises situated knowledge and the contingency of social positions and identities on the specific power relations prescribed by their social, cultural, and historical contexts (Haraway, 1988). This PhD thesis embraces this approach and elaborates on the situated accounts of queer and female farmers who participate in CSA, as opposed to essentialising their experiences into general approaches to gender and sexuality in these initiatives. Adopting an intersectional lens (Crenshaw, 2017), this research considers how multiple social positions intersect to shape the experiences of women farmers and queer participants in CSA. Intersectionality refers to the recognition that individuals occupy multiple intersecting social positions (e.g., class, sexuality, race, and

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3   Thank you Carolina Costa de Souza and Vera Gomes de Oliveira Pinho!

gender), and that the combination of these positions shapes their experiences and identities in the world (Collins, 2021). The intersectional lens is used, particularly in **Chapters 4 and 5**, to enrich the understanding of the encounters and entanglements of women farmers and queer members of CSA with power relations across different intersections of gender and sexuality, such as class, nationality, and agricultural education. Therefore, the participants who appear in **Chapters 4 and 5** were asked to explain what 'queer' and 'woman farmer' meant to them, and these explanations were combined with the experiences reported by them or observed during fieldwork to inform the data analyses. Both chapters employ the umbrella terms 'queer' and 'woman farmer' while also breaking down their meaning in practice by relating to the intersectional experiences and perspectives of the respondents.

1.6. Scientific contributions

This thesis breaks new ground by bringing together four fields of inquiry to advance the debates on power and empowerment in agri-food transformations, namely (i) sustainability transformation, (ii) agri-food grassroots initiatives, (iii) feminist and queer theory, and (iv) power theories (Figure 1.1.)

Figure 1.1. This PhD thesis at the intersection of research fields
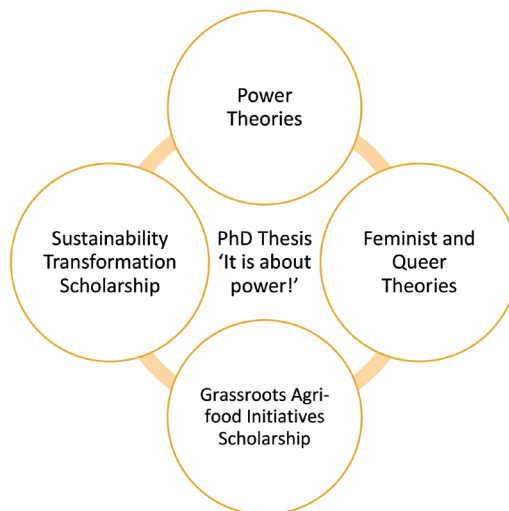
By addressing the sub-questions through research situated at the intersection of these four bodies of literature, the contribution of this PhD thesis is two-fold. First, a **theoretical contribution** is made, as this thesis expands conceptualisations of power and empowerment beyond strategic exercises, merges other conceptualisations of these terms

and theories of transformations, and integrates feminist and queer theories of power and empowerment in novel ways into research on the sustainability transformation of agri-food systems. Second, an **empirical contribution** is made, as this thesis documents and analyses the power relations that shape the transformation emerging from the micro-politics and collective identity formation of CSA initiatives, with particular attention paid to the perspectives of women and queer members of CSA on power dynamics. Next, I explain in more detail how each chapter contributes to these two scientific contributions.

- Theoretical
  - **Chapter 2** employs Allen's (2021) typology of relational power and Cohen's (1985) framework on empowerment to conduct a systematic literature review on concepts of power and empowerment and their empirical applications within and across 88 studies of grassroots initiatives. Furthermore, Allen's (2021) typology of relational power is based on a thorough literature review of the social and political sciences, including feminist studies. The typology contains an understanding of power that counters anthropocentrism by shifting attention to constitutional power and the nonhuman world and that views empowerment as a variation of power over. Both proposals are aligned with debates of power in feminist studies.
  - **Chapter 3** merges Allen's (2021) typology of relational power with Feola's (2019) and Feola et al.'s (2021) framework of unmaking capitalism to investigate how power shapes transformations of postcapitalist work relations in CSA. This focus addresses **Chapter 2**'s call to unpack the concept of power. Moreover, it calls for a further investigation of transformations in CSA that actively engage with the gender dimension.
  - **Chapter 5** merges concepts of power relations in queer theories of disidentification (Velicu, 2023) and the framework of unmaking capitalism (Feola, 2019; Feola et al., 2021) to investigate how women farmers disengage from the conventional identity of 'woman farmer' as prescribed by capitalist agri-food systems. This addresses **Chapter 2**'s call to unpack the concepts of power and empowerment while also responding to **Chapter 3**'s recommendation of engagement with the gender dimension in theorising power in agri-food transformation.

- **Empirical**
  - **Chapter 3** documents and analyses everyday manifestations of power in combination with some strategic power exercises that influence the diversification of postcapitalist work relations in CSAs. Furthermore, it focuses on the multifaceted power relations that shape the micro-politics

of these initiatives. In doing so, it addresses **Chapter 2**'s call for an empirical investigation of other forms of power beyond a strategic exercise as well as analyses of the micro-politics of grassroots initiatives.

- **Chapter 4** identifies and examines several manifestations of empowerment experiences by queer members that emerge from everyday relationships in CSA. This chapter explores empowerment and issues of collective and individual identities shaped by the CSA, and vice versa. This approach responds to **Chapter 2**'s call for an empirical investigation of other forms of power beyond a strategic exercise and analyses of the constitution of grassroots initiatives' collective identity. Moreover, it addresses **Chapter 3**'s recommendation for further investigations of gender relations and (in) equalities in grassroots initiatives.
- **Chapter 5** investigates everyday manifestations of power and empowerment in combination with some strategic power exercises that influence women farmers' efforts to forge alternative positions of power on the farm. In doing so, it addresses **Chapter 2**'s call for an empirical investigation of other forms of power beyond a strategic exercise and analyses of the constitution of grassroots initiatives' collective identity, while also providing concrete insights on gender relations and (in)equalities in grassroots initiatives, as suggested in **Chapters 3 and 4**.

Figure 1.2. outlines this thesis structure, illustrating the operationalisation of the leading research question into the four sub-questions, how each sub-question builds on one another, and their implications for the three contributions of this PhD thesis:

Figure 1.2. Thesis outline
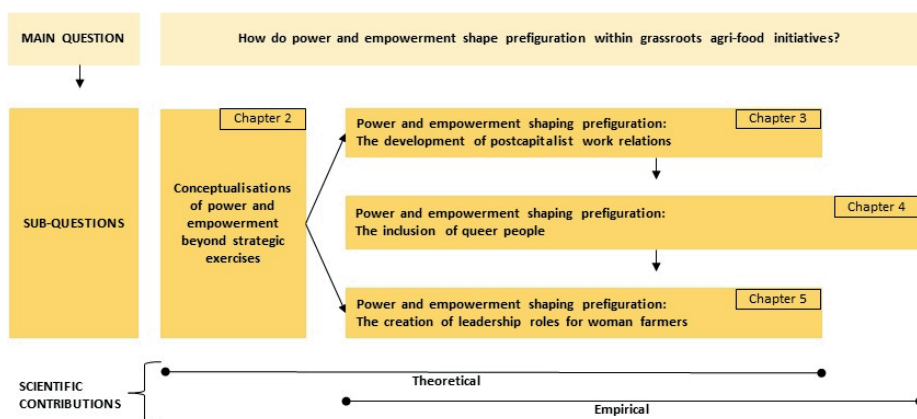
1.7. Positionality

'Feminists have stakes in a successor science project that offers a more adequate, richer, better account of a world, in order to live in it well and in critical, reflexive relation to our own as well as others' practices of domination and the unequal parts of privilege and oppression that make up all positions'. (Haraway, 1988, p. 579)

This thesis finds inspiration in the work of feminist scholars and their efforts to foster a commitment to scientific practice through a critical and reflexive approach to producing knowledge and understanding its entanglement with power dynamics. *Exploring* issues of power and empowerment in CSA extends beyond conceptual engagement with these terms. In particular, it becomes important to reflect on the *exploration* itself and how it is situated in the social interactions that co-produced the research outcomes. The notion of *situated knowledge* (Haraway, 1988), rooted in the socio-constructivist paradigm, posits that knowledge is always situated and constructed within a specific social, cultural, and historical context, which is in opposition to an understanding of knowledge as universal and thus distant from the context in which it was produced. If knowledge is situated, then it is also incomplete and partial, as it necessarily reflects the voices and viewpoints of those included in the process of knowledge production. Recognising this partiality leads to a reflection on my positionality as a researcher. My choices with regard to the inclusion in this thesis of voices and viewpoints when exploring issues of power and empowerment as well as which power relations configure this knowledge co-production deserve an explicit description.

The following three particular events prior to and during my PhD journey stand out as crucial and were factored into the orientation of my thesis: (i) voluntary work on organic farms; (ii) my first visit to a CSA composed of queer participants; and (iii) an interview with CSA farmers imbued with implicit heterosexist acts.

First, I volunteered on organic farms in Italy before I started my PhD. My PhD is part of a broader research project with specific objectives and predefined research questions. I was initially hired for a position in the project to research agri-food grassroots initiatives in Italy. I am originally from a large city in Brazil and have limited connections to Italy and the countryside. As I spoke poor Italian and knew relatively little about the agri-food context in the country, I decided to spend time in Italy before the start of my PhD programme to improve my language skills and become better acquainted with the reality on the ground. As I have performed voluntary work on organic farms in the past, I thought that combining these two objectives would be a suitable option. For two and a half months, I worked on three different Italian farms in exchange for food and shelter. Besides improving my Italian, several aspects of this experience factored into my research approach. As a volunteer, I noticed the need for support on small-scale organic farms regarding the workforce. These

farms are usually more labour-intensive than conventional farms (Ekers et al., 2016). I also became aware of an implicit ambiguity in the function of volunteers on the farms I visited. As much as the voluntary programme conducted in the farms was framed under the idea of solidarity with the reality of small-scale ecologic farmers in the face of an expanding industrial agriculture sector, it was also strongly related to the economic precarity of these farms and their constraints on hiring an appropriate workforce. The farms depended primarily on family work and volunteers. In **Chapter 3**, I revisit the case of voluntary work in the selected CSA initiatives and how the power relations between volunteers and farm owners influence the achievement of a postcapitalist arrangement of agri-food work relations.

In addition, I noticed that the boundaries between the public and private spheres were quite blurry in the context of these heteronuclear family farms (Hoffelmeyer, 2021). Through voluntary work, I often shared meals with the farmers and their families and enjoyed convivial moments on top of the work routine. As a white, male-identifying, hetero-passing, early-career researcher working on sustainable food systems, I was privileged to share many interests and social norms with the farmers. Moreover, this privilege extended to my intentional, yet subtle, agreement to be somewhat dependent on them in terms of language and work, which became an opportunity for learning and creating affinity. These experiences influenced my data collection approach and fieldwork for **Chapters 3, 4, and 5**, including voluntary work as a primary approach for participant observation in the CSA initiatives.

Fast-forward to the second year of my PhD journey, when the second event mentioned above happened. I visited one CSA initiative in Portugal for the first time to introduce my work and propose a collaboration for my study on work relations in CSA (**Chapter 3**). Besides the purpose of the visit, I was excited to see how freely queer partners and participants of the collective shared affection in the group and how gender seemed to be fluid and not a fixed category that shaped roles on the farm and in the CSA. It was the first time that I had not felt the need to filter my sexuality and gender in a CSA and, more broadly, in the countryside. I felt confident and thrilled to self-affirm my queerness that day and throughout the fieldwork campaign. The embodied experience within a queer community actively engaged in agri-food operations sparked my curiosity in exploring how queer members of the CSA felt within this space, particularly regarding their experiences of empowerment.

However, the decision to include this focus in this thesis was made only half a year after my first visit to the CSA. I was not accustomed to dealing with questions of gender and sexuality in the public sphere as part of my work, which made it a challenging process. Making the personal political (Hanisch, 2000) is a powerful emancipatory slogan as much as a contradictory process. I found inspiration in writings on rural queerness and queer farming (Hoffelmeyer, 2021; Leslie, 2017; Wypler, 2019) as well as encouragement during

numerous discussions on positionality with my colleagues; however, I also experienced a relative fear of discrimination and delegitimisation about 'coming out' in my writings and was unsure how to do so during fieldwork to yield results without risking that disclosure would lead to impressions of bias and influence participation (Leslie, 2017, p.757). It took time for me to feel sufficiently confident to engage with this research topic. Receiving positive feedback from my thesis supervisors granted credibility to my endeavour. It was a personal and intellectual journey that eventually led me to expand my thesis to include **Chapters 4 and 5**. This transformation and exploration of gender and sexuality within the context of my research were essential for a more holistic understanding of power and empowerment within the CSA. Starting the fieldwork with questions on work relations for **Chapter 3** also proved helpful, as it made apparent hierarchical and exploitative relations significantly entangled with heteropatriarchal norms and gender inequalities.

This brings me to the third and final event. On my first visit to the CSA in Italy, one of the case studies in **Chapter 5**, a woman colleague and I interviewed the farming heteronuclear couple who led most of the collective's farm work. During a debrief session after the visit, we both agreed that the woman farmer had a less prominent voice. Despite our attempts to include her in the conversation, the man farmer insisted on maintaining the role of protagonist. In addition, my colleague revealed several moments at which she felt discriminated against as a woman researcher and experienced discomfort in the presence of this man farmer. My colleague's testimony made me realise my own biases as cisgender and male-presenting as well as how gender played different roles in the process and outcomes of the interview. Questions then arose about whether and how CSA initiatives dealt with gender and gender inequalities in the collective. How did the representation of women farmers and leaders influence the micro-politics in these collectives? To what extent did they resist and reproduce aspects of conventional gender socialisation in agriculture? **Chapters 3, 4, and particularly 5** address some of these questions.

1.8. Thesis structure

The remainder of this thesis consists of five chapters. A brief description of each chapter is presented below. Then, Table 1.1. provides further information about the publication status and the authors of the different chapters.

Chapter 2 explores how power and empowerment can be conceptualised to move analyses of power and empowerment beyond strategic exercises. It presents a systematic literature review that was conducted of 88 studies based on Allen's (2021) relational typology of power and Cohen's (1985) typology of empowerment. This chapter identifies trends,

biases, and remaining challenges in the literature and provides avenues for future research, some of which are further explored in the remaining chapters.

Chapter 3 delves into how power dynamics influence the accomplishments and difficulties of CSAs in establishing and perpetuating postcapitalist work relations. By examining three CSAs in Portugal, it explores the role of power in shaping the transformation of three aspects of work relations—namely alienation, monetisation, and care. This chapter analyses power manifestations and their impact on unmaking unsustainable capitalist practices and relations within CSAs.

Chapter 4 investigates whether and how queer folks feel empowered to become active and thriving members of a CSA. The experiences of 12 queer members of a CSA in rural Portugal offer the empirical basis for the analysis of the intersection of power, gender, sexuality, and agriculture. It documents and analyses the complexities, contradictions, and limitations that underlie the empowerment experiences of the research participants.

Chapter 5 analyses whether and how new-entrant women farmers and leaders create empowered positions in CSA. The chapter delves into the experiences of four women farmers across three CSA initiatives in Portugal and Italy. In particular, it investigates acts of disidentification from the conventional and subordinate 'woman farmer' identity within the emancipatory strategies employed by these women farmers in CSA.

This thesis concludes with **Chapter 6,** where the sub-questions are revisited to yield implications for the main research question. The chapter presents a reflection on the PhD journey and discusses the main findings in light of the three contributions offered by this thesis. As a concluding chapter, it identifies the main remaining challenges and builds on some of them to present my future research agenda for my post-PhD work.

Table 1.1. Publication status and authors of the chapters

	Publication Status and Authors
Chapter 2	**Published** Raj, G., Feola, G., Hajer, M., & Runhaar, H. (2022). Power and empowerment of grassroots innovations for sustainability transitions: A review. *Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions*, 43, 375–392.
Chapter 3	**Published** Raj, G., Feola, G., & Runhaar, H. (2024). Work in progress: power in transformation to postcapitalist work relations in community–supported agriculture. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 41(1), 269-291..
Chapter 4	**Published** Raj, G. (2024). Selective, reciprocal and quiet: lessons from rural queer empowerment in community-supported agriculture. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 1-16.
Chapter 5	**Submitted** Raj, G., Velicu, I., Feola, G. 'It is a gender issue': Women farmers in community-supported agriculture. *Journal of Rural Studies*.
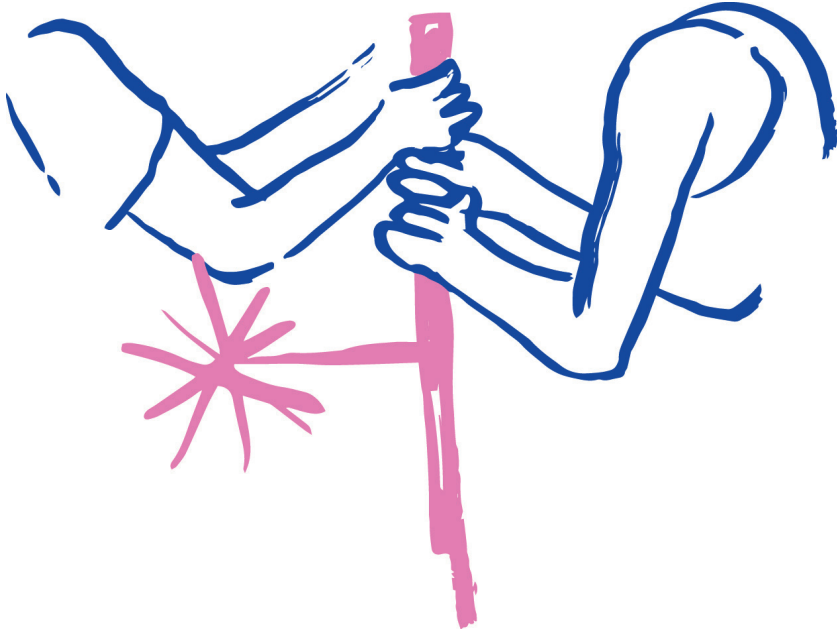
Chapter 2

POWER AND EMPOWERMENT BEYOND STRATEGIC EXERCISES

2.1. Introduction

Sustainability transitions are inherently political (Meadowcroft, 2011; Avelino et al., 2016; Köhler et al., 2019). As argued by Scoones (2016), the processes and outcomes of sustainability transitions are shaped by the ways in which different actors frame issues and set goals, assert positions and form alliances for or against change, and more generally try to influence the direction and speed of transitions.

There is a growing realisation of the limitations and inability of state and corporate interventions to lead sustainability transitions on the scope and magnitude needed to adequately respond to environmental change (Leach et al., 2012; Castán Broto, 2016; Swilling et al., 2016). Consequently, many researchers have turned their attention to grassroots innovations.[1] Grassroots innovations are solutions for sustainability that prioritise the values and beliefs of local communities involved over profit—a core element of conventional models of innovation (Seyfang and Smith, 2007). In particular, grassroots innovations 'arise in reaction to perceived social injustices and environmental problems' (Smith et al., 2013, p.115). These community-based solutions aim to address local needs while also potentially influencing broader societal change from the bottom up (Leach et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2013). Studies of grassroots innovations cover various thematic research areas, such as energy (e.g. Seyfang and Haxeltine, 2012; Schreuer, 2016), agri-food (e.g. Smith, 2006; Rossi et al., 2019), housing (e.g. Seyfang, 2010; Chatterton, 2016); and various geographical locations such as Europe (e.g. Celata and Coletti, 2018; Hölscher et al., 2019), North America (e.g. Laforge et al., 2016; Nicolosi et al., 2018), and Asia (e.g. Lee et al., 2017; Wolfram 2018). Well-known examples of grassroots innovations in the sustainability transitions literature include the Transition Towns movement (e.g. Seyfang et al., 2010; Feola and Nunes, 2014), community energy (e.g. Seyfang et al., 2014; Martiskainen et al., 2018), and ecovillages (e.g. Boyer, 2015; Frantzeskaki et al., 2016).

Grassroots innovations play a critical role in the politics of sustainability transitions, interacting with state or private actors, negotiating access to external resources and influencing the direction and speed of transitions (Hess, 2013; Laforge et al., 2016; Schreuer, 2016; Marletto and Sillig, 2019; Gregg et al., 2020). In turn, these politics affect the nature of grassroots innovations (Hess, 2013; Laforge et al., 2016; Celata and Coletti, 2018; Rossi et al., 2019).

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1   We follow Seyfang and Smith (2007) in using the term grassroots innovations, as this term is mostly used by the sustainability transitions scholarship (Hossain, 2016). However, we also acknowledge and include studies that refer to grassroots movements, initiatives or organisations.

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Within the literature on the role and impacts of grassroots innovations on the politics of sustainability transitions, researchers have explored the central notions of *power* and *empowerment* through various perspectives. For instance, power has been conceptualised as the capacity of grassroots innovations to leverage transformations in their field of action (e.g. Hess, 2013) or the ability to align internal interests, mobilise resources, seize external opportunities and overcome barriers to scale-up (Gregg et al., 2020). Furthermore, grassroots innovations have been considered as niches 'where projects can develop away from the normal selection pressures of mainstream systems' (Seyfang and Longhurst, 2013, p. 881), and as such may function as protective spaces of empowerment for (a) the configuration and development of alternative and bottom-up solutions for sustainability; and (b) local and marginalised actors (Seyfang and Smith, 2007; Schreuer, 2016; Marletto and Sillig, 2019). As niches, grassroots innovations face the risk of co-optation by incumbent actors in socio-technical regimes. On the one hand, co-optation may undermine the degree of radicality and alterity of grassroots innovations (Smith, 2006; Laforge et al., 2016); on the other hand, it may create an opportunity to access resources in order to survive and to scale-up (Pel, 2016; Laforge et al., 2016). To avoid the risk of co-optation and retain autonomy, grassroots innovations exercise political power to access external resources that foster long-term independence and survival (Smith and Ely, 2015).

In sum, studies of grassroots innovations for sustainability transitions have employed a variety of conceptual approaches to study manifestations of power and empowerment. Such diversity is consistent with the claim that power cannot be understood by means of 'one all-encompassing theory that applies to each context' (Avelino and Rotmans, 2009, p.544), but rather 'requires different conceptualisations depending on the empirical phenomena and analytical and political interests of the investigator' (Ahlborg, 2017, p.123). Although this diversity has enriched our understanding of power and empowerment of grassroots innovations for sustainability transitions, it has also created theoretical and methodological fragmentation (Köhler et al., 2019), thereby hindering the ability to assess both the depth of our knowledge on this phenomenon and the suitability of existing theoretical and analytical approaches for understanding the range of forms of power and empowerment manifested in and through grassroots innovations for sustainability transitions. Although studies of power and empowerment in sustainability transitions have flourished in recent years (e.g. Avelino et al., 2016; Ahlborg, 2017; Avelino, 2017; Hölscher et al., 2019; Rossi et al., 2019), no research has yet taken stock of the progress made in this field and specifically examined how power and empowerment are conceptualised and empirically investigated in the context of grassroots innovations for sustainability transitions. Indeed, among others, Köhler et al. (2019) have recently called for mapping the research on the role of power and empowerment in sustainability transitions, specifically those involving grassroots innovations.

This paper aims to conduct a systematic literature review of studies of grassroots innovations for sustainability transitions that investigate power and empowerment. Our objective is two-fold. First, we take stock of the conceptual development of power and empowerment in the grassroots innovations literature. We answer two research questions: (a) What concepts of power and empowerment are used in the grassroots innovations literature? (b) What understanding(s) do these concepts enable researchers to achieve? Second, we propose directions for future research to stimulate further theoretical development of power and empowerment in grassroots innovations. We address two additional research questions: (c) What are the strengths and limitations of the concepts of power and empowerment currently adopted in the grassroots innovations literature? (d) How can future research address such limitations?

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 presents five predominant research areas on power and empowerment in sustainability transitions. Next, section 3 first builds upon these five principal research areas to introduce the two meta-level frameworks that create a conceptual ground for the literature review, and then explains the methodological approach. The results are presented in section 4, following the first two research questions. Sub-section 4.1 maps the concepts of power and empowerment used in the grassroots innovations literature. Sub-section 4.2 elaborates on the understandings that these concepts enable researchers to achieve. Section 5 addresses the remaining questions, discusses the strengths and limitations of the concepts of power and empowerment currently adopted in the grassroots innovations literature, and proposes avenues for future research. We conclude our study in section 6.

2.2. Power and empowerment in sustainability transitions research

Research on sustainability transitions has discussed power and empowerment in relation to the concept of socio-technical transitions. Two publications stand out for indicating the achievements and remaining knowledge gaps of this sub-field of research (Avelino et al., 2016; Köhler et al.,2019). By and large, we identify five predominant research areas on power and empowerment in sustainability transitions.

Firstly, researchers have explored manifestations of power and empowerment and their impacts in socio-technical transitions through the prominent Multi-Level Perspective (MLP) framework. The MLP describes systemic change towards sustainability resulting from the interactions between three levels of aggregated societal functions: (1) niches, or spaces for innovative socio-technical practices and institutions; (2) regimes, or dominant socio-

technical practices and institutions; and (3) landscapes, or slow-changing developments (e.g. demographic changes) and external shocks (e.g. wars) on socio-technical systems (Geels, 2019). Comparably, Grin (2010) and Avelino (2017) attribute different aspects of power to each level of the MLP and distinctively theorise how power relations and dynamics between niche-regime-landscape and transition dynamics mutually constitute one another.[2] Similarly, de Haan and Rotmans (2011) and Smith and Ravens (2012) discuss empowerment in the case of socio-technical innovations developed within niches that scale-up and become more competitive towards the established regime practices and institutions, hence leading sustainability transitions from the bottom up.

Secondly, researchers have investigated actors' *capacities and abilities* exercised in social interactions that enable or constrain socio-technical innovations for sustainability. Through and beyond the MLP model, studies have analysed both human and nonhuman agency,[3] albeit analyses of the latter have been limited to a few studies (e.g. Castán-Broto, 2015; Hoffman and Loeber, 2016; Avelino et al., 2016; Ahlborg, 2017). Examples of conceptualisations of power in this category include innovative, transformative and reinforcive power (Avelino, 2017), relational and dispositional power (Grin, 2010; Hoffman, 2013), and regimes' resistance to change (Geels, 2014).

Thirdly, attention has been given to the *effects* of the exercise of power on the creation and implementation of socio-technical innovations for sustainability (Hoffman, 2013; Hoffman and Loeber, 2016; Ahlborg, 2017). These studies contrast with a more static understanding of power in their exploration of the dynamic character of power relations. For example, Avelino and Wittmayer (2016) examine how such forms of power relations shift throughout transition processes, whereas Rossi et al. (2019) discuss the redefinition of repressive power relations that would typically constrain the unfolding of sustainability agri-food transitions. In addition, Partzsch (2017) explores the interrelations of coercive power, individual empowerment and collective power that shape the processes and outcomes of environmental innovations.

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2   Grin (2010) offers a framework to examine how sustainability transitions may come about when a regime's dispositional power, i.e. "rules, resources, actor configurations and dominant images of the issues involved' (p.283) is altered by pressures from landscape's structuring power or niche agent's relational power, Avelino's (2017) typology considers varying power relations and dynamics within each of the levels in the MLP.

3   In this paper, we understand nonhuman agency in line with Braun and Whatmore (2010) as the active participation of e.g. energies, artefacts, technology and creatures in the constitution of social collectivities, political associations and knowledge production.

Fourthly, analyses of power in sustainability transitions have examined how power relations are *historically constituted and geographically situated* and consequently empower or silence agency in socio-technical innovation processes (Castán-Broto, 2015; Swilling et al., 2015; Ahlborg, 2017). This strand of literature has investigated the constitution of path-dependencies and their effects on sustainability transitions. Examples include studies of how social structures of gender, class and race define the winners and losers of sustainability transitions and particularly call for just transitions (e.g. Swilling et al., 2015; Ahlborg, 2017) and explorations of the structured arrangements of orders of signification, domination and legitimisation (structural power; Grin, 2010).

Finally, scholars have investigated *the empowerment and disempowerment* of agents in socio-technical innovation processes. Besides the above-mentioned notable works of de Haan and Rotmans (2011) and Smith and Raven (2012), Avelino (2017) and Hölscher et al. (2019) draw on organisational psychology studies to define dis/empowerment both as a process that diminishes or enhance actors' abilities to achieve desired outcomes that grant or impede the feeling of being empowered. From a different standpoint, Ahlborg (2017, p. 5) argues that empowerment refers to a 'situated capacity of individuals and collectives to exercise power in ways that positively shape their lives and societies'. At the network level, Loorbach et al. (2020) build on Pel et al. (2020) to indicate that social innovators' networks can empower transformative innovations by (i) sustainably embedding innovations in the local context, (ii) forming supportive translocal networks, and (iii) creating social cohesion and resilience.

As this brief overview clearly shows, research on power in sustainability transitions may be ordered with respect to five core areas. However, many frameworks and conceptualisations of power and empowerment coexist in the literature. Köhler et al. (2019) suggest that such diversity has created theoretical and methodological fragmentation and called for mapping the research on the role of power and empowerment in sustainability transitions, specifically those involving grassroots innovations. Power and empowerment are not only studied in this specific field of research but also in many other kinds of literature. To construct a conceptual basis on power and empowerment that allows us to examine how these terms are conceptualised and empirically researched in the context of grassroots innovations for sustainability transitions, we turn to meta-level frameworks of power and empowerment developed in sociology and political science.

2.3. Conceptual Framework and Methods

2.3.1. Meta-level frameworks of power and empowerment

Sociology and political science aggregate an extensive and diversified debate on what power is and what it is not, when power manifests itself, and with what consequences (Morriss, 2002; Lukes, 2004; Allen, 2021).[4] As a result, these disciplines have produced various approaches to conceptually and empirically examine power and empowerment (Allen, 2021). By drawing on frameworks of power and empowerment conceived by schools of thought outside the grassroots innovations literature as well as the sustainability transitions literature more broadly, we seek to discern which approaches to power and empowerment are reflected in the reviewed literature and which remain obscured.

We follow the frameworks developed by Allen (2021) and Cohen (1985), which we find particularly useful because they categorise different conceptual approaches to studying power and empowerment in political sciences and sociology, respectively. We use Allen's framework to analyse manifestations of power that are *already produced* in a given context. In contrast, Cohen's framework is used to examine manifestations of the social processes of *producing* power, i.e. empowerment. We also show how these perspectives relate to the aforementioned five main research areas and current discussions on grassroots innovations' power and empowerment.

Power frameworks

Allen (2021) outlines a thorough review of concepts of power in sociology and political sciences, resulting in a typology of three distinct theoretical approaches to power: *action-theoretical*, *constitutive* and *systemic* power. Common to all three types is a relational conceptualisation of power that foregrounds the intentions and actions of one person in relation to another (i.e. action-theoretical power) and to nonhuman elements (i.e. constitutive power) and how these are conditioned by several contextual factors (i.e. systemic power). Such a multifaceted relational approach deviates from the understanding of power as something owned and exercised by agents independently of its embedded context, which implies a static manifestation of power incompatible with the changing dynamics inherent to sustainability transitions (Ahlborg, 2017). Although Allen's typology has been used in one sustainability transitions study (Ahlborg, 2017), it is relatively new to this scholarship and has not yet been applied to the sub-field of grassroots innovations.

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4   As an example, political science theorists have engaged in a five-decade-long debate on the "faces of power" that has provoked fruitful discussions, opened up new areas for research, and refined epistemic perspectives to the study of power (Lukes, 2004).

Action-theoretical power is exclusively related to the realm of human agency, and its focus is two-fold, encompassing 'either the actions or the dispositional abilities of [these] particular actors' (Allen, 2021, p.3). The focus on actions foregrounds the *intentions* of those who exercise power towards others and the surrounding environment (Ahlborg, 2017; Ahlborg and Nightingale, 2018). It includes, for example, the exercise of the power to act or refrain from action that can either take form as power over others (e.g. dominance) or power with others (e.g. collective power to resist domination). In contrast, the focus on *dispositional abilities* highlights the human attributes that are unequally distributed in society and *may* be exercised (e.g. decision-making power at the disposal of elite actors). The action-theoretical perspective of power relates to current debates in the sustainability transitions literature regarding whose capacities and abilities may or may not be exercised during interactions between social actors (e.g. Grin, 2010; Avelino, 2017). Examples of action-theoretical manifestations of power in the context of grassroots innovations include, on the one hand, the collaborative or resistance actions of grassroots actors towards government officials, and vice-versa (Hess, 2013; Laforge et al., 2016); and on the other hand, the varying capacities and abilities of grassroots innovators to align internal interests, mobilise material resources and seize external opportunities to overcome barriers to scale-up (Gregg et al., 2020).

Constitutive power corresponds to the 'fundamentally transindividual and relational ways in which individuals and the social worlds they inhabit are themselves constituted by power relations' (Allen, 2021, p.3). This perspective of power foregrounds the multiplicity of elements that interact in a given system, thereby decentralising power from the human sphere and expanding the understanding of power as emerging from the interactions between human and nonhuman actors (Foucault, 1979 in Allen, 2021). In simplified terms, nonhuman elements can co-constitute human's capabilities (e.g. the hammer in the hand of a worker) or constrain them(e.g. complex technical devices that unskilled people cannot fix).[5] Some sustainability transitions scholars have employed this view of power to analyse how relationships between human agents and e.g. electricity infrastructure and technology influence the conception and implementation of socio-technical innovations for sustainability (e.g. Castán-Broto, 2015; Ahlborg, 2017). Constitutive power is reflected in the context of grassroots innovations, such as in the ways that participants of repair cafés along with repairing tools co-constitute sites of social transformation (Schmid and Smith, 2020, p. 13).

Lastly, *systemic* power refers to 'the ways in which broad historical, political, economic, cultural, and social forces enable some individuals to exercise power over others, or

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5   Alhborg (2017, p.127) clarifies the analytical purpose of including non-human agents in studies of power by arguing that 'this idea does not necessarily suggest that artefacts themselves exercise power, rather, artefacts become enrolled in exercises of power by planners, development practi-tioners, designers etc.'

inculcate certain abilities and dispositions in some actors but not in others' (Allen, 2021, p.3). In this sense, power refers to more elusive and contextual forces produced by the way that a particular system functions. Examples of systemic power include culturally institutionalised practices, legal institutions and discourse that condition human and nonhuman exercises of power (Ahlborg, 2017). Like other frameworks of power in sustainability transitions, Allen's typology is consistent with a systems thinking approach; it relates to sustainability transitions research on *how* agency in innovation processes is empowered or hindered by social conditions historically constituted and geographically situated (Grin, 2010; Castán-Brotto, 2015; Swilling et al., 2015; Ahlborg, 2017). Manifestations of systemic power include grassroots actors that develop and guarantee democratic socio-technical innovations (e.g. Smith and Stirling, 2018) while acknowledging that local challenges are embedded in broader political systems (Schipper et al.,2019).

Empowerment frameworks

Social movement theory is another focal point in the social science debate that allows us to evaluate empowerment. In this context, Cohen (1985) conducts a literature review on how collective action is researched in 'new social movement' theory and distinguishes between two prominent theoretical paradigms, namely 'resource-mobilisation' and 'identity-oriented'. Although social movement theory has evolved since Cohen's review, e.g. by englobing collective action geared towards the protection and survival of human actors and the natural environment (Rocheleau et al., 1996), the categories of each theoretical paradigm remain meaningful and consistent with current times.

Below, we describe how the 'resource-mobilisation' and 'identity-oriented' paradigms reveal different ways to make sense of current social movements' empowerment and how they are applicable to grassroots innovations' empowerment. These theoretical paradigms are not mutually exclusive and could be simultaneously used to identify distinct manifestations of empowerment happening under different circumstances in grassroots innovations.[6] By highlighting the specific strengths and weaknesses of each paradigm, Cohen (1985) provides a conceptual and analytical framework that is helpful to understand how the usages of these two conceptual approaches vary among studies of grassroots innovations and what manifestations of empowerment have been neglected by the grassroots innovation literature.

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6   For example, analyses of awareness-raising and cultivation of local knowledge in grassroots in-novations (i.e. identity-oriented empowerment) can be complemented with observations of the strategies developed by grassroots innovations to mobilise technological resources to support such endeavour (i.e. resource mobilisation empowerment; Smith et al., 2013).

The *resource-mobilisation* paradigm approaches 'collective action in terms of the logic of strategic interaction and cost-benefit calculations' (Cohen, 1985, p.675). Studies of this kind have discussed, for instance, activists' and social movement organisations' strategies to create online campaigns and mobilise collective environmental action (e.g. Lee, 2014) or how social movement organisations negotiate their independence from national governments to support local innovations for energy transitions (Hisschemöller and Sioziou, 2013). Accordingly, empowerment refers to a process in which individual and collective actors construct (i) strategic and instrumental reasoning and (ii) sophisticated organisational forms and modes of communication. In the context of grassroots innovations, this paradigm sheds light on a type of empowerment that relates to the actions and negotiations that grassroots innovators strategically employ to obtain, maintain, or enhance access to material and ideological resources, e.g. financial, political and mediatic repercussions as well as knowledge (e.g. Martin et al., 2015; Kooij et al., 2018a).

The *identity-oriented* paradigm offers analytical dimensions to the study of collective action that 'involve a reflexive relation to the objective, subjective, and social worlds insofar as [these dimensions] thematise issues of personal and social identity, contest the social interpretation of norms, communicatively create and agree on new ones, and propose alternative ways of relating to the environment' (Cohen, 1985, p.708). For example, this paradigm highlights aspects of political ecology struggles associated with the definition of gendered identities and environmental racism that fundamentally constitute the type of actions organised by social movements and their outcomes (Campbell et al.,1996; Miller et al., 1996). As such, empowerment refers to a productive process that includes active reflection, contestation and discursive reconfigurations that actors bring to the situation, including dimensions such as worldviews, epistemology and social identities. Drawing on this perspective, grassroots innovations are understood as collectives that engender individuals' awareness of their capacity to contest, recreate and disseminate alternative life choices and socio-ecological relations, to reinterpret norms and create new meanings (Udovyk, 2017; Hill and Connelly, 2018), by reflecting on the power relations that are both symbolically (e.g. ideologies) and materially (e.g. social norms and social hierarchies) involved in this process (Smith et al., 2013).

Analytical frameworks

We first applied Allen's (2021) typology on power to aggregate clusters of paradigms among studies that conceptualise similar types of power. The action-theoretical cluster was used to group two notions of power exclusively from a human agency perspective: firstly, the *dispositional properties* of grassroots actors and the social actors with whom

they interact, including capacities or abilities to bring about effects;[7] secondly, the *intentions* underlying the relationships between members of grassroots innovations and with external social actors, or how power constitutes specific types of relationships (e.g. domination, dependency, collaborations). Furthermore, the constitutive power cluster gathered notions of power that focus on the *co-constitution* of power involving human and nonhuman elements associated with grassroots innovations. The systemic cluster was used to bring together notions of *social conditions*—such as social practices, hierarchies and institutions—that shape and are shaped by grassroots innovations. Table 2.1. summarises how we operationalised Allen's typology in the context of power in grassroots innovations for sustainability transitions.

Table 2.1. Analytical framework on power (authors' elaboration based on Allen, 2021)

Types of power	Unit of analysis	Power of grassroots innovations (examples)
Action-theoretical	Dispositional properties	The ability of grassroots actors to align internal interests and mobilise material resources.
	Intentions	The collaborative or confrontational interactions between grassroots innovations and government officials, corporations and other actors in the mainstream system.
Constitutive	Co-constitution of power	Co-production of power between human actors and infrastructures, technologies, objects, and other materialities.
Systemic	Social conditions	Social structures of gender, class and race that act against or in favour of grassroots innovations.

Secondly, we followed Cohen's (1985) description of the resource-mobilisation and identity-oriented paradigms to aggregate clusters of paradigms among studies that have used similar conceptualisations of empowerment (Table 2.2.). Social movement theory and grassroots innovations literature share a common interest in collective action and offer insights on the process of building up individual and collective power, i.e. empowerment. Within the resource-mobilisation cluster, we identified notions of empowerment that refer to the production of power concerning the development of strategic and instrumental reasoning and organisational abilities. Through the identity-oriented paradigm, we identified notions of empowerment that elucidate the production of power in terms of individual and collective active reflection, contestation and reconfiguration of the social constructions of their worldviews, epistemologies and social identities that enable them to take action.

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7   Morriss (2002) explains that power can be understood as an actor's *dispositional property*, meaning that it is a capacity that actors have. Such capacity can be exercised or not depending on the social context; different social contexts provide the conditions that enable or disable the exercise of power.

Table 2.2. Analytical framework on empowerment (authors' elaboration based on Cohen, 1985)

Type of empowerment	Unit of analysis	Empowerment of grassroots innovations (examples)
Resource-mobilisation	The production of power concerning the development of strategic and instrumental reasoning and organisational abilities	Building up strategic actions to mobilise resources, alignment of interests, goal-setting capacities.
Identity-oriented	The production of power concerning active reflection, contestation and discursive reconfigurations that include dimensions of worldviews, epistemologies and social identities	Building up capacities and abilities to reflect, contest and reconfigure gendered identities, winners and losers of environmental change, social structures of oppression

In sum, Allen's and Cohen's frameworks were helpful instruments to achieve our research objectives. They enabled us to identify in the grassroots innovations literature (i) differences in the conceptual development of power and empowerment and (ii) limitations to be addressed in future research.

2.3.2. Methods

This study is based on a systematic literature review that entailed three main phases: (i) the selection of relevant literature on grassroots innovations; (ii) the identification of conceptual and empirical elements linked to power and empowerment through coding; and (iii) the analysis of these elements based on the frameworks introduced by Allen (2021) and Cohen (1985). Ultimately, we aim to address the four research questions mentioned in the introduction.

In this section, we first present the coding criteria and how they relate to the analytical frameworks, following which we explain the steps we took to select relevant literature on grassroots innovations.

Coding

We created a coding book comprising seven criteria to facilitate the screening of the selected literature, namely 'research topic', 'study location', 'thematic research area', 'type of grassroots innovations', 'level of analysis', 'type of power/empowerment', and 'theoretical approach'. Appendix A describes each criterion in detail and shows how each was operationalised into specific descriptors, examples, a guiding question and a justification. The coding book was conceived to extract relevant information that could be examined through the two analytical frameworks.

Selection of literature

In order to obtain relevant literature, we ran queries in the Scopus database in March 2020. Only literature in English was included. The final list is mostly comprised of peer-reviewed articles but also includes book chapters, conference papers and reviews. The diversity of sources ensures the credibility of the reported findings. Appendix C presents a profile of the selected literature. We used two sets of keywords combinations: (i) 'sustainability transitions' AND 'grassroots' or 'community' or 'civil society' AND 'power' or 'politics' or 'empowerment';[8] and (ii) 'grassroots innovations' or 'grassroots initiatives' or 'grassroots movements' AND 'power' or 'politics' or 'empowerment'. From a total of 18 different keyword combinations (Appendix B), 317 unique titles and 139 duplicates were shortlisted. Furthermore, we included 14 peer-reviewed articles that were either frequently cited by the shortlisted titles or referred to in key studies on power and/or grassroots innovations in the sustainability transition literature. This process resulted in a list of 331 titles.

Next, the abstracts of the 331 titles were scanned, and we filtered the list according to the following exclusion criteria: (i) studies that were out of the scope of sustainability transitions (e.g. studies that did not explicitly mention sustainability issues or did not apply sustainability transition frameworks); (ii) studies that were out of the scope of grassroots innovations (e.g. studies that mentioned grassroots, civic society or communities but did not study them). This action narrowed the number of relevant titles to 116. Through screening of the main bodies of the remaining articles in the light of the coding criteria, we excluded an additional 28 studies for the following reasons: (i) the terms power or empowerment were only mentioned once or twice and did not play a significant role in the theoretical development or the analysis; and (ii) peer-reviewed articles and book chapters that were no longer available online. Such filtering resulted in a final list of 88 works that were systematically reviewed as per the coding book, comprising 85 peer-reviewed articles, two conference papers and one book chapter. This list includes 75 empirical studies, four literature reviews and nine conceptual papers with some empirical illustrations. Figure 2.1. illustrates the systematic research process of relevant literature on grassroots innovations for our study.

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8   We include 'community' and 'civil society' as alternative keywords for 'grassroots innovations' because scholars sometimes use these terms when referring to the same phenomenon that characterises grassroots innovations.

Figure 2.1. Systematic research process
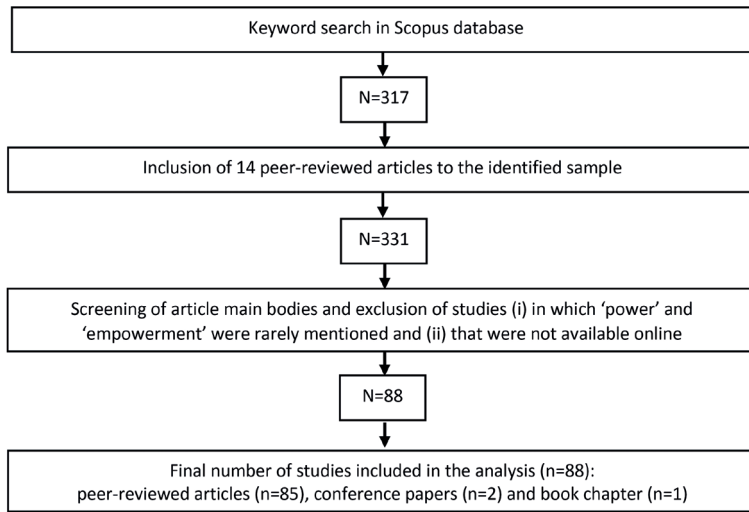
2.4. Results

2.4.1. Conceptualisations of power and empowerment

Conceptualisations of power and empowerment of grassroots innovations

We observed that in 18% of the 86 reviewed studies, scholars refer to different types of power without providing any conceptualisation. In these cases, the term 'power' is mainly used to convey the idea of specific actors' 'capacity' or an 'ability' to do something— e.g. grassroots innovations that 'gain and establish certain forms of credibility within the wider debate around the future of the energy transition' (Longhurst and Chilvers, 2019, p. 985). In addition, 'power' often implies a certain resource that some actors own in larger proportions than others—e.g. 'a coalition that included diverse civil society organisations and powerful allies in the state government' (Hess, 2019, p. 48). Similarly, the term 'empowerment' appears without explanation in 20% of the reviewed studies. In these cases, 'empowerment' seems to indicate a certain kind of actor, such as (dis) empowered communities, or a certain kind of process that actors go through, for example, 'citizen empowerment' (e.g. Martin, 2016; Ehnert et al., 2018; Mourato and Bussler, 2019). Furthermore, 81% of the 86 reviewed works explicitly employ notions of power and empowerment in their theoretical framings; however, the majority of these studies do not operationalise such notions, but rather merely refer to them in general terms when establishing the theoretical background. Therefore, we note that the larger share of the studied literature only superficially engages with theorisations of power and empowerment.

In the few studies that do operationalise theories of power, scholars most commonly draw on frameworks of action-theoretical power developed in sociology and political science such as Bourdieu's (2005) fields theory of power relations (Hess, 2103;2014), Wolf's (1990) anthropological theory of power relations (Lehigh et al., 2020), and Gui's (1991) and Hansmann's (1996) framework of decision-making power (Lambert et al., 2019). When scholars use concepts of power that have been developed in the sustainability transition literature, they frequently refer to power as a capacity of actors to mobilise resources to achieve a certain goal, as put forward by Avelino and colleagues (Avelino and Rotmans, 2009; Avelino and Wittmaywer, 2016; Avelino, 2017). Other concepts of action-theoretical power in sustainability transitions exist (e.g. Geels, 2014; Hoffman, 2013); however, with the exception of Ahlborg (2017), these concepts have not yet been applied in the context of grassroots innovations.

Among the small batch of 15 studies that operationalise theories of empowerment, most draw on frameworks of resource-mobilisation empowerment developed in the sustainability transition literature. In particular, scholars refer to the niche empowerment theory (see Smith and Raven, 2012) that is grounded in the MLP (Geels, 2002). To this end, grassroots innovations are defined as niches, or spaces 'where projects can develop away from the normal selection pressures of mainstream systems' (Seyfang and Longhurst, 2013, p. 881), and they function as 'protective' spaces of empowerment for the configuration and development of bottom-up innovations (Smith and Raven, 2012). In this view, empowerment manifests itself in two forms: 1) as a process through which grassroots innovations become more competitive and increase the diffusion of their socio-technical innovations in a given system (e.g. Martin et al., 2015; Grabs et al., 2016; Boyer, 2018; Kooij et al., 2018a); or 2) as an outcome that reflects two possible types of change that empowered grassroots innovations can bring about in a dominant system, namely fit-and-conform (incremental change) or stretch-and-transform (disruptive change; e.g. Feola, 2014; Kooij et al., 2018a).

Conceptualisations of power and empowerment tailored to grassroots innovations
The literature review revealed five conceptualisations of power and empowerment that were tailored to the phenomenon of grassroots innovations for sustainability transitions. These conceptualisations were developed through studies that mostly operationalise theories of power and empowerment developed in sociology and political science to inform research on the political struggles and achievements of grassroots innovations.[9] Table 2.3. describes these concepts, the traditions of thought in which they are rooted, and the types of power or empowerment to which they refer.

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9   We do not include frameworks developed in the literature for studies of power and empowerment in sustainability transitions more broadly rather than only grassroots innovations, for example Ahlborg (2017) and Avelino (2017).

Table 2.3. Conceptualisations of power and empowerment tailored to grassroots innovations

Author	Concept of power	Tradition of thought	Type of power or empowerment
Hess (2013)	Countervailing power: 'to show how a government entity (such as a city or state government) and a related industry (large financial and technology corporations) have formed alliances with distributed solar energy advocates that have provided them with the capacity to transform their field of position.' (p.849)	1. Pierre Bourdieu (2005): Fields theory 2. John K. Galbraith (1952): Countervailing power	Action-theoretical power
Schreuer (2016)	Empowerment is 'the increase of disadvantaged actors' ability to mobilise and use resources for their goals.' (p.1)	1. Hannah Arendt (1970): Power as productive and power as distributive 2. John Allen (2004): Power as an amorphous omnipresent form 3. Talcott Parsons (1963): Power as a resource that actors have at their disposal 4. Flor Avelino and Jan Rotmans (2009): Power in sustainability transitions	Resource-mobilisation empowerment
Laforge et al. (2016)	A four-part typology of different modes of interactions between grassroots innovators and government officials, namely containing, co-opting, contesting and collaborating.	1. Michel Foucault (1991): Governmentality 2. Gibson-Graham (2006): the politics of possibility	Action-theoretical power
Marletto and Sillig (2019)	Empowerment is conceptualised as 'the grassroots innovations' ability to influence the development of the societal function of reference; empowerment can manifest both through diffusion (to gain presence) and as changes in norms, routines and practices (e.g. new agriculture regulations).' (p.94)	No reference to any traditions of thought on empowerment	Resource-mobilisation empowerment
Gregg et al. (2020)	Power encompasses 'Internal power as a collective active initiative's ability to align internal interests, build networks, and mobilise resources, and external power as a collective active initiative's ability to seize opportunities and overcome barriers.' (p.17)	1. Charles Tilly (1997): resource-mobilisation approach to social movements	Action-theoretical power

2.4.2. Understandings of power and empowerment

Prevailing perspectives on power and empowerment of grassroots innovations

As shown in Figure 2.2., the grassroots innovation literature largely investigates action-theoretical power and resource-mobilisation manifestations of empowerment.

Figure 2.2. Types of power and empowerment used in the grassroots innovation literature
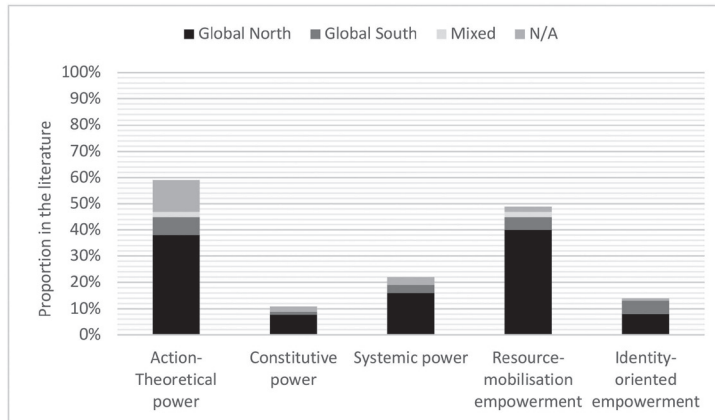
This finding indicates an epistemic orientation of the grassroots innovation literature to approach power and empowerment in instrumental and strategic terms. We observe a prominent analytical purpose of these types of power and empowerment, namely the analysis of influence (e.g. Ornetzeder and Rohracher, 2013; Kooij et al., 2018b) . However, we also note that this tendency is rather implicit, as none of the studies discusses the causal relations between power and influence. As such, these studies seem to have overlooked the differences and commonalities between the concepts of power and influence that correspond to different analytical foci and may require distinct theoretical perspectives (Morriss, 2002; Lukes, 2004).[10]

Additionally, Figure 2.2. shows that studies on power and empowerment of grassroots innovations are predominantly investigated in the Global North. In particular, studies explore cases in Europe (n=46) and North America (n=8). Grassroots innovations in Europe are most frequently studied through the lens of resource-mobilisation empowerment, whereas the action-theoretical type of power is more prevalent in the literature on grassroots innovations in North-America. Arguably, North American studies may use

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10   One way to distinguish the two concepts is proposed by Morriss (2002), who argues that power defines a dispositional capacity or ability that *may* be exercised, whereas influence necessarily describes an act that is exercised and affect something or someone.

action-theoretical notions of power because this approach reflects an account of power extensively debated by the U.S. political science community, in particular decision- and non-decision-making power (Lukes, 2004).

Most studies employ meso-level (44%) and macro-level (34%) perspectives to the study of grassroots innovations, whereas less attention is paid to the micro-level (10%). Overall, these studies substantially contribute to the literature with the lessons they draw from the political struggles of grassroots innovations to adjust to or contest repressive or productive actions—e.g. how local policies or development programs developed by regime actors affect grassroots actions and their transformative potential (Béal, 2012; Joutsenvirta, 2016)— as well as discussions on the implications of such lessons for systemic change driven from the bottom up— the action and potential of grassroots innovations to reconfigure local and global levels of politics (Ely et al., 2013; Blanco and León, 2017). Among the few studies that apply a micro-level perspective, we observed a preference to examine behavioural change. For example, Sharp and Salter (2017) investigate the impact of experiments with low-carbon living on participants' perspectives on sustainability transitions, and Roysen and Mertens (2019) analyse patterns of transitions in practices among the members of an ecovillage.

Diversity of understandings achieved by grassroots innovations scholars

Table 2.4. summarises the main contributions offered by grassroots innovations scholars to our understanding of power and empowerment in line with the various research areas on power and empowerment developed in sustainability transitions. We expand on these achievements in the remainder of this section.

Action-theoretical power

Scholars considering action-theoretical approaches to power often examine the different capacities and abilities of human actors involved in grassroots innovations. Such studies uncover the potential of grassroots actors to develop socio-technical innovations that, for instance, foster sustainable consumption patterns (e.g. Martin, 2016; Signori and Forno, 2019; Gregg et al., 2020) and reconfigure, to a greater or lesser degree, dominant political discourses and institutions reinforced by regime actors (e.g. Kooij et al., 2018b; Haderer, 2020). Many scholars also perceive this innovative and transformative potential of grassroots actors as a prefigurative capacity unique to grassroots innovations; they set examples of what democratic production and energy distribution look like in practice and provide alternative social norms and behaviour for visions of future societies (e.g. Cameron and Hicks, 2014; Grabs et al., 2016; Longhurst and Chilvers, 2019; Schmid and Smith, 2020).

Table 2.4. Main findings of the literature on power and empowerment of grassroots innovations

Research areas on power and empowerment in sustainability transitions	Type of power (Allen, 2021) and empowerment (Cohen, 1985)	Main findings
Actors' capacities and abilities	Action-theoretical power	- Grassroots actors develop socio-technical innovations that reconfigure dominant political discourses and institutions - Grassroots actors provide examples of sustainable practices and visions for future societies
	Constitutive power	- Grassroots actors develop socio-technical innovations for sustainability through their interactions with objects, infrastructure and energy, and their socially constructed meaning.
Effects of the exercise of power on socio-technical innovations for sustainability	Action-theoretical power	- Characterisation of the struggles between powerless grassroots actors and powerful state and market actors - Examination of the dominant-subordinate power relations that constrain grassroots actors to access material resources - Examination of advantages and disadvantages of the co-option of grassroots innovations - Grassroots actors contest and resist oppression and exclusion
Historical and situated constitution of power relations	Systemic power	- Grassroots innovations' potential to raise awareness about social hierarchies or dominant-subordinate power relations - Historical constitution of political systems that constraints grassroots innovations
Empowerment and disempowerment of actors	Resource-mobilisation	- Grassroots narratives of change strategically used to mobilise funding and collective action - Established grassroots translocal network as useful means to provide institutional support for local and marginalised projects - Grassroots internal communication stimulates community participation and the unfolding of social innovation
	Identity-oriented	- Grassroots innovations create networks of solidarity and strengthen the sense of community - Grassroots innovations mobilise technology for social inclusion and marginalised knowledge - Grassroots innovations facilitate the creation of critical consciousness of structural issues and power imbalances - Grassroots actors transform values and practises and feel empowered to address structural issues and power imbalances

Despite showcasing these different abilities of grassroots actors, scholars have also distinguished such capacities from those of elite actors. Such a distributed understanding of power also underpins the investigation of the intensions that shape the power relations between 'powerless' grassroots innovations and 'powerful' elite actors or social institutions—for instance, the dominant-subordinate power relations that constrain grassroots innovators' access to material resources (Ferguson and Lovell, 2015; Celata and Coletti, 2018; Lehigh et al., 2020). Particular attention is paid to the outcomes of such interactions, such as the advantages and disadvantages of the co-optation of grassroots innovations (e.g. Martin et al., 2015; Pel, 2015; Hess, 2019). However, a limited number of studies explore in-depth how grassroots innovations contest and resist oppression and exclusion (e.g. Laforge et al., 2016; Ahlborg, 2017; Rossi et al., 2019).

Constitutive power

Despite the calls for more research on the material participation of e.g. objects and infrastructure in the constitution of power and agency in sustainability transitions (Avelino et al., 2016), this research area remains more marginal in the grassroots innovations literature. Most studies examine forms of materiality in terms of resources managed by grassroots innovations. Implicit in this view is the notion that nonhuman elements are merely instruments passively used by humans to achieve their goals rather than active agents possibly influencing the outcomes of actions. Therefore, this view excludes nonhuman elements from the politics of sustainability transitions. In total, 11 out of the 86 reviewed studies employ a constitutive perspective of power and expand analyses of power of grassroots innovations to nonhumans. These studies highlight the role of objects, infrastructure and energy in co-constituting with human agents the capacities and abilities of grassroots innovations to develop bottom-up solutions for sustainability (e.g. Chilvers and Longhrust, 2016; Martiskainen et al., 2018; Ehrnström-Fuentes and Leipämaa-Leskinen, 2019). Examples of such co-constitution of power include the capacity to control energy practices and expenses that energy bills generate on socio-economically vulnerable participants of Energy Cafés (Martiskainen et al., 2018), but also how electricity infrastructure stabilises socio-economic and gender inequalities, which can either be reinforced or destabilised by a community-led hydropower system (Ahlborg, 2017).

Systemic power

Through the systemic power lens, scholars inquire into the historical and situated social conditions that act against or in favour of grassroots innovations. This approach is in line with research on sustainability transitions that emphasise the structural dimension of power in processes of societal change (Grin, 2010; Castán-Broto, 2015; Swilling et al., 2015;

Ahlborg, 2017). Some examples of research on systemic power include grassroots innovations' ability to raise awareness about social hierarchies or dominant-subordinate power relations that affect women's decision-making power in advancing transitions (e.g. Allen et al., 2019; Joshi and Yenneti, 2020). Similarly, Zhang (2012) describes the historical constitution of China's political system and highlights the constraints that this system currently imposes on community organisations that advocate for democratisation and political innovation in rural areas. Joutsenvirta (2016) argues that the neoliberal foundations of the Finnish taxation system, which government officials actively maintain, plays a crucial role in blocking the flourishing of a national economic grassroots network based on time exchange.

Resource-mobilisation empowerment

Through a resource-mobilisation approach, scholars emphasise an instrumental interpretation of how grassroots innovations relate to materials and discourses to build up their strategic abilities to achieve desired goals. In particular, several scholars employ this empowerment lens to study one type of grassroots innovations, namely Transition Towns (e.g. Seyfang et al. 2010; Seyfang and Haxeltine, 2012). For instance, attention is given to how narratives of change are strategically used to mobilise funding and collective action to expand the reach of social impacts (e.g. Feola, 2014) and how established translocal networks are a useful means to provide institutional support for local and often marginalised projects (Seyfang et al. 2010; Seyfang and Haxeltine, 2012).

Grassroots innovations are viewed through the lens of resource-mobilisation empowerment as vehicles for empowering citizens to take action—for example, through participation in policy-making processes (Frantzeskaki et al., 2016), redevelopment projects (Lehigh et al., 2020), and broader forms of political engagement (Frantzeskaki and Rok, 2018). Moreover, some studies examine the impact of urban policies on opening up possibilities for resource mobilisation, symbolic support or constraining the development of grassroots innovations (e.g. Lee et al., 2017; Wolfram, 2018).

Identity-oriented empowerment

A minority (13%) of the reviewed studies discuss empowerment in terms of individual or collective identity formation through grassroots innovations. A range of different drivers for empowerment is identified among this small batch of studies. Grassroots innovations create networks of solidarity and strengthen the sense of community, which is favourable to mobilise, on the one hand, technology for social inclusion (Smith et al., 2013), and on the other hand, marginalised knowledge (Udovyk, 2017; Souza et al., 2020). By exploring the new capacities enabled by technology and cultivating diversified marginalised

knowledge, grassroots innovations foster critical consciousness of structural issues and power imbalances in economic relations, knowledge production and political power (Smith et al., 2013; Udovyk, 2017; Souza et al., 2020). This process of social learning leads to changes in both the values and practices of grassroots innovation participants, who then *feel* empowered to address structural issues and power imbalances through individual or collective agency (Udovyk, 2017; Souza et al., 2020). For example, grassroots innovations support the recognition and engagement of women in collaborative forms of leadership that integrate climate, energy and gender equality concerns into the co-creation of visions and actions for just energy transitions (Allen et al., 2019).

1.5. Discussion

The results of the literature review indicate what concepts of power and empowerment grassroots innovations scholars use and what understandings they enable scholars to achieve. As illustrated in the previous section, some of the strengths of the grassroots innovations literature include the five conceptualisations of power and empowerment tailored to grassroots innovations, as shown in Table 2.3., and the main findings achieved by research on each of the different theoretical approaches to power and empowerment, as illustrated in Table 2.4. In this section, we first reflect on two important limitations of the current conceptual development of power and empowerment of grassroots innovations (Table 2.5.) and then propose avenues for future research. In doing so, we suggest that future grassroots innovations research can build on three promising but to-date under-represented research areas (Table 2.6.).

Table 2.5. Limitations of conceptual developments of power and empowerment of grassroots innovations and avenues for future research

Limitation	Implication	Avenue for future research
Restricted conceptualisations of 'power' and 'empowerment'	Scholars tend to use these terms as *explanans* (terms that contain the explanation), rather than *explanandum* (terms that require explanation)	More engagement with 'power' and 'empowerment' as *explananda*
Epistemic bias towards action-theoretical power and resource-mobilisation empowerment	Researchers overstress the exercise of power without considering its counterfactuals Limited understanding of grassroots innovations beyond their strategic abilities	Problematisation of the understanding of power as an overt, strategic and instrumental exercise to enable further documentation and analysis of other manifestations of power and empowerment of grassroots innovations

Table 2.6. Limitations of the conceptual development of power and empowerment of grassroots innovations and avenues for future research

Area of research	Implication	Avenue for future research
Conceptualisations of constitutive power and identity-oriented empowerment	Limited understanding of the role of collective identities (including ontologies, epistemologies, values) of grassroots innovations in sustainability transitions	Further development of research area on the process of collective identity formation in grassroots innovations
Micro-level analysis of power and empowerment of grassroots innovations	Limited understanding of the micro-politics of grassroots innovations	Further development of research area on the linkages between micro-level politics and macro-level societal change
Empirical studies on the Global South	Empirical studies concentrated on the Global North. There are missed opportunities for theory development	Further development of research area on grassroots innovations on the Global South to encompass notions and empirics of power and empowerment rooted

2.5.1. Main limitations of the current conceptual development on power and empowerment of grassroots innovations

An important finding of our review is that many studies in the grassroots innovation literature fail to conceptualise and operationalise the notions of 'power' and 'empowerment'. Frameworks of power and empowerment tailored to grassroots innovations do exist (Table 2.3.); however, they have not been widely used in this literature. In a fifth of the studies, the terms 'power' and 'empowerment' were not conceptualised at all. This finding highlights an implicit pattern within the grassroots innovation literature; scholars use these terms as *explanans* (terms that contain the explanation), rather than *explanandum* (terms that require explanation; Jessop, 2016). Jessop (2016) stresses the analytically fruitful nature of power when used as explanandum—i.e. when scholars provide a detailed specification of the context, attributes and effects of a given action and employ the concept of power to explain 'only what is left unexplained by contextual factors' (p.86). We recommend that grassroots innovations scholars not take the notions of power and empowerment for granted and rather approach these terms as *explananda*.

In particular, our study shows that grassroots innovations scholars predominantly investigate 'power' and 'empowerment' through two theoretical approaches, namely action-theoretical power and resource-mobilisation empowerment (Figure 2.2.). On the one hand, the grassroots innovation literature provides in-depth knowledge about the human agency involved in grassroots innovations during processes of societal change.

In particular, studies explore the strategic abilities of grassroots actors to align interests, mobilise resources and influence sustainability transitions. On the other hand, the predominant focus on action-theoretical power and resource-mobilisation empowerment leads the grassroots innovation literature to reproduce an epistemic bias of sustainability transitions scholarship oriented towards analysing power and empowerment as *overt exercises* and overemphasises their *strategic* and *instrumental* nature. This bias is consistent with the growing debate on the politics of sustainability transitions more generally, which is usually centred on the questions of who steer transitions process and in what ways and who are the winners and losers of sustainability transitions (Köhler et al., 2019).

The aforementioned bias is problematic as it fails to stimulate the conceptual development of the full range of forms of power and empowerment manifested in and through grassroots innovations for sustainability transitions. We contend that moving away from this bias in future research involves two considerations.

First, the grassroots innovation literature needs to problematise overt, strategic and instrumental conceptualisations of power and empowerment. Notably, more attention should be granted to critiques formulated within sociology and political science, such as the so-called *exercise fallacy* discussed by Morriss (2002)—i.e. the unfounded assumption that if one social actor has power, she/he always actively exercise it, which leads researchers to attach importance to the exercise of power without considering its counterfactuals. The power of grassroots innovations in the context of sustainability transitions should be addressed not only by the analysis of *how* they exercise power, but also by looking at their *dispositional abilities* that are enabled or constrained by given social conditions. We argue that in order to improve theorisations of power of grassroots innovations, the latter can be better investigated through the lens of constitutive or systemic approaches to power, which in turn sheds light on how the power of grassroots innovations is co-constituted during interactions between humans and nonhumans or how social hierarchies and institutions (e.g. policy frameworks or cultural norms) enable or constrain grassroots innovations to exercise their power (Allen, 2021), which is understood in this context as strategic power.

Second, better theorisations of power and empowerment of grassroots innovations would benefit from integrating non-strategic and non-instrumental conceptualisations of power. The aforementioned epistemic bias towards strategic and instrumental conceptualisations of power and empowerment overshadows existing analyses of other capacities and abilities of grassroots actors that diverge from these dominant conceptualisations of power and empowerment and, yet are potentially crucial to leverage social change. Cohen (1985) argues that overt, strategic and instrumental accounts of the power of social movements imply that they are *already organised* and inform analyses of how they produce negotiable

demands for particular resources of their interest; however, such accounts are absent when these collectives engage in processes of *collective organisation.* In this context, reflexive, contesting and discursive accounts of power come into play and inform analyses of social movements' capacities to perceive, signify and articulate the social practices, hierarchies and institutions that shape the production of their collective identity and actions. Certainly, these two distinct accounts of power are not mutually exclusive, and there is great potential to study how they relate to one another, such as whether and how the ability of grassroots innovations to develop strategies to influence societal change is enabled by their capacity to construct a favourable space for 'social engagement and experimentation, lifestyle changes, [and] awareness raising' (Mourato and Bussler, 2019; p.276), which are often suppressed by antagonist dominant power structures and actors (Smith and Stirling, 2018).

2.5.2. Marginal but crucial research areas on power and empowerment of grassroots innovations

There is ample room for further theoretical development in determining what constitutes the power and empowerment of grassroots innovations beyond the action-theoretical and resource-mobilisation theoretical approaches. In effect, our study reveals three research areas on grassroots innovations that explore power and empowerment beyond their overt, strategic and instrumental aspects, namely (i) the conceptualisation of constitutive power and identity-oriented empowerment; (ii) the discussion about power and empowerment at the micro-level; and (iii) empirical studies of grassroots innovation in the Global South (Table 2.6.). However, these research areas remain marginal in the grassroots innovations literature. Here, we add to our earlier call for future studies to research power and empowerment as *explananda* and advocate for further development of these research areas to help strengthen existing, yet under-represented, theoretical and epistemic approaches to power and empowerment of grassroots innovations. Doing so allows future studies to avoid further theoretical and methodological fragmentation. The literature already provides pertinent theoretical and epistemic tools that support a better grasp of the range of forms of power and empowerment of grassroots innovations.

Firstly, the existing literature on constitutive power and identity-oriented empowerment offers many insights on which modalities of human-nonhuman relationships are influential and how these, along with social norms, hierarchies, and institutions, enable or constrain grassroots innovations to construct a critical consciousness about structural issues and power imbalances that leads them to exercise their strategic power. Through the reshaping of collective identities, grassroots innovations contest neoliberal modes of socio-ecological interactions in food systems (e.g. Laforge et al., 2016; Hoey and Sponseller, 2018), engage

with certain types of technology and associated infrastructure to foster the inclusion and participation of socio-economically vulnerable groups in sustainability transitions (e.g. Ahlborg, 2017; Longhurst and Chilvers, 2019), and resist the unjust power relations that constitute the foundations of the global food system (e.g. Celata and Coletti, 2018; Rossi et al., 2019). Accordingly, we encourage future studies to explore questions of *collective identity* (including issues of worldviews and epistemology) and thereby enrich the current understanding of the constitution of grassroots innovations' power geared towards addressing social inequalities and environmental problems (Smith et al., 2013).

Secondly, we observe in the literature a latent potential to examine power and empowerment of grassroots innovations in sustainability transitions at the micro-level. Currently, micro-level analyses mostly concern behavioural change (Sharp and Salter, 2017; Roysen and Mertens, 2019). However, behavioural change is only one of the potential foci of micro-level analyses. Some studies of grassroots innovations have investigated how everyday forms of politics within grassroots innovations influence the speed and direction of transitions (e.g. Lange and Bürkner, 2018; Schmid and Smith, 2020) or how collective modes of governance and the ways in which grassroots actors negotiate meanings to be inscribed into practices can serve as examples for the governance of societal change (Chatterton, 2016). These are promising approaches to power and the empowerment of grassroots innovations at the micro-level; they highlight dynamics that to date have remained under-researched. These studies contribute insightful analyses of the propagation of change across levels, and therefore can, among others, inform future research to entail further investigation of the linkages between *micro-level politics in and of grassroots innovations and macro-level societal change*.

Lastly, a small portion of grassroots innovations studies investigates empirical cases in the Global South. Our review may have obscured research on grassroots innovations published in languages other than English, and it has focused more on the sustainability transitions research community than other communities that are engaged in applying a more global perspective toward researching social change at and from the grassroots— e.g., diverse economies, seeds of good Anthropocene (Bennett et al., 2016; Gibson-Graham and Dombroski, 2020). Nonetheless, it is known that sustainability transition scholarship has only recently geographically expanded to non-European and non-Western countries (Hansen et al., 2018), and this situation is clearly reflected in our review. Research on sustainability transitions outside of Europe and the Western world challenges established theoretical frameworks and concepts in this field (Hansen et al., 2018; Ramos-Mejía et al., 2018; Yuana et al., 2020). In our view, the same applies to concepts of power and empowerment, whereby grassroots innovations in the Global South often operate in contexts characterised, among other factors, by colonial legacies (e.g., of exploitation,

dependency), high levels of informality and social inequality, and epistemic plurality (Ramos Mejía et al., 2018). Although socio-environmental issues and associated grassroots innovations in the Global South 'prompts different power questions, and begs for different types of knowledge and interventions' than in the Global North, these different regions are interlinked and their historical and situated power relations are mutually constituted (Schipper et al., 2019, p.10). Accordingly, we envision research on power and the empowerment of grassroots innovations *outside the Global North* where political systems and the politics of transition may substantially differ from those of that region, hence having the potential to enrich conceptualisations of power and empowerment for subsequent application in different geographical contexts.

2.6. Conclusion

This systematic literature review aimed to take stock of conceptual developments of power and empowerment in the grassroots innovations literature and propose directions for future research to stimulate further theoretical development of these terms in the context of grassroots innovations for sustainability transitions. The results of the study reveal that the literature has discussed power and empowerment in diverse ways, ranging from the dispositional abilities of grassroots actors and the intentions behind their interactions with external actors to how they contest and reconfigure the social construction of their worldviews, knowledge and social identities to take action. However, this study indicates an implicit pattern within the grassroots innovation literature to use these terms as *explanans* (terms that contain the explanation) and evinces that scholars predominantly discuss power and empowerment in line with two theoretical paradigms, namely action-theoretical power and resource-mobilisation empowerment. These tendencies lead grassroots innovations scholars to reproduce an epistemic bias towards power and empowerment as *overt exercises* and overemphasise their *strategic* and *instrumental* nature. We propose three avenues for future research to overcome this epistemic bias, namely to: (i) address questions of collective identity; (ii) investigate the linkages between micro-level politics and macro-level societal change; and (iii) expand empirical investigations beyond the Global North. Grassroots innovations scholars would benefit by challenging the epistemic bias on power and empowerment as strategic exercises and engaging more in-depth with other characteristics of grassroots innovations, including identity, ontologies and values. Doing so will enable a better grasp of the range of forms of power and empowerment manifested in and through grassroots innovations that shape their struggles and achievements to leverage societal change.

Chapter 3

POSTCAPITALIST WORK RELATIONS

3.1. Introduction

Community-supported agriculture (CSA) is an agri-food provisioning scheme based on a partnership between the farmer and local consumers where local consumers pre-finance the costs of a harvest season in exchange for a weekly basket of fresh produce from the farm (Galt et al., 2019). Different CSA arrangements exist, and some encompass shared accountability of work duties among the CSA members next to the financial partnership (Feagan & Henderson, 2009; Pole & Gray, 2013). From a postcapitalist perspective (Gibson-Graham, 2006; 2008), CSA initiatives (thereon CSAs) can be viewed as spaces where alternative-capitalist (e.g., in-kind compensation of work) and non-capitalist (e.g., affective compensation of work) work relations exist next to capitalist (e.g., wage labour) ones. The postcapitalist perspective enables us to read the diversity of economic relations and unpack the achievements, contradictions and limitations emerging when CSA attempts to diversify work relations (Vincent & Feola, 2020).

Analyses of the types of work relations in CSAs abound. For instance, Nost (2014) compares the advantages and disadvantages of waged, voluntary, and reciprocal work performed in CSAs. Through workshares, CSA members exchange hours of work for a weekly share of the harvest and participate in a non-monetary exchange while also gaining gardening skills (C. J. Thompson & Coskuner-Balli, 2007; Wilson, 2013). Similarly, Watson (2020) argues that CSAs may cease the practice of alienating labour that is deeply inscribed in capitalist work relations. Aspects of non-alienated work performed in CSAs include the remuneration of the labour force by direct and tangible products (not by commodities or wages) that, in turn, encompass a more apparent use value than exchange value. For example, CSA work shareholders produce well-being and public goods in the forms of "food, friendships, exercise, learning, meaningful work, community" (Watson, 2020, p. 306). However, CSAs also face the risk of self-exploitation due to a perceived necessity to outcompete agricultural firms through long and intense work shifts in exchange for monetary compensation insufficient to ensure farmers' well-being (Galt, 2013). Additionally, the presence of interns and volunteers at CSA farms may signal solidarity but also the precarity of ecological farming as a viable and rentable agricultural venture (Ekers, 2019).

While accounts of work relations in CSA abound, it remains uncertain how this diverse configuration of work relations is made possible. Particularly, it is unclear how farm owners and CSA members negotiate the creation and perpetuation of postcapitalist work relations and for the benefit of whom; how the farm infrastructure influences the constitution and diversification of work relations; and whether CSA members tackle culturally institutionalised practices and discourses that hinder postcapitalist work relations. Scholars interested in work relations in CSAs have considered questions of power. They have shown, for instance, that CSAs implement democratic governance structures allowing members to influence

decisions and define work distribution (Watson, 2020) and prioritise autonomy over rules in the work arrangement between farm owners and apprentices (White, 2013). Others have shown that CSAs face several obstacles posed by policies and procedures to access land established in modern capitalist societies when creating alternative work relations (e.g., Galt, 2013; Ekers, 2019). This paper builds on these findings to further advance the understanding of how power relations shape the accomplishments and difficulties of CSAs to create and perpetuate diversified work relations while offering practical insights into transformations beyond capitalism in CSAs. Destructive modes of interaction with the social and natural environment are not simply a remediable side effect but rather a characterising trait of modern capitalist societies; thereby, challenging them is a fundamental endeavour for sustainability transformations (Feola, 2020; Feola et al., 2021).

This paper addresses recent calls for further theorisations of power that engage critically with the analysis of forms of power relations underlying issues of inequality and injustice in postcapitalist transformations (Gabriel & Sarmiento, 2020). It aligns with recent research that has emphasised the need for a deeper examination of questions of power in postcapitalist formations in agri-food systems. For example, Turker and Murphy (2021) and Morrow and Davies (2022) examined individual and collective power in agri-food grassroots initiatives to establish postcapitalist agri-food practices and Wilson and Mutersbaugh (2020) investigated conflicts between agriculture cooperatives and certification companies in attempts to forge postcapitalist futures. Drawing on the foundational work of Gibson-Graham (2006, 2008), this paper views transformations toward postcapitalist work relations as a political process of diversification that reattributes value to alternative- and non-capitalist work relations traditionally undervalued and invisibilised. To analyse how power shapes transformations to postcapitalist work relations, this paper employs a relational and multidimensional typology of power that includes human and non-human agency and historical and situated processes of constitution of agency and power relations (Allen, 2021). We combine those theorisations of power with the approach of Feola (2019) and Feola et al. (2021), who consider transformations as processes of unmaking capitalist relationships and practices that make space for the emergence of postcapitalist alternatives. We focus on the transformation of three aspects of work relations discussed in the CSA literature: alienation, monetisation, and care.

Three CSAs in Alentejo, South Portugal, serve as case studies. They are led by the farm owners, yet each one employs different levels of horizontal organisation. These cases provide a comparative ground to analyse how different power arrangements shape the achievements, contradictions and limitations of transformations towards postcapitalist work relations. The experiences of these three CSAs are inherently shaped by their regional dominant agri-food system that has been the main stage of the agrarian modernisation of

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Portuguese agriculture (Calvário, 2022). This paper contributes to research on agri-food grassroots initiatives for transformations to sustainability beyond capitalism by uncovering the processes through which postcapitalist transformations unfold in these three initiatives.

3.2. Theoretical background

3.2.1. Postcapitalist work relations

Postcapitalist analyses of diverse and community economies have formed the basis for studies of social transformations beyond capitalism in agri-food systems (Harris, 2009; Trauger & Passidomo, 2012; Vincent & Feola, 2020; Moragues-Faus et al., 2020; Rosol, 2020; Morrow & Davies, 2022; Sharp et al., 2022). A specific line of research has focused on work relations as a crucial aspect of postcapitalist agri-food system transformation. In particular, empirical studies of CSA, without using the terms and frameworks of postcapitalism systematically, have shown that these initiatives create diverse work relations that combine capitalist, alternative-capitalist, and non-capitalist work[1] at different phases of their operations (e.g. Cone & Myhre, 2000; Galt, 2013; Wilson, 2013; Nost, 2014; Vincent & Feola, 2020; Watson, 2020; Cristiano, 2021). The creation of diversified work relations in CSAs can be understood as an endeavour towards a postcapitalist arrangement of work relations in agri-food systems.

This study focuses on three interconnected aspects of work relations discussed in the CSA literature, and agri-food grassroots initiatives for transformations to sustainability more broadly: alienation, monetisation, and care. They are relevant areas of investigation to analyse the achievements, contradictions and limitations of CSA attempts to diversify work relations. Furthermore, they offer critical insights to inform our analysis of how attempts to create work relations that are non-alienated, non-monetised and full of care address issues of social injustice, environmental harm, and natural resource exploitation underlying capitalist work relations (e.g. Jarosz, 2011; Galt, 2013; Wilson, 2013; Watson, 2020).

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1   We follow Gibson-Graham's (2006) definitions of capitalist, alternative- and non-capitalist work. Capitalist work relations include paid labour in which employers and employees (or worker unions) negotiate the terms and conditions (e.g. salary, benefits, power relations) of the employment contract. Alternative-capitalist work relations, in turn, refer to labour that is paid differently than capitalist wages in the forms of collectively or individually defined living wages (e.g. cooperative salary) and payment-in-kind (e.g. labour in exchange for food and shelter). Non-capitalist work relations are unremunerated in monetary terms. Instead, they are compensated by affection (e.g. emotional support) or subsistence (e.g. food), and workers can directly enjoy the outcomes of their work (e.g. meals for themselves and their families). Conversely, non-capitalist work relations also encompass enslaved labour that is unpaid and unfree (e.g. sex slavery).

Alienation

The Marxist definition of alienation of work within capitalism comprises four key dimensions: (1) alienation from the product of labour, (2) alienation from the process of labour, (3) alienation from other workers, and (4) alienation from human potential (Marx, 1959 cited in Watson, 2020). In the context of agri-food systems, alienation results from the capitalist organisation of agri-food relations that depletes the use value of food and, in turn, imbues food with exchange value used for commodity trading and capital accumulation in market operations. Because the commodification of food has historically implied less favourable wages and benefits for workers along the supply chain, alternatives to capitalist organisations of agri-food relations must acknowledge and address workers' struggles (Minkoff-Zern, 2017).

Different examples of how CSAs address alienation when organising work relations include work performed by CSA members for a clearly defined purpose and outcome that they can directly enjoy (e.g., food); farm work that generates deeper connections between humans, other species, and the natural environment; and community work that provides a social support network for members (Watson, 2020). Also, in CSAs, farmers and co-producers experience excitement when working in the fields and discovering the practicalities of food production alienated by the capitalist separation of food production and consumption (C. J. Thompson & Coskuner-Balli, 2007). However, it is crucial to notice that capitalist relations of production dependent on wage labour may still exist in parallel to non-alienated work in CSAs, and waged work does not necessarily alienate workers (e.g., cooperatively defined wage) (Watson, 2020). Additionally, non-alienated work relations in CSAs may only partially signal transformation if these initiatives do not problematise the labour-intensive character of ecological farming and the need to promote and protect the well-being and benefits of workers (Minkoff-Zern, 2017). The maintenance and diffusion of non-alienated work relations is partially a result of the prefigurative capacity of these initiatives and also depend on their capacity to confront the capitalist labour regime in agri-food systems (Myers & Sbicca, 2015).

Monetisation

In the capitalist organisation of work, monetised work relations (e.g., paid and socially recognised work that produces commodities and services) receive more appreciation than non-monetised work relations (e.g., unpaid work that produces well-being) (Dengler & Strunk, 2018). Historically, the capitalist organisation of agri-food relations resulted in the increasing professionalisation of on-farm labour; yet, non-monetised work performed by family members and intermittent apprentices persist and can be understood as part of a broader negotiation of the "agrarian question", or the strategies employed by small-size farms to exist in the face of an expanding capitalist-led industrialised agri-food system (Ekers et al., 2016).

Different forms of non-monetised work relations in CSAs include workshare membership, which entails volunteering work for farming and distributing activities in exchange for a weekly vegetable basket (C. J. Thompson & Coskuner-Balli, 2007; Wilson, 2013). Also, additional voluntary work by CSA members and externals is offered as free input (Cristiano, 2021); for instance, volunteers and interns are temporarily employed to support farming work in exchange for access to agricultural knowledge, food, and shelter (Galt, 2013; Ekers, 2019). However, non-monetised work relations may cause work precarity in CSA farms, as evidence shows cases of self-exploration (Galt, 2013) and economic fragility (Ekers, 2019) in CSAs. Ekers et al.(2016) argue that the reliance of ecologically-oriented farms, like CSA farms, on interns, apprentices and volunteers to ensure their economic and ecological viability is inherently contradictory. It simultaneously signals (i) economic precarity of these farms vis-à-vis the competitive pressures created by the capitalist agri-food system and (ii) non-economic and moral motives to associate these forms of non-monetised work with their ethical and political engagements. These moral motives may also normalise precarious work conditions, instead of encouraging the active contestation of structural conditions that obscure the importance of wages, insurance coverage and other benefits for interns, apprentices and volunteers (Weiler et al., 2016). In line with Sbicca (2015b) and Levkoe and Offeh-Gyimah (2020) the presence of precarious working conditions of interns, apprentices or volunteers in CSAs that are justified by moral motives also relates to questions of class privilege and to activist or an unprotected worker subjectivities in these initiatives.

Care

In Western capitalist societies, reproductive work, such as care work performed to regenerate social and ecological lives, is understood as a "maintenance basis" for productive work, for example, food provisioning work performed to produce exchange value and generate an income (Dengler & Strunk, 2018). While the latter gains visibility and recognition in the public sphere (e.g., work legislations), the former is invisible and recognised only in the private sphere (e.g., internal organisation of the household). Historically, the invisibility of reproductive work in the public sphere of Western patriarchal societies has also reinforced gender inequality (Duffy, 2007). Besides this traditional conceptualisation of interhuman and social relations of care, debates on transformations to sustainable agri-food systems have discussed socio-ecological notions of care and stewardship in connection to the soil, the land and natural resources (Jarosz, 2011; Pungas, 2020).

Studies have provided evidence of how CSAs value work relations full of care (Delind & Fergunson, 1999; Cone & Myhre, 2000; Wells & Gradwell, 2001; Jarosz, 2011). Beyond food production and delivery, CSA members, particularly women, work for the maintenance of

the community by building a sufficiently large, committed, and stable membership (Cone & Myhre, 2000). CSAs characterise their resource management, food production, and other ecosystem interactions by employing care motives and practices (Wells & Gradwell, 2001; Jarosz, 2011). Yet, it remains a challenge to negotiate the valorisation of caring work relations and practices over productivist imperatives as CSA's economic and ecological viability are mainly associated with the latter approach to farm labour (Jarosz, 2011). Although CSAs do not deliberately challenge or alter structures of oppression that result in gender discrimination, they may create social spaces for women's self-identification and reproductive roles, including care practices such as community building (Delind & Ferguson, 1999).

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3.2.2. Power and postcapitalist transformations

We adopt the typology of relational power conceived by Allen (2021) that provides a typology of three distinct approaches to power: *action-theoretical*, *constitutive*, and *systemic* power. This multidimensional and relational conceptualisation of power deviates from understanding power as something "owned" and exercised by agents independently of its embedded context, implying a static manifestation of power incompatible with the changing dynamics inherent to transformation processes (Ahlborg, 2017; Raj et al., 2022). In Allen's typology, action-theoretical power is related exclusively to the realm of human agency. Its focus is two-fold: the *intentions* of those who exercise power towards others and the surrounding environment (e.g., the exercise of power-to act or refrain from action and the power-over others) and the *dispositional abilities*, or the human attributes, that are unequally distributed in society and may be exercised (e.g., decision-making power at the disposal of elite actors). Constitutive power expands agency to non-human elements and refers to power emerging from the relations between human and non-human actors (e.g., the hammer in a worker's hands). Systemic power accounts for the historical and situated processes that result in culturally institutionalised practices, legal institutions, and discourses that enable some human and non-human agents to exercise power over others or engender abilities in some actors but not others (e.g., energy distribution infrastructure stabilises socio-economic inequalities).

We conceptualise transformations as a "multilevel (individual, social, socio-ecological) and multidimensional (temporal, spatial, symbolic, and material) range of situated processes that can be used strategically to make space for sustainable alternatives" (Feola, 2019, p. 992). Such a perspective is relevant since societal transformation towards sustainability "necessarily rests on challenging and transforming capitalist institutions, and their cultural, social and political architecture" (Feola, 2019, p. 978). Rather than conceptualising transformations as a process of mere addition and innovation of

supposedly sustainable socio-technical solutions, values or practices, Feola et al. (2021) posits that more research is needed to examine how processes of unmaking unsustainable capitalist relationships and practices are possible conditions for transformations. Feola et al. (2021) introduced an inventory of possible processes of unmaking discussed across the social sciences, as shown in Appendix C. Previous work based on the concept of unmaking capitalism has been used to explore the construction of postcapitalist realities in a Colombian peasant movement (Feola et al., 2021) and the role of unlearning in the conversion to solidarity-payment schemes in two Dutch CSAs (van Oers et al., 2023).

These relational and political perspectives on power and transformations are employed in this paper to analyse how CSAs reattribute value to non-alienated, non-monetized and caring work relations. Different processes of unmaking capitalism may be a pre-condition for the revaluation of these three forms of alternative- and non-capitalist work relations. Based on similar experiences of unmaking discussed in the postcapitalist literature and studies on work relations in CSA, we select six concrete processes of unmaking capitalism: unlearning, sacrifice, everyday resistance, resistance, refusal and defamiliarisation (Feola et al., 2021). In particular, we examine how different power relations between CSA members, between them and non-human actors influenced by the regional and historical context, enable or constrain this transformation and the revaluation of work relations.

Table 3.1. shows how we operationalised the typology of power to six concrete processes of unmaking capitalism in transformations to postcapitalist work relations in CSA. The first column introduces the core idea of the selected process of unmaking. Then, the table cells of the remaining three columns illustrate how the three types of power could shape each process of unmaking in the context of work relations. The illustrative examples are based on similar experiences of unmaking discussed in the literature of work relations in CSAs and postcapitalist transformations.

Table 3.1. Power in processes of unmaking capitalism (adapted from Allen [2021] and Feola et al. [2021])

Processes of unmaking (core idea)	Types of power		
	Action-theoretical	Constitutive	Systemic
Unlearning (Consciously letting go of old values, norms, or beliefs)	Farm owners consciously let go of exploitative work routines	Farmers let go of old farm infrastructure that generates exploitative labour routines	Access to education defines who can critically reflect and let go of old exploitative working routines
Sacrifice (Giving up something for something else of higher value)	Consumers give up self-interest to do voluntary work for the community	Rotating shift schedules supports consumers to give up self-interest to do voluntary work for the community	Class privilege defines who can give up self-interest to do voluntary work for the community
Everyday resistance (Covert acts of opposition to abusive or oppressive power relations)	Farm employees act covertly to erode the legitimacy of the "boss"	Farm employees use heavy farming tools to slow down manual work (purposeful inefficiency)	The culturally institutionalised "boss–worker" relations foster farm employees to oppose hierarchy covertly
Resistance (Overt acts of opposition to abusive or oppressive power relations)	Farm owners act overtly to oppose environmentally harmful working relations	Farm owners oppose the adoption of agro-chemical inputs to avoid harming the soil and employees	Dominant discourse about the economic profit of agro-chemicals supports farm owners to organise protests
Refusal (Rejection of an imposed definition of a situation, subjectivity, or social relation)	Farm employees reject subaltern identities imposed by authoritarian figures	Farm employees reject the usage of certain work tools associated with subaltern identities	Gender norms determine different abilities in men, women, or non-binary to resist oppression
Defamiliarisation (Removal of an object from the sphere of automatised perception)	Consumers become dishabituated of shared understandings of the purpose of work	The dishabituation of industrial meanings attributed to food that hinder consumers to perform farm work	Access to education defines who can critically reflect and decide to become dishabituated of shared understandings of work

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3.3. Material and methods

3.3.1. Case studies

This study adopted a comparative case study approach. Comparing the similarities, differences, and patterns across various CSAs enabled us to document and analyse a multitude of power manifestations influencing the creation, consolidation, and perpetuation of work relations that are non-alienated, non-monetised, and full of care.

Three CSAs in Portugal served as case studies (Table 3.2.). For the sake of anonymisation, we refer to each selected initiative by different codes: CSA1, CSA2, and CSA3. We used the Portuguese CSA network platform to choose the case studies as the network offered a list of initiatives active for a minimum of two years. We expected work relations to change over time and selected initiatives that existed for multiple years. Transformations towards postcapitalist work relations in these CSAs have a tentative and incomplete nature and are currently in progress.

We selected three farms that have been converted to CSAs by their owners. We refer to these initiatives as farmer-led CSAs. We acknowledge that the results of this study are shaped by the micro-politics of this specific type of CSA, which may differ from other types of CSAs, such as consumer- or cooperative-led CSAs. While the three cases were farmers-led, each employed different levels of horizontality in their internal decision-making processes and distribution of work tasks and responsibilities. By levels of horizontality, we refer to the degree to which decision-making and work duties were organised through participatory means and employed shared work accountability among all members.

We distinguish among three general types of members across the three CSAs, as identified by CSA members themselves. Farm owners are the owners and main inhabitants of the farmland who manage and execute farm activities. Co-producers[2] are the local consumers who pre-finance the costs of a harvest season, receive fresh produce weekly, and can participate in decision-making and work activities organised by the CSA. Employees are the waged workers performing food production or administrative work under temporary, part-time, or full-time contracts. The farm owners across the three cases are new entrants.

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2   The selected CSAs adopted the term "co-producer" as an alternative to the term "consumer". Generally, the new term intended to spur active participation and shared accountability over the economic viability and labour for agri-food production, in contrast to the passive role of consumers performed in conventional market transactions. Nonetheless, this behaviour and mindset shift remained a challenge for most of the CSAs, as the work share of co-producers was significantly smaller than the work performed by farm owners and employees, and their involvement in work tasks was optional.

In CSA1 and CSA3, the co-producers are primarily urban dwellers, while in CSA2, they are mainly neo-rurals. The employees in CSA1 have a range of agriculture skills, from semi-skilled to highly skilled, and they are predominantly from rural areas, with a few from urban backgrounds. In CSA3, the employees are mainly semi-skilled in agriculture and live both in rural and urban areas. In contrast, CSA2 operates without any employees. Furthermore, the payment scheme varies across the three cases: in CSA1, co-producers can choose between monthly or semi-annual payments, whereas in CSA2 and CSA3, co-producers make monthly payments.

Table 3.2. Characteristics of the three cases of farmer-led CSAs in Portugal

		Case studies		
		CSA1	**CSA2**	**CSA3**
History	**Farmland acquisition**	Farm owners' inheritance	Farm owners' inheritance	Land bought from own savings
	Start of farm operations	1990	2009	2017
	Start of CSA operations	2015	2019	2019
Membership	**Number of farm owners (fall 2021)**	1	2	2
	Number of employees (fall 2021)	35	-	2
	Number of co-producers (fall 2021)	160	24	26
Food production	**Farm size (HA)**	600	3.4	2
	Farm activity	Horticulture and Livestock	Horticulture	Horticulture
	Approach to agriculture	Agroecology	Agroecology	Agroecology
	Labour	Employees	Farm owners	Farm owners; employees; co-producers
CSA administration	**Logistics**	Farm owners; employees; co-producers (intermittently)	Farm owners; co-producers	Farm owners; employees; co-producers
Organisation	**Level of horizontality**	Low	Medium	Medium–High

The three CSAs are located in Alentejo, South Portugal. Historically, this region has played a significant role in the modernisation of the Portuguese agri-food sector (Calvário, 2022) and is currently characterised by extensive monoculture and greenhouse farms that primarily cultivate olives, berries and other commodities (INE, 2021). While the rural population is declining and aging (INE, 2022), a growing neo-rural population has been formed mainly by immigrants from other European urban centres seeking a lifestyle change (A. M. Esteves, 2017; Novikova, 2021) and from south Asian countries looking for work opportunities in farms and greenhouses to fulfil their social aspirations and economic necessities (Pereira et al., 2021).

3.3.2. Data collection

Data on the three case studies were collected through desk research and fieldwork conducted between April and November 2021. Through participant observation, we gained a better grasp of the work relations and farm operations singular to each case and a more in-depth understanding of power relations between members of the CSA and between them and the farm infrastructure. Participant observation was carried out by the first author who visited the three farms for two to four weeks between June and November 2021 and participated in daily working routines at the farm, delivery of CSA baskets, and CSA meetings and assemblies (online and in-person). During the farm visits, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 36 CSA members (at least 10 members of each CSA). The first people interviewed in each initiative were the farm owners, who had an overall view of the different farm operations and CSA members. The co-producers and employees interviewed were selected through snowball sampling. Interviews were conducted in Portuguese, the mother tongue of both interviewer and participants. Topics covered in the semi-structured interviews included the motivation and objectives of farm owners, co-producers, and employees to work for the CSA; the explanation of their different tasks, responsibilities, and roles and how they related to those of other members of the CSA; the explanation of how decisions are made and who participates in them; and the achievements and difficulties to foster the participation of different CSA members.

3.3.3. Data analysis

We used the conceptual framework presented in Table 3.1. for coding the interviews, internal documents of the CSAs, and fieldwork notes. Coding enabled us to identify instances of unmaking capitalism entangled in the making of postcapitalist work relations and how they were shaped by different manifestations of power in the reconstructed transformation in each case study. We then organised the findings based on three work relations aspects: alienation, monetisation, and care. While the identification and choice of

these aspects were informed by a literature review of work relations in CSA, their relevance for this study emerged from the empirical investigation of the specific case studies. In the final stage, we used the conceptual framework (Table 3.1.) to contrast the results across the case studies, which led to further insights and suggested further explanations of how power enabled or disabled (un)making in the CSA's attempts to diversify work relations.

3.4. Results: Power in the unmaking of capitalist work relations for making postcapitalist ones

By and large, the creation of the three CSAs diversified work relations at the farms. These initiatives negotiated to different extents alternatives to capitalist relationships and practices in their internal work arrangement. While their attempts to revalue work relations that were non-alienated, non-monetised and caring were successful at times, they also faced barriers in their endeavour and reproduced aspects of capitalist work relations, such as hierarchal organisation, self-exploitation and discrimination.

In the three cases, the CSA fostered the participation of CSA members in decision-making, logistics, and food provisioning operations, and it created new tasks and responsibilities (e.g., community building, organisation of assemblies, coordination of distribution points) and new kinds of worker subjectivities. In terms of non-alienated work relations, the reoccurrence of CSA assemblies, help-out gatherings, and informal events across the three cases factored in the de-alienation of co-producers and employees by involving them in and increasing their awareness of farm operations. While in CSA3 we observed progressive accountability of co-producers and employees over the CSA, in CSA1 and CSA2 such accountability remained limited. Particularly, hierarchal interactions between farm owners and employees, co-producers and volunteers hindered the creation of non-alienated work relations. Concerning non-monetised work relations, CSA2 and CSA3 mainly relied on non-monetised work performed by temporary volunteers and co-producers. In contrast, CSA1 expanded the number of monetised work relations performed by salaried employees to manage production and logistic operations. The involvement of co-producers and volunteers with unpaid work was entangled with class privilege and simultaneously signalled the economic fragility of these initiatives, with the exception of CSA1 who afforded salaried employees. Regarding work relations full of care, the three CSAs reinforced the financial viability of ecological farming operations and increased the visibility of care work traditionally invisibilised. Yet, all three cases struggled to resist culturally institutionalised practices that devalued care work, which in some cases also resulted in gender discrimination.

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Table 3.3. summarises the main aggregate findings concerning how power enabled or constrained processes of unmaking capitalism entangled in making work relations that are non-alienated, non-monetised, and full of care across the three CSAs. The concrete cases of unmaking identified refer to particular moments when CSA members individually or collectively faced a barrier to implementing their alternative- and non-capitalist work relations and saw the need to rethink or abandon established capitalist relationships and practices. In the remainder of this section, we present these results in detail.

Table 3.3. Power shaping the unmaking of capitalism in the making of work relations that are non-alienated, non-monetised, and full of care

Entanglement of unmaking capitalism in the making of postcapitalist work relations	Power	
	Enabling the unmaking of capitalist work relations	**Constraining the unmaking of capitalist work relations**
Unmaking the alienation of work for making non-alienated work relations	• Farm owner exercised power to let go of the productivist paradigm and create meaningful and enjoyable work relations. • The synergetic relations between workers and the farm infrastructure constituted meaningful and enjoyable work relations. • CSA members gave up leisure time to work for the CSA. • Farm owners exercised power to decentralise tasks and responsibilities and empowered co-producers to take accountability for CSA operations. • Co-producers and employees created pejorative terms and refused to participate in meetings under the terms defined by the farm owner to implicitly undermine his power over them. • CSA members exercised collective power to resist hierarchical work relations among farm owners, employees, and CSA members.	• Farm owners centralised decision-making power to distribute tasks and responsibilities among CSA members. • The historical and situated constitution of boss–worker relations in the agricultural sector reinforced the centralisation of decision-making power on farm owners.

Entanglement of unmaking capitalism in the making of postcapitalist work relations	Power	
	Enabling the unmaking of capitalist work relations	Constraining the unmaking of capitalist work relations
Unmaking the monetisation of work for making non-monetised work relations	• Co-producers sacrificed individual preferences to pursue the collective responsibility of farm owners' well-being. • Co-producers refused monetary compensation for their voluntary work, which helped transform hierarchical work relations into collaborative ones. • CSAs enabled the creation of new producer and consumer subjectivities and empowered CSA members to discard the service mentality.	• The refusal of monetary compensation for work performed for the CSA was entangled with class privilege. • Acting upon the new producer subjectivities in CSAs was a contradictory experience that demotivated producers to pursue collaborations with co-producers.
Unmaking the structural separation of productive and reproductive labour for making work relations full of care	• The negotiations over the name and meaning of the CSA basket de-automatised taken-for-granted perceptions and enabled the creation of new meanings to interactions in the CSA. • Farm owner exercised power to foster collective responsibility for farm infrastructure. CSA members inscribed meaning into farm infrastructure that fostered collective action. • Rotating schedules conceived by CSA members partially constituted hindrance to the devaluation and invisibility of care work. • Female farm owner exercised power to resist both visible and invisible gender inequality associated with gender division of work.	• Devaluation of care work deeply inscribed in the local culture hindered collective accountability of housekeeping tasks. Only some CSA members sacrificed personal preferences to perform care work for the community. • Gender norms shaped the division of work and distribution of value across productive and reproductive work.

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3.4.1. Unmaking the alienation of work for making non-alienated work relations

Results confirm Watson's (2020) claim that CSAs counter the alienation of labour as members work to produce outcomes that contribute to the well-being of members and the farm's ecosystem. Firstly, co-producers who frequently participated in farm activities expanded their awareness of the practicalities and challenges of producing and distributing food. Such an awareness, in turn, enabled co-producers with limited experience in agricultural production to build an affirmative attitude in decision-making meetings, as pointed out by one co-producer:

> I became aware that the croutons were handmade and that it was a job that didn't pay off [...]. When someone makes a proposal [during decision-making meetings], one is aware of this sort of practical information, right? [...] Participation becomes more conscious. (co-producer, CSA1)

Secondly, work relations that produce outcomes directly benefiting CSA members included co-producers who worked voluntarily in the field to help grow the food they consumed and co-producers who took on unpaid administrative activities for the CSA. One co-producer explained their motivation to take on the responsibility of creating newsletters for the CSA members:

> I met many interesting people in the CSA who became my friends! I met, for example, a person with whom I'm working now [...] I think I can make a small contribution like this [production of the CSA newsletter] to maintain and make this community flourish, let's say, to bring more interesting people into it. (co-producer, CSA2)

Thirdly, CSA farm owners and co-producers strengthened their social ties during work activities. One co-producer commented on the importance of organising shared meals during the help-out gatherings at the farm:

> The mealtime is a time for conviviality, and it is a time that is part of the whole working day as a community. There is more fraternisation, and this part of social involvement is closely linked to the concept and the objectives of the CSA. Hence the importance of mealtime being greater here than in a traditional job, or in traditional ways of working in offices or industries. (co-producer, CSA3)

As this brief overview clearly shows, some work relations at the three CSAs included a level of non-alienation. These results need to be interpreted with caution, as creating non-alienated work relations in CSAs is not a comprehensive process and alienation may still exist in different levels of their internal work arrangement. When trying to create non-alienated work relations, different capitalist relationships and practices were actively unmade. We highlight four concrete processes of unmaking capitalism identified in the three CSAs, as shown in Table 3.4. We discuss them in turn.

Table 3.4. Evidence of processes of unmaking in the making of non-alienated work across the three CSAs

Non-alienated work relations	Process of unmaking	Case		
		CSA1	CSA2	CSA3
Awareness of the activity of labour itself	Unlearning	-	-	Farm owner rejected the productivist paradigm
Production of outcomes that directly benefit the CSA members	Sacrifice	Co-producers and farm owners give up leisure time to work for the CSA	Co-producers and farm owners give up leisure time to work for the CSA	Co-producers and farm owners give up leisure time to work for the CSA
Work relations that strengthen social ties	Resistance and everyday resistance	Co-producers and employees implicitly opposed the farm's hierarchy	-	Co-producers object to the centralisation of decision-making power on farm owners

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Unlearning: Unlearning refers to the conscious decision not to act or think in "old" ways (Appendix C). One farm owner of CSA3 rejected the dominant productivist arrangement of the farm infrastructure that prioritised high yields by reinforcing exploitative work routines. The deliberate rejection of productivity as the main driver for arranging farm infrastructure and farm work enabled the creation of enjoyable work routines. The farm owner decided to no longer arrange the horticulture beds in ways that required unpleasant positions and long working shifts. In doing so, the farm owner expected co-producers to enjoy their voluntary work at the farm, thereby increasing their participation in farming activities. As explained by the farm owner, they noticed that co-producers with limited farming experience worked less comfortably in the field when the size of the horticulture beds prioritised space for growing crops instead of room for people to work:

> With corridors of 50 cm, the crops can grow, but the corridors are very narrow, and it's challenging for someone to be there. With more than one-metre corridors, it is enough for people to weed, even lying down, without feeling too uncomfortable. So I started to change that [working] dynamic a bit as a consequence of what I observed. People who are not used to working on the land often revealed strategies to me, and I also realised in them what bothered me. […] It is not only the productive nature [of farming] that matters, but the social nature of making people feel good when they come to work in the field. (farm owner, CSA3)

From a standpoint that intersects *action-theoretical power* and *constitutive power*, the power of the farm owner to create enjoyable work relations and encourage co-producers' participation in farm activities was expanded by a type of farm infrastructure that prioritised synergetic interactions between co-producers and the horticulture beds instead of productivity and exploitative work routines.

Sacrifice: Acts of sacrifice entail a solid moral component that prioritises long-term benefits for the community over short-term individual benefits (Appendix C). Farm owners and co-producers across the three CSAs gave up individual self-interest to prioritise work that benefited the CSA. Acts of sacrifice were identified more frequently in CSA2 and CSA3 than in CSA1. Arguably, this might be the case because, in CSA1, most of the CSA operations were executed by the farm employees, which made CSA1 less dependent on co-producers than in the other two cases. In CSA2 and CSA3, co-producers gave up their leisure time to participate in CSA activities. One co-producer of CSA3 explained their motivation to join in help-out gatherings during the weekend, despite feeling tired from other working activities:

> One day at the field, and I get body aches. [The farm owners] might get even more body aches, as they work in the field every day. So I do think it is good that there is at least one day [help-out gatherings] that we [co-producers] are there to support them. (co-producer, CSA3)

Similarly, farm owners gave up their leisure time to work for the CSA. As explained by one farm owner of CSA2:

> [Before the creation of the CSA] we were always working. There was not much difference between weekdays and weekends. In reality, today is the weekend, and we are working too. (farm owner, CSA2)

As initiators of CSAs, farm owners envisioned a horizontal organisation of CSA operations and shared responsibility with co-producers to cope with the risks and benefits of agriculture. However, the degree of participation of co-producers in the organisation and operations of the CSA often fluctuated, creating internal organisation challenges. For instance, farm owners of CSA3 had to continuously hold co-producers accountable for their commitment to distributing the vegetable boxes one week per month. Farm owners of CSA2 often reminded co-producers to clean and organise the distribution point after collecting their vegetable baskets. One co-producer of CSA2 viewed the additional work performed by farm owners as beneficial for the collective:

> [The farm owner] organises activities for co-producers to help out with farm work and social events for everyone to discuss current topics.[…] I see that [the farm owners], who are the main drivers [of the CSA], do things beyond what they should do. (co-producer, CSA2)

From an *action-theoretical power* perspective, these findings indicate that CSAs relied on the *ability* of farm owners and co-producers to give up leisure time to work for the CSA. However, different motives influenced farm owners' and co-producers' sacrifice, also in relation to class privilege. While moral and solidarity motives underlay co-

producers' sacrifice, and their involvement in CSA work was optional, farm owners financially depended on the CSA and gave up expected leisure time on weekends to meet the production demand. Additionally, the viability of CSAs depended on farm owners' *ability* to coordinate the decentralisation of and co-producers' commitment to tasks and responsibilities to achieve their promises of horizontal organisation and co-responsibility.

Resistance and everyday resistance: Resistance is an overt, intentional action that opposes structures of domination (Appendix C). Co-producers in CSA3 resisted through visible acts the centralisation of decision-making power on farm owners to strengthen just and collaborative relations in the CSA. Co-producers objected to the internal division of tasks and responsibilities that allocated a coordination role and greater decision-making power to farm owners to claim decision-making power to co-producers. While some co-producers accepted farm owners' coordination, others were critical of the hierarchal interactions that such a coordination role imposed on the CSA:

> Within a CSA, the centrality is in the peasants who make your food, but at the same time you want a community that supports them. There's centrality and a hierarchy, in some way, even though this centrality is not wanted. […] My point is: centrality is hierarchy. In other words, who makes the decisions for the group is not the group. (co-producer, CSA3)

During a help-out gathering in October 2021, CSA3 co-producers voiced concerns about the uneven distribution of work tasks and responsibilities coupled with the centralisation of decision-making power on farm owners. Subsequently, CSA members organised a mapping exercise to identify the different tasks in the CSA and to whom they were assigned with the aim to reconfigure task division and allocate more decision-making power to co-producers. For instance, the following CSA assembly in March 2022 was the first one prepared and facilitated by co-producers and not the farm owner.

In contrast, everyday resistance refers to disguised, seemingly invisible acts of opposition to abusive power (Appendix C). Co-producers and employees of CSA1 covertly resisted the centralisation of decision-making power on the farm owner. In particular, co-producers and employees commented on tactics to resist the centralisation of power performed during meetings. One employee commented that the farm owner implemented sociocracy techniques to facilitate team meetings without previously consulting employees. Although the employee did not fully grasp the format and the purpose of sociocracy and felt demotivated to participate, they attended the meetings fearing possible remarks from the farm owner about their absence. The employee commented that they purposefully did not speak nor contribute to the conversations as a tactic to discreetly show discontent and opposition to the team meetings. Similarly, one co-producer commented that, together

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with other co-producers, they referred to the farm owner's participation in CSA meetings as "[name of the farm owner]splaining", or a type of condescending explanation of agenda points, in an attempt to undermine the legitimacy and authority of the farm owner.

When interrogated about the decentralisation dynamics in their CSA, interviewees of CSA1 articulated a historical constitution of the work culture in Portugal that perpetuates a hierarchical relation between land owners and farm workers.

> [The workers' cooperative meeting] was long, and [the farm owner] spoke the most. I feel that he doesn't want it to be that way. I feel he doesn't want to be the land owner and the boss. The person that people see in this position of hierarchy, right? [...] Fortunately, he tries to employ people in the area and is creating jobs for locals, which is great. However, what you get there is the culture of local people, especially the older generations, which is very worker–boss oriented. (employee, CSA1)

Two considerations of the role of power in (everyday) resistance can be made upon the instances mentioned above. Firstly, in *action-theoretical power* terms, achieving a participatory and horizontal organisation of work relations in the CSA relied on the farm owners' *ability* to decentralise power. However, decision-making power remained *centralised* on farm owners. Additionally, in systemic power terms, the constitution of work relations between farm owners and farm workers was influenced by a historical and situated process that allocated more decision-making abilities to farm owners than farm employees. Secondly, through a perspective that intersects *action-theoretical power* and *systemic power*, co-producers' power to decentralise decision-making power was exercised through covert or explicit acts of resistance. In both cases, we observe that resistance decreases farm owners' perceived or actual decision-making power, resulting in the increased power of co-producers and employees.

3.4.2. Unmaking the monetisation of work for making non-monetised work relations

By creating the CSA, farm owners diversified the work relations on the farm and attributed a higher appreciation to non-monetised work relations. Three examples of alternative and non-monetised work relations that were highly appreciated in and across the three cases are worth describing. Firstly, in the case of CSA3, voluntary work by co-producers became increasingly essential to compensate for the uneven division of physical efforts and logistical work among farm owners and co-producers. When farm owners expressed their desire for summer holidays in 2020 and 2021, a group of co-producers self-organised a farm stay to allow farm owners to take holidays and keep the CSA operations going. Secondly, in the three CSAs, farm owners and co-producers often articulated the importance of permanent

and temporary forms of voluntary work to decrease the operational costs of the CSA and secure a dignified income for farm owners and farm workers. Lastly, CSA members often highlighted the sociability character unique to their community interactions. Sociability, in practice, refers to the interactions based on care among co-producers, farm owners, and farm workers. Careful interactions also extended to the relation between CSA members and the farms' ecosystem, according to one co-producer of CSA3:

> As long as we don't go there to exchange work for money, that's a fundamental change that has repercussions on everything else. And actually, we're going there to restore a bit of life as it is, and life implies social relationships. It implies a synergetic relationship with the land, food, and production. (co-producer, CSA3)

Although the creation of the three CSAs led to diversification of work relations in the farm and farm operations, CSAs did not eliminate waged work. Regarding the determination of wages, CSA2 and CSA3 farm owners' salaries were discussed and agreed upon through collective processes. Conversely, in the case of CSA1, the farm owner tried to collectivise the decision of wages with the creation of the workers cooperative in 2018; however, the cooperative faced participation issues, and the farm owner continued determining wages alone. Additionally, the creation of CSA1 led to an increasing professionalisation of farm and CSA operations, as shown by the increase of salaried employees hired and the substitution of temporary volunteers by long-term interns from universities.

We identified different processes of unmaking capitalism in the attempt to value non-monetised work relations across the three cases (Table 3.5.). We discuss them in turn.
Sacrifice: A group of CSA3 co-producers with limited farming experience let go of the need for certainty and agriculture expertise to voluntarily run the CSA farm while farm owners went on vacation. One co-producer explained:

> I had little experience with farming. I didn't know much about it. Sometimes we [with the farm owners] spoke about horticulture. Maybe I relied on this little confidence, like "If I were to be alone on the farm, I wouldn't kill all the tomato plants". (co-producer, CSA3)

Additionally, another co-producer of CSA3 explained that their individual choice to run the farm was part of a collective effort. Co-producers, volunteers, and one employee gathered to organise the farm stay, allowing them to experience less responsibility pressure:

> I didn't really feel the weight of responsibility… I didn't know much about agriculture, but [the farm owners] explained what to do, and [the volunteer] knew what needed to be done for watering the fields. The employee also came in the mornings to organise. (co-producer, CSA3)

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Table 3.5. Evidence of processes of unmaking in the making of non-monetary work across the three CSAs

Non-monetary work relations	Process of unmaking	Case		
		CSA1	CSA2	CSA3
Voluntary work to even out physical efforts and logistical work among farm owners and co-producers	Sacrifice	-	-	Co-producers let go of certainty and expertise to run the farm while farm owners go on holidays
Voluntary work to decrease the operational costs of the CSA to secure a dignified income for farm owners and farm workers	Refusal	Co-producers refuse monetary compensation for their work	Co-producers refuse monetary compensation for their work	Co-producers refuse monetary compensation for their work
Work relations that attribute higher appreciation to sociability	Unlearning	Co-producers unlearn the logic of monetary compensation	Farm owners and co-producers discard the hierarchal interactions between producers and consumers	Farm owners and co-producers discard the hierarchal interactions between producers and consumers

Through a *systemic power* perspective, CSA3 created internal social norms that prioritised the collectivisation of individual needs. Co-producers needed to sacrifice to pursue the collective responsibility of farm owners' well-being. Although sacrifice was a personal choice, it was a joint effort that, in turn, helped alleviate responsibility pressure. Additionally, the collective organisation of the farm owners' vacations helped allocate higher value to voluntary work. It provided co-producers with non-monetised outcomes in the forms of fulfilment and solidarity to enable others to enjoy rest and amusement.

Refusal: Refusal refers to the individual rejection of some affiliations to reconfigure social relations (Appendix C). Across the three cases, co-producers rejected the notion that work is legitimised only through monetary compensations to engage with and hold accountability over voluntary work for the CSA. In CSA2, co-producers who wrote the CSA newsletters, organised events, or set up administrative documents refused to be compensated for their working hours as they viewed voluntary work as necessary for the project's viability. In the case of CSA3, co-producers realised that their financial contribution to the CSA resulted in low remunerations for the farm owners. During a CSA

meeting organised to address this situation, co-producers refused a proposal to increase their financial contribution. Instead, co-producers re-articulated the value of voluntary work to compensate for the non-paid working hours of farm owners. One co-producer of CSA3 explained the implication of refusing monetary remuneration for the organisation of work in the CSA:

> [The farm owners] are not properly paid for their work. Therefore, our participation in help-out gatherings and the distribution shifts must compensate for certain farm activities we don't do. So, we pay in kind. We pay [the extra part of their remuneration] through our services. We pay one part financially and the other part through work. (co-producer, CSA3)

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While money is an abstract form of compensation that allows workers to pursue their interests, community work prioritises the production of concrete collective benefits, for example, social bonds and knowledge sharing. Another CSA1 co-producer refused monetary compensation for their voluntary work as they prioritised the social results and the possibility of building knowledge through their engagement:

> The help-out gatherings were proposed by us [co-producers] to foster our participation in the project. If I'm not mistaken, I think it was [the farm owner] who spoke many times about compensating people [...] When people proposed [the help-out gatherings], they proposed it to help, to help and to understand better how things are done [at the farm]. That's it, without expecting anything in return. (co-producer, CSA1)

From an *action-theoretical* standpoint, refusing monetary compensation fostered a *reconfiguration of hierarchical work relations* that prioritised *collaborative work relations*. Asserting their voluntary intention to perform work for the community, co-producers stopped the reproduction of a relationship between the farm owner and worker in which the former is the one who solely benefits from the latter's work. Instead, co-producers work for the community voluntarily because they also benefit from the dynamics and outcomes of communitarian work.

In *systemic power* terms, the refusal of monetary compensation for work performed for the CSA is entangled with class privilege. While the CSA enables the rearrangement of hierarchical work relations to prioritise collaborative ties between members, the CSA remains the primary source of income for farm owners to secure their livelihoods. Refusing monetary compensation for the work performed for the CSA was not equally manifested among CSA members. Non-monetised work in CSAs was possible only for those who had already secured their income elsewhere. Arguably, the refusal of monetary compensation may function as a diagnosis of socio-economic disparities and privilege within CSAs.

Unlearning: By engaging with the CSA, co-producers and farm owners questioned the taken-for-granted "service" mentality underlying conventional market-based interactions between producers and consumers to create relationships of physical and emotional proximity between all CSA members. Generally, the "service" mentality implies a hierarchical relation between producers and consumers. Consumers detain purchasing power and demand a type of service or product from food producers that meet their expectations in exchange for monetary payment. One co-producer of CSA2 explained how they discarded the "service" culture after joining the CSA:

> I think that when people commit to the CSA they adopt a certain mentality. [...]. There is empathy! Also, because of the type of relationships created [in the CSA]. In the city, we experience a distance [between producers and consumers], this mentality of: "I am paying. Therefore, I want to be served". (co-producer, CSA2)

Similarly, a CSA3 co-producer pointed out that discarding the "service" mentality is a continuous conscious effort in CSAs, particularly in the case of new co-producers who have never participated in a CSA before:

> [The CSA] is a completely revolutionary idea to acquire food. We have to repeat these ideas many times. It is not enough to say it in an assembly and write it in the minutes. It is the cultivation of this culture. Why? Because it goes against the idea of the market, which is you pay for the service, you pay for everything, and you won't work anymore. And if you work, you get paid. (co-producer, CSA3)

Through the lens of *action-theoretical power*, discarding the "service" mentality may provide CSA members with new abilities and agency necessary to ensure non-alienated and active participation in the collective. Yet, such an unlearning experience can be contradictory. For example, CSA2 enabled a cheese producer to explore non-monetised work collaborations with co-producers. Although they valued the sociability aspect of collaborative work, they felt uncomfortable adopting a new role in the CSA. Meeting the expectations associated with consumers and work partners did not come naturally to them particularly because the relationship producer—co-producer included a monetary exchange (e.g., co-producers paid for her cheese) at the same time as a non-monetary collaboration (e.g., co-producers assisted in the logistics of ordering and distributing the cheese). At times, they felt uncomfortable negotiating their preferences for the logistics due to the persistent expectation of prioritizing the needs of co-producers, as they were the ones paying for the work.

3.4.3. Unmaking the structural separation between productive and reproductive for making work relations full of care

In the capitalist organisation of work, reproductive work, such as care work to regenerate social and ecological lives, is understood as an (invisible) "maintenance basis" for productive work, such as food provisioning work performed to produce exchange value and generate an income (Dengler & Strunk, 2018; Pungas, 2020). Results indicate attempts by the selected CSAs to create agriculture and community practices that attributed visibility and recognition to care. We highlight two of these attempts and the aspects of the separation they aimed to reconcile. Firstly, CSAs articulated discourses and new language to deliberately recognise and valorise reproductive work. In CSA2, CSA members discussed their financial contribution beyond the payment for the productive work of farm owners and their reproductive work to regenerate the farm's ecosystem.

Similarly, members of CSA3 proposed to name the vegetable basket "share" to shift the attention to the collective act of sharing the produce provided by the farm's ecosystem. Also, the farm owner, employees, and co-producers of CSA1 explained that the CSA was conceived to shift farm operations from the market economy to a planned economy. Doing so enabled a farm organisation that operated following the rhythm of agroecological work, as explained by the farm owner:

> CSAs are not an instrument of the conventional market; instead, they are a planned economy model. CSAs are closer to the temporality of agroecology than the market since agroecology encompasses long-term decisions, while the conventional market encompasses short-term decisions. (farm owner, CSA1)

Secondly, in CSA3, farm owners and co-producers explicitly organised reproductive tasks at distribution points and the farm. Parents organised child care and children's activities among themselves during help-out gatherings and school vacations. Co-producers running the distribution point created a schedule to manage housekeeping tasks and foster rotating roles. Farm owners deliberately systematised housekeeping and cooking tasks on the farm to secure gender equality. Yet, results confirm previous findings that gender issues are not central to CSA debates yet shape everyday interactions and micro-politics (Homs et al., 2020). Despite some attempts to discuss unequal gender division of reproductive work in smaller groups, CSA3 co-producers commented that most reproductive tasks were mainly performed by women, and such an issue never became a prominent topic in the collective debates. These attempts to create work relations full of care in CSAs were influenced by the unmaking of different aspects of the structural separation between productive and reproductive work (Table 3.6.).

Table 3.6. Evidence of processes of unmaking in making work relations full of care across the three CSAs

Work relations full of care	Process of unmaking	Case		
		CSA1	CSA2	CSA3
Discourses and new language to deliberately recognise and valorise reproductive work	Defamiliari-sation	-	Disruption of common sense that co-producers pay only for the product	De-automatisation of the commercial meaning of a CSA basket
	Unlearning	-	Discard the belief that in a CSA, the farm infrastructure was the only responsibility of farm owners	-
The explicit organisation of reproductive tasks	Resistance and sacrifice	-	-	Resistance to the devaluation and invisibility of care work. Individual sacrifice to perform care work to benefit the group.
	Resistance and refusal	-	-	Visible and invisible objection to the devaluation of care work and gender inequality

Defamiliarisation: Defamiliarisation refers to de-automatising an act or object by showing it in a novel or unusual light to make someone conscious of differences (Appendix C). Members of CSA2 and CSA3 engaged in collective activities that aimed to deliberately de-habituate their automatised perceptions of some of their CSA operations to generate visibility and higher valorisation of work performed to regenerate the farm's ecosystem. In the case of CSA2, a group dynamic exercise organised during the assembly in July 2021 invited co-producers to indicate whether they paid for the products in the CSA basket or the work performed by farm owners to regenerate their farmland and be able to share the harvest with the co-producers. The group dynamic exercise intended to disrupt the common sense that co-producers paid only for the provisioning work and not the care work to regenerate the farm's ecosystem.

Similarly, participants of the CSA3 assembly in October 2021 discussed the proposition to re-name the CSA basket from "basket" to "share" to de-automatise the commercial perception often attributed to a vegetable basket. Some co-producers contested the proposition, claiming the new name was an empty signifier. Nonetheless, the proposal triggered reflexivity. As explained by one CSA3 co-producer:

> The basket, the share. More and more, I realise that it is a sample of the farm because that's what you can collect on a given day, right? Which is a result of [the farm owners'] work, of all the co-producers and co-producers, to keep that land fertile and productive, and so on. (co-producer, CSA3)

From a *constitutive power* perspective, introducing a new name and meaning to the CSA basket triggered more profound reflexivity among co-producers about their perception of and interaction with the basket. Although co-producers contested the term "share", the new name proposition allowed them to realise that their role as co-producers and users of the "share" constituted a broader commitment to the regeneration of the soil. In other words, the interaction with a food basket called "share" sheds new light on the practice of producing or acquiring food aimed at by the CSA.

Unlearning: During the CSA assembly in July 2020, one of the CSA2 farm owners discarded the belief that farmers were exclusively responsible for improvements in the farm infrastructure. This argument reinforced shared accountability for the maintenance of the farm. The other CSA2 farm owner explained the incident:

> [During the CSA assembly] I said that we [farm owners] really wanted to have a greenhouse. Then, [the male farm owner] intervened and said: "We don't want to have a greenhouse. We, the CSA, need to have a greenhouse to guarantee winter production!" Wow, what an insight! [...] After that, co-producers got involved in all the phases for the greenhouse construction: fundraising and budget estimation. (female farm owner, CSA2)

By stressing that "we" did not mean the farm owners but rather the CSA as a whole, the farm owner displaced the market-based belief that farm owners alone are responsible for covering the expenses of agriculture work. Subsequently, as explained above by the CSA farm owner, farm owners and co-producers gathered to organise a crowdfunding campaign to construct a greenhouse at the farm.

This unlearning process enabled a stronger alliance between CSA members and farm infrastructure to generate human and ecosystem benefits in *constitutive power* terms. On the one hand, the greenhouse construction strengthened group cohesion, revealing individual abilities and capacities that were not yet collectivised. On the other hand, the greenhouse enabled greater variety of produce during the winter season and generated ecosystem resilience to cope with challenging weather conditions (e.g., winter frost).

Resistance and Sacrifice: Members of CSA3 attempted to resist the reproduction of a work organisation that devaluated and invisibilised housekeeping tasks to create a greater sense of collective accountability for reproductive work. In the autumn of 2020, co-producers running a distribution point received a complaint from their hosting institution alleging poor maintenance of the place. During an internal meeting to address the issue, co-producers discussed housekeeping tasks and created a rotating schedule to make these tasks explicit and encourage collective accountability.

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On the one hand, the discussion helped create a greater sense of care for the location of the distribution point, as pointed out by one co-producer:

> At the beginning, we were not very careful. In comparison to how it is now when we put an effort in cleaning tasks, the [distribution point] is very tight every week. (co-producer, CSA3)

On the other hand, the care for the location did not expand to the whole group. As explained by the same co-producer, the rotating schedule did not succeed, and housekeeping tasks continued to be performed by the usual suspects. According to them, one possible reason is the fact that these tasks are not paid:

> Lately, we have discussed that the same people usually perform these tasks. And there are [schedule] sheets. These sheets were made for this purpose [encourage rotating tasks]. But maybe it is because these tasks are not paid…Well, we have never talked about it… But yes, in fact, that could be a reason. (co-producer, CSA3)

The rotating schedule failed to resist a devaluation and invisibility of housekeeping tasks, and a careful relationship with the space remained limited to a few co-producers. Some of these co-producers, in turn, commented that they had to sacrifice their individual preferences to benefit the whole group.

> When I arrive at the [distribution point], I check what is needed to do and how to contribute to logistic tasks, like locking [the doors of the distribution point] and cleaning. This has been an issue since the beginning. These tasks are not explicit for everyone, also as rotating tasks. I don't necessarily like to take on these tasks every week, but it ends up being like this. But this is obvious, right? This is about self-management. We need to organise. (co-producer, CSA3)

From a *constitutive power* perspective, the rotating schedule enabled more visibility to care work; however, it did not constitute sufficient hindrance against the devaluation of care work. The rotating schedule empowered co-producers to systematise housekeeping activities in the distribution point but insufficiently disrupted a devaluation of care work more deeply ingrained in the local culture that, among other possible reasons, attributes more value to traditionally paid work than to traditionally unpaid work, such as housekeeping.

Resistance and Refusal: The female farm owner of CSA3 objected to the devaluation and invisibility of her housekeeping, cooking, and farm work to ensure a just distribution of care and provisioning tasks that preserved gender equality. Objections happened through covert and overt acts.

Currently, the male farm owner is in charge of farming for the CSA, and the female farm owner is responsible for administrative tasks for the CSA. When asked how such a division came to be, both farm owners answered that it was a natural process. However, each had a different view on how gender norms shaped the organisation of tasks. For the male farm owner, he took on farming activities because, as a father, he was the one available for the job. The female farm owner, instead, was available for administrative work as her motherhood duties prevented her from doing farm work:

> The tasks of a mother with a newborn child ended up draining a lot of energy from her that would be necessary to work in the field, tilling, planting, etc. And this turns out to be a job for the father because he is available. […] Besides, I was tired, and the last thing I wanted to do was to be held on the phone or the computer. [*laughs*]. [The female farm owner], on the other hand, although she didn't like it very much either, because she also wanted to be in the garden, ended up being the one available [to perform administrative work]. (male farm owner, CSA3)

The female farm owner implicitly objected to the devaluation of her farm work by the male partner by refusing to perform some farm work she did not feel valorised to do:

> He does some of the farm work that I don't do. I don't know how to do it. And I decided that I didn't want to know, either. For instance, watering plants requires a lot of work. I don't care [..] I already have a lot of other things to do. He does it, and if you want to do it too, or to learn how to do it: cool! I don't want to. (female farm owner, CSA3)

Moreover, the female farm owner pointed out the influence of gender norms on the uneven distribution of value across the work she and her partner do. She explicitly objected to her partner's devaluation of housekeeping and cooking tasks by re-arranging responsibilities and holding him accountable for some of these tasks:

> It is a gender issue, and I won't lie. […] Because there is also this thing that sometimes some work is not as recognised as it should be […] Because there were these moments, "I do this, and this, and this all. Therefore, I cannot cook" [referring to her partner][…] Now we have organised these tasks. I and the others that come here [at the communal kitchen] cook. He does the dishes in our house. I do the dishes here. We have been fine-tuning after so many discussions about this issue. Now we have found a balance. (female farm owner, CSA3)

From a *systemic power* perspective, gender norms influenced the *uneven value distribution* to provision and care work. The farm owners embodied the expectations of motherhood and fatherhood duties when distributing work among themselves. Such a distribution originated when their child was born and had an enduring effect on the organisation of farm work and CSA responsibilities. In *action-theoretical power* terms, the female

farm owner exercised *invisible and visible power* to object to the unjust patterns of such distribution. Arguably, her invisible objection may have enabled her to self-affirm her role on the farm despite the level of valorisation conceived by her partner. But also, such objection resulted in a coping mechanism to deal with a devaluation of her farm work deeply ingrained in her partner's perception of gender division of farm work.

3.5. Discussion and conclusion

3.5.1. Power in transformations towards postcapitalist work relations in CSAs

Our study analysed the role of power in transformations towards postcapitalist work relations in three CSAs. We looked at postcapitalist transformations as a political process of diversification that reattributes value to alternative- and non-capitalist work relations traditionally undervalued and invisibilised (Gibson-Graham, 2006, 2008). We combined three theorisations of power (action-theoretical, constitutive, and systemic) (A. Allen, 2021) with an approach to transformations as processes of unmaking capitalist relationships and practices to make space for postcapitalist alternatives (Feola, 2019; Feola et al., 2021) (Table 3.1.). We used this conceptual framework to analyse how power enabled or constrained the transformation of three aspects of work relations — alienation, monetisation, and care — based on empirical evidence from three CSAs in Portugal.

This paper makes two significant contributions to research on CSA and similar agri-food grassroots initiatives pursuing transformations to sustainability beyond capitalism. Firstly, it tackles the lack of research on the processes through which postcapitalist transformations unfold by identifying and examining processes of unlearning, sacrifice, resistance and everyday resistance, defamiliarisation, and refusal that pre-condition the making of postcapitalist work relations in CSAs (Tables 3.4.–6.). Secondly, our study addressed recent calls for further analyses of power in postcapitalist transformations (Gabriel & Sarmiento, 2020; Wilson & Mutersbaugh 2020; Turker & Murphy, 2021; Morrow & Davies, 2022) by offering new insights into action-theoretical, constitutive, and systemic manifestations of power shaping instances of (un)making in transformations to postcapitalist work relations (Table 3).

Notwithstanding the relatively limited sample, this study offers valuable insights about transformations in CSAs in practice. A critical finding of our analysis is that the three CSAs analysed created diverse work relations among co-producers, employees, and farm owners, as previously discussed in the literature (e.g., Thompson & Coskuner-Balli, 2007;

Wilson, 2013; Ekers, 2019; Watson, 2020); yet, the reattribution of value to alternative- and non-capitalist work relations is uncertain, and these CSAs reconfigure only to a limited extent the hierarchal, exploitative, and discriminatory relations that characterise capitalist work relations (e.g., Duffy, 2007; Dengler & Strunk, 2018). In particular, two approaches to diversifying work relations in CSA emerge from this study. First, the three CSAs implemented participatory mechanisms, such as sociocracy, to structure the distribution of tasks and responsibilities and to negotiate the reattribution of value to work activities traditionally obscured within capitalism. Second, farm owners encouraged meaningful and enjoyable work relations through synergetic human–non-human interactions as noticed in the co-construction of the farm infrastructure to enhance participation of members and collective accountability over CSA operations in CSAs 2 and 3, and through attempts to re-signify the interactions between farming work, co-producers, and the CSA basket in CSA3. We have shown that these approaches partially helped the selected CSAs achieve their envisioned postcapitalist work relations. While these CSAs focused on creating solutions to enable postcapitalist work relations that are non-alienated, non-monetised, and full of care, they insufficiently unmade unbalanced power relations established in capitalist work relations.

We highlight two unbalanced power relations reproduced in the selected case studies that constrained transformations to postcapitalist work relations. On the one hand, the selected CSAs were founded and led by farm owners, and their leading role reproduced hierarchal ties among them, co-producers, and employees. Such hierarchal relations created difficulties for maintaining non-alienated work relations. In contrast to Watson (2020), who argued that democratic governance structures implemented by CSAs enable all members to influence decisions and define work, and White (2013), who stressed that work arrangement between farm owners and volunteer workers favour autonomy, our results showed that the leading role of farm owners in all three CSAs centralised abilities and knowledge on them and hindered the participation of co-producers and employees in decision-making meetings and the arrangement of tasks and responsibilities. On the other hand, collaborative interactions among farm owners, employees, and co-producers to decide and execute CSA operations were limited by the historical and situated constitution of uneven power relations, as also discussed by, for example, Galt (2013) and Ekers (2019). In CSA1, the participation of employees and co-producers in decision-making or unpaid activities of the CSA was scarce due to their region's traditional boss–worker hierarchal culture. Similarly to Sbicca (2015b) and Levkoe and Offeh-Gyimah (2020), while farm owners and co-producers of CSA 2 and 3 sacrificed their leisure time to work for the CSA, their sacrifice motives differed and, in the case of co-producers, sacrifice was entangled with class privilege. In CSA3, the invisibility of care work in capitalist systems, as pointed out by Dengler and Strunk (2018), hindered co-producers' further accountability for maintaining

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their distribution point. Also, gender norms influenced an enduring devaluation and uneven distribution of care work between the male and female farm owners, as discussed by Wells and Gradwell (2001).

3.5.2. Implications for studies on agri-food grassroots initiatives for transformations to sustainability

We propose two implications for the scholarship on agri-food grassroots initiatives for postcapitalist transformations of agri-food systems, including studies of CSAs. Firstly, we observed that across the three cases, the power to *decentralise* tasks and responsibilities and to involve members in CSA operations became increasingly *centralised* on farm owners. The centralisation of decision-making power on farm owners reinforced hierarchal relations in all of the three CSAs. Subsequently, co-producers and employees relied on farm owners' coordination to participate in the initiative instead of feeling empowered to autonomously support or contest farm owners' decisions and actively shape the distribution of tasks and responsibilities across CSA members. This case is similar to the paradox of empowerment put forth by political scientists (Hardy & Leiba-O'Sullivan, 1998; Avelino, 2011; Schreuer, 2016). Schreuer (2016) explains that "the notion of one actor empowering another through the provision of particular resources is inherently paradoxical, as this makes the supposedly empowered actor newly dependent on this channel of resource" (p. 134). While some CSA members appreciated the coordination role of farm owners, the cases of CSA1 and CSA3 illustrate visible and invisible attempts of co-producers to resist and diminish the power of farm owners. Conversely, unlearning hierarchal relations between CSA members can be a contradictory personal experience (see Feola, 2019; van Oers et al., 2023), as illustrated by the case of one associated producer of CSA2. These findings highlight some of the barriers and opportunities faced by the three Portuguese CSAs for decentralising power relations and suggest that in order to fully accomplish transformations towards postcapitalist work relations, these initiatives may benefit from implementing horizontal and participatory mechanisms and actively deconstructing internal hierarchies and the centralisation of power.

Secondly, and in relation to the previous point, the selected CSAs showcase how the internal negotiations for a just and meaningful attribution of value to different forms of work relations in CSAs are strongly influenced by power relations established by structures of oppression. Our findings showed that collaborative interactions among farm owners, employees, and co-producers to decide and execute CSA operations could be limited because of the historical and situated constitution of uneven power relations. For instance, the case of CSA1 illustrates how participatory decision-making mechanisms aimed to resist and overcome hierarchical work relations are constrained by a traditional boss–worker

culture embodied by employees. Since the beginning of the 20th century, large agricultural estates have prevailed in the Alentejo region, where CSA1 is located, due to a state-led programme to modernise the agricultural sector (Calvario, 2022). The modernisation of agriculture in Alentejo was characterised by little mechanisation of farms and heavy dependence on long-term waged workers, resulting in the growing proletarianization of the rural population (do Carmo, 2010). Also, the illiteracy rates of the rural working class remained high (Russo, 2014). Such a political conjecture historically allocated more power to land owners than farm workers and consolidated hierarchical work relations. Therefore, we contend that future research on agri-food grassroots initiatives must seriously consider and actively address oppressive power relations that are ossified in the local and cultural context where these initiatives are situated and influence the implementation of participatory and horizontal decision-making mechanisms.

To conclude, we encourage future research on the role of power in tensions between deconstruction and construction in CSAs that embrace the *gender* dimension. Our analysis of transformations towards postcapitalist work relations revealed how gender norms shaped the internal organisation of work and influenced the uneven attribution of value to care and provisioning work to male and female farm owners. Arguably, these results remained limited to the case of unmaking the structural separation between reproductive and productive work because the literature we referenced on this topic offers several critiques of capitalist organisations of work and their implications for the reproduction of gender (in)equality (Duffy, 2007; Pungas, 2020). Although the gender dimension is of particular interest to the case of reproductive and productive work, this dimension is not exclusive to this case. Gender studies and feminist analyses of CSAs have discussed how these initiatives create social spaces for women's self-identification and reproductive roles, including community building (e.g., Cone & Myhre, 2000; Wells & Gradwell, 2001; Jarosz, 2011). Future studies on power in CSAs can benefit from deeper engagement with the gender dimension, for instance, to analyse how individual trajectories of becoming a male, female, or queer farmer shape the tensions between deconstruction and construction within collective processes of transformations.

3

Chapter 4

INCLUSION OF QUEER PEOPLE

4.1. Introduction

> Often, [male senior neighbouring farmers] offer us a hand because they want to 'help
> the girls'. For them, we must make do because we are two women, and there isn't
> a man responsible for the farm. They see us like 'poor little ones. They don't have a
> man to get away with, so they need someone to help'. (Ana)

Ana is a queer[1] artisanal food producer and goatherder living with her partner on their
farm in rural Alentejo, South Portugal. Ana is one of the founding members of community-
supported agriculture Guadiana (GUA). GUA is a collectively organised CSA where members
(producers and co-producers[2]) share accountability for various CSA operations such as
food production, distribution, community building and decision-making. Co-producers
pre-finance a harvest season through a six-month contract, securing the producers'
income and receiving a weekly share of the harvest. In addition to the six-month contract,
co-producers can purchase directly from a curated list of local artisanal producers
specialised in cheese, bread, nuts, jam and fruits sourced from farms ranging from 1.7
to 3.4 hectares. The findings suggest that rural queer people[3], like Ana, experience their
queerness with greater dignity when participating in CSA compared to their interactions
with other local agri-food actors unrelated to the CSA. Such contrasting experiences
reveal heteropatriarchal discrimination[4] at the foundation of the agri-food system in rural

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1   The term 'queer' is highly contested and central to distinct yet interconnected debates. For in-
    stance, queer identity politics focuses on the experiences, identities and lived realities of LGBTQIA+
    individuals (Butler, 1990). Queer political theory explores the intersection of queer issues with
    power, governance, law and public policy (Preciado, 2018). Queer ecology examines the inter-
    section of queer issues with ecological concerns, environmental justice, and biology (Sandilands,
    2002). In this study, 'queer' and 'queerness' are used in alignment with research on queer identity
    politics in rural and agriculture communities (Leslie, 2017; Wypler, 2019; Hoffelmeyer, 2021) and
    refer to individuals who are non-heterosexual and non-cisgender.
2   GUA adopted the term "co-producer" as an alternative to the term "consumer". Generally, the new
    term intended to spur active participation and shared accountability over the economic viability
    and labour for agri-food production, in contrast to the passive role of consumers performed in con-
    ventional market transactions. Nonetheless, this intended behaviour and mindset shift remained a
    challenge, as co-producers had a significantly smaller work share than farm owners and employees,
    and their involvement in work tasks was optional.
3   The profile of rural queer people can be highly diverse and entails gender and sexuality experienc-
    es in relation to other aspects of the social life in the countryside (e.g., class, family constellation,
    race). A well-known distinction in the profile of rural queer peoples in rural queer debates is the
    one between queers born-and-raised in the countryside and neo-rural queers (Bell & Valentine,
    1995). In this study, I refer to "rural queer peoples" generally as a group of rural queer dwellers,
    either born-and-raised, or not, in the countryside.
4   Heteropatriarchal discrimination "is a set of racialized, gendered, and sexualized power relations
    that privileges those who are white, cisgender, men, and/or heterosexual and limits human resourc-
    es for those who do not and cannot fit these boxes" (Wypler, 2019, p. 984). Heteropatriarchal logics
    may be incorporated into one's subjectivity and inform discriminatory acts across and beyond all
    genders.

Alentejo. However, it remains uncertain whether and how GUA, an initiative that focused on agri-food collaboration and not on gender and sexuality activism, influenced its queer members' experiences with gender, sexuality and agriculture in rural Alentejo.

Currently, the queer population in Portugal benefits from a legal framework that ensures equal rights in different segments of society, as well as protection against discrimination and hate crimes; yet, such achievements are a work in progress, and gender and sexuality inequalities remain engrained in social structures and everyday life in the country (Esteves et al., 2021; Santos, 2022). Five decades of right-wing dictatorship (1926–1974), 80 years of the criminalisation of homosexuality (1912–1982), and prevailing Catholic and heteronuclear family values are historical legacies that hinder further progress in social change towards gender and sexuality diversity and inclusivity (Santos, 2022). Notwithstanding these barriers, queer people in GUA experience empowerment in spite of the prevailing heteropatriarchal social order in rural Alentejo.

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In this study, I investigate whether and how queer members of GUA feel empowered to become active and thriving members of the CSA. I contribute to research on rural queerness that has discussed the participation of queer farmers in CSA yet calls for further scrutiny of the struggles and achievements of gender and sexually underrepresented groups in this agri-food provisioning scheme (Leslie, 2017). Research on rural queerness has examined structural and everyday factors that shape the pursuit of flourishing queer livelihoods in the countryside. In doing so, prior research has contributed to a heterogeneous view of sexual and gender diversity in rural life (Gorman-Murray et al., 2013; Johnson et al., 2016); challenged the "metronormative" bias in LGBT movements and scholarship that has mainly focused on the lives of urban queers (Halberstam, 2005); and unveiled the constraints caused by the family farm institution on queer farmers (Hoffelmeyer, 2020). To examine queer empowerment in CSA, I draw on the notion of "relational agriculture" (Leslie et al., 2019), which sheds light on "the often-hidden ways that gender and sexual relations organize food production on all farms, calling for gender and sexuality to be understood as central to the study of food systems, rather than a niche topic" (p. 867).

Thus far, the literature on CSA has overlooked the intersection between sexuality and agriculture, let alone the extent to which CSA is a viable model to counter heteropatriarchy. Much remains to be explored. Does CSA offer the means for queer members to pursue their envisioned agri-food system and livelihoods in the countryside and if so, how? What are the possible manifestations of queer empowerment in CSA, including its contradictions and limitations? How do different dimensions of this agri-food provisioning model enable queer empowerment, and how do they differ from other forms of community action? To address this gap, this paper builds upon studies on gender relations in CSA that provide a conceptual lens to approach CSA as a political space where gendered concerns about agri-

food practices, norms and structures are expressed and where emancipatory strategies, particularly for women, are lived through everyday politics (Delind & Ferguson, 1999). These studies view empowerment in agriculture in relation to gender, thus offering an analytical framework consistent with "relational agriculture" (Leslie et al., 2019).

I conducted participant observation, interviews and focus group involving 12 queer and three cis-gender heterosexual members of GUA. This study finds that while GUA was not originally designed to empower marginalised gender and sexual groups in rural Alentejo, the leadership of queer producers and their recurrent gatherings in queer-owned farmland proved vital for queer empowerment and active engagement in the collective. GUA provided a supportive environment for queer members to collaborate with both queer and cis-hetero[5] people while confidently expressing their queerness. Conversely, they faced heteropatriarchal discrimination when interacting with cis-hetero local agri-food actors unaffiliated with GUA. Remarkably, queer empowerment within GUA was limited to a socio-economically privileged group in rural Alentejo and constrained by the absence of internal discussions on gender and sexuality.

4.2. Literature Review

4.2.1. Exploring queer lives in the countryside

Rural queer studies have offered critiques of the heteropatriarchal organisation of rural communities, including rural agri-food systems, that pose restrictions to queer flourishing in the countryside[6]. Against a monolithic understanding of queer lives in rural agri-food systems and rural communities more broadly, these hindering factors affect queer people differently across gender, ethnicity/race, class and other social markers of difference (Leslie et al., 2019). For example, the experience of discrimination can vary for a white ciswoman, a Latina ciswoman, and a lesbian Latinx due to their unique social positioning (Hoffelmeyer, 2021). In terms of everyday heteropatriarchal discrimination, studies have highlighted experiences of oppression, discrimination, silencing and hiding lived by gender

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5   I use the term "cis-hetero" as an abbreviation of the terms "cisgender" and "heterosexual" combined.

6   The literature used in this study regarding rural queerness and gender relations in CSA is primarily focused on the Western and Global North contexts, both in terms of empirical research and onto-epistemological perspectives. Consequently, the scope and nature of the analysis in the study are inherently influenced by this limited context. However, it is important to acknowledge that experiences of gender and sexuality in non-Western and non-Northern contexts, particularly in rural areas and within CSA, prompt crucial questions about empowerment and the generation of knowledge that extends beyond the Western scientific paradigm.

and sexually underrepresented groups in rural communities (Gorman-Murray et al., 2013; Johnson et al., 2016). Within rural agri-food systems, studies have reported queer farmers' experiences of outright harassment or microaggressions. Microaggressions are "brief, daily assaults on minority individuals, which can be social or environmental, verbal or nonverbal, as well as intentional or unintentional" (Balsam et al. 2011, p. 163, as quoted in Leslie, 2017). Examples include verbal harassment and violent body language from neighbouring farmers, intimidating gazes in conventional food venues and probing questions about relationship status by co-workers (Hoffelmeyer, 2021; Leslie, 2017). Queer farmers may feel constrained to address microaggressions; for instance, queer farmers in CSA who rely on bringing volunteers and customers to their farms may not confront heterosexist remarks to avoid economic risks (Leslie, 2017).

At a structural level, the imaginaries of rural communities, access to farmland and the family farm institution are interwoven with heteropatriarchy. Cultural imaginaries of rurality often depict rural communities as exclusionary, lacking in sexual and gender diversity and dangerous for queer individuals (Gorman-Murray et al., 2013; Johnson et al., 2016). Although farmland is affordable, the perception of rural spaces as heterosexist discourages queer people from moving to the countryside (Leslie, 2019). Moreover, queer farmers, particularly trans and cis-gendered women, struggle to access farmland (Leslie, 2019; Wypler, 2019). Queer farmers have been denied private and public credit to purchase or manage land because credit institutions grant credibility to farm units based on heteronuclear relationships that combine romantic and work partnerships (Hoffelmeyer, 2021; Leslie, 2019; Wypler, 2019). Notably, the solidification of the family farm institution in agri-food systems restricts recognition and valorisation for queer farmers that may deviate from the conventional combinations of professional and private lives in the organisation of farm work and living space (Hoffelmeyer, 2021).

Despite these difficulties, rural queer studies foreground strategies developed by queer people to manoeuvre heteropatriarchy and enact and protect their agency to pursue desired careers and lifestyles in the countryside. Particularly relevant for this study are the analyses of queer farmers' community action that create queer spaces in rural areas through formal and informal networks. Queer farmers' networks are social and physical spaces that strive to minimize biases, criticisms and threats and where queer people build personal connections, exchange farming resources or knowledge and establish collective support and collaborations (Leslie, 2019; Wypler, 2019). These networks offer participants an opportunity to enjoy a farming space deviant from the predominant heterosexual family farm environment and to imagine and embody alternatives to agrarian heteronormativity (Leslie, 2019; Wypler, 2019). Outside queer networks, queer farmers navigate the politics of rural recognition and visibility to ensure acceptance in rural communities. They may

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enact the "sameness" tactic to downplay their queerness and assert other normative identity traces such as asserting themselves to be "just another farmer" to ensure social and commercial ties (Hoffelmeyer, 2021). Similarly, queer farmers may disclose their queerness only to those they trust or find relevant to be upfront about their identities, such as to find employment in queer-inclusive farms or bond with other rural queer farmers or customers (Hoffelmeyer, 2021).

4.2.2. Exploring gender relations in CSA

In this study, I draw lessons from women's empowerment in CSA to investigate the experiences of queer members. This approach is valuable because research on gender relations in CSA sheds light on particular dimensions of these initiatives that can potentially empower participants in the face of patriarchy, sexism and related forms of oppression. While the connection between queer and feminist theories is debated (Williams, 1997), I align with authors who address the theoretical limitations of both bodies of work and seek to foster a dialogue between them (e.g., Showden, 2012; Marinucci, 2016; Andrucki, 2021).

Studies on gender relations in CSA claim that CSA initiatives are not catalysers of fundamental political, economic or gender-based reform in agri-food systems and society. Yet, through the relationships of everyday life and the continuous negotiation and implementation of common practices and solutions in CSA, women create visibility for gender issues and assert personal and work relations consistent with their worldviews and objectives (Delind & Ferguson, 1999; Jarosz, 2011). These studies have taken the standpoint of women farmers and consumers to understand participation and resource management in CSA and referred to empowerment when reporting women's emancipatory strategies, self-determination and self-confidence experienced in CSA.

I distinguish three dimensions of CSA discussed in the literature on gender relations in CSA that may contribute to queer empowerment. First, CSA creates community relationships through which members perform a "quiet form of activism": proactive and conscious individual and personal acts to create relationships with food, the environment and people that reflect a lifestyle consistent with their values (Delind & Ferguson, 1999b). For instance, women farmers feel empowered to establish community relationships based on their desired work-life balance (Jarosz, 2011). Second, CSA offers a farmer–consumer partnership to negotiate the costs and terms of distribution and farm operations (Cone & Myhre, 2000). This partnership can empower women entering agriculture, enabling them to experiment with diverse farming methods, create alternative mechanisms for sharing risks, ensure equal access to agriculture knowledge and reduce the gender income gap in agriculture (Fremstad & Paul, 2020). Third, CSA creates a horizontal organisation

that allows farmers and consumers to negotiate and work through day-to-day issues and practical solutions for agri-food operations (Cone & Myhre, 2000; Delind & Ferguson, 1999). Through this everyday politics, the personal becomes political, and women's desires, worldviews and intentions shape how CSA re-creates and perpetuates smaller-scale, people-focused, nature-friendly and community-based agriculture (Jarosz, 2011; Wells & Gradwell, 2001).

4.3. Analytical Framework and Methods

4.3.1. Empowerment framework

I adopt the framework of empowerment developed by Allen (2021) that results from a thorough review of feminist approaches to empowerment. Empowerment is conceptualised as a "capacity or ability, specifically the capacity to empower or transform oneself and others" (Allen, 2021, p. 18). Allen's framework has been applied to analyses of power relations in grassroots initiatives (Ahlborg, 2017; Raj et al., 2022; Raj et al., 2024). It provides a multifaceted typology of power and empowerment that enables a fine-grained analysis of different yet interrelated real-life manifestations of power affecting the struggles and achievements of grassroots initiatives such as CSA.

In the remainder of this section, I introduce the conceptual framework for studying queer empowerment in CSA based on Allen's typology of empowerment. I focus the analysis and discussion on the first four types of empowerment, as they are highly relevant to the case study. In contrast, manifestations of power feminism were not identified in relation to queer empowerment in GUA.[7] I view the four types of empowerment as not mutually exclusive but as reciprocal possibilities and overlapping experiences influenced by the historical and situated context of those empowered. Moreover, such an empowerment typology opposes an understanding of this term as power-over, often linked to acts of domination and control embedded in oppression and subjection (Allen, 2021). However, I contend that empowerment is not an all-encompassing experience. Instead, it complies with the ambivalent and intersectional nature of emancipatory processes that imply

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7   Power feminism refers to the intentional individual choice to exercise power over others (Allen, 2021). It is consistent with an individualistic, self-assertive, aggressive manifestation of the will to power, in opposition to the notion of women's victimisation. In the case of GUA, queer participants shared personal stories in which they self-asserted their queerness without caring for others' opinions or confronting oppressors; however, none of these stories were related to the CSA, nor could I draw connections between those stories and their participation in the CSA.

contradictory and limiting effects; for example, women farmers may comply with and resist various aspects of subordination in agriculture (Jarosz, 2011).

The first two columns of Table 4.1. (Subsection 4.2.2.) show how I operationalised Allen's (2021) typology for the case of queer empowerment in CSA. The last two columns refer to the empirical findings which, in turn, are organised by the type of empowerment and how they intersected with each of the three dimensions of GUA. The dimension "producer–co-producer partnership" is an adaptation of the "farmer-consumer partnership" term used in the literature on gender relations in CSA. I chose this adaptation as it aligns with the terminology used by the members of GUA, as I explain in more detail next.

4.3.2. Methods

Case study: CSA Guadiana

I adopted a single case study approach. For several reasons, CSA Guadiana, located in rural Alentejo, South Portugal, was a relevant case for documenting and analysing queer empowerment in rural agri-food systems because, to start, it was a suitable case to address the call for research on rural queerness in initiatives pursuing alternatives to industrial agriculture (Leslie, 2017). GUA was part of the Portuguese CSA Network and shared the network's common goal of promoting food sovereignty, food as a commons and agroecology. GUA was one of the few active agri-food initiatives that envisioned an alternative to rural Alentejo's dominant industrial agri-food system. Historically, this region has offered the main stage for modernising the Portuguese agri-food sector (Calvário, 2022). Presently, it remains predominantly characterised by large-scale monoculture and greenhouse farms mainly producing olives, berries and other commodities for export (INE, 2021). However, this industrial agriculture model relies on the exploitation of immigrant workers attracted by perceived advantages within national legal frameworks, despite facing precarious labour and living conditions (Pereira et al., 2021)

GUA also linked farmers, artisanal food producers and consumers in rural Alentejo and offered a dynamic and contrasting socio-cultural context to investigate rural queer empowerment. The demographics of rural Alentejo are simultaneously marked by low population density, population decline, an ageing population (INE, 2022) and an increasing neo-rural[8] population. Neo-rurals are mainly immigrants from Brazil (INE, 2022) but also

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8   The term "neo-rural" is closely associated with the concept of "new rurality" (Mardsen, 1998; Wright & Annes, 2014). New rurality highlights the evolving and adapting character of rural population demographics, in which neo-rurals engage with non-traditional activities in rural areas and develop projects such as agro-tourism and alternative agriculture. In the context of Portugal

from other European urban centres seeking a lifestyle change (Esteves, 2017; Novikova, 2021). The findings suggest that the empowerment and agency of queer members in GUA were contingent on the region's socio-cultural context. Participants perceived a notable contrast between the progressive views of the neo-rural participants and the conservative local culture, characterised by prominent heterosexual social norms, traditional gender roles and lack of queer spaces. This observation echoes previous research highlighting the cultural shock and mutual estrangement between neo-rural people and the native population in rural Alentejo (Esteves, 2017).

Queer and cis-hetero neo-rural farmers founded GUA in the summer of 2019. GUA has never positioned itself as a queer-inclusive CSA and queer members primarily discovered the collective through word-of-mouth and personal connections with the founding farmers. I distinguish among two general types of members in the CSA, as identified by the CSA members. Producers are the horticulture farmers and food producers who manage and execute farm activities. Co-producers are the local consumers who pre-finance the costs of a harvest season, receive fresh produce weekly and can participate in decision-making and work activities organised by the CSA. I refer to co-producers and producers of GUA together as members. In 2019, the CSA counted 10 members; during the fieldwork, that number oscillated between 17 and 24. The fluctuation in membership occurred as producers and co-producers entered or exited the CSA during the renewal of the six-month contract.

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Data collection

I visited GUA for the first time in April 2021. With that visit, I meant to introduce my work and propose a collaboration for another study. However, I was excited to see how freely queer partners shared affection in the group and how gender seemed fluid and not a fixed category shaping roles on the farm and in the collective. It was the first time I had not felt the need to filter my sexuality and gender in a CSA and, more broadly, in the countryside. I felt self-confident and thrilled to self-affirm my queerness that day and throughout the fieldwork campaign. The embodied experience within a queer community actively engaged in agri-food operations has sparked my curiosity to explore how queer members of GUA felt within this space, particularly regarding their experiences of empowerment. I collected data through desk research and fieldwork from April 2021 until May 2022. I carried out participant observation in different formats and at distinct moments throughout the year. To start, I volunteered at the horticulture farm of GUA for three consecutive weeks in July 2021, which allowed me to follow everyday CSA operations and observe the power relations between members. I also participated in the weekly CSA gatherings to assemble and distribute fresh produce, CSA assemblies and other social events and celebrations

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(Esteves, 2017; Novikoa, 2021), neo-rurals are generally middle-class young people who migrate from urban areas seeking lifestyle changes and proximity to nature.

organised by the group. These moments allowed me to follow their everyday experiences inside and outside the CSA and enriched my understanding of whether and how CSA affected their lives and how their lives, in turn, have affected the CSA.

My sample was composed of 15 members of GUA who self-identified as queer (n=12) or cis-gendered heterosexual (n=3). Queer members' sexualities were self-identified as bi-sexual (n=4), gay (n=3), fluid (n=3), trans fluid (n=1) and undefined (n=1), and their gender as cis-women (n=7), cis-men (n=3), creative (n=1) and non-binary (n=1). All participants ages ranged from 20 to 55, and most were between 30 and 45 years old. Queer participants were mainly international, originating from Brazil (n=3), Spain (n=2), Germany (n=2), Italy (n=1), the Netherlands (n=1) and Morocco (n=1), and only two were from Portugal, of which only one was born and raised in rural Alentejo. Cis-hetero participants were migrants from other areas of Portugal (n=1) and Germany (n=2). Participants' occupations covered diverse areas of interest, such as farming, chef, filmmaking, and journalism. Regarding ethnicity, the sample was mainly White (n=6) and European Mediterranean[9] (n=5), but also multiracial (n=2), African Mediterranean (n=1) and Latin Jewish (n=1).

I selected participants through snowball sampling. I interviewed queer (n=10) and cis-hetero (n=2) CSA members. All participants mentioned in this study provided informed consent before the start of the interview and were given a copy of the audio file and transcription of the interview. I conducted interviews in Portuguese–my first language–or English as an alternative for those who did not speak Portuguese. Topics covered in the semi-structured interviews included the types of heteropatriarchal discrimination encountered in the CSA or more broadly in the region; experiences of and opinions about being an LGBTQIA+ member of the CSA; the barriers and opportunities for getting involved in the CSA; and the visions for sustainable agriculture. Additionally, I organised a focus group with CSA members (n=9), of which six were queer people who also participated in the semi-structured interviews, with two additional queer and one cis-hetero members. During the focus groups, participants discussed their understanding of (dis)empowerment of queer people, the values and principles of GUA and the advantages and disadvantages of creating a queer-inclusive community in GUA. To ensure confidentiality, I followed Leslie (2017) and assigned each participant a pseudonym based on the most common names currently used in their country of origin, as stated by governmental agencies. For instance, I used the list of most common names in Brazil published by the Brazilian government's news agency to choose the pseudonyms for participants originally from Brazil (Agência

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9   Participants indicated the ethnicity "Mediterranean" when referring to either the European Mediterranean population in the south of the continent or the African Mediterranean population in the north of the continent that are deeply marked by migratory flows historically characterising the Mediterranean region.

Brasil, 2021). To ensure the anonymity of the CSA initiative, I assigned it the fictitious name "Guadiana", the name of an important river in Alentejo.

Data analysis

I analysed data through open coding and then focused coding (Benaquisto & Given, 2008). I codified the interviews and focus groups with the NVivo qualitative data analysis software. I used open coding to identify emergent themes in and across the interviews and the focus group. I then used focused coding to categorise the data according to the analytical framework's empowerment typology and CSA dimensions (Table 4.1.). While a literature review informed the identification and choice of the three dimensions of CSA, their relevance for this study emerged from the empirical investigation of the specific case study. Open coding helped me to identify empowerment themes obscured in the literature review or that I had not previously seen, and focused coding allowed me to draw connections between these emergent themes and the analytical framework. In the final stage, I used the analytical framework to identify and compare experiences of empowerment reported by queer CSA members or observed during participant observation. The analysis of empowerment offered insights into which elements of GUA helped queer members feel empowered, including contradictions and limitations, thus suggesting initial understandings of how queer people found the means, through CSA, to overcome or manoeuvre heteropatriarchal discrimination in rural Alentejo and empower themselves to be active and thriving members of the collective.

4.4. Results

First, I present the results as per each dimension of CSA: community relationship, producer–co-producer partnership, and horizontal organisation. I introduce the different types of empowerment reported by queer members of GUA and highlight their contradicting and limiting effects. Remarkably, queer members reported heteropatriarchal discrimination only in relation to actors not engaged with GUA, so "outside" the CSA. Then, I synthesise the types of empowerment identified and then analyse how they are interconnected and affect one another in and across three dimensions of GUA.

4.4.1. Queer empowerment related to different dimensions of CSA Guadiana

Community relationships: "When queer people like me enter the CSA, we are not creating anything new. We are just another queer person."

The following results highlight the experiences of queer people within the context of community relationships fostered by GUA. Specifically, I explore three key aspects within the reported empowering experiences: heightened self-confidence to express queerness in the group, the assertion of control over queer identities during agri-food transactions and confidence to expand gender and sexuality expressions despite prevailing heteronormativity in rural Alentejo. Producers and co-producers of GUA gathered once a week to distribute fresh produce from the different CSA producers at the farm owned by Ana, a 39-year-old fluid cis-woman producer who sold cheese and pastry at the GUA, and her partner Antônia, a 44-year-old fluid cis-woman who sold bread for the CSA. Interviewees stressed that the recurrence of community gatherings at queer-owned farmland created a social, physical and cultural space in rural Alentejo that alleviated sexual and gender discrimination and where queer people felt safe expressing their queerness. Remarkably, all queer CSA members interviewed said it felt "natural" to be queer in the CSA. The stories of co-producers Miguel and Matteo illustrate how this feeling of naturality enabled queer members to experience heightened *self-confidence that deactivated internalised oppression* repressing their queerness. Miguel, a 40-year-old gay cis-man who worked as a chef at a local hotel venue, experienced microaggressions in the workplace. There, he felt exposed to unpleasant, macho and invasive comments made by his manager and primarily identified as a homosexual by co-workers, which made him constantly self-aware of his sexuality at work.

> I am self-aware of my sexuality, like in the hotel where I work. I work only with other Portuguese male cooks from this region. It is all right, and I can be who I am when I am there. However, for them, my sexuality is an essential characteristic of my personality. While in the CSA, I do not feel the same way. I do not even remember that I am gay.

Similarly, Matteo, a 50-something-year-old gay cis-man, felt natural being gay in the CSA. Matteo referred to a generational legacy that imbued him with a "filtering mindset" upon which he (un)consciously decided which personality traces, including sexuality, were (in)appropriate to show to others. Matteo commented, "there was no need for this filter mindset in the CSA because we are just ourselves."

Furthermore, queer members *took control over their queer selves* and chose when and how to express queerness when purchasing and selling food in GUA. The experiences of co-producers Laura and Valeria, both 32-year-old bi-sexual cis-women, showed the contrast

between expressing queerness in GUA and other agri-food venues in rural Alentejo, where they felt more exposed to discrimination. Laura attended the weekly CSA gatherings with her female partner and felt comfortable being open about their relationship, "Most people knew that we were together, and I *definitely* talked about her as 'my girlfriend'". In contrast, Laura experienced overt harassment when shopping for groceries with her partner at the local farmers' market:

> A male heterosexual farmer unexpectedly started asking about my relationship with my girlfriend quite provocatively. I honestly answered, "She is my girlfriend." And then he was like, "Oh, but why? It would be better if you were friends" [shows frustration in her voice]. That was so random. I was buying from him. Why would you harass your client? Anyway, I put down my stuff and did not buy from him in the end.

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Likewise, Valeria and her female partner experienced (c)overt harassment at local cafés. They felt targeted by intimidating gazes from other customers, whom they observed were often senior male Portuguese locals. Once, Valeria confronted a senior male Portuguese customer and heard, in return, that two women together were "a perversion, a vice". Conversely, when referring to her experience in the CSA, Valeria spoke of implicit safety and celebrated the role played by Ana and Antônia to help discard the need to protect or declare her queer identity:

> As the leading producers of the CSA, Ana and Antônia are setting an example by showing their homosexuality very naturally and not hiding it. When queer people like me enter the CSA, we are not creating anything new. We are just another queer person.

According to queer members of GUA, they felt inspired by the community relationships to *expand their identities and gain confidence to explore thriving sexual expressions*. In contrast, queer members viewed rural Alentejo as homogeneous, regarding heterosexuality and traditional gender roles, and lacking queer spaces.

The stories of Valeria, Laura, Adilah and Maria illustrate such an empowering experience in GUA. Each of their individual experiences highlighted how sexuality, rurality and agriculture intersected with other social markers of difference in their identity formation. First, Valeria's case highlighted the intersection of sexuality, rurality and gender. Valeria felt empowered by the encounter with other queer people in the CSA to reaffirm her queerness, despite hostile and sexist experiences in rural Alentejo.

> This region is hostile. Like the machismo and the type of masculine models in the region. This aggression and this treatment of women are horrible. It pushed me to escape heterosexuality. So, the homosexual path became more relevant to me. The CSA was essential because it showed that, within the hostility of this region, it is

possible to explore diverse sexual orientations. So yes, the CSA might have empowered me to explore my homosexuality further.

Second, Laura's case illustrated the intersection between sexuality and neo-rurality. Laura, born and raised in a European capital, found in the CSA a community of people who motivated her to pursue a farming career while continuing to explore her sexuality. After leaving her partner, Laura felt encouraged by the group of rural queers in the CSA to stay in the countryside. Third, in the case of Adilah, sexuality and nationality shaped her queer identity formation through the CSA. Adilah, a 37-year-old Moroccan bisexual cis-woman, experienced a heightened sense of freedom in the CSA to explore both prefigurative agri-food practices and queerness, mainly because the CSA gathered a group of international members seeking a lifestyle change: "When we leave our hometown, we feel freer to do what we want, to be who we want" (Adilah). Last, Maria's case showcased the intersection between sexuality and age. Maria, a 50-something-year-old trans-fluid whose gender was asserted as creative,[10] saw in the CSA an opportunity to unlock shyness or fear related to their sexuality. Maria called the fear of revealing and exploring sexuality a "restricted conditioning" inherited from a generational legacy.

In sum, the distribution operations of GUA required recurrent gatherings, hence fostering community relationships among members. The gatherings' location–queer-owned farmland–and the leading role played by queer producers helped create a safe space that alleviated gender and sexual discrimination and strengthened social ties and trust among all CSA members in ways that queer people felt self-confident about their queerness and released internalised oppression. Queer co-producers took control over their queer selves and were less exposed to discrimination in GUA than in other agri-food venues in rural Alentejo. In the context of rural Alentejo, GUA offered a safe social, physical and cultural space for queer people to expand their identities and explore thriving sexual expressions.

Producer–co-producer partnership: "CSA members trust and appreciate my work. When selling outside the CSA, […] my cheese production is viewed only as a hobby."

The following paragraphs delve into the key empowering experiences reported by queer members in relation to the producer—co-producer partnership established in GUA. I emphasise three distinct aspects of empowerment that have emerged from the analysis:

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10 The interviewee described a creative gender as a gender that is not fixed nor closed to a single category, but instead they understand gender as a category to be continuously put into question and always in the making.

the enhancement of self-esteem and self-respect among queer producers, the heightened motivation observed among queer co-producers to initiate artisanal food projects, and the pursuit of a flourishing social life and a stronger connection to agriculture among queer co-producers.

GUA created an informal network for small-scale producers and consumers to sell their artisanal food production and food surplus. Ana and Antônia found in the collective financial arrangement of GUA an economic opportunity for their small cheese, bread and pastry production. Additionally, beyond the economic benefits, they highlighted two forms of professional and personal recognition from CSA members that contrasted with the discriminatory experiences in the local conventional agri-food system.

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First, Ana celebrated the *collaboration with co-producers* that provided her with recognition and valorisation for her work and contributed to the viability of her artisanal production:

> I am grateful for the CSA because it allows me to exist. It is a place where I can express myself, where I can be creative and where I am respected for the work I do. CSA members trust and appreciate my work. When selling outside the CSA, I am viewed as unprofessional, and my cheese production is viewed only as a hobby.

Ana herded a small batch of 15 goats and mentioned that rigid gender roles and intimate relationships in agriculture influenced who was deemed eligible to buy land in rural Alentejo. In Portugal, only 15.1% of farm managers are women, which is similar to the number in the Alentejo region, 13.4% (INE, 2021). Although these numbers do not concern land ownership, it shows that women are rarely in charge of Portuguese farms. Ana encountered several difficulties in leasing land to expand her goat herd. She experienced discrimination for being a woman seeking land – more specifically, for being a woman without a male partner:

I want to lease land for more space for the goats, and I can't. That's only because I'm a woman. Maybe if I were married to a man, my husband would be able to help me lease land. But I'm a woman, so they don't trust that what I'm doing is serious. Agriculture and animals are a man's job here. So, I am like a joke to them.

Concerning land ownership, Ana and Antônia commented that it was unusual for two women to buy farmland in rural Alentejo. For instance, several neighbours inquired about their relationship status when they first arrived, implicitly suggesting they were not entitled to be landowners: "there was much questioning. People wanted to know about us and wanted us to confirm that we were a couple."

Second, GUA boosted Ana's and Antônia's *self-esteem and self-respect* as queers and food producers:

> Since the CSA meetings happen at our place, and we are a couple, this is not a concern to anyone. I do not need to pretend we are not a couple, or people do not seem to be uncomfortable because we are a couple. This is already a big step. The CSA members treat us as a couple, not as friends. We are a couple; we are a family. They not only accept it but also respect it. This is *very* important for me. (Ana)

Ana and Antônia commented that people from their neighbouring farms called them "the Brazilian girls". In this case, their gender and nationality obscured their occupation and intimate relationship. However, during the interviews and focus group with other queer and non-queer CSA members, participants referred to them by their names, occupation and intimate relationship, as exemplified in Miguel's comment:

> Before meeting Ana and Antônia, a goatherder that we both knew often spoke about them to me as "the Brazilian girls". I wondered why he spoke about them as "the Brazilian girls". […] After meeting them I realised they were a Brazilian couple producing food.

In effect, Ana and Antônia felt more discriminated against for being Brazilian women than for being queer in rural Alentejo: "We faced discrimination less for our queer identities and more as immigrant Brazilian women. The native Portuguese population in this region tends to stereotype Brazilian women as sex workers" (Antônia).They reported several cases in which they were mistakenly assumed to be sex workers by their neighbours.[11] Although Brazilian sex workers worked at a brothel near their town, Ana and Antônia claimed that the comparison between Brazilian women and sex workers was linked to a cultural connotation of Brazilian women and migrants in Portugal[12].

Furthermore, besides offering a market opportunity for queer small-scale producers, GUA encouraged queer co-producers to start and test their artisanal food production. For example, Miguel started an *empanadas* production after joining GUA and Maria, who was passionate about tofu found the motivation to start her artisanal production after realising that other CSA members were interested in the product. Moreover, the perception of the CSA as a supportive network, and not necessarily the experience in itself,

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11 In this case, Ana and Antônia referred to the negative connotations of sex workers. However, I acknowledge that this connotation is a social construct imbued with discrimination and obscures the dignity and working rights of sex workers.

12 In this case, heteropatriarchy intersects with xenophobia and informed discrimination towards queer Brazilian farmers, the largest immigrant population in rural Alentejo (INE, 2022). Historically, Brazilian women have been exposed to colonial and gender discrimination in Portugal (Gomes, 2018).

might have been enough for queer co-producers to kick off their artisanal projects. Laura found inspiration from other queer project leaders in the GUA, which made her feel an *increased inherent motivation and ability* to start her seed-saving project:

> The CSA is a space where small producers can start and try out and see if people like the product, get feedback, and so on. It's not like you're selling it at an anonymous supermarket. In that sense, it's also empowering. And then, I guess, the queer side, for me, is empowering because I can see these examples led by other queer people.

GUA organised intermittent voluntary farm work to expand the partnership between producers and co-producers. Often, voluntary work was followed by convivial moments. Queer co-producers commented that agri-food and convivial activities allowed them to *pursue a flourishing social life and connection to agriculture* in rural Alentejo. Adilah participated in one-off volunteer farm work at different farms associated with the CSA. For Adilah, these were crucial moments to materialise her desired connection to agriculture and to actively participate in distinct phases of food production, from planting to harvesting: "I see the CSA farms as places I want to be close to. I like to go there and see how things are growing, what is growing, and how it has changed." Similarly, Matteo explained that voluntary work for the GUA enabled him to strengthen social ties with other members of the collective while openly expressing his queerness:

> I liked working with others, sharing the work, and connecting food with more social activities. Because the CSA is about nutrition, not only physical nutrition but about nurturing relationships. […] I don't have many social connections in this region, so I don't normally express my sexuality publicly. While in the CSA, the social connections are tighter, which is why I am there with my husband.

Although most queer members celebrated the combination of sociability and work in GUA, this empowerment experience also implied contradictory feelings in some cases. For co-producer Andreas, a 50-something-year-old gay cis-man, social interactions in GUA were intimate and deprived of anonymity which, in turn, made it hard to position himself in the group: "Being in this in-between private and public is hard for me. How do I talk to other people? As a private person? As a public person?" As a result, Andreas rarely attended GUA's convivial moments and preferred baking the cakes his partner brought for potlucks.

In sum, GUA expanded and diversified the partnership between producers and co-producers. Financially, it created an informal network to commercialise and exchange artisanal food production and food excess. For queer producers, GUA offered economic opportunities along with recognition and valorisation of their informal and small-scale production that, in turn, were unappreciated in the local conventional agri-food system. For queer co-producers, GUA functioned as a supportive network that motivated them to kick off artisanal food production. Identity-wise, this partnership encouraged queer

producers to pursue their farming careers and express their queerness simultaneously. Work-wise, GUA brought co-producers closer to the farmland and food production by combining voluntary work and convivial moments. While it enabled queer co-producers to pursue a flourishing social life and connection to agriculture in rural Alentejo, it also created contradictory experiences related to reputation and anonymity in the group.

Horizontal organisation: "It was amazing to encounter this group of people who shared this perspective with me and realise that many were queer living in the countryside!"

In this section, I introduce the types of empowerment experienced by queer CSA members in relation to GUA's horizontal organisation. GUA created a democratic platform for collaborative decision-making that helped enhance self-confidence to shape decisions. Queer members felt empowered to establish reciprocal and collaborative relationships with other queer and cis-hetero members to build their envisioned agri-food system; however, this collective agency was limited to a privileged profile of queer rural people.

GUA offered its members a democratic platform to develop a community economy. The group employed several mechanisms inspired by sociocracy[13] to foster participation and transparency in decision-making. For instance, every member could suggest contractual terms to fine-tune the responsibilities of co-producers and producers. Particularly in the case of horticultural production, producers and co-producers gathered before a harvest season (every six months) to assess the prior season's pros and cons and collectively decide what to grow in the upcoming one. The story of co-producer Adilah illustrates the benefits provided by GUA's horizontal organisation. Adilah viewed the harvest evaluation meetings as an opportunity to express her opinions and desires for the vegetable basket. Adilah explained that the participatory and collaborative decision-making features of the CSA heightened *her self-confidence to shape decisions* precisely because they released the burden of the responsibility to make individual decisions that affected the whole group:

There is clear communication and clear agreements. There's co-participation, so I feel like I have a margin to change things I don't like. It's not a matter of, "Oops, I don't like it, I'm leaving" or, "I like it, I stay". As far as possible, I influence how the CSA system works. I can speak about my needs without fear. Sometimes they will be fulfilled, sometimes not. But at least I can give my feedback. There is an opening for us to decide together.

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13 Sociocracy is a method of self-governance that features decision-making mechanisms based on consent and participatory tools for co-creating and implementing proposals for collective modes of organisation (for a case of sociocracy in CSA, see Cristiano et al., 2021).

Although the evaluation gatherings were crucial moments for participants to embody the horizontal organisation envisioned by GUA, some queer members said that the meetings' length and deliberations posed restrictions. For instance, for co-producer Laura, the evaluation meetings required articulation ability and time availability, which was not always compatible with members' capacities and agendas.

Collaborative work between GUA producers and co-producers concerned convivial and agri-food activities while implicitly connecting queer people in rural Alentejo. In effect, several queer co-producers viewed the implicit queer inclusiveness of GUA as beneficial. On the one hand, it helped *establish reciprocal and collaborative relationships* with other queer and cis-hetero members to build their envisioned agri-food system. On the other hand, it helped avoid the stereotypes or stigma associated with queerness. For Miguel, the queer community in GUA was perceived as an aspect that enhanced, rather than pre-conditioned, his participation:

> What attracted me to the GUA was the group of people in it, with whom I shared a common interest in food and how to treat the Earth and one another. That was more attractive than the fact that some were queer like me. However, it was amazing to encounter this group of people who shared this perspective with me and realise that many were queer living in the countryside!

Notably, it was only in the focus group that participants explicitly discussed their queer collective identity for the first time. Focus group participants mentioned they had never addressed inclusivity and protection strategies for queer members in GUA. Co-producer Laura sketched two possible future scenarios for dealing with their collective queer identity: either (i) keeping their queer identity implicit, which implied limited outreach to queer dwellers spread in the territory but avoided confrontation with heteronormative values reproduced by the broader local community, or (ii) making their queer identity explicit to allow queer dwellers to know that a local queer community existed but risking a backlash from conservative segments of the local community. In response to Laura, producer Ana referred to the second scenario as "raising the queer flag" and argued that it was undesirable in the case of GUA. For Ana, the queer flag was to be raised if the queer members felt threatened or attacked in or outside the CSA and needed protection. Similarly, producer Antônia argued that the CSA did not need to "raise the queer flag" to create a protective space against sexism or homophobia. In her view, this approach has helped create affinity and alliances with conservative cis-hetero neighbouring farmers who would not participate in queer circles in the absence of a common interest, which, in this case, was farming and food. Although the focus group conversation did not reach a consensus, participants seemed to agree with Antônia's proposition that the CSA should aim to maintain their queerness

implicitly and continue to create a safe space for queer peoples in the countryside, something that Antônia referred to as "working to keep the queer flag low".

Furthermore, interviewees indicated that another core aspect of their collective identity and collaborative work was their privileged socio-economic and intellectual background, which some called "a bubble of privileged people in the countryside". On the one hand, many members celebrated the safety and security created by this "bubble" effect. Miguel, for example, highlighted that the shared progressive values and worldviews among queer and hetero-cis members fostered collaborations through which queer people felt comfortable expressing their opinions, utilising their abilities, and pursuing their interests without fear of rejection or discrimination based on their gender and sexual identities.

On the other hand, some members expressed criticism regarding this socio-economic privilege. They raised concerns about the potential segregation of the community from the broader local population. Andreas commented, "I mean, the CSA is a bunch of privileged people. We are well-educated, usually have international experience, and have enough money to afford the prices of the CSA.[…] It is a community that is not representative of all the people in this region, of course".

Another co-producer, Sophia, a 20-years-old cis-woman whose sexuality was undefined, echoed these concerns, sharing her experiences of encountering resistance when discussing the environmental concerns, principles of food sovereignty and autonomy she learned in GUA with friends, teachers and neighbours born and raised in the region. Similarly, Sophia commented that the enhanced sense of comfort to express queerness in GUA was less present when integrating other associations and cooperatives in the region, where sexual and gender diversity was less visible and obscured by the prevailing heteronormative culture. Both Sophia and Andreas recognised that the progressive lifestyles, worldviews, and conscious food production and consumption habits in GUA contributed to sexual and gender diversity and visibility in the collective, yet very distant from the reality of the broader local population. They considered this aspect of the initiative controversial and believed it had not been adequately acknowledged or addressed in internal meetings.

In sum, the GUA created a democratic platform to develop a community economy, which helped queer members enhance their self-confidence to shape decisions. Nonetheless, decision-making was lengthy and required substantial commitment from CSA members, which posed restrictions for participation. GUA foregrounded collaborations among members to construct an alternative local food system and implicitly created a queer-inclusive community. GUA opted not to raise the queer flag and keep their queer-inclusive collective identity implicit, which was also viewed as a strategy that helped create affinity

and alliances with conservative cis-hetero neighbouring farmers. Interviewees noted the "bubble" effect resulting from the direct participation of privileged rural queer people in GUA, which provided a safe space for expression but also raised concerns about segregation and differences with the broader local population.

4.4.2. Four types of queer empowerment

The findings revealed that queer members' empowerment reflected various forms of power from within, power over oneself, power with and power to pursue one's own flourishing through community relationships, producer–co-producer partnership and the horizontal organisation of GUA (Table 4.1.). GUA fostered collective participation without specific focus on queer empowerment. Notably, the leadership of queer producers and recurrent gatherings at queer-owned farmland were crucial for expanding the empowerment potential of GUA to encompass gender and sexuality diversity, inclusivity and flourishing. Also, the contrasts between interviewees' experiences in and outside GUA illuminated (c)overt heteropatriarchal discrimination in their interactions with local agri-food actors unrelated to the CSA. Queer cis-women, mainly Brazilian migrants, reported microaggressions and outright harassment while seeking farmland, buying food in local agri-food venues and integrating into the local rural community.

Two crucial empowerment experiences contributed to the active involvement of queer people in GUA: *power with* emerging through collaborations to build an envisioned agri-food system and *power over oneself* related to a heightened sense of self-confidence that deactivated internalised oppression and enabled queer expressions. Two pertinent examples from this case illustrate how daily collaborative interactions imbued with self-confidence supported and reinforced, to different extents, other queer empowerment experiences within the collective. First, these interactions reinforced *power from within* as queer members felt self-confident to pursue farming careers, develop artisanal food projects and actively shape the functioning of the CSA system. Second, they influenced *power to pursue one's own flourishing* as queer people actively pursued a connection to agriculture, a flourishing social life and an expansion of their sexual expression through their engagement in the collective despite the heteropatriarchal norms embedded in rural Alentejo.

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Table 4.1. Four types of empowerment in the case study

Type of empowerment	Characteristics	Empirical findings	
		CSA dimension	**Queer empowerment**
Power from within	Self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-respect consistent with life-affirming force	Producer–co-producer partnership	Queer producers felt heightened self-esteem and self-respect for being queer, and farmers
			Queer co-producers felt an increased ability and motivation to start artisanal food projects
Power over oneself	Mastering personal emancipation and the ability to decide one's own life in resistance to oppression	Community relationships	Queer members experienced a heightened feeling of self-confidence that deactivated internalised oppression and naturally expressed their queerness
			Queer members took control over their queer selves when selling or purchasing food
Power with	Ability to act in concert to address issues and shared goals and undergo a liberatory process	Producer–co-producer partnership	Queer producers received recognition and valorisation from co-producers, and this partnership offered economic opportunities for their artisanal production
		Horizontal organisation	Queer members established collaborative relationships to build their envisioned agri-food system while implicitly forming a queer community
Power to pursue one's own flourishing	Self-entitlement and capacity to seek and choose one's basic flourishing	Producer–co-producer partnership	Queer co-producers expanded their identities and explored thriving sexual expressions in the countryside
			Queer co-producers viewed the CSA as a means to pursue a flourishing social life and connection to agriculture in the countryside

Based on Allen (2021)

Several contradictions and limitations of empowerment were identified in this case study. Queer empowerment in GUA was limited to a socio-economically and intellectually privileged group in rural Alentejo, whose values and class profile aligned with the nature and financial operations of the CSA scheme. Although the small number of participants and the highly valorised social and convivial moments enabled the creation and maintenance of personal connections in the CSA, this close-knit environment also dissolved anonymity in the group and restricted the participation of some queer members. Furthermore, regarding participation, the queer-inclusive community in GUA was created rather implicitly, and the

initiative never discussed queer representation, inclusivity and protection, thus hampering the creation of internal agreements and measures for collective accountability of individual concerns. Moreover, participatory decision-making was a crucial democratic process to foster self-confidence and accountability over the organisation and implementation of CSA operations; however, it was exclusive to queer participants that wished and were available to participate in lengthy deliberations requiring articulation skills.

4.5. Discussion: Three Lessons from Queer Empowerment in CSA Guadiana

In this section, I draw three lessons from the empowerment stories of queer people in GUA. Each lesson discusses the main findings presented in the previous section "Four types of queer empowerment" and their implications for studies on relational agriculture within rural queer studies, including recommendations for future studies. To start, I offer new insights into the rural politics of recognition based on interviewees' self-confidence in expressing queerness in GUA. Then, I discuss how GUA's producer and co-producer partnership casts reciprocity as a relevant tactic for queer community action in the countryside. Last, I expand the notion of rural queer visibility based on the case of queer producers' leadership in GUA.

4.5.1. Recognition: Self-confidence to express queerness in a selective rural community

The rural politics of recognition refers to the tactics of queer rural people to assert their sameness and ensure acceptance in rural communities (Gray, 2009; Hoffelmeyer, 2021). However, the rural politics of recognition embodied by queer members within GUA offer a different reading of the maxim "We are just like everyone else" (Gray, 2009, p. 38): queer members asserted their sameness in the collective as "just another queer person" and gave visibility to their queerness with confidence and enjoyment, instead of downplaying gender and sexual identity differences to ensure acceptance. Queer people in GUA performed what Velicu (2023) calls the disidentification of the peasant and queer categories. To different extents, they lacked recognition and valorisation as artisanal food producers and queers in rural Alentejo's conventional agri-food system, which was rooted in heteropatriarchal values and oriented towards industrialised agriculture. Whereas in the CSA, queer people discarded these categories and their oppressive connotations to fulfil their desires and engage with artisanal food production while simultaneously feeling self-confident in expressing queerness.

One limitation of the empowerment capacity of GUA concerns the profile of the members. From an intersectional standpoint, GUA enabled a gender and sexually underrepresented group to flourish in a rural area. However, the same group was mainly neo-rural and enjoyed a degree of socio-economic and intellectual privilege that enabled them to comply with the principles and prices reproduced in the CSA that, in turn, were not representative of the worldviews and practices of most of the broader local population. This finding aligns with previous claims from gender studies on CSA that CSA initiatives are often composed of middle-class, well-educated and white participants (Cone & Myhre, 2000; Delind & Ferguson, 1999; Jarosz, 2011). A deeper examination of which strategies could be used by CSA to ensure further inclusivity and enable rural queer dwellers of different socio-economic backgrounds to be empowered would supplement the understanding of queer empowerment in CSA–more specifically, how the CSA could re-organise itself internally in ways that queer empowerment goes hand-in-hand with socio-economic diversity from a class perspective. Additionally, it is crucial to explore strategies that authorities, organisations and CSA networks can employ to promote and disseminate this agri-food model in ways that facilitate gender and sexual diversity across social classes. Well-known strategies to promote CSA that could be further explored to include gender, sexuality and class dimensions include community land trusts that provide low-cost secure tenure rights (Paul, 2019), public procurement aligned with the production capacities of CSA initiatives (Bonfert, 2022), and supportive legal and tax systems for small scale-producers(Kapała, 2020).

4.5.2. Community action: Reciprocal relationships among diverse queer agri-food actors

The producer–co-producer partnership performed in GUA casts new light on the potential of community action for rural queer empowerment. Members committed to meeting weekly during harvest season and actively shaped the CSA system. Recurrent gatherings showcase a viable strategy for community action that provides an alternative to participation restrictions reported in queer farmers' networks because of the geographic dispersion of members and few gatherings (Hoffelmeyer, 2021). Additionally, while queer farmers' networks are mainly composed of queer farmers (Leslie, 2019; Wypler, 2019), the partnership dimension of GUA reached a wider queer population involved in the local agri-food system of rural Alentejo also including artisanal food producers and consumers. In doing so, GUA created a communitarian and an extended-responsibility approach to farming and food provisioning beyond the traditional nuclear family farm model: its economic arrangement open up possibilities for queer farmers' businesses and provided recognition and valorisation for their artisanal production and queer identities otherwise discriminated against by the local conventional agri-food system.

While this study represents an initial step in bringing the literature of rural queerness into conversation with the scholarship on CSA to examine the experiences of queer people in agri-food community action, the use of a single case study limits the generalisability of findings. The case of GUA enabled a deeper understanding of the nuances and complexities of queer empowerment in a CSA initiative. Yet, to grasp more comprehensively the potential of the CSA model in empowering rural queer people, future research could benefit from engaging with comparative analyses exploring other dimensions of the CSA model beyond those considered for this study. For instance, diverse approaches to the producer—co-producer partnership, such as instrumental, functional or collaborative (Feagan & Henderson, 2009), and distinct structures and aims of organisational formats, including farmers-, consumers- and cooperative-led CSA (Degens & Lapschieß, 2023; Gorman, 2018; Piccoli et al., 2021) may enable different levels of reciprocal relationships among queer producers and co-producers. Accordingly, I envision future research that refines and provides more nuance to the potential of diverse CSA models in empowering rural queer people.

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4.5.3. Visibility: Quiet queer representativity in and beyond GUA

In contrast to visible forms of queer community action against heteropatriarchy in rural agri-food systems (Leslie, 2019; Wypler, 2019), the case of GUA foregrounds a "quiet form of activism" (Delind & Ferguson, 1999): a CSA that does not "raise the queer flag" but rather "works to keep the queer flag low" and implicitly creates a safe space for rural queer people to get involved with agriculture. Quiet, in this sense, is not related to a constrained queer agency such as "hiding in the closet". Instead, it refers to forms of emancipation from heteropatriarchal discrimination, and queer representativity lived through everyday relationships in the CSA when creating and negotiating the approach to food, the environment and people. Although quiet activism falls short in catalysing fundamental transformation in agri-food systems (Delind & Ferguson, 1999), in the case of GUA, it helped create affinity between queer and cis-hetero members and between them and cis-hetero farming neighbours.

Remarkably, the leadership of queer producers in GUA influenced the type of everyday relationships in the collective and was essential to tailoring the empowering potential of GUA to queer participants. Similar to previous claims that CSA producers highly influence the level and degree of members' involvement in CSA initiatives (Raj et al., 2024), queer producers' self-assertive attitude towards their queerness and intimate relationship was evident during GUA gatherings at their farmland and influenced the participation of other queer members. Queer co-producers discarded the need to protect and declare their queer identity and felt self-confident in pursuing their desired connection to agriculture, enjoying a flourishing social

life and, in some cases, further exploring their rural identity and sexual expressions. While this study only analysed the benefits and limitations of quiet queer activism in GUA, future research on rural community action against heteropatriarchy in the pursuit of sustainable agri-food systems may benefit from comparing the advantages and disadvantages of visible and quiet forms of activism across different agri-food grassroots initiatives.

4.6. Conclusion

In this study, I analysed the experiences of 12 queer members of a CSA located in rural Alentejo, South Portugal, and asked whether and how they felt empowered to become thriving and active members of the collective. Drawing on the notion of "relational agriculture" (Leslie et al., 2019), I approached queer empowerment through the intersection of gender, sexuality and agriculture. From the standpoint of this gender and sexually underrepresented group in rural Alentejo, I analysed four types of empowerment, including their contradictions and limitations, influenced by the community relationships, producer–co-producer partnership and horizontal organisation dimensions of CSA.

The results revealed that these three dimensions of GUA were not tailored to queer empowerment; yet, queer producers' leadership in the CSA and the recurrent organisation of CSA gatherings in their queer-owned farmland were crucial for expanding the empowering potential of GUA also to include gender and sexuality diversity, inclusivity and flourishing. Mainly, queer members found in GUA a social, physical and cultural space to safely develop collaborative agri-food operations with other queer and cis-hetero people while feeling self-confident in expressing their queerness. These experiences contrasted with other interactions with local agri-food actors unrelated to the CSA in which queer people encountered (c)overt forms of heteropatriarchal discrimination. Despite these emancipatory achievements, queer empowerment in GUA was exclusive to a socio-economically and intellectually privileged group and restricted by the lack of internal debates on gender and sexuality, as well as by the time and articulating abilities needed to participate in internal decision-making processes.

This paper contributes to debates on relational agriculture within rural queer literature by addressing the call for studies about the struggles and achievements of gender and sexually underrepresented groups in CSA (Leslie, 2017). It offers new insights into several manifestations of empowerment, including its contradictory outcomes and limitations experienced by queer farmers, artisanal food producers and consumers in a rural CSA (Table 4.1.). Based on these findings, this paper draws three lessons relevant for the further theorisation of relational agriculture: (i) self-confidence to perform queerness in rural CSA

may be restricted to a selective rural community, (ii) producer and co-producer partnership in CSA may enable reciprocal queer empowerment and (iii) queer producers' leadership in CSA may quietly represent gender and sexual diversity in rural communities.

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Chapter 5

LEADERSHIP ROLES FOR WOMEN FARMERS

5.1. Introduction

> It is a gender issue, I won't lie. My [male] partner has never said anything explicitly, but sometimes he doesn't recognise my work as it should be. There are moments when he says: "I do this, and this, and this all [on the fields]. Therefore, I cannot cook." It gets on my nerves! (Maria, women farmer and leader of community-supported agriculture Coast)

The case reported by Maria draws attention towards gender-based discrimination within a family farm that supplies community-supported agriculture (CSA). Gender is a decisive component of farm labour division, and women's contribution to sustaining farming livelihoods is perceived as often devalued and invisibilised (Shortall, 2014; Trauger, 2004). Despite progress in terms of women's access to farming resources previously out of reach, such as land tenure or the title of professional farmer, the heteropatriarchal[1] foundations of agriculture and associated unequal gender relations persist. (Leslie et al., 2019; Pilgeram & Amos, 2015; Shisler & Sbicca, 2019; Wypler, 2019). Therefore, shifting gender relations is an important component of agri-food system transformation.

Our paper examines the experiences of new-entrant women farmers in creating leadership roles in CSA and how that relates to the transformative potential of this agri-food model. CSA is an agri-food provisioning scheme where local consumers pre-finance a harvest season and receive a share of the farm's produce in return (Galt et al., 2019). Women often constitute the majority of active CSA members (Cone & Myhre, 2000; Delind & Ferguson, 1999; Fremstad & Paul, 2020). Gender and feminist scholars have turned to CSA to explore its transformative potential and contributions to emancipatory strategies within agriculture, known for being a male-dominated sector (Fremstad & Paul, 2020; Shisler & Sbicca, 2019). Although CSA initiatives contribute to a limited extent to catalysing fundamental political, economic and gender-based change in agri-food systems, they are viewed as political spaces where women experience everyday emancipatory strategies (Delind & Ferguson, 1999a). Nevertheless, remarkably, gender relations in CSA have been understudied to date (Cone & Myhre, 2000; Delind & Ferguson, 1999; Fremstad & Paul, 2020; Jarosz, 2011; Raj, 2024; Trauger et al., 2010; Wells & Gradwell, 2001). It remains unclear whether, and if so how, CSA may offer the context for women farmers to transform conventional gender relations as part of efforts to transform agri-food systems. Agri-food transformation involves fundamental changes, for example dismissing or ceasing obsolete knowledge and action while developing new paradigms, assumptions, models, methods

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1   We follow Wypler's (2019, p. 948) conceptualisation of heteropatriarchy: "Heteropatriarchy is a set of racialized, gendered, and sexualized power relations that privileges those who are white, cisgender, men, and/or heterosexual and limits human resources for those who do not and cannot fit these boxes."

and practices, that pave the way for the development of socially just and ecologically sound agriculture and food systems (Duncan et al., 2022; El Bilali, 2019).

CSA contributes to transformation by prefiguring future postcapitalist agri-food operations and experimenting with various organisational structures and socio-ecological relations with the potential for disrupting unsustainable capitalist practices and relations (Bonfert, 2022; Rossi et al., under review; Spanier-Guerrero Lara & Feola, 2023). The concept of prefiguration draws attention to grassroots attempts to disengage from the state and its institutions and to create autonomous spaces, where participants perform an approach to food production and consumption in the present that is envisioned for the future (Hoey & Sponseller, 2018). Yet, prefiguration alone is insufficient to leverage agri-food transformation. It should be accompanied by the dismantling of social and cultural hierarchies often reproduced in capitalism (Myers & Sbicca, 2015). This paper employs a theoretical approach to transformation that views it as the entanglement of *unmaking* unsustainable and unjust capitalist practices and relations and the *making* of postcapitalist alternatives (Feola, 2019; Feola et al., 2021). We investigate the unmaking of the conventional "woman farmer" identity, a particular capitalist identity structure that can be challenged by CSA, through the lens of disidentification (Muñoz, 1999; Velicu, 2022). As a concept developed in queer political theory, disidentification alerts us to the need for challenging oppressive subject positions or forms of identification as a political performative act, both individual and collective. This is ambiguous in terms of outcomes but supports the simultaneous deconstruction and reconstruction of political subjectivities in dialectics with hegemonic power relations (Butler 1993, Muñoz, 1999).

Our guiding question is whether, and if so how, new-entrant women farmers create leadership roles in CSA initiatives. The experiences of four new entrants across three CSA initiatives in Italy and Portugal serve as case studies. This comparative analysis provides novel insights into the tensions between disidentification and the creation of alternative power positions for women farmers across different CSA initiatives, thereby deepening our understanding of emancipatory strategies lived within CSA. In doing so, this paper also responds to calls for better accounts of gender relations in agri-food system transformations (e.g., Leslie, 2017; Raj et al., 2024; Sachs et al., 2016).

Our research is based on participant observation and semi-structured interviews with women farmers in CSA. It reveals how these women employ everyday strategies to disidentify themselves from the conventional "woman farmer" identity and create leadership roles, identities and practices in the CSA that are more closely aligned with their personal aspirations and abilities. We argue that although everyday transformation in CSA is conducive to women farmers' emancipation through disidentification, the absence

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of collective efforts to address unequal gender relations places restrictions on their transformative potential. We show how this happens by overlooking power imbalances emerging in the initiatives' internal micro-politics and by neglecting the ambivalent effects shaping transformation itself.

5.2. Shifting gender relations in agriculture and the case of CSA

Historically, the capitalist industrialisation of agriculture has promoted the rhetoric of the "family farm" to reinforce heteropatriarchal sexist and hierarchal structures as a cornerstone for agricultural commodification (Leslie et al., 2019). Women's roles as primary carers confine them to reproductive household labour (Brandth, 2002; Contzen & Forney, 2017; Shisler & Sbicca, 2019). The perpetuation of heteropatriarchal structures in family farms has assigned women the role of "farmwives" (Brandth, 2002; Keller, 2014; Pfammatter & Jongerden, 2023; Shortall, 2014). Governmental interventions and agriculture policies have legitimised the status of the farmwife, often tying women's access to resources and rights to their marital situation (Domosh, 2015; Pfammatter & Jongerden, 2023). For instance, property ownership often grants men superior power, particularly through patrilineal inheritance practices (Leslie, 2019; Shortall, 2014). For queer women farmers, additional challenges arise as finding land, labour, credit and knowledge in agriculture is inherently structured by heteropatriarchy (Leslie, 2019; Wypler, 2019).

Yet, women's positions in farming are dynamic and open to change (Sachs et al., 2021). Women are increasingly assuming leadership in farm operations (Leslie et al., 2019; Shortall, 2014). They have resisted the categorisation of farmwives and claimed the professional identity of a farmer, gaining visibility in roles historically associated with, or assigned to, male farmers (Annes et al., 2021; Keller, 2014; Serpossian et al., 2022; Shortall, 2014). Embodying the identity of "farmers", they have integrated care into productive work, contributing to a redefinition of the extractive approach to farming (Annes et al., 2021; Shisler & Sbicca, 2019). Queer cis-women farmers have disrupted the conventional labour division in family farms by creating queer co-habitational home spaces separate from the production site (Leslie, 2019).

However, shifts toward gender and sexual equality are not zero-sum, and progress in diversity, inclusion and protection is a continuous struggle. Examples include women farmers that lose the opportunity to farm when refusing to subordinate roles (Pilgeram, 2007), that experience higher expectations and overwork when assuming leadership positions on the farm (Annes et al., 2021; Whitley & Brasier, 2021), and that downplay their

gender and sexual differences when asserting their farming identities to gain acceptance in rural and agrarian communities (Hoffelmeyer, 2021). While a woman assuming the professional identity of a farmer is seen as a transgressive act by some (Keller, 2014; Trauger, 2004), others argue that it may not fully shift gendered power relations in agriculture or land ownership (Annes et al., 2021; Pilgeram, 2007; Pfammatter & Jongerden, 2023; Carter, 2017).

One agri-food initiative that has received increasing intention for its transformative potential is community-supported agriculture. Prefigurative politics within these collectives point to women's emancipatory strategies (Cone & Myhre, 2000; Delind & Ferguson, 1999; Fremstad & Paul, 2020; Jarosz, 2011; first author, under review; Wells & Gradwell, 2001). CSA prefigures postcapitalist agri-food systems, and examples include experimentations with care-based agriculture (Jarosz, 2011; Wells & Gradwell, 2001), non-alienated, non-monetised and non-commodified work relations (Raj et al., 2024; Rossi et al., under review), and resembling producer-consumer divides (Schermer, 2015).

Through the relationships of everyday life and the continuous negotiation and implementation of common practices and solutions, women in CSA create visibility for gender issues and assert personal and work relations (Delind & Ferguson 1999). Jarosz (2011) suggests that women farmers' position in CSA is both a product and a result of resistance to subordination, and that such a relationship with heteropatriarchy not only denotes oppression but can also be productive and reflect emancipatory strategies. Women farmers challenge gender stereotypes by claiming practices and identities conventionally attributed to men, but they also risk replicating heteropatriarchal tasks in their new roles (Jarosz, 2011; Wells & Gradwell, 2001). Following a framework developed in a previous study (First author, under review), we distinguish three dimensions of CSA that provide the context for women farmers to experiment with everyday emancipatory strategies (Table 5.1.).

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Table 5.1. CSA dimensions and influence on women farmers' emancipation

Dimension	Description	Emancipatory strategies
Community relationships	CSA promotes community action, connection and heightened social responsibility, enabling members to engage in "quiet activism" (Delind & Ferguson, 1999) by aligning their values with their actions concerning food, the environment and people.	Women farmers find solidarity and support to put into practice their desired work-life balance (Jarosz, 2011).
Farmer-consumer partnership	CSA establishes partnerships that facilitate distributions of costs and farm operations.	Women farmers find support in the community economy to experiment with diverse farming methods, risk sharing, equitable access to knowledge and reducing the gender income gap (Fremstad & Paul, 2020).
Horizontal organisation	CSA provides a collaborative platform for day-to-day problem solving among farmers and members.	Women farmers express their desires, world views and intentions in decision-making about farm operations and farming approach (Jarosz, 2011; Wells & Gradwell, 2001)

5.3. Conceptual framework and methods

This paper adopts a qualitative approach to explore how new-entrant women farmers and leaders in CSA disidentify themselves from conventional gender relations in their effort to create alternative power positions in agriculture. The conceptual framework that operationalises the concept of unmaking capitalism to the case of disidentification is introduced first. Then, we explain the empirical focus of our analysis that explores the experiences of four women farmers across three CSA initiatives, two in Portugal and one in Italy.

5.3.1. Conceptual framework

Transformation to sustainability "necessarily rests on challenging and transforming capitalist institutions, and their cultural, social and political architecture" (Feola, 2020, p. 246) or "unmaking capitalism: multilevel (individual, social, socio-ecological) and multidimensional (temporal, spatial, symbolic, and material) situated processes that can be used strategically [by grassroots initiatives] to make space for sustainable alternatives" (Feola, 2019, p. 922). As discussed in literature on prefigurative politics in CSA, this perspective highlights collective strategies to deconstruct, resist and disengage from unsustainable capitalist structures and enables the tensions to be explored between

"destruction and construction, resistance and experimentations, refusal and proposition" (Feola, 2019, p. 992). CSA initiatives may engage with unmaking along one or more axes simultaneously, such as labour (methods of remuneration), property (modes of access regulation) and knowledge production, among others (Vincent & Feola, 2020). Following Feola (2019), we understand unmaking as a combination of situated processes, whereby acts of unmaking are not end points but rather means inscribed in the performance of historically and spatially situated individual, social and socio-ecological transformation. Processes of "unmaking" involve both symbolic and material deconstruction and often entail contradictory personal experiences: the refusal of modern capitalist and utilitarian subjectivities opens up postcapitalist possibilities but might involve individual and collective compromises, negotiations, setbacks and dilemmas. Unmaking can occur through public actions (e.g. civil disobedience and protests) but is more often private or even covert, and hence less prone to co-optation by states and markets. Far from constituting mere rejection and stoppage, processes of unmaking are generative: as they interrupt the reproduction of capitalism in prefigurative grassroots spaces, they open possibilities otherwise out of reach.

Previous research has analysed collective strategies in CSA to unmake capitalist structures and the implications for postcapitalist transformations of the agri-food system (Feola et al., 2021; Raj et al., 2024; Rossi et al., under review; Smessaert & Feola, under review). In this paper, we shift attention to the individual level and investigate the unmaking of the "woman farmer" identity, a particular capitalist and heteropatriarchal structure in agriculture that can be challenged by CSA. To help us document and analyse transformation of identity structures, we turn to theories of disidentification.

Disidentification draws attention to a process of dissenting from consensus, challenging the social structures that frame the common sense. As Muñoz would refer to such acts, they create survival strategies adopted by minority subjects to resist and renegotiate the phobic majoritarian public sphere and socially prescriptive modes of identification (1999). The political strength of disidentification as an emancipatory tactic resides in the exact disruption of what seems to be the "proper" farmer. It is a form of a self-empowerment to navigate the borders of contingent identifications, which confronts the "logic of police" aimed at safeguarding validation criteria based on merit/virtue, and thus it privileges those who have been historically in a position to take advantage of such criteria (Velicu, 2022). Escaping such logic does not mean it is impossible to demand group identities: rather, it pinpoints the many layers of oppression that function as barriers in recognition of rights themselves, or the preliminary problem of justice (Ranciere, Velicu, 2017). The concept of disidentification makes it possible to remove oneself from oppressive status positions and "steal[ing] more space and time" for performing as a political agent (ibid. above):

dissent is not a conflict over solutions to some predefined problem or division: it is the active redefinition of the problem that exists in common through acts or events of [disidentification and] re-subjectification [...] to occur in multiple ways, to make ways for ongoing demonstrations of equality. (Second author, 2022, p.16)

Furthermore, disidentification, as a political concept emerging from gender and queer struggles and theory building, invites us to look at the "politically dubious or shameful components within an identificatory locus" (Muñoz, 1999, p. 12), and the multiple, contradictory and ambivalent components of it. Similarly, Berlant (2010) highlights attachment struggles emerging when individuals seek belonging (to others, to a community, to the world) and see no alternatives to repeating the familiar, even though they wish to be otherwise. In sum, disidentification helps in investigating the deconstruction and refusal of, and disengagement from, hegemonic identity structures by providing a lens through which to analyse the ambivalent, non-linear, fluid and in-and-against nature of emancipatory dynamics within agri-food transformation. It brings depth and nuance to the analysis of "women farmers" as a political position in and against the heteropatriarchal foundations of the agri-food system.

5.3.2. Methods

Case description

Three CSA initiatives were selected in Portugal (n=2) and Italy (n=1) for three main reasons: they are co-led by new-entrant women farmers situated differently in the intersections of gender, family constellation, sexuality and agricultural background; they deploy similar CSA operations; and they expressed interest in collaborating in this study. Table 5.2. describes the similarities of the three CSA initiatives and the singular intersectionalities of the four women farmers. To ensure anonymity, we assigned pseudonyms to the participants based on the most common names currently used in their country of origin, as stated by governmental agencies. Also, we refer to each initiative by different codes referring to a core characteristic of their territory. CSA Coast and CSA River are the two Portuguese initiatives and CSA Mountain is the Italian one. These initiatives embraced values and visions that contested the industrialisation of agriculture and aimed to support small-scale and ecologically centred agriculture. The Portuguese initiatives were part of the national CSA network and shared the network's commitment to promoting food sovereignty, food as a commons and agroecology as alternatives to the industrial agri-food system. Similarly, the Italian case was a member of the national CSA network and other food sovereignty and peasants' rights movements. We distinguish between two general types of members in the CSA, as identified by the CSA members. Producers are the farmers and food producers

who manage and execute farm activities. Co-producers[2] are the local consumers who pre-finance the costs of a harvest season, receive fresh produce weekly and can participate in decision-making and work activities organised by the CSA.

Table 5.2. Characteristics of the three CSA initiatives and four women farmers

	CSA Coast	**CSA River**	**CSA Mountain**
Start of CSA operations	**2019**	**2019**	**2019**
Number of co-producers	26 (autumn 2021)	24 (autumn 2021)	25 (summer 2022)
Farm size	2 hectares	1.7 hectares	1 hectare
Farm activity	Horticulture	Horticulture and livestock	Horticulture
Approach to agriculture	Agroecology	Agroecology	Agroecology
Gender and sexuality of woman farmer	Cisgender and heterosexual	Cisgender and lesbian	Cisgender and heterosexual
Family constitution of woman farmer	Couple with kids	Couple without kids	Couple without kids
Agricultural background	Limited experience with farming	Limited experience with farming	Limited experience with farming

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This study participates in research that "question[s] gender differences not only between men and women, but also among women themselves by developing an intersectional approach" (Annes et al., 2021, p. 46). We opted for the intersection between gender, family constellation, sexuality and agricultural background because their relevance emerged from fieldwork observations. Additionally, Shisler and Sbicca (2019) and Annes et al. (2021) stressed the particular relevance of these social markers of difference in advancing intersectional analyses of agrarian gender relations. To be clear, this study does not aim to identify which social marker of difference is most influential in the case of disidentification from conventional gender relations in CSA; instead, disidentification may be contingent upon the different situatedness of the four women farmers in the gender intersectionality, thus showcasing the complexities characterising the experiences of women navigating gender relations in agriculture.

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2   The initiatives in Portugal used the term "co-producer", and the Italian initiative employed the term "eating partner" as an alternative to the term "consumer". Generally, the new terms were intended to spur active participation and shared accountability over the economic viability and labour for agri-food production, in contrast to the passive role of consumers performed in conventional market transactions. Nonetheless, this intended behaviour and mindset shift remained a challenge for most of the CSA initiatives, as the work share of co-producers was significantly smaller than the work performed by producers, and their involvement in work tasks was optional.

Data collection and analysis

We operationalised disidentification into the context of women farmers in CSA through three interrelated moments: (i) encounters with policing acts; (ii) awareness of those policing acts and their resulting constraints; (iii) resisting, refusing or disengaging from them. Then, we analyse whether, and if so how, CSA created an environment conducive for women farmers to undergo disidentification as part of their everyday emancipatory strategies.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and participant observation through intermittent visits to the CSA initiatives between the spring of 2021 and the summer of 2022. To become better acquainted with the operations and social dynamics in the initiatives, the first author stayed between three and four consecutive weeks in each one of them and actively participated in different activities, such as farming, distribution, coordination meetings and convivial moments. Additional visits were organised throughout the year to carry out follow-up interviews, participate in CSA assemblies, volunteer in help-out gatherings and attend agri-food-related festivities organised by them. Interviews lasted about 60 minutes and included questions regarding their motivation to start and lead a CSA, interactions with CSA co-producers and other producers, relationships with their nuclear farming families and local farming community, experiences accessing farming resources through the CSA and independently from it, achievements and failures to attain their farming objectives through the CSA. Interviews were conducted in Portuguese or Italian, which were the mother tongues of the respective women farmers. A research assistant transcribed the interviews. Participant observation was carried out during three- to four-week stays at each farm and included voluntary participation in the farm work routine, and CSA meetings and assemblies, and intermittent visits to participate in CSA activities relevant for this study. Fieldwork notes were recorded on a daily basis.

We analysed the data through open coding (Benaquisto & Given, 2008). Interviews were codified using the NVivo qualitative data analysis software. Open coding helped identify emergent themes in and across the interviews in line with emergent themes in the literature mobilised for this study. Examples of coding include "overt/covert heteropatriarchal discrimination inside/outside the CSA", "horizontal organisation mechanisms", "invisible work" and "refusal". Additionally, coding allowed us to identify themes obscured in the literature review or that were new to us, for instance "xenophobia entangled with heteropatriarchal discrimination". In the final stage, we used the conceptual framework to organise the findings and to highlight experiences reported by the four women farmers or observed during participant observation that helped achieve the objective of our study and that could contribute relevant insights to research on gender relations in CSA, and, more broadly, to grassroots initiatives for agri-food transformation.

5.4. Results

In this section, we present each case by foregrounding disidentification in two parts. First, we examine the three interrelated moments of disidentification experienced by the four women farmers: (i) encounters with policing acts; (ii) awareness of those policing acts and their resulting constraints; (iii) resisting, refusing or disengaging from them. Second, we illuminate how CSA offered the context for disidentification and the creation of alternative social positions in agriculture. At the end of this section, we summarise the findings and highlight relevant aspects of disidentification from conventional gender relations in CSA.

5.4.1. CSA Coast

This case study presents the experiences of Maria, a married cisgender heterosexual woman farmer living with her partner, Miguel, and son on their co-owned farm and supplying horticultural goods for CSA Coast. We start by elucidating Maria's position and responsibilities on the farm and in childcare shaped by expectations regarding the biological and reproductive functions of women. Then, we explain how CSA Coast offered the context for Maria to rearrange farm labour division, while disidentifying herself from conventional gender relations.

Policing acts: A mother or a farmer?

When they moved to the farm in 2017, Maria and Miguel shared the administrative and food production activities of the farm. The farmers worked together in the field, with Miguel mainly making decisions and Maria providing support with the work. Yet, the division of labour changed significantly after the birth of their son. The allocation of tasks became more rigid and was strongly shaped by gendered expectations of parenthood. For Miguel, Maria's ability to perform agricultural work was considerably hindered by her biological functions as a mother: "[S]he had to breastfeed, and often felt tired and complained about back pain. So she couldn't do work in the field." Miguel found farm work "easier for the father, as I had more time and energy available for it". Subsequently, Maria shifted her focus to administrative tasks while raising the child, despite her desire to be more involved with work in the field. Both farmers commented that this internal work arrangement emerged naturally.

This gendered division of farm labour was perpetuated after the creation of CSA Coast in 2019. Maria took over most of the CSA's administrative work, community building, and organisation and facilitation of assemblies, and Miguel coordinated the agriculture and farm infrastructure. Notably, this division of labour reflected a conventional socialisation of women and men in agriculture that attributes care and reproductive work to women

and productive work to men. One co-producer observed this division: "The organisation of the CSA is centred on Maria. Miguel chose to be working with the plants since the start." The administrative work for the CSA not only reduced Maria's time working in the field but also made her less familiarised with the plot arrangements and farm infrastructure. In particular, with Miguel advancing individually with agriculture studies and experiments in the field, the production site of the farm became more a reflection of his expectations and knowledge than a combination of their mutual objectives and capacities. Maria mentioned that the irrigation system implemented by Miguel was very demanding and complex for her to handle alone. After a few trials, she decided to give up and focus on the relationship with co-producers, the organisation of events and other things she felt more comfortable doing.

However, Maria increasingly realised the asymmetrical valorisation of her and Miguel's distinct responsibilities and work. On the one hand, food production was more core to the CSA, as it secured the economic and ecological viability of the farm, than community building and social work. Therefore, the model placed Miguel and his tasks at the centre, while allocating to Maria and her responsibilities a more marginal position. On the other hand, on several occasions, Maria observed that her partner explicitly undervalued her housekeeping and caring work. In effect, Miguel acknowledged the undervaluation of Maria's work:

> [A]dministrative work locks Maria at home, which is a pity because she would have preferred to work more in the field. Also, farming gives a better feeling of accomplishing something than logistics, which is very dull. And the results are not so evident, right? For example, when she manages to get another co-producer to join the CSA it is great, but it is not a result as tangible as seeing a plant grow.

Creation of leadership roles in CSA: From subordination to leadership?

Maria found in the community dimension of the CSA the means to pursue her desire for a collective approach to farming. She pointed out that showing vulnerability was at the core of her engagement and leadership in the CSA. In her view, telling others she did not know what to do about certain issues, instead of immediately giving guidelines, was crucial to mobilising support. Fieldwork observations showed that Maria's leadership approach differed considerably from the one adopted by Miguel, who often made decisions and delegated food production and farm infrastructure tasks alone.

Furthermore, the horizontal organisation of CSA operations aligned with Maria's leadership approach as it provided a structure for collective accountability of farm operations. Two cases illustrate this interlinkage. First, in the winter of 2020–2021, Maria and co-producers participated in a collective process to evaluate and further streamline the

economic pilar of the CSA. During a CSA assembly in January 2021, Maria explained to the co-producers that the economic viability of the farm was at risk. The farmers needed to make more revenue to afford a dignified livelihood for their family. Maria and one co-producer followed a workshop on "economic viability of agroecological farms" provided by another CSA farmer from the Portuguese CSA network. The workshop helped Maria and the co-producer formulate a financial plan for the farm and equate the financial input provided by CSA members and farming output. In the CSA assembly in the spring of 2021, the financial plan was presented to the group that participated in a brainstorming session to idealise and operationalise solutions to secure the economic viability of the farm. After this CSA gathering, Maria celebrated the fact that co-producers shared her interest in securing the farm's viability while prioritising social benefits: "Most of the ideas shared by co-producers related to creating events to bring economic input to the farm and foster social ties between members of the community. They shared that dream with me!"

Second, childcare became a collective concern of the CSA. On the last Saturday of each month, CSA Coast organised a help-out gathering where co-producers worked in the fields. Several co-producers brought their children along, and the need to collectively organise childcare quickly became evident. Miguel explained that, without supervision, children messed up with the organisation of the farmhouse and damaged the farm infrastructure. In the summer of 2020, co-producers and Maria gathered to systematise childcare on the farm. Interestingly, this collective accountability over childcare expanded beyond the help-out gatherings, and Maria agreed to organise with other parents children activities at the farm during the holiday season.

The lively community dynamics within CSA Coast fostered strong ties between Maria and co-producers. In effect, several interviewees attributed value to Maria's leadership approach and influence on community building. For instance, one co-producer explained: "There is something special in Maria's leadership. It is a leadership full of affection. She is very affectionate. The way how I and others in the collective relate to her is extremely tender and caring." Arguably, CSA members gave meaning and importance to the marginal and reproductive work performed by Maria, providing her with greater recognition and legitimacy for her social position in the collective and at the farm.

The contrasting valorisation of Maria's reproductive work for co-producers and for Miguel resulted in an ambivalent position on the farm's organisation. Maria commented that after a while, she started contesting the devaluation of her work:

> [T]hings have changed, and I have settled some of the tensions underlying the division of work. I can't do some of the things he does, like the irrigation system. I stopped trying to do things his way. I decided I don't want to know, I don't want to do it

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anymore. I will focus on my work. Then, when I see him doing things that are part of my responsibilities, and I see that it is not working out, I ask him to tell me so I can do it.

For instance, Maria negotiated a reattribution of household and CSA logistics tasks to Miguel to balance their housekeeping responsibilities. Maria mentioned that communicating farm and house responsibilities to co-producers was essential: "I am very vocal about our housekeeping tasks, and I tell everyone 'I take care of the dishes in the communal kitchen, and Miguel is responsible for the dishes in the house'. This way, everyone knows there is no unbalanced division of tasks, and I don't feel embarrassed." Implicit in Maria's opinion is the importance of showing to others that she was not a victim, but someone actively addressing her gendered social position within the CSA. Arguably, we observe a shift from a subordinate to an empowering position on the farm.

5.4.2. CSA River

The following paragraphs explore the experiences of Ana and Antônia, two immigrant cis-women and queer farmers who live together on their co-owned farm and supply bread, pastry and cheese to CSA River. We start by placing emphasis on three policing situations reported by the farmers: access to land, fitting in the rural community and organising a social movement. Then, we elaborate on how CSA River offered them a protective space to disidentify themselves from the subordinate position of women in farming with limited access to resources, and to reclaim the professional farmer identity.

Policing acts: A professional farmer or a joke?

Since 2017, Ana has herded a small batch of 15 goats to supply her artisanal cheese production. The farmer faced difficulties in leasing the additional land necessary to expand her goat herd and cheese production. She highlighted the fact that women farmers, without a male partner, and producing on a small scale, received less professional credibility:

I want to lease land for more space for the goats, and I can't. That's only because I'm a woman. Maybe if I were married to a man, my husband would be able to help me lease land. But I'm a woman, so they don't trust that what I'm doing is serious. Agriculture and animals are a man's job here. So, I am like a joke to them.

Such devaluation and delegitimisation of women farmers are linked to a structural gender disparity in the national agriculture sector. In Portugal, only 15.1% of farm managers are women (INE, 2021). Similarly, the invisibility and precarity of farming work performed by women are ongoing issues. The Association of Portuguese Farming and Rural Women

estimates that 50% of agriculture work in the country is informal, with 65% of that being performed by women (MARP, 2020).

Furthermore, Ana and Antônia mentioned that their initial encounters with the native Portuguese population were often characterised by both subtle and explicit misogyny and xenophobia. Discrimination was reported on multiple occasions. For instance, despite being a legally married couple, heads of farm operations and land owners, they were primarily perceived and labelled as immigrant Brazilian women. This recognition carried with it an underlying prejudice, as elucidated by Antônia: "We encountered discrimination not so much for our queer identities but rather as two immigrant Brazilian women. The native Portuguese population in this region tends to stereotype Brazilian women as sex workers."[3] Ana told the story of her first encounter with a middle-aged native Portuguese woman farmer who assumed that Ana was a sex worker and cautioned her: "This is a respectable community. We don't appreciate disorder and parties here." Arguably, such a prejudice could have gained different contours if they had not been a queer couple, but women married to men.

Antônia highlighted a shift in hers and Ana's attitude towards their farming identities in the face of these policing behaviours. On the one hand, they decided to deliberately introduce themselves to the local farming community as artisanal cheese and bread producers, and farmers, before signalling any other identity trace. According to her, it was "easier to create affinity this way as we do the same type of work". On the other hand, they opted to be vocal about their queer identity and marriage, yet in a discrete fashion as they feared a backlash from the local population that embodied more conservative and heteronormative values. The strategy to affirm fixed identities helped the farmers attain recognition and avoid intimidating questions, even though they stressed that their sexuality was quite fluid. Antônia explained: "I am not a lesbian, I am *being* lesbian since I started dating Ana. I have already been straight in other moments of my life, and who knows what I will be in the future." This fluid understanding of their identities also reflected their approach to farming. For instance, labour was divided based on their capacities, and not on their gender. Although one produced bread and the other cheese, they shared duties in the garden, alternated housekeeping and cooking tasks, helped each other with the animals and the bakery, and dedicated time to nurturing their romantic aspirations.

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3   In this case, Ana and Antônia referred to the negative connotations of sex workers. However, I acknowledge that this connotation is a social construct imbued with discrimination and obscures the dignity and working rights of sex workers. Moreover, in this case, heteropatriarchy intersects with xenophobia and informed discrimination towards queer Brazilian farmers, the largest immigrant population in rural Alentejo (INE, 2022). Historically, Brazilian women have been exposed to racism and gender discrimination in Portugal (Gomes, 2018).

Creation of leadership roles in CSA: Queer farmers inside and outside the CSA?

Ana and Antônia found in CSA River a social, physical and cultural space to assert and be recognised as professional farmers without constraints. As part of the producer–co-producer partnership, they hosted the CSA weekly meetings to assemble and distribute the vegetable baskets at their farm, as well as decision-making and convivial gatherings. Ana celebrated the fact that during CSA gatherings she felt comfortable that they performed as their queer and farming selves simultaneously:

> Since the CSA meetings happen at our place, and we are a couple, this is not a concern to anyone. I do not need to pretend we are not a couple, or people do not seem to be uncomfortable because we are a couple. The CSA members not only accept it but also respect it.

Additionally, Ana highlighted a contrast between the values and principles nurtured in the CSA and those found in the conventional culture in the region, which in turn valued industrial, monocultural and large-scale agriculture. CSA members valorised the approach to farming envisioned by the two farmers: "I am grateful for the CSA because it allows me to exist. It is a place where I can express myself, where I can be creative and where I am respected for the work I do. CSA members trust and appreciate my work" (Ana).

An interesting illustration of this contrast is their engagement in a local social movement. The movement arose in the summer of 2021 in response to the construction of an 816-hectare photovoltaic power plant in their region. The farmers found support in the CSA to unite against this power plant, which represented numerous health, economic, social and environmental threats. The decision to build the plant had been unilaterally made by regional government representatives and a German engineering company, without sufficiently consulting civil society representatives. The social movement took action with the support of many CSA members who participated at different levels, including distributing informative posters, creating audiovisual content for awareness campaigns and engaging in press relations to report on the movement's objectives. Ana and Antônia, in particular, assumed roles on the movement's board, organising meetings at their farm, conducting awareness campaigns, and hosting public events to inform the local population about their concerns and mobilise a critical mass. In October 2021, the social movement presented a precautionary measure to halt the construction of the plant, targeting the regional government and the German company, which led to a temporary suspension.

Ana and Antônia used the same strategy to primarily introduce themselves as professional farmers in every activity organised by the social movement. For instance, during a public gathering in July 2021, Ana introduced herself as a farmer and shared her experience working exclusively with grains produced by small and medium-sized farmers from the

region. Nonetheless, they reported discrimination on numerous occasions that delegitimised them as women farmers. Similarly to the case of the neighbour, Ana was mistaken for a sex worker when approaching the local police to obtain approval for a public act:

> I visited the commissariat to inform them about our public gathering, as part of the official procedure for obtaining approval. As I began explaining that I was a farmer representing the social movement, and the intention to hold the meeting with other members of the local community, the officer, a native Portuguese male, interrupted and inquired the nature of the meeting. I reiterated that it was a meeting involving other members of the local community. He then questioned which community I belonged to, and where I lived. When I mentioned the county where I lived, which happens to have a famous brothel, he insinuated something. Thankfully, another comrade, also a native Portuguese male, intervened and introduced himself, reassuring the officer that we were together. With irony, the officer responded, "Ah, so she is with you. And you are the son of [the name of his father], right?" In the end, we got the approval.

Moreover, the farmers met resistance from some segments of the local population when promoting the social movement. Local politicians and members of affluent families questioned the credibility and legitimacy of social movement leaders as they were immigrants and did not belong to affluent local families. The working-class residents showed a lack of alignment with their arguments elucidating ecological and social benefits over the economic gains associated with the power plant promised by the local government. Ana reflected on this experience and shared that she felt like reproducing the "white saviour syndrome" or " the white saviour who wants to defend the poor and oppressed", yet she had very little knowledge about the reality of the native population. Similarly, the farmers stressed that this experience heightened their awareness of the bubble effect associated with the CSA that gathered like-minded people from the region with privileged values, beliefs and socio-economic power, while simultaneously segregating them from other segments of the population that embodied non-conforming lifestyles and culture.

5.4.3. CSA Mountain

This section delves into the experiences of Sofia, a cisgender heterosexual farmer living with her non-married partner in a cottage with a farming plot collectively rented by CSA Mountain. First, we show how some interactions between Sofia and her partner were charged with gender expectations towards her farming role that resulted in the devaluation and invisibility of her contributions to the collective. Second, we elaborate on Sofia's disidentification from the professional farmer identity, as someone with a rich agricultural background, and experimentation with a participatory and non-authoritarian approach to farming and CSA leadership instead.

## *Policing acts: A leader or "just a farmwife in the crowd"?*

Sofia and Leonardo were founding members on the board of CSA Mountain. Sofia had been actively involved with the collective since it started in 2019, at a community garden within a large urban centre. Her contributions to the collective included the organisation of several community events, seed management and plant nursery, and farming and gardening on a daily basis. In the spring of 2021, CSA Mountain rented a cottage with a farming plot to expand their food production and to host community events. Since then, Sofia and Leonardo have lived in the cottage and taken charge of most of the daily tasks to maintain the cottage and produce food. Additionally, Sofia has been actively engaged in multistakeholder platforms in the region working on topics of sustainable catering and waste, often as a spokesperson on behalf of the CSA.

Despite Sofia's expertise on CSA operations and regional food politics, we observed devaluation of her participation and contributions to the collective. In several group discussions where Leonardo was also present, it was noticeable that he dominated the conversation, while Sofia's participation was quite discreet and seldomly encouraged by Leonardo. One co-producer stressed that "during CSA gatherings and decision-making, it is clearly Leonardo who speaks the most". On the few occasions when Sofia participated in the conversation, Leonardo showed a lack of interest or did not acknowledge her contribution, notably by speaking over her sometimes. These exclusionary dynamics were evident during the meeting to organise the festivities for the summer solstice in 2021, where Leonardo had a dominating presence while Sofia's contributions, although pertinent, were limited and often neglected by him.

On the occasion of the summer solstice festivities, Leonardo decorated the cottage with different peasant movements' flags and traditional peasant tools. One particular decorative object placed by Leonardo was a copy of Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo's painting "The Fourth State" (Photo 5.1.). The painting portrays a political demonstration organised by factory workers, featuring three prominent figures at the forefront of the crowd. Positioned from left to right are a senior male worker, a young male worker and a barefoot woman in a striking pose holding a child. When questioned about the meaning of the painting, Leonardo explained its political significance and symbolism. However, when asked about the meaning behind the woman holding a child, Leonardo displayed disinterest and instead elaborated on the symbolism of the painting within the Italian peasant movement. In response to further inquiries about the intriguing position of the

woman, the farmer dismissively remarked, "She is likely just a farmwife in the crowd".[4] This apparent failure to recognise the woman's presence in the painting and the subsequent devaluation of her implied leadership and strength in the face of the political significance suggest gender discrimination. Implicit in Leonardo's interpretation of the painting was a devaluation and invisibilisation of the crucial and leading contributions of women in political movements, which were similar to his treatment of Sofia.

Photo 5.1. A copy of "The Fourth State" (1901) by Giuseppe Pelliza da Volpedo in CSA Mountain

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Leonardo emphasised that a key objective of CSA Mountain was to elevate and protect peasants' rights while promoting food sovereignty in the region. In contrast to Leonardo's central role in the collective, where he self-identified as a peasant, Sofia opted for a less prominent and assertive leading role. In particular, Sofia stressed: "I am not a peasant." She believed that a true peasant should possess advanced agricultural knowledge, make independent decisions and be confident with the use of farm machinery. She perceived limitations in these farming tasks, which were mainly carried out by Leonardo, and felt hesitant about claiming the title. Implicit in Sofia's explanation of a peasant was someone who centralised different capacities and abilities important for farming.

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4   The interpretation of the woman's role in the painting remains a subject of debate. According to different sources, she symbolises the movement's quest for social inclusivity, encompassing women and children within the working class (Museo Milano, n.d.). Some argue that she serves as an inspiration for the political demonstration (Arte Svelata, 2020), while others suggest she undermines its purpose (Analise dell'Opera, 2018) or even leads the protest (Patria Independente, 2016).

Creation of leadership roles in CSA: Participatory leadership for whom?

Sofia emphasised the partnership between producers and co-producers as a core dimension of CSA Mountain, enabling her to implement her personal aspirations in regarding to farming through collective organisation and operationalisation of food production. In particular, Sofia described how the CSA triggered a transformation in her approach to leadership, transitioning from a deterministic and individualistic mindset to a participatory and collective one. Decisions should not be imposed but rather involve active participation from all members in the CSA. This shift challenged traditional expectations of women confined to family roles and the identity of the farmwife, as she exemplified how these differed from her motherhood tasks years before engaging in the CSA when she had to independently make decisions on behalf of her children and make choices solely concerning family matters. Besides the identity of a farmwife, this change also conflicted with Sofia's sense of being a peasant in the CSA, as, in her view, this model was incompatible with an authoritarian farmer that assigned farming tasks to fellow members. Instead, she aimed to share ideas and guide the group toward common objectives.

However, Sofia encountered difficulties in establishing a collective voice and executing her leadership without authoritative control, particularly in her relationship with Leonardo and other CSA members. Sofia expressed frustration over Leonardo's preference for working alone in the field, never seeking assistance and failing to appreciate her offers to help. Additionally, she actively participated in various thematic working groups dedicated to different aspects of CSA operations, such as the systematisation of vegetable baskets, collaborations with local farmers and peasant movements, and the organisation of community-building events. Although Sofia viewed her involvement in multiple working groups as contributing to collective decision-making and actively engaging in the CSA's daily life, others perceived her participation differently.

CSA members pointed out that while Sofia consistently attended working group meetings, she often remained silent and shared ideas and suggestions without making concrete decisions. Interestingly, none of the interviewees interpreted Sofia's participation in the same way as intended by her. One co-producer speculated that Sofia did not believe in the decentralisation of decision-making and the efficiency of working groups, suggesting that her presence in all groups reflected a need for control. Another co-producer remarked that Sofia was always present in meetings but never took decisive action or proposed clear solutions to emerging issues, limiting her contributions to abstract ideas. Comparatively, both interviewees viewed Leonardo's leadership style as favourably contrasting with Sofia's and described it as more assertive and solution-oriented. The co-producer explained:

Sofia has learned more from her own experience with farming than any of us. But if I have to be honest… In any case, Leonardo has been a farmer all his life, so if I have any doubts, I would ask him directly, also because it's easier. He is much more pragmatic. He gives you answers that are concrete. Sofia may misinterpret the question or, in fact, understand it very well but in any case give you answers that have nothing to do with that question, just ideas. So it's just more tiring to even interact with her. Leonardo is certainly much more pragmatic and concrete.

5.5. Discussion

5.5.1. Disidentification from conventional gender relations in CSA

The four new entrants reported explicit and implicit policing pressures shaping their roles, practices and relationships on the farm. From an intersectional standpoint, we observed that biological and reproductive expectations tied to motherhood influenced a gendered division of farm labour, particularly in family constellations that included children. Although Maria (CSA Coast) and Sofia (CSA Mountain) were both mothers, Maria raised and lived with her child on the farm and saw her time in the field reduced to prioritise childcare, in contrast to Sofia whose children were raised and lived outside the farm. As regards sexuality, heterosexual women farmers encountered policing primarily from their partners. Conversely, Ana and Anônia (CSA River), the only queer farmers in our sampling, felt their identity and agency being policed outside their family unit, during interactions with members from the local farming community. Gender and sexuality intersected with nationality and social class in the case of Ana and Antônia. They felt delegitimised as professional farmers because of their immigrant status, and because their socio-economic and intellectual capital was tied to class privilege. In terms of agricultural background, all four new entrants had limited experience with farming. However, in the case of Maria and Sofia, whose partners were more qualified in agriculture, they became subordinated to their partner's decisions about agriculture and farm infrastructure.

Furthermore, findings revealed that new entrants employed everyday strategies to disidentify themselves from the conventional "woman farmer" identity while adopting leadership roles, identities and practices in the CSA that conveyed them better. The three CSA initiatives enabled this transformation in diverse forms, and examples abound in our findings. Through community relationships, Maria's marginal and reproductive work in the farm gained new meaning and importance. Additionally, the producer-coproducer partnerships in CSA Coast brought Maria and co-producers together in support of Maria's role in studying and ensuring the financial viability of the farm. In CSA River, such a partnership legitimised Ana and Antônia's professional farmer and queer identities, while also providing financial

opportunities for their small-scale and queer farming livelihood. Lastly, the horizontal organisation performed across the three CSAs yielded substantial support to systematise farming operations and relations in line with women farmers' aspirations. CSA Coast helped elevate the community and caring aspect of farming to the priorities of financial input; CSA River provided support for Ana and Antônia's engagement in the local social movement; and CSA Mountain provided participatory tools for Sofia to experiment with participatory decision-making and leadership. Despite these empowering effects, none of the initiatives discussed gender issues at the collective level. The case of CSA Coast and the readjustment of unequal distribution of productive and reproductive tasks (e.g. childcare and cooking) stands out as a key collective effort addressing gender inequalities on the farm, even though discussions of gender itself were not explicitly explored.

Additionally, results indicated that disidentification did not resume with the creation of alternative social positions on the farm; instead, women farmers continuously juggled between several dimensions of their identities and abilities, at times engaging with conventional gender relations, or refusing, resisting and disengaging from them. While Maria's leadership approach emphasising vulnerability gained recognition and valorisation among co-producers, empowerment remained confined to the reproductive realm, as was evident when she decided not to intervene in Miguel's productive work and, instead, renegotiated the delegation of reproductive tasks with him. Similarly, Sofia faced difficulties validating her participatory leadership approach in her relationship with Leornardo and co-producers. Moreover, Ana and Antônia experienced their professional farmer identities differently within the CSA and during interactions with actors unrelated to it. These findings reinforced the ambivalent nature of emancipatory strategies, while emphasising the non-linear, fluid and in-and-against characteristic of transformations of gender relations in CSA. Table 5.3. summarises the findings and highlights: (i) which aspects of the conventional "woman farmer" identity new entrants disidentified themselves from; (ii) what alternative agrarian positions they created; and (iii) how this process was inherently ambivalent.

5.5.2. Considerations on disidentification

Our study casts disidentification of the "woman farmer" identity as a pivotal dimension of women farmers' emancipation from conventional gender relations in CSA. For the women farmers participating in this study, disidentification entailed disrupting identity structures that perpetuated gender norms upholding capitalist and heteropatriarchal agri-food systems. These norms created a rigid and hostile terrain for women farmers to deploy emancipatory strategies on the farm, in the CSA and in the agri-food system more broadly. Evidence of disidentification is highlighted in our findings (Table 5.3.). In line with the literature on shifting gender relations in agriculture, the policing pressures identified

by our study led new entrants to replicate a position in the division of labour, identity attribution and resource allocation that aligned with a heteropatriarchal structure of intimate and business relations on the farm. However, as they became aware of these policing dynamics, new entrants opted to variously resist, refuse and disengage from conventional roles ascribed to women on the farm. These processes were factored into the creation of alternative power positions in the CSA.

Table 5.3. Summary of results

Case study	Disidentification from conventional gender relations	Creating alternative social positions in agriculture	Ambivalences
Maria (CSA Coast)	Woman refuses subordination to man's decisions on farm labour	Woman leads CSA operations	Woman receives recognition for her leading role in the CSA, yet confined within the boundaries of the reproductive sphere of the farm
	Woman resists performing reproductive work with little valorisation	Woman strives for equal distribution and valorisation of reproductive work	
Ana and Antônia (CSA River)	Woman disengages from a delegitimised professional farming role	Woman gains recognition for being both queer and a professional farmer	Woman gains legitimacy for her professional farmer and queer identity within CSA while facing challenges outside of it
		Woman independently accesses farming resources through CSA	
Sofia (CSA Mountain)	Woman disengages from the role of farmwife to support man's objectives with the farm	Woman self-defines a supportive role aligned with personal aspirations	Woman denies an authoritarian character and asserts a participatory approach to leadership, yet CSA members prefer the authoritarian approach
	Woman refuses subordination to man's decisions on farm labour	Woman leads CSA operations	

We suggest that the concept of disidentification contributes substantially to debates on gender relations in CSA by highlighting everyday emancipatory strategies to *dissent* from the conventional "woman farmer" identity. This perspective makes it possible to uncover and examine the often covert tensions that arise from challenging the status quo and the ambivalent effects on these women's farming experience that ensue. Our study followed Shisler and Sbicca (2019) and Annes et al. (2021) and examined the different experiences with disidentification emerging from the intersection of gender, family constellation, sexuality and agricultural background. This analytical shift complements existing analyses on women's emancipatory strategies to generate alternative gender relations in CSA

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(Jarosz, 2011; Wells & Gradwell, 2001), which often overlook the efforts to dissent from conventional positions they reject.

5.5.3. Implications for CSA from a gender perspective

Starting with the premise that shifting gender relations is integral to agri-food systems transformation, we explored the potential of three CSA initiatives to contribute to this endeavour. Our findings suggest that community relationships, producer–co-producer partnerships and horizontal organisation within and across the selected CSA initiatives created an environment conducive for new entrants to disidentify themselves from undesired aspects of the conventional "woman farmer" identity and create alternatives aligned with their personal abilities and aspirations. However, despite the empowerment that this process supports, there was a notable absence of collective efforts within the CSA initiatives to address unequal gender relations. This absence has two key implications for the transformative potential of these initiatives: (i) overlooking power imbalances emerging from the micro-politics of transformations,; and (ii) neglecting the ambivalent effects characterising their transformative efforts. These findings demonstrate areas of improvement for the debate on gender relations within CSA initiatives, presenting an opportunity to enhance their transformative potential. To this end, we now turn to practical suggestions for CSA initiatives.

Overlooking power imbalances emerging from the micro-politics of transformations

The selected CSA initiatives strived to exist autonomously from a predominantly capitalist agri-food system, maintaining small-scale and ecologically driven agriculture and resisting competitive pressures from the market; however, they often overlooked similar power imbalances arising from their internal micro-politics. Collective decision-making mainly concerned practical matters, such as the working groups in CSA Mountain, or more strategic decisions, like ensuring the financial sustainability of CSA Coast. These decisions primarily focused on solutions for maintaining a self-organised structure while struggling with a fluctuating membership, resource constraints and limited political support – challenges that resonate with reports from other CSA initiatives (Galt, 2013; Pole & Gray, 2013; Spanier-Guerrero Lara & Feola, 2023; van Oers et al., 2023). Critical issues related to gender inequalities on the farm seldom surfaced in these conversations, suggesting a limited awareness of the contradictions inherent in their prefigurative ambitions. These initiatives aspired to be an alternative to the dominant capitalist agri-food system without addressing heteropatriarchy, a major dimension of the problematic power relations established and perpetuated by it. In line with Swyngedouw (2022), this finding reflects

a tendency within counter-hegemonic initiatives that aspire to ethical and morally sound socio-ecological relationships while often neglecting the conflicting and antagonistic nature of interpersonal interactions, reproducing a depoliticised approach to the micro-politics of transformative efforts.

Gender-based emancipatory strategies operated on a personal level in the CSAs and were reinforced through everyday community relationships (Delind & Ferguson, 1999; First author, under review). Feminist concerns within peasant collectives are not usually prioritised in addressing problematic power relations in agri-food systems (Smessaert & Feola, under review). Therefore, when it comes to agri-food transformation, it is limiting that CSA initiatives overly emphasise their viability and survival within a dominant capitalist agri-food system, while downplaying the entanglements of their pressing issues with gender inequality. By paying attention to the heteropatriarchal foundations of agriculture, CSA initiatives could benefit from examining the barriers to including gender dimensions in their political agenda, besides, and as a complement to, other axes of action such as food sovereignty, food as a commons and agroecology.

Neglecting ambivalent effects characterising their transformative efforts

The selected CSA initiatives recognised only to a limited extent their transformative potential in supporting women farmers' experimentation with alternative power positions and neglected the ambivalent effects that may result. We argue for a more positive view of ambivalence in contrast to its problematic and undesired connotations (Walker & Shove, 2007). The disidentification experiences documented and analysed in this study highlight the messiness and contingent character of shifting gender relations in agriculture. Resisting, refusing and disengaging from the conventional "woman farmer" identity are never complete acts, and reminiscences from hegemonic identities might manifest within alternative power positions created on the farm.

Queer theories of disidentification argue that dismantling hegemonic identity structures entails an understanding of the self as plural and contradictory, and being within and against hegemonic identities (Berlant, 2011; Muñoz, 1999; Velicu, 2022). Several examples of this in-and-against positionality are found in the results. For instance, Maria received recognition for her leading role in community building by CSA members but also faced devaluation of reproductive responsibilities by her partner. Sofia experimented with participatory leadership but her partner and some CSA members invisibilised her contributions. Ana and Antônia felt recognised for being professional farmers, as well as women, queer and immigrants, by CSA members, yet they downplayed their gender, sexuality and nationality identities to gain legitimacy in interactions with external members

of their local community. We suggest that CSA initiatives could stimulate awareness and critical reflection by recognising women farmers' emancipatory strategies. Such awareness and reflection could then inform the ambition for realising more equal agri-food systems.

5.6. Conclusion

This paper has explored how new-entrant women farmers created leadership roles in CSA and how that relates to the transformative potential of this agri-food model. Four women farmers in three different CSA initiatives in Italy and Portugal served as case studies. Through the lens of disidentification, we examined their attempts to refuse, resist and disengage from the conventional "woman farmer" identity upholding heteropatriarchy and the expansion of the capitalist agri-food system. Results indicated several examples of disidentification in practice, echoing previous research that highlighted the CSA agri-food model as being an environment conducive for women farmers' emancipation. Emancipatory strategies observed in these cases were contingent on these women farmers' intersectional identities of gender, family constellation, sexuality and agricultural background. We emphasised disidentification as a key dimension of emancipatory strategies lived by women farmers in CSA. However, collective discussions on gender inequalities were notably absent, leading to two implications: overlooking power imbalances in CSA's internal micro-politics and neglecting ambivalent effects in transformative efforts. Recognising women farmers' emancipatory strategies and addressing their ambivalent effects could stimulate awareness and critical reflection within these CSA initiatives about the prefigurative ambitions to adopt and the potential directions for more equal future agri-food systems.

Engaging with the gender dimension offers crucial insights for analyses on power relations in the unfolding of agri-food transformations. We viewed the disidentification experiences of the selected women farmers in CSA as illustrations of deliberate unmaking of capitalism (Feola, 2019; Feola et al., 2021). In this process, alternative power positions in a postcapitalist agri-food initiative depended on the deliberate disidentification of conventional (hierarchical, market-oriented) relations. We drew valuable lessons from the disidentification experiences of women farmers to advance the understanding of agri-food transformation that include the unmaking of capitalist identity structures. The disidentification experiences analysed in our study illustrate the contradictory character of unmaking processes in practice and reinforced the non-linear character of agri-food transformation (Table 5.3.). Similarly to previous observations on the non-linearity of postcapitalist transformations (Smessaert & Feola, under review), gender inequalities did not cease once alternative power positions had been created by the

participant women farmers. These issues can always resurface, which explains why women farmers continuously employed disidentification strategies even when leadership roles were created.

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CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

This PhD thesis set out to elucidate the role of power and empowerment in the sustainability transformation of agri-food systems, focusing on power and empowerment's shaping of prefiguration within grassroots agri-food initiatives. This focus helped to illuminate how injustices and inequalities that stem from capitalist structures can be challenged within these spaces and what alternatives ensue; thus, novel insights were obtained on how these initiatives counter the dominance of capitalist agri-food systems. The primary contribution of this PhD thesis lies in expanding the conceptualisation of power and empowerment beyond strategic exercises (**research gap 2**), thus capturing which forms of power and empowerment emerge from micro-politics and collective identity formation and shape prefiguration within these initiatives (**research gap 1**). This contribution was achieved in two ways. First, at a conceptual and theoretical level, I integrated different conceptualisations of power and theories of transformation in novel ways. Second, I empirically investigated issues of power and empowerment that shape three areas of prefiguration, namely the structuring of postcapitalist work relations, the inclusion of queer people, and the creation of leadership roles for women farmers in CSAs in Italy and Portugal.

This concluding chapter is structured as follows: I start by presenting a brief summary of the main findings presented in **Chapters 2–5**. Then, I revisit the main research question and reflect on the main conclusions. With these considerations in mind, I outline the scientific contribution to the field of sustainability transformation in agri-food systems, including theoretical and empirical insights. Next, I reflect on my PhD journey, highlighting the implications of my research choices on this thesis's situated and partial outcomes. This chapter ends with a description of the primary challenges that emerged from the innovative approach employed in this thesis at the intersection of different fields of inquiry, namely (i) transformation to sustainability, (ii) agri-food grassroots initiatives, (iii) feminist and queer studies, and (iv) power theories (Figure 1.1.). Building on some of these challenges, I propose my future research agenda.

6.1. Summary

The following subsections summarise the main conceptual achievements and empirical findings of each sub-question achieved in the different chapters.

6.1.1. **Sub-question 1:** How can power and empowerment be conceptualised to move analyses of power and empowerment beyond strategic exercises?

Chapter 2 presented a systematic literature review that I conducted of 88 studies based on Allen's (2021) relational typology of power and Cohen's (1995) typology of empowerment.

The results indicated the trends, achievements, biases, and remaining knowledge gaps in the grassroots innovation literature. A crucial finding of this analysis was an implicit pattern within said literature of adopting the concepts of power and empowerment as *explanans* (terms that contain the explanation) and a preference to approach these terms as overt, instrumental, and strategic exercises. The chapter reinforced the need to broaden the understanding of power and empowerment in grassroots initiatives for sustainability transitions beyond strategic exercises. It encouraged further engagement with these terms as *explananda* (terms that require explanation) to illuminate how grassroots' dispositional abilities are enabled or constrained by the power (im)balances historically formed in their context and how power and empowerment manifest when grassroots initiatives engage in the process of collective organisation. The chapter shed light on grassroots innovations' characteristics beyond the strategic actions discussed in the literature, including issues of identity, worldviews, and values that influence their struggles and achievements to leverage societal change. It suggested the following three concrete avenues for future research to move analyses of power and empowerment beyond strategic exercises: (i) addressing questions of collective identity, (ii) investigating the linkages between micro- and macro-politics of societal change, and (iii) expanding empirical investigations beyond the Global North.

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Furthermore, **Chapters 3 and 5** developed a novel conceptual framework to inform the investigation of power and empowerment beyond strategic exercises that shape prefiguration in grassroots initiatives. **Chapter 3** presented a conceptual framework that combined Allen's (2021) relational typology of power and Feola et al.'s (2021) unmaking capitalism framework. This novel conceptual framework enabled the examination of power in terms of the intentions and actions of one person in relation to another (i.e., action-theoretical power), constituted through the interactions between people and nonhuman elements (i.e., constitutive power) and how these are conditioned by several contextual factors (i.e., systemic power). This chapter analysed how these multifaceted power dynamics enabled or constrained six concrete processes of unmaking capitalism and shaping prefiguration, namely unlearning, sacrifice, everyday resistance, resistance, refusal, and defamiliarisation.

Similarly, **Chapter 5** merged accounts on relational power developed in disidentification theories (Berlant, 2011; Muñoz, 1999; Velicu, 2022) with the unmaking capitalism framework of Feola (2019) and Feola et al. (2021). This conceptual framework enabled the analysis of power and empowerment's shaping of prefiguration in novel ways, highlighting how power dynamics influence resistance, refusal, and disengagement from capitalist identity structures in prefigurative attempts within grassroots initiatives.

6.1.2. **Sub-question 2.a:** How do power and empowerment shape prefiguration in grassroots agri-food initiatives in regard to the development of postcapitalist work relations?

Chapter 3 delved into how power dynamics influence the accomplishments and difficulties of CSA in establishing and perpetuating postcapitalist work relations. It analysed how power enabled or constrained the diversification of work relations based on three work dimensions, namely alienation, monetisation, and care. Three CSAs in Portugal served as case studies. The findings indicated that although these initiatives aimed to create non-alienated, non-monetised, and caring work relations, they struggled to challenge and deconstruct hierarchical, exploitative, and discriminatory power structures rooted in capitalism. Common strategies for diversifying work relations included implementing participatory decision-making mechanisms and fostering meaningful, enjoyable work interactions through human–nonhuman synergy (e.g., pleasant work routines in a farm infrastructure tailored to the abilities of volunteers). However, farm owners' leading roles centralised knowledge and abilities, posing challenges to maintaining non-alienated work relations in the long term. Cultural norms that historically reinforced unequal power dynamics between farm owners and employees and perpetuated gender inequalities on the farm also hindered the diversification of work relations.

6.1.3. **Sub-question 2.b:** How do power and empowerment shape prefiguration in grassroots agri-food initiatives in regard to the inclusion and facilitation of queer people?

Chapter 4 investigated whether and how queer folks feel empowered to become active and thriving members of a CSA. A case study based on 12 queer members of a CSA in rural Portugal provided the empirical basis for the analysis. The results indicated that the CSA, despite not being originally designed for this purpose, facilitated various forms of empowerment and active engagement among its queer members, particularly influenced by the leadership of queer producers and recurrent gatherings on queer-owned farmland. Three critical lessons about queer empowerment in CSA emerged from the analysis. They offered novel insights into debates on the politics of recognition, queer community action, and visibility in the rural context. First, the self-confidence to perform queerness may be restricted to a selective rural community; second, partnerships between producers and co-producers may enable reciprocal queer empowerment; and finally, queer leadership in agri-food community action may quietly represent gender and sexual diversity in the countryside.

6.1.4. **Sub-question 2.c:** How do power and empowerment shape prefiguration in grassroots agri-food initiatives in regard to the creation of empowered positions for women farmers and leaders?

Chapter 5 analysed whether and how new entrant women farmers create leadership roles in CSA. The experiences of four women farmers across three CSA initiatives in Portugal and Italy were examined. The chapter illustrated the tensions, contradictions, and ambivalent effects that emerged when the women farmers attempted to resist, deconstruct, and disengage from capitalist identity structures through their participation in the CSA. The analysis demonstrated that the disidentification was contingent on the intersectional situatedness of these farmers and differed across their family constellation, sexuality, and agricultural background. The chapter highlighted everyday forms of power and empowerment that influence the destabilisation and deconstruction of capitalist identity structures, thereby contributing to further research on intersectional and gender studies in agri-food transformation.

6.2. Revisiting the main research question

This PhD thesis aimed to elucidate the role of power and empowerment in the sustainability transformation of agri-food systems, focusing on grassroots agri-food initiatives. It examined **how power and empowerment shape prefiguration within grassroots agri-food initiatives** (main research question), engaging specifically with the issues of micro-politics and identity formation. Based on the findings achieved through addressing each sub-question and summarised in the previous section, I suggest the following conclusions:

Investigating power and empowerment in real-life and practical settings is challenging, as these phenomena often operate invisibly. While theoretical frameworks are pivotal for identifying power and empowerment in real life, this research emphasises the significance of the researcher's positionality and embodied experiences with power (im)balances. The combination of theory and embodied knowledge significantly contributes to unveiling dimensions of power relations that have become naturalised, normalised, overlooked, and taken for granted.

By shedding light on established power positions within CSA and questioning their perceived naturalness and imbalances, this PhD thesis opens avenues for future research on how the prefiguration of sustainable agri-food systems unfolds within grassroots initiatives. Drawing on Ahlborg and Nightingale (2018, p. 382), this research viewed power as a 'relational, productive force that generates contradictory effects within the same actions'. This conceptual approach facilitated an examination of domination,

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oppression, and empowerment as mutually constitutive in the context of the sustainability transformation of agri-food systems. In other words, the findings of this thesis confirm that 'the possibilities for individual and collective empowerment in a particular society will be shaped largely by the specific relations of domination and oppression within which they arise' (Allen, 2008, p.165).

The relational conceptualisation of power effectively shifts attention from prevailing conceptualisations of power and empowerment as strategic exercises (Lai, 2023; Schmid & Smith, 2020; Welch & Yates, 2018). It emphasises the emergence and production of power dynamics through everyday politics, in contrast to purposeful action for mobilising resources in a competitive environment. Additionally, the relational conceptualisation of power enables the recognition of ambivalences as essential rather than undesirable effects of power dynamics. In the context of grassroots agri-food initiatives, relational power is consistent with the type of agri-food transformation one can expect in these spaces – namely transformations that are always ongoing and generate ambivalent effects. Therefore, relational power provides a conceptual approach that supports the unpacking of these initiatives' ambivalent position within and against capitalism. It captures the conflicts between dominance and empowerment at the heart of the prefiguration of sustainable agri-food systems – which in this case are residual injustices and inequalities that stem from capitalism (e.g., hierarchies, exploitation, and discrimination) and alternative power configurations (e.g., horizontality, synergetic relationships, and collaboration) that shape the prefiguration of sustainable agri-food systems within grassroots initiatives.

Informed by the relational conceptualisation of power (Allen, 2021) and the framework of unmaking capitalism (Feola, 2019; Feola et al., 2021), the empirical findings of this PhD thesis yield novel insights into the concrete manifestations of power and empowerment that emerge from micro-politics and collective identity formation as well as shape prefiguration within the studied grassroots initiatives. They confirm that transformation is intrinsically tied to the power imbalances accentuated by the capitalist agri-food system (El Bilali, 2019; IPES-Food, 2013; Rossi et al., 2019). These initiatives experiment with alternative and non-capitalist approaches to agri-food practices, relations, and identities while operating within the complex web of power relations prescribed by capitalist agri-food systems.

A crucial finding that begs for further investigation concerns the potential of the selected grassroots agri-food initiatives to facilitate empowering experiences among gender- and sexually underrepresented communities in a masculine and heterosexual dominant agri-food system. They assert new positions, express their worldviews and opinions, and collaborate to develop agri-food systems that reflect their social and ecological values

and objectives. However, this empowering potential remains latent and therefore not fully achieved for two main reasons: First, these initiatives insufficiently unmake hierarchal, exploitative, and discriminative relationships that stem from capitalist work relations and heteropatriarchal structures of the family farm; and second, they question these problematic power relations only to a limited extent in their deliberation efforts. This thesis advocates for a more intentional inclusion of gender and sexuality dimensions within the broader political agenda of these initiatives, alongside and in synergy with other concerns and axes of action, such as food sovereignty, food as a commons, and agroecology.

In sum, and to conclude on the main research question, grassroots agri-food initiatives within the specific contexts studied are spaces where conflicts between domination, oppression, and empowerment shape the prefiguration of sustainable agri-food systems. In particular, grassroots initiatives' ambivalent position within and against capitalist agri-food systems emphasise the nonlinear nature of agri-food transformation. These initiatives foster micro-politics and collective identity formation, which facilitate the prefiguration of diversified work and gender and sexuality relations in unique ways; however, existing literature has failed to unveil several empowering effects that ensue and their limitations. The selected agri-food grassroots initiatives do not prefigure a future of agri-food systems where injustices and inequalities vanish entirely and where marginalised communities are fully empowered. Rather, the findings suggest that micro-politics and collective identity formation must continue to prefigure inclusive and participatory structures that unveil and challenge persisting inequalities in the initiatives, thus allowing for the emergence of novel possibilities for sustainable agri-food systems.

Through this PhD research, I hope to have enriched the scholarly debate on the power imbalances perpetuated by the expansion of capitalist agri-food systems. I also hope to have stimulated critiques and envisioning to counteract them and facilitate a more equitable and sustainable future of agri-food systems that fosters inclusivity and safeguards social diversity alongside environmental sustainability.

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6.3. Main scientific contributions

6.3.1. Theoretical contributions

Contribution 1: Expanding research on power and empowerment beyond strategic exercises in grassroots initiatives

Although theoretical development on power dynamics within sustainability transitions has increasingly expanded, conceptual fragmentation persists. Among others, Köhler et al. (2019) recently called for mapping the research on the role of power and empowerment in sustainability transitions, specifically those involving grassroots innovations. By taking stock of the conceptual development of power and empowerment in the grassroots innovations literature and proposing avenues for future research (see **Chapter 2**), this PhD thesis sheds light on the achievements and most important remaining challenges, thereby contributing to the further development of research on power and empowerment in sustainability transitions (e.g. Avelino et al., 2016; Ahlborg, 2017; Avelino, 2017; Hölscher et al., 2019; Rossi et al., 2019).

To broaden research on power and empowerment beyond their overt, instrumental, and strategic exercises, **Chapter 2** proposed different understandings of these terms relevant to the context of grassroots innovations and raised original questions to encourage novel research areas. First, it recommended further explorations of *constitutive power*— that is, power emerging from the interactions between human and nonhuman agents (Allen, 2021)—and *identity-oriented empowerment*—that is, power concerning active reflection, contestation, and discursive reconfigurations that include dimensions of worldviews, epistemologies, and social identities (Cohen, 1985)—to advance research on the constitution and production of power through inter- and extra-personal relationships and how that has influenced processes of collective identities (including ontologies, epistemologies, and values) of grassroots innovations in sustainability transitions. Second, the chapter identified a latent potential to examine the power and empowerment of grassroots innovations in sustainability transitions at the micro level. Exploring the micro-politics of grassroots innovations could raise novel questions about everyday forms of politics and collective modes of governance, thus contributing insightful analyses of the implications of social change across levels and potentially clarifying the linkages between micro-level politics, grassroots innovations, and macro-level societal change. Third, it suggested expanding empirical investigations beyond the Global North, emphasising the need to study grassroots innovations in diverse global contexts to enrich the understanding of power and empowerment, considering the regional disparities and unique power dynamics that inform their conceptualisations.

Contribution 2: Conceptualising and operationalising a relational typology of power vis-à-vis the unmaking of capitalism in grassroots agri-food initiatives

The existing literature on power in sustainability transformation has primarily investigated how power dynamics condition the development of innovative solutions for sustainability while overlooking the destabilisation of unsustainable existing practices and structures (Hoffman & Loeber, 2016). Implicit in the emphasis on innovation is the assumption that the establishment of social, technical, and cultural alternatives automatically displaces existing configurations that are no longer desired (Davidson, 2017). To move beyond this innovation bias, research on the power dynamics underlying the destruction and destabilisation of unsustainable structures in sustainability transformation is needed (Ahlborg, 2017; Avelino, 2011; Feola, 2019; Hoffman, 2013; Hoffman & Loeber, 2016). To this end, this PhD thesis (i) integrated a relational typology of power and the framework of unmaking capitalism and (ii) operationalised this innovative conceptual approach to examine different areas of prefiguration in CSA. In doing so, it paved the way for future explorations into the role of power and empowerment in shaping the unmaking of unequal and unsustainable capitalist structures that may precondition the creation of alternative and postcapitalist configurations.

Chapter 3 operationalised Allen's (2021) relational typology of power into six concrete processes of unmaking capitalism in transformations to postcapitalist work relations in CSA (Table 3.2.). The first column introduces the core idea of the selected process of unmaking. Then, the cells of the remaining three columns illustrate how the three types of power could shape each process of unmaking in the context of work relations. The illustrative examples are based on similar experiences of unmaking discussed in the literature on work relations in CSAs and postcapitalist transformations. This framework was productive in describing multiple forms of power that shape various acts aimed at destabilising and deconstructing socially and environmentally unjust and unequal capitalist work relations. Despite this descriptive strength, the framework was less productive in explaining the interlinkages and influences between the different types of power and unmaking processes. To address this limitation, the chapter analysed how power enabled or constrained the progress of transformations to postcapitalist work relations, individually or in combination with other forms of power.

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Table 3.2. Power in processes of unmaking capitalism (reproduced from Chapter 3)

Processes of unmaking (core idea)	Types of power		
	Action-theoretical	Constitutive	Systemic
Unlearning (Consciously letting go of old values, norms, or beliefs)	Farm owners consciously let go of exploitative work routines	Farmers let go of old farm infrastructure that generates exploitative labour routines	Access to education defines who can critically reflect and let go of old exploitative working routines
Sacrifice (Giving up something for something else of higher value)	Consumers give up self-interest to do voluntary work for the community	Rotating shift schedules support consumers to give up self-interest to do voluntary work for the community	Class privilege defines who can give up self-interest to do voluntary work for the community
Everyday resistance (Covert acts of opposition to abusive or oppressive power relations)	Farm employees act covertly to erode the legitimacy of the 'boss'	Farm employees use heavy farming tools to slow down manual work (purposeful inefficiency)	The culturally institutionalised 'boss–worker' relations foster farm employees to oppose hierarchy covertly
Resistance (Overt acts of opposition to abusive or oppressive power relations)	Farm owners act overtly to oppose environmentally harmful working relations	Farm owners oppose the adoption of agro-chemical inputs to avoid harming the soil and employees	Dominant discourse about the economic profit of agro-chemicals supports farm owners to organise protests
Refusal (Rejection of an imposed definition of a situation, subjectivity, or social relation)	Farm employees reject subaltern identities imposed by authoritarian figures	Farm employees reject the usage of certain work tools associated with subaltern identities	Gender norms determine different abilities in men, women, or non-binary people to resist oppression
Defamiliarisation (Removal of an object from the sphere of automatised perception)	Consumers become dishabituated of shared understandings of the purpose of work	The dishabituation of industrial meanings attributed to food that hinder consumers from performing farm work	Access to education defines who can critically reflect and decide to become dishabituated of shared understandings of work

Chapter 5 turned to relational power from an intersectional gender perspective. The chapter produced a conceptual framework to investigate the unmaking of the 'woman farmer' identity in CSA as the following three interrelated moments: (i) the encounter with policing acts; (ii) awareness of that policing act and its resulting constraints; and (iii) resistance, refusal, or disengagement from them. This novel framework casts disidentification as a pivotal dimension of emancipation and supports future explorations of the unmaking of the conventional 'woman farmer' identity, a particular capitalist and heteropatriarchal identity structure that leads to gender inequalities in agriculture that CSA can challenge.

Contribution 3: Integrating feminist and queer theories of power and empowerment into research on sustainability transformations of agri-food systems and CSA

By incorporating feminist theories of power and empowerment, this PhD research responds to the calls made by Leslie (2017) and Delind and Ferguson (1999). Specifically, it advances the theorisation of agri-food transformation that challenges the heteropatriarchal foundations of capitalist agri-food systems.

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Through the lens of *identity-oriented empowerment*, *constitutive power,* and systemic power—that is, the historical and situated constitution of power relations and human abilities (Allen, 2021), **Chapter 2** revealed different studies in the grassroots initiatives literature that have explored issues of gender and women's empowerment in particular (e.g., Ahlborg, 2017; Joshi & Yenneti, 2020). The questions addressed in these studies and their remaining challenges could open up possibilities for future research on grassroots initiatives that delve into issues of gender (in)equality.

Similarly, in **Chapter 5**, the concept of disidentification arose as a pivotal dimension of emancipation, offering novel insights into studies on intersectional gender relations within CSA. This concept illuminates various everyday strategies that challenge the conventional 'woman farmer' identity and can be used to unveil covert tensions as well as to examine their nuanced impact on the farming experience of women farmers and leaders of CSA. Drawing inspiration from Shisler and Sbicca (209) and Annes et al. (2021), this chapter emphasised that experiences of disidentification are contingent on the intersection of gender, family dynamics, sexuality, and agricultural backgrounds. This analytical focus is a complementary lens to existing research on women's emancipatory strategies within CSA (Jarosz, 2011; Wells & Gradwell, 2001), offering a nuanced perspective for exploring dissent from conventional identity structures that have often been overlooked in previous analyses of gender relations in CSA.

Finally, this PhD research expands the possibilities for further explorations of the empowering potential of CSA initiatives. It offers a conceptual framework that elucidates three pivotal CSA dimensions conducive to everyday emancipatory strategies, namely (i) community relationships, (ii) farmer–consumer partnership, and (iii) horizontal organisation (Table 5.1.). Constructed upon foundational studies on gender relations within CSA (e.g., Fremstad & Paul, 2020; Jarosz, 2011; Wells & Gradwell, 2001), this innovative framework serves as a valuable analytical tool for further inquiry into the transformative capacity of CSA initiatives and their role in catalysing the emancipation of gender- and sexually underrepresented communities in the face of heteropatriarchal foundations of agri-food systems.

Table 5.1. CSA dimensions and influence on women farmers' emancipation (reproduced from Chapter 5)

Dimension	Description	Emancipatory strategies
Community relationships	CSA promotes community action, connection, and heightened social responsibility, enabling members to engage in 'quiet activism' (Delind & Ferguson, 1999) by aligning their values with their actions concerning food, the environment, and people.	Women farmers find solidarity and support to put into practice their desired work–life balance (Jarosz, 2011).
Farmer–consumer partnership	CSA establishes partnerships that facilitate distributions of costs and farm operations.	Women farmers find support in the community economy to experiment with diverse farming methods, risk sharing, equitable access to knowledge, and reduction of the gender income gap (Fremstad & Paul, 2020).
Horizontal organisation	CSA provides a collaborative platform for day-to-day problem solving among farmers and members.	Women farmers express their desires, world views, and intentions in decision-making about farm operations and farming approaches (Jarosz, 2011; Wells & Gradwell, 2001).

6.3.2. Empirical contributions

Contribution 4: Providing novel insights of power in relation to micro-politics

This research explored the micro-politics of CSA initiatives and provided concrete evidence of the implications of everyday politics within grassroots initiatives for collective modes of governance and the negotiation of meanings to be inscribed into their practices, operations, and relationships (Chatterton, 2016). Table 3.3. outlines the overall discoveries regarding how power facilitated or limited CSA efforts to unmake capitalist work relations while simultaneously establishing work configurations that are non-alienated, non-monetised, and full of care. The specific instances pointed to real-life occasions when members of CSAs encountered obstacles, either individually or collectively, in establishing their alternative, non-capitalist work connections. These challenges prompted a revaluation or abandonment of established capitalist norms and practices within CSA, as described in **Chapter 3.** These empirical findings uncovered previously unnoticed power dynamics that shape prefiguration in CSA, thereby adding depth to the empirical understanding of transformation in postcapitalist work relations within these initiatives.

Table 3.3. Power shaping the unmaking of capitalism in the making of work relations that are non-alienated, non-monetised, and full of care (reproduced from Chapter 3)

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Entanglement of unmaking capitalism in the making of postcapitalist work relations	Power	
	Enabling the unmaking of capitalist work relations	**Constraining the unmaking of capitalist work relations**
Unmaking the alienation of work for making non-alienated work relations	• Farm owners exercised power to let go of the productivist paradigm and create meaningful and enjoyable work relations. • The synergetic relations between workers and the farm infrastructure constituted meaningful and enjoyable work relations. • CSA members gave up leisure time to work for the CSA. • Farm owners exercised power to decentralise tasks and responsibilities and empowered co-producers to take accountability for CSA operations. • Co-producers and employees created pejorative terms and refused to participate in meetings under the terms defined by the farm owner to implicitly undermine his power over them. • CSA members exercised collective power to resist hierarchical work relations among farm owners, employees, and CSA members.	• Farm owners centralised decision-making power to distribute tasks and responsibilities among CSA members. • The historical and situated constitution of boss–worker relations in the agricultural sector reinforced the centralisation of decision-making power on farm owners.

Entanglement of unmaking capitalism in the making of postcapitalist work relations	Power	
	Enabling the unmaking of capitalist work relations	Constraining the unmaking of capitalist work relations
Unmaking the monetisation of work for making non-monetised work relations	• Co-producers sacrificed individual preferences to pursue the collective responsibility of farm owners' well-being. • Co-producers refused monetary compensation for their voluntary work, which helped to transform hierarchical work relations into collaborative ones. • CSAs enabled the creation of new producer and consumer subjectivities and empowered CSA members to discard the service mentality.	• The refusal of monetary compensation for work performed for the CSA was entangled with class privilege. • Acting upon the new producer subjectivities in CSAs was a contradictory experience that demotivated producers to pursue collaborations with co-producers.
Unmaking the structural separation of productive and reproductive labour for making work relations full of care	• The negotiations over the name and meaning of the CSA basket de-automatised taken-for-granted perceptions and enabled the creation of new meanings to interactions in the CSA. • The farm owner exercised power to foster collective responsibility for farm infrastructure. CSA members ascribed meaning to farm infrastructure that fostered collective action. • Rotating schedules conceived by CSA members partially hindered the devaluation and invisibility of care work. • The female farm owner exercised power to resist both visible and invisible gender inequality associated with the gender division of work.	• Devaluation of care work deeply inscribed in the local culture hindered collective accountability of housekeeping tasks. Only some CSA members sacrificed personal preferences to perform care work for the community. • Gender norms shaped the division of work and distribution of value across productive and reproductive work.

Furthermore, this PhD thesis employed the conceptual framework on the empowering dimension of CSA (Table 5.1.) and offered concrete evidence about the ways in which the micro-politics of CSA initiatives lead to empowerment experiences among queer participants. Table 4.1. summarises the findings, which are explained in detail in **Chapter 4.** These findings bring depth and nuance to how power dynamics influence the prefiguration of agri-food systems that are more inclusive and protective of gender and sexuality diversity.

Table 4.1. Four types of empowerment identified in the case study (reproduced from Chapter 4)

Type of empowerment	Characteristics	Empirical findings	
		CSA dimension	Queer empowerment
Power from within	Self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-respect consistent with life-affirming force	Producer–co-producer partnership	Queer producers felt heightened self-esteem and self-respect for being queer, and farmers
			Queer co-producers felt an increased ability and motivation to start artisanal food projects
Power over oneself	Mastering personal emancipation and the ability to decide one's own life in resistance to oppression	Community relationships	Queer members experienced a heightened feeling of self-confidence that deactivated internalised oppression and naturally expressed their queerness
			Queer members took control over their queer selves when selling or purchasing food
Power with	Ability to act in concert to address issues and shared goals and undergo a liberatory process	Producer–co-producer partnership	Queer producers received recognition and valorisation from co-producers, and this partnership offered economic opportunities for their artisanal production
		Horizontal organisation	Queer members established collaborative relationships to build their envisioned agri-food system while implicitly forming a queer community
Power to pursue one's own flourishing	Self-entitlement and capacity to seek and choose one's basic flourishing	Producer–co-producer partnership	Queer co-producers expanded their identities and explored thriving sexual expressions in the countryside
			Queer co-producers viewed the CSA as a means to pursue a flourishing social life and connection to agriculture in the countryside

Based on Allen (2021)

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Lastly, this research significantly advances the understandings of gender relations within CSA by unveiling how women farmers employed everyday strategies to create alternatives to the conventional 'woman farmer' identity. This empirical exploration illuminates how micro-politics facilitate everyday forms of emancipation in CSA, as shown in Table 5.3. and further elaborated in **Chapter 5.** Additionally, these findings confirm the validity of previous claims regarding the ambivalent outcomes of prefiguration in grassroots initiatives (Chatterton & Pusey, 2020; Feola, 2019; Smessaert & Feola, 2023; Temper et al., 2018). **Chapter 5** contributes to this understanding by offering concrete insights about the contradictions that arise from women farmers' experiences within the CSA, the farm, and agri-food systems more broadly. These experiences contain an element of unmaking subordinate roles perpetuated by the heteronuclear family farm that offers novel perspectives on everyday strategies for challenging heteropatriarchal and capitalist norms and structures.

Table 5.3. Summary of results (reproduced from Chapter 5)

Case study	Disidentification from conventional gender relations	Creation of alternative power positions in agriculture	Ambivalences
Maria (CSA Coast)	Woman refuses subordination to man's decisions on farm labour Woman resists performing reproductive work with little valorisation	Woman leads CSA operations Woman strives for equal distribution and valorisation of reproductive work	Woman receives recognition for her leading role in the CSA, yet confined within the boundaries of the reproductive sphere of the farm
Ana and Antônia (CSA River)	Woman disengages from a delegitimised professional farming role	Woman gains recognition for being both queer and a professional farmer Woman independently accesses farming resources through CSA	Woman gains legitimacy for her professional farmer and queer identity within CSA while facing challenges outside of it
Sofia (CSA Mountain)	Woman disengages from the role of farmwife to support man's objectives with the farm Woman refuses subordination to man's decisions on farm labour	Woman self-defines a supportive role aligned with personal aspirations Woman leads CSA operations	Woman denies an authoritarian character and asserts a participatory approach to leadership, yet CSA members prefer the authoritarian approach

Contribution 5: Providing novel insights of power in relation to collective identity

Examining collective identity formation within grassroots initiatives drew attention to the construction of a critical consciousness about structural issues and power imbalances (Cohen, 1985). I argued that conceptualisations of constitutive power and identity-oriented empowerment are most suitable for documenting and analysing manifestations of power relations in collective identity within grassroots initiatives (see **Chapter 2**). The empirical findings of this PhD thesis provide concrete insights into constitutive power and identity-oriented empowerment's shaping of transformation on the ground, thus adding to further understandings of power dynamics beyond strategic exercises.

Through the lens of constitutive power, **Chapter 3** elucidated how the interactions between CSA members and the farm infrastructure resulted in novel reflexive and practical abilities. Aligning with existing studies on the sociomaterial dynamics of grassroots initiatives (Ahlborg, 2017; Ehrnström-Fuentes & Leipämaa-Leskinen, 2019; Longhurst & Chilvers, 2019; Martiskainen et al., 2018), this PhD thesis contributes practical insights into the co-constitution of power through human and non-human interactions within and through grassroots initiatives as well as the implications for the transformation of unjust and unequal power relations. Examples of these interplays abound in the empirics: farm infrastructure plays a key role in facilitating a shift from exploitative work routines to enjoyable ones, reinforcing synergetic relationships between CSA members and the farm ecosystem, and fostering participation in farm activities. Moreover, the CSA basket stimulated internal debates on its various attributed meanings, leading to contradictory perceptions among CSA members about the purpose of sharing the costs of a harvest season both symbolically and in practice.

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Furthermore, examining real-life manifestations of identity-oriented empowerment in CSA highlighted critical dimensions of oppression and discrimination experienced by gender- and sexually underrepresented communities in agri-food systems. While the studied initiatives acknowledged the marginalised position of small-scale and ecological farming within capitalist agri-food systems, fostering partnerships and collaborative practices to support farmers' livelihoods, they overlooked discriminatory experiences that were internal to their organisation and rooted in the heteropatriarchal structure of agri-food systems. These empirics confirm previous claims that grassroots initiatives often overlook residual capitalist systems of injustice, such as gender inequalities (Holms et al., 2021; Pickerill & Chatterton, 2006).

My research revealed discriminatory experiences faced by CSA members that were not addressed during collective discussions and were absent from the initiatives' political priorities (see **Chapters 4 and 5**). This opens up possibilities for future research to examine the barriers to and opportunities for surfacing gender and sexuality inequality issues to

these initiatives' political agenda. I suggest that doing so can be a first step in starting to question how injustices and inequalities become legitimised in these collectives, how they could be tackled and reconfigured if they shift over time, and which interventions may be required to secure safe and empowering spaces in otherwise conservative countryside and agri-food systems.

6.4. PhD journey

The outcomes of this PhD thesis are directly related to my positionality as a researcher, which influenced the concepts employed and the experiences and relationships formed during the fieldwork. In this section, I reflect on my choices throughout my PhD journey and how they enabled me to hear some voices more than others when documenting and analysing issues of power and empowerment in CSA. I do so in two parts: first, I elaborate on my conceptual choices in Subsection 6.4.1., and second, I reflect on my fieldwork experiences in Subsection 6.4.2.

6.4.1. Conceptual choices

My PhD journey started with a literature review that examined power and empowerment conceptualisations in the grassroots innovation literature (**Chapter 2**). **Chapter 2**, submitted as a paper to the *Journal of Environmental Innovations and Societal Transformation*, received critical comments from an anonymous reviewer that challenged my use of constitutive power, as conceptualised in Allen's (2021) typology of relational power. Constitutive power expands agency to non-human elements and refers to power emerging from the relations between human and non-human actors (e.g., the hammer in a worker's hands). At first, I used constitutive power to examine all sorts of power relations among human actors and between them and the non-human world. However, the reviewer emphasised that constitutive power should exclusively focus on power that emerges from human–non-human interactions. My limited training in non-human agency, along with little exposure to ontological and epistemological approaches discussed in disciplines such as science, technology, and society (Braun & Whatmore, 2010), cosmopolitics theory (De La Cadena, 2010), and decolonial scholarship (Todd, 2016), became evident.

During the same period, the research project I am a part of organised a reading group to explore cosmopolitics theory, which offered valuable and new insights on non-human agency. Some of the questions raised during the reading group resonated with my initial confusion about the analytical purpose of non-human politics: Why give autonomy to infrastructure and other species if our understanding will always be contingent on

humans' ability to make sense of them? How can we assess the intentions behind non-human agency? Could even a stone, static for centuries, be considered a political actor? A colleague with prior training in science technology and society, and another working with the topic also for the first time, made a crucial observations about the analytical contribution of non-human studies: it is not about justifying *what* qualifies agency but rather observing the *effects* of non-human agents on the politics of social change.[1] This shift helped me to recognise my Western modernist[2] bias and anthropocentric understandings of power and politics. It inspired me to re-examine the data collected for the literature review, identifying accounts of constitutive power and analysing their impact on grassroots innovations. The revisions from the anonymous reviewer and the cosmopolitics reading group opened my eyes to a new domain of power. This enthusiasm, combined with new findings on constitutive power retrieved from the literature review, fuelled the call presented in **Chapter 2** for further studies on power and empowerment beyond strategic exercises, emphasising how it emerges and is produced during social, material, and ecological interactions.

The results of **Chapter 2** emphasised the potential of examining other grassroots innovations' characteristics, including identity, ontologies, and values, as a starting point for having a more comprehensive understanding of power and empowerment's shaping of their struggles and achievements to leverage societal change. This finding substantially shaped the course of my PhD journey and created a strong case for exploring power and empowerment in grassroots initiatives beyond their strategic exercise. With the results of the literature review in hand and a clear objective for the PhD thesis, I set out on empirical investigations that became **Chapters 3, 4, and 5**.

Chapter 3 examined how power shaped the accomplishments and difficulties of CSAs in creating and perpetuating diversified work relations**.** To this end, I merged Allen's (2021) typology of relational power with the framework of unmaking capitalism (Feola et al., (2021). The concept of unmaking capitalism helped me to examine processes such as deactivating exploratory work routines, rejecting productivist mindsets, and refusing the valuation of work relations through monetary compensation within CSA. Remarkably, this approach enabled me to view these processes of deactivation, rejection, and refusal as generative rather than solely negative phenomena (Feola, 2019), which opened up political opportunities to re-signify operations and relationships conventionally established in agriculture yet that are incompatible with the communal and solidarity values and

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1   Thank you, Julia Spanier and Jacob Smessaert!
2   Western modernity scientific paradigms rooted in dualism uphold binary reasoning and the primacy of human reason disregards non-human elements as active agents in political processes (De La Cadena, 2010; Smessaert & Feola, 2023).

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objectives upheld in the studied initiatives. It also revealed a preference within the selected CSA initiatives to focus on practicalities, the realisation of alternative food production, and collective decision-making, rather than addressing hierarchal, exploitative, and discriminatory practices and relations inherited from dominant capitalist work relations on farms. Allen's approach to constitutive power allowed me to examine non-human agency. However, applying constitutive power led to descriptive accounts of power relations, while the more critical and analytical reflections came about through engagement with the notions of action-theoretical and systemic power.

In **Chapter 4**, I focused on queer identity politics in CSA. To investigate how queer folks experienced empowerment in CSA and became thriving and active members, I chose not to employ Cohen's framework of empowerment from **Chapter 2.** Cohen's framework revealed limited engagement with questions of identity-oriented empowerment in the literature on grassroots innovations. Identity-oriented empowerment refers to 'the production of power concerning active reflection, contestation and discursive reconfigurations that include dimensions of worldviews, epistemologies and social identities' (Cohen, 1985, in Raj et al., 2022). While this framework presented a comprehensive description of empowerment paradigms, it was limited in its explanation of different manifestations of empowerment in practice. By contrast, Allen's (2021) typology of empowerment aligned with the identity-oriented paradigm and offered, in addition, a multifaceted description of empowerment in practice. Adopting Allen's typology enabled me to address the call for an empirical investigation on collective identity presented in **Chapter 2** for documenting and analysing a variety of empowerment experiences by queer folks in the CSA and their mutual reinforcement.

The focus on queer identity politics in CSA led me to investigate the processes that challenged the heteropatriarchal foundation of agriculture. However, I had limited space in **Chapter 4** to delve deeper into these considerations. Thus, in **Chapter 5**, I explored the unmaking of capitalist identity structure through the case of women farmers' disengagement from the conventional 'woman farmer' identity in capitalist agri-food systems. While **Chapter 4** contributed to the literature on rural queerness, more closely connected to queer identity politics in the countryside and agriculture, **Chapter 5** engaged with the concept of disidentification elaborated in queer political theory, that is, the difference between queer identity politics that emphasises the experiences, identities, and lived realities of LGBTQIA+ individuals (Butler, 1990), and queer political theory that, in turn, explores the intersection of queer issues with power, governance, law, and public policy (Preciado, 2018). While both queer identity politics and queer political theory address questions of power from the perspective of queer folks, the latter scholarship provided me with a more robust theoretical foundation for exploring power in the context

of unmaking capitalist identity structures. Reflecting on my theoretical choices for these two chapters, I observed that defining an identity can serve different analytical purposes. In **Chapter 4**, I defined the rural queer identity to be able to examine gender and sexually-based discrimination and to explore how CSA created an empowering space for them. Similarly, in **Chapter 5**, I defined the woman farmer's identity to highlight discrimination but documented and analysed disidentification as a pivotal dimension of emancipatory strategies to refuse, resist, and disengage from the conventional identity of the woman farmer and their policing and disciplining effects to uphold the heteropatriarchal and capitalist structures of agri-food systems.

6.4.2. Fieldwork experiences

My experiences and the relationships formed during fieldwork significantly shaped the theoretical background of **Chapter 3**. While the literature on work relations in CSA discussed alienation, monetisation, and care, their relevance became apparent during the fieldwork. These topics often arose during the interviews, especially when CSA members explained the motivation behind their voluntary work. Participants, primarily urbanites or rural migrants, sought proximity to the farms producing their consumed food, where they learned about agriculture, contributed to farmers' well-being, and were actively involved in ecosystem restoration and land stewardship. While these aspects emerged in their testimonies, experiences during participant observation highlighted less visible aspects of alienation, monetisation, and care. When I engaged in voluntary work on the different CSA farms during my PhD research, I performed all sorts of work that the CSA farmers requested, from cleaning and cooking to building farming infrastructure and harvesting. I noticed that most tasks assigned to me involved physical work in the field, using farming tools, sometimes heavy ones. This raised several questions about whether they wanted to alleviate their physical workload, free up time to focus on other things, or even signify a historical reminiscence of exploratory intentions behind unpaid work.

One issue that caught my attention was the gender division of labour, which was seldom referred to during the interviews unless participants were explicitly prompted by me. In part, my positionality as a queer researcher contributed to this observation. Despite being socialised as a cisgender and heterosexual man and associated with heterosexual masculine social codes, symbols, and practices while growing up, I never fully aligned with them, preferring to navigate beyond gender binaries and sometimes explore what exists beyond the gender and sexuality binary. Similarly, on CSA farms, I alternated between physical work in the fields and maintenance tasks like cleaning and cooking. Conversely, gender roles for women and men farmers remained more fixed. I observed that I was surrounded mainly by men when doing the heavy physical work in the field, and

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when I engaged in cooking and cleaning, I enjoyed the company of women. Although no specific gender-assigned tasks were explicitly mentioned, one of my fieldwork diary notes presented the following interesting observation:

'Last night, [the man farmer] asked me if I knew how to work with farm machinery. I said no. His question seemed to have a hidden expectation of me – why was I supposed to know how to handle machinery? Because I pass by a heterosexual, cisgender man like him? When I declined, [the man farmer] said, 'Then do other things, clean the soil, prepare the land, other things with your hands'. Manual work as an alternative to my inability to handle machinery revealed a certain imbalance in the attribution of value to manual and technological agricultural activities. Could this correlate with the fact that men conventionally use machinery and are, therefore, more valued, while manual labour, performed by *it doesn't matter who* is less valued?'

Starting fieldwork with questions of work relations enabled me to consider pressing issues of power imbalances concerning gender and sexuality shaping the organisation of CSA. **Chapter 2** referred to similar dynamics, such as through Allen's typology of power based on feminist literature (Allen, 2021) and findings that refer to women's empowerment in grassroots innovations (Allen et al., 2019; Joshi & Yenneti, 2020). Furthermore, **Chapter 3** delved into gender relations in the case of care work in CSA (Jarosz, 2011; Wells & Gradwell, 2001). The literature on care work mobilised for this chapter sheds light on the gender division of labour and patriarchal values that historically structure gender roles and hierarchies in agriculture (see, e.g., Dengler & Strunk, 2018; Duffy, 2007; Jarosz, 2011; Wells & Gradwell, 2001). **Chapter 3** showcased gender inequalities in CSA, focusing primarily on the devaluation of care work. However, **Chapters 4 and 5** carried a more detailed exploration of the intersection of power, gender, sexuality, and agriculture. These chapters offered a more comprehensive understanding of internal power dynamics' influence on prefiguration from a gender and sexuality perspective, shedding light on their broader implications beyond care-related aspects.

My position as a gay, cis-gender man had various implications for data collection on the topic of discrimination with queer participation in CSA (**Chapter 4**) and women farmers in CSA (**Chapter 5**). When I collected data for **Chapter 4**, I already knew most participants, as I used the same CSA as a case study for **Chapter 3**. During the visits and stays with the CSA farm, I created a bond with most members and naturally came out as queer. While being mindful of how disclosing my sexuality could influence biases in participants' responses (Leslie, 2017), I also observed that when asking questions about discrimination during interviews, there was a shared sense of belonging. At first, participants tended to resist my questions and emphasised that they had seldom experienced discrimination or stigmatisation in rural Alentejo. However, as the interview went on, the participants shared

an increasing number of stories of discrimination, even though my questions addressed other topics. At several moments during the interviews, queer participants could relate to the themes of my questions, while I could relate to the stories they shared. This was visible when they said, 'You know what I mean' after sharing personal experiences, or when we freely used jargon from the queer community, such as 'cis-passing', 'non-binary', 'sissy boy', 'tomboy', 'dyke', and even 'queer', assuming reciprocal familiarity with them.

By contrast, investigating discriminatory experiences against women farmers proved more challenging. The fieldwork in Italy for **Chapter 5** serves as an illustration. It was difficult to position myself as a researcher interested in questions of discrimination and gender relations. In that case, the woman farmer and I spent plenty of time together, cooking, farming, chatting, and taking strolls around the farm. While I felt welcome to share these moments with her, she showed less interest and discomfort compared with the participants from the CSA initiatives in Portugal when I asked about, for example, her experiences as a farmer and how that differed from how she perceived her male partner and other male farmers related to the CSA, her relationship with other women and men farmers or members of the CSA, and her opinion about the distribution of roles in the collective. It made me mindful of my positionality as a male- and heterosexual-passing researcher investigating feminist topics. This was mainly because these were not questions about gender relations in abstract terms but rather about her personal experiences and opinions about her identity and role in the collective. What consequences could there be to evoking these personal questions and reflections and then leaving after the fieldwork campaign? I reconsidered my questions and data collection strategies and opted for fieldwork notes, observations, and informal conversations as the primary data collection methods. It also brought me embodied experiences of what it means, in practice, to be an ally in feminist debates, to learn from and amplify the voices and perspectives of women and marginalised groups while being a man and occupying a historical position of gender privilege.

To conclude, I wish to share a final reflection about the PhD journey. Throughout this PhD thesis, I have emphasised the significance of adopting a relational perspective on power when examining the micro-politics and constitution of collective identity within grassroots initiatives. This approach drew attention to marginalised voices within the selected CSA initiatives and required a critical examination of power relations to understand their disadvantaged positions and the possibilities for change within their CSA. As discussed in **Chapter 2**, research into the collective organisation of grassroots initiatives revealed reflexive, contesting, and discursive manifestations of power, shedding light on the abilities of grassroots actors to perceive, interpret, and articulate the social practices, hierarchies, and institutions that shape their collective identity and actions (Cohen, 1985). This approach enabled a deeper exploration of everyday emancipatory experiences and the

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micro-politics effects on grassroots initiatives' transformative potential. Finally, exploring these questions in practice and learning from the experiences of rural queer individuals and women farmers within the selected CSA also prompted personal reflection. The encounters made possible by this research echoed similar personal experiences as a queer person working on agri-food topics and transiting between urban and rural cultural contexts. They have significantly shaped the trajectory of my PhD thesis, and their narratives have gained centre stage. This resulting aspect aligns with an understanding of knowledge production as a relational process contingent on the interactions and generated effects among those involved (Haraway, 1988).

6.5. Challenges for future research

6.5.1. Limitations

The relational power framework used in this PhD thesis enabled an examination of power imbalances in capitalist agri-food systems from both domination and oppression and empowerment standpoints (Allen, 2021; Ahlborg & Nightingale, 2018); however, the focus on the situatedness of power dynamics in the chosen CSA cases located in specific regions of Portugal and Italy limited the generalisability of the findings and lessons on prefiguration within grassroots agri-food initiatives. The power dynamics documented and analysed in this thesis were highly context-specific, which hinders generalisations. Recognising the importance of context enabled a deeper understanding of the nuances and ambivalent effects of power relations in the selected grassroots initiatives. This thesis also examined whether these initiatives replicated or reconfigured discrimination and other power imbalances historically ossified in their social and cultural context and perpetuated by the expansion of capitalist agri-food systems (see **Chapter 3**). The detailed outputs of context-specific analyses of power relations were visible across the empirical chapters. In **Chapters 4 and 5**, intersectionality highlighted how empowerment was contingent on the historical and situated construction of different social markers of difference (e.g., gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and family constellation). However, to achieve a more generalisable understanding of relational power, future research could benefit from engaging with comparative and longitudinal analyses (see Castán-Broto, 2016; Hoffman, 2013; Hoffman & Loeber, 2016). As demonstrated in **Chapters 3 and 5**, exploring power dynamics across various contexts revealed commonalities and differences in power (im)balances in different CSA initiatives. Nevertheless, this PhD thesis only paid limited attention to temporal shifts in power dynamics within and across initiatives, thus limiting the understanding of how oppression and empowerment changed over time and which power (im)balances shifted. Therefore, while this thesis illuminates the nuanced power dynamics within grassroots

initiatives in capitalist agri-food systems, broader insights into how relational power shapes their transformative potential could be achieved through combining future comparative and longitudinal analyses.

Additionally, the empirics relate to the exclusive case of farmer-led CSA. I chose farmer-led CSA initiatives partially because, in Portugal, the majority of CSA initiatives are farmer-led. Since fieldwork with these initiatives happened first and revealed exciting dynamics related to the position of power of farmers, I selected similar initiatives in Italy to ensure consistency and focus on the comparison across the same type of CSA. Working with this particular configuration of CSA also contributed to the limited generalisability of my findings and conclusions. The leadership of farmers and the effects on micro-politics and collective identity were remarkable; however, the findings and conclusions of this thesis require testing in other CSA configurations, such as consumer-led and cooperative-led CSA (Degens & Lapschieß, 2023; Gorman, 2018; Piccoli et al., 2023). Recognising that different CSA arrangements bring up different types of power relations could also be the basis for future studies on power relations shaping the transformative potential, achievements, and limitations of this agri-food model.

Furthermore, this PhD thesis viewed grassroots initiatives as spaces of transformation; accordingly, it only analysed power and empowerment's shaping of transformation internal to these spaces. Except for **Chapter 5**, where I also discussed the engagement of CSA River in a local social movement, most findings reflect transformative dynamics in the internal operations and relations within CSA initiatives. While strategic and everyday transformation in grassroots initiatives provides relevant insights for studies on power imbalances in transformation to sustainability, it would be misleading to conclude that because they are internal to these spaces, they only depend on the efforts of grassroots actors. Future analyses on power shaping transformation within grassroots initiatives could be supplemented by investigating how strategies that authorities, organisations, and CSA networks can be employed to promote and disseminate this agri-food model in ways that alleviate the barriers to reconfiguring internal power imbalances, such as the participation of individuals with diverse gender and sexual expressions across different social classes (see **Chapter 4**). Similarly, the internal dynamics could be related to external ones, such as how visions for sustainability created within grassroots initiatives are negotiated during interactions with other social actors along transformation processes (Feola et al., 2021; Laforge et al., 2017; Lai, 2023), and how innovations developed in and through grassroots initiatives are diffused horizontally across similar initiatives and may achieve vertical influence by attracting institutional and political support (Chatterton, 2016; Feola & Butt, 2017), and through the support of grassroots initiatives networks (Bonfert, 2022).

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6.5.2. Future research agenda

This section outlines my future research agenda, which addresses the most critical remaining questions directly related to the findings of this research. They are divided into the following three levels: identity structure (personal), micro-politics and internal organisation (collective), and collective action (societal).

Identity structure

This PhD thesis focused on the achievements and struggles of new entrant women farmers and leaders of CSA to unmake ingrained capitalist and heteropatriarchal identity structures that historically policed their agency and relegated them to subordinate roles. However, a limitation of this research lies in neglecting the voices of men farmers in CSA and their relation to capitalist and heteropatriarchal structures of the conventional 'man farmer' identity, which are problematic for various reasons.

There is a growing realisation that hegemonic masculinities perpetuate unequal power dynamics, slowing the transition towards just and sustainable agriculture (Ferrell, 2012; Leslie et al., 2019; Peter et al., 2000). My research findings revealed barriers within the studied CSA initiatives, such as the association of masculine norms with farm leadership, which limit the active involvement of women farmers and less skilled CSA members in decision-making and farming operations (see **Chapters 3 and 5**). Moreover, conventional expectations surrounding fatherhood led to an unequal gender division of labour in CSA, hindering the full engagement of farming mothers and CSA leaders in desired farm work and burdening women farmers with additional community-building and reproductive tasks brought with the creation of the CSA (see **Chapter 5**).

Looking forward, I wish to explore whether and how prefigurative grassroots agri-food initiatives facilitate everyday strategies for challenging hegemonic masculinity, and also how far that opens up possibilities for novel rural and agrarian binary and non-binary identities that align with gender and sexually equitable and just agri-food systems. This research approach has the potential to further illuminate how individual identity structures link to community dimensions of agriculture, to explore what types of rural masculinities inform collaborative operations and relations within these initiatives, and to examine how they align with the collective project to transform agri-food systems.

Drawing from the literature on rural masculinities (e.g., Bell, 2000; Brandth & Haugen, 2005; Campbell & Michael, 2000; Peter et al., 2000; Saugeres, 2002), promising avenues for my future research include the analysis of how these spaces facilitate the reconfiguration of agriculture and fatherhood dynamics (Allan et al., 202; Brandth, 2019); reshape the

traditional association of masculinity with agriculture work and farm machinery and foster inclusive knowledge dissemination and skill development (Brandth & Haugen, 2005); and encourage men farmers to do gender differently by promoting unconventional approaches to agriculture that are, instead, ecologically and community-driven (Ferrell, 2012). Additionally, critical insights to my exploration could be provided by similar research fields that examine the roles of masculinity and identity formation in upholding the norms of heteropatriarchal and capitalist systems of extraction and capital accumulation fuelling climate change (Daggett, 2018; Nelson, 2020) and exacerbating social and environmental injustices (Eversberg & Schmelzer, 2023; Khanna, 2021).

Micro-politics and internal organisation

In this PhD research, I emphasised that although gender and sexually underrepresented communities experience empowerment and emancipation through everyday relationships, the CSAs largely overlook heteropatriarchy in their political agenda. Making power dynamics and imbalances visible is a prerequisite for pursuing social change within grassroots initiatives. In **Chapter 4**, I argued that the absence of gender and sexuality collective debates hampers their empowering potential, particularly in terms of the restricted diversity of socioeconomic profiles among queer participants in the selected CSA. Therefore, in the future I intend to conduct research to explore which strategies could be used by CSAs to ensure further inclusivity and enable rural queer dwellers of different socioeconomic backgrounds to be empowered. More specifically, I intend to investigate how the CSA could re-organise itself internally in ways that queer empowerment goes hand-in-hand with socioeconomic diversity from a class perspective.

A first step could be to review the literature on prefigurative and confrontational strategies employed by CSA and similar grassroots agri-food initiatives to tackle issues of, for example, class privilege (Levkoe & Offeh-Gyimah, 2020; Myers & Sbicca, 2015; Sbicca, 2015a) and access to food (Flora et al., 2012; Forbes & Harmon, 2008; Landwehr et al., 2021), followed by reflecting on how those strategies could be combined with gender and sexuality issues (for an example, see Fremstad & Paul, 2020). Additionally, it is crucial to explore strategies that authorities, organisations, and CSA networks can employ to promote and disseminate this agri-food model in ways that facilitate the participation of individuals with diverse gender and sexual expressions across different social classes. Well-known strategies for promoting CSA that could be further explored to include gender, sexuality, and class dimensions include community land trusts that provide low-cost secure tenure rights (Paul, 2019), public procurement aligned with the production capacities of CSA initiatives (Bonfert, 2022), and supportive legal and tax systems for small-scale producers (Kapała, 2020).

6

Collective action

Research on queer sustainable agriculture has explored the potential of collective action to address rural and agrarian heteropatriarchy. Emerging research on queer and queer farmer networks is one example of visible and strategic efforts to support queer folks to pursue farming careers and thriving rural livelihoods (Leslie, 2019; Wypler, 2019). While this PhD thesis examined the internal dynamics of CSA initiatives, it did not pay substantial attention to how queer members participate in other spaces for agri-food transformation or how exemplary CSA experiences of inclusion could inspire and inform the public debate on progress for social change towards gender and sexual diversity in agriculture.

Delving into the role of CSA in broader collective action for '*queering* the countryside' could stimulate novel insights about the transformative potential of these initiatives beyond their internal dynamics. Additionally, it could expand the debate on queer empowerment stimulated by this PhD thesis (see **Chapter 4**) by exploring the 'power feminism' empowerment dimension included in Allen's (2021) framework but that is not evident in the empirics. Power feminism refers to the intentional individual choice to exercise power over others, reflecting an individualistic, self-assertive, and aggressive manifestation of the will to power in opposition to the notion of women's victimisation (Allen, 2021). While queer participants shared stories of self-assertion and the confrontation of oppressors, these stories were not related to their participation in the CSA. This empowerment dimension could prove most impactful within confrontational politics, which is an aspect ripe for more profound analysis within CSA initiatives (Myers & Sbicca, 2015; Sbicca, 2015).

Overall, the outlined future research areas will advance research on the intersection of sustainability transformation scholarship, agri-food grassroots initiatives scholarship, feminist and queer theory, and power theories (Figure 1.1.). This will offer novel insights on the nuances and complexities of power dynamics in the sustainability transformation of agri-food systems. Beyond the scientific contributions, this future research has potential for societal impact. By providing evidence-based resources and tailored insights, this research can empower grassroots organisations to enhance their prefigurative and advocacy efforts for more equitable, inclusive, and environmentally sustainable agri-food systems.

6

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Appendices

Appendix A: Coding book used to assist the screening of the 88 selected studies

Criteria	Descriptors	Examples	Guiding question	Justification
Research topic	The subject or issue related to grassroots innovations for sustainability transitions investigated through the lens of power or empowerment.	The influence of grassroots innovations on sustainability transitions, the upscaling of grassroots innovations, etc.	What is the topic of research investigated through the lens of power or empowerment?	This coding criterion allows the identification of general empirical phenomena investigated in the literature.
Location of the study	The geographical location where the study is conducted	Netherlands, Tanzania, etc.	In which geographical location is the study conducted?	Cultural/political/economic aspects of different geographical locations may require the adoption of appropriate perspectives on power and empowerment.
Thematic research area	The social or economic sector, or the problem area in which the studied grassroots innovation is involved.	Social or economic sectors: Agri-food, water, energy, etc. Problem area: urban or rural development, housing, etc.	In which thematic research area is the studied grassroots innovation studied?	Specific characteristics of the thematic research area may require the adoption of appropriate perspectives on power or empowerment.
View of grassroots innovations	The ontological approach to grassroots innovations.	Strategic actors capable of instrumental reasoning, collectives that create the means for awareness raising, etc.	Which ontological approach is used to qualify the studied grassroots innovation?	Different ontological approaches to grassroots innovations may require the adoption of appropriate perspectives on power or empowerment.

Criteria	Descriptors	Examples	Guiding question	Justification
Level of analysis adopted in the study	Micro Meso Macro	Individual level Collective level Societal level	Which level of analysis is employed by the study to investigate grassroots innovation?	This coding criterion enables the identification of theoretical approaches to power and empowerment used in different levels of analysis of grassroots innovations.
Type of power/ empowerment	Following Allen (2005) and Cohen (1985) frameworks	Ability, capacity, power relations, systemic power, empowerment, etc.	What type of power or empowerment is used in the study?	This coding criterion enables the identification of type(s) of power or empowerment is (are) used in the study.
Theoretical approach used in the study	Power/ empowerment	Disciplinary power, strategic power (Foucault, 1996 in Allen, 2002); collective power (Arendt, 1958 in Allen, 2002), etc.	Which theory (ies) of power or empowerment is (are) used in the study? From which school of thought?	This coding criterion enables the identification of theories of power or empowerment used to conceptualize these terms.
	Sustainability transitions	Strategic Niche Management (SNM), Transition Management (TM), etc.	Which theory (ies) of sustainability transitions is (are) used in the study?	

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Appendix B: Keyword combinations to identify relevant literature

Keywords	"Sustainability transitions"			-		
	Grassroots	Civil Society	Community	Grassroots innovations	Grassroots initiatives	Grassroots movements
Power	"Sustainability transitions" AND grassroots AND power	"Sustainability transitions" AND "civil society" AND power	"Sustainability transitions" AND community AND power	"Grassroots innovations" AND power	"Grassroots initiatives" AND power	"Grassroots movements" AND power
Politics	"Sustainability transitions" AND grassroots AND politics	"Sustainability transitions" AND "civil society" AND politics	"Sustainability transitions" AND community AND politics	"Grassroots innovations" AND politics	"Grassroots initiatives" AND politics	"Grassroots movements" AND politics
Empowerment	"Sustainability transitions" AND grassroots AND empowerment	"Sustainability transitions" AND "civil society" AND empowerment	"Sustainability transitions" AND community AND empowerment	"Grassroots innovations" AND empowerment	"Grassroots initiatives" AND empowerment	"Grassroots movements" AND empowerment

Appendix C: Inventory of theories of Unmaking capitalism (Feola et al., 2021)

Theory/ concept (field)	Selected references	Core Idea	Levels at which it occurs	Significance for the unmaking of capitalist work relations*	Significance for the making of postcapitalist work relations*
Destabilisation (Sustainability transitions)	Turnheim and Geels (2013)	The 'process of weakening reproduction of core [sociotechnical] regime elements' such as routines, technical capabilities, strategic orientation, and mindsets (Turnheim and Geels, 2012, p. 35)	Macro (societal)	Weakens the reproduction of core elements of capitalist socio-technical regimes (e.g. technical capabilities for the increasing exploitation of human and non-human life, strategic orientation towards efficiency).	Allows cultural, technical and strategic diversification and experimentation (e.g. as related to modes of exchange outside of the market, responsible technologies or strategic orientation towards sufficiency).
Exnovation (Sustainability transitions)	Davidson (2019)	A 'conscious decision to phase out technology or practice, to decommission it, and to withdraw the corresponding resources and use them for other purposes' (Kimberly 1981, p. 91)	Macro (societal)	Abandons, purposively terminates, defunds, deroutinizes and, or deinstitutionalises socially and environmentally destructive or exploitative technologies, and the production and consumption practices with which they are bound.	Allows political and financial capital to be invested in alternative technologies (e.g. low-tech, frugal technologies) and related practices, value systems (e.g. oriented towards care), and more horizontal power structures.
Unlearning (Organisation studies)	(Fiol and O'Connor, 2017a, 2017b)	Consciously not thinking or acting in 'old' ways (Stenvall et al., 2018)	Micro (in-dividual), Meso (col-lectives)	Abandons, rejects, discards from use, gives up, abstains from retrieving, questions taken-for-granted values, norms, beliefs (e.g. the idea of progress as endless accumulation and expansion), and operations and behaviour (e.g. over-production and consumption).	Enables learning new cultural significations and routines (e.g. voluntary simplicity) and emotional re-attachment (e.g. with nature).

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Theory/ concept (field)	Selected references	Core Idea	Levels at which it occurs	Significance for the unmaking of capitalist work relations*	Significance for the making of postcapitalist work relations*
Sacrifice (Political ecology)	Maniates and Meyer (2010)	Giving up something (now) for something of higher value (to be obtained now or in the future).	Micro (individual), Meso (collectives)	Entails voluntary reduction of consumption (voluntary simplicity).	Enables time and space for developing new cultural significations and practices, e.g. as related to non-utilitarian, non-market-based engagements with the self, others, and the biophysical environment.
Crack capitalism (Social movement studies and autonomous geographies)	Holloway (2010)	A refusal to perpetuate capitalist practices and organisational structures through its commitment to value, money, profit.	Micro (individual), Meso (collectives)	Entails the refusal to reproduce capitalist relations (e.g. labour, value). Rejects rigid classifications and totalising abstractions (value, labour) as expressions of modern rationalism and capitalist form of domination.	Enables autonomy to enact forms of doing and organising based on nonmonetary values, self-determination, horizontal relations, and principles of cooperation and recognition.
Everyday resistance (Peasant and development studies)	Scott (1986)	Everyday resistance refers to quiet, dispersed, disguised, or otherwise seemingly invisible acts of opposition, struggle or refusal to cooperate with abusive powers.	Micro (individual), Meso (collectives)	Questions, opposes and objects to abusive or oppressive power relations. Refuses to cooperate with or submit to oppressive behaviour and control (e.g. as it relates to the appropriation and exploitation of cheap nature and labour).	Enables autonomy and sense of dignity.

Theory/concept (field)	Selected references	Core Idea	Levels at which it occurs	Significance for the unmaking of capitalist work relations*	Significance for the making of postcapitalist work relations*
Resistance (Social movement and political studies)	Hollander and Einwohner (2004)	Resistance refers to varying forms of overt (visible) intentional actions of opposition, which are recognised by the targets of such opposition.	Meso (collectives), Macro (societal)	Questions, opposes and objects to abusive or oppressive power relations. Actively dismantles material and symbolic infrastructures of capitalist exploitation of human or non-human life; contests and prevents the physical or symbolic presence of organisations imposing capitalist institutions and relations.	Defends spaces of diversity and autonomy. Reinforces alternative identities through collective action.
Refusal (Decolonial and cultural studies)	McGranahan (2016) Simpson (2016)	Refusal is the rejection or negation of an imposed and taken-for-granted definition of a situation, identity and/or social relation.	Micro (individual), Meso (collectives)	Abstains from, stops, and/ or breaks exploitative and/ or alienating relations (e.g. labour relations). Rejects (taken for granted) consent to, e.g. definitions of progress as endless accumulation or consumption as only political space.	Affirms freedom to redefine identities, problem definitions, histories; thereby provides alternative basis for social recognition, empowerment and reconfiguration of social relations on the ground of, e.g., principles of care, democracy, autonomy.
Delinking (Decolonial and cultural studies)	Mignolo (2007) Wazner-Serrano (2015)	De-linking from the colonial rhetoric of modernity, which must be conceived as simultaneously capitalist, and denouncing the pretended universality of a Western and European episteme in which capital accumulated as a consequence of colonialism.	Meso (collectives), Macro (societal)	Uncovers hidden assumptions, rejects/resists claims to epistemic privilege and universality of Western thought. Disengages from the logic and rhetoric of modernity and capitalism.	Allows claiming and relinking with diverse (e.g. relational) logics and types of knowledge (e.g. non-scientific) and a redefinition of citizenship, democracy, human rights, human and non-human nature, economic relations.

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Theory/ concept (field)	Selected references	Core Idea	Levels at which it occurs	Significance for the unmaking of capitalist work relations*	Significance for the making of postcapitalist work relations*
Decolonisation of the imaginary (Degrowth)	Latouche (2010)	A radical and profound cultural change of the foundational imaginary significations of modern capitalist societies.	Micro (individual), Meso (collectives), Macro (societal)	Refuses complicity and collaboration with the ideology of development, e.g. as in the abstention from the use of environmentally destructive technologies, or the limitation of space allotted for advertisement. Cognitively subverts and critiques economicism and the imperative of endless economic growth.	Enables the autonomous determination of new imaginaries (e.g. alternatives to development).
Defamiliariza-tion (Decolonial and cultural studies)	Shklovsky (1925) Vaught (2012)	The 'removal of an object of the sphere of automatised perception' (Shklovsky, 1925, p.6)	Micro (individual)	Ruptures, de-automatises, dishabituates automised perception, e.g. as related to cultural constructions of value and worth. Emotional detachment and critical reflection. Disrupts common sense, e.g. as related to taken-for-granted production-consumption routines and utilitarian value systems.	Allows critical awareness, emotional re-attachment, and establishment of new cultural meanings.

* We provide here an interpretation (stretching) of the theories and concepts to illustrate their applicability to and significance for the study of the unmaking of capitalist modernity and the making of post-capitalist realities. The examples are illustrative and not comprehensive.

Summary

Capitalist agri-food systems foster economic growth and capital accumulation, resulting in unprecedented environmental degradation and halted social inequalities. The dominance of capitalist agri-food systems, historically established through unequal negotiations among actors with varying power positions, is contingent on undervaluing, invisibilising, and marginalising agri-food identities, operations, and relations that deviate from the logics of appropriation, capital accumulation, and economic growth. These power imbalances have spurred contestation by various scholars, activists, and practitioners who, in turn, have called for a sustainability transformation towards more socially just and environmentally sound agri-food systems.

This PhD thesis aims to elucidate the role of power and empowerment in the sustainability transformation of agri-food systems. It focuses on sustainability transformation within grassroots agri-food initiatives, which serve as spaces for realising sustainable alternatives in agri-food systems. The primary contribution of this research lies in expanding the concepts of power and empowerment to capture how they emerge from micro-politics and collective identity formation and shape prefiguration within grassroots initiatives. For this purpose, this thesis integrates different conceptualisations of power and empowerment with theories of sustainability transformation in novel ways. It empirically investigates how power and empowerment shape the structuring of work relations, the inclusion of queer people, and the creation of leadership roles for women farmers in a specific type of grassroots agri-food initiative, namely community-supported agriculture (CSA), in Italy and Portugal..

Chapter 2 conducted a systematic literature review of 88 studies about power and empowerment in grassroots initiatives. It revealed an implicit pattern of approaching these concepts as strategic exercises. The chapter emphasises the need to broaden the understanding of power and empowerment in grassroots initiatives, encouraging further engagement with these terms to illuminate how power imbalances enable or constrain grassroots abilities. It suggests avenues for future research, such as addressing questions of collective identity, investigating the linkages between micro- and macro-politics of societal change, and expanding empirical investigations beyond the Global North.

Chapter 3 analysed how power dynamics influenced the prefiguration of postcapitalist work relations in three CSAs in Portugal. The chapter showed that despite aiming for non-alienated, non-monetized, and caring work relations, CSAs struggled to challenge hierarchical, exploitative, and discriminatory power structures rooted in capitalism. Common strategies for diversifying work relations included implementing participatory decision-making mechanisms and fostering meaningful, enjoyable work interactions through

human-nonhuman synergy. However, challenges such as farm owners' centralised roles and perpetuated gender and class inequalities hindered the diversification of work relations.

Chapter 4 investigated queer empowerment within a CSA in a rural region in Portugal, based on the experiences of 12 queer members. Despite not being initially designed for this purpose, the CSA facilitated various forms of empowerment and active engagement influenced by the leadership of queer producers and recurrent gatherings on queer-owned farmland. Three critical lessons on rural queer empowerment emerged from the analysis: the self-confidence to perform queerness may be restricted to a selective rural community; partnerships between producers and co-producers may enable reciprocal queer empowerment; and queer leadership in agri-food community action may quietly represent gender and sexual diversity in the countryside.

Chapter 5 examined whether and how new entrant women farmers create leadership roles in CSA. It illustrated tensions, contradictions, and ambivalent effects that emerged when women farmers attempted to resist, deconstruct, and disengage from oppressive capitalist identity structures. The analysis revealed that these forms of disidentification were contingent on the intersectional situatedness of these farmers and differed across their family constellation, sexuality, and agricultural background. Additionally, it highlighted everyday forms of power and empowerment that influence the destabilisation and deconstruction of capitalist identity structures, contributing to further research on intersectional and gender studies in agri-food transformation.

Collectively, these chapters demonstrate that grassroots agri-food initiatives are spaces where conflicts between domination, oppression, and empowerment shape the prefiguration of sustainable agri-food systems, emphasising the nonlinear nature of sustainability transformation. The findings confirm that transformation is tied to power imbalances accentuated by the capitalist agri-food system. These initiatives experiment with alternative and non-capitalist approaches to agri-food practices, relations, and identities within the complex web of power relations prescribed by capitalist agri-food systems.

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However, grassroots initiatives' micro-politics and collective identity formation facilitate the diversification of work relations and empower gender and sexually marginalised communities in agriculture. However, their transformative potential remains latent. Two main reasons are suggested: Firstly, these initiatives inadequately dismantle hierarchical, exploitative, and discriminative relationships rooted in capitalist work relations and heteropatriarchal structures of the family farm. Secondly, their deliberation efforts only partially address these problematic power relations.

This thesis advocates for a more intentional inclusion of gender and sexuality dimensions within the broader political agenda of these initiatives in synergy with other concerns such as food sovereignty, food as a commons, and agroecology. Furthermore, this research showed that the selected initiatives do not prefigure a future of agri-food systems where injustices and inequalities vanish entirely. Their micro-politics and collective identity formation must continue to prefigure inclusive and participatory structures, unveiling and challenging persisting inequalities and allowing for novel agri-food relations, practices and identities to emerge.

Samenvatting

Kapitalistische landbouwsystemen bevorderen economische groei en kapitaalaccumulatie, hetgeen resulteert in een ongeziene aantasting van het milieu en stijgende sociale ongelijkheid. De dominantie van kapitalistische landbouwsystemen, historisch tot stand gekomen door ongelijke interacties tussen actoren met verschillende machtsposities, is gebaseerd op het onderwaarderen, onzichtbaar maken en marginaliseren van landbouwidentiteiten, -activiteiten en -relaties die afwijken van de logica van toe-eigening, kapitaalaccumulatie en economische groei. Deze onevenwichtige machtsverhoudingen worden vandaag in vraag gesteld door verschillende wetenschappers en activisten die op hun beurt oproepen tot een duurzaamheidstransformatie naar meer sociaal rechtvaardige en milieuvriendelijke landbouwsystemen.

Dit proefschrift heeft als doel de rol van macht en empowerment in de duurzaamheidstransformatie van landbouwsystemen te verduidelijken. Het richt zich op duurzaamheidstransformatie binnen grassroots landbouwinitiatieven, dewelke dienen als plaatsen voor het realiseren van duurzame alternatieven in het landbouwsysteem. De centrale bijdrage van dit onderzoek ligt in het uitbreiden van de concepten van macht en empowerment om uit te leggen hoe deze voortkomen uit micropolitiek en collectieve identiteitsvorming, en hoe ze vorm geven aan prefiguratie binnen grassroots initiatieven. Met dit doel voor ogen integreert deze dissertatie verschillende conceptualisaties van macht en empowerment op nieuwe manieren met theorieën over duurzaamheidstransformatie en onderzoekt dit werk empirisch hoe macht en empowerment vorm geven aan het structureren van werkrelaties, de inclusie van queer mensen, en het creëren van leiderschapsrollen voor vrouwelijke boeren in een specifiek type grassroots landbouwinitiatief, namelijk community-supported agriculture (CSA) in Italië en Portugal.

In hoofdstuk 2 werd een systematisch literatuuranalyse uitgevoerd van 88 studies over macht en empowermentin grassroots initiatieven. Deze analyse onthulde een impliciet patroon van het begrijpen van macht en empowerment als strategische oefeningen. Dit hoofdstuk benadrukt de noodzaak om het begrip van macht en empowerment in grassroots initiatieven te verbreden en moedigt aan om dieper op deze termen in te gaan om te belichten hoe capaciteiten van grassroots initiatieven worden gesterkt of beperkt door machtsonevenwichten. Er worden suggesties gedaan voor toekomstig onderzoek, zoals het aanpakken van vragen rond collectieve identiteit, het onderzoeken van de verbanden tussen de micro-en macropolitiek van maatschappelijke verandering en het uitbreiden van empirisch onderzoek buiten het Globale Noorden.

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In hoofdstuk 3 werd geanalyseerd hoe deze machtsdynamieken zes processen beïnvloedden die betrekking hebben tot de van ontmanteling van het kapitalisme en de prefiguratie van postkapitalistische arbeidsrelaties in drie CSA-projecten in Portugal : afleren, opoffering, alledaags verzet, verzet, weigering en defamiliarisering. Dit hoofdstuk onderzocht hoe machtsdynamieken invloed hebben zijn op de prestaties en moeilijkheden waarmee CSA's worden geconfronteerd bij het tot stand brengen en bestendigen van postkapitalistische werkrelaties. Er werd vastgesteld dat, ondanks het streven naar niet-vervreemde, niet-gemonetariseerde en zorgzame werkrelaties, CSA's worstelden met het uitdagen van hiërarchische, uitbuitende en discriminerende machtsstructuren die geworteld zijn in het kapitalisme. Terugkerende strategieën voorhet diversifiëren van werkrelaties waren onder andere het implementeren van participatieve besluitvormingsmechanismen en het bevorderen van zinvolle, plezierige werkinteracties door middel van menselijke en niet-menselijke synergieën. Deze diversificatie van werkrelaties werd echter belemmerd door de gecentraliseerde rol van boerderijeigenaren en de aanhoudende gender-en klasseongelijkheid.

Hoofdstuk 4 onderzocht queer empowerment binnen een CSA in een landelijke regio in Portugal en was gebaseerd op eencasestudy van 12 queer leden van het project. Hoewel de CSA oorspronkelijk niet voor dit doel ontworpen was, faciliteerde het project verschillende vormen van empowerment en actieve betrokkenheid onder haar queer leden, beïnvloed door het leiderschap van queer producenten en herhaaldelijke bijeenkomsten op de boerderij die eigendom was van deze producenten. Uit de analyse kwamen drie belangrijke lessen naar voren over queer empowerment op het platteland: het zelfvertrouwen om queerness uit te dragen kan beperkt zijn tot een selectieve plattelandsgemeenschap; partnerschappen tussen producenten en coproducenten kunnen wederzijdse queer empowerment mogelijk maken; en queer leiderschap in de landbouwgemeenschap kan een stille vertegenwoordiging zijn van gender-en seksuele diversiteit op het platteland

Hoofdstuk 5 onderzocht of en hoe nieuwe vrouwelijke boeren leiderschapsrollen creëren in CSA projecten, en illustreerde de spanningen, tegenstrijdigheden en ambivalente effecten die naar voren kwamen toen ze zich probeerden te verzetten tegen kapitalistische identiteitsstructuren, deze probeerden te deconstrueren en zich ervan los te maken. De analyse toonde dat de-identificatie afhankelijk was van de intersectionele positie van deze vrouwelijke boeren en verschilde in functie van hun familiesamenstelling, seksualiteit en landbouwachtergrond. Verder werden er in dit hoofdstuk alledaagse vormen van macht en empowerment belicht die de destabilisatie en deconstructie van kapitalistische identiteitsstructuren beïnvloeden. Dit draagt bij aan verder onderzoek naar intersectionele en genderstudies in landbouwsysteemtransformatie.

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About the author

Guilherme Raj (he/him) (1990) is originally from Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Guilherme earned a bachelor's degree in Communication Sciences, specializing in marketing and advertising, from the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro. In his bachelor's thesis, he examined the impact of communication campaigns by the French NGO Mouvement Colibris, focusing on promoting themes related to sustainability, participatory democracy, degrowth, and simple living across different societal sectors, including agriculture and food. After gaining invaluable experience with the Mouvement Colibris, Guilherme pursued a master's degree in Innovation and Sustainable Food Systems at Wageningen University in the Netherlands. During his master's studies, he actively participated in academic and practical agri-food initiatives, notably contributing to the "Boerengroep" organization that bridges the gap between academia and peasant communities. Additionally, he was awarded the Japanese JASSO scholarship to conduct his master's thesis research on power dynamics within an alternative food network in Kyoto, Japan. These experiences were pivotal in building up his interest in issues of power and the politics of agri-food transformation. In 2019, Guilherme embarked on his PhD journey within the Unmaking project at Utrecht University. Collaborating with a talented team of researchers, he expanded his expertise on power and empowerment in agri-food sustainability transformation. With a particular focus on the intersection of gender, sexuality, and agriculture, Guilherme aims to foster the development of research and evidence-based interventions to ensure an agri-food transformation that takes social diversity and inclusion seriously alongside promoting environmental sustainability. Beyond academia, Guilherme is an enthusiast of the outdoors, passionate about dance, theatre and cinema, and actively engaged with agri-food collectives on the ground.

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