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Bridge-building practices for holistic vision of agrarian-rural societies in India and Spain

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ABSTRACT

Small-holder agriculture and rural societies are often presented as declining and deteriorating contexts in media as well as national and international policies. The solutions aimed at addressing this decline often is framed in terms of external (market and policy) interventions while simultaneously presenting agrarian-rural societies as static and impoverished. This essentialist view of agrarian-rural societies is based on a modernist knowledge politics that functions by creating asymmetries of power through the practices of definitions and categorizations of understanding and engaging with the world. Binary oppositional categories, such as the rural and the urban, knowledge and experience, and nature and culture, is one route through which this knowledge politics unfolds. Rather than providing sustainable solutions, approaches based on these binaries have often exacerbated the vulnerabilities and challenges of agrarian-rural societies in terms of resource depletion, loss of biodiversity and livelihoods, deterioration of social ties, and challenges to food, nutrition, and health. In this paper, we present a comparative study of two Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) from India and Spain, which are engaged in the constructive practices of building relational connections across these binaries in order to re-envision agrarian-rural societies beyond modernist knowledge politics. Additionally, the paper brings together the cases from India and Spain to reflect on the binary of global south and north to build relationality and solidarity.

1. Introduction

In contemporary scholarly and policy discourses rural life is often portrayed as ‘declining’ and ‘vanishing’ (Recaño et al., 2020; Li et al., 2019; Gupta 2005), and rural people as ‘abandoned’ (Calvário, 2017) and ‘left behind’ (Wu and Liu, 2020). These framings present the rural world as a static, traditional, pre-modern thing of the past, that is incapable of change (Zhang, 2023; Cruickshank 2009). As a result, they undermine the efforts and agency of people, still living in these areas, as bearers of change (Zhang, 2023; Gibson, 2016). Scholars have argued that the practice of presenting the agrarian-rural societies as ‘invisible’, ‘static’ and ‘deprived’ justifies the intervention by the state and/or corporate (Patel 2013; Hall et al., 2015; Vicol and Pritchard, 2021; Pritchard et al., 2016). This has led to unchecked exploitation, appropriation, and acquisition of resources from the countryside contributing to further vulnerability and crisis in agrarian-rural societies all over the world (Calvário, 2022; Meek and Khadse, 2022; Germond-Duret, 2016). How can we understand such discursive and material articulations of agrarian-rural societies? What are the implications of such discursive articulations? How do local actors make sense of these articulations and what mechanisms do they develop to engage with the ongoing agrarian-rural crisis manifested through such articulations? In this paper we discuss two cases of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) from India

and Spain in order to engage with these questions.

We employ the conceptual tools of Science and Technology Studies (STS) (Law and Lin, 2017; Jasanoff, 2005; Latour, 2012), and de-colonial studies (Smith, 2019; Hamilton et al., 2017) to argue that the above-mentioned negative framings of agrarian-rural societies result from a knowledge politics of modernity that understands, articulates and eventually shapes the world through binary thinking. The organizing of thoughts and actions through binaries is one of the most common scholarly as well as social practice. The constitution and deployment of binaries as opposites is often guided by asymmetrical treatment of two positions eventually reinforcing asymmetric relations in their materialization (Chueh, 1999; Levi-Strauss, 1963). Depending on the power dynamics in a given social context, one part of the binary is always presented as the ‘better’/‘good’ while the other as ‘less’/‘bad’. The representation of the world through scholarly discourses, such as the employment of binaries, are world-making endeavors (Germond-Duret 2016; Cruickshank, 2009; Foucault, 2002; Puig de La Bellacasa, 2012). Such binaries direct the path to universalism by rendering ‘other’ worldviews as inferior (Smith, 2019). Thinking in terms of binaries also erases or invisibilizes everything else that does not fit rigid categories (Gillen et al., 2022; Germond-Duret 2016; Sardar, 1999). The problem of binary thinking and the subsequent marginalization of rural societies has been discussed in scholarly work for over decades now (Baird, 2022;

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Gillen et al., 2022; Ortega, 2020, Rigg et al., 2016; Ginsburg et al., 1991). One approach advanced by critical scholarship in rural studies, rural sociology and political ecology is to unpack the binaries through connected, entangled, and relational approaches (Gillen et al., 2022; Baird, 2022; Ortega, 2020). This paper is situated in these calls for relational and entangled approaches. We focus on two CSOs cases that employ, what we heuristically call, bridge-building practices to engage with the vulnerabilities (created by binary thinking) by enabling symmetry, relationality and connection, and facilitate exchange, interdependence, and care. Building on the work of Casas-Cortés et al. (2008), we will argue that the bridge building practices of these CSOs are knowledge-practices that, in the process of the creation of alternative materialities, also engage in creating alternative knowledges.

The contributions of this paper are threefold. One, by employing STS and de-colonial studies we unpack the practices of employing binaries in modernist visions of engaging with social and material world. In particular, we look at the core modernist binaries of knowledge-experience and nature-culture that create vulnerabilities through disconnection of livelihood and dignity, agrarian and rural, and producers and consumers. Two, we look at the alternative practices of CSOs that engage in situated, local mechanisms of finding ways to deal with the vulnerabilities produced by such binary thinking. Friedmann and McNair (2008) argue that social movements and organizations that focus on transformation in agri-food systems generally take two directions. A more radical and confrontational ‘warrior’ approach (public protests), and a non-confrontational ‘builder’ approach (food/seed festivals) focused on slow changes from within. More often, the ‘warrior’ approaches of CSOs are highlighted in social media and academic discourses. Thus, as a strategic choice, rather than focusing on the confrontational politics of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) (through public protests, and legal actions), we engage with the not so popular, non-confrontational ‘builder’ approaches of the CSOs that seek slow transformation from within (Friedmann and McNair, 2008). The paper focuses on the efforts of these organizations in building rural resilience through strengthening rural-urban connection and community empowerment. Third, a majority of times, the scholarship on civil society engagements with agri-food systems is organized around rural peasant led movements from the global south and urban consumers led movements in the global north (Calvário, 2017). In this paper, the cases from India and Spain reverse this distinction. By bringing together cases of a country from global south (India) and a country from southern Europe (Spain) we aim to chart the contours of vulnerability that are shaping the agrarian-rural societies beyond the conventional global north-south borders. In doing so, we also extend the canvas of solidarity among marginal communities across the globe. The paper is organized in the following way. The next section presents a literature review focused on modernist knowledge politics and the material implication of binary-making practices. Section 3 discusses the methods and data collection. Section 4 presents the findings of the Indian (Alliance for Sustainable and Holistic Agriculture) and Spanish (The Carquiexa) cases. Section 5 discusses the findings followed by conclusions in section 6.

2. Literature review

The literature is organized in two parts - part one is organized to systematically unpack the knowledge politics of modernity through binary thinking. Part two discusses the discursive and material implications of the practice of binary-making that result in the vulnerabilities of agrarian-rural societies (see Table 1).

2.1. The modernist knowledge politics and the practice of binary thinking

Knowledge, more broadly, is constituted by a complex interplay of values, practices and experiences that shape worldviews (ontology) and ways of knowing the world (epistemologies) (Pandey and Sharma, 2021;

Table 1

Schematic representation of modernist knowledge politics of binary divisions leading to vulnerabilities in agrarian-rural societies.

Knowledge politics of modernity			
The practice of binary thinking (thought, discourse, actions)			
1. Creates asymmetric power hierarchies and value judgements (devaluation, negation)			
2. Creates disconnects and differences (undermines relationality, interdependence and community)			
3. Invisibilizes everything in-between (loss, extinction)			
Core binaries on modernist knowledge politics			
Binary	Impacts	Binary	Impacts
Nature/ Culture	Environmental degradation, invisibilization of communities	Knowledge/ Experience	Devaluing of diverse knowledge systems and skills other than techno-science
Secondary binaries (as a result of collective effect of core binaries in shaping agrarian-rural societies)			
Agrarian/ Rural	Exploitation of local ecosystems and community	Livelihoods/ Dignity	Loss of rural livelihoods, rural out-migration
Food access/ nutrition	Monocultures, loss of knowledge on nutrition, loss of biodiversity	Producers/ Consumers	Corporate control on agri-food systems

Valkenburg et al., 2020). Similarly, practices are conceived as the nodes of what we do, what we are and what we know. Thus, knowledge could be understood as performative in practice. The practice turn in critical theory designates the arbitrary separation between knowledge and practice as problematic (Nicolini, 2011; Casas-Cortés et al., 2008; Dreyfus, 2005). As per the practice theorists, knowledge and practices are intricately intertwined in what Casas-Cortés et al. (2008) call “knowledge-practices”. This implies that practices breach the boundaries of materiality. But more importantly, it is that knowing is organized, renovated, and reproduced in practices (Nicolini, 2011). Everyday practices such as cooking, caring, and discussing are knowledge making endeavors. Similarly, practices of knowledge making such as categorization, critical thinking, and theorizing are world making endeavors that are fundamentally entangled with the politics of knowledge (Smith, 2019; Law and Lin, 2017; Foucault, 2002). Knowledge politics determines which worldviews and ways of knowing are valid and desirable, who decides on whose behalf, and who wins and who loses as a result. In this background we look at the practice of making sense of the world through binary thinking – how are certain binaries created and employed, who employs them and what are the impacts of this practice.

Organization of thoughts and practices into binaries is a core feature of human societies worldwide (Germond-Duret, 2016; Cloke and Johnston, 2005). According to structuralists, every component of a system is constituted by two logical (sometimes) opposite divisions where one part conveys the presence of an attribute and other its absence, for example light/dark, order/disorder, sustainable/unsustainable etc. (Germond-Duret, 2016; Carolan, 2016). Depending on the context and power dynamics, same attributes of a binary system could project different values. For example, Germond-Duret (2016) demonstrates a list of attributes of the binary tradition/modernity that are valued differently in different contexts. As a result, despite being an easy heuristic tool, binaries often end up in instituting asymmetric power relations, creation of hierarchies and value judgment that materialize into the marginalization and negation of the ‘other’ (Puig de La Bellacasa, 2012; Sardar, 1999; Agrawal, 1995). The creation of binaries also ends-up in invisibilization of everything that is in-between two binaries and that which does not fit binary categorization (Germond-Duret, 2016; Cruickshank, 2009; Foucault, 2002). Contingent on power dynamics and knowledge politics, it is thus important to pay attention to the purposes that the practice of binary making serves (Baird, 2022).

In the context of agrarian-rural societies, the knowledge politics through binaries could be traced back to the industrialization in Europe where a modernist faith in science and technology declared traditional agriculture as well as rurality as obstacles in the march towards a future of endless possibilities through economic growth (McMichael, 1996). The modernist worldview, through its various entanglements with colonialism and post-WWII developmentalism made its way to the global south, where it has become a hegemonic policy discourse (Jakobsen, 2019; McMichael, 2009).

The Western notion of modernity is conventionally associated with a belief in technological and economic progress as ways of emancipation from subsistence and underdevelopment (Kaltoft, 2001). Merrill (2006:27) argues that modernity is a 'more expansive cultural revolution, state of consciousness that elevates science, mastery over nature, mass production, mass consumption'. The universal visions of scientific modernity get mobilized through knowledge politics in two concurrent steps. One, by creating dichotomous binaries such as knowledge and experience, science and tradition, facts and values, nature and culture, urban and rural, spheres of production and spheres of reproduction (Barca, 2020; Lugones, 2010; Kaltoft, 2001). Two, through employment of power and discursive hegemony where one aspect of the binary, such as science over tradition, becomes the privileged versions of reality and perceived as a 'good' in itself, othering alternative ways of knowing and being. For instance, Post-WWII, USA politics is known particularly for the modernist foreign policies and faith in progress and power through technology even at the cost of ethics and morality,¹² (Merrill, 2006). Similarly, in the countries of the global south, such as India, science and modernity often become hegemonic discourses (Visvanathan, 2006) and the 'reason of the state' (Subramaniam, 2000; Arnold, 2013). In the modernist worldview, while the city and industrial structures (such as steel and power plants and dams) are celebrated as signs of progress and development, the villages are deemed as areas of backwardness, darkness and a waiting room for the aspiring and the despairing (Gupta and Thakur 2017; Gupta 2005; Parry, 2004; Visvanathan, 2006).

2.2. The performativity of binaries and vulnerability of agrarian-rural societies

Binaries are performative, either as tools of knowledge politics or as heuristic ordering devices, as they shape thoughts, discourse, actions and the ways in which we make sense of the world. The knowledge politics of modernity configures agrarian-rural (in opposition to industrial-urban) as a 'pre-modern', static space that is incapable of change (Cruikshank, 2009). This identity of the rural is configured and maintained through two interconnected, core binaries of the modernist knowledge politics – nature/culture, and knowledge/experience. Consequently, these core binaries further result in secondary effects in the form of creating more binaries that further exacerbate the vulnerabilities of agrarian-rural societies. Although there could be many more, in this paper we identify and engage with four secondary binaries. These are livelihood/dignity, producers/consumers, agrarian/rural, and food access/nutrition. These categories represent binaries either because of the lack of consideration of the other aspect or due to disconnect between two elements of the same system.

Historically, the nature-culture divide is often traced back to the

¹ Two weeks before dropping the bomb in Hiroshima, Truman wrote 'I hope for some sort of peace but I fear that machines are ahead of morals by some centuries' (Merrill 2006: 29).

² We are using the term 'holistic', as described by ASHA members and ASHA website, as an approach to agriculture that collectively and simultaneously engages with the question of social, economic, and environmental justice. The term holistic in literal sense employs thinking relationally, interconnectedly and interdependently. These are the core values discussed by members of both organizations.

dualistic worldview prevalent in ancient Greek philosophy, particularly in the works of philosophers like Plato and Aristotle (Casas-Cortés et al., 2008). Plato saw the material world (nature) as a mere reflection or imperfect copy of ideal forms, while human reason and intellect (culture) were considered superior and divine. The scientific revolution of the 16th and 17th centuries reinforced the notion that nature operates according to fixed laws, while human beings possess the capacity for reason and mastery over nature (Polanyi, 2001). The nature-culture binary of Plato is re-articulated into the knowledge-experience binary expanded along the thoughts of Rene Descartes (Murriss, 2020). By privileging mind over body, Descartes sowed the seeds of the modernist scientific thought that privileges universal, disconnected, dis-interested, and objective knowledge over embodied, situated, and contextual (Murriss, 2020). In a way, the centralization of human reason as the organizing principle of social lives in the Enlightenment period (as opposed to beliefs) marked the unfolding of western modernity as a victory of culture/humans over nature/non-humans and mind over body (Casas-Cortés et al., 2008; Foucault, 2002). This led to the belief in human dominion over the natural world, shaping the development of industrialization and capitalism (Warren, 1973). The binary of nature-culture and knowledge-experience are central to the hierarchical shaping of academic domains, disciplines, and research methods (Smith, 2019; Foucault, 2002). Scholars of political ecology and decolonial studies have systematically shown that these binaries serve as the basis of exploitative, colonial, and extractivist paradigms that oppressed and subjugation 'other' humans and 'non-humans' for progress and economic growth of the west (Smith, 2019; Urzedo and Chatterjee, 2021; Agrawal, 1995; Escobar, 2018).

The binary of nature/culture and knowledge/experience has significant contribution in shaping agrarian-rural societies as static and deficient either directly or through creation of more secondary binaries. For example, the binary of nature/culture leads to a sense of disconnection and detachment from the environment. Nature is seen as a resource to be exploited for human benefit. This binary has favored narratives that see nature either as a resource for capitalist exploitation or as a domain to be protected from human intervention (Alonso-Fradejas et al., 2015; Robbins, 2019). While one perspective justifies extraction of resources from rural areas for advancing industrial-urbanization, the other perspective frames rural spaces as 'protected' sites either for nature or for traditional culture turning them into museums/recreation sites (Cruikshank, 2009). In this view, the values of local and indigenous people are undermined and marginalized through processes of co-optation and appropriation (Howitt and Suchet-Pearson, 2006). Lee (2016) argues that cultural notions have been central in the visions of harmonious cohabitation of indigenous communities with nature. Policies and interventions that rely on the nature-culture binary have increased vulnerability of both nature (bio-diversity loss) and culture (loss of indigenous knowledge and practices).

The manifestation of knowledge/experience binary results in privileging of, knowledge generated in meticulously designed public and private laboratories, while degrading the value of local, embodied knowledge and experiential wisdom. The preference for universalism over context specificity and objective distance over embodied understanding results in bureaucratization, privatization, and commodification of knowledge (Haraway, 2020; Escobar, 2018; Shiva, 1991). As a result, rather than being owners of their own knowledge, rural people are converted into mere passive recipients of external knowledge and technology (Calvário, 2022; Pandey and Sharma, 2021; Kumar, 2016; Cullather, 2010; Shiva, 1991). This de-valuing of embodied knowledge and skills results in loss of rural livelihoods and eventually respect for such skills (Schneider, 2015; Scoones, 2009; Mamidipudi and Gajjala, 2008; Carolan, 2008)

By systematically devaluing local farming and artisanal practices over intensive agriculture production; and devaluing agriculture in comparison to industrial production, the politics of modernity shaped rurality as sites of value extraction rather than value creation (Saltzman

et al., 2011; Cruickshank, 2009). Specially, the binaries on nature/culture and knowledge/experience aided in designating value creation as an exclusive affair of the educated human mind, thus disconnecting local, rural communities from their potential of value creation (Cruickshank, 2009). In this way, a binary of agrarian and rural is created where both agrarian and the rural stop making sense in connection to each other in the local context. Rather, they are fed into the value creation cycles of urban-industrial systems either as sites of resource extraction or as sites of recreation (Gupta, 2005; Markey et al., 2008; Li et al., 2019). In the vision of modernity, rural practices are measured in relation to contribution to national economy (urban-industrial) and rural livelihoods in terms of productivity and economic profits. The calculations of efficiency and productivity deem local agricultural and rural artisanal skills and knowledge as slow and unproductive as opposed to industrial production (Van der Ploeg, 2018; Plahe et al., 2017). Work designated non-quantifiable such as care, community building and social solidarity are ignored and invisibilised (Barca, 2020). As a collective impact, livelihoods are disconnected from dignity of work leading to displacement and migration of rural people to urban areas.

Further, the knowledge/experience divide facilitates development of agri-food systems based on universal scientific models that make farmers increasingly dependent on external systems for knowledge, technology, inputs, and outputs (Cabral et al., 2022; Kumar 2016; Patel, 2013). The modernist focus on techno-market centric monocultures has resulted in a disconnect between food access and nutrition, and producers and consumers (Kirwan and Maye, 2013). While there is over-production of a few varieties of calorie dense, resource-intensive food items such as corn, wheat, and rice; a wide diversity of nutrient-rich, environmentally resilient local crop varieties such as millets, vegetables, lentils, and oilseeds, often known as ‘orphan’ crops, are being marginalized or lost (Feyisa, 2022; Hazareesingh, 2021; Shiva, 1991). The neglect of these crops has also resulted in the loss of culturally specific ways and knowledge on cultivating, cooking, consuming and conserving these crops. The disconnect between food access and nutrition has resulted in an epidemic of obesity and nutritional hunger all over the world (Ingram, 2020; Pfeiffer et al. 2011). In the traditional system producers and consumers were connected directly to each other in a situated local context. The scientific models of agri-food systems resulted in ever-increasing gaps between producers and consumers (Kirwan and Maye, 2013). These practices have resulted in the development of international agri-industrial complexes that propagate ‘a food from nowhere’ vision of agri-food systems. These visions have built and supported ‘inequitable structures and policies that have destroyed rural livelihoods and the environment’ as well as produced food and nutritional insecurity for producers as well as consumers (Akram-Lodhi, 2015: 565). This vision also cleaves the connection between producers and consumers (Alonso-Fradejas et al., 2015). For producers, the market-oriented agri-food policies have resulted in unsustainable and exploitative agricultural practices leading to increase in costs of production and eventually de-peasantization (McMichael, 2013; Patel 2013). For consumers, the mediation of food choices through large agri-value chains has led to decreasing quality and increasing cost of food. The critique of the binary of producers and consumers has resulted in the emergence of alternative food networks (Goodman et al., 2012), community supported agriculture (Wells and Gradwell, 2001) and local food networks (Schermer, 2015).

Set in this background the remaining part of the paper will focus on how local actors (here CSOs) understand the vulnerabilities of agrarian-rural societies and what practices do they devise to counter these vulnerabilities.

3. Research setting, data collection, and method

To explore the motivations, sites, and politics of addressing the vulnerabilities of agrarian-rural societies, we focus on the case studies of

ASHA network in India and the Carqueixa in Spain. There are multiple differences and divergences in the context of these two countries in terms of geo-political locations, socio-economic conditions, and trajectory of modern agriculture. Yet, we found some interesting convergences that made pursuing this study worthwhile (see Table 2). In both countries, issues of agriculture and farmers’ dignity hold great importance and value in national politics (Pandey, 2020; Calvario, 2022). Both these countries are facing challenges posed by decline in rural social institutions and communities. Thus, despite the differences in latitudes, scales, reaches, and overall design, both CSOs deal with the current collapse of “farm-based rural economy and livelihoods.” We have employed the multiple, parallel case study research design (de Vaus, 2001) to ground the comparative analysis but also to sketch a global picture of CSOs in the agricultural and rural sectors. Hence, the case selection was done using a paradigmatic criterion (Flyvbjerg, 2006). The two cases are documented as collective case studies (Cousin, 2005); that is to say, each case is described with a constitutive collection of practices within itself. This approach becomes convenient as both cases were part of separate studies and data collection was informed by different aims. However, the common threads revealed during informal discussions between authors led to data analysis using a common conceptual framework.

India: The study of practices and sites of their performances in India employed the use of a multi-pronged approach that includes interviews with key actors, ethnographic observations and document analysis (text and video). Multiple rounds of interviews were conducted with 6 activists working with ASHA and allied organizations in different regions of north and south India in November 2016, February and September 2017, March 2019, October 2020 and March 2022. While the meeting in 2016, 2017 and 2019 were in-person and on-site, the meetings in 2020 and 2022 were held online due to COVID-19 precautions. The first author participated in an on-site organic food event and meeting with more than 100 natural,³ organic as well as conventional farmers in November 2016 and a field-level activists meeting with 17 participants, in March 2019. We conducted semi-structured interviews ranging from

Table 2
The table depicts the convergences and divergences in case studies from India and Spain.

S. No	Characteristics	ASHA	The Carqueixa
1.	Organization	informal, voluntary network of NGOs, CSOs and individuals	voluntary, regional community cooperative
2.	Initiation	activists and consumers led	farmers led
3.	composition	farmers’ organizations, rural artisans and livelihood organizations, women and tribal rights organizations, consumer organizations, individual farmers, rural artisans and consumers	individual farmers, consumers and residents of Ancares (Galicia)
4.	Decision-making	horizontal with a core group addressing day-to-day concerns	horizontal with a core group addressing day-to-day concerns
5.	Focus	Holistic ² , resilient and sustainable agrarian-rural society	holistic, resilient and sustainable agrarian rural society
6.	Funding	No sustained external funding; self/crowd funded for special events.	No sustained external funding; self-funded by volunteers

³ Natural farmers are different from organic farmers in terms of non-availability of a certificate for organic with the former. Along with this a vast majority of natural farmers rely on traditional knowledge and use traditional inputs as compared to organic farmers who often use organic inputs available in the market.

30 min to 1.5 h that were audio-recorded and transcribed. For understanding of the overall ideology and focus of ASHA, the first author attended several online events conducted by the organization that included an online seed diversity festival in 2020. A detailed study of the ASHA website was conducted to understand different kinds of practices the organization engages in. Post COVID-19, the use of digital methods in ethnographic research gained a lot of significance. Along with the video of different events posted by the organizers, this case also benefited from the online video documents created by participants who attended the most recent *Kisan Swaraj Sammelan* (KSS, 2022), seed biodiversity, and food festival hosted by ASHA from 11–13 November 2022. In total around 20 video documents made by participants of KSS 2022 from different regions of India were studied. These video documents included participant's view on the overall event, recording of their conversations with other participants from different regions, recording of panels they attended, food they ate, things they learned, shared, and bought during the entire event.

Spain: The study of practices in the case of the Carqueixa, was informed by ethnographic methods composed by interviews, participatory observation and affective engagement. The fieldwork was conducted in the region on the Ancares in Galicia, northern Spain, between February and May 2022. During this period the second author conducted 31 semi-structured interviews on site and one semi-structured interview online. The second author also attended the mountain cineclub and a number of festivals in the villages. Out of the 32 interviews, 19 are fully recorded and transcribed. The interviews were done as a mix of snowball, convenience and purposive sampling.

The 32 interviews encompass a wide variety of actors including the local priest, organization members and policy makers. Out of this variety of actors 18 of them are directly related to the Carqueixa (farmers/members, activists, managers).

4. Findings

4.1. India: Alliance for Sustainable and Holistic Agriculture

As per ASHA's⁴ website and interview with key members 'ASHA is a volunteer driven, large informal network of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and individuals with common concerns around food sovereignty, food safety and rural livelihoods. The network was set-up in 2010 and includes 400 member organizations and individuals. The organizations gathered within ASHA have specific and diverse local agendas ranging from promoting nature based agriculture and cultural revitalization of agrarian-rural life (such as Kheti Viraasat Mission⁵ in Punjab) to fighting invisibilization and marginalization of women farmers (such as MAKAAM⁶) and tribal farmers (eg. Living Farms⁷). All these organizations are united under an alliance to build and promote a sustainable, resilient, and holistic agrarian-rural society.

The problem of knowledge politics of modernity and the implications of binaries made repeated occurrences in the interviews and discussions with individuals and groups. For example, the question of the agricultural crisis, as per ASHA members, is not just about the farmers. It is rather a crisis that has resulted from the systemic and long-term neglect of 'farm based rural economy and livelihoods'⁸ in public policies leading

to an urban-rural division (Cullather, 2010; Tom, 2012). The ASHA activists question these biases in policy. As per one activist:

'Politicians favoring industrialization over agriculture regularly talk about the need to move people away from agriculture and rural areas. However, in doing so they never give a solution as to where would these millions of people go, what kinds of livelihoods they would practice, and who takes control of agriculture? Can the already overcrowded cities accommodate millions of rural inhabitants in a dignified manner' (Activist, October 2021)

In this argument the activist draws attention to the complex entanglements of dignity and livelihoods. Where on one side a migration from skill-based rural livelihoods to unskilled urban workforce may negatively impact the dignity of rural people; on the other side, the knowledge politics that frames agrarian-rural societies as 'lacking' may lead to loss of self-worth in rural livelihoods and an aspiration for profit oriented urban jobs (Gupta, 2005). Along with the vulnerabilities resulting from lack of investments and infrastructures in rural economies, the urban-rural bias of policies translates into mindset and attitudes of people exacerbating the plight of rural communities (Pandey, 2020; Gidwani and Ramamurthy, 2018; Gupta 2005). As per one of the respondents from an NGO in ASHA network:

'[...] the neglect of the rural economy has resulted in an urban-rural bias that presents rural identity and rural concerns as inferior to the urban. Everyone wants to run away from the village to the cities or even to foreign countries. The children of farmers are ashamed of their agrarian identity and no one wants to be a farmer anymore. This is not just an agrarian-rural crisis but a civilization crisis' (ASHA Activist, March 2021).

The sentiments of CSO activists were repeated multiple times by the farmers during the fieldwork who noted that 'farming used to be the noble-most profession in the former decades, filled with self-respect and dignity; and now no one even wants to marry their daughter to a farmer' (Elderly farmer, interview, March 2021).

In order to deal with the vulnerabilities of agrarian-rural societies caused by the modernist practice of binary-making, ASHA's interventions aim to form alliances between different disconnected actors through practices that range from individual events (such as the nationwide farmers' march in 2010 and the farmers' sovereignty policy⁹), to repetitive and recurring events (such as the seed and food festivals, public meetings, response papers on specific policy issues¹⁰, and farmers' conclave etc.). In the next section we discuss some specific practices within the most recent Farmers' Sovereignty Conclave and their effort to bridge modernist binaries.

4.1.1. The farmers' Sovereignty Conclave (*Kisan Swaraj Sammelan*)

The farmers' Sovereignty Conclave (locally known as *Kisan Swaraj Sammelan*) is one recurring event that brings together diverse interests, practices, organizations, actors, and worldviews around sustainable and holistic agriculture. The FSC is generally a bi-annual event, organized for 2–3 days, each time in different parts of India. The fifth and most recent FSC was concluded from 11–13 November 2022 in Mysuru city in Karnataka, India. The event attracted more than 4000 registered participants from all over India and hundreds of everyday local visitors. These participants included farmers and people with allied rural

⁴ <https://kisanswaraj.in/about/> last accessed 23 December 2022.

⁵ For details see website <https://khetiviraasatmission.org/> last accessed 23 December 2022.

⁶ MAKAAM- Mahila Kisan Adhikar Manch (translates in English to Women Farmers' Rights Platform). For details see website <https://makaam.in/> last accessed 23 December 2022.

⁷ for details see website <https://livingfarms.wordpress.com/> last accessed 23 December 2022.

⁸ <https://kisanswaraj.in/about/>.

⁹ For more details see Poonam Pandey and Kavitha Kuruganti (2024, forthcoming). A toolkit for hope: towards a sustainable and holistic vision of agriculture, in Marcelo Silli edited *The Atlas of Hope*, Emerald Publications.

¹⁰ For example, ASHA produces multiple critical policy documents to provide feedback to the government on key agri-rural policy issues such as pesticide bill, farm laws, digitalization of agriculture and farmers' producer organizations. For more details see <https://kisanswaraj.in/2021/04/11/ashas-note-on-gois-approach-to-farmer-producer-organisations/>.

livelihoods such as artisans, NGOs and CSOs, scientists, and journalists. Though almost all farmers are allied to an interest in sustainable agriculture, they differed from each other in relation to their landholdings, political and religious ideologies, education, age, region, language, and gender.

The vision, organization and practices within FSC reflects the commitment of ASHA to bring the marginalized rural issues to the fore and bridge multiple binaries by engaging with policy, economy and society. First, the FSC event is often held in a city, for example this time in the historic city of Mysuru Karnataka. Besides being convenient for transportation, the hosting of a farmers and artisans' event in cities becomes an educational event in itself for the urban consumers who rarely get an opportunity to cross paths with rural producers (Zhang and Qi, 2019). The city event also becomes a site for bringing the rural and the agrarian concerns to the fore. Second, non-chemical-based agriculture is currently being practiced on a very small scale in India. By bringing together farmers practicing holistic agriculture and rural livelihoods from different villages and regions in India, the FSC provides a platform to share experiences and concerns and build a bond of trust, belongingness and solidarity, eventually restoring self-confidence and dignity in agricultural and rural livelihoods. The event is organized into different streams that include formal as well as informal events. The formal interaction involves panel discussions on contemporary agrarian concerns and training sessions while the informal events are seed bio-diversity festival, food festival, and rural cultural programs.

4.1.2. Panel discussions on food and farmer sovereignty

The formal platform of panel discussions is designed in such a way that the conventional hierarchical distinction between science and tradition, and knowledge and experience could be dissolved. The panel discussions invited experts from all walks of life to share their experiences and views. This means that a trained agricultural scientist working on organic farming, experienced natural farmers (both male and female) and activists working on supporting natural farmers were seated together and they spoke from the same platform. As opposed to the events organized in agricultural and technical institutions¹¹ where a clear hierarchical division between knowledge and experience is witnessed by the first author, these panel discussions valorised knowledge making as a hybrid, holistic, practice-based, and embodied experience. The holistic vision of agriculture is also reflected through the choice of topics of discussion that included concerns such as role of women and youth in agriculture, practices and challenges of organic farming, ways to support allied rural livelihoods, tribal agriculture, and food culture etc. For example, the session on empowering marginalized and invisibilized farmers¹² takes a critical look on how Indian agricultural policies are oriented to large, male landowners from dominant castes and how tribal agriculturalists, women and tenant farmers, and landless laborers are marginalized. A tribal agriculturalist and activist shared his views on the problems of binary thinking as follows:

¹¹ The first author attended two farmer and multi-actor engagement events conducted in agriculture and technical institutions. One, on the vulnerabilities that result in farmers' burning agricultural residue in their fields at Krishi Vigyan Kendra (Agriculture Science Center), Noormahal in Punjab in November 2016 and second, in February 2017 where participants discussed the ways to mitigate declining soil quality at Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi. In both these events farmers looked at scientists to either find technocratic solutions to their problems or to validate their experiential knowledge through science. Despite being multi-stakeholder and participatory in organization, in both these events the conventional dichotomies of modernist visions (knowledge and experience) are kept intact.

¹² Recording of the session on marginalized and invisibilized farmers available on YouTube via link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R-hVcuNLDhY> last accessed on 06 December 2022.

'The current agri-food system works on disconnect and distance. For example, humans are prioritised and separated from other living beings, single varieties of crops are grown in mono-culture ignoring the biodiversity, and monetary value of agriculture is preferred over its social roles. In tribal worldview these separations are considered disastrous not for the environment but also for the survival of the community as a whole' (Tribal Agriculturalist at FSC, November 2022).

To deal with the vulnerabilities posed to the environment and community the agriculturalist argued for a holistic vision of agrarian-rural societies that relied on interconnectedness and interdependence between humans and non-humans. Through a process of democratic involvement of those who are most affected, most panel discussions ended up in developing policy suggestions and recommendations for the government.

4.1.3. Seed and food festival

Parallel to the formal panel discussions, a food and seed festival was organized at the FSC. This acted as a bridge that enabled the exchange of knowledge, experience, and materials between rural artisans and farmers as well as rural producers and urban consumers. Through proximity and one-to-one exchange with rural producers and seed savers, urban consumers learned to situate their food within everyday struggles and vulnerabilities of smallholder producers and a wider set of complex ecological, social, economic and political relations. Despite the odds faced by rural producers, the FSC 2022 in Mysuru witnessed participation of more than 100 seed savers who displayed thousands of varieties of traditional and heirloom seeds of popular and forgotten grains, pulses, and vegetables. For many urban consumers, witnessing so many varieties of their favorite foods and vegetables is an eye-opening experience. According to one participant of FSC 2022:

'This is a lifetime cherished experience for me. I am overwhelmed with the knowledge, experiences, practices, stories and learnings. I have never seen so many varieties of traditional food grain in my entire life' (Participant at FSC, November 2022).

In the seed festivals, the interconnectedness of different rural livelihoods and socio-ecological systems within a rural-agrarian economy is demonstrated by the presence of different items that are ecologically and sustainably developed by rural artisans. These include natural fabrics, soaps, spices, snacks, ornaments, agricultural and household equipment and decorative items.¹³ The food available at the festival showcases the richness, diversity and nutritional aspects of often neglected crops such as millets. The food is prepared using traditional as well as modern recipes to cater to the diverse preferences of city dwellers and the recipes are shared with the consumers in training sessions. By bringing the neglected richness of the agrarian and rural diversity to the fore, the seed and food festival enabled an alternative imagination of agrarian-rural societies as sites of production, dynamism, diversity and knowledge.

4.2. Spain: cooperative the carqueixa and 'heroic farming'

The Carqueixa is a farmer cooperative with over 100 members in the province of Lugo, in Galicia, Spain. It is an initiative of the Centro de Desarrollo Rural de Os Ancares (CDR The Ancares, rural development center). The cooperative and, for that matter, the whole CDR was created in response to the issue of rural abandonment and all its consequences in the Galician part of the Ancares mountainous range. Although the phenomenon of rural abandonment is not exclusive to this region, it is true that it has been especially dramatic in the Galicia mountainside. In the last 50 years, there has been a reduction of 21% in

¹³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ruos3BXFXsY>.

the agrarian surface in the autonomous region of Galicia (López-Iglesias, 2018), which for the Ancares has meant that a big majority of estates and agricultural plots are nowadays catalogued as ‘abandoned’. According to some local accounts, the Ancares has had continuous agrarian activity for at least 2000 years. But just in the last few decades, contingent to systematic denigration by modernist visions, activities such as rye cultivation, which were central for the diet and housing,¹⁴ has almost completely disappeared.

However, *vis-a-vis* this grim picture, the Carqueixa and its practices have emerged as a site of revalorization of ecology, lives, and livelihoods for the people remaining in the Ancares. One activist linked with CDR argued that:

‘the cooperative has been the most effective way of preserving life in the Ancares, because everything else appears to be against people in the Ancares [...]’ (Activist linked with the CDR and the cooperative, February 2022)

Very telling of this constant vindicatory endeavour of the Carqueixa is the way the farming style of the Ancares is self-recognized by the local inhabitants as *Ganaderia heroica* (Heroic farming). The Carqueixa members humorously describe that the livelihood they have opted for is not the easiest, as their difficulties may range from challenges of orography and labour to environmental bureaucracies and market pressures. However, the most difficult of all obstacles, the cooperative recognizes, is the lack of pride and a sense of insecurity among rural inhabitants in agrarian-rural identity. Hence building positive narratives around the agrarian-rural identity of the Ancares are one of the main focuses of the Carqueixa. One of the ways in which the Carqueixa materializes the assertion of pride in rural regional identity is through the local cooperative brand named- *O Sabor dos Ancares* or the flavour of the Ancares. *O Sabor dos Ancares* serves as the brand name for all the marketable produce of the cooperative. The cooperative manager articulates this assertion of identity and dignity as:

‘The thing now is that the producers can feel proud of who they are and where they are’ (Cooperative manager, April 2022).

The label *O sabor dos Ancares* as a ‘food from here’ also acts as a bridge of authenticity and trust between producers and consumers as opposed to the globalized regimes of ‘food from nowhere’.

The positive feedback loop around rural identity that the cooperative has been able to build through the recognition of consumers and the self-recognition of farmers has already started to show some success in the generational change of farmers in the Ancares. As a result, as compared to the previous constitution of predominantly elderly farmers, now the youngest member of the cooperative is 23 years old. This, rather than a shift in a statistical tendency, is an expression of hope, which was powerfully articulated as:

‘We are hearing more and more stories among members who thought for a long time they would be the last generation of farmers in their families but recently they are seeing an increasing interest among their kids and grandsons’ (Cooperative manager, April 2022).

Though in their own account, the cooperative has been moderately successful and still with the longest road ahead. It is worth going into more detail on the precise mobilizations of networks and resistances that have enabled the *Heroic farming* of the Ancares.

4.2.1. The community care, happy cows and toxo

The cooperative believes that along with building a sense of pride around agrarian-rural identity, community empowerment is key for rural resilience. In order to empower the local community, the cooperative organizes its practices around different networks of care for

¹⁴ Bread in that region is traditionally made with rye and the straw of rye was used as roof for the pallozas which are the traditional houses.

humans and more than human beings. These include the organization of play days for the kids across villages and weekly visits to the elderly population. The more recent initiative of care has been the operationalization of the mountain cinema club. These networks of care have widened everyday life in the villages. Another set of networks of care, horizontal to the cooperative, are the ones with more than human beings. The concept of ‘happy cow’ articulated by the members is a case in point. The ‘happy cow’ concept implies a set of practices that embody a relational idea of the wellbeing of the cow along with the farmer. This means that if one asks any member of the cooperative about any cow, they will give their name and an account of their personality. Another paradigmatic example of care with non-humans is the care and appreciation for the *Toxo*.¹⁵ Despite the *toxos* not having any practical use for farmers and perhaps even taking up space for possible grazing, it is still valued as integral to the farming land and moreover to the aesthetic identity of the area.

4.2.2. The community resistance to museumization of rural life

The Ancares nowadays has over ten environmental designations like UNESCO biosphere reserve, Natura 2000, Bear reserve, and Wolf reserve, among others. In 2018, the inhabitants of the region rejected a project proposal to be designated as a natural park. According to the members of the cooperative, all the environmental designations have marginalized the inhabitants of the Ancares in one of two ways. One, as a relic of the past, only worthy in instances where they are gazed at by tourism, and two, as a hindrance or a threat to nature. These characterizations often relegate the value of agriculture in the Ancares as a touristic opportunity. These sentiments are felt and expressed by local respondents whenever the environmental designations are mentioned. One of the activists’ voiced his concern as:

‘They want to make an Amusement Park [...] they do everything so it is impossible for producers [to survive], they don’t give any value to them [...]’ (Activist linked with the CDR and the cooperative, February 2022)

The infra-valuation of farmers and agriculture by the environmental designations and by the conservation paradigms in which they are inscribed hides a paradox. A recognition of the landscape and the nature within it, but at the same time, a dismissal of the productive and reproductive conditions of such landscapes. These conditions mainly being traditional embedded agricultural practices. An academic linked with the CDR argued that the policy-makers pushing for environmental designations did not understand the environment of the Ancares:

‘They don’t realize that the environmental features of the Ancares are the result of thousands of years of traditional activities. They are clueless about how the majority of the ecosystems they claim they are trying to protect, functions’ (Academic activist linked with the CDR, March 2022).

Implicit in this comment is the ways in which knowledge and expertise about environmental designations shapes marginalization of people that have been central to the conservation of bio-diversity. It is in the recognition of the ecological milieu of the Ancares that the Carqueixa contest and resist the imposition of top-down environmental designations. However, rather than getting dragged into the debates of farmers vs nature, it has instead put forward in practice and in narrative a different conservation paradigm for the Ancares. One that includes the people and their practices:

‘It is not that we are against nature, but we also see value in nature’ (Farmer, February 2022)

As per the farmers, it is the ecological embeddedness that informs the totality of practices of livestock farming in the Ancares: The breed of the

¹⁵ *Toxo* or *Ulex europaeus* is an ever-green shrubby plant with yellow flowers common in south-west regions of Europe.

livestock, the size of the operation, the herding technique, the seasonality, and much more. The intertwining of sustainability and identity is sort of at the core of the fight against the imposition of environmental designations. This shifts the debate on conservation to a debate on agriculture making it an issue of heroic farming vs industrial farming rather than nature vs farmer. Here too, similar to the visions of ASHA, Carqueixa focusses on the relationality and interdependence of the young and the old, productive and reproductive, and humans and more-than-humans. The networks of care, mobilized by the cooperative, builds an alternative vision of agrarian-rural society that is contrary to the modernist visions that designates them as static, abandoned, and unproductive.

5. Discussion: bridge-building practices to tweak the modernist knowledge politics of divisions

The modern world and the knowledge politics that shape it are ‘trapped in a cartesian bind of great divides that enable claims of singular reality through unified science’ (Blaney and Tickner, 2017: 296). The ‘metaphysics’ of modernity renders ‘other’ cosmologies unscientific and ‘other’ ways of being as problematic often leading to their erasure (Smith, 2019; Escobar, 2018). This paper brings together case studies from India and Spain to highlight how local actors tweak the modernist knowledge politics of binary divisions. The cases problematize the binary of global south and north by re-centering the common challenges facing agrarian-rural societies and the analogous approaches devised by local actors, in the two contexts, to address them. Both empirical cases of CSOs in India and Spain demonstrated that local actors articulated their lived experiences of vulnerabilities within agrarian-rural societies as a result of the knowledge politics of modernity that mobilizes binaries to make sense of the world. As per the experiences of the respondents, these binaries have historically and systemically denigrated agrarian-rural societies. Through the discussion of their lived experiences, the local actors articulated binaries of nature and culture, producer and consumer, knowledge and expertise, livelihood and dignity, and the neglect of the dynamism of rural life. On a meta level, both the CSOs in our study are directing their efforts to prevent the erasure of the diversity they represent - or *pluri-verses* as framed by Escobar (2018) - where agrarian-rural societies could be seen beyond modernist divisions. Simultaneously, these organizations are actively building capacities to re-envision and mobilize new and alternative imaginations of agrarian-rural societies as sites of dynamism, diversity, productivity, care and knowledge.

Along with creating vulnerabilities for the ‘others’ by discursive practices of binary making, the knowledge politics of modernity, that separates knowledge and experience (practice), designates academia as the bearers and owners of valid knowledge. As a result, all non-academic claims to knowledge are considered unscientific, and alternative worldviews are rendered invalid. The turn to practices in studying knowledge as a world-making endeavour have problematised this position (Nicolini, 2011; Casas-Cortés et al., 2008; Brown and Duguid, 2001; Schatzki et al., 2001). As per these studies, knowledge is located within the relationship of people engaged in specific practices. Knowledge, thus resides in the community and network of practices (Brown and Duguid, 2001; Wenger, 1998). People in a community of practice might not necessarily always work together but might share common concerns, interests, ideologies, and outlooks (Oreszczyn et al., 2010). Civil Society, commonly understood as a collection of groups that voluntarily join hands for a shared purpose (Lewis, 2004; Van Rooy, 2004; White, 1994), thus, becomes a community of practice (Oreszczyn et al., 2010). In order to deal with the vulnerabilities of modernist knowledge politics, both the organizations are actively involved in the building of communities and networks of practices that collectively build and share the capacity to engage with, tweak, and intervene in the hegemonic discourses of binaries that create vulnerabilities of agrarian rural societies.

The practice of binary making generates vulnerabilities and material impacts by creating asymmetric power hierarchies and value judgments (devaluation, negation), disconnects and differences (undermining relationality, interdependence and community), and invisibilizing everything in-between (loss, extinction). Building on Friedmann and McNair’s (2008) conceptualization of the creative ‘builder’ approaches of CSOs (as opposed to confrontational ‘warrior’ approaches), we argue that the practices of these CSOs could be, heuristically, described as bridge-building practices. The metaphor of bridge-building enables us to conceptualize different types of practices of the two CSOs - aim to build connection and relationality, facilitate mutual exchange, bring the marginalized and the invisible to the fore, and acknowledge and respect the interdependence across modernist binary divisions. The bridge-building practices of the two CSOs differ in their type by addressing different vulnerabilities created by binaries (see Table 3). For instance, the formal panel discussion at FSC of ASHA is aimed at creating symmetrical relation between knowledge and experience through a shared common platform between a scientist and a farmer. For Carqueixa, the protest against the designation of natural parks and the practices around networks of care between the human and the non-humans are focused on bringing the marginal and the invisible humans and more-than-human perspectives to the fore. The platform of

Table 3

Below presents a schematic view of the types of practices of both the CSOs, the binaries they aim to bridge, the characteristics of bridge-building practices and the type of knowledge these practices aim to generate.

	Bridging Platforms	Addressing Binary Divisions	Characteristic of Bridge Building Practices	Characteristic of knowledge Practice
ASHA	Farmers’ Sovereignty Conclave	All six binaries	Bringing marginal agrarian-rural concerns to the fore; spaces and sites for non-hierarchical engagement and exchange between diverse set of actors	New ways of imagining agrarian-rural societies
	Panel discussion	Knowledge and expertise, nature and culture	Building symmetry and mutual respect for different onto-epistemic positions; bringing the invisible to the fore through talk on tribal agriculture	Re-defining expertise; re-defining agricultural practices
	Food and Seed Festival	Knowledge and expertise, livelihoods and dignity, producer and consumer	Building and nurturing relations for mutual exchange, care and interdependence	Re-defining producer consumer relations as those of proximity and interdependence
CARQU	O Sabor dos Ancares	Knowledge and expertise, livelihood and dignity	Site of assertion of rural pride as producers	Re-defining rurality as sites of production and innovation
	Communities of care, happy Cow and Toxo	Nature-culture, agrarian-rural	Cultivating relations of care and interdependence	Redefining relations between different rural humans and more-than-humans
	Resistance against natural parks	Nature-culture, knowledge-expertise	Bringing the invisible and marginalized perspective to the fore	Rearticulating meanings of natural conservation and human well being

seed festival of ASHA and O Sabor dos Acares of Carquiexa, both, were aimed to re-vitalise connection and relationality between producers and consumers.

The metaphor of bridge-building also enables us to engage with the materiality of these practices relating to the binaries they target. Both ASHA and Carquiexa are engaging in the practices of bridge-building across all six binaries. Yet, specific practices and platforms are directed towards specific binaries. For example, the platform/format of panel discussion in FSC of ASHA was designed to bridge the knowledge/experience binary, while the enabling of interactions between different farmers and rural artisans from different regions within the FSC is targeted at enabling solidarity by bridging the rural livelihood/dignity divide. In the case of Carquiexa, the farmers' articulation of different, interdependent relationships of mutual care between humans, ecology (toxo), and animals (happy cow) as central to their practice of agriculture served as the bridge between nature and culture binary. Similarly, the platform of food and seed festival of ASHA, where a diverse variety of seeds and rural artisanal products were displayed, served as the assertion of rural pride while simultaneously bridging the gap between livelihoods and dignity. The platform also bridged the gap between producers and consumers by enabling exchange of knowledge on food and farming through proximity. For Carquiexa, the platform of O Sabor dos Acares as the sign of local, rural pride and 'food from here' is designed to bridge the binary of livelihood and dignity as well as producers and consumers.

In essence, the bridge-building practices of the CSOs are entanglements of knowledge and practices demonstrating that all practices are knowledge-making/world making endeavours and vice versa. Casas-cortes et al. (2008: 20) argue that the range of encounters that take place through meetings, conferences, email exchanges, heated discussions, mobilizing for advocacy etc., all constitute knowledge-practices as 'sites of knowledge creation, reformulation, and diffusion. This hyphenated term aims to escape from the abstract connotations usually associated with knowledge, arguing for its concrete, embodied, lived, and situated character.' The term knowledge-practice also highlights the intricate entanglement of knowledge and practice, problematizes the binary of knowledge and experience, and destabilizes the hegemony of academic practices in knowledge making (Casas-Cortés et al., 2008). Through their knowledge-practices CSOs engage in creating new subjects, meanings, and materialities that challenge dominant positions, transform and eventually co-produce worldviews (Mamidipudi and Gajjala, 2008; Casas Cortes et al., 2008). The continuous engagement in social interactions through a diversity of practices results in sharing of experiences and understandings and eventually creation of new knowledge and relationalities. The organization of Farmers' conclave by ASHA and different community activities by Carquiexa, among other things, is a mechanism to develop capacities for knowledge-making within communities of practice. Both the organizations have consciously designed activities around mundane and embodied practices of valuing, eating, training, celebrating, caring, buying, listening, protesting, and space and experience sharing. These practices eventually become the sites of new ways of knowing, being and collective meaning-making (Beacham, 2018). Thus, at the micro level, the practices of these CSOs work towards mobilizing agency of the marginalized groups/concerns by either redefining the existing relations in agri-rural communities (shaped by corporate food regime) or rebuilding new and alternative relationalities. The everyday practices of CSOs are also knowledge making endeavours that not only sustain the social movements and bring people together into communities of practices but also create new meanings and materialities. For instance, the panel discussion of ASHA that aims to bridge the knowledge-experience binary also redefines expertise as hybrid (of knowledge and experience) rather than pure, and knowledge as embodied and situated rather than distant and universal. The seed and food festival of ASHA and networks of care and O Sabor dos Acares of Carquiexa rearticulates the meaning of agriculture as relational entanglements of nature and culture, rural and

urban, and producers and consumers based on proximity, situatedness and interdependence.

6. Conclusion

This paper questioned the popular articulations of agrarian-rural societies as 'vanishing', 'deteriorating' and 'declining'. The literature review suggested that such articulations are based on a modernist knowledge politics that makes sense of the world through the practice of binary-making. Binary thinking, as a set of two aspects, are discursive tools that valorise and universalize one worldview while denigrating and marginalizing the other. In this background, the paper set out to understand how local actors articulate the vulnerabilities of agrarian-rural societies and what practices they devise to deal with these vulnerabilities. We looked at the practices of two CSOs in India and Spain that focus on imagining alternative futures of agrarian-rural societies. The analysis of the case studies demonstrated that local actors articulated their lived experiences of vulnerabilities within agrarian-rural societies in relation to the modernist knowledge politics of binary thinking. In response, these actors are actively engaged in building bridges across modernist binaries through common platforms of discussions, training, and meetings and mundane everyday practices of eating, celebrations, caring, and sharing. These bridge-building practices target different modernist binaries by building symmetry, relationality, mutual respect, and bringing the marginal and invisible perspective to the fore. The bridge-building practices also create new knowledges by re-defining and rearticulating binary discourses while simultaneously creating new meanings and understandings.

Although the case studies are specific to their local contexts and could not be generalized, they provide us with tools to critically engage with the questions of agrarian-rural decline and their treatment in policy.. The bridge building practices also draw attention to the transformative potential of slow, low-input, and sustained collective creative efforts that are devised to execute change from within. The cases showed that in order to re-imagine agrarian-rural societies from 'waiting rooms of aspiring and despairing' to holistic, resilient and sustainable systems, the urban and the rural has to be seen as intricately intertwined (Gupta, 2005). Rather than a divide, rural-urban has to be seen as a nexus and neglect of one might lead to disastrous consequences for the other. The bridge building practices and their purpose of revalorizing agrarian-rural societies from within may serve as useful heuristics for government policies on rural development, and entrepreneurship efforts in rural revitalization that aim for a holistic approach rather than narrow focus on economic gains through tourism and rural employment (Wu et al., 2022).

Though we briefly discussed the impacts of practices on participants (overwhelming appreciation for food and seed diversity festival in India and re-ignited interest in agriculture among rural youth in Ancares) further detailed studies in this domain are needed to understand the long-term impacts of these local, situated practices. The paper brought together the cases from India and Spain to reflect on the binary of global south and north by highlighting common challenges and concerns (though maybe different in scale and impact). More studies, that go beyond the conventional north-south boundaries, are needed to demonstrate the global scale at which agrarian-rural societies are facing vulnerabilities in the modernist paradigm (Akram-Lodhi, 2015; Scoones, 2016; Calvário, 2022). These studies can act as ways of sharing experiences and practices that could potentially build solidarities and mutual cooperation in subverting the knowledge politics that marginalizes and re-appropriates agrarian-rural concerns.

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Poonam Pandey: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Sebastian Iturriaga Gazol:** Data curation, Writing – original draft, Investigation, Methodology. **Mario Pansera:** Writing – review & editing.

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