



## Transforming critical agrarian studies: Solidarity, scholar-activism and emancipatory agendas in and from the Global South\*

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COMMENTARY



## Transforming critical agrarian studies: Solidarity, scholar-activism and emancipatory agendas in and from the Global South\*

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\*All authors are part of the Collective of Agrarian Scholar-Activists from the Global South (CASAS). Authors contributed to the paper according to their abilities, and their names are listed alphabetically by surname. CASAS is a network emerging from the 2019 Journal of Peasant Studies Writeshop on Critical Agrarian Studies and Scholar-Activism in Beijing, China, and expanded through its following three annual editions till 2022. Self-organized by former Writeshop participants, CASAS aims to promote scholarship and activism in critical agrarian studies and to also seek ways to navigate the structural barriers in academia by following principles of solidarity and mutual care (<https://casasouth.org/>).

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#### ABSTRACT

This paper examines the challenges and opportunities faced by critical agrarian scholars in and from the Global South. We argue that despite the historical and structural limitations, the critical juncture of convergence of crises and renewed interest in agrarian political economies offers an opportunity for fostering a diverse research agenda that opens space for critical perspectives about, from and by the Global South, which is mostly absent in mainstream scholarship dominated by the Global North. We also propose doing so by enhancing solidarity to transform injustices within academia and other spaces of knowledge production and dissemination. To develop the argument, first, we reflect on the multiplicity of crises in rural areas and the changing character of social struggles, as well as the interlinkages between environmental crises and the re-emergence of critical agrarian studies that are reshaping the agrarian question. Then, we discuss the implications and conditions of the political agenda carried out by a scholar-activist movement working on agrarian studies from the Global South. Drawing on our experience as the Collective of Agrarian Scholar-Activists from the South (CASAS), we conclude by proposing three ways forward for enhancing solidarity through networks of scholar-activists: knowledge accessibility, cooperative organization, and co-production of knowledge.

#### KEYWORDS

scholar-activism; Global South; critical agrarian studies; academic inequalities; knowledge politics

## A critical juncture for agrarian studies

Multiple crises around food, fuel, land, finance, labor, migration, environment, climate and human rights have converged in the last two decades. These crises have both driven and partly resulted from a race to global resource grabbing, thus heightening environmental degradation and injustice affecting rural populations, mainly in the Global South.

Different figures illustrate the uneven impacts of the convergence of these multiple crises, leading to a scenario of intense agrarian and environmental conflicts (Martinez-Alier 2021). While global food production has increased at a higher rate than demographic growth for over five decades, between 10–20 percent of the population in Africa, Asia, and Latin America suffer from hunger (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO 2022; UN 2021). Much of this production increase relied on land use change through deforestation, as well as the unsustainable use of technological packages, such as agrochemicals and Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) (Shattuck 2021). Globalized and

financialized agrifood commodity chains controlled by a few transnational corporations have therefore been a key driver of large-scale land use change, erosion of biodiversity and climate change on a planetary scale (Shand, Wetter, and Chowdhry 2022; GRAIN & IATP 2018).

While the most impoverished people in urban and rural areas are disproportionately affected, the richest are driving environmental crises. For instance, it is estimated that since 1990, the bottom 50% of the world population has been responsible for only 16% of all carbon emissions, while the global top 1% has accounted for 23% of the total emissions. In 1990, most global carbon inequality (over 60%) was due to differences between countries, whereas today it is due to a gap between low and high emitters within countries (Chancel 2022), adding an extra source of inequality. This is highlighted by Ceddia (2020) who points out the role of foreign direct investments in Southeast Asia and South America by the super-rich in driving the expansion of flex crop agriculture which results in extensive forest loss.

The prospects for the future are not only challenging but also life-threatening. It is now common knowledge that ever since the advent of industrialization in the mid-nineteenth century there has never been as much heat-trapping carbon dioxide concentration in the Earth's atmosphere as there is today. The sixth report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) points to a significant increase of average temperature of 1.09°C and highlights that if the world reaches the critical point of 1.5°C increase, the scenario will be disastrous with significant probability of extreme weather conditions, severe droughts, high risk of extinction of many species and consequent agricultural collapse. Peasant households across the Global South will be the most severely impacted, particularly those practicing subsistence rainfed agriculture and reliant on native agrobiodiversity. Consequently, this would result in more widespread hunger, reduced scope for adaptation, and exacerbated societal inequalities (IPCC 2022).

Institutionalized responses to these convergent crises have rendered peasant communities even more vulnerable. For instance, the food crisis has been observed as an opportunity to continue increasing food production of major crops. However, governments and other powerful actors such as agribusiness corporations, investment funds and multilateral financial institutions usually regard peasant and Indigenous Peoples' agricultural systems as unproductive and inefficient in terms of both land use and yield per unit area (Borras and Franco 2018). Thus, their territories are commonly classified as 'vacant' or 'wastelands' — or simply as a resource — available for capture by large-scale industrial agriculture to increase food production through commodity chains (Li 2014; Tsing 2004).

Crisis-induced land, water, and green grabbing have been observed in several countries of the Global South (Bruna 2019; Franco, Mehta, and Veldwisch 2013; Gyapong 2021a) with dire consequences for land and territorial rights and access to the commons by Indigenous Peoples and peasant communities (Borras et al. 2012; Rulli, Savioli, and D'Odorico 2013). For instance, one-third of the world's investment funds are operating in the Brazilian land market (Yoshie Martins Kato and Pereira Leite 2020). Land market operations are not reduced to existing farmlands but are one of the drivers of agricultural frontier expansion and deforestation in Brazil (Aguiar and Torres 2021). The environmental and socio-economic impacts of the expansion of industrial farming and cattle-ranching disproportionately affect pastoralists and peasant

communities (Scoones 2020). In many cases, these groups face evictions and suffer consequences of rising territorial conflicts.

Of all the Global South regions, Africa is at the crosshairs for land and resource grabs today. Although peasant agriculture contributes over 70% of the continent's food basket, this farming system is still deemed inefficient in comparison with large farms (Collier and Dercon 2014) and perceived as backward or as only capable of subsistence. Thus, instead of supporting peasant agriculture, some governments and multilateral agencies pursue a 'modernisation' agenda while the displacement by large-scale agricultural corporations is rationalized by a development discourse (Gyapong 2021b; ROPPA 2014), such as in the infamous and controversial case of the ProSavana project in Mozambique (Monjane and Bruna 2020).

Similarly, in many Asian countries, land dispossession for plantation expansion is a growing trend (Julia and White 2012; Lamb et al. 2017; Li 2017; Morgan 2017). Widely observed in the agrobiodiversity and wild biodiversity rich regions of Southeast Asia with consequences for water availability, erosion of cultural practices around agriculture, rising societal inequalities, etc. it is also observed in other locales now. For instance, in Bangladesh, violation of property rights through corruption and coercion has led to the displacement of owners and tenants (Feldman and Geisler 2011). The shrimp processing zone in the southern part of the country forced many poor farmers out of their land (Adnan 2013). Significantly, Indigenous Peoples' land rights are systematically being disregarded (Kapaeng Foundation 2010).

The crises, their drivers, their institutionalized responses, and their social and environmental consequences, as well as the political reactions to these processes from rural social movements, have captured the attention of critical scholars and researchers worldwide. Thus, critical agrarian studies is currently witness to a dynamic historic moment, in which theories, cases, and methodologies – indeed, knowledge production as a whole – are being constantly debated and revisited (Edelman and Wolford 2017; Akram-Lodhi et al. 2021; Borras 2023). The resurgence of academic interest in rural areas and agrarian political economies associated with this moment also brings with it political questions about how knowledge is produced, who is producing it and interpretations about what is taking place on the ground. Academic research, knowledge production, and its dissemination is a contested field and a political arena shaped by global inequalities and power relations. In this context, scholars from the Global South struggle to gain space and recognition in a field dominated by their Global North counterparts.

Therefore, this paper examines the obstacles, challenges, and opportunities faced by critical agrarian scholars in and from the Global South. We argue that despite the historical and structural limitations for our research and knowledge dissemination, the current historic moment offers an opportunity for enhancing solidarity as a way to transform injustices within academia and other spaces of knowledge production and dissemination in order to provide new insights into understanding the challenges facing the rural world.

In the following section, we reflect on critical issues of agrarian studies today, such as the struggles taking place in rural areas, and the interlinkages between the environmental crisis and the re-emergence of critical agrarian studies. Then, based on the accumulated knowledge and experiences within the Collective of Agrarian Scholar-Activists from the Global South (CASAS), we deepen the debate to showcase the obstacles, challenges and political agenda of a movement of scholars-activists working in critical agrarian studies from the

Global South. We conclude by considering the ways forward for enhancing solidarity through networks of scholar-activism which we feel are integral to bringing about change in a world that needs more engaged scholarship and multiscalar collective action.

## Changing agrarian social movements, environmental politics, and academia

As the convergence of multiple crises expands around the globe, struggles led by rural workers, pastoralists, peasant communities and Indigenous Peoples for land, territory, environmental and climate justice, food, water and seed sovereignty, as well as complex processes of resistance to dispossession, exploitation, oppression, marginalization and authoritarianism are emerging as a historical necessity. Faced with this reality, scholar-activism – understood as ‘rigorous academic work that aims to change the world, or committed activism work that is informed by rigorous academic research, which is explicitly and unapologetically connected to a political project or movement’ (Borras 2016, 5)<sup>1</sup> – has an essential role to play. Committed to a deep dialogue and collaboration with these struggles, we, as scholar-activists in and from the Global South, are claiming our active role and place in mobilizing efforts to produce syntheses and analytical tools to reflect on new and old perspectives on the agrarian question that have shaped current global debates.

Peasants were and remain makers of history, albeit not in the conditions of their own choosing (McMichael 2008). Historically, when and where possible, rural working classes have sought to take to collective action and political struggles to confront the processes of dispossession, marginalization, exploitation and oppression that accompanied colonial and capitalist transformation of agriculture and appropriation of resources, as well as the imposition of state power in the name of national development and modernization. They have also devised multiple alternative ways of organizing social and ecological reproduction, managing a plethora of diverse agroecosystems, forest and water resources and, in the process, accumulated intergenerational knowledge associated with biodiversity and land management.<sup>2</sup>

The agency and politics of rural working classes have taken different forms across time and space. Examples can be found in contexts as diverse as the revolt of the enslaved people forced to work in the sugar plantations in Haiti (James 1989), the peasant rebellions of the twentieth century in Mexico, Vietnam, Algeria (Wolf 1969) or the Philippines (Kerkvliet 1977; Pomeroy 1978; Lanzona 2009), the agrarian laborers and Indigenous Peoples who fought for the independence of India (Sainath 2022), the contemporary struggles of small farmers, Indigenous Peoples and peasant communities against neoliberal policies, extractivist development projects and land grabbing, and mobilization for access to land, control over resources, food and seed sovereignty across the world (Avcı 2017; Kavak 2021; Monjane 2022; Hernández Rodríguez 2022). In civil wars, rural

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<sup>1</sup>See also Rosset 2020 and Mora 2017 for a discussion of collaborative research with and by social movements and the ethics and implications for researchers carrying out ethnographic work within indigenous communities in resistance.

<sup>2</sup>See Kothari et al. (2012) for a global overview of territories and areas conserved by Indigenous Peoples and local communities. For an overview of Indigenous Peoples and peasant communities’ territorialities connected to the management of biodiversity that endured in the face of the expansion of the frontier respectively in Brazil and in the Amazon across several countries in South America, see Almeida (2011) and Little (2001). For the case of communal forest management in Thailand, see: Aquino and Narintarakul Na Ayutthaya (2001) and Pobsuk (2019).



movements have also played a critical role in not only resisting lethal violence and rebel governance (Arjona 2016; Hernández Delgado 2004; Uribe de Hincapié 2006) but also configuring new landholding systems and forms of resource distribution (Berman-Arévalo 2021; Hristov 2005; Vergara-Figueroa 2018). Peasants have also been key political agents who contributed to the culmination of nation-wide uprisings. Scholarly work on the Middle East shows that rural areas witnessed recurrent waves of small-scale farmers' and rural mobilizations long before the 2010–2011 uprisings, particularly in countries such as Egypt and Tunisia (Ayeb and Bush 2019).

These struggles and revolts have attracted attention from academics, largely addressed from the perspectives of political economy, class conflict and moral economy. A vast literature has examined specific grievances and motivations for peasant rebellion or peasant support for revolutionary guerrilla movements based on the assumption that certain sorts of peasants are more prone or more able to rebel. For instance, the 'Wolf-Paige' debate discusses what stratum of peasants have the potential to be revolutionary (Wolf 1969; Paige 1975), and the 'Scott-Popkin' debate draws attention to the relative weight of economic, organizational and cultural determinants of peasant behavior (Scott 1977; Popkin 1979; Goodwin and Skocpol 1989). Scott (1977) asserts that peasants rebel as a reaction to the threat to their minimal subsistence caused by capitalist penetration in the countryside. Popkin (1979) contested Scott arguing that peasants are individual decision-making, utility maximizing individuals and they rebel to maximize potential for profit, an opportunity, to tame capitalism in their favor, and not as a reaction to economic distress. Scholarship has also paid attention to rural mobilization through institutional means and its impacts on land rights regimes (Coronado 2021), including women's land rights (Bejeno 2021) and constitutional frameworks (Güiza Gómez et al. 2020). In doing so, burgeoning research emphasizes the rural poor agency to shape policy outcomes via institutional channels such as politico-legal mobilization.

Today, however, peasant societies have become more culturally, socially and economically diverse, which reflects the structural change that agrarian societies and landscapes are going through (Edelman 2013). The proliferation of capitalist forms of farming, land grabs, altered property relations, patterns of proletarianization and migration, the penetration of new information technologies and developing travel opportunities have affected the structural composition of the peasantry. Meanwhile, space–time compression (Harvey 1989) seriously and irreversibly shook the historical construction of the peasantry as a remote, static and conservative entity. In response, the paradigms to understand peasant dissidence have become more diverse and sophisticated, especially in the period of neoliberal economic restructuring, which demolishes old theories on peasant mobilization in the face of strong and impactful movements such as the landless movement MST of Brazil (Kröger 2011), the EZLN of Mexico (Collier and Quaratiello 2005), the Landless People's Movement of South Africa (Alexander 2004), *Nayakrishi Andolan* (New Agriculture Movement) of Bangladesh (Mazhar 2019), and the transnational peasant organization of La Via Campesina (Martínez-Torres and Rosset 2010) and on the pressing issues of food sovereignty (Boyer 2010; Giunta 2014; Masson, Paulos, and Beaulieu Bastien 2017) and seed sovereignty movements (Kloppenburger 2014; Peschard 2017; Peschard and Randeria 2020; Felicien et al. 2020; Muller 2020) and those against land and water grabbing (Hall et al. 2015; Martinez-Alier et al. 2016).



Concurrently, rapid environmental degradation and environmental threats have reshaped the context of agrarian conflicts and the political framing of agrarian struggles. Especially since the 1970s peasant and Indigenous Peoples struggles against large-scale infrastructure projects – such as the Sardar Sarovar Dam in the Narmada River valley in India, and multiple roads and dams in the Amazon, as well as against logging and deforestation – such as the Chipko movement in India and the rubber-tappers led by Chico Mendes in Brazil – drew significant attention and brought environmental concerns to the center stage of agrarian conflicts. The development of such struggles in Latin America has led to the so-called ‘territorial turn’ in the political practices of agrarian movements and, therefore, in theoretical debates (Porto-Gonçalves and Leff 2015). This became increasingly apparent as movements were not only claiming their right to land and resources against environmental degradation but were framing their struggles in terms of the defense of their *territories* and diversified land use (Schwartzman 2018). Dynamics of territoriality and territorial conflicts beyond the nation-state reshaped the landscape of the agrarian question in the region. Similarly, in India, the Forest Rights Act of 2006 is a culmination of years of struggle to lawfully redress the historical injustice against forest-agrarian communities and to regain their right to access and use of land.

Meanwhile, environmental concerns also gained centrality in the Global North. Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962) showcased the dire consequences of industrialization of agriculture and the ill-effects of the indiscriminate use of pesticides on the environment. The variegation of the environmental movement into an environmental justice movement against the targeting of African American neighborhoods and communities as the destination of toxic waste in the United States (Bullard 2000), and the Tar Sands Healing Walk by a coalition of First Nation Indigenous women against the damage by crude oil extraction on land and fish resources in Alberta, Canada (Zalik 2015; Wong 2013) are key illustrations of this trend. Most recently, the commodity boom in an era of Chinese ascent has produced new scholarship on neoextractivism and environmental conflicts in Latin America (Svampa 2019), especially related to megaprojects such as large-scale mining and infrastructure under South America’s IIRSA/Cosiplan program (Peregalli 2022) and, most recently, China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (Amar et al. 2022; Apostolopoulou 2021). The growth of the field of political ecology in recent years (Perreault, Bridge, and McCarthy 2015), building upon Marxist agrarian political economy but opening new avenues of inquiry to build bridges between the agrarian question and environmental politics, is a testament to this trend. The special forum and conference by this journal together with other partners in 2022 on Climate Change and Critical Agrarian Studies is attuned with this theoretical imperative to engage with the diverse character of environmental issues.

We identify four aspects of contemporary rural and agrarian struggles that need to be addressed in research by critical agrarian scholars. First, capital’s response to the food and environmental crises has ushered in a new rush for land and resources, especially in the Global South. The concepts of ‘land grabbing’ (Borras and Franco 2012; McMichael 2012; White et al. 2012) and ‘green and blue grabbing’ (Fairhead, Leach, and Scoones 2012; Rocheleau 2015) indeed highlight these processes, where land and natural resources are appropriated in the name of food security and for purportedly environmental ends. This dynamic, which dates back to the colonial era but gained new life in the early twenty-first century with the confluence of crises, seems only to exacerbate. In particular,

climate change mitigation projects, either in the form of large-scale renewable energy, tree plantations to be marketed as carbon sinks, biofuel production or REDD + initiatives, substantially increase the global demand for land and water, especially for the expansion of flex crops (Borras et al. 2016; Alonso-Fradejas et al. 2016; Gillon 2016). We call upon our colleagues from the critical agrarian scholar community to continue investigating the various ways that rural people are affected by such initiatives as well as how they respond to them with specific references to socio-economic and political effects.

Second, and in close relation to the first, the ongoing food crisis aggravated by climate change, has put agriculture and food back at the center of development debates (Clapp 2022). In fact, agriculture and food have become key arenas of struggle with diverse actors advancing conflicting views on the causes of and solutions to the food crisis (Holt Giménez and Shattuck 2011; Clapp and Moseley 2020). On the one hand, powerful actors of the corporate food regime are trying to promote solutions that prioritize technological and market-based interventions without addressing the concentration of power and resources entrenched in the way global commodity chains are structured, as well as the erosion of agrobiodiversity. On the other hand, agrarian social movements (and their allies in civil society) and many research institutions are pushing for a more progressive and radical transformation of the food systems and regime (McMichael 2014). In this confrontation, the future of agriculture and food is at stake. Hence, we need to pay close attention to how to amplify the voices of those calling for radical transformation towards just, diverse and sustainable food systems (CSIPM 2022; IPES-Food & ETC Group 2021).<sup>3</sup>

Third, agrarian struggles for control over land, resources and conditions of production and social reproduction are increasingly intertwined with other social struggles, including those for food and seed sovereignty, environmental and climate justice, defense of territories and alternative ways of living, Indigenous Peoples' rights and autonomy, gender and urban justice. Agrarian struggles also involve solidarities that cross national boundaries, i.e. are transnational (Borras 2016; Klein 2015, Mingorria 2018, Martinez-Alier et al. 2016). In this sense, the crucial task for critical agrarian scholars is to understand the ever-changing terrain of social justice struggles – the new alliances and solidarities including tensions and challenges, and the question of how these influence the movements' demands, discourses, organizational practices and strategies.

Lastly, there are many examples of peasants and their allies developing alternative ways of organizing social and ecological reproduction. These alternatives, including but not restricted to agroecology, social and solidarity economy, territorial self-government, practices of commoning, *buen vivir*, do not necessarily and always work towards a predetermined socialist horizon, but work from their territories to foster more caring, just and ecologically attuned ways of living.<sup>4</sup> Transnational, national and local agrarian and environmental justice movements have also been increasingly mobilizing and jointly collaborating around and in the face of the global crises in order to scale up these alternative frameworks and practices. The acceleration of the processes reshaping capitalist development and directly or indirectly affecting territories such as financialization (Clapp and

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<sup>3</sup>See also the numerous proclamations and actions in this sense of the international peasant organization La Vía Campesina (LVC) on its official website: <https://viacampesina.org/>

<sup>4</sup>See e.g. Kothari et al. (2019) for a plethora of concepts under which such alternatives are organized.

Isakson 2018), digitalization (Ajates 2022; Fraser 2019), and the advancement of a green corporate capitalism (Friedmann 2005) requires that we support the political processes and transformative social practices on the ground. To do so, we need to understand the complexities of rural realities and be part of a collective effort to transform food systems (Gliessman 2016) while improving peasant – and neo-rural – livelihoods.

In this regard, scholar-activists from the Global South are called to critically analyze these old and new struggles without essentializing rural communities but rather employing multidisciplinary approaches to understanding diverse forms of exploitation, oppression, dispossession and marginalization that they are subjected to, recognize the full complexity of their agency, and emphasize their right to land and livelihoods. Such a research agenda cannot be conducted from a disinterested stance. It must involve political commitment and loyalty to these struggles, to contribute to their efforts to change the world. It also needs to have ethical commitments to dismantle the hierarchies in the processes of knowledge production, co-produce knowledge in dialogue and collaboration with rural struggles, and be accountable to them (Duncan et al. 2019; Montenegro de Wit et al. 2021; Borrás 2016).

As a response to these crises, academics and scholar-activists from diverse backgrounds have been devoting their research efforts to analyzing and finding answers to the questions, and confront challenges posed by and to development (see Stephens and Bagelman 2023). We, as scholar-activists in and from the Global South committed to social, agrarian and environmental justice, are assuming our role in this matter.

## Rethinking the Global South

The concept of ‘Global North’ as opposed to the ‘Global South’ entered the development lexicon to identify regions that make up the wealthy and industrialized world and those that are not. The application of the term ‘North–South divide’ emerged from the need to map the patterns of uneven development across countries and regions. The term Global South, broadly comprising Asia, Middle East, Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean, has been used to represent low- and middle-income countries as per categorization in World Bank income-per-capita index. Historically, the Global South represents former colonized nations with a shared history of social and economic differentiation, located roughly at the geographical south.

This conceptualization has been problematic from the onset as it lends itself to reinforcing binary narratives of superiority and inferiority, and detract attention away from cultural and territorial specificities and complexities. It has also been challenged as the increasing polarization within Global North and Global South countries is leading to the development of internal ‘north’ and ‘south’ layers in different societies (Therien 1999, 724). Thus, there exists a need to challenge the internal homogeneity of the nation-state, mainly because inequality is also increasingly pronounced at smaller scales, between and within countries and communities.

Accordingly, we aim to conceptualize the Global South beyond a geographical and binary emphasis. In lieu of a better concept, and as part of a wider effort to decolonize knowledge production and scholarship, we maintain that the term ‘Global South’ be used carefully to describe spaces where various forms of exploitation and oppression deliberately undermine specific social groups.

The notion should also encompass the many differences existing within Global North countries, where scholars from the working class, migrants and their children, racialized groups, women, and Indigenous Peoples – among other marginalized groups – face similar obstacles. We also acknowledge that in the Global South, there are capitalist structures of knowledge production which enforce class divisions and other forms of injustice. Usually, at the top of those structures are elites influenced by colonial ways of knowledge production. Therefore, we also problematize the idea that the world is not just divided between South and North: multiple imbrications of categories of oppression and privilege (Gill and Pires 2019) need to be recognized. Critical agrarian studies acknowledge the effects of the global order on agrarian communities in the Global South that also depend on imbricated identities such as class, caste, ethnicity, race, gender, generation, and religion. Incorporating these considerations into research agendas helps to identify social agency of dominated groups and embraces global struggles and solidarities that result from shared experiences from the margins under contemporary capitalist globalization. The Global South should be, therefore, understood not merely as a place of provenance of researchers and scholar-activists, but as a place situated within a broad framework of social struggles ranging from workers' struggle to women's movement, from food sovereignty to environmental and anti-nuclear movements.

While many efforts have been made to rethink agrarian issues from the Global South, our colonized societies – and subjectivities – have largely accepted mainstream interpretations and solutions produced in the Global North as the best ones for too long. Academic elites in the Global South tend to uncritically reproduce and reinforce mainstream theories, enhancing the marginalization of critical perspectives. Power disputes between geographical contexts and inside Global South countries expose the current challenges and call for new ideas and critical analysis within academia, that have been there but remained marginalized (Dados and Connell 2012; Jha, Yeros, and Chambati 2020).

However, bringing these ideas into the center stage is not an easy task for scholar-activists from the Global South, since there has been an established system of power in academic knowledge production, circulation and status, taking place everywhere. Inequalities in knowledge production are unevenly dispersed across the globe and intersect with colonialism, post-colonialism, racism and gender injustices. In several cases, it has echoed citation analysis by intensification of references in certain core countries while others are neglected and their scholars treated as 'sub-contractors' (Collyer 2016, 3).

Thus, we aim to develop an expanded solidarity network of researchers, writers, readers, and reviewers to provide mutual support and create a diverse network that promotes collaboration among critical scholarship engaged with rural movements fighting for social, agrarian and environmental justice, and thus contribute to a more internationally influential production of knowledge by Global South scholars. A solidarity network among scholars from the Global South is important for bringing equality in knowledge advancement and a symbolic representation in this field that makes it inclusive. It aims to help decolonize scholarship in the field of critical agrarian studies by identifying, critiquing and correcting the inequalities embedded within scholarship.

### **The dominance of English and a call for language justice**

We recognize language as a vehicle of power in both academia and activism. Currently, English is the vehicular language of academic and activists' forums. This predominance

invites us to recognize not only its links to colonial legacies, but also how knowledge production and dissemination is one of the strategies through which imperial domination is enforced. English language predominance tends to perpetuate and reproduce inequalities of the kinds of knowledge it advances (R'boul 2022).

The dominance of English in research and scholarly publications reinforces epistemological hierarchies and dominant narratives by limiting knowledge diversity, defining whose voices count, what messages matter, and the audience they can reach. Since science plays a role for policy-making, these hierarchies can perpetuate inequalities and social injustice. In this section, we draw attention to the ways in which English continues to be dominant in all facets of knowledge production and dissemination. Considering this, we present the implications of this dominance on the emancipatory agendas that we are pursuing and look for ways to have other languages and knowledge systems integrated in scholar-activist spaces and initiatives.

Scholars in the Global South that are non-native English speakers are compelled to use this language in order to engage with dominant debates in the Global North, many of which are rendered as international debates. However, its preponderance reveals deeper inequalities and injustices. To start, it limits whose voices and what messages can be shared in broader global debates and who can read or access these debates (McAlvay et al. 2021). Specifically, writing in English becomes a challenge as many times it is learned as a second or third language therefore limiting the articles, debates, research opportunities, and resources that academics can have access to if they are not proficient (ibid). The challenge is even more pronounced for some groups within the Global South, e.g. women, rural population, Indigenous Peoples, racialized groups and persons with disabilities, among others who often struggle to enter academia simply because enacting the right to higher education is a privilege.

Publishing in English is considered a must not only to be known and to have a voice in academia, but also for other academics to engage with our ideas. For instance, in the context of the Arab World, the colonial legacy led to the emergence of a university system that produced a compartmentalized elite, whereby scholars either 'publish globally and perish locally' or 'publish locally and perish globally' (Hanafi 2011, 291). Furthermore, many journals require a certain standard of English without consideration of other linguistic traditions or other ways of creating knowledge or conveying ideas, e.g. the orality of Indigenous Peoples' knowledge and how perpetuating an education in other language and based on knowledge systems other than their own, kills not only a language but Indigenous Peoples (Redvers et al. 2022; Martinez-Cruz 2022). In terms of knowledge production, the choice of language already becomes an automatic mechanism of exclusion towards certain groups.

Academics and researchers from the Global South who are primarily non-native English speakers face greater difficulty fitting into the language standards and requirements in their publications but also navigating the complex world of academia that is based on networking, building collaborations and certain competencies where, if English is not your first language, you stand at a disadvantage.

Additionally, the largest academic forums, journals, and publications where mainstream ideas and discourses are debated and reinforced are usually dominated by renowned scholars affiliated with wealthy universities and research centers, mainly from the Global North. Ironically, many of these debates are focused on analyzing

dynamics in the Global South through the lens of the Global North. This trend has a few important consequences for knowledge generation. Firstly, this reduces the accessibility of scholars from the Global South to participating in these debates to set research agendas. Secondly, it can also make it onerous to disseminate important ideas that are outside the bounds of what is deemed to be relevant scholarship by standards set by the Global North. However, the obverse of the above points is perhaps more pertinent. The knowledge generated and published in non-English language journals is not significantly integrated in the dominant English language publications world. It is therefore safe to assume then that the knowledge being claimed as state-of-the-art in the English language domain is, at its best, incomplete, and at worst, flawed.

Such barriers and fundamental problems continue to not only alienate research and researchers from the Global South, further deepening the existing underrepresentation in international publications by scholars from these countries, but also silence their interpretations of the worlds they occupy voiced in their own language journals. Bridging this gap to ensure more Global South scholars and activists at the forefront of sharing, debating, and publishing in critical agrarian studies, therefore, becomes crucial.

Avenues identified under CASAS to support the achievement of this goal include solidarity and support for translation, proofreading, and academic writing courses for upcoming scholars, creating collaborations among different scholars with a broad range of profiles, and supporting each other in navigating the challenging and complex world of academia. Other alternatives involve finding available resources to fund not only translation and collaborative research, but also improving language skills, supporting capacity development, and creating opportunities for young scholars and activists as part of our solidarity network. The articulation of these initiatives under the umbrella of an organized effort to face inequalities would even the terrain of struggle. However, these efforts do not suffice to transform structural inequalities that Global South scholars will continue to face while power structures reinforce the dominance of English and certain standards of knowledge production, presentation and attribution of relevance in academia.

### ***'Buscando visa para un sueño'<sup>5</sup>: Overcoming structural barriers for academic exchange***

Personal health and safety, time differences, travel costs, and ever-changing government regulations are some of the few risks and challenges that scholar-activists from the Global South face when we lead or participate in academic or activist conferences or other gatherings that are held in the Global North. Against this backdrop, we raise questions about how to overcome these challenges that decrease reliance on us having to make long-distance, cross-border travel and to form new academic and activist communities in our own places. The ultimate goal is that the knowledge production around critical agrarian issues and its dissemination are not centralized in the Global North, but rather in the places where research is being conducted.

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<sup>5</sup>Title of a song authored by Dominican artist Juan Luis Guerra. The song title translates into English as 'Seeking visa for a dream' and tells the histories of several migrants making the line for a visa request in Santo Domingo, facing embassy bureaucrats with their folders packed with documents.

The Covid-19 pandemic has transformed academic conferences. During the period of hard mobility restrictions, academic conferences took place in virtual formats. For over two years, instead of packing universities' auditoriums and classrooms, we attended conferences, seminars, and different forms of academic events remotely. At present, many academic conferences have resumed in-person formats, with the option of hybrid participation. The return of normal academic conferences reminded us of the great difficulties to promote the participation of scholars from, and especially based in, the Global South.

Securing a visa to travel abroad to participate in an academic event is much more than a procedure to successfully meet. Global South researchers applying for a visa confront in their own bodies the weight of global inequalities. Visas are expensive, and not all academic events include in their budgets the costs of those fees. Besides, people must often gather a stack of documents to prove that they are indeed traveling to an academic event in the face of immigration policies that increasingly treat Global South citizens as potential illegal migrants. Proof of employment and/or university letters, health insurance, personal references, invitation letters, bank statements (and proof of accommodation), travel history, flight reservations, are just a few items that people must gather to apply for a visa to attend a conference. That this prolonged and costly work can affect academic work is rarely even given thought. By the end of the process, one might have a visa rejection or, even if granted, might have to endure hostile treatment when going through migration. Both situations are filled with harassment and symbolic violence that the holders of privileged passports from the Global North rarely experience.

The situation may be worse when attempting to participate in a conference in the Global North, but not exclusive to it. Governments in the Global South usually welcome visitors with Global North countries' passports and impose enormous restrictions for allowing travelers from other countries in the Global South to enter their borders and visit their universities. For instance, a researcher from Cuba is only allowed to travel visa-free to 29 countries in the world. Most countries in Latin America and the Caribbean request a visa from Cuban travelers. A Palestinian researcher is only welcomed without a visa in 34 countries. A Pakistani can only enter 31 countries without a visa. Conversely, as of December 2022, US passport holders can travel visa-free to 143 countries and territories. This situation is not only faced by early career young scholars, but also by senior scholars, who despite having achieved recognition in their fields and earned the respect of their colleagues, are often subject to humiliation when attempting to attend seminars abroad. Scholar-activists also face the risk of being denied research permits or visas, and some are altogether refused entry to undertake fieldwork.<sup>6</sup>

Besides visa-related constraints, flight costs are exorbitantly high for scholars based in the Global South. The availability of flight routes and reasonable itineraries is unevenly distributed around the globe. It is not uncommon that a scholar from Latin America and the Caribbean would have to fly to Europe or North America in order to get to

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<sup>6</sup>See: The Washington Post (June 11, 1982) 'Judge Upholds U.S. Denial of Visas for Activists'. Available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1982/06/11/judge-upholds-us-denial-of-visas-for-activists/26222176-5c84-4b27-884b-e572b3a3d68b/>



Africa or Asia and vice versa, while most European and North American countries will have direct flights to most countries in the Global South. Furthermore, outside of a few global cities in the Global South, such as São Paulo, Johannesburg or Beijing, the situation is even more chaotic, as multiple connections and an even more fragile infrastructure is the pervasive reality of travel experiences. As a result, longer, less comfortable, and more expensive flights are in the way of Global South scholars' access to academic events, exactly those who have much scarce resources available.

Travel restrictions and high costs affect academic collaboration of scholars from the Global South. While there are attempts to foster other forms of academic exchange, especially in the early times of the Covid-19 pandemic, in-person interactions are irreplaceable.

### **Infrastructure and funding for critical research**

Although in many countries of the Global South, most scientific research takes place at public universities, the working conditions and stipends for master's, PhD students and scholars are precarious. Access to graduate training does not usually address pre-existing inequalities in undergraduate training. One such important instance is that universities do not actively address the systemic inequalities for Indigenous Peoples and racialized groups, women, people with disabilities, and working-class students. If attrition rates are high there are systemic reasons for it.

We count on unequally available and insufficient funds for our research, such as scholarships, travel grants, conference and fieldwork funds. The value of most scholarships is insufficient to live in large and medium-sized cities, where most of the main university centers are located. Moreover, it is not uncommon for graduate students to experience delays in payment of scholarships. Meanwhile, these students often face, in practice, a workload of more than 40 h per week, sometimes undertaking tasks which are not part of their responsibilities such as teaching without payment or working for other research projects. Further, they frequently lack any kind of labor rights such as health insurance, paid holiday, vacations, pension benefits, or maternity and paternity leave. Along with limited access, these working conditions have a higher impact on women, who continue to take a harder toll for the work of social reproduction within their families.

Similarly, institutions do not always have the infrastructure or services to develop necessary research infrastructure: office space, up-to-date computers and software (with licenses that are needed to be paid most often in USD), libraries and access to journals, which are mostly subscription-based and written in English. As a result, scholars are more vulnerable to predatory journals, all of which tend to affect research outputs and recognition. Scholars and institutions usually lack affordable English courses, training or staff to assist with writing in the languages recognized in the academic world. Such working conditions often force graduate students to look for secondary jobs, mostly resorting to teaching or consultancies. These jobs are also precarious and sometimes informal or illegal since most scholarships demand exclusiveness.

To exacerbate these conditions, the possibilities of access to the academic labor market after obtaining a PhD degree remain scarce. Available positions are insufficient, precarious and frequently underpaid. In many countries, decades of neoliberalization – first through

Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) imposed by International Financial Institutions and Development Cooperation and later through the neoliberal rationale ingrained in state bureaucracy – have meant that public capacity to fund autonomous and critical research has consistently diminished (Silva Júnior, Mendes Catani, and Fargoni 2021).<sup>7</sup> In sum, the academic world tends to reproduce and reinforce different types of inequalities. Even though many critical agrarian scholars in the Global South endure and resist these conditions, the situation tends to be even more constraining for scholar-activists or researchers who are politically engaged and committed to social change, especially those working in conflict-affected countries and regions.

### **Scholar-activism and sensitive research in conflict-affected contexts**

Hundreds of environmental defenders, climate activists and journalists based in the Global South are killed, incarcerated and/or tortured yearly. Most of them are members of Indigenous Peoples and peasant communities who are resisting extractivist activities, land and water grabbing, and infrastructure development projects affecting their territories (Global Witness 2022). In addition, long-term armed conflicts and the rapid expansion of illegal activities such as drug-, human-, and natural resources-trafficking, as well as the rise of authoritarian populism (Scoones et al. 2017) have severely undermined social stability and security across rural areas. Scholars and activists working in countries under authoritarian rule face greater challenges, since human rights institutions and infrastructures in these countries are usually undermined (Sandwell et al. 2019). This is the context where many critical agrarian scholars and scholar-activists in and from the Global South work.

There are diverse ways of being a scholar-activist. Some will see themselves as primarily activists who also conduct research as a tool to enhance their activism goals and strategies. Others conceive of themselves as scholars, who either take part in activist networks or consciously conduct politically engaged research – be it as a response to social movements needs and requests or as an endeavor sensitive to the political context and impact of one's research process and results.

As scholar-activists, we are committed to conducting research aimed at not only addressing structural inequalities in rural contexts but also promoting radical change. Such normative commitment calls for theorizing and practice infused by reflexivity, responsibility, and reciprocity (Lederach 2016). Firstly, academic research and activism ought to be guided by a constant scrutiny of power relations in knowledge production and dissemination. As such, we constantly reflect on and rework theoretical frameworks, methods, and data collection and analysis procedures employed to analyze agrarian politics, seeking to develop academic accounts open to and affected by processes of social transformation. Secondly, we also assess the implications of our engagement with rural movements on gender, race and class power dynamics in the contexts we study. Rather than undertaking a naïve, neutral approach to rural settings, we are aware of

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<sup>7</sup>See: Daniela Hirschfeld, Aleida Rueda, Meghie Rodrigues and Marielba Núñez (19th October 2022). 'Fuga de cerebros: Desafíos en la pospandemia'. Available at: <https://www.scidev.net/america-latina/features/fuga-de-cerebros-desafios-en-la-pospandemia/>

previous power dynamics and power relationships we develop with the people with whom we engage. Thirdly, our work is geared towards acknowledging rural movements as knowledge producers, change seekers, and peacebuilders despite seemingly insurmountable hurdles they encounter in their quest for social justice. Hence, we regard Indigenous Peoples and peasant communities as research participants who largely influence our positionality and research findings as opposed to being mere recipients of treatments designed and implemented by foreigners.

The challenges of Global South scholar-activism are multifaceted. We must tackle the risks to our personal life and security and challenges of carrying out sensitive research (Lee 1993). This includes working on controversial topics related to land dis-possession, resource extraction, marginalization and violation of rights of Indigenous Peoples, and researching politically unstable environments such as conflict zones or regions under military occupation. Global South scholar-activists often face severe personal risks for exposing and denouncing abuses undertaken in the name of development. Those working on conflict-affected contexts may face state surveillance, threats by state and non-state actors, and in some cases, they may even be arrested or some have to seek asylum.<sup>8</sup> Authoritarian regimes often target activists and scholars so as to block research on state policy and keep the situation under wraps. Scholars from Indian administered Kashmir, for instance, often face intimidation and censorship from state agencies (Zargar 2022). This complicates even more their acceptance within those countries that scrupulously exclude people with histories of 'extremist' or 'radical' ideas.

Along the same lines, scholar-activists based in the Global South usually face threats to academic freedom (Baser, Akgönül, and Öztürk 2017). Particularly, young scholars grapple with acute dilemmas between a normative commitment to social transformation for rural communities and career development based on mainstream criteria to reward academic work. In most instances, they face these dilemmas when choosing their topic of interest. They further face significant delays to be awarded a PhD, unsuccessful job applications, hostile environments, administrative and bureaucratic barriers, rejection of proposals for funding, conferences and journal articles, and difficulties in obtaining funding from mainstream academic institutions.

Under such circumstances, scholar-activism does not translate into neglecting research standards and protocols, yet entails acknowledging the impracticability of neutrality. Neutrality is, in fact, often pleaded to disguise a support for the maintenance of the status quo while claiming moral superiority. Scholar-activism – in its multiple forms – means being sensitive to the power relations that most likely emerge between a researcher and their counterparts in the field, thus developing clear agreements on boundaries and mutual collaboration that ensure trust-based relationships and avoiding intellectual extractivism.

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<sup>8</sup>See: The Guardian (13 April, 2022) 'Myanmar jailed more writers in 2021 than any other country, says rights group'. Accessed at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/13/myanmar-jailed-more-writers-in-2021-than-any-other-country-says-rights-group>; Human Rights Watch (25th October, 2022) 'Kyrgyzstan Arrests Activists en Masse'. Accessed at <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/10/25/kyrgyzstan-arrests-activists-en-masse>; Haaretz (May 16, 2010); The Leaflet (March 10, 2022), "Adivasi activists and international organizations call on Chhattisgarh CM to free activist Hidme Markam". Accessed at: <https://theleaflet.in/ativasi-activists-and-international-organisations-call-on-chhattisgarh-cm-to-free-activist-hidme-markam/>

## **Towards an academia that is more diverse and unapologetically engaged with social transformation**

Under the difficult conditions in which we find ourselves, Global South scholar-activists should undertake concrete steps and strategies to nurture new and innovative frameworks and social configurations that lean on fellowship and human wellbeing in their broadest sense. Such a scenario opens spaces for new answers and interpretations where we will have so much to contribute, and a solidarity-based network of scholars from the Global South working in critical agrarian studies offers a broad range of possibilities.

First, scholar-activists from or working in the Global South have firsthand knowledge and language abilities relevant for our own countries, which equips us with nuanced understandings of everyday lives, links between the social dynamics within the agrarian world as well as between that and wider politics, rural mobilization, among other topics.

Besides a commitment to social change, following the political dynamics in our specific social and cultural context allows us to have access to sources and information and to also pick up language and cultural cues to navigate shifting cultural and institutional contexts. Conducting research and action-research in our own languages and ambiances opens the door to plentiful sources of information including printed sources, local collaborators, as well as everyday dynamics. This nuanced (and sometimes subliminal) information and its complex meanings might not exist yet in current Global North academic debates. We, however, highlight its necessity in order to refine analysis as well as gaining a more comprehensive understanding of the processes to be studied and the problems to be solved.

As scholars driven by normative commitments to social transformation, we can build bridges between scholarship as much as we can join efforts to collectively decolonize academic practice. We come from a wide range of academic training in the social sciences as well as interdisciplinary fields and who adopt methodologically pluralist approaches to our fields of research. We are also willing to critically and strategically engage with research agenda including land and resource grabbing, climate change politics, environmental conflicts, agrarian social movements, agroecology, social and ecological reproduction, indigeneity and feminist politics, among other dynamics that are central to the lives of rural workers, peasant communities and Indigenous Peoples, as well as their organization and autonomy.

The transdisciplinary and cross-regional dialogue also helps us to discriminate between the actions that deepen the inequalities and those that overthrow them, including those inside academic practice. As mentioned earlier, capitalist structures and colonization inheritance still have a strong influence on knowledge production in most universities around the world, and contribute to deepening injustices. Some of us, for instance, have encountered enormous resistance in certain Global North and English-speaking contexts when using a word that is key in critical agrarian studies such as 'peasant'. For certain academics, peasants no longer exist. However, from a scholar-activist perspective, this conclusion remains problematic and disparate to the reality we find on the ground.

Power imbalances between scholars and departments from Global North and Global South turns this divergence of views into an inhospitable environment for scholar-activists and Global South perspectives. A cross-regional scholar's work, with a common political and ethical guidance, helps us to identify those colonial and patriarchal practices in

academia that weakens Global South scholars' work and influence. As pointed out, these include differentiated access to funding, valid publications in our own language, training programmes, security and labor rights.

Within the academic world, one of the major critiques is the point-based university system, which follows a productivist vision of the academic labor: (1) the more you write and produce, the more points you earn; (2) certain publications (mainly in English) will provide more points than others; (3) the points can then be translated into monetary incentives, employment promotions, academic privileges, among others (Borras 2016). Despite the inherent problems of such a system, publishing in such highly-valued publications is a key avenue for engaging critically with mainstream ideas and promoting perspectives from the Global South. This, however, requires considerable access to publications, language editing and conference funds.

The solidarity-based network that we propose and are already engaged with, seeks to provide support in these areas of need and beyond. Nevertheless, it cannot in itself promote structural change unless it also raises significant solidarity and self-scrutiny within the Global North. We are aware that neoliberalization of academia and knowledge production combined with increasing precarity and an increasing workload to meet productivity standards is also taking a toll on the well-being and mental health of scholars in the Global North. Therefore, the radical change we are proposing here – not only for a 'slower' academia but towards one that is more diverse and unapologetically engaged with social transformation – will bring richness in terms of the quality and ground-breaking character of knowledge production across the board. The sum of these opportunities also entails theoretical and practical efforts to decolonize our thinking, research and science.

### **Way forward: community, network and movement building among scholar-activists**

The way we look forward points to a call for nurturing and sustaining community, networks and movements through and with scholar-activism. While addressing some emerging challenges, it is necessary to take further actions to generate concrete transformations within these social spaces. We are therefore keen to facilitate dialogue across thematic sectors such as agriculture, forests, and water, and between academic disciplines and widen access and plough new furrows in critical agrarian knowledge for various communities. Through collaborative organization, cooperation and joint research, we ought to bring together various people, institutions and interests that matter for broader social change.

Collectively reflecting on the structural barriers and obstacles posed by mainstream academia to Global South scholars, and specifically within the field of critical agrarian studies, is just the first step for advocating towards its transformation. However, this is not an easy task. As scholars, we are also compelled to write, teach, attend conferences, publish, and engage with wider audiences. As activists, we are committed to addressing injustices and to critically supporting social movements. Eventually, those ends might clash with one another, and we, as scholar-activists, must navigate these very contradictions of our own position.

The greatest challenge is articulating dispersed efforts for making knowledge construction more just and democratic. CASAS emerged in 2019 as an organizational umbrella aimed at bringing scholar-activists from diverse disciplines and backgrounds into fruitful conversation and collaborative work. We share principles and goals with other international and regional networks, such as the Young African Researchers in Agriculture – YARA<sup>9</sup>, the working group in Critical Studies in Rural Development hosted by the Latin American Social Sciences Council – CLACSO<sup>10</sup>, Thimar, an independent, self-funded initiative covering the Arab Middle East region<sup>11</sup>, and the Agrarian South Network promoted by the Sam Moyo African Institute of Agrarian Studies in Harare<sup>12</sup>, just to mention some of the most visible experiences. Each network has its own emphasis, and they act in complementary ways.

Different ways forward emerge out of the sum of these considerations. In the following lines, we consider some urgent tasks to attend to. In general terms, academic language tends to exclude subjects who are not trained for participating in its own terms. Through our network, we consider the importance of translating academic work into multiple formats such as outlines, policy briefs in order to support other activists who have little opportunity to read scientific and technical peer-reviewed papers, or other outputs produced in popular formats such as podcasts<sup>13</sup> or blog entries. Making knowledge accessible to both the community of agrarian studies and the general public is critical.

Another key element to strengthening scholar-activism is a cooperative organization. Networking encourages scholars to take initiatives in alliance with activists, community members, NGOs, and even local authorities to promote more secure, just and democratic paths for agrarian struggles. Some scholar-activist ‘alliances’ have been developed recently, such as the Rural Reconstruction Movement, the Food Sovereignty Network and others in China (Yan, Bun, and Siyuan 2020; Leung 2021), the food sovereignty CaLiSaS network in Argentina<sup>14</sup>, or the Agrarian Resources Center in Indonesia.<sup>15</sup> These ‘alliances’ aim to enable cooperation between researchers and frontier practitioners, to document the existing and emerging peasants and farmers’ struggles and alternative farming practices, and, ultimately, to offer radical discourse to agrarian transformation in local and trans-local contexts.

Lastly, joint research is crucial. Addressing the politics of co-authorship, promoting cooperation between and among academics, activists and scholar-activists to strengthen knowledge co-production, and broadening the scope of its dissemination, are just a few tasks to consider. This implies the recognition of the multiple layers of academic research and exploring different ways in which the people we engage with during our research, can be actively considered and taken on board in our research. Even though writing is

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<sup>9</sup>See: <http://www.yara.org.za/>

<sup>10</sup>See: <https://www.clacso.org/grupos-de-trabajo/grupos-de-trabajo-2019-2022/?pag=detalle&refe=1&ficha=1775>

<sup>11</sup>For Thimar, please check: <https://athimar.org/en/about>

<sup>12</sup>See: <https://www.agrariansouth.org/>

<sup>13</sup>For instance, the ‘Agrarian Politics’ podcast conducted by Boaventura Monjane and Ruth Hall. See: <https://www.plaas.org.za/agrarian-politics-podcast/>. Another good example is the podcast ‘Peasants, food and agrarian change’ conducted by A. Haroon Akram-Lodhi, available in Spotify: <https://open.spotify.com/show/3FchJhLrFiCV1aVvcsLXDZ?si=2647fb7a777b4367>

<sup>14</sup>See: <https://redcalisas.org/>

<sup>15</sup>See: <http://arc.or.id/en/>

a form of cooperation and resistance, activism requires defining together the purposes and means of the research to be part of the process of social change (Dueholm Rasch 2022). Such engagement also facilitates the creation of a conduit for members in local groups to engage with the scholars of broader agrarian studies groups elsewhere who might be facing similar challenges not only in academia but also in the contexts they work locally.

Such consideration enables the development of dialogues amongst researchers from – and located in or outside – the Global South for finding ways of co-authorship that meet ethical dilemmas. The transformation of predatory practices in academia requires the development of new ways of cooperation and knowledge construction between scholars from the Global North and from the Global South. Social justice standards should be considered not only as topics to research, but also, methodologically, as approaches to knowledge and recognition within academic communities (Tilley and Kalina 2021).

As a community of scholar-activists, we are conscious about the necessity of being reflexive and sensitive to issues pertaining to our collaborative efforts and the building of cross-border solidarity. In an academic world dominated by profit-making and ruthless competition, we propose and pursue an alternative politics to knowledge production, circulation and legitimation, based on solidarity and mutual care as a way of making and pursuing social justice.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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