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>Intersectional knowledge as rural social innovation

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ABSTRACT

The interrelationship between rural, rurality and social innovation still remains underexplored even though there has been considerable work within the individual discourses of social innovation and rural studies. This paper aims at broadening the scope of this interrelationship by exploring the nuanced dynamics and complexities of rural lifeworld and the experiences and knowledges of actors that shape the understanding of rural social innovation. At the core of this analysis lies two key ideas including a) an understanding that rural groups' and communities' complexities and marginalities might not be adequately understood without addressing the complex ways in which identities of caste, race, gender, ethnicity and class intersect and b) that the locally-rooted solutions resulting from these concerns are usually underrepresented in the social innovation literature and the relevance of the same needs to be recognized. This reimagining of rural social innovation is located within the theoretical perspectives of intersectionality and feminist perspective and the epistemologies of the South focusing on 'ecologies of knowledges' that are capable of complexifying and adding to the contemporary debates on social innovation. From an understanding of the above, the authors argue that strategies and innovations grounded on the specific groups' and communities' own knowledge and rhythm within complex rural contexts needs be recognized as social innovation.

1. Introduction

This paper aims at framing the theoretical debates on social innovation within the context of rural and rurality to understand how identities including caste, race, ethnicity, gender and intersectionalities interface with rural poverty and marginalities impinging on the processes of innovation. The various processes would include drivers, formation of actor networks, solidarities and dissonance amongst actor networks, local knowledges and emergence of social values that are specific to socio-spatial realities of the communities. Such grassroots processes are articulations of social innovations, being necessary to consider how they interact and interface with 'mainstream' idea/s of 'development'/'innovation'. With regard to this, Chambers (2008) has reminded us of how the complexities and diversities of rural lives are usually underperceived and consequently undervalued by 'mainstream' development professionals and the need to observe and understand the microenvironments within the rural context.

Grounded on feminist postcolonial studies (Spivak, 1988; Castillo, 2009; Hillenkamp and Lucas dos Santos, 2019) and the epistemologies of the South (Santos, 2014) - particularly the concepts of the ecology of

productivities, ecology of knowledges and the ecology of temporalities -, we argue that the knowledge(s) brought by diverse rural communities (as they deal with intersected aspects of their reality) should be also addressed as social innovations. Firstly, they provide understanding of how people deal with the everyday challenges, and secondly, the research into these existing rural social innovations provide scholarly foundation for decolonising such research areas as social innovation and solidarity economy and see them as important articulations of epistemologies of the South in the area of holistic sustainability (Eynaud et al., 2019; Banerjee et al., 2020; Lucas dos Santos and Banerjee, 2019). If the discussion on social innovation sounds still unfamiliar in rural studies, besides some relevant work on this issue (Neumeier, 2012; Bock, 2012; Noack and Federwisch, 2018; Hillenkamp and Bessis, 2012), it is also true that some aspects have been undervalued and underrepresented, be in rural or innovation studies. We thus aim at stressing the rhythms in rural life that are suffocated by external development guidelines as well as the political dimension that domestic work might assume within rural contexts. Besides, we intend to stress the rareness of research debating development through the lenses of the rural communities and their subjective experiences.. Accordingly, this paper aims to bring these

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dimensions to the scene by focusing on a people-centered social innovation perspective (Banerjee et al., 2020; Hulgård and Shajahan, 2013) that resonates with the strong versions of both innovation studies (Godin, 2015) and social innovation studies (Moulaert and MacCallum, 2019; Ayob et al., 2016; Banerjee et al., 2020). The empirical evidence of the paper derives from our studies of rural experiences in India and Brazil. With this, we aim 1) to propose a broadened scope of the social innovation concept, mainly coined here as the result of a collective community effort; 2) to emphasise the social and economic contribution brought by rural communities and their lived experiences and knowledges usually neglected in social intervention projects; 3) to discuss to what extent a hegemonic narrative (and agenda) of development and even of social innovation (Hulgård and Ferreira, 2019) might neglect or even distort the sense of well-being within some communities. Given that feminist theories have largely contributed to epistemological debate on issues such as work, as well as on the very sense of the social, political and the economic (Gibson-Graham, 2002; Castillo, 2009; Castillo and Hernández, 2020; Hillenkamp and Lucas dos Santos, 2019), they will constitute, along with the epistemologies of the South, one of cornerstones of our argument. Thus, departing from some “emergences” in Global South, we aim at theoretically framing social innovation within rural contexts from a people-centered and intersectional perspective.

The paper thus explores the above by focusing on the following broad sections. Section two grounds and locates the idea of rural social innovation within the concept of rural and rurality and unpacks the complexities within the same that not only shapes the complex idea of rural but also shapes and drives social innovation within the context of rurality. Section three attempts to theorise rural social innovation from an intersectional and feminist perspective and broadens the scope of epistemological understanding of social inequities and intersectionalities that play out within the rural contexts. Drawing from this, section four takes a deeper look at the epistemologies of the South and the experiences of innovation within rural contexts to interrogate whether it is possible to decolonise the concept of rural social innovation. Section five is the concluding section of this paper which proposes to reimagine rural social innovation weaving in the understanding from the earlier sections.

2. Framing the concept and complexities of rural and rurality as driver of social innovation

There has been a growing and diversified literature on social innovation studies (Mumford, 2002; ; Godin, 2015; Mulgan et al., 2007; Puelles and Ezponda, 2016; Fulgencio and Lefever, 2016). However, regardless of its vitality and dynamism as a field, this is characterised by different readings of the concept - some of them still located within a market-oriented or urban discourse, even when targeting at an issue such as inclusiveness. Even if it is true that a linear model of innovation is being increasingly replaced by a more complex, people centric and systemic concept, as argued by authors such as Banerjee et al. (2020), Puelles and Ezponda (2016), there is still a need to further explore the dynamics of rural societies and contexts and its interrelationship with social innovation, especially the role, complexities and diversities of actors and actor networks within the same. Some thorny questions remain unanswered within the larger discourse of social innovation, for example, the bargaining power of each actor concerning the guidelines that will lead the process of social transformation. Accordingly, despite the fact that social groups might be considered as innovative - in other words, the bees that fertilises the trees (Mulgan et al., 2007 apud Adro and Fernandes, 2020), a mismatching derived from power imbalance and positioning especially within the rural contexts is underrepresented in the literature. Even in social innovation as such, the dimension of democratic change and power relations “are largely unspecified” (Teasdale et al., 2021). Saying that, a social-oriented innovation paradigm does not mean that equity among the actors, even in a co-creation perspective, is achieved from the outset. However, it means that an

analysis of the situated realities and lifeworld of rural groups needs also to be understood as articulations of inherent power relations.

The context and concept of rural and rurality as sites of social innovation thus needs more attention. Simultaneously, the diversities and the nuanced and situated realities of the lifeworld of rural groups and communities has often been either unrepresented or romanticized as the ‘exotic’. Chambers (2008: 29) explicate how development practitioners, academicians and other urban based professionals get trapped in the urban bias whose major source of direct experience of rural conditions is limited to rural development tourism, a phenomenon of brief and hurried rural visits. He further adds that the knowledge generated about rural life by such urban centric professionals captures urban as the core and rural as the periphery. This definitely has a significant impact in understanding the voices and the lived experiences of rural communities and the way we understand their knowledges, and about rurality itself. In one of our participatory exercises with rural communities in Maharashtra, India, while we were having a cup of tea with a few women in one of their houses and engaging in a discussion with them, one of them said, ‘We just felt so good that you are spending time with us and listening to us.’ The women further added, ‘usually people who come from outside never come to our houses or sit with us or share a cup of tea and if they don’t have tea in our cups or food in our utensils, how will they even know the size or condition of our cups or utensils’. Indeed, these are the voices which tells us not only the need for in depth understanding of rurality but also the need for deeper engagement to understand the same. This also helps reflect on our own biases, experiences and the need to explore deeper and theorise more.

Whilst the idea of rural is located in the concept of place and usually defined as a place with relatively low population density, the understanding of rurality is located in the concept of space which is further interwoven within the understanding of power, social hierarchies and differential roles and responsibilities based on class, caste, ethnicity, race and gender. This idea of rurality is largely missing within the rural development and social innovation discourse. The OECD’s 10 key drivers of rural change, resulted from the Edinburgh Policy Statement on Enhancing Rural Innovation (OECD, 2018), have focused on two aspects, namely the global economic integration and the quality of life. Technological solutions are assumed as key factors to promote the ‘inclusive growth’ of rural areas all over the world, either be in education, food security, manufacturing (through distributive manufacturing), or energy systems. Just a small part of this tech-based solution is devoted to shifting values. In addition to it, the urgent need for a mindset change towards the community technologies either by the governing bodies or the organisations who address the guidelines still remains out of the scope. The understanding of rurality is therefore important not only to counter the urban bias but also to get an understanding of the contextual complexities that drives social innovation within this context. The complexities of rural lifeworld reveal a pathway not only to understand the emergence of social innovation as a dynamic process but also the emergence of actors and actor networks creating social value within their immediate contexts. While discussing the dynamics of rurality and the role of actors in the emergence of innovative local practices, ‘Jugaad’ innovations (the meaning of the Hindi word ‘Jugaad’ can be loosely understood as finding a way around or innovative quick fix solutions) offer an argument to look at the bottom-up approach of frugal and flexible innovations that local actors in rural areas, especially in South and South East Asia has been evolving for long to address their immediate needs and concerns using traditional knowledge and limited resources (Radjou et al., 2012). The examples of ‘jugaad’ innovation ranges from informal quick fix solutions like adding seats to a tractor (a farm equipment) for use as a vehicle in the absence of regular transportation or a low cost and biodegradable refrigerator using clay’s cooling properties called ‘Mitticool’ (the meaning of ‘mitti’ being clay). ‘Mitticool’ products were innovated by a rural earthenware craftsman from a village in India and the inspiration of the clay fridge that runs without electricity came from a tragedy, a devastating earthquake in

Gujarat which disrupted the already irregular electricity connection in the villages in the region (Sharma, 2012). ‘Jugaad’ innovation is also illustrative of the fact of how rural people deal with challenges in their everyday life. However, the critique of ‘Jugaad’ innovation emerges from the fact that it does not address structural and systemic issues. The complexities of rural and rurality and its interrelationship with social innovation could be further interrogated and unpacked within the understanding of experiences and knowledges of actors located within rural diversities and their participation in the innovation processes.

3. The context and contradictions of politics of power and participation in rural social innovation

The context of lifeworld and the dynamics of participation of rural people is therefore located within the inherent heterogeneity of groups and communities in rural areas and the power hierarchies of caste, class, ethnicity, race, gender and intersectionalities that operates within the same. This plays out in the everyday struggles in people’s lives which needs a deeper understanding in the discourse of social innovation. Some voices of people from the field experiences of the authors further strengthen this conceptualization. While trying to understand the local indicators and reasons of poverty in rural areas in Maharashtra in India, the authors found that men from privileged groups and communities (based on caste and class location) mentioned the lack of farm equipment and irrigation facilities as major reasons of poverty. Men from the marginalized communities on the other hand expressed fear as an indicator and manifestation of their poverty. They said they were scared that they have to repay debts, they were scared about livelihood uncertainties and they were also scared about atrocities from the privileged groups. The women however from both privileged and marginalized communities identified alcoholism of their spouses as a major indicator, source and manifestation of their poverty. The women said alcoholism not only leads to outflow of money but also domestic violence against them. Such experiences of people tell us about the context of power and heterogeneity within rural communities, not only limited to India but manifested differently across the world and therefore the need to recognise this as a key lens for understanding the complexities of rural life and how it might drive social innovation pathways.

A set of questions thus needs to be addressed in our discussion and engagement with rural social innovation, where a simplification of complexities from an outsider’s perspective is still evident:

a) to what extent may the rural communities’ rhythms be overwhelmed by the outsiders/outside organization’s timetables and required efficiency level? b) to what extent does this scenario compromise from the very beginning the co-creation perspective? Is co-creation a reality since the outside organisations are the ones who usually defines effectiveness patterns and the change pace?

c) What is the possibility of outside organisations reinforcing market-oriented representations and parameters even when evoking the idea of social impact? d) Should not we discuss more regularly the power imbalance within the very social innovation system? An intersectional approach therefore becomes a key to understanding the complexities and power relations within rural communities and their knowledges. This also helps development practitioners in identifying how and whom to prioritize in the process of social innovation if it is initiated by them as outsiders.

We argue that such concerns that are at the core of practice and policy of rural social innovation could benefit from a more complex understanding of rurality, marginality and rural poverty concerns. In the next section, some contributions from the feminist and post development theories are addressed in order to broaden the scope of this discussion on the rural communities, centering their constraints and well-being, by stressing underrepresented aspects in the analysis of their everyday lifeworld.

4. Feminist and intersectional lenses to think of rural social innovation: epistemological contributions

Feminist theories in general have largely contributed to challenge and broaden the scope of the epistemological grounds supporting different areas of knowledge. Feminist Economics, for instance, has questioned the naturalised androcentric standpoint in the field (Ferber and Nelson, 2003; England, 2002) by either demonstrating the way Economics overrates abstraction and logics or unveiling the social construction of gender and its influence on the sexual division of labour. If the relevance of this subfield to gender equality is evidenced, Feminist Economics has also had a ground-breaking role in challenging some epistemological roots. It includes some ideas that could be of relevance for Rural Social Innovation.¹ In this section, we are going to address a set of feminist weightings towards the very concept of the economy as well as a broader comprehension of poverty, in order to demonstrate to what extent rural social innovation as a field might benefit from different standpoints for more accurate local public policies and practices. Although this paper does not specifically debate the gender issues in rural studies, it highlights the feminist epistemological contributions towards new lenses through which rural social innovation might be interpreted.

First of all, it is worth recalling the already existing and lively research on feminist rural geography from the 2000s onwards (Morton-Robinson, 2000; Ramzan et al., 2009; Sullivan, 2009; Pini et al., 2015; Pini et al., 2020). These works have contributed not only to evince the heterogeneity of rural women but also to refine some debates on gender roles and rural living. From the pieces of research which detailed “the shifting nature and temporalities of the gendering of farm practices and spaces” (Riley, 2009 apud Pini et al., 2020: 203) to the use of feminist methodologies to demonstrate the complexity of the research subjects or the inadequacy of western perspectives to address indigenous women, these works have offered new lenses to interpret rural dynamics. With regard to this, Pini et al. (2020) provide us with a remarkable review of the literature, pointing out its recent dialogue with decolonial approaches and feminist authors from the Global South² such as Aída Hernández Castillo and Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui.

Although the relevance of these works are undeniable, there remains a gap as to the economic dimension. Some expressions have been naturalised without further discussion - development or the economic itself, for example, grounding some public policies and funding programs. For this reason, we argue that postcolonial and feminist perspectives on the economy, specially the ones criticising the formalist and neoclassical approach, are important to shed light on some rural economies’ undervalued aspects - reciprocity and redistribution

¹ Regardless of the Feminist Economics’ relevance, and particularly of Post-colonial Feminist Economics, to challenge some general concepts such as that of development, there is still a lack of studies focused on the positionality/ies as well as the heterogeneity of rural women. The same applies to the very diversity of “the rural”. As remarked by Pini et al. (2015, p. 1), “the question of how women are differently positioned because of their non-metropolitan location has remained largely overlooked”. Some feminist works however have differently addressed the theme, such as Pini et al. (2020), Castillo (2020), and Hillenkamp (2013).

² Global South is applied here in the sense proposed by the Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos. According to him, Global South does not refer to a geographical category but a sociological one. It means the set of previously colonised countries which are still dealing with the wounds of colonialism. However, Santos (2014) and (2010, p. 12–13) have called the attention to the fact that this category, being sociological, might be applied to some groups in the North (indigenous peoples, Afro-Europeans, muslim communities, Roma people etc), while the ‘North’ might be also applied to local elites in the South who benefited from the colonial roots, keeping its heritage alive. Global South should not be thus assumed as a synonym for the term Third World.

mechanisms, domestic and care work, political strengthening against big corporations and their interests through local alliances. Besides not being focused on the rural economy, the works of the Sudanese economist Eiman Zein-Elabdin and of the Indian sociologist S. Charusheela in the Postcolonial Economics have been crucial for untangling the modern discourse of development. Similarly, Feminist Economics as a field has focused on the gender bias into the economic activities and discourse (Ferber and Nelson, 2003), which is also relevant to debate the usual power imbalance in rural areas.

The themes are diversified in this set of works. While some authors have had the narrative of development - a so-vaunted world within the innovation studies - under scrutiny (Olson, 1994; Zein-Elabdin and Charusheela, 2004; Hillenkamp and Bessis, 2012), by detailing how this narrative has played a role to guarantee an “ontological precedence of modern European societies” (Zein-Elabdin and Charusheela, 2004: 2), others have focused on underrepresented aspects such as race, caste, and gender in the social inequality analyses (Rege, 1998; Brah and Phoenix, 2004; Rio, 2012; Brewer et al., 2002). The later have been concerned with the way some minority women are underrepresented in Feminist Economics and economic-related fields. The intersectional approach in feminist studies (Brah and Phoenix, 2004; Rio, 2012; Brewer et al., 2002) has helped us to better understand the way different asymmetries (such as that of gender and race/ethnicity) feed each other, deepening and multiplying social inequality situation of some groups, poverty and marginalities being the most visible consequences.

Given that addressing social inequality is one of the main goals to be achieved by social innovation projects, we argue that the complexity brought by these postcolonial and feminist analyses might guarantee more accuracy in identifying what is at the core of poverty-framing processes in rural spaces. We thus present some aspects that might be useful for the social innovation approach when addressing either the poverty status or the resilience level of rural communities. The first aspect is epistemological and has to do with the very concept of the economy. The everyday organisation of the material life, including the reproductive work, remains undervalued, despite representing a significant part of the economy. As stressed by Gibson-Graham (2002), the economy as we imagine it (wage labour, market, and enterprises) “comprises but a small subset of the activities by which we produce, exchange and distribute values”. Notwithstanding this remark, non-market activities which guarantee many material life routines are persistently neglected as community assets. As a result, market-based solutions have been prioritised in rural areas to boost local development, while the provisioning strategies, associated with the domestic domain, are still under the radar as a source for community resilience. Considering Polanyi’s advice on not taking the economy as a synonym for the market, we argue that a larger group of economic activities should be considered in the community inventory, including “non-market forms of exchange”, “different ways of performing and remunerating labor”, and the “multiple ways of producing, appropriating and distributing surplus” (Gibson-Graham, 2002: 4

The second aspect has to do with the underrepresentation of the three other Polanyi’s (1944) principles of economic integration - namely the reciprocity, the redistribution and the householding. Feminist authors have not only given particular attention to these roles in the everyday economy (Ashwin et al., 2013; Hillenkamp and Lucas dos Santos, 2019), but also emphasised the possible detachment of the redistribution from the State, to whom it is usually assigned. These economic principles not only strengthen social bonds, by creating a network of confidence and protection, but also contribute to rural communities’ resilience in material terms. Besides, economies of the South have challenged the usual assumption of market precedence, since priority might not be given to the market expectations. An example of this could be seen in Brazil: contrary to the stereotypes regarding rural women, peasant, peripheral, and indigenous women, as leading actors they have played a pivotal role in the community surplus redistribution. It helps us think differently about two issues: the idea of underpowered

women in the peripheries or rural areas and the split between domestic and economic domains. Both issues lead us to the third aspect to be highlighted - the community agency.

The domestic domain has more and more assumed a political dimension in the Global South (Lucas dos Santos, 2017; Hillenkamp and Lucas dos Santos, 2019). Peasant, marginalized and indigenous women have departed from domestic concerns within their territories (regarding water, right to seeds, food sovereignty) to forge alliances among different women with common agendas and protest against transnational interests and/or the neglect by the State (see the Daisies’ and the Indigenous Women’s Marches³). Domestic domain has thus proved to be political in many places and have influence on the rural communities as a whole. By political dimension, here, we understand: 1. the possibility of forging spaces for confidence and intercultural dialogue capable of empowering communities, and 2. the capacity of outlining self-tailored solutions for community problems as well as wholesome combinations of the economic principles to enhance its resilience. Nonetheless, the communities’ agency seems to be still underestimated in many documents on rural change, where the place-based solutions are otherwise expected to come from outside. External technologies in transport and communications as well as openness to foreign investments from ‘emergent economies’ (OECD, 2018) are seen as solutions for problems in western countries such as rural depopulation and desertification. However, as demonstrated further by the case from Brazil, popular technologies developed by the communities themselves have been able to guarantee not only sustainable ways of preserving values associated with specific territorialities but also endogenous strategies for rooting people, even the youngest, in rural areas. Simultaneously, the collective community-based enterprise of poor and marginalized women in rural India is rooted in the idea of agency. Promoting the sense of belonging and the communities’ agency, it is able to reconnect the economic, the social, and the political dimensions.

Healthy economies result from appropriate ways of recognising social inequality roots into the territories, enabling public policies and institutions to go beyond its most tangible material consequence, the poverty. And here we get to the fourth aspect to be stressed: the need for an intersectional approach to properly understand how naturalised and intertwined asymmetries (of gender, race, class, age) affect the level of community resilience, undermining the quality of life in the territories. The feminist concept of intersectionality, first coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, has contributed to the fine-tuning of social analyses and public policies towards social, economic, and environmental justice. Sustainable modes of production in rural communities will not be enough, for example, if marginalized groups remain gated in devaluated areas with high levels of toxic waste or landfills. Brah and Phoenix’s definition (2004) shed light to the complexity behind scarcity and resistance, describing intersectionality as “the complex, irreducible, varied, and variable effects which ensue when multiple axis of differentiation – economic, political, cultural, psychic, subjective and experiential – intersect in historically specific contexts”. Regarding rural social innovation, it means that place-based solutions neglecting the mutual reinforcing by different asymmetries are not likely to last, the compliance with outside-modelled quantitative parameters being insufficient for an effective social change.

Grounded on these feminist lenses and departing from their epistemological contributions, the next section will focus on three main ideas: 1. diversified knowledges in rural communities may reinforce social cohesion as well as give rise to creative forms of organising the everyday economy and lifeworld; 2. different rhythms and temporalities in the rural communities, if ignored by scholars and technical staff, will

³ Daisies’ March is a 2-day event organised by peasant workers in Brazil. In 2019 it gathered at about 100.000 peasant women not only from different Brazilian states but also from 25 countries.

compromise the long-term goals of promoting rural change; 3. different rationalities in a heterogeneous rural environment, particularly in the Global South, could be silenced by hegemonic rural innovation guidelines, compromising the communities' resilience. The following section therefore also argues about the need for collective and co-created knowledges and social change emerging from the intersectional realities of rural actors and their everyday lifeworld.

5. Learning from experiences: is it possible to decolonise the concept of rural social innovation through the epistemologies of the south?

A deeper understanding of local practices in the rural contexts, innovation solutions and participation of diverse actors and actor networks in the innovation solution is important to not only understand the dynamics of the pathways of rural social innovation but also for exploring whether such understanding can help in decolonising the concept. Critical approaches in rural development and rural studies (Borras Jr., 2010; Kay, 2010; Fairbairn et al., 2014) have played an important role in the field on heated debates such as the power imbalance and the international division of labour in a globalised agrarian system, the growing impact on the Global South's food sovereignty, and the everyday politics in marginalized and peasant communities (Kervliet, 2010), including the power politics with respect to caste, class, race, ethnicity and gender. These studies have been thus attentive to the grassroots peasant's forms of struggle and resistance. However, being more focused on the big picture, this discussion has paid less attention to the everyday lived realities and struggles and micro-resistance within the communities. Similarly, a bridge between these studies and the rural social innovation seems to be lacking as mentioned in the earlier sections. We consider that the epistemologies of the South (Santos and Meneses, 2010; Santos, 2014) might contribute to this bridge by questioning the monoculture of knowledge⁴ (that is, the overrating of the science and the devaluing of other sources of knowledge, such as peasants, indigenous and other marginalized groups and communities) and by proposing instead an "ecology of knowledge" (Santos, 2006). To support this argument, Santos (2006) draws our attention to the fact that the western science is not able to express the world's epistemological diversity. He also asserts that peasant and indigenous peoples are the ones whose knowledges have more effectively contributed to the biodiversity conservation. It leads us to our main argument in this paper: that rural communities' knowledges should be also considered as innovation, and the knowledges that arise from their situated intersectionalities. We refer to: 1. the knowledge and production technologies they might develop by themselves; 2. the collective arrangements they foster as a community strategy towards more sustainable rationalities of production and living; 3. the rural tacit knowledge⁵ that, not being replaceable by outside-modelled technical solutions, plays a pivotal role on a co-creation process and its successful outcomes.

Two other concepts associated with the epistemologies of the South are central to our argument and help us address some less prioritised aspects in the field of rural social innovation, such as the peasants' and

diverse rural actors' rhythms and the different production rationalities and complex lifeworld that are likely to be found in rural communities. The concepts we call for attention are the ecology of temporalities and the ecology of productivities (Santos, 2001; 2006). The first one questions the idea of a linear (and progressive) time on which the narrative of development is grounded. With regard to this, Santos (2004: 20) remarks that "the predominance of linear time is not the result of its primacy as a temporal conception, but the result of the primacy of western modernity that embraced it as its own". Drawn on this concept, but having in mind that even the western temporality is also heterogeneous, we argue that other temporalities and rhythms regarding production and quality of life should be effectively considered as legitimate and coexistent with the capitalism's hectic timing. In this sense, indigenous, peasant and marginalized rural communities' rhythms should not be taken as a sign of backwardness to be surpassed. In terms of social innovation concerns, we argue that these temporalities should be safeguarded and not threatened by a market-based notion of efficiency very common in projects' guidelines and evaluation criteria. Simultaneously, of course there is a need to grasp the heterogeneity within rural communities and the historicity of exclusion and power relations within them which leads to differential experiences and differential knowledges within these communities.

The other concept, the ecology of productivities, is also important to our argument of popular knowledge as innovation. It challenges the myth that rural communities are not able to find solutions by their own efforts and knowledges. Regardless of the social relevance of the co-creation perspective, it also questions that co-creation is a necessary condition for these communities to move forward in social and economic terms. The ecology of productivities demonstrates that alternative systems of production are legitimate and should not be dispelled as backward or inefficient. On the contrary, the very idea of efficiency which animates management and economics should be under scrutiny (Eynaud and França Filho, 2019). The ecology of productivities, according to Santos (2004: 22), "consists in valorising alternative systems of production, popular economic organisations, worker's cooperatives, self-managed enterprises, solidarity economy, etc., which have been hidden or discredited by the capitalist orthodoxy of productivity". From our perspective, it also means to consider the way the economic principles of exchange, reciprocity, redistribution, and householding are blended into the community to shape the economy in a very specific way, grounded on creating synergies, social cohesion and sense of belonging (Lucas dos Santos, 2016; Hillenkamp and Lucas dos Santos, 2019).

This section therefore explores two examples of rural social innovation from the global South including India and Brazil. Here, we also go beyond the usual representations of the South as 'fragile' and 'underdeveloped' and try to highlight not only the possibility for peasants', indigenous' and other rural and marginalized communities' knowledges as innovation themselves but also the processes of collectivization and agency for co-creation of intersectional knowledges. The focus therefore is primarily on the innovation solutions that facilitates participation of diverse actors, captures their knowledges and facilitates the creation of new actor networks for processes of change and transformation.

5.1. Dignity and Design (D&D), a collective community-based garment manufacturing enterprise of poor and marginalized women in rural India, who were earlier engaged in the oppressive practice of manual scavenging

"We women are now determined and have taken an oath to never pick up human waste again", said a woman in rural Madhya Pradesh in India while she was stitching garments along with other women as part of the social enterprise, Dignity and Design (D&D). She and other women of D&D were previously engaged in manual scavenging, an oppressive caste and gender-based livelihood practice of collecting human waste, practiced primarily in many parts of rural India. Dignity and Design is a social enterprise where poor and marginalized women,

⁴ For more information, please see Santos (2006, 2014).

⁵ An example of this tacit knowledge which science cannot explain: the fox's howl has been an indicator of good or bad harvests in the Andean altiplano (Morales, 2010) and the elders are able to interpret this howl as an advice that the sowing time is about to arrive. They do it without any scientific procedure. As Morales (2010) explains the female fox "is able to predict the arrival of the rainy season almost two months in advance, producing pheromones at the most opportune moment in order to make mating, gestation period and young's birth match food availability". Although scientists may explain the connections between the fox' howl, the rain season, the soil fertility, and the food provisioning, it is not possible for them to explain the peasants' capacity of interpreting these nexuses so precisely.

freed from the practice of manual scavenging and other forms of bondage and sexual violence, collectively manufactures and sells ethnic garments striving towards livelihood security and dignity (Dignity and Design, n.d.). Anderson and Banerjee (2020): 55–56) further stresses that, D&D is a significant example of grassroots innovation that has endeavoured to transform gendered and intersectional marginalities in one of the most socially excluded and marginalized communities in India. D&D is therefore a narrative of struggle, survival and solidarities of poor, marginalized and excluded rural women who came together to reclaim their rights, dignity and livelihood security. This narrative is drawn from a larger empirical study done as part of SI Drive Research project (Millard et al., 2017) undertaken by the authors, reports and secondary literature including the book chapter (Anderson and Banerjee, 2020), and field visits and interaction of authors with women and other stakeholders and activists from D&D over a period of time.

The historicity and contemporary context of caste and gender based intersectional exclusion of manual scavengers formed the site and driver of this social innovation process. According to the report of Human Rights Watch (2014), manual scavengers are usually from caste groups customarily relegated to the bottom of the caste hierarchy and confined to livelihood tasks viewed as deplorable, involving tasks of cleaning human waste from dry toilets, open defecation sites, gutters and drains. Women comprised a majority of the manual scavengers and this caste and gender-based occupation reinforces the social stigma on the entire community that they are unclean or “untouchable” and perpetuates widespread discrimination. Though the practice has now been almost eradicated through various laws, the report by United Nations in India (n.d), mentions that while manual scavenging for many may have ended as a form of employment, the stigma and discrimination associated with it lingers on, making it difficult for former or liberated manual scavengers to secure alternate livelihoods and raising the fear that people could once again return to manual scavenging in the absence of other opportunities to support their families.

The site and context of struggle for daily survival in a context of exclusion and intersectionality led to resistance and mobilization for liberation. Even after laws to abolish the practice in 1993, and extending the time limit several times by the government, the practice continued because of the deep-rooted caste and gender based intersectional exclusion in rural India. A grassroots movement was needed and in 2001, a civil society organization, ‘Jan Sahas’ spearheaded by Mr. Ashif Sheikh launched the national campaign for Dignity and Elimination of Manual Scavenging, which is considered a very innovative movement for advocacy with the Government at one end, and simultaneously conscientisation raising at the grassroots. According to the report of (National Campaign for Dignity and Eradication of Manual Scavenging, 2012–13), the campaign’s rights based, bottom up approach to end manual scavenging has proven to be an effective and comprehensive model where many women engaged in the practice of manual scavenging, took the decision and said, “I will not do this work from today. I condemn it” and thousands of women decided to get free from this practice, and those freed started spreading this message to other women, and became role model for other women.

This movement leading to the liberation of about 18,000, manual scavengers in 2013 led to the formation of women’s solidarity groups and the enterprise, ‘Dignity and Design’ for reclaiming dignity, rights and livelihoods security by the women freed from the practice of manual scavenging. In an interview with Singh and Chamola (n.d) for socialworkindia.in, Mr. Ashif Shaikh, the founder of Jan Sahas (out of which the social movement and the enterprise evolved) said that in 2013 after completing a nation-wide march as part of the campaign to abolish manual scavenging, he felt the need to also address other issues in the fight against caste-based exploitation. He further said, “If you are repeating the same stories all your life, you have either refused to understand the problems or you have failed to solve them.” An immediate need for the women who came out of the practice of manual scavenging was alternate livelihoods which would also allow them to live a life of

dignity. This is when D&D evolved as a garment making enterprise in 2014, focusing on women’s collectivization and solidarity through a skill based training programme for livelihood generation. The journey was not easy for women and they found it difficult to even learn stitching. This is revealed by one of the women from D&D who said, ‘we had throughout our lives only cleaned waste and had never touched a sewing machine earlier and thus learning to stitch and operating sewing machines seemed a herculean task for us’. The social value of D&D was therefore not only enhancing livelihoods security for women but it was also about dignity and rights through a journey of struggle, mobilisation, solidarities and consciousness raising, where women decided they would no longer tolerate the injustices meted out to them by a caste based and patriarchal society. It is more about bottom-up approach that was used here which is again the core reason for the progress made by the innovation. The journey of the women and the enterprise is therefore about moving from an instrumental understanding of enterprise and rural social innovation to a transformative understanding that attempted to deinstitutionalize caste and gender based hierarchies in rural India and works towards reinstitutionalizing participation, empowerment, dignity and rights. This also substantiates our conceptualization of rural social innovation, and the need for the solutions to emerge from an understanding of the complexities of the context and realities of people’s experiences and their participation in the same. The women from one of the garment producing centres in Madhya Pradesh said, ‘we have got a new hope now and a new life where we don’t have to wake up every morning and collect human waste and face abuses. Now, every morning we look forward to stitching garments, speaking to other women in the centre and earning a livelihood with dignity’. The journey continues and many challenges remain, including that of marketing of garments but the hope continues and so does the agency and aspiration of the women, thus highlighting an alternative conceptualization of rural social innovation.

5.2. Terra Vista Settlement’s agroecological transition and its organic chocolate to settle the young people in the rural community (Brazil)⁶

Terra Vista is a 29-year settlement located in the Arataca City, in Southern Bahia (Brazil).⁷ It results from the occupation of the Bela Vista Farm in 1992 by the Landless Workers Movement. It covers an area of 904 ha–313 ha of which being nature reserve (Santos et al., 2018) - and is a home for at about 60 families. Having initially built on a conventional technological approach, the Terra Vista Settlement changed its perspective, standing out in the region due to its ground-breaking production rationality which connects an agroecology-based approach to the idea of a networked community towards food, hydric and land sovereignty. The originality of Terra Vista Settlement (henceforth TVS) is to foster a far-reaching program of food sovereignty by re-signifying the sense of large-scale, usually attached to capitalist markets, in favour of rural and urban social movements. This rationale could not be uncoupled from a political dimension of community resilience and land democratisation, shared with counterparts from other movements in the region.

⁶ To analyse this initiative, the following methods were adopted: 1) site visit (2018); 2) participant observation on the Social Strategic Council Meetings at the Federal University of Southern Bahia (UFESB), where the Network of Peoples was actively involved (including the Terra Vista Settlement); 3) 10 online in-depth interviews (2021) among key actors in the Terra Vista Settlement and the Network of Peoples and key informants in Academia. The consented interviews are addressed as I1...I10 along the text.

⁷ Bahia is a federative unit in Brazil, situated in the northern region. Its population is of approximately 15 millions of people, according to the last census (2019). The monthly household income per capita is of 965 reais (at about 144,80 euros). Please see: <https://www.ibge.gov.br/en/cities-and-states/ba.html>.

The dissemination of agroecological principles among the rural people in the Terra Vista Settlement and the redistribution and reciprocity economic practices with other communities, by exchanging seeds and surpluses through the Network of Peoples, has made a large-scale food sovereignty program possible within a context of significant social and economic vulnerability. Terra Vista Settlement has also achieved striking rates of environmental recovery within the Atlantic Forest Biome, including a riparian buffer restoration of 92% and springs recovery of 80%.⁸ In social and economic terms, the diversification of production apart from the cocoa crop - fruits, vegetables, beans and even unconventional food plants (PANCs) - has not only laid the foundations for a healthy diet but also allowed peasants to both create synergies between different crops and benefit from cocoa and fruit processing to trade jams, liquors, handcrafted organic chocolate and other products. In addition, TVS has been concerned with old big issues in rural areas - gender imbalance in the economy, rural depopulation, and youth drain - and tabled creative and internal solutions through collective processes of decision and self-management to face challenges.

Since the 2000s, an agroecological transition has supported the settlement economy, the cocoa being cultivated under the “cabruca” system (Cacao Cabruca Agroforestry system of production). According to this system, cocoa is planted under the shade of selected native trees, in concert with the Atlantic Forest rhythms. The Terra Vista Settlement has been responsible for invigorating and disseminating this eco-friendly technology in other rural communities in the region. Social innovation stems from three main characteristics: the intertwining of social, economic, environmental and political dimensions around the cocoa crop; the sharing of agroecological principles and popular technologies of production with other links of the chain (the counterparts within the Network of Peoples) grounded on the idea of sovereignty for all; the capacity of making use of its political dimension towards more resilient communities to face structural problems in the region.

“I could mention here two relevant examples involving the Terra Vista Settlement, the Serra do Padeiro Community, and the Tupinambá Indigenous community - they are neighbours (...) One of these [examples] was the truckers’ strike 3, 4 years ago which shook Brazil. We had the worst supply crisis in the country (...) and the two communities weren’t affected (...) The ritual of exchanging criolla seeds [guaranteed] these communities to be almost totally self-sufficient (...) Another recent example is the pandemics. Both communities are passing through this process with a better degree of sanitary control than achieved by any other city in the surroundings (...) There have been no death in the Serra do Padeiro and in the Terra Vista Settlement. There was no hunger during the supply crisis” (I2, adapted version to English, henceforth AVE)

“We managed to introduce several seed banks (...) - corn, beans - they are living seed banks and not only seed banks kept in cold chambers (...) What is it? You grow a set of grains for food - roots, tubers, etc. - but, in addition, forest plants and crops as source for generating income in a way that they [the seeds] could be multiplied for all the other farmers. And germplasm bank - living seed banks - to make [the seeds] accessible for all the other communities in the region (...) We did it for the Pataxó community (...) They now count on a seed bank grown in agroforestry system (...) it was a restoration process (...) Since these seed banks are introduced, [people] are saving [seeds] and returning them to us. (I6, AVE)

Although agroecological transition is a key element to explain the economic and the environmental results brought by the settlement (increased revenue, productivity gains, soil recovering, and the amazing rate of reforestation), the mutual help among different social movements in the region seems to be the differentiating factor to both promote the peoples’ autonomy and the assumption of cooperation as the path towards a counter-hegemonic concept of scale, and to renew a

collective fight for the democratisation of the land. Without neglecting the relevance of having their products in an alternative market, the Terra Vista Settlement emphasises the need of maintaining the fight for land and territories. However, according to the community and worldwide leader at the settlement, Joelson Oliveira, the democratisation of the land is not to be a single purpose by landless workers or settled peasants but depends on the achievement of other autonomous communities through a cooperation model among different peoples in the region.

A key element for this proposal has been the creation of an alliance among different rural and urban communities. This collectivity has been named as the Network of Peoples (henceforth NP) and intentionally takes alliance as the most suitable model instead of a movement. It means to be available to learn from the differences and to respect the autonomy of each link of this chain. As argued by one of the interviewees who have a long-standing work with the TVS and the NP, the TVS can be understood as “an arena of multiple forms of dialogue”, giving rise “to a polyphonic form of organisation”, capable of “overcoming the usual class-based approach” (I2, AVE). If this polyphony might be taken as an ongoing exercise at the Terra Vista Settlement, this openness to the difference is embodied by the NP and plays a pivotal role in the fight for social and economic justice in the region.

The NP is an agroecological alliance which gathers landless rural workers, indigenous communities, Quilombola People, fishing and resource-extraction communities, *axé* people (Afro-Brazilian religious community) towards a multifaceted sovereignty. The NP has also presented itself as a black, indigenous and popular alliance (Aliança Preta, Indígena e Popular). This chain is characterised by horizontal forms of solidarity among its constituent parts. Regardless of the political dimension assumed by both the TVS and the NP, it distances from the political parties’ logics and strives for not being entangled in minor political/ideological differences. It is the long-standing commitment with social justice and land rights that is emphasised:

“We constitute a kind of alliance - an alliance of peoples, political organisations, territories, movements and struggles (...) The different is that the network is made of communities and not from a top-down approach (...) That is the community, the most elementary grouping, who decides to join the network (...) It is a networked process because of its exchanges - including mutual trade (...) For example, the Jefferson Popular Brigade (...) offers molasses, [fruit] pulp, manioc in return for fish and seafood from the municipality of Salina das Margaridas. Jefferson Popular Brigade gave more than a ton of food to Reaja [Political Movement “React or you will be killed” in relation to which there are different political approaches]. Reaja is the only organisation with a long-lasting work within the prisons, where a substantial proportion of black people has been arrested” (I4, AVE)

“If we are to forge alliance with MSTB - Bahia’s Homeless People Movement (...) we shouldn’t start a partnership debating it [our political differences] (...) MTSB has an occupation named Manuel Faustino located in a suburban area along the train line in Salvador [What is] the first problem you face when you occupy an urban area? The local power cuts off the water supply in order to prevent people from being there. They had to cross the road carrying water in buckets on their heads - women, children, the elderly people. What did we do from the very start? Joining MPA, a movement of small farmers, we built a 16-L water container [for] piping rainwater (...) They didn’t have water supply problems anymore (...) We start by doing necessary things as friends, counterparts. Then we can debate our differences (...) (I4, AVE)

This networked arrangement demonstrates a complex set of innovations, some of them more clearly identified as SI for being explicitly designed as community solutions towards better conditions of living. Others, however, challenges epistemological and theoretical

⁸ Information given by I5 and I6.

assumptions.

Technological and social/economic innovation Terra Vista Settlement has had an ambitious goal regarding the Atlantic Forest: the restoration of 200 000 ha of Atlantic Forest through cocoa crop under “cabruca system” as well as the implementation of additional 200 000 ha of agroforestry systems (both in process). Besides the soil restoration since 2000, which allowed peasants to treble the cocoa production in a 4-year period (I5) and bet on crop diversification and healthier diet, the TVS started producing its own organic chocolate. This chocolate, called as “rebel chocolate” due to its similarities with the ‘rebel coffee’ by Chiapas, has been produced by the youngsters at the School-Factory of Chocolate. Plants and crops organically grown are part of a settlement’s gender equity plan in economic terms: women have produced and traded fruit pulps, candies, liquors and herbal medicines, being responsible for the processing of plants and fruits. TVS recognizes that women have stayed ahead of the fight for the land against evictions and need to actively participate in production processes (I5).

Epistemological and political innovation. As they challenge some universalised perspectives, they should be taken as “theoretical agents” (I7). Key informants working with the settlement in different activities have stressed original characteristics usually neglected by academia: 1. the TVS’ different spatiality and territoriality grounded on a multi-level sovereignty which not only blur the boundaries between the rural and the urban but also evince the current central role of rural communities in far-reaching social changes (I1); 2. the relationship between nature and culture which is effectively reframed and challenged in its modern dichotomy, with “the life of the vegetation, of the animals, of waters” being considered as much relevant as the humans’ lives (I2); 3. the capacity of learning from and non-humans beings (eg. the ants) to foster eco-friendly handling processes (I1); 4. the capacity of stimulating other imageries and narratives on the fight for the land as the TVS naturally constitutes a kind of open-air museum (I3); 4. the materiality of the spiritual dimension which assumes a key role in the design of economic processes towards territorial development (I8).

6. Conclusion: engaging with intersectional knowledges and spaces for critical reflexivity and reflexive diversity in rural social innovation

This paper aimed at reimagining and broadening the scope of rural social innovation by interrogating the scope of concepts evoked in the debates on rural, rurality and social innovation. This is done, on one side, by emphasising the relevance of considering different rhythms, power constructions and temporalities in rural communities in contrast to the ones scheduled by development practitioners, funding programs for social intervention and academic research. On the other, we argue that these diverse groups and communities have their own knowledges emerging from their lifeworld and embedded in intersectionalities of caste, class, race, ethnicity, gender etc., and the need to recognise them as key to social innovation regardless of their scalability. This paper also intends to close gaps regarding the dialogue between rural studies and the feminist thought. By recalling some contributions by feminist rural geography and adding breakthrough research on Feminist Economics, we argue that the field of Social Innovation might benefit from a more intensive dialogue with feminist scholars, particularly in epistemological and methodological issues. In doing so, some discussions on topics such as poverty, social inequity, and agency could be deepened through a broader understanding of the economy and society, an intersectional perspective of local imbalances or methodological approaches to further improve the research on gender roles’ dynamics and some under-the-radar forms of agency in rural communities. Last but not least, we aimed to bring the epistemologies of the South to the debate on social innovation, discussing to what extent some concepts such as those of the ecology of temporalities and the ecology of productivities might be of help for more accuracy either in our academic analyses of this heterogeneous rural dimension or in the guidelines which have supported

public policies and practice towards rural development and rural innovation in different places. Following this, the social innovation perspective we have advocated here lies within the strong version (Ayob et al., 2016) that is committed to “values of solidarity, reciprocity and association” (Moulaert and MacCallum, 2019) and thus is an articulation of the social movement discourse that is also important in solidarity economy (Hulgård and Ferreira, 2019).

Thus, a nuanced understanding of the ecology of temporalities and the rhythms of rural life and the subjective knowledges, agency and challenges of rural actors from a feminist lens and the epistemologies of the South helps us in not only reimagining rural social innovation but also ways to repoliticise the same from an intersectional perspective. The key questions that emerges from this analysis includes: 1) how can we learn from rural contexts and actors and actor networks in rural areas to develop a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities in rural social innovation and 2) how can we reimagine social innovation in rural contexts, especially in the global South and South within North from individual centric innovations to collectives that address the rural dynamics and impacts public policy. Further, this points towards an understanding of processes of collectivization of marginalized groups within rural contexts and rural social innovation that can lead to re-institutionalization through newer actor networks leading to de-institutionalization of oppressive structures. A reimagination of social innovation therefore needs a critical reflexivity in both our theoretical and practice approaches that recognizes the critical intersectional spaces of power and marginalities within the rural contexts for conceptualising a pathway for rural social innovation and change and transformation. Accordingly, with this paper, we have tried to frame an approach to social innovation that captures better the lifeworld, livelihoods and aspirations of rural communities and rurality than those versions of social innovation that are top-down driven whether by external experts, development agencies or based upon generating aggregate changes in individual utility (Ayob et al., 2016). With our adoption of a postcolonial feminist perspective, including the important insights from intersectional analysis and epistemologies of the South, we have aimed at contributing to and developing further the so-called strong version of social innovation as mentioned by Ayob et al. (2016).

Our work can thus contribute to refine the arguments of people-centered social innovation (Banerjee, Carney and Hulgård, 2020) by understanding better how processes of collectivization can lead to new forms of re-institutionalization better equipped to respect diversities and understand the dynamics of power at play. Thus, with Moulaert and MacCallum (2019) we reserve social innovation to be an ethical approach to social change that aims at building community and society based on values of solidarity, reciprocity and association. Instead of repeating the claim that there is a lack of a common definition of social innovation, we suggest that there are at least four different discourses of social innovation (Hulgård and Ferreira, 2019) that all address people, places and policies in different ways. Among the four discourses only the social movement discourse structurally acknowledges both the necessity of civil society and social movements to influence the political process by concerted and collective action as also suggested in this paper when looking at the empirical evidence from the two examples. Robert Chambers (2008) beautifully summarizes that these new participatory and reflective frames or theories can lead to new eclectic, versatile and creative pluralism at the grassroots. In this article we have made the argument following Chambers for co-creating collective knowledges, and for which the attitude of the academicians, facilitators and innovators is equally important which includes mutual respect, humility, listening, sensitivity, courage, awareness, integrity, curiosity, playfulness, humour, originality and critical reflection. Thus, there is no social innovation, be it in rural or urban contexts, in the south or in the north, or in the south in the north if it does not engage with solidarity, reciprocity and association as suggested by Moulaert and MacCallum (2019) and the embedded intersectionalities as located within these contexts.

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