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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Protests, knowledge and agroecological social movements. An approach to the Argentine case from a decolonial perspective (2019-2023)

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ABSTRACT: This article analyzes the knowledge mobilized by agroecological social movements (ASMs) in Argentina between 2019 and 2023 to justify their opposition to agribusiness and to articulate alternative proposals for a socially, economically, and ecologically sustainable food system. Particularly, it examines the conceptual repertoires expressed in public mobilizations to understand how Argentine ASMs interpret agribusiness, sustainability, and social justice, and how these interpretations underpin political proposals advanced through protest. The study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining a systematic count of ASMs' public protests from 2019 to 2023 with a qualitative content analysis of press releases and organizational documents. The findings show that, through demands opposing extractive practices, advocating state support for agroecological projects, and calling for access to land, Argentine ASMs mobilize key conceptual repertoires that articulate both critiques of agribusiness and alternative proposals. These repertoires underpin specific political demands and, at times, integrate broader projects grounded in diverse knowledge systems. A decolonial lens illuminates how ASMs conceptualize their opposition to modern/colonial civilizing projects and construct locally grounded alternatives to global challenges. The article contributes to scholarship on political agroecology and social movements, and to dialogue between these fields.

KEYWORDS: Agroecology, conceptual framework, conflicts, demands, proposals

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1. Introduction

The currently hegemonic food system–agribusiness–faces a profound contradiction. While vital to human well-being, it simultaneously functions as one of the main drivers of climate change and environmental degradation. By undermining the very conditions that make agriculture, food security, and even life on Earth possible, agribusiness jeopardizes its own purpose (Gliessman 2015). Despite its technological capacity to feed the global population, only 30% of its production currently serves direct human consumption, with the remainder largely diverted to animal feed or biofuel exports (Altieri and Nicholls 2022; González 2025). Furthermore, intensive agrochemical use pollutes ecosystems and poses severe risks to human health (IPCC 2023; UNEP 2022).

In this context, agroecology has gained recognition as a viable alternative to agribusiness because it “works with, instead of against, natural ecosystems and support the wellbeing of people” (Gliessman, Mendez, Izzo and Engels 2023, 19; Wezel, Bellon, Doré, Fracis, Vallod and David 2009; Wezel, Herren, Kerr, Barrios, Gonçalves and Sinclair 2020; Rosset and Altieri 2018). However, the definition remains contested between two different approaches: 1) an institutional or conformist perspective grounded in natural sciences, which promotes agroecological practices to create a more sustainable industrial food system; and 2) a holistic, transformative, inter and transdisciplinary perspective, that integrates social and natural sciences, offering a radical transformation of food systems aimed at achieving both ecological sustainability and social justice—including equitable access to resources, rights and privileges related to food. The first approach is primarily advanced by international institutions like the FAO and the World Bank, along with governmental agencies. The second is promoted by social movements, civil society organizations, and scientific councils (Sachet, Coq, Cruz-Garcia, Francesconi, Bonin and Quintero 2021; Rosset and Altieri 2018).

Adopting the latter approach, this article examines the knowledge mobilized by agroecological social movements (ASMs) in Argentina from 2019 to 2023 to justify their opposition to agribusiness and articulate alternative proposals for a socially, economically, and ecologically sustainable food system. Here, knowledge is understood as a system composed of two interrelated components: first, the concepts and meanings—conceptual repertoires—that underpin social movements’ claims and practices; second, the techniques used to acquire, construct, and transmit this knowledge. This study focuses on the conceptual repertoires expressed in mobilizations to understand how Argentine ASMs interpret agribusiness, sustainability, and social justice, and how these repertoires support political proposals for alternative food systems through protests.

This study is relevant because it contributes to the literature on both political agroecology and social movements studies, and the dialogue between these fields. Since its emergence in the early 20th century, agroecology has been extensively studied as a science—focused on the ecological dynamics of agroecosystems—and as a set of practices—based on chemical-free farming methods. In the 1990s, agroecology gained traction as a social movement, offering a political framework to reimagining agriculture-society relations. In this study, ASMs are analytically treated as the people, organizations and networks seeking to transform food systems radically—from production to waste management—whose adverse effects disproportionately impact both rural and urban communities (Wezel et al. 2009; Giraldo 2024, 2022). To achieve this, they integrate ecological economic, cultural and social principles into agriculture.

Since the early 21st century, scholarship has increasingly analyzed agroecology as a social movement, emphasizing its political dimension (Sachet et al. 2021; Wezel et al. 2020). This focus is important because, while agroecological practices can enhance ecological sustainability, ASMs practices also seek to confront and

transform the power structures that perpetuate social inequalities within food system. Analyzing the political dimension of agroecology is therefore essential for understanding how this approach aims to achieve holistic ecological futures by reconfiguring food-people-ecosystem relations (Gliessman 2015). These inequalities include land access, displacement of rural and indigenous communities, food insecurity, the distance between producers and consumers, and the invisibility of women's roles and needs in food systems.

Within social movement studies, ecological practices in agriculture and struggles over land access have been extensively examined in peasant and rural studies, and Indigenous movements scholarship (Méndez and Gliessman 2002; Sevilla Guzmán 2002; Rosset and Martínez Torres 2016; van der Ploeg 2009; Escobar 2016). While these approaches occupy a consolidated place in social movements studies, as can be seen in major handbooks (Della Porta and Diani 2015; Rossi 2023; Almeida and Cordero 2015), agroecology movements are often subsumed within them rather than examined as distinct political actors organized explicitly around agroecological transformation.

Bridging agroecology scholarship with social movement studies allows for a more comprehensive understanding of agroecology's political goals within food systems (Holt-Giménez 2011; Holt Giménez and Shattuck 2011). This approach facilitates the examination of ASMs' claims, the action tactics they use to resist agribusiness, and their interactions with other actors who may enable or constrain their transformative objectives—including the State (Tilly et al. 2020; Tilly and Tarrow 2015). From a Latin American perspective, this framework also highlights the proactive and creative strategies ASMs employ to advance concrete proposals for sustainable food systems (Soto Pimentel, Reiri and Gradin 2024a).

Social movements studies in Latin American have contributed to understanding ASMs through analyses of their organizational structures, political strategies (e.g. Motta 2016; Wahren and García Guerreiro 2020), pedagogical practices (e.g. García and Figueroa 2021; Utter, White, Méndez and Morris 2021; Núñez and Navarro Heron 2021; Val and Rosset 2020) and feminist approaches (e.g. Calaça 2023; Siliprandi 2010; Siliprandi and Zuluaga 2014). While these contributions have advanced our understanding of agroecological movements, fewer studies have systematically examined how conceptual repertoires are articulated in public mobilizations, particularly in the Argentine context.

Building on the substantial literature about the political dimension of agroecology—particularly in Latin American scholarship—this article focuses on mapping the diversity of conceptual repertoires used by Argentine ASMs in mobilizations to justify their demands and proposals, and on analyzing how these repertoires connect with targets and action tactics. A comprehensive examination of full knowledge systems or knowledge-production practices would require a different empirical design and thus falls beyond the scope of the present dataset.

Methodologically, this study utilizes a mixed-methods approach to examine ASMs' knowledge through a systematic count of their public protests between 2019 and 2023, which constitutes key contexts to observe the articulation of the conceptual repertoires developed by the movements during their struggles (Soto Pimentel and Gradin 2023; Soto Pimentel et al. 2024a). The quantitative description is combined with a qualitative content analysis of press releases and organizational documents to deepen the understanding of the knowledge identified.

The decolonial perspective adopted here is particularly appropriate, as it focuses on the knowledge systems employed by movements to challenge modern/colonial projects that promise universal well-being while benefiting only a privileged minority (Lander 2020). This perspective represents a relevant contribution, since traditional social movement scholarship has prioritized identity and strategy over epistemological and

propositional dimensions (Soto Pimentel 2024; Soto Pimentel and Gradin 2024; Conway 2006; Della Porta and Diani 2015; Flórez Flórez 2015; Flórez Flórez and Olarte Olarte 2023).

The article proceeds as follows. First, we present the conceptual and methodological framework. Next, we analyze ASM-led protests in Argentina between 2019 and 2023, examining the demands through their knowledge systems—that is, the key concepts and meanings adopted by the movements. We conclude by discussing our findings and reflecting on how ASMs conceptualize their opposition to agribusiness and mobilize locally grounded alternatives to global challenges, challenging dominant paradigms through collective action.

2. Conceptual and methodological framework

2.1 Decolonialism, knowledge and agroecological social movements

As proposed by Flórez Flórez and Olarte Olarte (2023), decolonial perspectives defy dominant strands of social movement literature. This is particularly relevant for those analyses that employ a colonial approach, where the existence of distinct social movements in Latin America is questioned due to their perceived inability “to question the crisis of modernity and propose alternatives to it”—an idea that assumes Modernity has not fully taken root in the region (125). Colonial approaches typically evaluate regional struggles through a framework which states their supposed lack of comparison with the movements of northern countries, measuring them against a priori criteria, and characterizing them as anachronistic pre-modern organizations.

This conclusion often arises because a significant portion of Latin American social movements’ demands are material, rather than postmaterial or symbolic, and because many movements operate without full autonomy within the State to address their concerns. However, according to Flórez Flórez and Olarte Olarte (2023), this is not evidence that Modernity has not taken root in the region. Rather, modernization processes have unfolded in Latin America, but their development has been shaped by the persistence of colonial domination and unresolved social questions. Ignoring these particularities obscures the critiques and alternative proposals that Latin American social movements have advanced in response to the limits and contradictions of Modernity.

Alternatively, decolonial approaches offer conceptual tools to reframe these debates through dialogue with social movements rather than theorizing about them (Flórez Flórez and Olarte Olarte 2023). They make three proposals to decolonize social movements studies:

1) Reinterpreting Latin American trajectory as part of an ongoing Modernity marked by both continuity and rupture with colonial forms of domination, examining how these structures shape social movements demands and mobilization.

2) Recognizing Latin America as a space of epistemic agency where social movements are considered as knowledge producers that generate their own theory rather than merely serving as objects of analysis.

and 3) Developing knowledge through situated, collaborative engagements with movements via joint research and pedagogical practices.

This article focuses on the second proposal. It analyzes how agroecological social movements mobilize diverse forms of knowledge to contest modern/colonial projects, such as agribusiness, and their promises of universal well-being, which often exacerbate inequality and exclusion (Lander 2020). Contrary to perspectives

that dismiss movements' knowledge as mere belief systems opposing scientific rationality, decolonialism reveals the sophisticated spectrum of knowledge employed by them (Flórez Flórez and Olarte Olarte 2023). These encompass experiential, technical, and scientific modes of thinking cultivated along generations, as well as popular and formal education and the dialogues between activists, technicians, and researchers (Soto Pimentel 2023). This approach advocates for social science grounded in epistemic pluralism, creating academic spaces that legitimize alternative knowledge systems developed through centuries of resistance to modernity's civilizational project (Castro Gómez 2015). This is especially relevant as movement proposals offer concrete strategies for addressing contemporary ecological and food crises (Lander 2020).

Building on previous research, knowledge is understood here as a system–knowledge systems–compromising two elements. First, the concepts and their material-symbolic meanings–conceptual repertoires–that movements deploy to construct and justify their practices, which are typically aimed at political transformation (Soto Pimentel 2023; Soto Pimentel and Gradin 2023; Conway 2006). Second, knowledge systems include a set of strategies and methodologies for acquiring, producing and transmitting these concepts and meanings. These strategies encompass popular education methodologies, intergenerational or peer to peer knowledge transmission, instruction through formal or informal institutions, and dialogues among technicians, academics, and farmers. I define knowledge systems as the epistemological dimension of social movements, expressed in a variety of practices, including protests, organizational structures, internal dynamics, and their interactions with the political system (Soto Pimentel 2023, 2024).

For the purposes of this article, a decolonial analysis of the conceptual repertoires mobilized by ASMs proceeds as follows. For example, when an agroecological movement organizes a mobilization to demand land access, we examine at least:

- 1) The material means of the claim–property rights and the accessibility to the means of production (land, seeds, tools, etc.)–, as well as the symbolic–cultural dimensions of identity related to land (Simmons 2014).
- 2) Its conceptual articulations with other knowledge systems to design a broader political proposal, such as a land access bill.
- 3) The power structures and dominant actors contested through these framings.

Agroecological social movements are defined as organizations and collectives operating across diverse urban and rural spaces that seek to contest and radically transform the hegemony of agribusiness within the agrifood system (Giraldo 2024; Wezel et al. 2009). As grassroots political actors, they address distributive injustice, environmental degradation, food insecurity, and rural-urban impoverishment while affirming the value of rural knowledge systems and identity, cultural practices, and rights over seeds (Giraldo 2024, 2022; Wezel et al. 2020).

Their praxis centers primarily on three interconnected principles:

Agroecology, a holistic approach integrating social, economic, ecological and political dimensions, combining technical-agronomic and traditional knowledge to develop locally adapted food systems, attending climatic, cultural, and territorial particularities, encompassing the academia, technicians and also indigenous, rural and other subaltern actors (Altieri 2015; Altieri and Nicholls 2022; Pástor Pasmíño et al. 2017).

Food sovereignty, or the right of peoples to define and control their food systems, first articulated by La Vía Campesina (1996), as the first bottom-up proposal linking rural development and hunger eradication, through enforcing access to culturally appropriate, nutritious, and sustainably produced food (Collado, Soler Montiel and Rivera Ferre 2010; Nyéléni, 2007; Loveday Brown, 2013).

Access to land, which is a central demand among Latin American agroecological social movements, addressing inequality, particularly affecting women (Anseeuw and Baldinelli 2020; OXFAM 2016; UN Women 2020).

2.2 Methodology

This article identifies the knowledge mobilized by agroecological social movements (ASMs) to challenge the hegemony of agribusiness, analyzing the conceptual repertoires expressed during public protests between 2019 and 2023. Argentina represents a significant case study because while existing literature on Latin American ASMs has focused on emblematic cases of “agroecological revolution” in Brazil, Cuba, Central America, Mexico, and the Andean region, the Southern Cone remains understudied (Altieri and Toledo 2011; Toledo 2012). The selected period is also relevant as it marks a notable political shift with the election of a populist coalition government following Mauricio Macri’s neoliberal administration (2015-2019).

The Alberto Fernández administration (2019-2023) implemented a policy of non-repression toward social movements and fostered collaborative relationships with them. The government incorporated movement leaders into official positions and involved grassroots members in participatory policymaking to address social crises. This shift created more favorable conditions for recognizing social movement demands and incorporating them into public policy agendas. This political opportunity structure facilitated clearer articulation of movement proposals in policy discussions, thereby making their knowledge production processes more visible—a central focus of this study.

Analyzing knowledge rather than state-movement relations remains methodologically appropriate because, despite this collaboration with the government, movements continued with their public mobilization in response to rising inflation and economic instability during this period. Consequently, these conflicts reveal demands that extend beyond government-channeled negotiations. Indeed, protest demonstrations frequently criticized executive leadership while demanding greater state support to ensure the long-term viability of movement-led crisis solutions (Soto Pimentel et al. 2024a; Soto Pimentel and Gradin 2023).

To examine the knowledge employed by ASMs between 2019 and 2023, this study analyzes protest dynamics during this period. As already said, public mobilizations are essential to this analysis because they express conceptual repertoires underlying the movements’ political objectives. Central to this analysis is examining both the substantive claims expressed in protest demands and whether they had a reactive or proactive component reflected in the absence or manifestation of a project solution—such as a bill project. Since conceptual repertoires encompass both material and symbolic dimensions, the specific action tactic employed become crucial for interpreting them, as some of these expressions are performative non-conventional actions—for example, a protest demanding more state resources against the closing of a public school, could be expressed with a “collective hug” instead of a parade, expressing the urgency to protect and take care of education. The following sections elaborate this analytical framework.

The research employs a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative and quantitative tools in a triangulation strategy, particularly suited to identifying concepts and meanings attributed to the actor’s demands and proposals (Creswell and Creswell 2018).

The first phase of analysis involved drawing the data sample on ASMs political actions from FLACSO’s Observatory of Public Policies and Structural Reform, an Argentina’s public protest database (Soto Pimentel, Reiri and Gradin 2024b). Case selection required filtering for ASM-led actions and verifying through secondary sources (webpages and documents of the organizations) whether groups met these criteria:

- Explicit opposition to agribusiness hegemony to move forward sustainable food systems.
- Commitment to ecologically, socially, economically, and culturally sustainable production models (implementation of agroecological practices, biodiversity and nature conservation).
- Recognition of peasants as key actors in addressing hunger, malnutrition, and ecological degradation.
- Land access demands framed within agroecology or food sovereignty principles.

The second phase of the analysis provides a quantitative description of the protests through a systematic count of mobilizations, organized according to the following dimensions.

- The type of agroecological movement (following Giraldo 2024):
 - Agroecologies of return, when agroecology is a response to economic crises, ecological impacts of monoculture, natural disasters, or deterioration of health.
 - Emerging agroecologies, when agroecology emerges as novel forms that previously did not exist, which represent new forms of collective struggle on issues like rural-urban migration, urban agroecology, local food networks, re-peasantization and new feminist rural or non-rural agroecology.
 - Historical agroecologies, when agroecology are traditional agricultural practices with vernacular organizational structures, and their developers are creators of agroecological knowledge, and custodians of agrobiodiversity and biocultural heritage.
- The characteristics of the protests (following Soto Pimentel, Reiri and Gradin 2024c):
 - Demand—the substantive claim articulated by protest participants.
 - Target—the institutional recipient of the demand (whether government body, private entity, or individual).
 - Type of collective action—classified as: reactive, when the protest is a response to violations of established rights by a governmental, private, or civil society actor; or proactive, when the protest introduces new demands or solutions developed by the movement into public discourse.
 - Action tactic—the specific modes of public expression employed.
 - Repression—the occurrence or absence of state-sanctioned violence during the protest event.

Among these variables, demand, type of collective action and action tactic prove particularly relevant to identify the knowledge systems produced by ASMs. The demand variable is a first clue of conceptual repertoires underlying movement claims, while the type of collective action indicates whether these claims incorporate one or more knowledge systems articulated in an innovation or project to solve a problem. The action tactic, as we previously mention, facilitates interpretation of the material and symbolic dimensions of these concepts.

The third analytical phase deeply examines the material and symbolic meanings of the conceptual repertoires identified and the power structures they seek to challenge. To answer these questions, I conducted a content analysis of press releases and movement-authored documents produced during protest events. This section was organized around the key concepts of the theoretical framework: knowledge, agroecological social movements, agroecology, food sovereignty, and access to land.

3. Knowledge and protests in Argentina's agroecological social movements (2019-2023)

3.1 Conflict dynamics in agroecological social movements

The systematized data reveal that ASMs organized 20 of the 1,138 recorded protests between December 2019 and December 2023. While representing only 1.76% of total protests events, ASMs belonged to the broader category of social movements, which collectively accounted for 43% of all registered conflicts during this period (Soto Pimentel et al. 2024a).

Type of agroecological social movement

The analysis of these 20 protests identified two different types of ASMs according to their focus: Agroecologies of Return (18 cases) and Historical Agroecologies (2 cases).

The category Agroecologies of Return comprises movements that adopted agroecology into their practices in response to Argentina's successive economic crises, particularly following the collapse of the neoliberal economic model in 2001. Among these organizations, the Unión de Trabajadores de la Economía Popular (UTEP, Popular Economy Workers Union) and the Movimiento de Trabajadores Excluidos (MTE, Excluded Workers Movement) emerged from the popular economy sector in the early 21st century. These movements represented workers excluded from the formal labor market due to the 1990s neoliberal reforms, including the privatization of public companies and market liberalization policies. These workers developed their own means of economic subsistence through informal activities such as waste collection. Guided by the slogan "Tierra, techo y trabajo" ("Land, Housing, and Work"), they expanded their political agenda by incorporating new sectors, including the rural and fishing workers. This decision allowed them to join forces with peasant and indigenous communities in their struggles for agroecology, food sovereignty, and access to land.

Founded in 2010, the Unión de Trabajadores de la Tierra (UTT, Land Workers Union) organizes horticultural producers of fruits, vegetables, grains, and dairy products who struggle to survive under agribusiness pressures. Agroecological practices emerged within this movement as a strategy to achieve economic autonomy, and secure access to family health outside agrochemical activities. It also represented a response to the inflated costs of seeds and fertilizers controlled by corporate agribusiness. The UTT gained recognition for its *verdurazos*—public demonstrations in urban centers where farmers sell affordable, healthy food to showcase the viability of agroecological production.

In the category of agroecologies of return, Giraldo (2024) also includes two movements that actively participated in the protests during this period. "La Vía Campesina" (founded in 1993, The Peasant Way)—an international movement that unites agricultural workers worldwide to defend peasant agriculture and promote food sovereignty—, and the "Coordinadora Latinoamericana de Organizaciones del Campo" (CLOC, Latin American Federation of Rural Organizations)—a regional alliance of Latin American and Caribbean peasants, indigenous, and Afro-descendant organizations that advocates for territorial rights and continental food sovereignty.

Historical Agroecologies encompass movements with long-standing agroecological practices transmitted across generations. These include recently established movements whose members, nevertheless, draw upon inherited agroecological knowledge. Among others, the "Movimiento de Mujeres Indígenas por el Buen Vivir"

(Movement of Indigenous Women for Good Living), founded in 2012, whose members belong to the 36 indigenous nations of Argentina. And the “Unión de Trabajadores Rurales Sin Tierra” (UST, Landless Rural Workers Union), established in 2001 by farmers and engineers to emphasize the centrality of land ownership for the sustainability of peasant livelihoods (Gómez 2020; Jurado 2020), committed to the struggle for food sovereignty and comprehensive agrarian reform.

Target of the protest in ASMs

Among the ASMs analyzed, 45% addressed the National Congress demanding the approval of the Bill for Access to Land and the Bill for Artisanal Fishing—both of which were developed with the collaboration of ASMs’. Another 35% of protests addressed the executive power, particularly the national government, which had previously expressed support for these legislative initiatives and for agroecological social movements. Private corporations were the focus of 15% of the protests, primarily in response to the negative environmental impacts of their extractive activities. Meanwhile, only 5% of protests were directed at civil society actors, most notably the powerful Etchevehere family, in connection to the Proyecto Artigas—a campaign advocating for the establishment of agroecological colonies. This project will be explained in the next section.

Central demands in protests organized by ASMs

The most prevalent demand expressed by ASMs (65%) was securing access to land for Indigenous and peasant communities, which is regarded as a necessary condition for agroecological production. This claim was expressed through mobilizations in support of the Proyecto Artigas and the Access to Land Bill—this Bill will be explained in the next section.

A secondary set of demands (25%) opposed extractive activities and its environmental consequences, such as water scarcity and the forceful privatization of terrestrial and marine territories. Two protests (10%) called for state support for the development of agroecology, including the expropriation of the Vicentín grain export company and the protection of the Agroecological School in Mendoza from the threat of closure. Both cases, which aim to strengthen agroecology, are discussed in the next section.

Type of collective action in protests organized by ASMs

In terms of collective action typology (Soto Pimentel et al. 2024a; Tilly 1978), 75% of protests led by ASMs were proactive in nature. These introduced previously unrecognized issues into the public discourse, articulating novel demands or proposing concrete solutions. This category includes actions that highlighted the environmental impacts of extractive industries on local territories, advocated for the legislative proposals mentioned earlier, and promoted alternative agroecological initiatives such as the colonies established through Proyecto Artigas.

The remaining 25% constituted reactive protests, responding to immediate threats or specific events like the potential closure of the Agroecological School in Mendoza or the expropriation of Vicentín.

This predominance of proactive actions among ASM-led protests stands in marked contrast to patterns observed in the broader protest database, where only 17% of actions were proactive while 83% were reactive.

Action tactics in protests organized by ASMs and repression

As to their action tactics, the most frequent were the symbolic protests (50%). These tactics aim to increase visibility for movement demands through unconventional actions performed in public spaces. Among ASMs, such actions included “verdurazos”, “pescadazos”, and “canoazos”: events in which farmers and fishers sold food products at reduced prices in urban areas, showcasing the feasibility of producing healthy, accessible food through agroecological methods.

Other symbolic actions included a “banderazo”, a demonstration in which participants waved the Argentine flag, in support of the expropriation of the Vicentín grain export company. And the organization of public classes to protest the potential closure of the Peasant School of Agroecology in Mendoza.

Finally, other action tactics regarding protests included mobilizations (30%), public spaces occupations (10%), concentrations (5%), and road blockades (5%).

This strong preference for symbolic action sets ASMs apart from other actors during the same period, where mobilizations (37%), concentrations (17%), and strikes (14%) were the most common protest forms, while symbolic actions accounted for only 12%.

Regarding repression, only one out of the 20 protests involving ASMs encountered a violent response, a rate (5%) similar to the national average (8%) and likely attributable to the national administration’s policy of non-repression toward social protest.

3.2 Argentina’s ASMs demands, knowledge and proposals

Argentine agroecological social movements articulated a set of conceptual repertoires through their mobilizations against extractive agribusiness. This repertoire was expressed in three central political demands raised during protests: state support for agroecological projects, opposition to extractive practices, and access to land. As outlined in the theoretical framework, agroecology, food sovereignty, and land access are core principles of ASMs. Thus, we begin with a conceptual examination of how these movements articulate these principles within the aforementioned demands. Then, we identify additional conceptual repertoires and examine whether they are integrated into broader political projects or policy proposals. A summary of the three most frequent demands adopted during these protests is presented in Table 1, including relevant cases related to them, conceptual repertoires mobilized, and their connections to specific proposals or projects, where applicable.

State support for agroecology projects

As Table 1 shows two protest cases were aligned with demands for greater state support for the development of agroecology according to the analyzed data.

First, the national *banderazo*—a protest organized on June 24, 2020 by the “Unión de Trabajadores de la Economía Popular” (UTEPE), the “Coordinadora Latinoamericana de Organizaciones Campesinas” (CLOC), and “La Vía Campesina” (LVC), that sought to demand the expropriation of the Vicentín, a major agroexport cereal company. This action supported the national government’s intentions to prevent the company’s bankruptcy, and its potential negative consequences for the provincial economies, as well as to block its acquisition by a foreign company. The mobilization countered a separate *banderazo*, previously organized by

agricultural groups and residents opposed to the expropriation, which emphasized Vicentín's role in the regional labor market (Press release, 2020).

The ASMs demands included the distribution of 20,000 to 30,000 hectares of land to farmers, local producers, and communities by the government, to produce healthy, high-quality food, to ensure access across all social sectors, and also to stimulate the economy, and promote territorial decentralization (Gringo Castro 2020 cited in Dinatale 2020).

Three central concepts emerge from this case: expropriation, agroecology, and food sovereignty. Expropriation is framed not merely as a legal or administrative tool but rather as a strategic mechanism for developing productive practices aligned with agroecological principles and food sovereignty. ASMs characterizes agroecology as both a “way of life” rooted in community relationships and as a practical, indispensable tool for advancing food sovereignty and dismantling polluting production models (UTEP, CLOC, LVC 2020). These practices are seen as central to social justice, as they enable “the production, distribution, and marketing of healthy, safe, and sovereign foods that ensure access for dispossessed popular majorities” (UTEP, CLOC, LVC 2020).

The organizations proposed specific actions to be implemented after land redistribution: a) the creation of mixed farms alongside planned and federal industrialization of rural areas; b) the prioritization of local production to satisfy domestic consumption and market demand while promoting fair trade; c) the designation of key food-producing sectors as public interest activities to address food crisis, and d) the establishment of a state-owned company to regulate domestic food prices (SS.AA 2020).

The second protest occurred on December 23, 2022, in Mendoza, when the educational community of the Rural School of Agroecology, coordinated by the “Unión de Trabajadores Rurales sin Tierra” (UST), organized public classes to protest the potential closure of the institution. The protest was directed at the General Board of Schools of the province, which had intended to discontinue the salary agreement with the school.

Two knowledge transmission strategies emerge here: the school ITSELF and its “alternation” teaching methodology. The school had operated for over eleven years, specializing in training rural educators in agroecology. Its mission and significance were powerfully captured by its director during a graduation ceremony: “Here stand 35 new teachers, 35 sunflowers. Sunflowers are persistent, they grow in saline soils, and they not only germinate but also flourish. These sunflowers do not produce one seed but millions. I am sure that you will multiply these seeds, sowing not only transformative knowledge for society but also social justice” (Greco 2022 cited in Solana 2022).

The institution's pedagogical approach, rooted in the “alternation” methodology requires students to reside at the school for one week to ten days each month, where they engage in action research and participatory learning; then, they spend the remaining days applying their knowledge in their communities through workshops and fieldwork (Solana 2022; Universidad de Cuyo 2013). According to UST, this model enables rural residents to pursue education without abandoning agricultural work (UST 2022 cited in Solana 2022).

Opposition to extractive practices

The second category of demands concerns opposition to extractivism. As Table 1 shows three protests cases illustrate how ASMs and allied organizations articulate their collective knowledge and resistance practices regarding this issue.

Table 1 - Argentina’s Agroecological Social Movements’ Demands and Knowledge

<i>Demand</i>	<i>Case Protest</i>	<i>Conceptual repertoires</i>	<i>In which projects are used?</i>
State support for the development of agroecology	Expropriation of Vicentín	expropriation, agroecology, food sovereignty	Agroecological practices
Against extractivism	World Water Day	water, extractivism, climate crisis	Not applicable
	Women Against Terracide	Terracide	Not applicable
Access to land	Artisanal fishermen	Artisanal fishing, food sovereignty, agribusiness, labor conditions	Artisanal fishing Bill project
	Access to land	Public credit trust fund, access to land, food security and sovereignty	Access to land bill project
	Etchevere Family	“Casa Nueva”- Agribusiness, sustainable agricultural mode - agroecology	Artigas project

Source: Data from Soto Pimentel, Gradin and Reiri (2024b)

The first case occurred on March 22, 2021, when the “Unión de Trabajadores de la Tierra” (UTT) participated in a protest organized by environmental movements to commemorate World Water Day. The action took the form of a “verdurazo” held outside the National Congress, where vegetables harvested in the Buenos Aires Province were distributed. The protest symbolically advocated for the implementation of public policies ensuring access to clean water and restricting extractive activities that threaten its availability (Press release, 2021).

In this protest, the concept of water is central: it is essential for agricultural production, including livestock farming of goats, sheep, and pigs. Its scarcity results from extractive activities like dam-building, mega-mining, and agribusiness, which not only overexploit water resources but also exacerbate climate change, leading to droughts, excessive snowfall, and flooding. This phenomenon impacts rural livelihoods and farming systems, reduces productivity and increases livestock diseases (Puma 2021 cited in Press release 2021). Data submitted to the United Nations by the UTT, and other organizations indicate that 13% of Argentina’s population lack access to drinking water. In rural areas, this scarcity poses significant risks to food security, as families rely on self-production of crops and animal husbandry; and it introduces severe accessibility challenges—rural residents may pay up to eight times more than urban populations for water or must walk up to six hours daily to retrieve unsafe water for household use (Informe Relatoría 2020).

The second protest took place between March 17 and May 22, 2021, when the “Movimiento de Mujeres Indígenas por el Buen Vivir” organized a plurinational march beginning from multiple provinces and converging at the National Congress in Buenos Aires. The protest’s objective was to denounce “terracide”—the first key concept identified—, and to demand accountability from various actors operating in complicity with state institutions (Redacción Clarín 2021).

The concept of terracide refers to the systematic extermination of all forms of life on Earth, including tangible and spiritual ecosystems understood as Pachamama or Mapu (Movimiento de Mujeres Indígenas por el Buen Vivir 2022 cited in Press release 2022). This notion highlights the negative impacts of extractive industries such as forestry and mining, which deplete water sources, destroy forests, pollute ecosystems, and poison the environment (Movimiento de Mujeres Indígenas por el Buen Vivir 2022).

The concept also calls for reparations for indigenous women, recognizing them as legitimate protectors of territories and natural environments, who must not be criminalized or judicialized (Curia 2021 cited in Alderete and Pardo 2021). This movement seeks international recognition of terracide as a crime against nature and humanity, along with the prosecution and conviction of those responsible (Movimiento de Mujeres Indígenas por el Buen Vivir 2022 cited in Press Release 2022).

The third case occurred on May 11 and May 26, 2022 when artisanal fishers from the UTEP organized two high-profile protests: a “pescadazos” and a “canoazos”. During these actions, they sold fresh fish at affordable prices to support a draft bill aimed to secure state support for artisanal fishing, considered to be a sustainable and dignified livelihood. According to Matías, a member of the organization, the protest’s objective was to demonstrate that “we are workers, that we work in the popular economy, and that we can lower food prices if the State supports us” (Casimir 2021 cited in Vales 2021).

This case’s key concepts are embedded in the bill titled Regulatory Framework for Artisanal Fishing in the Inter-Jurisdictional Rainwater and Lake Waters of the Argentine Republic, which was drafted and submitted to the National Congress by a deputy affiliated with UTEP. The first concept is artisanal fishing, defined as a sustainable economic activity relevant for the environment, as well as a cultural and identity trait that guarantees nutritious food for rural families.

Given sufficient state support, many rural and indigenous communities for whom artisanal fishing represents their main source of food and income, could contribute significantly to national food security amid ongoing economic and inflationary crises. Moreover, artisanal fishing constitutes a way of life, and a cultural tradition passed down through generations, creating a dialectical relationship between the popular economy, environmental management and identity (Artisanal Fishing Draft Bill).

Indeed, small-scale fishing activities and the use of sustainable fishing gear ensure the long-term viability of resources and environmental conservation. As stated in the proposal, artisanal fishermen are integral to the territory, the rivers, and the environment. They protect and take care of them because they depend on their existence for their own sustenance and livelihoods. The environment represents where they develop, grow their food, raise their families, and maintain their traditions (Artisanal Fishing Draft Bill).

Artisanal fishing emerges as an alternative to neoliberal food systems, which is a third concept articulated in the bill. The neoliberal food systems prioritize international trade over nutritional needs and convert food “into a commodity imported and exported, dependent on chemical inputs” (Artisanal Fishing Draft Bill). By contrast, artisanal fishing represents a strategic response to the concurrent food, financial, and climate crises caused by intensive, large-scale agricultural production dependent on chemical inputs and dominated by multinational corporations.

Consequently, it relates to a fourth concept: food sovereignty, defined as the “right of people to access sufficient, nutritious, and healthy food, produced through ecological and culturally appropriate methods, and their right to define and govern their food systems at local and national levels through equitable, sovereign, and environmentally sustainable means” (Artisanal Fishing Draft Bill). This vision extends to urban populations, emphasizing the development of short food supply chains, localized production, and enhanced connections between producers and consumers, as it is outlined in the bill.

A fifth concept addressed in the proposal concerns labor conditions, stemming from the recognition of the sector's precarity. It encompasses fair pricing, infrastructure development—including fishing terminals and cold storage facilities—, state-regulated purchases and ensure profit margins, and a simplified registration system for legalizing artisanal fishers' work to prevent product confiscation. These measures collectively aim to formalize the sector while preserving its social and ecological functions, raising awareness of fisher's culture, and fostering their participation in policymaking.

The bill is grounded in international agreements on the right to food and food security ratified by Argentina, particularly those promoted by the FAO, the United Nations, and the Sustainable Development Goals, which are likewise incorporated in the bill.

Access to Land

Access to land constitutes the core demand articulated by Argentina's ASMs, accounting for 65% of all protests. It is expressed through two emblematic initiatives, as it can be seen at Table 1: mobilizations in support of the Access to Land Bill, and the actions promoting the Artigas Project.

The first case is led primarily by the UTT, which conducted a series of symbolic protest actions between 2021 and 2022, including "verdurazos" and "feriazos", outside the National Congress to advocate for the bill's approval. Although originally introduced to the legislature in 2016, and subsequently reintroduced in 2018 and 2020, the bill has yet to be passed. Nevertheless, it has garnered support from national deputies across various parties and received endorsement from high-ranking officials at both national and provincial levels.

Access to land is a central notion introduced by the bill titled Creation of the Public Credit Trust Fund for Family Agriculture (CREPAF/FONDO), encompassing several dimensions. First, it refers to the decline of small-scale farming units and land concentration, providing data on precarious land tenure conditions among family farmers—even though they produce most of the food consumed locally, they lack land titles, and work under abusive rental conditions, or amid severe economic and health vulnerabilities.

In this context, access to land is equated to the right to live and produce with dignity, since land represents not only a productive resource but also a home. The bill emphasizes the social dimension of land, as ownership facilitates the provision of fresh and healthy food to a wider population. This is due to family agriculture being organized around principles that contrast with those of agribusiness, which treats food as a commodity distributed according to purchasing power rather than human need (Access to Land Bill).

To ensure these proposals' feasibility, the UTT introduced a second core concept: the Public Credit Trust Fund for Family Agriculture (CREPAF)—a financing mechanism for acquiring rural properties, housing, and land for agricultural families. The fund is intended to: 1) support the development of agricultural colonies and community projects that facilitate access to land and family housing; 2) enable the purchase of private lands; 3) provide mortgage loans for land and house acquisition or housing improvement for vulnerable families; and 4) finance infrastructure and other investments that promote rural settlements and permanence.

Through the approval of this bill, proponents hope to achieve:

- 1) The recognition of the peasant family's labor.
- 2) A collective advance toward food sovereignty, understood as "the right of people, communities, and countries to define their own agricultural, labor, fishing, food, and land policies in ways that are ecologically, socially, economically, and culturally appropriate to their unique circumstances" (Access to Land Bill).
- 3) The realization of the four dimensions of food security as defined by the FAO:

Availability—as family farming produces food for human consumption rather than environmentally damaging commodities.

Access—as family farming promotes short supply chains, reduces costs and increases proximity between producers and consumers.

Utilization—as land access enables the cultivation of fruits and vegetables, improving dietary diversity and health, while also providing access to clean water and sanitary living conditions.

Stability—as secure land tenure allows small producers to engage in their life across generations, ensuring long-term sustainability.

The second case focuses on the “Proyecto Artigas”, which gained public attention in October 2020. The “Movimiento de Trabajadores Excluidos” (MTE) and other civil society organizations mobilized in support of this initiative. The “Proyecto Artigas” emerged during a high-profile inheritance dispute involving the Etchevehere family, prominent landowners, in Entre Ríos Province. Dolores Etchevehere, family’s only daughter, publicly donated part of her land to the movement for the establishment of agroecological colonies, framing this act as an historical reparation for those affected by her family’s legacy (Dolores Etchevehere 2020 cited in Risso 2020).

This donation enabled farmers to reclaim “Casa Nueva”, a site that the MTE symbolically framed as the embodiment of agribusiness—a model associated with land concentration, environmental degradation, agrochemical contamination, and peasant displacement.

In contrast, the “Proyecto Artigas” aimed to establish a sustainable agricultural model, defined as a system for producing poultry, pork, vegetables, livestock, and cereals, respecting Mother Earth and protecting the rights of peasant families (MTE 2020 cited in Risso 2020).

Agroecological production commenced immediately, focusing on vegetables cultivation, livestock rearing, and collective food production. However, the experience proved short-lived. Within two weeks, project participants were besieged and harassed by representatives of the agro-industrial sector and the “Sociedad Rural” from Entre Ríos, who opposed the initiative and obstructed access to the property. This case reveals the violent resistance frequently encountered when challenging the dominant agro-industrial paradigm through land reclamation and alternative models.

4. Discussion

This article analyzed agroecological social movements in Argentina from a decolonial perspective, highlighting the conceptual repertoires that underpin their proposals for sustainable food systems and their resistance strategies. Drawing on a mixed-methods approach, it examined protests held between 2019 and 2023, alongside press releases and organizational documents, to identify the conceptual repertoires mobilized by ASMs.

The quantitative results indicate that the ASMs’ protest dynamics exhibit distinct characteristics, which suggests a strong orientation toward articulating and communicating conceptual repertoires rather than merely counting participation. First, fifty percent of ASMs-led protests involved proactive collective actions, compared to only 17% in the general protest sample from the same period. In this type of collective action, ASMs were able to present agroecological project proposals grounded in the articulation of diverse conceptual repertoires. Second, symbolic actions constituted 50% of ASMs’ protests, whereas such repertoires accounted

for less than 12% in the overall sample. The relevance of this tactic lies in its capacity to enable ASMs to express the symbolic meanings embedded in their conceptual repertoires.

This study examined the three main demands expressed in ASMs' protests to further explore the knowledge they mobilize: state support for agroecology projects, opposition to extractivism, and access to land. The analysis aimed to uncover the conceptual repertoires underlying these demands, as well as their potential integration with other knowledge systems in broader projects or political proposals.

The study examined the ASMs' three core principles—agroecology, food sovereignty, and land access—as reflected in their primary demands. Qualitative findings showed that their conceptual repertoires were mainly associated with land access, highlighting its central role in the agroecological transition. A key finding is that, although agroecology, food sovereignty, and land access are central principles guiding ASMs, their deployment in protests varies according to local and territorial concerns. This selective articulation reflects the movements' ability to adapt conceptual repertoires to specific struggles, demonstrating how knowledge is situated, contextual, and responsive to concrete social and ecological challenges. As Conway (2006, 9) argues, knowledge “is grounded in activist practice; it is partial and situated, arising from concrete engagement in social struggle and embedded in specific times and places”.

Besides the core concepts of agroecology, food sovereignty and access to land, ASMs mobilize additional conceptual repertoires to articulate both critiques and alternative visions to extractive agricultural models—what Motta (2016) refers to as “controversies around agribusiness” and Giraldo (2024) describes as “life projects”. Key terms such as terracing, water, artisanal fishing, and alternative development function as complementary concepts to frame and justify counter-proposals to extractivism and industrial agricultural models. Extractivism and agroindustry are frequently criticized for polluting ecosystems, harming human health, concentrating land ownership, destroying ecosystems, and displacing small-scale producers.

The conceptual repertoires articulated in ASMs' protests operate on multiple levels of complexity. They underpin specific demands by incorporating both material and symbolic dimensions, and at times they integrated broader projects drawing on concepts and evidence from other knowledge domains. For example, to support legislative initiatives, ASMs mobilize knowledge grounded in their own experiences and way of life, supplemented by data on land concentration and water access, as well as international and national legal and constitutional principles that safeguard rights to habitat and food security.

This strategic use of diverse conceptual repertoires demonstrates ASMs capacity to deploy a sophisticated range of knowledge that transcends the opposition between rational or belief-based systems. It also reflects their effort to obtain legitimacy to participate in academic and policy fields from which they are often excluded.

Furthermore, these conceptual repertoires carry symbolic and affective meaning—for instance, land and fishing represent not merely resources but ways of life and cultural identity. This knowledge also has a material dimension, encompassing food production methods, necessary tools, and distribution channels that promote food sovereignty and environmental management.

As Conway (2006, 1) argues, the knowledge of social movements is often tacit, practical, and unsystematized. Nevertheless, examining their conceptual repertoires allows us to understand how this knowledge is articulated to promote and advance emancipatory policies. Our findings indicate that agroecological movements employ diverse conceptual repertoires to link concrete food production practices with broader sustainability initiatives, providing an epistemological approach aimed at transforming the food system for producers, consumers, and the planet alike.

As a result, a decolonial approach as the one proposed in this article is particularly suited to exploring the epistemological dimension of social movements. It foregrounds the analysis of knowledge, but also:

1) It highlights how social movements articulate diverse conceptual repertoires in opposition to modern/colonial civilizational models, such as agribusiness, demonstrating their proactive capacity to develop alternatives. Such repertoires allow ASMs to identify both new and longstanding problems and to propose concrete solutions for transforming inequalities within the food system.

2) As demonstrated by decolonial scholars, this analytical approach challenges the boundaries established between scientific knowledge and social movements' knowledge. Instead, thinking through the idea of multiple epistemologies—as proposed by Escobar (Escobar 2014a, 2014b)—, recognizes multiple forms of knowledge within ASMs, ranging from lived experience and emotional understanding to technical expertise, all of which constitute valid contributions to public and political debate (Soto Pimentel 2023; PCN and GAIDEPAN 2018; Flórez Flórez and Olarte Olarte 2023).

3) The knowledge approach allows us to overcome the traditional question of whether these organizations constitute a real social movement. It facilitates a deeper exploration of the proposed solutions to global challenges in the particular context of ASMs trajectories, while keeping an eye on their local contexts' particularities (Allegretti, Bruno and Propato 2023).

As stated in the introduction, this article provides a preliminary investigation on the knowledge systems produced by ASMs in their resistance to agribusiness, focusing specifically on their conceptual repertoires. Future research should expand this analysis in two directions: first, by examining how the conceptual repertoires are acquired, produced and transmitted. And second, by exploring how the elements of knowledge systems—concepts, meanings and production strategies—facilitate or are articulated in the development of sustainable food systems. Pursuing this objective will require interdisciplinary approaches integrating not only social movements theory but also perspectives from agricultural, environmental, and climate sciences. Such integration would legitimize a mode of knowledge that has become increasingly crucial—framing food production strategies amid the complexities of the climate crisis and the need for resilience in face of global warming.

A key challenge for future research is to confront this knowledge-based, social movement-centered analysis with other critical approaches that, for example, question its anthropocentric biases, such as the Nature-based Solutions framework (Battisti and Cuomo 2025). Such discussion is essential to highlight agroecology's political dimension and its goal of restoring the relationship between nature and humanity.

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