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"When Someone Gets Sick, We Run to Them, Not From Them": Holding Space for Solidarity Otherwise and the City in Times of Covid-19

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Abstract

How can we think about solidarity in ways that are attentive to the diversity of stories, spaces, practices, bodies, and temporalities shaping a city? In this article, we argue that "holding space" is at the heart of such endeavour. In the project that informs this article, we examined different practices and dynamics of solidarity in The Hague, The Netherlands. The project took place during the Covid-19 pandemic and aimed at exploring the multiple forms of solidarity that occur between city dwellers, the places they occupy in the city, and their daily practices that support urban life. Departing from our own practices of solidarity as researchers with different migratory backgrounds and belongings, as well as a basic understanding of solidarity as an embodied and enfleshed set of relations of care, we interrogate how solidarity practices unfold across different locations in the city of The Hague. Embarking upon this exploration, we as researchers became part of the communities and locations where these communities exist. We learned about solidarity firsthand as our stories became interwoven with those of other residents and the places they inhabit. These stories are the ones we describe in this work. The article is not just about *what* we learned, but also about *how* we learned in the process of doing this research. Thereby, we highlight the need to reconceptualize solidarity in a way that allows for differences to come forward; to be creative with those differences (Lorde, 1979/2018) to be able to grapple with the plurality of life stories of solidarity that shape the city of The Hague.

Keywords

Covid-19; holding space; solidarity otherwise; storytelling; The Hague

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1. Introduction

In March 2020, as Covid-19 began spreading and national lockdowns were implemented, the poorly denominated "social distancing" regulations in the Netherlands imposed control on everyday physical interactions to contain the outbreak. In this context, the Local Engagement Facility initiative of the International Institute of Social Studies (ISS) funded the multidisciplinary and inter-universities collaborations that underpin the research informing this article. In 2020–2021, researchers and students from different disciplines, and at different moments of their academic trajectories at Leiden University College (LUC), the ISS, and The Hague University of Applied Sciences (THUAS), worked together exploring stories of solidarity in five different locations of The Hague. The aim was to make visible stories of communities "othered" by the white Christian Dutch norms and misrepresented as a separate group organized based on race, religion, ethnicity, and so on (Weiner & Carmona Baez, 2018). Migrants are constituted as one such group and are often misrepresented or erased in the media and local politics in the city. During the Covid-19 lockdowns, these communities' stories were further silenced and denigrated under the shadow of the pandemic fears.

At the onset of this project, we started by identifying ourselves by differentiated degrees of "otherness": We are all immigrant women in the Netherlands—yet with divergent social positionings as a result of global processes of migration, racialization, and capitalist exploitation. These positionings determine from where we think and speak, and how we theorise and practice solidarity in our respective milieus. We carry with us differences in terms of our respective epistemic perspectives yet have in common a refusal to adhere to dominant systems of knowledge production disembedded from solidarity practices (Lorde, 1979/2018). Moreover, we have experienced the position of being "othered" in our institutional journeys as we have embraced and specialised in critical feminist, Indigenous, post-and/or decolonial approaches to scholarship. In this sense, we take research to be a co-learning journey, making it an embodied experience. As will become clear, our different positionalities across migratory histories shaped our roles, responsibilities, experiences, and cultivated knowledge in this research, with some of us becoming part of daily community life and others engaging in conversations and exchanges with city dwellers. We all participated in team meetings and the collaborative writing process.

Our article is organised into five sections, through which we attempt to ground theory, that is, to open space for plural ways of knowing by focusing on the everyday expressions of macro-structures of inequality (De Eguia Huerta, 2020). Grounding the research in the city is not to be confused with the research methodology of grounded theory as the systematic development of theory through the collection and analysis of data (De Eguia Huerta, 2020; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Martin & Turner, 1986). Grounding means a movement towards epistemic vulnerability instead of certainty, assuming researchers are most of all learners. Firstly, we unpack and challenge normative liberal approaches to solidarity. Secondly, we introduce the role of storytelling as a means of exploring plural practices and meanings of solidarity. Thirdly, we elaborate on the embodied and place-based character of the stories of *solidarity otherwise* through food market initiatives in The Hague. Fourthly, we highlight the ambivalences and shades of solidarity as experienced in a Pakistani community centre in the city. Fifthly, we describe the enfleshed character of these stories in shaping plural temporalities of the city by sharing stories at a mother, father, and theatre/cultural centres in the city. Finally, we conclude by weaving lessons learned within the context of "holding space" (Cairo, 2021) as research methodology in critical times. In each of these sections, we present embodied and situated responses to our opening question while displaying how our positionalities influenced our interest in

challenging dominant societal norms, refusing extractivist research and normalized assumptions about othered communities while foregrounding practices of solidarity otherwise in the city of the Hague.

2. Challenging Normative Notions of Solidarity

It is with attention to our divergent positionalities that Gronemeier, as a white European who crossed one EU border, critically interrogated dominant notions of solidarity, which we contextualize within the Western European liberal tradition. The Dutch Covid-19 preventive lexicon and related notions of solidarity demarcated possibilities of belonging to the "solidarity community" and becoming a subject of solidarity. Solidarity was framed in terms of rational individual behaviour and personal responsibility in response to sanitary needs. Characterising citizens as grown-ups, the Dutch government advised them to self-isolate appropriately while keeping a *frisse neus* ("getting fresh air"; Burgos Martínez, 2020). As the government addressed "the people," imagined in terms of rational, autonomous, and self-sufficient individuals, preventive measures were tailored to a particular ideal subject (white, middle-class, able-bodied). The imperative of social distancing was proven to be far from being universally exercisable as "place, space and sociality were already differently conceptualised and practised by inhabitants of The Hague of diverse backgrounds" (Burgos Martínez, 2020) and in different settings. Often equated with antisocial behaviour, non-compliance with preventive measures became ascribed to certain bodies/subjects, as an intrinsic characteristic of certain groups (defined by race or/and class), and was attributed to lack of respect, integration, or education (Burgos Martínez, 2020).

These appeals to solidarity often resorted to discourses embedded in Western European liberal thought. This tradition maintains two distinct notions of solidarity, which feature prominently in EU policy and intellectual discourses: "solidarity within Europe," which erases diversity within states, and "solidarity with Europe's 'other'" (Karagiannis, 2007). "Solidarity within Europe" constructs people who form part of European polities since the times of colonial and imperial conquest as Europe's "others," often displacing them outside of European "solidaristic culture" (Bhambra & Narayan, 2016, p. 4; see also Karagiannis, 2007, pp. 15–16). These "others" tend to be glozed over under the façade of multicultural societies. Discourses on multiculturalism ascribe an essentialized notion of culture to some bodies, which is used to explain the behaviour of those recognized as non-Dutch (read: non-white, non-Christian), thus doing the work of "race" (Wekker, 2004). Thereby, they reproduce distinct boundaries between the dominant culture (that becomes unintelligible as culture through its claim of universality) and the cultures of Europe's "others." The "multicultural" contrasts with the "cosmopolitan," which reinstitutes the Enlightenment subject of the human/Man in the likeness of the European (white, male, middle-/upper-class) rational subject (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2012). Since multiculturalism was declared dead by the early 2010s, working-class populations, especially those with migratory backgrounds, are increasingly constructed as a financial and social burden to European solidarity in official discourse (Bhambra, 2017; Mantu & Minderhoud, 2017).

"Solidarity with Europe's 'other'" is theorised as enacted upon distant "others" by a disembodied, reasonable, cosmopolitan subject, and is thus disengaged from place, time, relationality, and primal forms of care and reciprocity (Ahmed, 2004; Andreotti et al., 2015; Chouliaraki, 2011; Jabri, 2007). From a postcolonial perspective, liberal cosmopolitan thought is inherently hierarchical, conferring legitimacy to act upon "distant others" in the name of cosmopolitan right (Jabri, 2007). Ahmed (2004, 2016) shows how the Western subject becomes aligned with the agent delivering solidarity. This solidarity is disconnected from

histories of oppression, reinforcing the very relations of domination and subjugation that require responses to existing injustices.

Our team examined how these racialized and classist constructions played out in the Dutch response to Covid-19, and how they were reproduced, negotiated, or disrupted by residents of The Hague in different locations. To do so, our research project needed to *move beyond* these frameworks. This implied not only challenging liberal multicultural understandings of solidarity, but mostly de-silencing existing practices of solidarity already supporting the reproduction of daily life, as embodied and enfleshed experiences. Thus, methodologically, we approached this research by using story-telling and became involved with what Cairo (2021) conceptualises as Holding Space.

3. Storytelling and Holding Space as Approaches to Knowledge

From Indigenous perspectives, storytelling is at the core of being in the world. This is why for Motta (2016, p. 33) storytelling is an "onto-epistemological" positioning, a way of being that grounds us and shapes how we come to know the world. Storytelling strengthens and affirms connections with others, across time and space, while at the same time being situated in time and place. Stories are what bind us to the world and each other. For example, the Ubuntu principle from South Africa, "I am because we are," affirms that one's life only has meaning because its story is interwoven with that of others. It is believed that as people share stories, their spirits connect, and they can be transformed (Turner, 2003). This form of connection of the present (what is) with who preceded us (what has been) speaks of the plurality of temporalities that coexist in the act of sharing stories.

As a research team focusing on the stories of the marginalised, we chose to be guided by Indigenous forms of knowledge. Building on aspects such as relationality, plural temporalities, and the appreciation of place, embodied-enfleshed relations, spiritual, and ancestral knowledges, and ways of knowing, we intentionally embraced stories to pursue this work. We witnessed and shared stories with people often silenced and/or ignored in the mainstream representations of the city. And in some instances, their stories interwove with our stories, both as researchers and migrants. Storytelling became then a form of dialogue and exchange. Motta (2016) however cautions that this dialogue is not simple and cannot be taken for granted. So many have been silenced, objectivised, instrumentalised, and harmed in extractive research processes. Thus, paying attention and care to this requires developing special listening skills and using the storytelling craft to retell and reinvent stories with those marginalised at the centre *without* speaking on their behalf. Motta (2016) describes this as "an act of love." This links to Cairo's (2021) work on holding space, which she describes as the communal act of allowing people's stories to be present in all their complexities, without judgement. She refers to this act as "love work," as it requires considering the historical contexts that shape the way stories are told, held, and shared. The act of Holding Space can be transformative for everyone involved. Thus, in this research process, we held space for each other, for our students in the respective settings of the city we worked in, and for communion with people for whom these settings are part of their daily lives and routines in The Hague.

In this way, we understand holding space and storytelling as revolutionary acts that enable us to place marginalised people at the centre, affirming their/our presence in a world that silences and negates them/us. Williams et al. (2003) examine the potentialities of collaborative storytelling for challenging dominant social discourses through asserting alternative understandings, identities, and worldviews. As "othered"

researchers with stories of migration and relative marginalisation of our own, both personal and academic, we embraced storytelling as a way of bringing all of ourselves into these exchanges: We became volunteers and regular visitors to different settings in the city to connect, listen and share stories of dealing with the pandemic with community members. Each team spent a minimum of three months engaging in their respective community sites, initially face-to-face and after the lockdown, online. On four occasions, we held collaborative storytelling workshops with community members and the students who joined our projects. Furthermore, we paid attention to how community members included us in their stories and made us part of their routines, sometimes as a matter of fact, sometimes explicitly. We connected these experiences with our academic understanding of solidarity, and realised the interwovenness of theirs and our stories, moving us to think solidarity otherwise.

4. Solidarity as Embodied and Situated Experiences in the City

In this section, we focus on the relevance of place for how stories of solidarity unfold in the city. We considered place, following Aucoin (2017), as infused with meaningful interactions and experiences, and understand the space these places create as always under construction and unfolding as the result of ongoing relations (Massey, 2005). This helps us think about how solidarity relations are situated in relation to specific spatial infrastructures, in this case, food markets. Thrivikraman and Vicherat Mattar together with a group of 5 LUC students, explored different food markets and food provisioning initiatives during the pandemic.

Traditionally, food markets are a key part of the city's social infrastructure that can foster social solidarity between different peoples. During this project, we engaged with two open-air markets (De Haagse Markt and the Organic Farmer's Market), one food cooperative (Lekkernassuh), and one digital platform of food distribution, especially active during the height of the lockdown (Lokale Markten). De Haagse Markt is the biggest and oldest open market in The Hague, located at the intersection of two highly stigmatised immigrant neighbourhoods, and usually open to the public four days a week. The Organic Farmer's Market is a small gathering of vendors at an upper-scale location in the centre of The Hague, serving organic products. Lekkernassuh is a cooperative-based initiative aimed at distributing locally grown organic foods once a week, occupying a former gym location in a rapidly gentrifying neighbourhood. Finally, Lokale Markten was a student-organised online initiative to distribute fresh food from De Haagse Maarkt during the pandemic.

In all these different formats, these food market initiatives provide the infrastructure needed for practices of food exchange. In doing so, they are not merely topographically or discursively defined as spaces "out there" in the city. Rapidly, the research team realised these were infrastructures in specific places of the city that held spaces of sociality, grounding interactions for those frequenting them. The notion of "holding space" (Cairo, 2021) invites us to think about space not as something to be produced outside of us, and potentially among us, but also *within* us. In that way, the group explored the ways in which these food markets and initiatives could be understood as connective spaces with others, with food, as an external/public, and also as intimate relations. The food markets and associated initiatives can be understood as infrastructures of solidarity (Vicherat Mattar et al., 2023), where solidarity becomes an embodied and situated in-place experience.

The markets' own infrastructures reflected a messiness and complexity of settings, where solidarity is manifested both to replicate and disrupt the socio-economic segregation that characterises The Hague. Each

market dynamic reflected their location in the city. The plurality of relations in these markets revealed alternative layers and forms of solidarity. In the marketplace, people connect with the purpose of exchanging food, regardless of their differences. Covid-19 allowed for traversing historically entrenched racialized and socio-economic differences in new and unsuspecting ways, but also reproduce existing historical boundaries.

Several vendors in the De Haagse Markt have been in this market for several decades, with market stalls that pass down from generation to generation:

> You know, my father-in-law started in 1950, and so did all the other people in the market. So yeah, you knew the customers, the fellow market traders, and they knew I had a boyfriend, that we were going to marry, that I was pregnant (cheese vendor).

This familiarity was crucial for surviving the Covid-19 restrictions, because maintaining close and trusting relationships with the customers enabled vendors to carry on with their business. In the words of a coffee vendor:

> If I had no connection to my customers, I would have been bankrupt. I have had conversations with many of them, people have "liked" [my posts] on social media, other people send you emails. So, I think all businesses have a form of resource management, and so do I. Whoever I sold goods to in the past, I actively sent them messages and told them "I'm alive, if you want to order coffee."

Solidarity emerged amongst vendors across products sold; for example, vegetable vendors partnered with cheese, nut, or coffee vendors. It was rare for vendors of similar products to support each other, especially as customer flow was reduced, and competition to sell hindered collective action between similar sellers of products.

Workers at the Lokale Markten, the online platform distributing food from the De Haagse Markt, indicated that deliveries were always racially segregated, inhibiting potential solidarity and collective action, something that is also visible given the presence of two trade unions in the market, with marked racialised differences between their affiliations.

However, collaboration emerged in other ways:

> There are 400 market entrepreneurs at a very small surface and we constantly look at each other, how we do business, what makes us stronger, so of course we help each other. Just a couple of days ago I talked to someone who sells vegetables and how we could improve our marketing strategies. Of course we do that together. That looking out for each other also has something to do with crime, because when he has to take a leak (points at the vendor across from him), and he goes to the bathroom he leaves his shop all alone, so if I see something happening over there-he knows I will go towards it. (coffee vendor)

The Covid-19 measures associated with control and policing brought a common enemy to previous competitors, allowing for collaboration and support to appear where it had been previously absent, for example between white Dutch vendors and racialised vendors with migratory backgrounds. For example,

policing was unevenly implemented in open markets, being more prevalent in De Haagse Markt than in any of the other locations, which generated resistance among vendors across the board. This market experienced an increased security presence at the entrances and exits of the market with security cameras, marked routes for pedestrian flow, and the noticeable and constant presence of security guards.

As we mentioned above, racialised dynamics manifested not only at De Haagse Markt. They could also be observed in upper-end markets like the Organic Farmer’s Market. Thrivikraman recounts her experience as follows:

> The veggie stall has a dedicated entrance and exit, and people line up 1.5 m distance waiting for their turn. It was my turn to enter the main veggie stall area, so I stepped in. Then this white lady who was behind me inches closer to me….I step further to the right to keep my distance. She kept moving towards me, so I kept moving right. And then the stall owner asks me to keep distance. I was outraged!! I was outraged because this is the second time I have been called out for not keeping distance, when it was this lady behind me that kept on moving towards me (and it was not her turn to be helped). I did call out the lady and pointed out it was actually her and not me, which led to a flurry of conversation in Dutch which I could not understand. And then I was shown what 1.5 m was by the owner spreading his arms out….I was fuming because his actions implied I was disregarding the safety protocols and was essentially clueless. Mind you, I was the only one wearing a mask and even the sellers, who were not keeping 1.5 m, didn’t have safety protocols. In addition, people are only supposed to move in one direction, yet there were people moving back and forth at this same stand and not getting called out for it.

This experience left her shaken. Through being specifically singled out as not adhering to “normal solidarity practices” and confirmed in her “otherness,” she lost trust and loyalty to a market where she was a recurrent client. Her experience aligned more closely with minoritized groups in the city, like those severely securitized in De Haagse Markt, than her supposedly integrated place as an “expat” academic researcher. It also confirmed that even when one sees oneself as being part of the story of the market, there can be reminders—through forms of solidarity that demarcate difference—that one does not belong (Davis & Nencel, 2011). This story illustrates how solidarity is fraught with tensions and contradictions. It cannot be described in an abstract disembodied manner because solidarity is always entangled with the (hi)stories of places, spaces, bodies, and relationships that support it as a mechanism of inclusion or exclusion, depending on those who are involved.

These food markets and initiatives housed a dense network of bonding and support strategies deployed between different actors, including vendors, customers, volunteers, and researchers and their various interrelations. This multiplicity of social ties varies in their intensity and the strength that binds communities together and also keeps people apart and marked as different. To better imagine how different intensities shape different expressions and forms of solidarity, Thrivikraman and Vicherat Mattar suggest extending the notion of strong and weak bonds from the work of Granovetter (1973). In the markets, there were strong forms of solidarity, like those deployed by generations of vendors in De Haagse Markt, producing intense forms of attachments and care. Conversely, solidarity can also take place when the ties are weak, for example demarcating racialised difference, like in the story told by Thrivikrman. This story illustrates the racialization of national identity, and how this manifests in mundane othering practices that are prone to produce tensions. Thinking about solidarity in terms of weak and strong bonds invites us to think about

solidarity otherwise—that is, solidarity as embodied and situated through specific infrastructures and places in the city, like the various forms of exchange occurring in food markets show.

5. The Pakistani Community: Shades of Solidarities

As part of the Pakistani community, Salim spent time and shared stories with a faith-based community: Muslim Pakistani families. This last engagement is from where the inspiration for the title of our work comes from. As one member of the community stated: "When someone gets sick, we run to them, not from them." This guided community members' actions during the pandemic. They did not think of their caretaking actions as anything special, but they supported each other "as a given," continuing what they did before Covid-19, but now through different means and with adjusted behaviour.

In Urdu, solidarity is formally translated as *yakjehti*. However, the more commonly used Urdu word referring to solidarity, care, and being there is *farz*. It is translated as responsibility and duty—something Pakistani community members take pride in as part of everyday social norms. Salim who is of Pakistani origin herself, spent time investigating *farz* in a community where she plays multiple roles.

For members of the Pakistani community, *farz* is translated into collective efforts and initiatives in individual capacity. Particularly, Salim observed *farz* in relationships people had among each other, within the community as a whole, and across communities. During Covid-19 the standard "expected" joint community efforts had to shift to more individualised efforts. As a recovered member shared: "For me, solidarity means 'not expecting' what I expected from my near and dear ones in normal conditions." She practised solidarity by first understanding that they should not visit and secondly caring for her friends and relatives by keeping away from them. The isolation and loneliness were a new and challenging feeling as they seemed counter-intuitive to the historical forms of solidarity forged by the community. Their understanding of solidarity shifted, it became otherwise: Healing became rooted in prayers and in adopting the feeling that physical distance was a form of social caring. She elaborated that coming to terms with this was not easy. She had to convince herself that she needed to "give" care instead of "expect" it and shift her role from care-recipient to care-giver. Significantly, "listening" to each other, to our challenges, and sometimes to stories of everyday life increased manifold as we sensed and felt that listening contributes to healing from isolation and loneliness during Covid-19. Community members shared we feel and heal *with* others when we listen to each other. This showed their trust in feeling and listening as crucial aspects during the pandemic, something that Salem and Icaza (2023, p. 221) affirm as "really trust[ing] my other senses." These acts of solidarity otherwise are different from ways of solidarity advocated by the Dutch government and may not make sense within the dominant intelligibility (Lugones, 2003).

5.1. Shifts and Adaptations

In a community that relies on mutual support for social, physical, and cultural survival, a shift from care-recipient to care-giver significantly contributed to creatively remaking solidarity practices. For some, adaptations were more difficult. For example, some elderly people did not receive the expected and needed attention from their relatives. Whether this was due to Covid-19 restrictions, neglect, or a combination of both is not the question, rather what mattered is that these elders could not get past the fact that their family members did not act according to cultural expectations. They saw it as shameful and felt embarrassed

towards the community, illustrating like in the stories recounted by Thrivikraman and Vicherat Mattar, how solidarity can also become tainted by tensions and frustrations. In the case of these elders of the Pakistani community, rather than forming other connections or sharing their needs and concerns with the community home nurse, they chose to experience this in silence.

5.2. Being There in Spite of...

However, one way to practise *farz* is by "being there." People continued to be there, if not in person, then with the support of digital infrastructures, like those creating virtual spaces or via phone. Crossing physical locations and social boundaries was already an integral aspect of *farz*. Residents in The Hague connected across neighbourhoods, across cities, and across regions of the world. Under the Covid-19 lockdown, community members continued to reach out and support each other as best they could. Food and rituals were also a major part of these forms of connections. As one woman shared:

> During a WhatsApp community session, I learned how to store food as our ancestors used to do in Pakistan. I find it the most important and relevant thing to share this knowledge of our traditional ways of storing food. I think "sharing" such valuable and about-to-die knowledge is the biggest example of care and solidarity in our community. Transmission and preservation of our [knowledges] in such challenging times is important.

Cooking together or sharing recipes online allowed community members to feel connected to their ancestral and family recipes, norms, and memories of elders, thus practising multi-generational solidarity. In this way, *farz* as an act of caring and sharing ancestral knowledges was practised while cooking together and maintaining relationships such as with the elders and the community members (Salim, 2023).

People practised solidarity to support each other locally and nationally, within their community and beyond. A second-generation Pakistani single mother, working three jobs, adopted an orphan child in Afghanistan whom she will support for the rest of her life. Explaining her reason, she shared that she felt the responsibility for the ones near to her and for those most deserving: "My mother died of Corona. I was not allowed to see her during her last moments. I decided if I can't be there for her, I can be there for someone else needing support." This shows how practising *farz* was not limited to Pakistani people in their community. Sometimes, the shared religious and/or migratory background and the associated challenges brought people together. The Pakistani community had relations with Moroccan, Turkish, and Indonesian communities and collaborated on initiatives such as food distribution via community centres and mosques.

6. Solidarity as Enfleshed Experience in Plural Temporalities

Cairo and Icaza set out to learn about stories of solidarity as these were articulated by residents who attended three community centres, some of whom shared migration and parental experiences and languages. The father centre, mother centre, and theatre/cultural centre were located in neighbourhoods of ethnically diverse and immigrated residents in The Hague. They supervised two groups of students from THUAS who engaged with these community centres to work on two projects for a sustainable design course.

6.1. Becoming Part of These Stories

Cairo and Icaza began their journey of becoming part of the stories by joining the different community centres. Having immigrant backgrounds themselves, they were easily included in conversations in languages other than Dutch or English. At the father centre, once it was clear that Cairo was of Surinamese descent, references to Surinamese particular behaviours or experiences were directed at her. Icaza was often included in Spanish conversations, while at the same time being encouraged to work on her Dutch. On Tuesdays, they regularly visited the mother centre. Here, rather than volunteering alongside community members, they attended scheduled presentations or provided some themselves, including a workshop on storytelling. Attending the Hague Municipality's health programs allowed them to interact as fellow mothers, and to sometimes be called upon for their expertise. They were also confronted first-hand with the denigrating ways some program presenters addressed the mothers. Repeatedly, material was presented with the assumption that the mothers had little to no knowledge: from information on the importance of childhood vaccinations to response in cases of medical emergencies. By joining as migrant mothers themselves, the researchers were able to challenge those assumptions and help create new spaces where the women could share their wisdoms. When Cairo challenged a doctor who questioned the mothers' lack of medical consultation, the mothers joined in and started sharing their experiences with health care personnel. Consequently, the doctor admitted that there was value in looking at discriminatory medical practices in stigmatised migrant neighbourhoods.

In listening to, and sharing in, the unfolding stories in Dutch, English, Spanish, and Papiamento, the authors refused disembodied, abstract, and uprooted notions of solidarity that are detached from place, cultural roots, embodied/enfleshed memory, and spiritual and ancestral wisdoms and instead assert autonomy and universality. Eventually, their stories became interwoven. Their presence, including their language, ethnic and parental experience, and active contribution became part of the stories of the other volunteers. As researchers, they were gradually invited to participate in practices of solidarity. They were called upon to help newcomers, move furniture as needed, and were approached for assistance and consultation with personal matters.

Consequently, the more interwoven their stories became, the less they felt it appropriate to utilise some of the formal research methods they had planned. This was not a matter of "going native" as it is referred to in anthropology, where researchers become so enmeshed with their research subjects that they abandon their research, while power asymmetries often remain intact. Instead, these authors had become part of the communal body in these different centres, through "being with" and interweaving stories. Doing so shifted something inside them, they were learning about solidarity not just intellectually, but affectively as well. They included those shifting feelings as a guide on how to proceed. "This doesn't feel right, so we are not going to do it"—trusting that inner ethical voice became part of the lessons about solidarity.

6.2. Enfleshed Experiences

Aiming to avoid extractive relation to the regular members of these centres, especially women, Cairo and Icaza considered offering one young woman in the mother centre a stipend. The young woman was a skilled singer and they wanted to compensate her for her performance in the planned community gathering. They were quickly corrected by the program director. Offering the woman money would set her apart from the

group, the body of people. As a group member, she was supposed to be willing to offer her gifts to benefit the community. This might be seen as a research dilemma to be "solved," but for Cairo and Icaza this was an invitation to think solidarity otherwise.

They found guidance in Black feminist theologians' concept of "enfleshment." Copeland (2010), for instance, posits that the body is more than just the self: "The body mediates our commitments with others, with the world and with the Other" (p. 7). This facilitates understanding the body not only as place or cultural discourse, but as an enfleshed and contextual experience located in a plurality of temporalities. An enfleshed understanding of the body goes beyond the physical, social, or political body in the here and now (contextual). It goes back to the Indigenous knowledge of interconnectedness, as it draws upon ecological, ancestral, remembrance, spiritual connections, and things you just feel but cannot put into collective words (Vázquez, 2017, p. 2017). You only get there when you surrender and become part of a collective body, as Cairo and Icaza understood by joining these community centres.

Indeed, across these sites, food markets, Pakistani community centre, fathers, mothers, and theatre/cultural centres, we learned central lessons about the importance of Holding Space (Cairo, 2021) for the many stories of solidarity unfolding in the city. The spaces created by solidarity practices made us mindful of the complexities, contradictions, and subtleties, of solidarity. Rather than reducing solidarity as strong displays of social bonding and ties within communities, we recognise the need to be particularly cautious of the stories that are overlooked and silenced, contradictory and ambivalent, often not part of dominant discourses, but vital part of these initiatives existence in The Hague.

7. Holding Space for Solidarity Otherwise

We started off questioning how we can think about solidarity in ways that are attentive to the diversity shaping The Hague. Particularly, we were concerned with the incomplete Covid-19 story because it neglected, minimised, or misrepresented the stories of many city dwellers. Whereas the normative liberal notions of solidarity are mediated through grammars of "otherness" and are conceived from within the same registers that (re-)produce injustice (Andreotti et al., 2015), we go beyond this framework to think and practice plural solidarities, or solidarity otherwise, as derived from embedded and enfleshed experiences.

We highlight the intellectual and political relevance of conceptualizing solidarities in a way that not only challenges homogenized narratives of solidarity "towards" marginalized communities that remain a "separate pillar" (Essed, 1991; Ghorashi, 2014) in Dutch society but also de-silence ongoing practices of solidarities. Rather than mining and extorting stories from "others," we interwove our own stories with those of various communities, spaces, and places these initiatives take in the city. Doing so, we moved away from extractive research approaches that often build on tools, theories, and concepts that separate the "researcher" from "the researched," the academy from the community, the self from the "other," and privileges reason over experiential, embodied knowledges (Hlabangane, 2018). The emerging lessons ultimately transformed *us*.

7.1. Relationality: Being There, Being With

"Being with" is the first and most profound lesson we learned from thinking about solidarity otherwise. From the Pakistani community, we learned that "being there" and "being with" was not limited by the Covid-19

physical restrictions. Being with was linked to “being seen” and “being seen as valuable.” In different sites, like food markets or community centres, ethnic and class differences were bridged on the basis of religious and migratory backgrounds, shared hardships, or other shared experiences. Being with requires working across differences and helps forge strong bonds, like in the Pakistani community, but also fleeting ones, like the stories shared in the markets. These are stories of mutual support like the coffee vendor illustrated.

Being with offers a possibility for healing and transformation, which disrupts the often instrumentalized logics of (neo)liberal understandings of solidarity, where solidarity becomes “a practice of voyeuristic altruism” (Chouliaraki, 2011, p. 366), reproducing the moral distance between the “self” as empowered and self-aggrandising agent and the “other” as passive recipient of solidarity. This instrumentalization of solidarity perpetuates relations of domination between the subject of solidarity and “vulnerable others” (Chouliaraki, 2011). As we interwove our stories with each other and the communities, we did not feel the need to defend, justify, explain, or downplay our differences. For the first time, and during these critical times, we could just be, and as a result were able to bring out the best in ourselves and each other. The process of carrying out this research was a way of being with one another and in the city—holding space for one another—in spite of the restrictions imposed during the lockdown.

7.2. Multiplicity of Spaces and Temporalities

“I am because we are”—so says the Ubuntu philosophy. In doing so, it subverts space and time as a limitation for what we can be, who we are, and what we can become. In the market stalls that were part of family businesses for generations, as in the community centres, there was an extended sense of self that was always present and practised. We were connected and strengthened through relationships based on collective memories, places, and its infrastructures (like the community centres, markets, and digital platforms). Furthermore, even though people are physically in The Hague, that location is just one of the many meaningful locations that people feel connected to. From accepting financial responsibility for orphaned children in other countries to organising medicine drives for one’s home country, examples of solidarity practices across ethnic, national, and cultural boundaries abound. This radically reformulates liberal narratives of solidarity, whereby solidarity is either practiced among people(s) characterized by sameness or enacted upon distant “others,” and is thus disengaged from place, ancestrality, relationality, and reciprocity.

7.3. (Un)muting Stories of Solidarity

“I am sick and tired of talking about Corona!” The forcefulness with which the community member at the mother centre addressed Cairo and Icaza stopped them in their tracks and made them shift their whole course of inquiry, forcing them to listen. Just because you want to hear a story does not mean you are entitled to it, and certainly that story, all stories, have a life of their own. Even though the initial intent was to collect stories to correct the incomplete story-scape of The Hague, the message was loud, clear, and profound: Stories of solidarity exceeded those of surviving or coping with the pandemic because they are stories of creation and support to endure life in the city.

When exploring the different markets, the following questions were raised: Which story gets told, by whom? Who speaks, in which language, for whom, how loud, and who gets drowned out? How is it that some solidarity measures support some members while excluding others? The biggest lesson here is that making

stories visible should be a careful, sensitive, and embedded process. The students working with Thrivikraman and Vicherat Mattar became voluntary workers in the food initiatives; their team navigated both strong and weak ties of solidarity among themselves and with the people they met in the different food markets and initiatives. Secondly, it matters which stories are being muted, and which are not. Rather than digging hard to make visible stories, we highlight the value of being with and using that principle to process and protect the stories we became part of, too. Thereby, we moved away from the instrumentality of research as predominantly conducted within academic practice, which ultimately serves the researcher's objective of knowledge production, whereby methods constitute "a way to a goal" (Brinkmann, 2018, pp. 1003, 1018).

7.4. Restorative Transformation and Resilience

That you matter is a given. That you are worth fighting for is a given. Time and time again, this message reached us as we interwove our stories with those of the communities and the places we visited, and the spaces these engagements created. Time and time again, we heard ourselves repeat that same message to our students who struggled with their studies during the lockdowns.

We came to understand these messages as a reflection of solidarity otherwise, actions used to preserve the preciousness of life. We saw this in the community centres where the directors were relentless in creating new stories for their constituents, or in the Pakistani community where members never wavered in their support of their immediate and extended community. We also saw this in the marketplace and food initiatives, where actions were not just about economic survival, but about honouring the preciousness of relationships, both in strong and weak terms. Driven by their respective causes, people were committed to engaging with one another. These engagements were often about taking a stand, fighting for, and finding alternatives and creative ways to pursue their goals. In doing so, creating new stories that supported the reproduction of the city life.

From the media to the government, the negative representations of the communities we were part of were consistent. The goal of this project was to broaden the story-scape of The Hague and bring some healing with the tools of honouring, listening, and respecting the multiplicity of stories that get often portrayed in a rather monochromatic form. This requires transformation that allows unfolding, rather than forcing. For this unfolding to happen it is crucial to display the ability to hold space.

7.5. Holding Space for the Unfolding of Solidarity Otherwise

In pursuing this research, we proposed to think about solidarity otherwise. The concept of "otherness" connected us with the work of Cairo (2021), who employs it to explain the maintenance of unequal power relations, which defined our story-scapes. Holding space required us to examine the conditions necessary for all the stories to just be, rather than seeking out "positive stories" that advance a normative and normalised understanding of solidarity. We assert that thinking solidarity otherwise goes beyond its understanding of it as always affirming, always positive, and devoid of conflict. We learned that solidarity is ambivalent, it is rather a form of holding space that takes multiple shapes, contributing to the transformation or the rewriting of stories—the communities', our own, and inevitably, or hopefully, the city's. We learned about transformation "out there" and also within. We learned that transformation can be forceful and also restorative.

We have been strengthened in our own sense of the right to be here just as we are, personally as well as academically. Ironically, the gift that we wanted to give to the various communities we engaged with was in fact bestowed upon us. This also manifests how our stories as researchers are interwoven with that of The Hague. Whilst we saw its undersides, we also learned to love parts of it as we rode our bikes through familiar and unfamiliar routes in the city, enjoyed our gatherings, and engaged with different peoples. As our stories are now grounded in the land—and story-scapes of The Hague, we believe that we have contributed to a restorative transformation of the city towards a better understanding of itself in the plural.

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Data Availability

Relevant data is available with the authors upon request.

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