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Superficial and Substantial Practices of Solidarity in Social Sciences

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We intervene in debates on ethics and politics in social science, exploring how to foster substantial solidarity in research and knowledge production. Renewed discussions around intersectionality, diversity, and decolonization expose problematic aspects of knowledge production, too often revealing violent and predatory practices. Building on critiques of detached, positivist understandings of knowledge, we emphasize the situated nature of knowledge production, highlighting the structural complicity of social sciences – especially in the Global North – with colonial, patriarchal and capitalist logics. Yet we contend that dominant ways to address this criticism can be compatible and reproduce these logics. Thus, we identify phenomena of superficial solidarity, such as tokenism, and discuss the limits and possibilities of situated knowledge. Practically, we propose substantial solidarity in the context of politically committed research emphasizing ethics of care, comradeship, and coalition-building with marginalized subjects to promote research as a productive and mutually valuable encounter for all participants.

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1. Superficial Inclusion and Solidarity

Knowledge production constitutes a type of productive relation—articulated between the researched, the researcher, and the research in itself—that encompasses inequalities. Against the positivist myth of neutral knowledge, feminist and anti-colonial scholars have shown the violent potential of knowledge production (Quijano 2007, Collins 2000, Haraway 1988, Harding 1986, Fanon 1986). Demands for more diversity, intersectionality, or for decolonizing the curriculum/university/etc. are the latest renewal of addressing forms of violence that also trouble knowledge production. Still, there is a risk of superficial adoption and domestication within the neoliberal university (Dabiri 2021, Connell 2019, Tuck and Yang 2012, Castro Varela and Dhawan 2010).

Intervening in debates on ethics and politics of research and knowledge production, we propose the idea of substantial solidarity as basis for research committed to social change and justice. This notion is contrasted with superficial solidarity not "simply" in terms of degree. We understand substantial solidarity to be defined by an explicit political commitment which relates theory and practice and positions researcher, people in struggle and possible research-participants on the same side. It thus echoes Eduardo Galeano's comment on charity and solidarity.[1] Solidarity understood as relation of horizontality is not dismissing questionings of power inequalities and positionalities but fostering comradeship through accountability. With this argument we refer to a long-standing body of literature which provides us with arguments and experiences of praxis that still are relevant.

We focus on challenges faced by social sciences engaging with emancipatory agendas.[2] While acknowledging related problems, such as the difficulty for certain agendas to even gain traction within mainstream academia,[3] our primary focus is on the dangers of superficial solidarity with these agendas – in contrast with practices of substantial solidarity. Although centering on the social sciences, we maintain that these power imbalances are present in many kinds of research, both in the humanities and in the natural sciences. This shows clearly in the case of Henrietta Lacks, a poor black woman, whose cells were taken for medical research without her or her family's consent and used in multiple research projects. By 2011, they had been involved in about 11,000 patents (Khan 2011). Cases like this make us question the structural conditions of knowledge production as productive relations. Who is entitled to the value realized in them?

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[1] "I don't know if you know this old African proverb saying that 'the giving hand is always above the receiving hand.' So charity is humiliating. But solidarity is not because it's a relationship between equals." (Galeano in Birnbaum 2006).

[2] This focus is due to our disciplinary formations in law, anthropology, sociology, and political theory.

[3] Within philosophy for example, Mills (2015a) pointed out how the refusal to engage with antiracist arguments promotes a particular "colorblindness" of mainstream Rawlsianism.

What kinds of value are produced? When are research relations valuable for all parties involved? Acknowledging the precarious standing that emancipatory approaches have in social science, how to commit to a substantial understanding of solidarity within research and knowledge production?

Recently, we watched a growing interest in matters such as diversity politics, decolonization, postcolonial theories, critical gender theories, etc. (Dabiri 2021, Tuck and Yang 2012, Dhawan 2010). And we see an undeniable value in the current proliferation of such debates. Knowledge production and representation impact social reality. However, the focus on representation renders more visible—also due to more interaction with subjects and groups more impacted by matters such as colonialism, racism, gendered violence, etc.—the risks of reproducing and prompting tokenism. This is exemplified by Tuck and Yang's (2012) famous criticism of decolonization as a metaphor, disconnecting it from indigenous peoples' struggles, has become a classic. Attempts to fit decolonization into "human rights or civil rights based approaches to educational equity" represent what we see as superficial solidarity; decolonization and other social justice frameworks can be, in many ways, irreconcilable (Tuck and Yang 2012, 2).[4] This metaphorical use also occurs with other radical ideas, such as intersectionality, domesticating and undermining their subversive potential (Castro Varela and Dhawan 2011). Other concerns for research on marginalization include extractivism and epistemic violence.

Recently, some of us engaged in research projects involving urban social movements.[5] Reflecting on our practices, we encountered explicit skepticism from activists both in Germany and Brazil when talking to academics. While they acknowledged that research could increase the visibility of their movements, we also heard many complaints: academics reach out, make promises, take knowledge from the movements, publish papers, and never return—extractivism, in short. Consequently, we often hear that academia should "give something back," which we understand as a call for building an actual relation. However, this should not be understood as transactional. Our idea of substantial solidarity goes further than creating benefit for everyone involved but emphasizes the creation of lasting relations as equals. To achieve substantial solidarity in our research, we propose rethinking it as a productive encounter that potentially benefits all participants. In short, we should be comrades, not *kharisiris*.

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[4] For a critical discussion of Tuck and Yang´s argument influenced by Black studies, see e. g. Garba and Sorentino (2020).

[5] Glenda Vicenzi and Judith Möllhoff took part in "Spheres of Citizenship," a joint research project between German and Brazilian researchers, which focused on urban forms of political action within the cities of Rio de Janeiro and Berlin and which was in close contact with different social movements, such as urban occupations, movements of mothers against state violence, LGBTQ and migrants' movements, etc.

We built an awareness that the issue is not only individual but also amplified by certain structures and historical relations that shape knowledge production. Yet, we recognize an individual and collective responsibility to build different histories through different practices. Anders Burman's *kharisiri* anecdote vividly illustrates the concerns of this paper and highlights both the structural and individual dimensions. The *kharisiri* is a scary figure from the narratives of the Aymara people, popular in Andean culture and often said to be rooted in their experience of colonial exploitation and alterity. This figure "inflicted the Aymara world and mind in the guise of a Catholic priest or a landowner of Spanish" (Burman, 2018, 49), and was said to appear on deserted roads in the Bolivian Andes, attacking solitary travelers. The monster would hypnotize or sedate its victims and extract part of their body fat, leading to health deterioration or even death. Burman (2018) conducted field research in Bolivia for many years. On one such trip, while standing by a roadside, a local traveler mistook him for a *kharisiri*.

Burman tried to learn from this episode, using it to reflect not exactly on the Aymara people, but on what being taken for a *kharisiri* revealed about himself, about outsiders (namely the anthropologist position), and about their relation with people they study. This fundamentally showed him "something about the asymmetries of power that characterize such a relation" (2018, 50). He thus used this monster as a metaphor to address the exploitative and colonizing dimensions of science and the role of the researcher.

Burman (2018, 53) identifies four characteristics that anthropologists and *kharisiris* may share: they are strangers, hold relative power, exploit their victims, and use the extracted resources in "strange" contexts (2018, 53). However, Burman (2018, 60) does not only highlight individual researchers, but also points to the conditions and structural setup of the neoliberal university, which tends to reproduce (a) asymmetrical power relations between researchers and "informants"; (b) extractivist methodology; (c) Anglophone-centrism; (d) publishing "in an insular, closed system"; (e) giving little to nothing back (by not making available and intelligible the produced knowledge to the "informants"); and (f) "keep[ing] a distance." Notably, scholar activism is often condemned, as despite critiques of the most extreme forms of positivism are present in most scientific disciplines, to succeed in academia one is still urged to produce "distanced and supposedly neutral social science" (Burman 2018, 61). Burman (2018, 60) explicitly ties these problematic characteristics to a structural critique of anthropological research conducted within the neoliberal university, which has a history of exploitation and colonial power asymmetries. This practice of questioning research methods and their ethical implications seems more common in anthropology (Bönisch-Brednich 2023, Burman 2018), particularly when discussing the political

implications of theoretical approaches and assumptions (Graeber 2015). However, we argue that this debate needs to be broadened to other research areas and attempt to contribute to it.

Thus, in the following, we further explore how an extractivist and in many ways violent form of knowledge production is in continuity with enduring legacies of injustice in the knowledge economy. Bridging this structural level with the role of individual researchers, we address knowledge producers as situated. We discuss limits and possibilities of positionality and reflexivity in knowledge production to understand scientific practices as situated within relations of power, taking them out of an apolitical vacuum and addressing challenges of transforming academic culture. In the final sections, we shift toward a practical and somehow individualized level of research practices. To advance our perspective on the need for substantial solidarity, which contrasts with more superficial forms, we explore different historical meanings of solidarity, considering it in the context of social science research focused on marginalization experiences. We conclude with practical considerations for ethically engaged research, highlighting three aspects of substantial solidarity—care, comradeship, and coalition building—as means to foster more positive research relations for all.

2. Legacies of Injustice and the Knowledge Economy

It is very common for researchers to consider their work separate from political matters and to not see themselves as political agents. Historically, this distanced position has been a means by which asymmetrical power relations shape knowledge production. A certain blindness to one's own political role has, in itself, been a way through which the political nature of research manifests. A seminal text of Frankfurt's Critical Theory tradition, which promoted pertinent scientific criticism, directly addresses limitations of traditional theorizing and knowledge production by showing how this mode of "scientific creation," in its detached form, fulfills a social function— "like a material tool of production" (Horkheimer 1975, 205)—central to the reproduction of a particular order. Other scholars have further explored this political economy of knowledge, rooted in modern philosophy, by connecting it to coloniality. As Raewyn Connell (2019, 75) points out:

> A crucial fact in the history of the knowledge economy is that the circulation of knowledge between cultures and regions – which had been going on throughout history – was restructured by empire as an unequal global division of labor. While the colonies became a vast data mine, the imperial metropole (to use the French term for the colonizing centre) became the main site where data were accumulated, classified, theorized and published.

The imperial and exclusive genealogy of modern science traces back to the 16th century and transformations of early colonialism. From the 19th century onward, colonialism and imperialism were modernity's constituent conditions and, hence, of modern knowledge production. Missionaries, adventurers, military and colonial officials, and later professionals traveled the world to collect data, and bring it back to the metropolis (Connell 2019, 74). Cases of renaming like that of *Botany Bay*, a gulf close to Sydney, named by biologists traveling with James Cook (Connell 2019, 75), are further practices of colonial and racialized erasure (Mills 2015b, 220).

Turning our attention to how coloniality operates in knowledge production helps to grasp how research practices are historically entangled with a structure of power that prevents substantial solidarity. As Aníbal Quijano (2007, 174) asserts, coloniality not only affects the division of (academic) labor, but also blocks other than European cultures from being seen as active subjects in knowledge production by objectifying and dehumanizing them. Coloniality is not exhausted by material exploitation and dispossession but perpetuates more general structures of discrimination. Originating during early eras of European colonialism, these were only later codified as "racial," "ethnic," "anthropological," or "national." These discrimination patterns continue despite the formal end of official colonial rule, colonizing imagination (Quijano 2007, 168–160). To counter its coloniality, knowledge has to be understood as "an intersubjective relation for the purpose of something, not a relation between an isolated subjectivity and that something" (Quijano 2007, 173). Key is that the basic structure of dominant knowledge production still presupposes an unequal, often exploitative relation between researching subjects and researched objects.

We do not state that nowadays, we live within the very same discrimination patterns of the colonial heyday. Nevertheless, scholarly disciplines are not detached from their imperial and racialized genealogies. While there are temporal and local particularities of coloniality and white supremacy,[6] there are still extractive tendencies of research. The empire-led structuring of knowledge circulation (Cornell 2019, 75) impacts us through the division of academic labor according to coloniality and racial capitalism (Quijano 2007, Robinson 2000). We thus next look into responses to theses legacies of injustice that center marginalized experiences and build awareness of relations between positional power and identity.

[6] We endorse Ansley's definition: "By 'white supremacy' I do not mean to allude only to the self-conscious racism of white supremacist hate groups. I refer instead to a political, economic, and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white subordination are daily reenacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings." (as quoted in Harris 1993, 1714).

3. Knowledge Producers

When research and education as main objectives of academia are understood in a way that acknowledges the tension between colonization and empowerment (Smith 2005, 120), there is a need for humility and reflexivity about possible common goals, situatedness, and research methods. This sort of reflection has received growing attention in social thought. We praise, for example, propositions from Black feminist scholars of standpoint epistemologies and accounts of embodied knowledge as forms to critically engage with paradigms of knowledge as rational, abstract, disembodied, and universal (Collins 2000, Harding 1986).

Social movements—against racism, colonialism, and capitalism, for LGBTQ+ rights, environmental justice, and antimilitarism—analyzed and criticized the (ab–) uses and exclusions of science and supposedly detached rational, scientific research practices (Harding 1986, 16). In the past, this criticism was tied to norms of neutrality and impartiality in scientific methodology by making visible the ethical and political dimensions of these epistemic practices which separate the knowledge producing mind from the situated and limited body (Smith 2012, Mohanty 2003, Mills 1997, Harding 1986). Particularly, Black and feminist scholars like Patricia Hill Collins (2000) and Donna Haraway (1988) emphasize the role of situated and embodied knowledge and tie knowledge production to lived experience.[7]

In *Black Feminist Thought* (2000), Collins discusses knowledge production and criticism of detached and disembodied knowledge. The question of trustworthy knowledge is here intricately bound to knowledge as a collective endeavor. Hence, interpersonal relations, connectedness, and communication are key for Collins' (2000, 260) reflections on epistemology. Crucially, the history and presence of an epistemology of ignorance in the knowledge economy marginalizes and invisibilizes according to traditional hierarchies (Mills 1997, Collins 2000, 251; Quijano 2007). Lived experience is of central importance when accessing knowledge claims since "ideas cannot be divorced from the individuals who create and share them" (Collins 2000, 262).

For both Collins and Quijano, the relational and political dimensions of knowledge production as an intersubjective and collective endeavor triggers ethical questions. Collins (2000, 262–5) discusses ethics of care as a way to make room for respecting marginalized kinds of knowledge. Without taking individual experiences seriously, finding common goals becomes difficult. Therefore, valuing individual uniqueness and expressiveness, acknowledging emotions as appropriate, and capacity for empathy are necessary to enable mutual understanding, and possibly coalitions.

[7] Personal integrity, of course, is a necessary but not sufficient condition for trustworthy knowledge.

Positivist and supposedly objective research methodologies position the researcher as outsider observing phenomena without being directly involved. By decontextualizing themselves in order to become "objective" or "impartial" observers, researchers aim to refrain from emotional involvement and detach from their normative assumptions (Collins 2000, 255; Harding 1986). However, this distancing move, or the assumption of separate knowing subjects, far from fostering neutrality, conceals the researcher's motivations and the intersubjective dimensions of knowledge production and circulation (Collins 2000, 264, Quijano 2007, Burman 2018). In contrast, critical anti-racist, anti-colonial, and feminist approaches "made the insider methodology much more acceptable in qualitative research" (Smith 2012, 138). Nevertheless, when the researched are defined as passive "objects" of study, the researcher, in turn, is constructed as an active "subject." This dynamic implies—or at least facilitates—the objectification of the researched (Collins 2000, 255; Quijano 2007, 174), and potentially enables dehumanization.[8]

Since interpretation is part of any methodology, the dangers of bias, perspectival absorption and particularism remain present even in abstract social theory production.[9] The aforementioned approaches to epistemology are keenly aware of one's position in relation to structural conditions of subject formation and knowledge production. It affects researchers as well as their research questions and designs. Ignoring this positional power leads to a problematic tendency to fall back into a simplistic dichotomy of researching subjects and researched objects. The relationship between researchers and their research is complex, and every selection of a research topic is shaped by what Charles Mills (2015b, 222) called "collective interpretative resources."

Detached and disembodied understandings of knowledge are therefore ill-suited to counter the epistemological and violent effects produced by systematic white supremacy as well as gendered, and classist domination. Instead, it perpetuates a political system produced and upheld by an "epistemology of ignorance" (Mills 2015a, 542) through the ideology of "colorblindness" (548). "Global white ignorance" constitutes epistemic violence by undermining the credibility of racialized epistemic agents, and depriving racialized groups of "collective interpretative resources" (Mills 2015b, 222). In other words, the epistemic resources of racialized people are denied validity—for supposedly being too subjective or overly positioned.

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[8] Dehumanization is a theme problematized prominently by Fanon (1986: 181), who discusses it with regard to Christianity, but also stresses dehumanization through the animalization of the colonized. Objectifying or animalizing the colonized negates their agency and reason. This dichotomous distinction is addressed in other critical approaches I, for example in Mills (1997) via the concept of subpersonhood, or in Quijano (2007) via the concept of Coloniality, see above.

[9] "For all our aspirations to be independent, impartial, and ecumenical, we too occupy specific institutional roles and socio-economic positions that shape our moral outlooks. While a turn to ethnography may not free us from our positionality and situatedness, it can serve to counterbalance our own parochialisms." (Herzog and Zacka 2017, 280).

However, this is due to the naturalization and/or normalization of whiteness as standard (Tuck and Yang 2012, 6, Quijano 2007, Mills 1997). This default perspective (white, male, bourgeois, able-bodied) is epistemologically biased. In contrast to positivist understandings of knowledge, Black and Indigenous feminist epistemological approaches—illustrated by Collins' work here—emphasize knowledge as interactive, collective, and embodied. This acknowledges and stresses the importance of emotions, ethicality, relationality, and lived experience, alongside reason for assessing knowledge claims. Rather than concealing what motivates one's research, an epistemological approach that accommodates the researcher's positionality connects the validity of knowledge claims to their personal integrity. While significant, solely reflecting one's identity and positionality is hardly enough. Thus, in the next section we discuss how to move beyond a focus on identity and point out some of the pitfalls of individual reflexivity.

4. Beyond Identity

Critiques of supposedly disembodied, objective science gained a kind of precarious dominance in social sciences and humanities. Reflexive approaches highlight the entanglement of knowledge production with colonial-patriarchal-capitalist violence in methodology and diverse fields such as decolonial studies (Striffler 2024, Smith 2012). Yet, it is key to question how violent power dynamics are reproduced when academia turns its attention to historical forms of exclusion and domination. These trends illustrate how the proliferation of antiracist and decolonial struggles, of the critiques of eurocentrism and of settler colonial knowledge production in academia (Campbell and Aung 2024, 145), produced significant impacts, reflecting hard-won achievements that deserve celebration. Nonetheless, we raise concerns about research practices based on problematic forms of self-reflexivity, a narrow focus on identity, and tokenistic representation.

The success of certain theories and methodologies neither validates nor invalidates them, but it raises questions about their alignment with institutional logics and their lack of threat to funding bodies. This is particularly concerning in light of the violence inflicted on "forms of speech that might enact real danger to the constellation of economic and social values" as Tbakhi (2023) points out. We argue that widely accepted forms of reflexivity—interrogating the dominant locus of enunciation and engaging with marginalized voices, theories, and actors—fail to go far enough and may even reproduce the violence they claim to challenge, ultimately hindering research that could contribute to emancipation.

A few clarifications are necessary. First, we describe this dominance as "precarious" because it is crucial to acknowledge ongoing—and increasingly aggressive—attacks by conservative forces. As Leon Moosavi (2020, 334) notes, we should not "presume that the new enthusiasm for intellectual decolonization in some circles means that intellectual decolonization has been universally endorsed within Northern academia," given that its universities tend to resent and often resist intellectual decolonization, remaining as sites of racism, orientalism and white privilege. Resistance to addressing the colonial, racist, and patriarchal foundations of dominant knowledge goes far beyond academic debates, as ongoing right-wing campaigns in many parts of the US and Europe chillingly demonstrate. Second, our object of critique might seem somewhat broad, referring to diverse developments. Therefore, it is important to reiterate that we are not questioning the significance of reflexivity itself or the value of polyvocal fields such as decolonial studies. Our critique of certain dominant expressions is not meant to undermine complex debates and praxis within these fields. Nevertheless, we emphasize the importance of interrogating what superficial forms of reflexivity fail to achieve, especially in contrast to more substantial forms (of solidarity).

This critique is not new. Already in the 1990s, Lila Abu-Lughod (1991, 143) observed that "decolonizations on the level of the text leave intact the basic configuration of global power on which anthropology, as linked to other institutions of the world, is based." Making positions transparent does not make them unproblematic. Silvia Cusicanqui (2010, 63) notes the "*gatopardismo* [the policy of changing everything so that everything remains the same] of the political and economic elites is reproduced in miniature in the social sciences that study the Andean region." We connect this to critical stances on the logics of (social) more generally. David Graeber (2015, 34) reflects that, in his more cynical moments, he views "social theory as a kind of game, … to see who can come up with the wildest, most shocking, most dangerous-sounding idea, that still does not offer any meaningful challenge to existing structures of authority"––a game which we have become so accustomed, to the point that "we no longer recognize what a genuinely dangerous idea would even look like."

Sharing the disillusion with superficial engagement, Daphne Patai (1994, 66) criticizes postmodern language games as the "amusement of the new semi-leisured class" where discourses remain tied to structures that privilege "access to limited resources journals, presses, publishers, public attention, careers." She argues that the extreme personalization prevalent in academia often coincides with a superficial pretense that merely acknowledging one's positionality is enough to address the world's problems. Patai rightly points out that this individual and linguistic practice alone does not tackle material realities.

To be clear, we distance ourselves from conservative criticism of identity politics. We recognize its origins in the 1960s and 70s when it emerged as a necessary response to oppression. Coined by the radical, anti-racist, and feminist *Combahee River Collective*, "identity politics" was originally intended for political work within their groups and "*in coalition with* other progressive organizations." (Dabiri 2021, 140) However, this form of awareness, if detached from political work and collective goals, becomes a very limited source for dismantling entrenched systems of power. As Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang (2012, 19) state, "[u]ntil stolen land is relinquished, critical consciousness does not translate into action that disrupts settler colonialism." While freeing the mind is an important step, it does not, in itself, dismantle material and structural legacies of colonialism, patriarchy, and classism. Consequently, we emphasize that explorations of eurocentrism, white supremacy, and other categories of marginalization do not always lead to fundamental challenges to these systems. Instead, they may remain comfortably within the very epistemic and material structures they seek to critique. Highlighting the risk of reproducing Eurocentrism and dominant hierarchies, Moosavi (2020, 336) describes how "discussions about intellectual decolonisation can be Northerncentric in the sense that Southern scholarship about intellectual decolonisation may be ignored."

Cusicanqui's warnings are crucial to our cautions about the structural context. She criticizes the rise of decolonial discourses on Latin America produced in the "the 'palaces' of empire"—Global North universities, foundations, and international organizations—where domination is reproduced (Cusicanqui 2010, 57). She observes the lack of meaningful dialogue with Andean actors and forces. Instead, their ideas are used to further academic careers, "creating a jargon, a conceptual apparatus, and forms of reference and counter-reference that have isolated academic treatises from any obligation to or dialogue with insurgent social forces" (57–8). Not only are these insurgent forces excluded from these "palaces," but their knowledge and theorization are also appropriated and repurposed to advance careers within Northern frameworks.

Even in the growing literature critiquing anthropology's links to colonialism, key issues of domination continue to be avoided (Abu-Lughod 1991). A significant area of neglect concerns political economy and material inequality. Discussions about decolonizing knowledge "at times come at the expense of political economy and broader discussions about the economic impact and architecture of empire" and can lead to "marginalization of earlier anti-imperialist intellectuals, activists, and militants from the Global South who struggled centrally with the question of the imperialist political economy" (Striffler 2024, 244). Once absorbed by the palaces of empire, radical ideas often lose their potential and political urgency. The final product becomes thoroughly depoliticized, characterized by "cooptation and mimesis, the selective incorporation of

ideas and selective approval of those that better nourish a fashionable, depoliticized, and comfortable multiculturalism" (Cusicanqui 2010: 68).

The issue goes beyond narcissism or ineffectiveness. The ways in which ideas, deemed emancipatory and positioned against violences, are produced and circulated in academia may not only fail to challenge these systems but also reproduce and legitimize ongoing violence. These forms of reflexivity can reinforce the authority of privileged researchers, rendering superficial solidarity with emancipatory agendas a dangerous mix. Attempts at radicality often displace or render invisible other(ed) struggles and approaches. Decolonial thought, for example, is often valued only when detached from praxis and grounded movements of liberation and material decolonization (Turner 2022).

Attachment or detachment of theory from praxis is demanded (or avoided) with strategic selectivity. This concerns our distinction between superficial and substantial solidarity insofar as strategical detachment of, for example, decolonial rhetoric in theory from material practices of reparation is one phenomenon of superficial solidarity addressed above. To contribute to more substantial, non-superficial forms of solidarity in research dealing with experiences of marginalization, we now contextualize our understanding of substantial solidarity.

5. Contextualizing Solidarity: Care, Coalitions, and Comradeship

For a better understanding of what is being considered here as practices of substantial solidarity—which encompasses as its integral aspects an ethics of care, and comradeship—we take a look back into the historical meaning of the terminology of solidarity. The first theoretical discussions and typologies for different types of solidarity arose in the 19th century (Sangionvanni and Viehoff 2023).

Sociologist Emil Durkheim (1893 [1984]), for example, who was deeply concerned with societies' disintegration due to loss of religious and traditional homogeneity in face of the rising industrialization, created a classification between "mechanical solidarity" and "organic solidarity." Whereas traditional societies would have relied on the former due to more immediate relations, modern division of labor and increasing individualization would develop "organic," more abstract and mediated forms of solidarity mandated for example by the state.

However, solidarity as a concept is also historically tied to the working-class movement and union tactics (Noetzl and Hinkmann 2008, 564). In this sense, it refers to standing in for each other, justified by common interests, but also by responsibility and/or duties toward specific individuals or groups. The practices of substantial solidarity proposed in this paper could be said to pertain rather to this line of tradition, as it's conceived towards the context of marginalization experiences. However, these contexts are

broader than just the working-class movement – whose terminology has been criticized for its masculine bias as it was primarily geared toward the white, male industrial worker (Adamczak 2017) – and thus need to further develop the notion of solidarity.

More recent debates have indeed produced a broad range of understandings. They distinguish from traditional understandings of political and civic solidarity to more reflexive forms like affective solidarity or solidarity in difference (Deveaux 2021; Bargetz et al. 2019; Franzen and Freitag 2007). Conjointly, practical responses to modern problems of solidarity such as collective housing projects and solidarity economies which aim for a new common good are put forward as practical responses (Bargetz et al. 2019, 10–11). More abstractly, Derridean notions of the impossible are taken up to discuss the (im)possibilities of solidarity in difference (Gebhardt 2023), a theme popularized by critical race theorists and postcolonial scholars (Bargetz et al. 2019: 14–5). While conceptualizing solidarity through a deconstruction of difference and identity, particularly with a focus on alterity, can be useful for interrogating the welfare state, for example, these ideas are open to moderate and radical interpretations (Weithaler and Bstieler 2023). In our view, it is important to insist on building solidarity, regardless of the difficulties and (im)possibilities, considering the legacies of injustice our world must deal with.

Thus, on a theoretical level, the idea of affective solidarity, associated with Bini Adamczak or Jodi Dean, contributes to our conception of substantial solidarity. Adamczak (2017) rethinks solidarity as a form of relating, one that cannot be reduced to purely theoretical claims or limited solely to demands arising from struggle. As solidarity necessarily encompasses an affective dimension, relationships of care and a desire for alternative forms of relationships are integral to affective solidarity (Bargetz et al. 2019, 19).

In order to contribute to substantial, non-superficial forms of solidarity in research dealing with experiences of marginalization, we consider an ethics of care, coalition building, and comradeship as integral aspects of substantial solidarity. To create adequate space for the knowledge of marginalized peoples and facilitate the explicit pursuit of common goals in research, we draw on Collins' (2000, 262–265) proposition of an ethics of care as an essential element. Rooted in African humanism, Collins (2000, 263) identifies three interrelated aspects of an ethics of care that offer an alternative, relational epistemological stance in contrast to claims of scientific neutrality. These aspects include valuing individual uniqueness and expressiveness, acknowledging emotions as valid, and fostering empathy—all of which are necessary for mutual understanding and coalition building. Furthermore, the emphasis on individuality, emotions, and empathy as conditions for mutual understanding must be complemented by personal accountability wherein "people are expected to be accountable for their knowledge claims" (Collins 2000, 265). The central issue of care, which is stressed particularly by scholars with experiences of marginalization (Collins 2000, 262–265, also

Linda Smith 2012), does not open the door for esoteric quackery. Instead, it emphasizes the conditions for countering the structural violence of racial capitalism in a heteronormative and highly stratified society.

In political systems that explicitly or implicitly further the annihilation of Black and Indigenous people of color, while struggling with more diverse gender identities and sexualities, self-care and community-care practiced by these marginalized groups must be seen as acts of resistance (Wyatt and Ampadu 2022). These resistant care practices allow for reflecting on common goals and interests while acknowledging the physical and emotional needs of different knowledge producers. These forms of community-care are part of fostering substantial forms of solidarity: finding common goals (and potentially political agency) by taking seriously individual needs while respecting differential access to collective interpretative resources.

Accountability and commitment to a group must go beyond a transactional "giving back" and adapt to different contexts. We, thus, turn to coalition-building and draw particularly on Emma Dabiri's (2021) critique of allyship. Dabiri (2011, 11) associates this—in activist and solidarity environments very common—vocabulary with "empty, meaningless, performative gestures" of solidarity. Allyship, she criticizes, exacerbates and essentializes differences and frames an ally's actions as "selfless" and performed for others. In contrast, coalition-building focuses on finding common goals and working towards them together, fostering solidarity across heterogeneous groups.[10]

Allyship reifies difference and hierarchy (Dabiri 2021, 14). Like an ability for charity, this form of superficial solidarity is built on privilege, while coalition-building promotes more equitable mobilization. Allyship implies inclusion into a system predicated on inequalities, where calls for privilege transfer remain vague (21), and reflections on privilege are often perceived as white loss or sacrifice (22). We previously discussed how (self-)reflexivity and identity politics risk depoliticizing issues and downplaying material inequality, leading to further marginalization. With Dabiri (2021, 148), we are critical of strategies like "amplifying voices," often focused on representation. These risk arbitrary privilege calculations or, worse, hinder coalitions based on shared interests by essentializing identities. This has been an issue since the 80s, also called 'oppression olympics' (Martínez 2008, 754). Instead, we argue for building coalitions within our practices, centering on relationality and collaboration, especially when researching marginalized experiences. A focus on actively seeking common goals[11] is more compatible with turning research into a valuable experience for all involved.

[10] See also Charles Mills (2015a, 555).

[11] However, we stress that solidarity through common goals alone does not guarantee for an ethically righteous research, and the studies that examined harmful social bonds, e. g. racist societies, or mafia and terrorist networks (Franzen/Freitag 2007). These are functional systems according to their internal norms and goals but are considered dysfunctional by broader society (Sangiovanni and Viehoff 2023).

Both an ethics of care and coalition building is present in the work of June Nash with Bolivian miners, which profoundly shaped her research trajectory. Her commitment and substantial solidarity with the Bolivian miners led her from Bolivia to the US, where she wanted to help their interests in understanding why the US American working class did not share the miners' revolutionary aspirations (Nash 1981). Nash exemplifies and is a precursor of what is now termed engaged or activist anthropology. However, her relationship with her interlocutors transcended mere engagement or allyship (and the often-tepid advocacy those terms can imply). Instead, she positioned herself on the same side as Oruro miners (Dean 2019). She stood with them in denouncing the ravages of global capitalism and its political regimes in Bolivia and in Pittsfield and Chiapas" (Kasmir 2013; 212).

In section two, we noted that there is little room for scholar activism in the neo-liberal university. Still, particularly in researching marginalized groups and contexts, the distance academia demands may reproduce the very forms of violence we critique. Moreover, choosing to research these contexts requires recognizing the type of know-ledge produced in them. This should displace the typical subject-object relation—which risks extractivism of knowledge—in favor of a "side-by-side" partnership, where the researcher enhances rather than appropriates marginalized knowledge, and by estab-lishing common goals. We see this as comradeship.

In contrast to a sociological, descriptive and hence ambiguous understanding of solidarity, the comrade represents a political relation. It shifts the focus away from specific identity positions (e.g., survivors) and systemic hyperobjects (race, class, gender) to commonality and 'sameness' that engages us in emancipatory egalitarian political struggles. As Dean (2019, 32) argues, being a comrade "engenders discipline, joy, courage, and enthusiasm" and "if the left is as committed to radical change as we claim, we have to be comrades." This interconnected sense of discipline and joy, Jody Dean (2019, 25) notes, is a mode of political belonging. We understand this belonging precisely as standing side-by-side through differences. It builds a common ground for our feet, not for an identitarian belonging.

The comrade figure also helps with questions of benefit, profit, and value created through research. To avoid superficial solidarity, particularly in research dealing with marginalization, assuming the comrade position offers another perspective on the research work. The comrade relation "enables the revaluation of work and time, what one does, and for whom one does it. Is one's work done for the people or for the bosses? Is it voluntary or done because one has to? Does one work for personal provisions or for a collective good?" (Dean 2019, 25) We engaged here with feminist, anti-racist, and scholar-activist positions that challenge detached understandings of knowledge production. We align with their call for an affective, political, and normative need for

more substantial forms of solidarity to confront issues like *gatopardismo*, tokenism, and epistemic extractivism.

Politicizing knowledge production and our roles as knowledge producers is, therefore, a way to contribute to this collective good—and maybe it is time to put it above individual career considerations. By fostering substantial solidarity with our research partners, not objects, we may leave behind the solitary path, and stand as careful comrades building coalitions.

6. Comrades or *Kharisiris*: For Substantial Solidarity in Social Science Research

To sum up, we discussed knowledge production as situated. We emphasized legacies of colonial, patriarchal and capitalist logics in academic knowledge production. Reflecting on these legacies is key to avoiding them, and to do research conducive to justice and emancipation. While acknowledging the importance of awareness, we critique the tendency of dominant forms addressing oppression and exploitation as often superficial, unhelpful at best, and damaging at worst. Practices of tokenism, exclusively linguistic self-reflexivity, and epistemic extractivism were examples for superficial solidarity. We contrast this with substantial solidarity informed by practices of care, coalition-building and comradeship.

We aim to foster relations of substantial solidarity in research and social science theory, particularly when dealing with experiences of marginalization. Given the structural and individual dimensions of power imbalances in academia, we highlighted potential risks of reproducing tokenistic and extractivist practices. These form part of epistemic injustice that occur even when adopting emancipatory vocabulary if we lose connection to the struggles it originates from. For this, we drew on discussions about the benefits and limitations of situated knowledge, identity, and reflexivity. Since our focus has been on social science research dealing with experiences of marginalization (drawing from feminist, anti-racist, and historical-materialist thinkers), we limited our discussion to the relation between researched, research and researcher within specific research agendas. We were not able to further explore, for instance, how one chooses a research topic. Nor did we fully delve into the material-economic dimensions of knowledge production which further distort our collective interpretative resources.

By ending our discussion of superficial and substantial solidarity in knowledge production and the social sciences with notions of care, comradeship and coalition, we are not suggesting these as specific resolutions to particular situations. Rather, we take these notions into our research relations and practices so we may act as comrades, and not *kharisiris*.

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