When someone gets sick, we run to them, not from them": holding space for solidarity otherwise and the cxxxity in times of COVID-19

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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? Situated in diverse geo and body political locations as researchers, we argue that holding space for otherwise unseen and non-intelligible plural forms of solidarity, that is solidarities, is at the heart of such an endeavour. In The Hague, The Netherlands, the COVID-19 pandemic has fuelled an interest in understanding solidarity towards migrants' communities. However, dominant theories of solidarity do not suffice to unpack the many forms of solidarity in the city. These theories explain solidarity either as enacted upon "others" or as limited to a delineated community. In both cases, solidarity is assumed to be disengaged from basic forms of reciprocity between city dwellers and the places and daily practices that exist for urban life to thrive. In this article, we move beyond these disengagements.

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, weaving city and residents together. Embarking upon this explorative journey, we as researchers ended up becoming part of the communal bodies and learned about solidarity firsthand as our stories became interwoven. Rather than visibilizing stories, we held the space for our and the communities' stories (Cairo 2021). This paper then is not just about what we learned, but also about how we learned. In doing so, we highlight the need to reconceptualize solidarity in a way that allows for differences to come forward and to be creative with those differences (Lorde 2017 [1979]), and to grapple with how this plurality shapes The Hague. In advocating for *creativity with* rather than tolerance of difference, we underline the power that lies in turning the nondominant differences between us into strengths, as a way to forge new urban relationships, to think and live in the city and ways of thinking and practising (Lorde 2017 [1979]). We also highlight the potential of research as a praxis of transformation rather than data collection and extraction.

Keywords

Holding space, solidarities, communities, storytelling, migration, The Hague, markets, city, relationalities.

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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

1 Introduction

How can we think about solidarity in ways that are attentive to the diversity shaping the urban cityscape of The Hague - the most segregated city of the Netherlands? Disparities based on class, exemplified in "the sand versus peat" residential occupation, go back to the origin of the city.[1] Power differentials are expressed in discourses about certain neighbourhoods that are labelled as poor, backwards, troublesome, or dangerous (the peat city). Beyond class, these areas are generally occupied by people with non-European migration backgrounds reflecting the processes of racialization that have exacerbated urban fragmentation.

In this context, the Local Engagement Facility (LEF) initiative of the International Institute of Social Studies (ISS) funded the multidisciplinary collaboration that underpins this paper. Together with researchers and students from Leiden University College (LUC), the International Institute of Social Studies (ISS), and The Hague University of Applied Sciences (THUAS), our team approached the specific and differentiated impacts of COVID-19 through exploring stories of solidarity in five different locations of the city during 2020-2021.[2] The aim was to look at the stories of those who are deemed "other" and whose communities are often portrayed in a negative light or are erased in the media and local politics. With the experience of the COVID-19 lockdown, these communities' stories were either denigrated or silenced.

Rather than entering the search for these stories as disembodied academic researchers, we identify ourselves by differentiated degrees of "otherness" at the onset of this project. Hailing from Mexico, Chile, the US, Pakistan, and Germany, carrying ethnicities of Mexican, Chilean, Indian, Pakistani, Surinamese, and German descent, we are all immigrant women in the Netherlands - yet with divergent social locations as a result of global processes of racialization and capitalist exploitation. These locations determine from where

[1] When The Hague originated as a village it was divided between those who lived on the sand - the rich - versus those who lived on pete soil - the poor. The rich were referred to as Hagenaar, while the poor were referred to as Hagenees. Today the distinction between Hagenaar and Hagenees is rather linked to who was born and raised in The Hague (Hagenees) versus those who immigrated into the city (Hagenaar) https://pauwenenregahs.wordpress.com/2016/03/08/op-t-veen-of-op-t-zand/

[2] As a research project, "Learning from Stories of Solidarity" (LEF-SOS) was originally planned to take place over three stages - lockdown, transition and post-lockdown in the City - during the last months of 2020 and only involving ISS based researchers. As the project progressed, and LUC based researchers became part of the team and new funding was secured parallel to COVID-19 restrictions shifts, the project extended to the end of 2021 with different moments of data collection along the process.

and how we theorise and practice solidarity across our differences. We carry with us different onto-epistemic perspectives yet have in common a refusal of the hegemonic knowledge system and its limiting understanding of solidarity. Moreover, we have experienced the position of being "othered" in our institutional journeys as we have specialized-in and embraced feminist, Indigenous, decolonial, our respective fields. Moreover, some of us enter this space as elders as we also include student researchers as part of our engagements in this project. Our positionalities then shape our intent and fervour as we enter this story.

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, people have been disrupted from the usual ways of sensing the presence of others. Physical presence became a threat and the poorly denominated "social distancing" regulations-imposed control on everyday physical interactions to contain the spread of the virus. How to feel the presence of others, to engage in relations of care, in times when "social distancing" becomes the paramount of care? In this project, the LEF/LUC team explored some of the multiple forms in which solidarity emerged and manifested in the city of The Hague, accommodating "social distance" regulations to maintain sociality and keep the city alive. In other words, we inquired how people were there for one another instead of running away from each other, even under aggravated circumstances. We paid particular attention to communities at the margins of The Hague. Paying attention to these stories helps us reconceptualize solidarity from a plurality of angles rather than from its canonical normative origins. We argue for stories of *solidarity otherwise*, understanding solidarity as a way to connect bodies, the stories they carry, and the places and plural temporalities these bodies inhabit.

To develop this argument, our paper is organised in five sections, in which we attempt to ground theory,[3] not be confused with grounded theory, in the interweaving of stories of solidarity as *solidarity otherwise*. The first section unpacks canonical and moral approaches to solidarity as monocultural in defining it. The second section introduces the role of storytelling as a means of exploring plural practices and meanings of solidarities. The third section elaborates on the embodied stories of solidarity across place and space in The Hague. The fourth section focuses on enfleshed stories of solidarity in the plural temporalities of the city. The final section identifies interwoven lessons learned within the context of Holding Space (Cairo, 2021).

[3] Grounded theory is often understood as what emerges from the processes of data collection conducted by researchers with access to the "field" and "informants" via a plurality of methods and techniques with various degrees of involvement and participation of the protagonists of those stories. For de Egia Huerta (2020) grounded theory as a methodological choice can contribute to open space for plural ways of knowing by centering around the everyday expressions of macro-structures of inequality. On the other hand, grounding (our) theories points at a movement towards epistemic vulnerability instead of certainty as researchers-learners. By grounding the theories with which one enters in relation with others and Earth, research becomes a praxis of transformation rather than data collection and extraction. Methodologically, grounding our theories means to abandon pre-accepted onto-epistemic and axiological assumptions to see and hear what remains unintelligible underneath.

2 Normative definitions of solidarity: Enacted upon 'others' and bounded

During the COVID-19 pandemic, nongovernmental and governmental entities have appealed to 'solidarity' among citizens. These appeals 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). The latter form of solidarity is theorised as enacted upon distant 'others' by a disembodied, reasonable, cosmopolitan subject, and thus is disentangled from place, relationality, and primal forms of care and reciprocity (Ahmed 2004, Andreotti et al. 2015, Chouliaraki 2011, Jabri 2007).

Bayertz (1999) identifies four different uses of the concept in relation to morality (human solidarity), society (social solidarity), liberation (political solidarity), and the welfare state (civic solidarity). These are premised on Eurocentric conceptions of humanity, citizenship, social belonging, and moral obligation, which operate along logics of domination and exclusion (Gaztambide-Fernández 2012). For example, the categories of the 'human', 'citizen', and 'political subject' have historically excluded the people other-ed as not human or as outside/at the margins of a political community and society under colonialism and gendered racial capitalism. Appeals to 'solidarity' during the pandemic then assumed a specific normative subject, excluding those other-ed from their orbit. With our research, we circumscribe these normative monocultural notions of solidarity and their universalizing remit by revealing them as specific and limiting historical and political projects.

In fact, Nathalie Karagiannis (2007) problematizes the construction of a dilemma in EU policy discourse and theoretical debates on Europe that posits the irreconcilability of solidarity within Europe ('social solidarity') or solidarity with 'the rest of the world' ('human solidarity'). Karagiannis (2007) deciphers two distinct trajectories of these two forms of solidarity. Whilst 'social solidarity' moves from emphasising differences between - not within - European societies to foregrounding commonalities (European social model, European civilization), 'human solidarity' moves from a premise of common humanity to insurmountable 'otherness'. This hierarchical classification is also reflected in political and intellectual debates on cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism within Europe. 'European cosmopolitanism' is predicated on the recognition of (national/ cultural) differences within the European framework of nation states, while assuming a European (cultural/ civilizational) difference from Europe's 'others' that become associated with multiculturalism.

The EU's pursuit of 'unity in diversity' pertains to diversity between states rather than *within* states, whereby it would have to encompass those 'others' who form part of European polities since the times of colonial and imperial conquest (Bhambra and Narayan 2016). The distinction between citizens and 'migrants'/ 'refugees', between those who belong and have rights and those who do not, are rooted in racialized conceptions of the nation state and historical belonging to the nation. Multiculturalism is predominantly identified as a feature of

'postcolonial immigrant societies' in standard literature. Europe's 'others' migrating to Europe and, increasingly, working-class EU citizens are understood as a financial and social burden to European solidarity (Bhambra 2017, Mantu and Minderhoud 2017). Our team examined how these constructions played out in the Dutch response to COVID-19, and how they were negotiated or disrupted by residents of The Hague.

Although the Netherlands is a country historically constituted by migrants, migrants of colour are deemed perennial 'allochtonen', the until recently official term denoting "those who came from elsewhere", and thus have their claim on Dutchness denied (Wekker 2016). It is whiteness and Christianity that confer the title of 'autochtonen', meaning "those who are from here". In discourses on multiculturalism, an essentialist notion of culture is ascribed to some bodies and is used to explain the behaviour of those recognized as non-Dutch, thus doing the work of 'race' (Wekker 2004, 2016). During the coronavirus pandemic, 'social solidarity' was framed in terms of rational individual behaviour and personal responsibility. Characterising citizens as grown-ups that do not require stronger confinement measures, the Dutch government advised them to self-isolate appropriately while keeping a 'frisse neus' (i.e. getting fresh air) (Burgos Martínez 2020).

As the government addressed 'the people' and appealed to unity, responsibility, and solidarity, it spoke to a particular subject imagined in terms of rational, autonomous individualism. Preventive measures were tailored to a particular subject (white, middle-class, able-bodied) and thus safeguarded some lives over others (Brandon 2020). 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). Often equated with antisocial behaviour, non-compliance with preventive measures became ascribed to certain bodies/subjects, as an intrinsic characteristic of certain (racialized or class) groups, and was attributed to lack of respect, of integration, or education. This is contrasted with the rational and responsible citizen who represents Dutchness (Burgos Martínez 2020).

2.1 Disrupting dominant notions of 'solidarity' and its subject

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). Sara Ahmed (2004, 2016) shows how the Western subject becomes aligned with the agent of solidarity. This solidarity relation is an active/ passive relation, whereby the recipient of solidarity receives from and becomes indebted to the subject of solidarity. This notion is removed from forms of reciprocation and mutual care. It follows that solidarity then, disconnected from histories of oppression, reinforces the very relations of domination responsible for injustice. Mohanty (2013) criticises the individualization and privatisation of notions of agency under neoliberalism, which undermine collective forms of political solidarity.

Critiques of liberal political thought predominantly move from a notion of solidarity as enacted by an autonomous cosmopolitan subject to conceptualizations of 'group solidarity', understood as derived from 'particularist affiliations and attachments' to distinct traditions, practices, languages, etc. (Young 1990, Rothschild 1981, Ross 1980, Fischer, 1982). Such critiques have been crucial in highlighting structures and relations of domination and some practices challenging these (cf. Young 1990). However, they do not suffice to grasp the multiple, complex practices of solidarity across boundaries and the radical plurality unfolding among communities and in cities.

To think and practice plural solidarities or solidarity *otherwise*, our research project needed *to go beyond* these frameworks of understanding. Our aim was to be able to highlight the intellectual and political relevance of conceptualising solidarities in a way that not only challenges homogenised narratives of European exceptionalism but that also de-silences ongoing practices of solidarities already shaping urban life as embodied and enfleshed experiences. To do so, we approached this research methodologically by using storytelling and became involved with what Cairo (2021) conceptualises as Holding Space.

3 Storytelling as an approach to knowledge

From an Indigenous perspective, storytelling is at the core of being in the world. This is why for Motta (2016) storytelling is an onto-epistemology or in other words, a being in the world that grounds how we know that presence in the world. Being in the world is defined as the presence of one's soul or spirit that is connected with everything throughout the universe (Turner 2003). Storytelling strengthens and affirms the connection with others, regardless of time and space. The Ubuntu principle from South Africa states: "I am because we are". It 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 have the opportunity to 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 co-existing in the world. Hence, stories contribute to the creation of sacred space just for the sake of being, something especially essential for peoples who have a history of being removed, silenced, erased, or marginalised (Iseke 2013).

Our research purposefully employed a perspective based on Indigenous knowledge. As a research team focusing on the stories of the most marginalised, we chose to be guided by a knowledge perspective that comes from the margins. Building on aspects such as relationality, plural temporalities, and the appreciation of localised, embodied-enfleshed, spiritual, and ancestral knowledges and ways of knowing, we specifically embraced stories to pursue this work.

In addition to spiritual affirmation, there are the cognitive and political affirmations that are significant for storytelling for Indigenous people. At the simplest, stories nurture relationships and allow for validation of Indigenous experiences and epistemologies (Iseke 2013). Motta (2016) explains that

storytelling assures survival for those who have been marginalised in a colonised world - "I am because my story is here". In other words,

> It is through the family narratives – the small unit of my parents' lineage and the larger community of African Americans with whom I am acquainted – that I understand my past, my present, and where my kin are on their journey in becoming (Johnson-Bailey, 2010: 78).

Johnson-Bailey explains that stories can bridge the personal and political as they exist on various levels, from community over regional to the self. Therefore, stories are a means for learning about each other, making meaning of our storied lives, and moving beyond one's self (2010). This movement, as Motta emphasises, is based on dialogue and exchange, but cautions that this dialogue is not simple. So many have been silenced and hurt and therefore will not engage. Thus, the storyteller has to develop special listening skills, and use their craft to retell and reinvent stories with those marginalised at the centre. She describes this as "an act of love". Storytelling is then an essential act, but at the same time also a revolutionary act. Storytelling affirms people's being and well-being. For marginalized people especially, it also affirms their presence in a world that often does not want to see or acknowledge them.

Williams et al. (2003) examines the potentialities of collaborative storytelling for challenging dominant social discourses through asserting alternative understandings, identities, and worldviews. Coming from our entrance as other-ed researchers with stories of marginalisation of our own, both personal and academic, we embraced the use of storytelling as it would allow us to bring all of ourselves, rather than our academic restricted selves. This is in line with Williams et al.'s message that storytelling can strengthen communal stories that subvert dominant discourses and "(re)construct communities as empowered rather than disempowered collectives" (2003: 36). Hence, storytelling carries the potential to uncover submerged knowledges and can further epistemic justice (Williams et al. 2003). It is this epistemic justice we seek in broadening the storyscape of The Hague.

Iseke (2013: 573) emphasises that storytelling as a research practice initiates the "transformative process of understanding oneself in relation", as it involves listening and mutual storying within a specific context from which it cannot be separated. Storytellers can convey, interpret, and give meaning to their lived experiences within their own cultural and linguistic context. It entails the merging of the stories of the research participants "to create a collaborative text, a mutually constructed story created out of [their] lived experiences" (Bishop 1999: 2). It is thus embedded within the human and more-than-human relational world. Importantly, stories can be spaces of resistance (Iseke 2013). For our team, storytelling emerged as a possibility for nurturing and harvesting plural stories of solidarity with fellow city dwellers and among ourselves.

We as a research team became volunteers and regular visitors to research locations to connect, listen and share in creating stories with community members in the places we were embedded (described and discussed in sections 3 and 4). Each team spent a minimum of three months engaging their respective community sites. In addition, we spent hours gathering with each other, initially

face to face and after the lockdown online. On four occasions, we held collaborative storytelling workshops with community members or students, respectively, but our storytelling research consisted mostly of joining in the stories of our communities, reflecting with the team afterwards and then coming to conclusions as to what stories were at play at that given moment. Moreover, we paid attention to how community members included us in their stories, how they welcomed us and made us part, sometimes matter of factly, sometimes explicitly. We extracted concepts from our experiences that gave us insight into lessons and the interwovenness of our stories. Reflecting in our meetings, we also paid attention to how our own stories were changing as a result of our engagements.

As researchers embodying the "other" in various contexts, we chose to engage in stories of the community through pre-existing relations. From the Pakistani community to the markets and community centres, we engaged with the hopes of building upon the stories with which we had some familiarity. We also did so with the hopes that in these familiar spaces we needed to spend less time negotiating our "otherness". We approach storytelling in the research not as a method for data collection that after a proper justification of certain validation parameters can be analysed. Storytelling was deployed as a means to hold space for the stories of solidarity that were trusted to us, to collaborate in those stories, and to be touched by them. The pursuit of engaging stories then became an act of being with and potential transformation.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, much storytelling research was forced to shift to virtual spaces and digital tools, raising questions as to how educational and social/ emotional benefits could be facilitated under the unfolding conditions. Reflecting on digital storytelling with young people during the pandemic, Jones et al. (2020) highlight the importance of building on existing relationships and familiarity with methods to conduct a storytelling research method that is socially and emotionally beneficial. They emphasise that participants should be provided with the possibility to employ the methods in their own time and space. A feminist 'ethic of care' that particularly attends to relationships with and responsibilities towards participants can create space for participants to cope with the consequences of the pandemic on their lives, when other social relations may be strained. Specifically, participants can reflect on and document their emotions and express sensitive and stigmatised issues in times of lockdown.

As part of this research, we saw students explore the use of digital storytelling as a means to articulate and assemble their stories and at the same time offer comfort to each other. However, we also experienced the at times painful limitations of online research and were challenged to problematize some of the assumptions underpinning social distance regulations: Whose crisis is the pandemic? Who is able to abide by the regulations? What cannot be put on hold? Consequently, we made an ethical commitment and concerted effort to limit our online engagement to team meetings but continued holding space for the stories with our community members face to face, while abiding by COVID-19 regulations as much as possible.

In the process of doing research with a storytelling approach, the researchers not only observed relations of solidarity unfold in different places from the outside, but we also learned about solidarity through what happened and shifted inside of us.

4 Solidarity as embodied experience in place and space

In this section we want to concentrate on the place stories of solidarity took in the city, and what spatial forms were revealed in relation to two types of infrastructures: food markets and the university. Food markets and initiatives to provide food during Covid were explored by Jyothi Thrivikraman and Daniela Vicherat Mattar, together with a group of five LUC students. The team focused on how food markets and initiatives reacted to the Covid policies, and what role solidarity played in their adaptation to such regulations (if any). Meanwhile, a student team from the ISS explored stories with their fellow international students about their experiences of attending university during the COVID-19 lockdown.

4.1 Food markets and initiatives

Traditionally, food markets have the potential to be a key part of the city's social infrastructure that can foster social solidarity (Van Eck 2020; Klinenberg 2018; Mishra 2020). The markets in this project included De Haagse Markt, the Organic Farmer's Market, Lekkernassuh and Lokale Markten. De Haagse Markt is the biggest open market in the city, located at the intersection of two highly stigmatised immigrant neighbourhoods, which in normal times is open to the public four days a week. The Organic Farmer's Market is a small gathering of a few vendors at the centre of the city serving locally grown organic products once a week. Lekkernassuh similarly focuses on redistributing locally grown organic foods once a week, occupying a former gym place, in cooperation with various other initiatives. Finally, Lokale Markten was a student-organised online market distribution service specifically designed to collect and deliver fresh foods from the markets to customers during times of COVID-19.

By exploring these food market initiatives, they came to understand solidarity as a practice that, through exchange, makes people available to one another, in connection to the place they occupy in the city. In other words, they experienced how different marketplaces afford different spatialities of solidarity based on exchange.[4] The practices of exchange need infrastructure to transpire, and these market initiatives provide such infrastructure. In fact, unlike the conceptualisations of space that assume it to be "there" – topographically or procedurally as in the work of Kurt Iveson (2007) – in this project the team departed from the assumption that, to exist, spaces are held in place. Holding space means that space is always "here", or within the interaction that is taking

[4] The researchers considered place, following Aucoin (2017), as infused with meaningful interactions and experiences, whereas they understood space as always under construction and unfolding as the result of ongoing relations (Massey, 2005).

place. The notion of "Holding Space" (Cairo 2021) triggers a way of thinking 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 the food markets could be understood as spaces of solidarity that connect us, from within, to others, no matter for how long or under how fleeting circumstances.

The methodological route the LUC team took to achieve this was to map the markets, the types of interactions that could be identified and, as they became soon aware, how the markets also gave shape to a network of connections extending across the city, connecting some markets with one another and with their communities of reference. The infrastructures the different market initiatives afforded to the city reflected a messy and complex setting for the unfolding of solidarity connections across The Hague. Unlike the sanitised, efficient, and decreased social experiences derived from "social distancing" regulations experienced in supermarkets, the plurality of relations established in these different market initiatives connected the team with ways of doing solidarity, alternative stories of solidarity.

In the marketplace, people connect with a purpose of exchange across differences. Some of these differences have been engrained for such a long time and have become part of the common story that they seemed unsurmountable. COVID-19 allowed for shifts and insights in traversing those differences in new and unsuspected ways, but also entrenched existing boundaries. The researchers held the perspective that rather than starting from people giving meaning to the markets with their stories, the markets are storied places themselves with particular histories in which people become interconnected. For instance, most vendors have been at the Haagse Markt for several generations with stalls passing down through children.

> But, 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. That is not the case anymore. (Cheese vendor)

The Haagse Markt sells both food and non-food items, but due to COVID-19 only food, flowers and food take-away stalls were allowed to remain open. This had a disproportionate impact on market vendors and inhibited related practices of exchange and support to materialise. While all the markets studied exchange food, they vary with regards to the place and space they can occupy in the city, which raises the question "who sells, who buys and who leads" (Alkon and Agyemen 2011)? Consequently, some issues of discrimination were exacerbated by a lack of trust. Vendors of the Haagse Markt were distrustful of the Lokale Markten online sales initiative due to a lack of transparency in pricing, even though Lokale Markten was designed specifically to support vendors during COVID-19.

During the COVID strenuous regulations affecting the market, one way to overcome engrained differences was to use versatile products to come together in solidarity. Relations and support could be fostered around the product sold; for example, vegetable vendors may partner with cheese, nut, or coffee vendors.

It was rare for vendors of similar products to support each other, especially as customer flow was reduced due to COVID-19.

Similarly, maintaining relationships with customers was critical and facilitated by the length of time vendors were established at the market. 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 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". (Coffee vendor)

COVID-19 accompanied by regulations and policing restrictions brought a common enemy and saw collaborations and support where previously absent. There was some increase in reaching out for support across ethnic lines, but in general supportive actions were mostly ethnic bound and focused on customers, rather than vendors from different backgrounds. The Hague's market dynamics are strongly influenced by race and class, just like in the city as a whole. White Dutch vendors would seek produce from other white Dutch vendors and other groups would cluster in a similar fashion. Workers at the Lokale Markten indicated that deliveries from the Haagse Markt were indeed always racially segregated. This distinction is so pervasive that processes of racialization inhibit making connections across differences. One vendor states:

> A lot of racists here at the market. Yes it's true, they don't like me, I like them. I don't like them, I love them. But they don't like me. What do I do? Nothing! I'm not here for them, I'm here for my customers. I'm here to make my money. So do you care about them? I don't care about them! (Vegetable vendors)

The racialization of difference does not happen only among vendors. During COVID security regulations were severely implemented, and they were far more visible and present in the Haagse Markt than in any of the other markets (and much more than in closed supermarkets). For example, the organic farmer's market did not have a security person walking around to ensure compliance with the COVID-19 measures, however the Haagse Markt had increased security presence at the entrances and exits of the market with security cameras, marked routes for pedestrian flow and the noticeable presence of several security guards.

The other markets, Leekernassuh and the organic market, were never so severely securitized. Run by and servicing a mainly white Dutch, young and/or international (transient) population, these markets are not exempt from racialized interactions. In fact, crossing differences proved challenging and could hamper solidarity, especially when the implementation of "solidarity practices" were racialized. Thrivikraman recounts her experience as follows:

> During this time of COVID, I also liked shopping outdoors since the Netherlands was slow to take up mask advice. Even while at the market, I would wear a mask.

> 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 lady who was behind me, inches closer to me…I step further to the right to keep 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 1.5m 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 had no 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 has made me think about which bodies belong in the market. The only difference between me and the others was that I was brown, spoke English and wore a mask. I was following the rules and am super conscious of keeping distance. I have my own hand gel which I use after typing in my pin in the pin machine, I leave my mask on the entire time. Others were not following the rules and not called out. With this one act, my trust and loyalty were broken. And this has happened once before…so it seems like a pattern. Why was I called out? Thinking about how solidarity can be built, but so easily lost also.

This experience left her shaken. Through being specifically singled out as not adhering to "solidarity practices" and confirmed in her otherness, she lost trust and loyalty to a market where she was a recurrent client. The racialised implementation of health protection in this case contributed to widening the chasm rather than building a bridge across differences. Her experience was reflective of her shift and lesson within that aligned her more closely with minoritized groups in the city rather than her supposedly integrated place as an academic researcher. It also confirmed that even when one sees oneself as being part of the story of a market, there can be reminders - also through "solidarity practices" - that one is not. Solidarities, then, cannot be described in the abstract, but are always entangled with the (histories of) places, spaces, bodies, and relationships within which they manifest, and can thus be fraught with tension.

How we relate to each other and how we use different places to do so has an effect on us as well as our environment. In these marketplaces, in spite of the tensions among different groups, solidarity also emerged through different practices of exchange: of food, recipes, knowledge, pleasantries or unpleasantries, of financial transactions, or time. Thinking about solidarity both as relational and spatial (Schillinger, 2020) Thrivikraman and Vicherat Mattar understood how the markets create their own constellations of meanings of solidarity derived from spatial exchanges in the markets. *Solidarity otherwise* in the marketplace then, is deeply embodied and embedded in the various forms of exchange occurring through them.

> People want to come to the market for the experience, you know. They want to come to the market because there they meet people who think alike and share the same ideas. The people who were in charge of distribution points realised that it was a bit more work than they initially expected, therefore some stopped organising it after 1/2/3 times. (Lekkernassuh volunteer: coordinator market setup)

Lekkernassuh expanded from 280 to 600 people during the pandemic as more individuals sought local, sustainable options. The customer base provided needed income and support to local farmers. However, the market's growth came at the expense of the relationships that are crucial to support Lekkernassuh as a small organic market community. It grew so big that the social aspects of food sharing were harder to manage. Lekkernassuh also began food delivery at multiple locations which dispersed the connections between individuals. Interestingly, some relationships solidified - especially amongst volunteers.

Through the pandemic and attempts to develop safe ways of providing local produce, the volunteers were "growing closer and closer". They formed their own bubble where COVID-19 distancing rules were relaxed. A worker stated: "the group of volunteers has become tighter (not in a physical sense) and people feel more at ease in the workplace than ever before". In another moment, a worker shared:

> I remember walking in at 09:00 in the morning once to find one of the volunteers sparkling with joy. I said hi, and she went on and on about how she had just become a grandma, this was the first time I met this woman. Another time, while I was putting potatoes in a crate, someone opened up about his burn-out which had led to his poor financial situation. There were many moments in which people opened up and showed their vulnerable sides.

These markets housed a dense network of bonding and support strategies deployed between different actors, including vendors, customers, volunteers and researchers and their various interrelations. These multiplicities of bonds varied also in their intensity, that is whether they were strong, generated intense forms of attachments and care, or whether they were weak, produced tension, or fleeting connections between parts (Granovetter 1973).

For example, while observing the dynamics at the Haagse Markt it became visible how some vendors had to monitor distance between customers and spoke about how although they needed the exchanges, they endured an underlying and prevalent fear of being in public spaces. Others indicated that in times of hardship they would join with fellow vendors they normally would not associate with. A cheese vendor stated: "If something goes wrong for example, or something gets stolen, then we all work together. Then we really are in it together". One vendor demonstrated how even in the smallest exchanges bonds could and would be forged, even if the exchange was not about money.

> When a customer comes and I give them a smile to their face, I think they forget a bit about their sadness. Most of them have problems, I don't know what their problems are, but I like to give them a smile on their face. Some of them don't want to buy nothing, the other just come say hello to me. That gives me also joy.

> So that is my gift and I love that. So, what else do I want more than that, it's more than money.

Other vendors lost long standing customers; but found new ways to bond with customers. The Lokale Markten initiative reached customers online and in doing so broadened the public space of the Haagse Markt to include a virtual spatiality. Interestingly, it started as a way to support vendors but rapidly forged a bond with customers. In addition to their strength and forms, the bonds of solidarity in the markets were associated with different identitarian dynamics. For example, in Lekkernassuh ecological resonance and a social dimension stood out as people bonded because of their affiliation with local and sustainable food practices or from the pleasure of being with others of a similar mind-set around food and products.

Thrivikraman and Vicherat Mattar saw strong bonds and support strategies in the sense of community experienced at the Lekkernassuh initiative, or the generational attachments among some of the selling stalls in De Haagse Markt. They saw weak bonds in the customer-oriented service by Lokale Markten, and the ethinic differentiation among different groups in the Haagse Markt. In either case, it became evident that solidarity bonds require an infrastructure to support them (Schilliger 2020). Moreover, it is also clear that no matter how strong or how weak these different bonds are, both forms sustain the web of solidarity practices experienced in these food markets.

4.2 The university and solidarity across the digital divide

Two international students investigated the impact of the COVID-19 lockdown on their fellow international students. Their experience held valuable lessons on positive coping and solidarity practices among students in the city. Constrained by COVID-19 restrictions, the students devised research methods that they hoped would be the least intrusive and stress-provoking. They informed students of their research through distributing notes in the residence hall, rather than recruiting via the internet. They recruited students for interviews, participation in an open message board in the hallway of the residence hall, and a photo voice project. The message boards allowed students to write or post notes on three different boards in the hallway. The photo voice project asked students to use photographs and accompanying commentary to explain how they experienced the lockdown.

Two major issues clearly shaped the collective story of the students. First, the pandemic had a significant impact on mental and physical health. The disconnection from other students and especially the uncertainty about the health of loved ones in countries no longer accessible due to COVID travel restrictions were sources for anxiety and depression. Some of these stresses translated into physical health complaints. Moreover, a quickly rolled-out and sometimes ill-conceived new online educational program contributed to health problems. Impact was felt by all students, but especially by the first-year students who missed a proper introduction and social adjustment period to being in the Netherlands and away from home. Furthermore, being an international in the Netherlands brought additional risk factors, especially in terms of a sense of

isolation and the inability to seek or receive help. Secondly, as the institution adhered to the story of wanting to fix and return to "normal" as swiftly as possible, students' stories clashed with that of the institution as their worlds were anything but "normal". Where they were unable to reconcile their story with that of the institution, stress and anxiety were again the result.

> It feels like the world is ending, but we are having to show up in these spaces [online classrooms] and perform in certain ways.

Importantly, as much as there were hardships, there were creative and positive coping skills as well, demonstrating various forms of solidarity. For students with social anxiety, the shift to online was experienced as a positive change. Students scheduled their times to include outdoor activities and made sure to check up on each other. Others organised their rooms into a living/working/relaxation space or reorganised so that they could see and feel the sunshine in their room. Some connected with non-human city dwellers:

> This bird was my best friend during the lockdown period. It was the breeding season, so he had a nest in front of my window. He was kind of my pet as I fed him regularly. I used to socialise with him when the University was closed, and everything became online.

The biggest lesson in positive coping and solidarity practices came from the student researchers themselves. As students, they were deeply affected by the stories of suffering they had listened to and exchanged. The interweaving of their stories created a major discomfort and shift within. Their initial reaction was to want to lash out at the university administration on behalf of their fellow students. In our role as shepherds, it was important to guide them to the transformation that the interweaving of stories had elicited. As such we had to hold space for them (Cairo 2021). The first step in doing so was to remind them of their role as researchers and to help them recognize and celebrate their accomplishments. They had provided a platform for the stories of their fellow students, and they had to trust that the stories themselves would be impactful enough. Furthermore, students had expressed how helpful and enjoyable the message boards and photovoice activity had been. This was another valuable experience to be savoured.

Secondly, the student researchers had to be assisted in taking a step back and looking at the bigger picture without being overwhelmed by their feelings of hurt. Given this information they had gathered, how could they use it to make a bigger and lasting impact for their fellow students? What was to be preserved here? In addition to a good report, the students ended up working with a filmmaker and made a seven-minute film in which their major findings were shared. The film raised questions to the audience at which time it could be paused so the audience could engage in discussion. The film is scheduled to be used at the institution as part of the introductory week and other classes. They were extremely pleased with the end result and were able to move on with a sense of pride and joy from this experience. Most of all, they had used their skills to contribute to the wellbeing of their fellow and future students in an act of solidarity.

Weaving the stories of the markets and the student research reveals solidarity as a form of exchange, one that holds space for reciprocity and a connection that transcends simple binaries perpetuated in normative understandings of solidarity, such as here/there, self/other, and subject/recipient of solidarity. *Solidarity otherwise* was demonstrated in practices and constellations of meanings that were embodied and embedded in place and space, that at times crossed and confirmed social boundaries, revealing how plural stories support the multiplicity of bodies that inhabit this city.

5 Solidarity as enfleshed experience in plural temporalities

From June to December 2020, Rosalba Icaza and Aminata Cairo set out to learn about stories of solidarity as these were articulated by residents who attended three community centres: a father centre, a mother centre, and a theatre/cultural centre in The Hague. Each of these centres were located in neighbourhoods of ethnically diverse and immigrated residents. Moreover, they supervised two groups of students from THUAS who engaged with these communities to work on two respective projects for a sustainable design course. Another member of the team, Umbreen Salim, focused on a community defined along faith identification: Muslim Pakistani families.

Icaza and Cairo spent all Wednesday mornings during these months visiting what originally was created as a mostly Muslim father-led, father-focused community centre located in the neighbourhood of Laak. In the context of COVID-19, this community centre decided to fabricate 100.000 face masks with donated, used, and carefully re-converted fabrics to be distributed freely in the city. As volunteers interested in understanding this practice of face mask making by collaborating with others, their mornings were spent making the masks in the company of other volunteers that included Muslim fathers, but also non-Muslim fathers, mothers, refugees from the Middle East and Colombia, young Dutch students of Caribbean descent, and international students from Asian and European backgrounds. They were two researchers among them, or at least that was what they thought initially.

5.1 Becoming part of the stories

Icaza and Cairo set out their journey of becoming absorbed in the stories by joining with the people at the different community centres. Coming from 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. As there were no direct leaders, those with the most knowledge or experience directed others. Icaza and Cairo also started functioning in those roles as new volunteers would step on the scene. Lastly, their sense of belonging was affirmed in the sharing of food. They never left the centre without being

loaded with foods that had been donated by community store owners. "You have children at home, take some extra." Becoming part of the stories was thus also experienced as caring for bodies and spirit.

On Tuesdays, they regularly visited with mothers at 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 programs allowed them to interact with the mothers as fellow mothers, and to sometimes be called upon for their expertise. They were also confronted first-hand with the denigrating ways some of the program presenters addressed the mothers. Time and time again, material was presented with the assumption that the mothers had little to no knowledge themselves: from information on how relevant vaccination for children is to what to do in case of a medical emergency. Through joining with the mothers, the researchers were able to raise questions and challenge those assumptions and help create new spaces where the women could share their ordinary wisdoms. When Cairo challenged a doctor who was questioning the mothers' lack of consultation participation on the issue of trust, the mothers joined in and started sharing their experiences with health care personnel. Consequently, the doctor admitted that perhaps there was value in looking at how patients were being treated and not just their presumed lack of compliance.

Deploying an activated listening (Aguilar and Icaza 2021) which distinguishes silence from being silenced and of listening as a condition for meaningful dialogue, they sat and listened while making the face masks at the father centre and embarking in conversations in Dutch, English, Spanish, and Papiamento. In listening to and sharing in the unfolding stories, they did not entertain disembodied, abstract, and uprooted notions of solidarity and their underlying assumptions about bodies and temporalities. Eventually they became part of the stories, their stories became interwoven. Their presence, including their language, ethnic and parental identity, and active contribution became usurped in the interwoven stories of the 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 with the other volunteers, the less they felt it appropriate to utilise some of the formal research methods they had planned to use. 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. No, they had become part of the communal body 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 inside as a guide in 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 as it also became a lesson about how to proceed in Holding Space.

5.2 Time and temporality

In this listening-talking-weaving-feeling-sensing journey, the researchers heard stories in which the dominant representation of time and temporality as a linear chronology of past-present-future did not exist as separate from each other. For example, they were told about the challenges of the 'now' as experienced by refugees working in the catering and cleaning sector for whom COVID-19 was far from being about stockpiling food and avoiding public transport. "Si no limpio, no trabajo. Ni COVID ni nada me detiene." ["If I don't clean, I don't eat. Not COVID nor anything can stop me"], shared one of the Colombian volunteers in the centre. Their stories were about how to go outside and keep their income, while finding the time and energy to keep coming to volunteer in the centre.

They heard about ideas of home in the 'now' as well as in the 'before' and in the horizon of what 'would be' after COVID-19, often articulated in the same phrase or in the form of a morning greeting in non-colonial languages: "Bon dia di awe, mi no ta dia" ["Good morning today, don't know tomorrow"] was repeated in Papiamento. Jokes and name calling about a particular volunteer who instructed everyone what to do were uttered in relation to this person's similarity to dead relatives, who were there with them in the centre taking care of their health and would be also there after COVID-19 ended. Sharing food with volunteers or bringing their own food and eating in the company of others stimulated stories about the costs of food here in the now, as in the country of origin, but also of their migratory experience through Dutch food customs and their expectations after COVID-19. Painful stories of domestic abuse by one volunteer over another one **were** also uttered in the now, in which past experiences were expressed as vivid as the one shared in the now, while showing the path to go through and be safe. Strategies for overcoming the situation were identified as calling dead and alive relatives for protection and refuge.

5.3 Moving from embodied to enfleshed experiences

Not only did Icaza and Cairo set out to think differently about 'solidarity' as defined in the Western European liberal tradition, they also had to re-think critical feminist notions to account for their experiences of solidarity as "enfleshed" in plural temporalities. In other words, they practised what they thought by grounding their well learned theories.

Critical feminist conceptualizations of bodies have been concerned with embodied and positioned knowledges (Haraway 1991) through which people think and act in the world. In particular, anti-essentialist feminist theory has promoted the understanding that universalisms serve to render bodies absent, irrational or instinctual. Consequently, they subject bodies to cultural discourses and regard them as sites where or through which dominant norms are constantly re-produced, prescribed, questioned and disrupted (Butler 1993 and 2015).

It was from this perspective that Icaza and Cairo considered offering one young woman in the mother centre a stipend. The young woman was a skilled singer and Icaza and Cairo wanted to compensate her for her performance in

the planned community gathering. Looking through the lens of not wanting to reproduce the story of researchers coming to exploit community members, especially women, they thought a stipend would be appropriate. They were quickly corrected by the program director. Offering the young woman money would set her apart from the group, the body of people. As a member of the group, she was supposed to be willing to offer her gifts to benefit the community. The critical feminist perspective around embodiment proved insufficient here.

Similarly, to the experience in the father centre, they became attuned to the importance and power of belonging to the body. This belonging to the body seemed more important than the dominant norms imposed on the body by the world out there, and could potentially cause shifts of affirmation, guidance, and learning, within. Theoretically then, they found understanding and guidance in the concept of "enfleshment" as put forth by black feminist theologians. M. Shawn 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" (ibid: 7). By presenting this vision, Copeland (2010) opens conditions for the possibility of understandings of the body not only as place or cultural discourse, but also as an enfleshed and contextual experience located in a plurality of temporalities, which are the kind of bodies Icaza and Cairo joined with in the community centres.

Enfleshment goes beyond the physical, social, or political body in the here and now. It goes back to the Indigenous knowledge of interconnectedness. It goes back to the Ubuntu concept of "I am therefore we are". It draws upon ecological, ancestral, remembrance, spiritual connections, and things you just feel but cannot put into collective words (Vázquez 2017). You only get there when you surrender and become part of the body. You cannot get there by intellectualising about the body. When you surrender and pay attention to those guiding forces, your sense of responsibility and actions will shift accordingly. Making sense of enfleshment helped Icaza and Cairo understand and step into solidarity as it was practised in these community centres.

At the mother centre, it was the program director who jolted Icaza and Cairo and redirected them. Sometimes the guidance comes from the outside. The task for them was to listen and to internalise that lesson. How could they contribute while honouring the whole body of the group of women, rather than singling one out and bringing disharmony? When they organised a special gathering with the women, they asked the women to use their favourite recipes from home to provide the food and paid for the ingredients. It was one of the ways they were able to practice solidarity, while being respectful and non-exploitative. By tuning in, joining and listening, they had learned something. And by acting upon the accompanying sense of responsibility they had acted upon that learning, which only affirmed that this is how solidarity works here.

5.4 The Pakistani community: shades of solidarities

In Urdu, the national language of Pakistan, solidarity is formally translated as 'yakjehti'. The more commonly used Urdu word referring to solidarity, care, and

being there is *farz*. It is translated as responsibility and duty. It is lauded to take the lead in doing *farz* and Pakistani community members take pride in doing so with positive vibes as part of everyday social norms.

Umbreen Salim, who is of Pakistani origin herself, spent time investigating *farz* in the community in which she plays multiple roles. She plays an active role as a supporter of community members and various community programs and initiatives. As such, she was able to work with the existing relationships she had built to explore the concept of *farz*.

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, relationships within the community as a whole, and relationships across communities. Importantly, where the core values guiding the ideology and actions of the members of the Pakistani community remained the same, the meaning, modalities and understanding of solidarity shifted during COVID-19 to adjust to the new conditions. Salim observed that the practice of *farz* was strengthened and at the same time had to shift. One member stated: "When someone gets sick we run to them, not from them". This guided community members' actions during COVID-19. Members did not think of their caretaking actions as anything special, but as a given. They continued doing what they did before COVID-19 but now through different means and with adjusted behaviour.

The standard 'expected' joint community efforts had to shift to more individualised efforts. People became more willing to individually 'give' and 'contribute' to community initiatives. A COVID-19 recovered member shared, "for me solidarity means 'not expecting' what I expected from my near and dear ones in normal conditions." She explained that normally she expects them to visit during sickness and be there to share the difficult and hard time of her life. During COVID-19 she practised solidarity by first understanding that they should not visit and physically be around her, and secondly by caring for her friends and relatives by keeping away from them. The isolation and loneliness were a new and challenging feeling for her as previously she was always surrounded during sickness as company, care and sharing used to be sources of comfort and healing. The normal approach to healing thus shifted. Instead, healing became rooted in prayers and in adopting the feeling that physical distance in fact is a form of social caring. She further elaborated that coming to terms with this was not easy. She had to convince herself that she needed to 'give' care instead of 'expecting' this time and shift her role from care-receiver to care-giver.

5.5 Shifts and adaptations

This mental shift was a major factor of solidarity in this community. For a community that relies on each other for social, physical, and cultural survival, certain standard practices were being challenged and needed to be altered. Being creative and able to adapt in terms of services and logistics was relatively easy compared to the mental adaptations that had to be made.

Some of the supportive adaptations occurred rapidly and effectively and included things such as online meetings and people assisting each other with growing IT needs as connection and service activities shifted online. Corona messages were video recorded in Urdu for the elderly. Financial support and grocery packages were organised for severely affected persons and businesses. WhatsApp groups and telephone services in Urdu language were created for connection and support, and more. These kinds of changes worked well when a mental shift occurred at the same time. For those who could not make the mental shift however, adaptations were more difficult.

For example, there were some elderlies who did not receive the attention of their offspring or relatives as expected and as needed. Whether this was due to COVID-19 restrictions or neglect or a combination of both is not the question, rather what mattered is that this elderly needed attention and 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 rest of the community. Rather than partaking in other, newer forms of connection or sharing their needs and concerns with the community home nurse, they chose to suffer in silence.

As stated, for some of the elderly this was hard, especially if they could not make the shift and accept support from others. Community homecare nurses played a significant role in serving as substitutes and would often encounter elderly members in a state of depression or loneliness. One nurse stated: "Sometimes all I did was listen as this is what people wanted, to vent out and I was there to listen". But even with the nursing care system there were obstacles. A Pakistani doctor who served the community explains:

> The question of care for the elderly is lived and experienced differently. In the Pakistani community, children are expected to care for their parents. There are limitations of homecare nursing. They will only do what they are allowed to do on paper. If they need to do anything else, that needs to be requested which can take for however long. Then a problem arises due to unavailability of own-language speaking homecare nursing.

5.6 Being there in spite of…

Practising *farz* in the Pakistani community, solidarity is generally practised by "being there". People continued to be there, if not in person than in virtual spaces or on the phone. But who do the people hold space for? How big is that space and what do they need to traverse that space to practise *farz*? Going beyond physical locations and boundaries was already a normal aspect of practising *farz*. Residents in Transvaal, Schilderswijk and outside these geographic locations, such as Rotterdam and city centre in the Hague felt equally connected to Pakistani community centres in Transvaal and Schilderswijk. They would regularly visit, no matter where in the city, or in which cities they resided. This coincided with one of the first discoveries by Icaza and Cairo when they visited an African catholic church in The Hague. The priest explained that even though people attended the church locally, many did not live in the immediate

neighbourhood or even in the city. They felt like they belonged to a body of community and a spiritual community, regardless of geography.

The COVID-19 lockdown did not change that practice. Community members reached out and supported each other best as they could. Solidarity and thus *farz* was about connection with people. Food and ritual were a major part of that connection. It is understandable how these practices would be of special significance for an immigrant community that is so far removed both physically and culturally from their home community. Food and ritual could serve as major balms to appease one's otherness. One woman shares:

> 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 during COVID-19 restrictions, members of the community shared that while they felt connected to their ancestral and family recipes, norms and memories of elders, they were also practising multi-generational solidarity through cooking as caring. Travelling between memories of ancestors and reliving those moments and caretaking practices for parents and elders at all times emerged as key practices of *farz*.

People practised solidarity to support each other locally and city wide, but internationally as well. A second-generation Pakistani woman, single mother, and working three jobs, felt a strong sense of responsibility and a need for taking action towards others. During the COVID-19 lockdown, she made and distributed packets of groceries in The Hague. She 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". Again, we see the notion of enfleshment as a driving force for *farz*. Feelings that moved because of experiences with the body of the community led to responsive actions. The Pakistani doctor who organised a drive to send medical supplies to Pakistan to help during Corona demonstrated the matter of factness and responsive commitment as seen in the attitudes of the community centre directors in the research journey of Icaza and Cairo.

Like in the other locations, solidarity had to be practised across boundaries. Practising *farz* was not limited to Pakistani people. Sometimes religion was the binding force for communities from different origins and on other occasions 'being a migrant' was what brought them together as they faced similar challenges. The Pakistani community had relations with Moroccan, Turkish and Indonesian communities and collaborated on initiatives such as food distribution, via the community centres and mosques. During Ramadan *farz* extended to joining with these Islamic communities to collaboratively serve hundreds of meals daily across The Hague. Not only did the community trespass local and geographic boundaries. It also spanned across generations, as

exemplified by the sense of responsibility between children and parents. One Pakistani girl who looked after her parents when they were sick with COVID-19 shared that she grew up seeing her parents look after her grandparents and relatives when they got sick. "This is our way of being. I don't have to think about it. I have to look after and care for my parents. There is no one else and I don't expect it from anyone."

Some unexpected differences and similarities with the experience of social infrastructures in the marketplaces crystallised. In the marketplace, we saw the need for and importance of a social infrastructure that was typified by a range of flexible bonds that were amenable to various intensities, dynamics and forms. Its flexible means of adaptation is what gave it its strength. In the Pakistani community, similarly, the social infrastructure plays a significant role along which solidarity practices are deeply ingrained. However, it is because the solidarity practices are so ingrained that there is a big difference. The bonds are indeed very strong as they are socially expected, facilitated, and require deep commitment.

There are rituals and practices from caring for elderly to healing and food practices and storytelling that encourage people to overcome boundaries, differences, temporalities, difficulties and more. Consequently, they can deliver strong bonds. However, for those who fall outside of those norms and expected behaviours, the experience and expression of solidarity can be very different, even detrimental. Elders have shown that if their children don't help for whatever reason as expected, the level of shame can prevent them from functioning well within the community. Unlike the social infrastructures in the marketplaces then, the Pakistani community does not have the same flexibility to accommodate both strong and weak bonds.

The researchers became part of stories and the body of people that subverted critical feminist conceptualizations of embodiment as well as the dominant representation of the temporality of solidarity in terms of linear chronology. Stories about dead relatives were with people in the present and recipes were passed on across generations to provide healing and sustenance. These stories carried ancestral knowledges, cross-border memories, and intergenerational wisdoms, giving way to enfleshed experiences of solidarity across relational temporalities. A deep lesson to be learned is that in Holding Space for the many stories of solidarity unfolding in the city, we have to be mindful of complexities, contradictions, and subtleties, rather than be pleased with the obvious and strong displays of solidarity. We need to be particularly cautious of the stories that are overlooked and silenced, not only in the dominant discourse, but also by the communities we are part of.

6 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 city of The Hague. Particularly we were concerned with the COVID-19 story of the city that was incomplete because it neglected, minimised, or misrepresented the stories of many of its inhabitants. We questioned the neoliberal concept of solidarity and instead introduced stories

of how grounding our theories allow for the concept of *solidarity otherwise* to fill that gap. We learned about the power of sharing and weaving stories of solidarity during the COVID-19 lockdown in The Hague. Rather than mining and extorting stories from others, we interwove our own stories with that of various communities to share lessons and make *solidarity otherwise*. These lessons ultimately transformed *us*. From the onset, we included our own stories of otherness as researchers, shepherds, and citizens. Here, finally we want to share how our own and collective stories have been enriched and transformed through our interweaving with the stories of our community members and the potential lessons they can offer all of us.

6.1 Relationality: Being there, being with

In the Pakistani community, solidarity practices - also known as *farz* - imply "being there". When somebody is sick you run towards them, not away from them. As in the market, in spite of rivalries, when something goes wrong, they pull together. The COVID-19 lockdown only strengthened that resolve and showed that no physical and geographical limitations would limit the resolve to be there for each other, and that being with was not limited by physical restrictions. Similarly, in the community centres we saw how people with mostly immigrant and lower income backgrounds easily came together and relished in being of service and in support of each other. *Being with* was linked to *being seen* and being seen as valuable.

Throughout this journey we learned about the value of *being with*, and that *being with* brings its own challenges. *Being with* requires working across our differences. Whereas differences of ethnicity and class in immigrant communities can be bridged on the basis of religion, shared hardships or other experiences that unite, in the predominantly white spaces differentials prove harder to bridge. The experience in the marketplace demonstrates that COVID-19 safety measures framed in terms of solidarity might actually prevent the possibility of being there for and with each other.

For our international student researchers *being with*, as in having their stories interwoven with the painful stories of their fellow students, proved a painful experience. They needed a helping hand in guiding them through the opportunity of transformation that the feeling of discomfort offered. Another student researcher who faced their own personal struggles was comforted when doing their volunteer work and research assignment at the Lekkernassuh market. Being with the other volunteers and their strong commitment to comradery was the support they needed to go through their own transformation.

Being with then offers a potential state of healing and transformation. Even for us as researchers who have grown accustomed to our otherness, to be with each other has been transforming and healing. As we interwove our own stories with each other and the communities, for the first time we were confronted with not having to defend, justify, explain, or downplay our otherness. For the first time we could just be, and as a result were able to bring out the best in ourselves and each other.

Being with is the first and most profound lesson we learned from solidarity otherwise.

6.2 Temporality unleashed

"I am because we are" - so says the Ubuntu philosophy. In doing so, it erases space and time as a limitation for what we can be, who we are, and what we can become. In the community centres the extended sense of self that was always present and practised, clearly surpassed any limiting identity they were normally ascribed. Those *allochtonen*, those refugees, those delayed, those maladjusted, and those criminals, now became people with rich and extended meaning and purpose. Their voices confirm:

> My children live in [such and such] country, I don't see them very often, especially not now with Corona.
>
> I speak this language because I used to work in [such and such] country for several years.
>
> I will help all the children in our community who need help with their Dutch homework in an online session for free.
>
> My grandmother taught me how to do this. Now I can do it.
>
> Our ancestors are with us and will be with us even if we die from Corona.
>
> I can make the best 'haldi yakhni' for healing internally.

Furthermore, even though people are physically linked to the city of the Hague, that location is just one of the many meaningful locations that people feel connected to and responsible for. The Pakistani and catholic African communities encountered were committed to other fellow country people regardless of where they lived and did not mind travelling there to support as needed. From accepting financial responsibility for orphan children in other countries to organising medicine drives for one's home country, to organising citywide Ramadan food drives, examples of solidarity practices are admirable and abound. What is of interest here is not just how temporality influences identity or practices, but how temporality can serve as a resource and buffer for those that live in a world that tries to silence, minimise, or erase their stories.

When we looked at our community members in the Father Centre, what stood out was their sense of pride. As people worked on face masks while recounting stories of their children, travels, origins, extended family members, ancestors, and many languages, negative messages about who they were presumed to be did not reach or touch them. "I am because we are" was more than just a philosophical statement.

6.3 (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 both Cairo and Icaza

stopped them in their tracks and made them shift their whole course of inquiry. They were forced to listen, and so they did. Just because you want to hear the story does not mean you are entitled to it. And even though the initial intent was to collect stories to correct the incomplete storyscape of The Hague, the message was loud and clear and profound.

What we can share are the lessons we gained from those stories. Positive stories were uncovered in this research, but other stories were uncovered as well. It was more interesting to see the solidarity mechanisms at play that shape and affect those stories. Flexible social infrastructures in the market allowed for flexible and temporary bonds that contributed to traversing the stories of the marketplace. Less flexible social infrastructures were noted in the Pakistani community and consequently had the potential to make certain stories salient, while other stories were silenced.

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? Which solidarity measures are designed to support some, while excluding others? Even reflecting on our own stories as researchers, we had questions to ponder. Which of our own stories have we been silencing for so long, and as we help unearth the stories of these communities, can we not help but be surprised that we are unearthing some of our own stories as well?

The biggest lesson here is that unearthing should be a careful and sensitive process. Just because you want to does not mean you have the right to. Secondly, as we are unearthing and unmuting, which stories are being muted, and not necessarily by outsiders? Rather than digging hard to unearth we come back to the value of *being with* and using that concept and process to let unmuting unfold.

6.4 Restorative transformation and sustainability

That you matter is a given. That you are precious is a given. That you are worth fighting for is a given. That you are worth being invested in is a given. Time and time again this message reached us as we interwove our stories with that of our communities. Time and time again we heard ourselves repeat that same message to our students who struggled with their learning and figuring out their lessons and abilities to contribute.

We had come to understand these messages as a reflection of sustainability. Sustainability was the action 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 community members never wavered in their support of their immediate and extended community. We also saw this in the marketplace, where actions were not just about economic survival, but about honouring the preciousness of relationships and providing certain types of nourishment. People did not quit but driven by their appreciation of their respective cause were committed to act. Actions were often about taking a stand, fighting for, with a matter of factness, and finding alternative and creative ways to pursue goals. In doing so they created new stories.

In reflecting on these messages of preciousness we want to add another lesson. They are not only at the core of being driven to act, but at the core of being driven to transform as well. Part of the damage of the incomplete stories is the relentlessness and normalisation of the discourse. From the media to the halls of government the negative connotations with these communities are consistent. The goal then becomes to broaden the storyscape of The Hague with the tools of honouring, listening, and respecting the stories that are already there, but to do so with a matter of factness. To get to that point requires a transformation, but a process of transformation that allows unfolding, rather than forcing.

We saw transformation take place using this principle first hand when working with the design students from THUAS. These students who are very project and outcome driven had to be guided to just be and be with community members. Repeatedly they shared their amazement about how differently they expected their experience to be, but also how their work evolved differently.

> I had expected for these people to be just sad, but they were so happy and kind.
>
> I had expected them to treat us differently as outsiders and students, but they were so welcoming and kind.

This initial seed of rest and appreciation became the impetus for their transformation. They did not have to work hard at it. Instead, they could fall into doing their work and doing it well. Their instructors confirmed that in comparison to the groups who had other assignments, these particular students truly learned about the value of community engagement in addition to developing their craft.

Why do we prefer this type of transformation? Because a transformation that requires a lot of work, fighting, and resisting requires a lot of energy. For people who are already marginalised and have to fight for their dignity on a daily basis it is important to have tools of transformation that restore.

We learned this first hand as researchers as we were confronted with our own stories of transformation in this journey. As researchers who are othered in our daily personal and professional lives we are used to being a certain way in the world in order to thrive and survive. However, the anger we felt at being singled out at the marketplace (once again), or the joy we felt being at the Father Centre where our otherness was welcomed and embraced touched and moved us deeply. It also affirmed for us, that even for us who are seemingly well functioning and integrated in Dutch society, we carry wounds that deserve to be nurtured and healed. As we are in search of transformation that might be based and aspire to *fighting for* with a matter of factness, we should also aspire to a transformation that unfolds and restores.

6.5 Holding Space for *solidarity otherwise*

In March of 2020 the world and the city of The Hague shut down in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Everybody's world was affected, but some people's worlds were compromised more than others. In a city known as the most

segregated city of the Netherlands and where certain communities are publicly talked about either in a negative light or not at all, we felt that the COVID-19 storyscape about The Hague was unfair and incomplete. Knowing that there were other, better stories about these communities we set out on a quest, a quest to unearth those stories with the ultimate goal to make the storyscape of The Hague more holistic.

What followed was a journey, a journey using storytelling as an onto-epistemology to transform the story of The Hague. We focused on the concept of solidarity and proposed that the standard liberal approach to solidarity as something that was bestowed by the dominant upon the other would not suffice, nor would a critical understanding of solidarity that confined it to a delineated community. Instead, we proposed the use of *solidarity otherwise*, a far richer and broader concept of solidarity that we were going to define as we were discovering it. Using the concept of the dominant and the other also immediately connected us with the work of Cairo (2021), who employs it to explain the unequal relations that are maintained and, in this case, defined our storyscape.

In this journey, inspired by the Indigenous epistemology of interconnectedness, we set out to "be with" our community members. We used *being with* in the hopes of earning access to those overlooked and underappreciated stories. *Being with*, however, taught us that our quest should not be about collecting stories. That the stories were there was a given, and there was in fact no need to prove their worth. Instead, then, we were guided to interweave our stories with that of our community members and learn to hold space for plural stories.

We dove into the world of the other, recognizing that even though we were outsiders, we were others in our worlds as well. Interweaving our stories with these community members then gave us insights and appreciation for our own otherness that we could not have foreseen. Holding Space, rather than focusing on 'positive stories' required us to look at the work necessary to allow room for all the stories to just be, in whatever form they may exist. As we learned to hold space for all the stories, including our own, we also learned that doing so can lead to the transformation or the rewriting of stories, of the communities', our own, and inevitably and hopefully of the story of the city as well.

Holding space required honouring, patience and appreciating what was given, listening, being brave to step up or speak out when necessary, or to be humble and step back when it was called for. Including students in this journey added the work of shepherding which required an even deeper level of holding space as we had to guide them and at the same time allow them to go through their own transformation with all emotions involved. As our stories interwove with those of the communities we learned about their practices, rituals and strategies which resulted in a range of expressions of solidarity, truly a *solidarity otherwise*. We unearthed stories that showed strength and vulnerabilities, which incidentally also exposed our own vulnerabilities. We learned first-hand about transformation "out there", but also within. We learned that transformation can be forceful but also restorative.

In holding the space for and with the communities and their stories we have been transformed. We have been strengthened in our own sense of value and

understanding of the right to be here just as we are, personally as well as academically. Ironically, the gift that we wanted to give our community members was in fact bestowed upon us. Lastly, our story interwove with that of The Hague. As we saw its shortcomings, we also learned to love it as we rode our bikes through familiar routes in the city, enjoyed our gatherings and engaged with its people. Our gift to The Hague is our combined and interwoven story as it is presented here and in a beautiful documentary that is for all to see. As our stories are now grounded and interwoven into the land- and storyscape of The Hague as yet another act of solidarity, we believe that we have contributed to a restorative transformation of The Hague into a better representation of itself.

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