



'Can we hug?': Enacting Situated Solidarity for Research as a Transformative Practice

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Abstract

Adopting a stance of 'situated solidarity' is one way feminist researchers have sought to redress the colonial legacies that continue to shape research practices, particularly those involving researchers from the global 'North' working in the global 'South'. In this paper, I argue that while this stance has helped reduce research harms, its transformative potential can be expanded through research practices that foreground co-creation and embodiment. I develop this argument through discussing key moments from a Moroccan-Swiss performative and collective research on peasant agroecology. Drawing on (auto)ethnographic material from this research, I reflect on our efforts, successful and not, to navigate power asymmetries, constitute a learning community and engage in processes of being-doing-knowing that enabled relational and embodied forms of knowledge co-production. I highlight the transformations in subjectivities, imaginaries, and understandings that emerged through this research and suggest that, however modest, such transformations are among the ways research can contribute to world-making.

Keywords

learning community, participatory action research, peasant agroecology, performative and collective research, embodied inquiry, world-making

I accompanied the eight farmers, activists, and researchers to the airport in Switzerland, from where they would fly back to Morocco. After an intense week—farm visits, discussions, public events, bus rides, shared meals, walks, and seeds—we arrived at that moment in front of the security gate: the goodbye. There was a pause, as if none of us quite knew how to part. A question floating in the air: *Can we hug?* Yes. For a fleeting instant, as arms wrapped around arms, I felt the bridge across the many power-and-knowledge divides we have struggled to navigate take shape in that gesture. I wondered if this was the first time some of these farmers had hugged a woman outside their family. But I also knew that when we would meet again in Morocco, the greetings would likely be more reserved—a smile, a nod, a hand to the heart, or perhaps just a handshake.

Geneva airport, October 8, 2024

Author's notes

Introduction

In 2002, seeking to move beyond postcolonial paralysis, feminist geographer Raju asked, 'We are Different, but *Can We Talk?*'. With the present title, '*Can we hug?*', I revisit this question two decades later, expanding feminist insights on international fieldwork with recent research practices that foreground co-creation and embodied aspects of knowledge production.

Adopting a stance of 'situated solidarity' (Nagar and Geiger 2007) is one way that researchers have sought to redress the colonial legacies that have—and continue to—shape research practices, especially those carried out by researchers from the global 'North' working in the global 'South'. In this paper, I argue that this research stance has been an important step toward reducing research harms but that these efforts could be furthered even more by incorporating more recent research practices that approach knowledge production as involving processes of co-creation and embodiment.

I elaborate this argument by drawing on key moments from a Performative and Collective Research (PCR) on peasant agroecology that formally ended with the scene described in the epigraph above. This PCR has grown out of my PhD research, a multi-sited ethnography on peasant agroecology in Morocco and Switzerland, that was initially based on taking a stance of situated solidarity but expanded to incorporate processes of co-creation and embodied inquiry, including by taking a group of Moroccan farmers, researchers and civil society activists to Switzerland to meet with their Swiss counterparts. It stemmed from the interest of both Moroccan and Swiss actors to learn about each other, as well as my own academic and ethical interest in enabling such an encounter as a 'third-space' (Richelle et al. 2024) and 'learning community' (hooks 2010) to destabilise a set of dualisms—mind-body, researcher-researched, North-South—associated with 'Western' knowledge production. I highlight the transformations that resulted through this PCR and propose that although seemingly modest they are nevertheless the means by which research can contribute to *world-making*.

The term PCR was coined by Cameron (2011) in their work on community gardening as part of the Community Economies scholarship, which aims to craft post-capitalist alternatives (Cameron & Gibson 2005). PCR resembles Participatory Action Research (PAR)—

grounded in the pedagogical and activist work of Freire (1970), Fals-Borda (1987), and others (Kindon et al. 2007)—in its commitment to research for social justice that goes beyond simply describing the world. Consistent with PAR, PCR aims to disrupt knowledge hierarchies, counter extractive research practices, and foreground research conducted with rather than on people. Yet there are two major differences. First, while Freire (1970) argues that a political-pedagogical project must begin with people's aspirations and understanding of reality, PCR builds on participatory processes that may precede or disrupt the structured representations and discursive aspects of critical consciousness central to Freirean PAR (Dickens 2017). PCR does not exclude collective political action more usually associated with PAR but concentrates on the micro-politics through which new subjectivities emerge (Cameron and Gibson-Graham 2020). Second, while PAR foregrounds collaboration with groups portrayed as disempowered or economically and socially marginalised, PCR includes people who could hardly be described in these terms and shifts attention from fixed identities defined by lack or absence to the diverse subjectivities constituting any subject (*ibid.*).

PCR demands not only 'external' work but also 'internal' ongoing reflexivity. Following Ritterbusch's (2019) call for a *sentipensante*¹ ethos—thinking-feeling actions combining "reason and love, body and spirit" (Moncayo 2015, 10)—this paper emerges from a reflexive space and offers an embodied account of the material and intellectual challenges underpinning such research.

Positionality statements and other forms of 'confession' have become a common reflexive practice aimed at exposing unequal power relations in knowledge production. Yet, as Gani and Khan (2024) argue, they may also function as forms of guilt redemption that paradoxically recentre privilege through a narcissistic gaze. To navigate these pitfalls, I include autoethnographic information only where it illuminates the conditions under which this PCR unfolded and the relations through which knowledge was co-produced (Denzin 2018).

Adopting a narrative-based approach, I draw on (auto-)ethnographic material gathered throughout this research—including fieldnotes, participants' daily text or voice-message reflections, as further explained in the paper, and recorded debriefing conversations with each participant—to reflect on the lessons learnt of navigating power asymmetries to enable co-creation of knowledge. Dwelling on the complexities of conducting a 'North-South' research in the global 'North', I examine the evolving constituting of a *learning community* (hooks, 2010) and what it reveals about the conditions under which *situated solidarities*, epistemic justice and co-creation become possible.

Situated Solidarities

Conducting a multi-sited ethnography in Morocco and Switzerland, which gave rise to this PCR, I found myself grappling with the enduring (post)colonial divide between "'us' (who have) and 'them' (who need)" (Escobar 2020, 107).

My aim to engage performatively such divisions is neither based on absolute relativism nor historical amnesia making abstraction of the continuing legacies of European and United

¹ *Sentipensante* is the adjective of the verb *sentipensar*—a concept, originating from the linguistic traditions of fishing communities along Colombia's Atlantic coast (Moncayo 2015).

States colonialism and contemporary practices of imperialism. Instead, I draw on Said's (1979) argument that European representations of the 'Orient' do not reflect it as it is but rather produces 'Orientals' as inferior Others. Such work continues to shape geographical knowledge production, obscuring the interconnections between regions and peoples, positioning them as distinct and distant from one another, thereby reinforcing dichotomous modes of thinking that are inherently hierarchical (Sidaway 1992; Sundberg 2005; Daigle and Sundberg 2017). Feminist postcolonial research has called for a more differentiated analysis of power relations that imagine beyond these essentialising divides.

Mohanty (2003), when revisiting her paper 'Under Western Eyes' (1986), moves away from "geographical and ideological binarisms" (506) between "'Western' and 'Third World' feminist practices" (509) and calls for anticapitalist transnational practice and solidarity. Such feminist politics of knowledge is not only about criticising hegemony but also about creating alternatives (Koopman 2011), notably through *situated solidarities*—across geographical, professional, and socioeconomic divides—where the political concerns of researchers intersect with the struggles of their research partners (Nagar and Shirazi 2019). This may include collaboration with partners who see engagement with a foreign researcher as advancing their own political or practical aims, for instance by gaining visibility for their struggles (Fung 2024; Nagar 2003, 2014; Weir et al. 2019).

This, however, does not resolve the practical dilemmas of addressing unequal power relations in the field. Sultana (2007) urges us to acknowledge and embrace the researchers' and researched's multiple positionalities—constantly renegotiated across situations, in which "different parts of [the] embodied social identity are given prominence" (Sundberg 2005, 20) to create ethical relations for challenging but rewarding research. I argue this can be more effectively done by embracing sensory and embodied aspects of knowledge (co-)creation, as discussed below.

Embodied Inquiry

I explore this PCR as a *world-making* practice, foregrounding the micro-politics through which imaginaries, knowledge and subjects—including we as researchers—are transformed. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) philosophy of immanence, Dickens (2017) conceptualises *world-making* as a pedagogical process that enables social transformation by "enhancing capacities for becoming otherwise in an unfolding world" (1290).

Such capacities emerge through micro-politics that tap into precognitive states—visceral, affective, emotional—to free embodied practices from sedimented patterns, foster pleasure and creativity, and "allow new subject-worlds to arise" (Gibson-Graham 2006b, xxxvi). Here, this meant giving each of us new capacities to cultivate the intellectual and material spaces for enabling farming futures.

Geographers have explored experiential learning through everyday material forces (Somerville et al. 2011) and how this shapes knowledge production and pedagogic encounters (Dickens 2017). Cameron (2011) notably examines embodied learning for a (climate) changing world through a PCR on community gardens. Drawing on Latour's (2004) notion of 'learning to be affected', she writes: "the emphasis shifts to include embodied forms of learning where people are doing, walking, chatting, moving, tasting, sensing with each

other and with nonhuman others, and potentially registering the world in more articulate and sensitive ways" (505). I build on this work, which responds to Whatmore's (2006) call to "supplement the familiar repertoire of humanist methods that rely on generating talk and text with experimental practices that amplify other sensory, bodily and affective registers" (606), while also foregrounding ontological politics. That is, it recognises research as a constitutive practice in which researchers, by focusing on certain aspects of the social world, render those more and other aspects less real (Law and Urry 2004).

I show that ontological politics—and the embodied and relational epistemologies they rely on—are vital for fostering epistemic justice, where different voices and bodies are listened to. When Spivak (1988) asked, 'Can the subaltern speak?', she pointed to the more fundamental question of how to create spaces where subaltern voices are truly heard (Guha 1997), through what translations, and in whose interest (Landrin 2016). Actively favouring embodied inquiry "takes 'other ways of knowing' of subaltern worlds seriously" (Escobar 2020, 35) and invites us to embrace the repressed pole of modernity's mind-body dualism. Below, I explore how we attempted to open the sensorial as a transversal space where farmers' embodied knowledges—used to navigate agroecological complexity—could be expressed and (imperfectly) translated.

PCR as *World-Making*

"There is an ethical dimension to most, or perhaps all, of the decisions we make and the acts we perform" (Kara 2018, 18). Based on an approach where theory, pedagogy, and epistemology are inseparable (Nagar and Shirazi 2019), I reflect here on the decisions that shaped whose voices *and bodies* were ultimately listened to—and through what translations—both in the lead-up to and during the week of PCR itself (see below for an overview).

A Week-Long Performative and Collective Research in Switzerland (2024)

CONTEXT

This project emerged out of my PhD research on alternative agricultures in Morocco and Switzerland. It builds on three years of ethnographic research, including the time to identify and build relationships with people engaged in agroecological practices. These relationships gave rise to the idea for this project and ultimately made its realisation possible. The project was funded by the University of Lausanne and the Cadot prize.

PARTICIPANTS

Coming from Morocco and participating the whole week:

- 5 farmers (and civil-society actors) from the Rabat region and the Haouz of Marrakech
- 1 activist/NGO actor
- 2 researchers: 1 PhD student and president of a cooperative and 1 rural sociology professor

Hosting or joining us in Switzerland for one or several activities:

- 14 farmers from 6 different Swiss agroecological farms

- 5 researchers from Swiss universities ranging from PhD candidates to professors, in the fields of geography and environmental sciences
- 5 people from the fields of arts, art-science collaborations or civil society in Switzerland

THE PROGRAMME OF THE WEEK

Each day, we visited one or two Swiss farms. We also spent two half-days exploring nearby cities and weekly markets, a full day at the University of Lausanne, and organised a public evening event. The Moroccan participants stayed throughout the week at La Lizerne farm, hosted by the family Devenoge.

- **6 Swiss agroecological farms** visited, ranging from a 5-hectare micro-farm to a 70-hectare mixed crop-and-livestock farm, and including both family farms inherited across generations and newly established farms.
- **1 day at the University of Lausanne**, in the context of the Agroecology Science Days with a special session on agroecology in Morocco, where all Moroccan participants presented their farms and practices.

1 public evening event, a sensory encounter with agroecology in Morocco over hand-made Moroccan couscous with Moroccan and Swiss vegetables, Moroccan tea, and Swiss sweets at La Grange du Chapallaz². Held as part of the official *Days on Agroecology*, the evening brought together around 60 guests from the agricultural, academic, and civil society sectors to share food, music, images, and stories.

Whose Voices and Bodies Are Listened to?

Inviting the Moroccan actors to Switzerland, rather than the other way around, was a deliberate choice aimed at unsettling dominant patterns of knowledge production.

Recognising how our positions are produced within uneven geographies of power requires attending to the conditions that shape encounter and the very terms of what can be seen, said, and known (Haraway 1988). For several participants, coming to Switzerland would have been impossible outside the context this PCR provided. Many had never left the country and lacked the financial means, contacts, or language skills—French, Spanish, or English, the languages of former colonisers—to participate in the platforms for exchange around agroecology that exist around the world.

Practising a *sentipensante* ethos (Ritterbusch 2019), the decision on whom to invite to Switzerland was thus both a political and embodied one. It was political because people who typically participate in transnational agrarian exchanges often have certain language skills and trajectories that allow them to navigate these spaces and who are not necessarily those with the most meaningful engagement for their territories (Edelman 2004). It was embodied, grounded in *sentipensar*, as the following considerations all played a role: i) people invested in agroecology (be it 'quiet' or 'loud' in its expression)³; ii) people who could not easily travel

² See: <https://www.agroecologyworks.ch/fr/journees-de-l-agroecologie/2024/events/rencontre-sensorielle-avec-l-agroecologie-au-maroc-autour-d-un-couscous-et-du-the-marocain>

³ See Mathez (2024)

outside of such a context; iii) people with different profiles, competences and experiences; and iv) people with whom I had a good personal feeling and whom I imagined might get on well together.

Accordingly, I quickly identified whom I wanted to invite. Yet these criteria also reveal how even well-intentioned decisions stabilised my position of power within the project. The following example illustrates some unforeseen consequences and potential harms of these invitations: I had invited the wife of a male member of an agroecological cooperative with whom I had worked for several years. I first met her after an interview with her husband, when she laughed and remarked that she was actually the one running the farm—a claim he confirmed with a nod. A year later, I called her and we agreed that I would visit their home to formally invite her to Switzerland. Knowing it might be delicate to invite her without her husband—especially alongside other male cooperative members—I asked Fatiha El Jazouli, a Moroccan colleague and fellow participant in the PCR, to accompany me. Used to navigating such situations, she helped explain the invitation. Yet after we clarified that, for visa and financial reasons, I could not invite the whole family, her husband signalled for us to leave without accompanying us to the door, though the couscous was ready to be served. That was a ‘no’: a voice and body not listened to, and excluded from our PCR.

The power-laden histories shaping geographic knowledge production were further exposed through the performance of bureaucracy. Once participants had been identified, a six-month administrative struggle to obtain visas began. This involved assembling evidence for largely informal livelihoods that did not easily translate into documents reassuring to the Swiss Embassy that participants would return to Morocco, such as property titles or substantial bank accounts. The visas were ultimately granted one month before the planned encounter, following an appeal supported by a fifty-page dossier I compiled. It included letters from partner institutions, a scientific publication citing some participants by name, and a detailed motivation letter outlining each person’s trajectory through interview excerpts and specifying “the measures taken to prevent people from staying in Switzerland”. Reflecting on this struggle, Lise Landrin, a French geographer, wrote to me after attending the session on agroecology in Morocco that we organised during the Agroecology Science Days at the university:

To be honest, I had tears in my eyes yesterday listening to Moroccans share their lives, their activism and their evidence. I was also greatly moved to see you interact in this serious and familiar context: it is so rare in research to have this relational quality. [...] thank you for this gift.

The emotions she describes also reveal something about whose perspectives on the ‘South’ are typically authorised within academia. As Zakaria Kadiiri, a Moroccan researcher and participant, remarked after that day: “For the countries of the South, very few voices are expressed, or it is rather the researchers of the North who express themselves on agroecology in the South”. This PCR thus created an opportunity to reverse these dynamics in a field where ‘Southern’ farming practices are often evaluated through ecological principles conceived in the ‘North’, reflecting the institutional double standards that continue to shape ‘North–South’ collaborations. While Swiss institutions fund fieldwork assistants and translators for ‘Northern’ researchers conducting work in the ‘South’, ‘Southern’ researchers are expected to assimilate linguistically and culturally when working in the ‘North’ (Myat 2024). This relates to the “hidden colonialism” of “subcontracted ghost production of overseas academic research” by

'Southern' research assistants for 'Northern' researchers within broader political-economic asymmetries in knowledge production (Sukarieh and Tannock 2019, 2; Gogishvili, 2026).

How to Listen to These Voices and Bodies?

The fundamental idea underpinning participatory research approaches, is that research must be done *with* and *not for* people to induce meaningful change. This can place so much emphasis on equality and co-construction (Luguetti et al. 2024), there is a tendency to forget that inequality does not necessarily mean paternalism and domination is taking place (hooks 2010). At least, if the researchers 'do their homework' (Spivak 1990) and acknowledge that other group members have other capacities to contribute to the collaborative process (Schurr and Segebart 2012).

Gibson-Graham (2006b) notably explain how in their attempt to engineer an "equal exchange" between themselves with "formal knowledge" and the community members with "embodied knowledge", they withhold their knowledge, such as never offering a textbook definition of the economy and thereby contaminated the research process with power (133). It made their knowledge desirable, and they realised that "far from attempting to achieve a pristine interaction untainted by power, our project needed to mobilise and direct power, and to make sure that it was used to foster rather than kill what we hoped to elicit—passionate participation in this project" (*ibid.*, 134). Seeking to dismantle unnecessary hierarchies, I viewed our different knowledges, experiences, competences, and temperaments as constitutive of the PCR rather than as a hindrance. I sought to foster relations of mutual respect and care in which power enabled rather than constrained one another, both during the planning process and throughout the week itself, as explored below through its (un)intended micro-politics.

(Un)intended Micro-Politics

Some Moroccan participants had limited literacy skills, and I felt it was important to handle the visa administration *with* rather than *for them* for two reasons. First, I did not want to act as a service provider or tour operator but to foster collaboration. Second, I considered it derogatory not to explain the required documents and sometimes highly personal information involved. Together with Safae Moudni, a research companion and fellow participant, we therefore sat down with the concerned farmers to create email accounts and complete the necessary paperwork. Yet they avoided these moments, disappearing whenever we opened our computers. Another day, we seized the opportunity of a trip to a nearby town with better internet. After hours in a café—and many cigarettes—we abandoned our attempt to book their visa appointment together, and I ultimately completed the procedure myself. The Swiss embassy had outsourced the process to VFS Global, a private company operating an online platform that frequently crashed, leading even participants literate in French to give up.

Overall, my attempt to involve them in every step of the process—intended to be empowering—ended up feeling rather intimidating. Paradoxically, as I later realised, this glimpse into the administrative and organisational work required for the project contributed to what Gibson-Graham (2006b) call the micro-politics of cultivating subjectivities. Witnessing the effort involved seemed to impress them more than their limited literacy and computer skills, encouraging participants to see themselves in terms of assets and capacities rather than

needs and deficiencies. As Thami Drabli, one farmer, explained, it showed them that “there is something important about us and our experiences”, a point I explore further below. Moreover, compared to the previous two years, my relationship with the farmers felt different—we laughed more, and our interactions became more spontaneous and relaxed. Safae Moudni, highlighting how the gaze operates in all directions, analysed the situation accordingly (see Mathez, 2025):

You know, there are two types of women; those in front of which you shouldn't smoke and those, like me with short hair—you know what I mean. Well, you were somewhere undefinable in-between. You still are I guess, but now they know they can smoke in front of you. This changes a lot.

Indeed, these (un)intended micro-politics and informal moments became critical sites of transformation in the research encounter, destabilising the preconfigured researcher-researched script, allowing us to encounter one another beyond these roles. They could smoke; I could express frustration at my computer—such seemingly mundane acts marked a shift in relational dynamics and allowed for the embodied and relational dimensions of fieldwork that favour reciprocity and relational accountability (Nagar and Shirazi 2019, Wilson 2008).

To nourish these relational dynamics for the co-creation of knowledge, I often felt I had to navigate the tension between participation as *doing with* and *doing for*. As such, during our week in Switzerland, the Moroccan participants formally presented their trajectories, farms, and experiences twice: at the university and our public event. For these occasions, I prepared a PowerPoint presentation to illustrate their talks with pictures. They chose the pictures they wanted to show from among their own collections and from those I had taken during my fieldwork the previous years. Since not all photos finally chosen were of the same quality, I spent some time editing colours, adjusting brightness and contrast, so that everyone had some equally nice ones to show in a common PowerPoint language. I encouraged them to share what felt important to them while also highlighting aspects I found interesting. I observed that these preparations helped them feel confident and proud to present what had seemed ordinary to them. It contributed to the micro-politics of transforming subjects (Gibson-Graham 2006b) by destabilising existing subjectivities articulated around absences and lack, and challenging sentences I first heard, such as ‘I have nothing to say’. Rim Serdaoui, a Moroccan farmer, after the day at university, shared these thoughts with me:

I am touched by the sincere effort that was made to promote the work and encourage peasant farmers, one could see the joy in [farmer's] eyes and the pride and love in [farmer's] face after presenting their projects.

This was also visible at our public event a few days later (see Figure 1), where the different participants took pleasure and pride in presenting their experiences.



Figure 1. Hassan Drabli and Safae Moudni presenting. Photo credit: Joachim Sommer

Fostering a Learning Community

Inspired by what hooks calls a *learning community* (2010, 118), I tried to instil a sense that we were all responsible for and dependent on each other in forging a constructive dynamic, co-creating the conditions to make this week a collective and, at best, transformative research experience. Many ingredients—the warm atmosphere at the Gîte de la Venoge where the Moroccan team was hosted by Silvana and François Devenoge and their larger family, the intensity of a week-long encounter, convivial moments that nurtured the pleasure of being together, friendship, and the “surplus of cooperation” (Kaufmann 2024, 12)—supported this emerging sense of community. Yet simply bringing together those who desire change does not, in itself, lead to transformation (Nagar and Shirazi 2019). This requires epistemic justice, and there is much evidence that, within relationships shaped by unequal power, epistemic justice is more likely achieved through interdependence and trust—fostering honest dialogue, ethical interaction, and mutual learning across difference (Freire and Faundez 1989; hooks 2003; Kara 2018).

As a first step toward epistemic justice—and recognising that travelling outside Morocco for the first time might be overwhelming—I aimed to reassure the Moroccan participants that they had valuable knowledge to share. I was aware that peasant agroecology in Switzerland might be difficult to recognise as such, given its different material expression compared to Moroccan socio-ecological realities. To bridge this, I shared a written analysis of the farms we would visit with the researchers, and pictures and anecdotes with the farmers. On the first evening⁴, I also addressed Swiss geography, agricultural policies, farmers’ administrative burdens, elderly farmers’ isolation and high rates of indebtedness and suicide (Droz et al. 2014). My aim was to provide a context to their impressions and offer a frame for

⁴ The Moroccan participants and I stayed the whole week together at one Swiss farm, whereas the other Swiss participants joined us for one or several activities (see pages 5-6).

assessing agroecology's challenges and opportunities in each country. Cautious not to lecture while still providing the necessary information, I used printed illustrations to support my points as we sat together over tea, creating a sense of familiarity in this unfamiliar setting. In contrast, my support to the Swiss participants was more limited. The time and uncertainty around visa procedures left me with less energy to prepare and involve them. As a result, we only had a few in-person and phone conversations about Morocco, its agriculture, and the participants invited, and I shared some photos via WhatsApp so they would at least have a sense of who was coming.

Moreover, for our *learning community* to emerge and function, I felt it important to re-explain to the Moroccan participants, on the first evening, the two interrelated objectives of the week: the encounter itself and my research reflecting on that encounter. I shared that I was interested in their thoughts and observations as a way of bringing our understandings into dialogue and mutually enriching them. To facilitate this, I invited them to undertake a daily reflection exercise in which they could record their impressions. I explained that these reflections were primarily personal, but asked them to share one observation with me each evening via voice or text message. The idea was to collect just enough data to understand their experience without placing undue burden on them (Kara 2018). I emphasised that this process enabled me to adapt the programme in ways that supported the co-production of knowledge: helping identify which elements to bring into collective discussion to explore commonalities, opportunities, and challenges of peasant agroecology across North-South divides—an outcome for which the project was partly funded.

Getting up the next morning, I saw no messages. When I asked, they said they either planned to do it later or had 'nothing to say'. I felt forced into the role of a teacher scolding students for missing homework—exactly the dynamic I had hoped to avoid. Unsure how to navigate the complex power dynamics at play—as a young Swiss woman, literate but low in the academic hierarchy, and simultaneously a friend and colleague—I decided to express my frustration openly. Much like the unsuccessful experience reported by Fung (2024), who asked participants to share and explain photos of their everyday lives but received either none or large batches with minimal context, I realised I had underestimated the time and care needed to elicit genuine participation and understand one another's expectations. There was certainly also fear—of not having the 'right answer' or of being truly honest—as the power dynamics persisted nonetheless.

I reexplained the purpose of the exercise, encouraging them to use the week to explore new experiences, even if our expectations of its benefits differed. The response "I have nothing to say" prompted me to share a personal anecdote. Identity is narratively constructed and drawing on Gibson-Graham's (2006b) idea of micro-politics for enabling futures, I did not want anyone to perform the notion of having nothing to say. I told them how, on my first visit to a Moroccan farm, I got lost. Accustomed to the distinct shapes of Swiss farm buildings, I had not recognised the farm—though I was standing right in front of it—as it blended with other rural houses. We all laughed, and I encouraged them that even something as simple as what appears different is already worth sharing. Hooks (1994, 2010) and Nagar (2019) remind us that empowerment cannot happen if we refuse to be vulnerable, while encouraging others to take risks. By making myself vulnerable, I hoped to open a space where participants could trust their thoughts and feel confident that their observations would be considered with care and respect.

The next morning, I had received a message from everyone except one farmer. At breakfast, in a cheerful yet caring atmosphere, the others encouraged him to quickly send one. He went outside for a cigarette and sent me a voice message. When he returned, we were all laughing and he had a big smile on his face. The following days, everyone participated, sharing one or more reflections almost every night. I had deliberately avoided giving specific themes or questions, simply inviting them to comment on anything they had observed or wanted to share from the day. As such, Thami Drabli, a Moroccan farmer, shared his surprise at seeing so few police officers in the streets, which led us to discuss the different ways in which governmental control operates in Switzerland and Morocco, both more broadly and within agriculture. More generally, they shared a range of observations—from farming practices and organisation to aesthetics. Below I list some of the messages I received.

Translated and Transcribed Messages from Moroccan Participants

Concerning the day at the university:

- "I was impressed to see a minister of agriculture speaking with great proximity to a farmer."
- "My impression for today is a lot of speeches and *blabla* for the morning but some initiatives in the afternoon were interesting. I really liked the theater initiative even if I didn't really understand the link with agroecology (I understand the soft skills part)."

Concerning the visited farms:

- "I found the dirtiness of [name of the farm] reassuring. The mixed farming model is feasible and interesting. I am delighted to find this mood of activism and of struggle that this farm represents."
- "Very pretty stable in the old style, and I really liked this breed of meat cows with their long hair and horns."
- "People don't plant many legumes, even though it would be good for the soil."
- "There is mutual help between the members of the family. The little ones can be taken to school by their mothers, their fathers or their grandfathers."
- "[Name of the farmer] has a lot of work during the day and he is behind everything. I find this stressful. They have so many activities and so few people. The stable is huge and well equipped, but they must think of how to adapt the farm."

One key learning was that, despite receiving subsidies and having well-equipped stables, Swiss farmers seemed to "have less time than in Morocco", as one participant noted at the end of the week. Still, I am not sure how much the exercise helped participants reflect on their impressions, and it was clearly not the ideal medium for everyone.

Nevertheless, it seemed to foster a sense that everyone's impressions mattered, and while I felt our *learning community* did not necessarily emerge through the planned exercises—but rather through what Cameron (2011) calls a *bus-trip-workshop method* as explored below—it allowed for a collective discussion session where I felt a genuine co-creation of knowledge taking place. Hooks writes that "mindful conversation, talking that is

powerful and energetic, always spotlights what *really* matters”, even though professors often fear that spontaneous dialogue may derail their planned topics—what matters, at least to them (2010, 45, *emphasis in original*). I could relate to this when the conversation slipped out of my hands. I had intended to discuss gender roles and impressions of the previous day, but the discussion quickly shifted. I soon found myself trying to follow an animated exchange in Darija on sanitation issues, regulatory norms, and the impact of large-scale avocado farms on local water resources on which some of the participants depend. One farm mentioned was run by an Israeli investor who had drilled eighty wells to produce avocados for export to Europe and the Middle East. Someone noted how food trends were changing, pointing to the rise of avocado cultivation in Morocco for both export and domestic consumption. This opened a wider conversation about ‘superfoods’ (Wilson 2019), shifting diets in Morocco, and vegetarianism and veganism in Switzerland. The next day, the topic resurfaced when we saw avocados from Morocco and Israel in Swiss supermarkets and at the city’s weekly market. Reflecting on that moment, I was struck by how even quieter participants engaged in the discussion, and how avocados—something which seemed not of immediate concern—gave us a tangible way to discuss the entanglement of their lived experiences with the international political economy of food.

Being-Doing-Knowing

A growing sense of *learning community* emerged as participants gradually shared co-authorship of the process and engaged with me as a facilitator to shift from rather static to more embodied and interactive engagement, confirming that modest facilitation can enable co-production of knowledge in such settings (Schurr and Segebart 2012).

This dynamic was made possible by cultivating trust and fostering what scholars variously call ethical interdependence (Cameron and Gibson 2020), radical wholeness (hooks 1989, 16), and radical vulnerability (Nagar 2019)—an ethic of care that allows participants to subvert, reshape, and critically engage with the conditions of knowledge production. As Nagar and Shirazi (2019) note, such co-authorship depends on sharing authority through *situated solidarity*—rooted in place, time, and struggle—while acknowledging that embodied differences, shaped by inherited histories and geographies, create uneven capacities for risk and experimentation. Indeed, participants who were initially marginal to the program design began suggesting ways to make activities more relevant to their own lives. One farm visit, though truly inspiring to some, lacked interactivity for others, leaving some feeling passive. They later told me they wanted more active involvement. Indeed, I had seen how some drifted into a kind of trance—listening but unable to absorb more. I called the Swiss farmers to adjust upcoming visits to include more hands-on activities. Still, I felt torn between different expectations and customs of politeness: Swiss hosts tended to begin with oral introductions, while some Moroccan participants preferred to explore the farms independently; walking, touching, seeing, tasting and exploring first by themselves.

Activities I expected to be less intellectually engaging, like weeding together, sparked the richest conversations. Engaging our bodies in shared gestures—where the farmers held more expertise—allowed conversations on how to farm in a climate changing world to flow more naturally. Topics like soil protection emerged organically, leading to debates about crop performance, pest-control techniques, and how climate deregulation is most acutely felt: as increased water scarcity in Morocco and rainfall unpredictability in Switzerland, disrupting

cultivation calendars. Coming from the dry, reddish-brown fields of late-summer Morocco awaiting rain, participants were struck by Switzerland's lush green landscape after an unusually wet summer—described by one as “glowing in fluorescent”. Early in the week, a participant observed, “I didn't know there are freshwater lakes this big; I know now that I don't have to worry about agriculture in Switzerland”. Yet, later, another remarked, “I didn't know too much water can be a problem”. These exchanges revealed a shared, though uneven, vulnerability to climate deregulation. They affirmed the *bus-trip-workshop method* (Cameron 2011) as a space where knowledge emerges through being together over time, engaging our bodies side by side, and ‘learning to be affected’ (Latour 2004) by our surroundings—maybe even more for farmers, whose knowledge and learning are deeply rooted in sensory engagement with more-than-human worlds.

Yet, while shared work and spontaneous conversations helped participants feel more at ease, ensuring continuous translation for those who did not speak French became more difficult, limiting equal engagement. Also, we did not always succeed in fostering co-creation of knowledge on the farms: we left many Swiss farmers wanting to know more about their Moroccan colleagues, who likewise hoped to share their know-how more actively, beyond their formal—and sensory⁵—presentations at the university and public event.

Moroccan participants' desire to share more of themselves—and their realisation that a living lamb was cheaper in Switzerland than in Morocco (contrary to the meat), combined with a craving for meat after our vegetarian meals (chosen because Swiss farmers were not cooking halal)—led to the suggestion that we might sacrifice one. All the Swiss farmers we consulted were immediately intrigued. In Switzerland, slaughter is tightly regulated; while farmers may kill animals for personal use, this typically applies only to poultry or rabbits. Though logistical constraints prevented this on some farms, at one, we changed plan upon our arrival: we would sacrifice a sheep. This act brought visible joy to the Moroccan participants, yet Antoine Hentsch, the Swiss farmer later described the day in more ambiguous terms:

Overall, it was really nice, it went really well. I learned a lot about Morocco. There, the relationship with life and death is normal—the sheep dies, we sing, and all the men know how to do it—whereas here, death is hidden. That simplicity in facing death was beautiful. It's a moment that will go down in the history of the farm. But I had the impression that what they liked most was what reminded them of home. [...] I didn't particularly feel they were fellow peasants; it felt more like they were showing me their science than sharing their experiences. Maybe it's also linked to the sheep—it was a moment of celebration for them, but for me, it took us away from our shared identity as peasants.

This feedback differs of that of other Swiss farmers, who, felt that they were exchanging with pairs:

⁵ The public event and final evening offered a sensory encounter with Moroccan agroecology: alongside pictures, songs and presentations (cf. pages 5-6 and Figure 1), Moroccan and Swiss participants prepared and shared saffron-infused tea and handmade couscous cooked with vegetables from both Swiss and Moroccan farms.

The best and most rewarding thing was meeting colleagues. We share the same goal: to integrate ourselves as best we can into our biotope. I felt that we were doing the same job. In Switzerland, I can't always say that.

Timothée Faes

The moment when they tasted our vegetables was cute. I felt closer to them than to some of our colleagues here in terms of what we do and what we aspire to.

Raphaël Van Singer

Despite the many differences—"Everything is different, the green of the fields, the language, the food, the people, and the smell of the air" as Thami Drabli, one farmer put it—the Moroccan participants also noticed many commonalities and felt a sense of solidarity that bridged those differences:

What I liked the most about this farm were the farmers and how they behave. I felt like in Morocco, and I learned how they make cheese, I saw new seeds, how the farmer stores manure and how he prepares a mixture to make it better.

Boujemaa Afilal

I appreciate this farmer, ⁶شعبي, who does not follow all the rules, who does as he pleases. But it pains me to see that they may have to leave the farm. What will become of the sheep, the cow and the cereals?

Hassan Drabli

In line with an embodied and relational view of reality (Escobar 2020), these encounters—often joyful, sometimes frustrating—revealed how knowledge emerges through the living, material forces of everyday worlds, through the friction of difference as much as through shared gestures. Cultivating solidarity is not about erasing divergence but about staying with its complexity (Nagar and Shirazi 2019) in the co-creation of knowledge. Moments of embodied engagement—harvesting celery, slaughtering a sheep, cooking a couscous, making cheese and simply walking together while sharing observations and thoughts—destabilised entrenched mind-body and researcher-researched separations (Cameron 2011), affirming the entanglement of being, doing, and knowing—however unevenly—in place.

Situated and Embodied Solidarities as Creative Acts

If *world-making* is the cultivation of new possibilities, hopes, and ways of becoming (Dickens 2017), I argue that we succeeded in sparking such a transformative process for some participants, me included. This does not mean there was no co-creation of practical knowledge—Swiss and Moroccan participants shared recipes (e.g. for tofu, sourdough bread, liver) and techniques (e.g. preparing biodynamic manure or shaping metal brackets to better guide tomato growth)—but I came to see it as secondary or rather, a means to transformation. Less about the exchanged peasant seeds for nuts, vegetables, and cereals—already taking root—this PCR was more about the sprouting of immaterial seeds. Like certain mushrooms

⁶ I keep the Arabic word, chaabi, to convey the emphasis in his voice and its connotation difficult to translate; popular in the sense of common people, and as I felt also 'true peasant'.

that cannot be cultivated directly but need a supportive ecosystem to grow (see Figure 2), these immaterial transformations depended on the conditions we collectively shaped.



Figure 2. A mushroom growing after the agroecological conversion of Rim Serdaoui's farm. Photo credit: Rim Serdaoui.

I later realised that, due to my own abstract approach to agroecology, I had unconsciously worked towards cultivating participants' identification with their capacities and possibilities, rather than towards facilitating the co-creation of concrete agroecological knowledge. My efforts and (un)intended micro-politics to bring this PCR to life, participants witnessing their stories spark interest, and our shared exploration of a *learning community*—where each person's knowledge matters across our differences—likely all contributed to this process. Thami Drabli expressed it this way: "I cannot thank you enough for what you have done for us. I didn't really know why you have been doing all this, but I understood that there is something important about us and about what we do".

This PCR fostered a sense of solidarity among both the Moroccan and Swiss participants, who had each a different entry point to agroecology, through research, activism, or practice⁷, whether formally recognized or not, as Boujemaa Afilal shared: "I didn't even know what 'ecological agriculture' was when we first met. You came to me, looking for something I didn't know had a name".

The experience of such *situated* but also *embodied solidarity*, however difficult to institutionalise, represents also the birth of new pathways, possibilities and hopes. As such, Safae Moudni, who following our collaboration for my PhD research had already started to

⁷ This tryptic corresponds to the definition of agroecology (Wezel *et al.* 2009)

work with some of the Moroccan participants, bringing funding to their cooperative and helping out with administrative matters, said:

I have a lot of new ideas for future projects with the team that is already here. [...] For me, social sciences were useless, but through our exchanges, I am starting to learn and appreciate them more and to develop an awareness of the potential of the intersection between academic research and the action on the ground.

Gibson-Graham (2006b) suggest that we understand community as “the call of becoming” and elaborate how their participatory research fostered this by encouraging individuals to open to one another and recognise their own potentiality (156-157). This resonates with some of the feedback I received.

I had tears in my eyes when they left. I hugged them all. They’re all so respectful and the women are just as crazy as we are. I’m so glad you didn’t give up, that you brought them to us. It gave me the energy and the courage to keep going [despite the difficult financial situation].

Silvana Devenoge, Swiss farmer

It generates hope that the approach we are trying to apply here resonates elsewhere in the world.

Timothée Faes, Swiss farmer

In terms of agroecological practices I didn’t really learn anything, but I find that people here work intelligently with their animals and make a lot of effort to give them freedom. I was touched by this. Before, I had a lot of dreams, and today I feel like I can make them come true. I want to take better care of the house, the environment, have more animals, [...]. I would have liked to bring more seeds, because it makes me happy to know that our exchange continues in the soil.

Thami Drabli, Moroccan farmer

Caroline and Fabien gave me the assurance that I am on the right track. At La Ferme des Terres Rouges, I saw that everything I want to do is possible. When you want to do something, it happens. Find a way!

Rim Serdaoui, Moroccan farmer

This idea of transformation as becoming—never fixed or fully defined—echoes Tsing’s (2015) notion of latent commons: “fugitive moments of entanglement in the midst of institutional alienation”, “sites in which to seek allies”, always more-than-human, and elusive, yet alive with unrealised possibility (255). It resonates with the sense of *situated solidarity* fostered among participants—entangled in the more-than-human international political economy of food. These entanglements link drilled wells, dry soils, too-wet summers, veganism and avocado consumption in Morocco and Switzerland, markets for living and slaughtered sheep, exchanged seeds now growing in each other’s soil but also shared struggles to make a living while caring for the environment and for others.

Fittingly, Ahmed (2017) writes “survival can also be about keeping one’s hopes alive; holding on to the projects that are projects insofar as they have yet to be realized. [...] Survival can thus be what we do for others, with others. We need each other to survive; we need to be

part of each other's survival" (235). Yet, latent commons do not institutionalise well and drawing on feminist and radical geographers' conception of knowledge production as a transformative practice for enabling worlds, I argue however much of the new ideas and collaborations will become realised is probably secondary to the experience of being part of something bigger, of one's own potential in a latent common cause, where each one's struggle counts. As Dickens (2017) frames it: "As-yet-to-be transformations is, by definition, beyond reach of the present, these emergent capacities nonetheless signal the potential for participants to continue making worlds within which they might think and feel differently" (1302).

Concluding Thoughts

In this article, I explored the processes through which I sought to destabilise colonial legacies in geographical knowledge production, building on situated solidarities and expanding them through forms of co-creation and embodied aspects of knowledge production. Discussing key moments in the preparation for and during a Moroccan-Swiss PCR on peasant agroecology, I showed how this required confronting the histories and geographies we inherit and embody, even when we might wish to disown them, to enable "just translations" (Nagar and Shirazi 2019, 239) that resist essentialising dualisms and allow for different voices and bodies to be heard and listened to. Engaging in a PCR "welcomes surprise, entertains hope, makes connection, tolerates coexistence and offers care for the new" (Gibson-Graham 2006b, 8). It recognises knowledge not only as produced *about* but *from relation*, opening the sensorial as a transversal space where a hug can come to speak. Arms wrapped around arms materialised, if only for a fleeting instant, the learning community we had struggled to build across the multiple divides of power and knowledge. A hug became a way of being-doing-knowing that could be shared through our efforts to enact situated solidarity. Though not all efforts succeeded, it was our honest engagement that sparked the most meaningful transformations—new understandings unlocking aspirations and nurturing one another's struggles and actions—that however modest and fugitive are nevertheless the means by which research can contribute to *world-making*.

Supplementary material: a 5-minute video presenting the project and participants

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tZCviFAamhw> French with English subtitles

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lcPBYYcqTj4> Arabic with English subtitles

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