



Dismantling Walls Building Bridges

Creating antiracist feminist alliances
within, outside, and against universities

Bridges Collective

Dismantling walls, building bridges

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universities*

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Authors:

PAR Barcelona: Catalina Álvarez Martínez-Conde, Blanca Callén Moreu, Marisela Montenegro Martínez, Francina Planas Piedra, Álvaro Ramírez-March, Sandra Tejada Mejía (UAB); Naty Arias, Marelía Armas, Eugenia D'Ermoggine, Norma Falconi, Ramona Fernández, Karina Fulladosa Leal, (Sindillar/Sindihogar)

PAR Athens: Myrto Tsilimpounidi, Aila Spathopoulou, Anna Carastathis (FAC research); Marleno Nika, Aude Sathoud, Marina Liakis (Za'atar NGO)

PAR Giessen: Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez, María Cárdenas, Douglas Neander Sambati, Sebastian Garbe (JLU); Cuso Ehrich, Emilia Carnetto, Marina Faherty, Robert Schönzart (an.ge.kommen e.V.)

Deanna Dadusc (University of Brighton)

Illustrations by: Shareen Elnaschie (Office of Displaced Designers)

Layout by: Lazaros Rafail Kouzelis (Office of Displaced Designers)



BRIDGES: Building Inclusive Societies

Diversifying Knowledge and Tackling Discrimination Through Civil Society Participation in Universities.



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Agiou Panteleimonos 7b 104 46 Athens

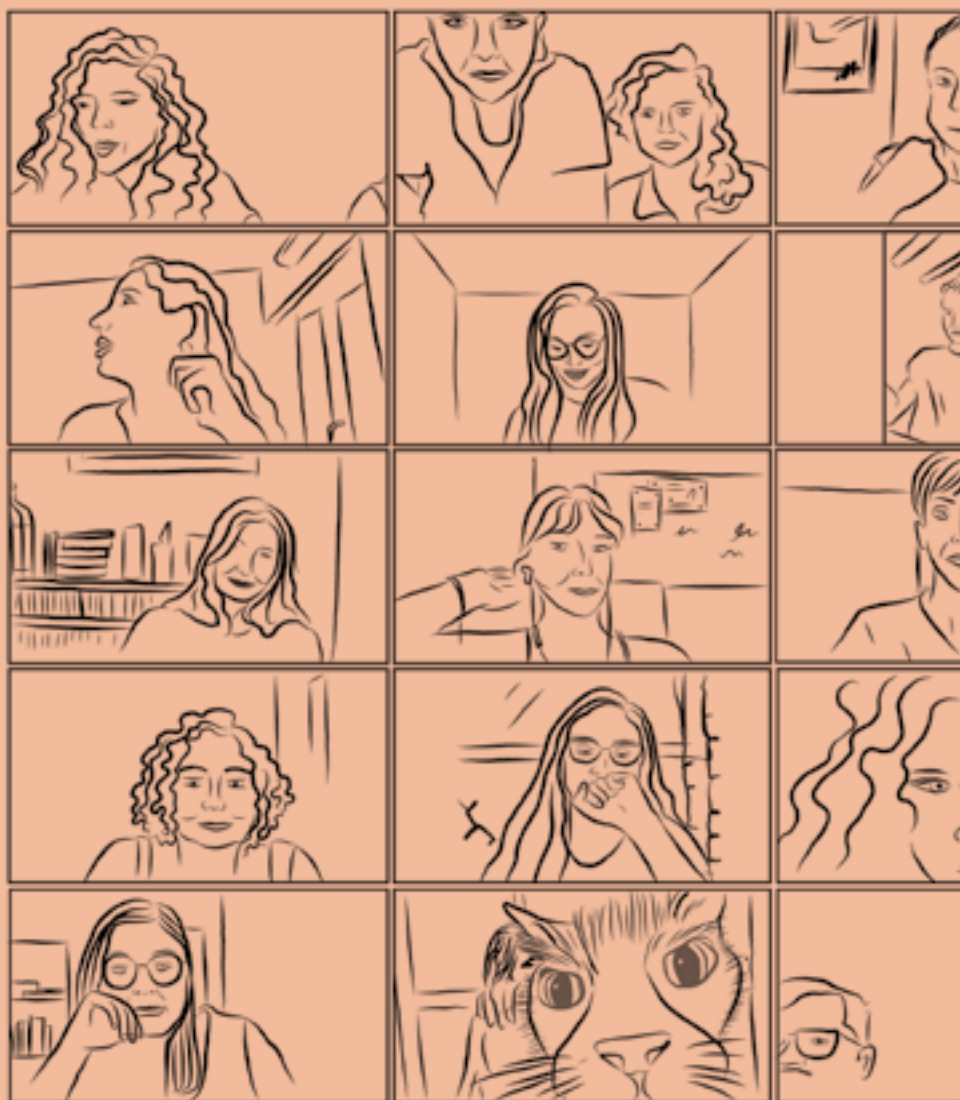
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Bridges Collective

This book is the result of a collective journey. Four years ago, in 2018, eight of us writing this introduction met for the first time. We were engaged with border struggles against the necropolitical European border regime that was intensified by the declaration of the “refugee crisis” in 2015.¹ Based in different nation-states of the European Union (EU), this first group shared a background in academic research. We also shared a discomfort with the wave of academic interest in the so-called “crisis” and its complicity with European border enforcement. At that time, we met with the motivation to bring to the fore migrants’ struggles for freedom of movement and to create encounters through which to imagine horizontal, militant research. Those initial concerns are the origin of BRIDGES.

Some time later, we came across the call of Erasmus+ *KA203 Strategic Partnerships for Higher Education*, a funding framework aimed at improving educational institutions in the EU. We believed this could

1. Necropolitics (from the Greek “necro-” meaning dead) is a concept that circulates widely in no border and other anti-authoritarian social movements in the world, to signify the exercise of state power to determine who lives and who dies: killing specific racialised/gendered groups of people, as an expression of state sovereignty, particularly as it articulates coloniality. According to Achille Mbembe, late modern colonial state power is distinguished from historically previous forms of colonial power in that it takes three interconnected forms: disciplinary, biopolitical, and necropolitical. Achille Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” trans. Libby Meintjes, *Public Culture* 15 no. 4 (2003): 27. See also C. Riley Snorton and Jin Haritaworn, “Trans Necropolitics: A Transnational Reflection on Violence, Death, and the Trans of Color Afterlife,” *The Transgender Studies Reader* 2, eds. Susan Stryker and Aren Aizura (New York: Routledge, 2013), 66–76.

be a way to channel these concerns into a project that intervened in European academic institutions. In the process of applying to this funding framework, the initial group extended an invitation to colleagues and organisations with diverse but related trajectories in queer antiracist feminisms, thus creating the BRIDGES Collective.

The BRIDGES project brings together civil society organisations—some of which are dedicated to research, whilst others focus on organising—all of which advocate for the rights of migrants, refugees, Black, Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPOC). Some of us teach and research in Higher Education Institutions (HEI), which we try to transform—at the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB), Justus Liebig University (JLU), and the University of Brighton (UoB)—whilst others, namely the Feminist Autonomous Centre for research (FAC), seeks to create change by collectively exiting the frame of the neoliberal university. Some of us have formed unions, such as Sindillar/Sindihogar, a household and care workers union made up of mostly migrant women in Barcelona. Others provide support to migrants and BIPOC communities —like An.ge.kommen, a registered association that supports migrants at their arrival in Giessen; and Za’atar, an NGO that provides support to migrants and asylum seekers in Athens in the form of psychosocial and legal services, focussing on women and the LBTQI+ community. Finally, others are designers, like the Office of Displaced Designers (ODD), based in Greece and the UK, a collaborative platform of designers who have been displaced.

In bringing together these different groups in BRIDGES, we wanted to harness the emancipatory potential of diversity for addressing

intersecting forms of oppression, which are resisted in collective action, and for highlighting heterogeneity within collectives composed by people with a plurality of routes (see Chapter 2). Moreover, the research design of BRIDGES reverses the underlying logic of social research about migrants that constructs them/us as subjects “lacking” something. On the contrary, BRIDGES argues that people with direct experiences of border, asylum, and migration regimes have valuable knowledge due to their/our proximity to the social context, which can help contest the epistemic and material inequalities in HEI resulting from intersecting axes of oppression based on gender, sexual orientation, “race,” ethnicity, disability, and administrative status, among others.

Over the past three years, we have faced many contradictions in the BRIDGES project, but probably the most intractable one has to do with the conditions of possibility that are demarcated by the institutional framework imposed by the university itself. We know universities play a key role in sustaining the colonality of knowledge, the mechanisms by which Eurocentric canons of knowledge produced in the Global North become legitimised as the only valid ones.² We are inspired by a long tradition of struggles, such as those by feminists in the 1970s, which stated the need for situated knowledge on the oppression and lives of women; as well as by more recent movements for institutional change, demanding to decolonise institutions, study programs, and curricula, that have spread through various countries

2. Aníbal Quijano, “Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America,” *International Sociology* 15, no. 2 (June 1, 2000): 215–32, [y](#).

and across and beyond university campuses.³ These asymmetries are reproduced in the classroom space, which is seldom structured as a horizontal, anti-authoritarian space of learning and thinking; rather, the classroom is designed as a hierarchical place for competition, standardisation, and professionalisation. To what extent, then, is it possible to carry out antiracist feminist practices in universities, given their inherently patriarchal and colonial foundations?⁴ This is a paradox that has stayed with us during the whole project. Our approach to it, however, hasn't been one of seeking to do away it, but rather of adopting an ethics of discomfort,⁵ a way to embody these limitations in such a way that they become productive.

Following Suryia Nayak's remarks on the activism of Black feminist theory, we have sought a methodology that allows us to "occupy the tensions, dialectics, aporia and inherent contradictions rather than seeking out methodologies to resolve or tidy up the tensions."⁶

3. Catalina Trebisacce, "Una historia crítica del concepto de experiencia de la epistemología feminista," *Cinta de Moebio. Revista de Epistemología de Ciencias Sociales* 57, (2016): 285–95, <https://doi.org/10.4067/S0717-554X2016000300004>; Aziz Choudry and Salim Vally, "Lessons in struggle, studies in resistance," in *The University and Social Justice. Struggles Across the Globe*, eds. Aziz Choudry and Salim Vally (London: Pluto Press, 2020), 11–32.

4. As bell hooks writes, reflecting on her own trajectory through school, to studying, and then to teaching in university: "[d]uring college the primary lesson was reinforced: we were to learn obedience to authority." bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 4.

5. See Itziar Gandarias Goikoetxea, "Habitar las incomodidades en investigaciones feministas y activistas desde una práctica reflexiva" *Athenea Digital. Revista de pensamiento e investigación social* 14, no. 4 (December 30, 2014): 289, <https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/athenea.1489>.

6. Suryia Nayak, "Location as Method," *Qualitative Research Journal* 17, no. 3 (August 14, 2017): 208, <https://doi.org/10.1108/QRJ-02-2017-0004>

Participatory Action Research in BRIDGES

These initial concerns about knowledge production in academic institutions raised, for us, a number of questions, such as: how should knowledge be produced in a project like BRIDGES? Which subject positions are legitimated to participate in knowledge production and through what processes of legitimation? How can these diverse subject positions be articulated? What political effects do we seek to engender through the knowledge we produce? We address these questions by drawing on the Latin American tradition of Participatory Action Research (PAR). This methodological framework asserts that knowledge production results from the horizontal dialogue between different positions.⁷ It is an approach to research that argues for an ethical and political commitment to transform social relations of domination through reflective cycles between theory and collective practice.⁸

We considered all partners as having an equal epistemic and methodological standing within the Consortium, thus recognising each organisation as having valuable knowledge and skills to share with the others. We organised the daily local teamwork within the consortium in local PAR Groups in three cities of the project: Athens, Barcelona, and Giessen. These PAR Groups are each composed

7. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30th anniversary edition (New York: Continuum, 2000).

8. Maritza Montero, *Hacer Para Transformar. El Método de La Psicología Comunitaria* (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 2006).

of one research organisation (university or research centre), and one civil society organisation dedicated to promoting the social inclusion and self-determination of migrants and refugees. The three PAR Groups are the main dialogical device for knowledge production in the project, the site from which we critically addressed the interlocking systems of domination that structure HEI and to produce tools for tackling them. Moreover, PAR Groups were in constant conversation with each other and the two other partners in the Consortium who were not engaged in PAR processes.

Thanks to this collective architecture inspired by PAR methodology, we collaboratively worked to produce curricular materials that responded to the needs, political desires, and material urgencies that PAR members raised in each of the local contexts of BRIDGES. First, we produced a toolkit with concepts and strategies to dismantle intersecting discriminations and, in particular, structural racism, in European societies and in Higher Education Institutions.⁹ Then, we developed an open access course curriculum,¹⁰ which proposes three strategies with which to fight structural racism in HEI: first, performing institutional diagnosis; second, liberating theories; and third, using difference as a creative force for transformation in antiracist pedagogies.

9. "About Toolkit – Bridges," accessed March 15, 2022, <https://buildingbridges.space/about-toolkit/>.

10. "BRIDGES Course – Bridges," accessed March 15, 2022, <https://buildingbridges.space/course/>.

Situating PAR within BRIDGES

Taking Latin American PAR as an initial inspiration, we believed it was important to collectively reflect on the ways in which this methodological framework could materialise within BRIDGES. By discussing the foundational notions behind the broader framework of PAR—Participation, Problematisation, Reflexivity, and Empowerment—we sought to generate situated definitions of what these concepts could mean for BRIDGES.¹¹ In the process, the original meaning of these principles was transformed in response to the specific challenges we faced whilst we carried out the project.

Participation is crucial to PAR methods. The importance given to this notion in the Latin American PAR tradition is a response to positivist, eurocolonial research paradigms that consider academics as privileged subjects of knowledge whilst deeming “populations” mere objects of research. Conversely, in PAR, people facing systemic forms of oppression, in partnership with engaged outsiders, take action to change conditions of their lives. whilst agreeing with these radical critiques of power asymmetries in research, we found that when trying to translate PAR methods into our project, we considered this definition created a border between “academics” and “civil society,” as if these were two pure, homogeneous blocks in mutual opposition (which, in BRIDGES, they are not). Rather, we

11. Marisela Montenegro, Marcel Balasch, and Blanca Callen, *Evaluación e Intervención Social* (Barcelona: EdiUOC, 2009).

came to define “participation” as a process of collective construction of a space of dialogue. We understand “dialogue” as a critique of positivist research methods that contribute to perpetuating exploitative and extractive relations of knowledge production. Drawing on Paulo Freire’s theory of anti-oppressive pedagogy, PAR seeks to uncover meanings and practices that normalise domination.¹² Thus, *problematisation* is the process of questioning social conditions of life perceived as natural, through a collective dialogue between educators/researchers and community members. However, this Freirean approach has its own limitations: it tends to construct a metanarrative of “discovery” which is based on the logic of representation.¹³ Countering this tendency, within the BRIDGES project, we defined dialogue as a practice of knowledge production that seeks to *diffract*,¹⁴ rather than *represent* the structural processes that differentiate and hierarchise subject positions in particular contexts. This is an approach that favours the coexistence of a multiplicity of accounts and, consequently, of different horizons of transformation.

Such an approach to knowledge production required the creation of different instances where the articulation of diverging accounts

12. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

13. See Álvaro Ramírez-March and Marisela Montenegro, “On Narrativity, Knowledge Production, and Social Change: A Diffractive Encounter between the Narrative Productions Methodology and Participatory Action-Research,” *Qualitative Research in Psychology* (November 7, 2021): 1–12, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2021.1994678>.

14. See Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 575–99, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3178066>.

could emerge—instances in which to question ourselves and our ideas, whilst sharing with each other our different trajectories of discrimination, struggles, of complicities, and privileges. In this context, *reflexivity*, understood as the cyclical, nonlinear process of synthesis between action and reflection, theory and practice, worked as one of the interwoven principles of PAR implementation. In short, reflexivity refers to the collective analysis of the intersecting power dynamics at play in the ways that knowledge, theories, and products of the project were generated in the different contexts of the BRIDGES Collective.¹⁵ Finally, the normative aim of PAR is the *empowerment* of systemically oppressed communities. Here, we align with critical feminist approaches toward development studies who reject understanding empowerment as a process of gaining individual or group control over certain resources, highlighting instead the need for a radical transformation of societal oppressions.¹⁶

15. We inherit this understanding of reflexivity from feminist scholars' methodological contributions to the social sciences. See Kim V. L. England, "Getting Personal: Reflexivity, Positionality, and Feminist Research," *The Professional Geographer* 46, no. 1 (February 1994): 80–89, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0033-0124.1994.00080.x>; Gandarias Goikoetxea, "Habitando las incomodidades." Reflexivity, here, also has to do with the already classic debates after the "interpretative turn" in Anthropology; see James Clifford and George Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986) and the feminist response by Ruth Behar and Deborah A. Gordon, eds., *Women Writing Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

16. See Naila Kabeer, 'Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: A Critical Analysis of the Third Millennium Development Goal 1', *Gender & Development* 13, no. 1 (March 1, 2005): 13–24, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13552070512331332273>.

Our approach to empowerment thus mirrors that of other militant researchers who seek to learn from and with marginalised, oppressed, and exploited social groups.¹⁷ However, a different understanding of empowerment is derived from BRIDGES, given the lack of a clear distinction in the project between those entitled as external researchers, on the one hand, and “oppressed populations,” on the other, and the intermeshing of these positionalities. That is, we define *empowerment* as a collective process that derives from mutual recognition. It has to do with acknowledging the multiple ways in which patriarchal, racist, and other structures of domination construct our diverse positions within and outside of HEI. Thus, empowerment goes hand in hand with the abovementioned PAR principle of participation: with taking up responsibilities and commitments in a collective articulation of knowledge and praxis. Empowerment is a function of problematising what is, in hegemonic ideologies, taken for granted: we are, thereby, able to construct new frames of intelligibility and new possibilities of transformation of the historical, geopolitical, and epistemic matrices of domination that we inhabit.

PAR becomes PAR*: Pandemic Action Research

Whilst seeking coherence between PAR principles and the actual process of generating BRIDGES toolkit and course we encountered a major obstacle (to say the least): in 2020, coronavirus (COVID-19)

17. See Orlando Fals-Borda, “The Application of Participatory Action-Research in Latin America,” *International Sociology* 2, no. 4 (December 1, 1987): 329–347, <https://doi.org/10.1177/026858098700200401>; Maritza Montero, *Hacer Para Transformar*.

became a global pandemic, resulting in hundreds of millions of people contracting the virus, and millions of people dying.¹⁸ In an unprecedented move, a third of the world's population (nearly 3 billion people) were put into lockdown and most international borders closed, as states sought to control contagion by controlling human movement, and by imposing quarantines, and, in some cases, through the militarisation and police surveillance of city streets.

Very quickly, it became apparent that, although the pandemic was a shared existential threat, its management by states and capital re-entrenched and redoubled existing inequalities and differential exposure to precarity and death. The directive to “stay home, stay safe” was only practicable for those who have homes, and for whom home is, indeed, a safe place. Being “quarantined”—or left to die—in detention centres, camps, and prisons where social distancing is impossible and access to basic necessities to maintain health is denied, is not the equivalent.

Care workers (such as household workers, hospital workers, and others) who are predominantly migrant women may have found themselves exposed at work (not having the option to “work from home”) or may have found themselves suddenly unemployed, whilst being overburdened with unremunerated care responsibilities at home. Rising rates of interpersonal gendered violence were reported

18. As this book goes to press, the World Health Organisation reports that there have been 517,648,631 confirmed cases of coronavirus, of which 6,261,708 people who contracted the virus have died. World Health Organisation, “WHO Coronavirus (COVID-19) Dashboard” (May 13, 2022), <https://covid19.who.int>.

across the world by feminist organisers who have long insisted that the home, and the heteropatriarchal nuclear family, is not safe for many women, children, and LGBTQI+ youth. Racialised class divides became starkly apparent worldwide as Black, Indigenous, migrant, refugee, and other subaltern groups viewed as disposable by states and were the hardest hit by the virus, whilst also becoming the targets of state surveillance and police violence in the name of “public health and safety.” Confronting these new conditions of existence, we were compelled to undertake a process of collective reflection and reinvention of PAR, which we called “Pandemic Action Research,” or, PAR*.

Since PAR in BRIDGES relies on transnational cooperation between universities and civil society organisations (CSO) in order to produce knowledge, and face-to-face meetings, workshops, and exchanges were central to this, the limitations on movement within and across the four research countries (Spain, UK, Germany, and Greece) posed challenges to our research design. Travelling and connecting in person across borders and geographies was central to how we had imagined BRIDGES. This was, now, impossible. Yet, at the same time, the pressure from neoliberal universities and funding agencies to adjust to this situation and immediately continue with “business as usual” sat uneasily with us. In some contexts, we fell back on desk research in a situation where meeting face-to-face (or even virtually, given the digital divide separating us) to work in local PAR Groups became im/possible. In other contexts where citizens were allowed greater freedoms of movement and assembly, it was

possible for researchers to meet up for “working strolls” in parks and thereby to break the isolation that was imposed by stricter lockdowns. In general, we were not entirely comfortable resorting to desk research or virtual encounters: the question emerged, (how) can principles of PAR (participation, problematisation, reflexivity, and empowerment) continue to be embodied in PAR*?

Social distancing, social isolation, lockdown, and quarantine measures as voluntary or state-mandated responses to pandemic conditions obviously place severe limitations on PAR. Replacing planned face-to-face PAR Group meetings with virtual meetings was only possible in cases where participants had access to computers and fast internet connectivity. In light of this, we discussed different forms of participation, and “slowing down” as a political and epistemological necessity. Moreover, the pandemic exacerbates structural inequalities already faced by participants, exposing them differentially and disproportionately to risk of premature death. All of a sudden, we were confronted with the need to interpret how domination materialised within and beyond HEI. Against claims made early on that the pandemic was the “great equaliser”—since the virus does not “discriminate” and anyone, regardless of “race,” class, gender, or geopolitical location can become infected—very quickly, structural inequalities, including those caused by neocolonial processes of structural adjustment and austerity, of apartheid and segregation, and racial capitalist class exploitation, became apparent in the differential effects of the coronavirus—as well as the ongoing situation of vaccine apartheid, affecting primarily people living in

Central Africa, Yemen, and Afghanistan, as this book goes to press.¹⁹ As obvious and enraging these facts are, problematising a situation still unfolding harbours several challenges, not least among which are the urgencies of survival, mutual aid, and care, which take precedence over the analytical, reflective, and conceptual activities of problematisation (and its expression in writing). The labour of collective survival under constantly shifting conditions, which interpellates and implicates us as action researchers (who seek not to separate research from social activism), often takes precedence over the labour of problematisation, which may presuppose luxuries of time, space, and well-being that we lacked during pandemic times.

Reflection as an embodied, collective endeavour was obviously affected by disconnection and distantiation. It is difficult to make space to reflect when facing an existential crisis of global proportions. Moreover, as we were increasingly encouraged by institutions and funders to turn to desk research, we quickly realised that a PAR process interrupted by a pandemic cannot be replaced by the musings of isolated researchers sitting at their desks—however interesting or well-informed. Where local conditions allowed, we tried to meet in person as much as safely possible. Still, through PAR*, we aimed to make space for processes of collective reflection, to highlight differences and commonalities between differently socially situated subjects, as these were brought into harsh relief by pandemic conditions which reveal our interdependence and the stakes we have in each other's survival. In this sense, PAR* is a

19. World Health Organisation, "WHO Coronavirus (COVID-19) Dashboard."

methodology responsive to the urgency of challenging the material and semiotic effects of interlocking systems of oppression in a time of global crisis.

PAR sees empowerment not only as the outcome (e.g., policy) but as the process through which the outcome is produced. But this, too, needed to be critically interrogated under pandemic conditions. What would an empowering process of PAR* look like? Would it mean “pressing pause” on institutional clocks in order to ensure meaningful participation at a(n imagined) future time when the pandemic subsides or (let’s hope) the virus no longer threatens human lives? Prioritising mutual aid efforts over research outcomes? Moreover, as the dictates of capital and the looming threat of “new” financial crisis compelled governments to ease social distancing measures and rollback lockdowns, we were (and are) concerned about what happens to social health as we are encouraged to embrace the “new normal”? As states use the global pandemic as a pretext to close borders to refugees, curtail their movements in camps under perpetual logics of quarantine, or punish noncompliance with detention and deportation—as, in short, the biopolitics of coronavirus is accompanied by an ever more accelerated necropolitics—empowerment through solidarity gains new urgency.²⁰ And, as we are drafting this introduction, we are facing yet another crisis, yet another war that generates still

20. Anna Carastathis, Aila Spathopoulou, and Myrto Tsilimpounidi, “Crisis goes viral: containment in the age of contagion in Greece,” *Fennia: International Journal of Geography* 198, no. 1–2 (2020): 9–10, <https://doi.org/10.11143/fennia.99514>.

more suffering, fear, death, and new contradictions in our political struggles. We, therefore, arrive at this moment not only with a journey behind us, but also with emergent questions as we confront new urgencies.

Overview of the book

The next chapter, chapter 2, engages with current debates on decolonising HEI whilst maintaining a critical stance in relation to hegemonic institutions discursively incorporating “decolonisation” as a token in an otherwise white supremacist, patriarchal, cis- and heteronormative curriculum. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the main methodology used in this research project, that of Narrative Productions, tracing its genealogy. We argue the Narrative Productions methodology can help nurture decolonising research practices, and question our training by hegemonic institutions to perform social research. In this connection, Narrative Productions methodology points toward possibilities of co-creation of meaning by dissolving the hierarchies between theory and empirical “data,” researchers and researched.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 are the Narrative Productions produced by the three PAR Groups in BRIDGES: Chapter 4 was produced by PAR Group Barcelona; it tackles social exclusions and discrimination in the context of Catalan society in the Spanish state from an antiracist feminist perspective that seeks to forge transformative alliances. Chapter 5 was produced by PAR Group Athens; it is

a collective, poetic attempt to crystallise the contradictions of different positionalities in terms of the open-ended project of decolonisation, in a context—Greece, the Aegean border at the periphery of “Europe”—where coloniality is a fraught, contradictory reality. Using the genre of prose poetry, it is also an attempt to unlearn the strictures of academic writing. Chapter 6 was produced by PAR Group Giessen; it questions the hegemonic neoliberal university and its processes of exclusion, whilst putting forward an agenda of decolonising German universities that is based on the experiences of people with migration biographies—both inside and outside of the university—confronting ethnocentrism in a core capitalist country.

Finally, Chapter 7 presents a manifesto, which we all wrote together collectively. The BRIDGES manifesto was produced during an online workshop that brought together everyone’s ideas, thoughts, perspectives, and desires for a decolonised university. We tried to practise horizontality, inclusion, and synthesis of contradictions across different positionalities, experiences, and political views, to find—or form—common ground, and to seek inspiration from the genre of manifestos to confront the routine depoliticisation of this kind of work in and by the university.

This book is an invitation. It is a node within a larger entanglement of collectivities that struggle for social change in universities. We want to challenge the binary inside/outside that the university itself sets up in order to claim a monopoly on “science,” “knowledge,” “truth,”

and “research.” We would like to invite alliances with all those who seek to embody antiracist feminist, queer anticapitalist perspectives in these embattled times, to turn theories into praxis, pedagogies into critical encounters, within, outside, and against the university.

02





Chapter 2

Don't diversify: Decolonise!

Bridges Collective

When we conceptualised the BRIDGES project and sought funding to carry it out, we wanted to harness the emancipatory potential of diversity for addressing intersecting forms of oppression, which are resisted in collective action, and for highlighting heterogeneity within collectives composed by people with a plurality of routes and baggage. But we also knew that the language of diversity had purchase: within neoliberal universities it has been co-opted and assimilated as a tool of managing difference whilst eliding structural oppressions. We consciously exploited the latter (to secure funding) whilst believing the former, building on feminist and antiracist struggles within universities. These movements have achieved the creation of emancipatory spaces for alternative forms of knowledge production within certain academies, such as gender and sexuality studies, Black studies, ethnic studies, and critical race studies departments in some national contexts. In other national academies, these fields are extremely marginalised or nonexistent.

Initially an emancipatory tool to visualise forms of discrimination and struggles against them as intersectional and multilayered, the concept of diversity has been commodified by the neoliberal university in order to pay lip service, without implementing the

demands for structural change raised by antiracist and decolonial feminists. Indeed, functioning as a defusion and a distraction, the inclusion of an alleged diversity that needs to be tolerated more often than not ensures the continuation of white supremacy and colonial and heteropatriarchal relations of power, rather than abolishing them. In this chapter, which elucidates the theoretical and political framework of the BRIDGES project, we argue that discrimination and exclusion are structural features of universities (§1). We show how diversity can be emancipatory, and yet, how this emancipatory potential is at risk of being co-opted through institutional discourses that seek to diversify without decolonising (§2). Finally, we present our intervention in this problematic, drawing on decolonial theory as well as experiential knowledge from the BRIDGES project (§3).

Intersecting discriminations in/exclusions from universities

Discrimination and exclusion are palpable at universities across Europe, as well as in the broader societies. BRIDGES asks a deceptively simple question: what can we do? In the design of tools and curricular materials to address this injustice, we have proposed an approach that moves from diagnosis to reclaiming theory for collective liberation, and to creating pedagogies of alliance and solidarity with systematically excluded groups of people. Persons with migration biographies, particularly those who are denied legal status or have precarious status, Black people and people of

colour, including, in particular, Roma people, continue to experience discrimination and exclusion based on structural, epistemic, and everyday racism in universities across Europe. For instance, a recent study of UK universities documents that only 85 of the 18,500 professors are Black and only 17 are Black women.²¹ In Germany, in 2012, only 6% of professors had a migration background.²² No such statistics can be found for Greece and Spain, where tenured academic positions are restricted to those holding full national citizenship.

The glaring underrepresentation of Black people and other minoritised and racialised groups in European universities despite decades of antiracist and anti-colonial struggle leads us to think anti-discrimination policies (which are in force in many jurisdictions) are necessary but not sufficient.²³ These policies are limited to the extent that discrimination is commonly understood as resulting from the behaviour of individuals,²⁴ and its remedy is usually understood to benefit individuals. Moreover, institutions can

21. Encarnación Gutiérrez-Rodríguez, "Sensing dispossession: Women and gender studies between institutional racism and migration control policies in the neoliberal university," *Women's Studies International Forum* 54 (2016): 167-177, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2015.06.013>.

22. Gutiérrez-Rodríguez, "Sensing dispossession."

23. Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2012); Shirley Anne Tate and Paul Bagguley, *Building the Anti-Racist University* (London: Routledge, 2018); Hedi Mirza, "Harvesting our collective intelligence: Black British feminism in post-race times," *Women's Studies International Forum* 51, (2015): 1-9. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2015.03.006>.

24. Shirley Anne Tate and Damien Page, "Whiteness and institutional racism: hiding behind (un)conscious bias," *Ethics and Education* 13, no. 1, (2018): 141-155, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449642.2018.1428718>.

“indirectly” discriminate against groups who have been excluded by design, but not necessarily by intent—to use the language of antidiscrimination law, which occludes as much as it reveals about racist exclusion and epistemic violence. The persistence of so-called “indirect discrimination” in universities not only affects who has access to universities, but also the curriculum: what is taught, and how.²⁵ At a minimum, intervention is needed to tackle discrimination in its indirect and direct forms. Yet, as Shirley Anne Tate and Paul Bagguley have argued, still more work is needed “in order to develop a maximal, transformative approach to institutional change, rather than a minimal meeting of legal obligations in those countries where an anti-discrimination framework exists.”²⁶

BRIDGES has sought to contribute to such a transformative approach by experimenting with participatory action research methods (PAR) and by producing curricular materials and tools and promoting antiracist feminist pedagogical practices, with a decolonial horizon. Foregrounding perspectives that emphasise the historical processes underpinning contemporary social exclusions, BRIDGES emphasises the significance of universities (amongst other cultural institutions) in transforming unequal societies,²⁷ particularly when the boundaries of these institutions are contested and the borders around them

25. Jason Arday, Dina Zoe Belluigi, and Dave Thomas, “Attempting to break the chain: reimagining inclusive pedagogy and decolonising the curriculum within the academy,” *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 53, no. 3 (2021): 298-313, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2020.1773257>.

26. Tate and Bagguley, *Building the Anti-Racist University*, 290.

27. Sara de Jong,, Rosalba Icaza, and Olivia Rutazibwa, *Decolonisation and Feminisms in Global Teaching and Learning* (London: Routledge, 2018).

are challenged by groups systematically excluded from them. Bringing together epistemic communities, which are located both inside and outside the academy, BRIDGES seeks to dismantle the assumptions that theory must be derived from a process of abstraction that is detached from everyday struggles.²⁸ Instead, we have engaged in reflection and collective analysis of the role of structural, epistemic, and interpersonal racism; the legacies of colonialism; and intersecting discriminations in shaping situated experiences within and outside universities. Taking the university as our site of intervention and study, we argue it is as significant to look at who/what makes it “in” as it is to look at who/what remains on the “outside,” if we are to understand how knowledge production reproduces violence. BRIDGES highlights how exclusion functions at universities and in knowledge production, and seeks to know how we can really change that—and not only talk about it.

The concept of diversity has had an emancipatory potential for addressing axes of inequality within institutions such as the university. In the Anglo-American academy, feminist and antiracist struggles within universities have achieved the creation of emancipatory spaces for alternative forms of knowledge production, such as the creation of gender and sexuality studies, Black studies, ethnic studies, or critical race studies. Yet, such departments do not exist in universities in Spain and Greece (two of the three BRIDGES case studies). Further, even in UK and German universities, where gender studies and, to a much lesser extent, Black studies, have

28. bell hooks, *Teaching to transgress* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

been institutionalised, diversity is tokenized and co-opted: the “inclusion of diversity” tends to problematise and objectify anything that deviates from white hegemony, by producing dichotomies and categorisations which make the alleged “different” visible in two complementary roles—the problem and the victim.”²⁹ From W.E.B. Du Bois’ question to African Americans: “how does it feel to be a problem?”³⁰ to Sara Ahmed’s observation that naming the problem means becoming named as the problem,³¹ diversity discourses, we argue, reproduce segregations and differentiations between desirable and undesirable diversity, which inherit colonial histories and narratives. In this way, the tolerance and inclusion of an alleged diversity fosters white supremacist, Eurocolonial and heteropatriarchal relations of power, rather than challenging them.³²

The emancipatory potential of diversity and its enclosure

Universities in Europe play an important role in the construction of the West as liberal, tolerant, and democratic. Establishing diversity and equality goals in universities can be understood as an important element of this process, which is embedded in a broader attempt to

29. Paul Gilroy, “The end of anti-racism.” *Race and local politics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1992), 191-209.

30. W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg, 1903), <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/408/408-h/408-h.htm>.

31, 32. Ahmed, *On Being Included*.

forge a “European Identity” through migration management—which is to say violent bordering. Diversity is constructed as a source of “richness” and as a social benefit in intra-European processes of economic, social, and cultural integration and the homogenisation of educational systems. Whilst this is seemingly opposed to approaches that construct anyone coming from outside of Europe as a threat to European identity, values, and to the “European way of life,” both practices have in common the construction of the category of difference as a monolithic, homogeneous identity.

Increasingly, educators within European HEI are asked to design programs that take diversity into account and to produce teaching resources that include diversity and foster equality. This challenge is twofold. On the one hand, there is a growing consensus that professors (who are predominantly white, cis men with class privilege) lack the will or the capacity to transform curricula or to produce antiracist pedagogies. This labour usually falls on precarious, racialised academic workers and students—predominantly cis and trans women and non-binary people—often organising in social movements demanding these transformations. On the other hand, whilst the notion of diversity has a liberatory potential, it can easily be tokenised, absorbed into institutional projects whilst deliberately failing to dismantle the ways in which “theoretical models and Eurocentric histories continue to provide intellectual materials that reproduce and justify colonial hierarchies.”³³ In managing diversity, institutions preserve rather than dismantle structures of power

33. Gurminder Bhambra, Dalia Gebrial, and Kerem Nişancioğlu, *Decolonising the university* (London: Pluto Press, 2018), 6.

and privilege. Avtar Brah suggests “difference” is systematically produced and organised through economic, cultural, and political discourses as well as through institutionalised practices, a process in which specific power regimes are articulated.³⁴ María Lugones argues that contemporary power regimes work follow a categorical, dichotomic, and hierarchical logic, and that this logic has been central to colonial/modern, capitalist thinking about race, gender, and sexuality.³⁵

Whilst university curricula and pedagogies often reproduce structural discrimination, they also have the potential to promote antiracist and feminist practices. To do so, they need to review curricula to reflect diverse histories, achievements, and experiences of social groups subject to discrimination.³⁶ In opposition to the “management of diversity,” antiracist feminist perspectives depart from recognising diversity in order to build intellectual and political solidarities across differences. This use of diversity differs from the depoliticised, aseptic morality often mobilised within European academic institutions. For instance, diversity has been crucial to the dismantling of the idea of a homogenous subject of white feminism, articulated around the notion of basic common identity

34. Avtar Brah, “Travels in negotiations: difference, identity, politics,” *Journal of creative communications* 2, no. 1-2 (2007): 245-256.

35. María Lugones, “Toward a Decolonial Feminism,” *Hypatia* 25, no. 4 (2010): 742-759. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.2010.01137.x>.

36. Tariq Modood, John Carter, and Steve Fenton, *Ethnicity and employment in higher education* (London: Policy Studies Institute/UCAS, 1999).

and the common ground of shared oppression, and has led to a wider engagement with the intersections which constitute identities, and the articulation between identity, diversity, and politics.³⁷

Considering the interlocking character of power regimes, diversity can be useful within socio-political struggles for addressing axes of inequality which occur in collective action, and for highlighting heterogeneity within collectives, composed by people with a plurality of routes and baggage. In this context, diversity is key to visualising what axes of differentiation occur within and outside the collective, in order to avoid becoming (or remaining) “the colonisers of the coloniser,” which Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui addresses as “the colonial wound.”³⁸ Nevertheless, as antiracist feminists have observed, given the specificity of each position, to centre political action on multiplicity may lead to processes of fragmentation, competition, and disconnection between particularised struggles. This tension is taken up by Heidi Mirza, for whom activism should pay attention to

37. Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds., *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, fourth edition (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015); Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2007); Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1996); Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, second edition (New York: Routledge, 2009); bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, third edition (New York: Routledge, 2015); Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2003); Nira Yuval-Davis, “Intersectionality and Feminist Politics,” *European Journal of Women’s Studies* 13, no. 3 (August 1, 2006): 193–209, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506806065752>.

38. Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, “Ch’ixinakax utxiwa: A Reflection on the Practices and Discourses of Decolonisation,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 111, no. 1 (2012): 95–109, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-1472612>.

diversity and, at the same time, engage a conscious construction of “sameness.”³⁹ In this context, “sameness” doesn’t refer to assuming that experiences of oppression are identical; nor does it refer to the necessity of creating a unified, universal political project. Instead, the conscious construction of sameness refers to achieving a sense of commonality from which to act. This can be illustrated through Sindillar’s experience; as Karina Fulladosa-Leal explains, Sindillar’s political project has explicitly addressed the challenges of creating a common initiative, whilst taking into account the diversity of participants’ situations and the conditions of their participation.⁴⁰ Of course, one of the most important contributions in this area is that of Black feminist theorist and poet Audre Lorde, who persuasively argued that difference is a powerful force for politics.⁴¹ Lorde sees difference as an opportunity for generating coalitions. Conjoint action needs the interdependence of different strengths and can also generate powerful feminist connections for struggle and life. This, in turn, also forges personal power. The political force of difference needs commitment, so our task is to use our differences as bridges rather than barriers between us.

Departing from Lorde’s work to imagine the possibilities for concrete action, Surya Nayak points out that we lack patterns to relate to

39. Mirza, “Harvesting our collective intelligence.”

40. Karina Fulladosa-Leal, *Mujeres en movimiento: ampliando los márgenes de participación social y política en la acción colectiva como trabajadoras del hogar y el cuidado* (Tesis Doctoral, Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona, 2017), <http://hdl.handle.net/10803/455567>.

41. Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 114-123.

human differences as equals.⁴² Thus, generating interdependent coalitions and powerful connections from diversity represents an enduring challenge, as our history and our present show us. Whether we look at historical feminist, antiracist, or class struggles, overcoming coloniality has often failed, creating more divisions, rather than unity. First, overcoming coloniality involves not only interrogating our own privileges on an abstract or discursive level, but also developing practical alternatives to the established power positions and practices that continue, to this day, to re-established whiteness and patriarchy.⁴³ Second, overcoming coloniality involves redistributing access to material resources, decolonising settler states, restoring self-determination to colonised and subaltern groups, and making reparations.⁴⁴

We argue processes of redistribution and reparation within universities begin with a diagnosis that academic institutions remain a primary site through which white supremacy and colonial power relations are reproduced. It is necessary to analyse how these power relations result in categories of *difference*, and how racism, misogyny, and ableism have been materialised through a range

42. Surya Nayak "Living activist struggles to end social injustice." *Critical Social Policy* 40, no. 2 (2020): 179-195, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0261018319898177>.

43. Tate and Bagguley, *Building the Anti-racist University*. On whiteness see George Yancy, *Whiteness and the Return of the White Body*. (Ph.D. Diss, Duquesne University, 2005), <https://dsc.duq.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2402&context=etd>.

44. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1-40, <https://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/des/article/view/18630/15554>.

of scientific disciplines in white supremacist institutions—how, in other words, the colonial construction of difference has served to perpetuate visible and invisible racial hierarchies.⁴⁵

The enclosure of diversity within academic institutions has gone hand in hand with a cooptation of struggles. Discourses of diversity within academic institutions render diversity a tool to tame potential conflict related to racial justice, rather than to envision radical alternatives. Too often, the language of diversity “bypasses power as well as history to suggest a harmonious empty pluralism.”⁴⁶ This can be observed in institutional attempts to add curriculum materials addressing history and politics in colonised societies without, however, revising the hegemonic telling of history; or to discuss issues of racial inequality as if they were separate from, rather than intrinsic to European history, politics, the construction of whiteness and eurocentrism. Used in this way, according to Sara Ahmed, “diversity can participate in the creation of an idea of the institution that allows racism and inequalities to be overlooked.”⁴⁷ This serves as liberal narrative to uncritically mask the racist foundation of Europe’s educational, social and political infrastructures: namely, *including or enclosing* an alleged difference rather than *undoing* the dominant, exclusionary norm.

As Philomena Essed and Kwame Nimako argue, “taken for granted claims of race neutrality, colorblindness and the discourse of

45. Anibal Quijano, “Coloniality of power and Eurocentrism in Latin America,” *International Sociology* 15, no. 2, (2000): 215-232, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580900015002005>; Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal knowledge and imperial power: Race and the intimate in colonial rule*, 2nd edition (California: University of California Press, 2010).

46. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders*.

47. Ahmed, *On Being Included*, 13.

tolerance often hide from view the 'hidden, invisible, forms of racist expressions and well-established patterns of racist exclusion."⁴⁸ They serve as disciplining tools to tame what has historically been constructed and excluded as the other, rather than challenging the way whiteness is constituted through epistemic violence. European societies present themselves as self-satisfied, thinking of themselves as ethical and free of racism. This relies on concealing or justifying historical and contemporary forms of colonial violence. This form of thinking, conceptualised by Gloria Wekker as "white innocence,"⁴⁹ is a disciplining technique aimed at managing trauma and deflecting responsibility for, and dismantling structural racism.⁵⁰ This unwillingness of white people to acknowledge their own racial position, or the fact that every institution, including the university, is suffused with the ideology and material practices of white supremacy is what Charles Mills calls an "epistemology of ignorance."⁵¹ This deliberate, productive racial denialism manifests today is through claims that the world is past the colonial era (post-colonial) or free of oppression based on race (post-racial).⁵² A unified "European

48. Philomena Essed and Kwame Nimako, "Designs and (co)incidents: Cultures of scholarship and public policy on immigrants/minorities in the Netherlands," *International journal of comparative sociology* 47, no. 3-4 (2006), 281-312.

49. Gloria Wekker, *White innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

50. Robin D. G. Kelley, "Black study, Black struggle" *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* 40, no. 2 (2018): 153-168, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8cj8q196>.

51. Charles Mills, *Black Rights/White Wrongs: The critique of racial liberalism* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007).

52. Stefanie C. Boulila, *Race in Post-Racial Europe: An Intersectional Analysis* (London: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2019).

identity" is constructed through practices that normalise whiteness and western cultural practices whilst excluding "different cultures," a liberal terminology for addressing the racialised other. As Fatima El-Tayeb argues,

*instead of reconceptualizing Europe in order to include them, the unification process creates a narrative that not only continues to exclude racialized minorities but also defines them as the very essence of non-Europeanness in terms that increasingly link migration to supposedly invincible differences of race, culture, and religion.*⁵³

Moreover, we need to take into consideration that Europe is not a unified space; it is marked by uneven cultural, political, economic geographies, relations of colonialism internal to Europe, and divisions—between core/periphery, North/South, East/West, developed/underdeveloped—that have been exacerbated in the era of multiple crises. This process of homogenisation through differentiation, then, is not only between a homogeneous "Europe" and its alleged exterior; but also occurs within Europe itself. Thus, following Wekker, El-Tayeb, and others, we try to avoid referring to "Europe" as the marker of a unified identity that tracks an undifferentiated socio-spatiality, wherein diversity is clearly constructed as a deviation from a Eurocentric norm. As Gloria Wekker writes,

53. Fatima El-Tayeb, *European Others: Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011): 2-3.

*contemporary constructions of “us,” those constructed as belonging to Europe, and “them,” those constructed as not belonging ... entail the fundamental impossibility of being both European, constructed to mean being white and Christian, and being black-Muslim-migrant-refugee.*⁵⁴

People marked as “diverse” are categorised as “others” through processes of differentiation and subalternisation. Thus, rather than dismantling the racist and patriarchal foundations of Europe, institutional discursive practices that seek to include diversity more often than not reinforce relations of power where whiteness remains an unmarked category, whilst “being black, migrant or refugee are marked categories.”⁵⁵ This, of course, erases the role of colonialism and imperialism in forging Europe, the multiple forms of appropriation and exploitation on which Europe is built and the legacies of these forms of violence in defining contemporary European identity. Therefore, by implementing policies seeking to include difference, the neoliberal university tokenizes difference; it encloses difference into its ordinary operations; and it fails to dismantle “theoretical models and Eurocentric histories ... that reproduce and justify colonial hierarchies.”⁵⁶ Adding diversity as an ingredient to enrich whiteness fails to acknowledge how European knowledge and identity are historically produced through appropriation and exploitation, as well as racialised and gendered

54. Wekker, *White innocence*, 21.

55. Wekker, *White innocence*, 69.

56. Bhabra et al, *Decolonising the university*, 6.

forms of epistemic violence, institutionalised practices of silencing and smothering.⁵⁷ White supremacist epistemologies cannot be dismantled by including different compartmentalised identities, which reinforce essentialised colonial categories and racist practices of segregation, taxonomical reason, and scientific racism.⁵⁸ Instead, Europe and its self-narration of its colonial history must be disrupted; Europe must be situated in an analytical field that centres its entanglements with the rest of the world: “because we are all products of a shared colonial history, we are all subjects of the enquiry.”⁵⁹

Challenging and deconstructing whiteness by centering the histories, perspectives, and experiences that are being erased, in order to make its epistemic violence visible and tangible. This includes making visible the erasure of racist and colonial violence, embedded in the architecture of European academic institutions. Rather than creating safe spaces for difference to be included, it is necessary to create dangerous spaces for whiteness not to be reproduced. In the context of neoliberal academia, it is necessary to create cracks in order to transform the epistemologies, methodologies, and pedagogical

57. Kristie Dotson, “Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing,” *Hypatia* 26, no. 2 (2011): 236-257, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23016544>.

58. Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016); Dalia Gebrial “Rhodes Must Fall: Oxford and Movements for Change,” *Decolonising the university*, eds. Gurinder Bhambra, Dalia Gebrial, and Kerem Nişancioğlu, (London, Pluto Press, 2019), 19–36.

59. Elisabeth Mackinlay and Katelin Barney “Unknown and unknowing possibilities: Transformative learning, social justice, and decolonising pedagogy in Indigenous Australian studies” *Journal of Transformative Education* 12, no.1 (2014): 58, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1541344614541170>.

practices through which knowledge is produced as an abstract theory, which is intrinsically based on colonial principles of rationality, universality, and violence. In order to create cracks within these walls, we seek to build bridges between communities of decolonial feminist struggles so as to build alternative epistemological and pedagogical practices.

Decolonising the university: Liberating diversity?

Transforming the curriculum from a decolonial feminist perspective goes far beyond enriching the syllabus by including different perspectives, or adding new resources to a reading list. Rather than merely “including diversity,” the aim, as we see it, is to disrupt the colonial imagination, to unlearn the internalised domination of whiteness. This means dismantling the way knowledge production and pedagogical practices perpetuate the white, male, and Eurocentric canon, from an intersectional, antiracist feminist perspective with a decolonial horizon. Antiracist feminist perspectives and critical race theory do not just problematise race or gender as objects of study. Instead, they address interlocking systems of domination in order to put them in crisis: they entail militant interventions that challenge and dismantle the forms of epistemic violence and ethnocentric normativity inherent in universities and academic modes of knowledge production. As Cusicanqui has written, “[t]here can be no discourse of decolonisation, no theory of decolonisation, without a decolonizing practice.”⁶⁰

60. Cusicanqui, *Ch'ixinakax utxiwa*, 2012: 100

We understand the coloniality of knowledge as a set of power mechanisms that position as valid knowledge only that produced in institutions of the Global North under the positivist scientific paradigm.⁶¹ These power mechanisms articulate processes of hierarchisation of territories and populations following a colonial geopolitical logic. This logic is based on a univocal definition of how to produce knowledge. The scientific method is established as beyond question, systematic, objective, and neutral. It is positioned as a disinterested, disembodied knowledge, generated from the “God’s eye view”; that is, an omniscient view from above, which sees everything, but is not seen.⁶² Science, enmeshed with colonial power, has contributed to the othering and demonisation of groups; its history is replete with epistemic violence.

The coloniality of knowledge generates theories that reproduce interlocking systems of oppression. In “Under Western Eyes,” Chandra Talpade Mohanty critiques the ethnocentrism implied in the construction of the category of “Third World Women” within western feminist discourses, who are understood as poor, traditional, and sexually oppressed, in contrast to the emancipated, educated, and progressive women of the Global North.⁶³

61. Encarnación Gutiérrez-Rodríguez, “Decolonizing postcolonial rhetoric,” *Decolonizing European Sociology: Transdisciplinary Approaches*, eds. Encarnación Gutiérrez-Rodríguez, Manuela Boatcă, and Sérgio Costa (London: Routledge, 2010), 49–67, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315576190-8>.

62. Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective.” *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 575–99, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3178066>.

63. Mohanty, *Feminism without Borders*.

Just as white Europeans elevated themselves as the global arbiters of knowledge and truth—the “Zero-Point Hubris” as Santiago Castro-Gómez calls it⁶⁴—white feminists exalt themselves arbiters of agency whilst constructing all other women, especially “Third World Women”, as benighted victims. Both fall prey to the colonial logic of failing to recognise the geopolitical location where knowledge is produced. Consequently, theories generated in the global centres of scientific production are mistakenly understood as applicable to any context and situation. These mechanisms of the colonality of knowledge, in our view, do not only affect academic knowledge production, but are also reproduced in industrial as well as in household work and care environments, establishing hierarchies of knowledge, labour, and value, according to the colonial/modern gender system.⁶⁵ As a first step to decolonising knowledge, we consider “resituating these phenomena as key shaping forces of the contemporary world, in a context where their role has been systematically effaced from view.”⁶⁶ As a second step to decolonising knowledge, we argue we must challenge pedagogical practices that normalise and reward white supremacist, colonial, patriarchal violence in the classroom, currently the pre-eminent site for the “transmission” of

64. Santiago Castro-Gómez, “Decolonizar la universidad. La hybris del punto cero y el diálogo de saberes.” *El giro decolonial. Reflexiones para una diversidad epistémica más allá del capitalismo global*, Santiago Castro-Gómez y Ramón Grosfoguel, eds. (Bogotá: Siglo del Hombre Editores, 2007), 79–92, <http://www.ceapedi.com.ar/imagenes/biblioteca/libreria/147.pdf>.

65. María Lugones, “Toward a Decolonial Feminism.”

66. Bhabra et al., *Decolonising the university*, 2018.

knowledge.⁶⁷ Crucial to this is unpacking how academic language is a vehicle of colonial power, and the ways it perpetuates disembodied, emotionless, deracinated, abstract pedagogies.

Resisting Closure: Toward a Decolonial Horizon

Decolonising knowledge, particularly that which is produced, or otherwise created or shared within the university, is a process fraught by contradictions. In seeking to decentre the coloniality of knowledge, decolonial theories confront those paradigms that validate only a certain type of knowledge as valuable or legitimate. At the same time, decolonial theories and methodologies amplify a plurality of alternatives to hegemonic forms of thinking, doing, and feeling that are mistakenly considered universal to all cultures in the world. Far from being universal, these hegemonic theories are based solely on parameters and values of western societies, which have affirmed themselves as the only valid place from which to look at the world—whilst, like the God’s eye view, remaining out of view, beyond question, unmarked. On the one hand, pedagogies of discomfort lead the current infrastructure into a crisis; on the other, they can establish epistemic communities based on collective practices, conversations, and discussions, organised around a politics and ethics of antiracist feminist solidarity.

67. Louise Autar, “Decolonising the classroom: Credibility-based strategies for inclusive classrooms,” *Tijdschrift voor Genderstudies* 20, no. 3 (2017): 305-320, <https://doi.org/10.5117/TVGN2017.3.AUTA>.

Decolonial knowledges are those practices that, in different ways, question both the assumptions and the effects of the coloniality of knowledge.⁶⁸ As knowledge emerges under specific conditions of possibility, it always responds to the interests and questions of those who create it. In contrast to knowledge produced along the univocal colonial logic, there is a wide diversity in the ways alternative knowledges can be generated and shared. These perspectives are critical of the supposed neutrality of scientific knowledge, through which specific truths are produced and legitimated as valid, universal, and unquestionable. And, contrary to the dominant ethnocentric paradigm, which seeks to legitimise domination, decolonial approaches promote an understanding of knowledge as a politically embedded practice against the various forms of domination present in the contexts under which they are produced.⁶⁹

Decolonising the university is an epistemic process that opens the space for uncomfortable, critical, and militant interventions on the practices and discourses that reinforce and normalise Eurocentric values and the colonial continuum—that is, processes of long historical duration that established contemporary racial capitalism and the colonial/modern gender system.⁷⁰ Acknowledging their

68. Castro-Gómez, *Reflexiones para una diversidad epistémica*.

69. Arturo Escobar, *Territorios de diferencia. Lugar, movimientos, vida, redes* (Envió editores, 2010).

70. On racial capitalism see Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, new edition (London: Penguin Books, 2021); on the colonial/modern gender system see María Lugones, "Heterosexuality and the Colonial/Modern Gender System," *Hypatia* 22, no. 1 (2007): 186-209, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4640051>.

constitutive role, not only historically but, also, in the present in European academia requires a collective process to reject pedagogies that instrumentalise inclusion, in favour of pedagogies of discomfort as transformative educational praxis.⁷¹

Paying attention to personal trajectories in the production of knowledge also led us to reflect on the role of feelings and affects in these processes. Emotion has, traditionally, been expelled from the world of epistemology. It has been associated with subjectivity and irrationality, with the feminine, with that which cannot be explained according to the white patriarchal paradigms and which does not provide valid knowledge.⁷² However, we understand that emotion and affective elements—trust, laughter, fear, anger—have allowed the very existence of a space for dialogue for our work. In addition, feelings of anger at powerlessness expressed within the group have also been recognised as a motor for understanding the multiple ways in which oppressive relationships materialise. The focus on bodily affectivity points to a creative potential within political projects. Nevertheless, we consider that the possibility of articulating this type of analysis requires a space of listening and care that is not always present in institutional contexts under capitalism. The epistemological aspect intersects with the ethics of care as a condition of possibility for these processes, an element that must

71. Sara Motta, *Liminal Subjects: Weaving (Our) Liberation* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018).

72. Megan Boler and Michalinos Zembylas. "Discomforting truths: The emotional terrain of understanding difference." *Pedagogies of difference*, ed. Peter Pericles Trifonas (New York, Routledge, 2003), 115-138.

be taken into account in the definition of decolonial knowledge. We recognise that alliances are in themselves a form of critique of the dynamics of individuation, fragmentation, and competition characteristic of neoliberal universities.

The aim of BRIDGES has been to elaborate epistemological tools that build theory through praxis, avoiding universalising abstractions, revealing in order to contest situated historical practices through which relations of colonial, heteropatriarchal power are reproduced. Through these disobedient epistemological tools,⁷³ we have sought to dismantle the assumptions that theory must be derived from a process of abstraction that is detached from everyday struggles. Instead, we tried to engage in and foster collective processes of analysis, which originated from our own situated experiences of being within and outside European universities, dismantling divides between objects and subjects of knowledge, between activism and scholarship.

Having said this, we are aware of the limitations of BRIDGES as a project for decolonising education, not least of which is its embeddedness in neoliberal educational institutions and capitalist systems of knowledge production. Important open questions that emerge, include, to paraphrase Lorde, whether it is possible to produce liberatory practices created “with the master’s tools,” whilst

73. Motta, *Liminal Subjects*.

remaining within “the master’s house.”⁷⁴ Notably, calls to “decolonise the university” are far from being mainstream in Germany, Greece, and Spain and the linguistic communities of German, Greek, and Spanish. However, as decolonisation is mainstreamed as a buzzword in various anglophone contexts (including the settler societies of Canada, the US, and Australia, and the former colonial empire of the UK), much of what we address as a critique of Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion (its tokenism, co-optation of struggles, and what recentring of whiteness) could be said of institutional appropriations and academic whitewashings of decolonisation as well. In connection to proliferating calls to “decolonise the university,” we asked, from our various locations, in some of which these calls are unheard of: is an antiracist feminist decolonial praxis possible within the space of the university? What happens to the university once it is decolonised? Can the university survive its decolonisation? Or is the decolonisation of the university coterminous with its obsolescence? Aware of the difficulty in answering these questions, and the various answers that may be rehearsed to them from varying locations and situated knowledges, we raise them as points of reflection and discussion. Rather than staking claims to “decolonising,” which would reproduce the arrogances of the totalising logics of coloniality, we sought to make intellectual and political alliances with existing attempts to shift consciousnesses, create collaborative knowledges, and shake the epistemological foundations of universities. From the rubble of ivory towers, we may build antiracist feminist bridges.

74. Lorde, *Sister Outsider*.

03





Chapter 3

The Narrative Productions methodology in BRIDGES:

A short guide on its origins and uses

Bridges Collective

This monograph systematises the three-year experience of the BRIDGES project through the Narrative Productions methodology (NPM). This methodology was developed for the first time at the end of the 1990s, within the research group Fractalities in Critical Research in the Department of Social Psychology of the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, in one of the clusters of what was then labelled Critical Social Psychology.⁷⁵ As described by Joan Pujol in his account of the methodology's origins,⁷⁶ that particular institutional context was characterised by the prevalence of Discourse Analysis (DA), a methodology that supports rigorous procedure based on a ritualised analysis of transcribed texts. Mirroring the prominent figure in the early developments of science of the “anatomical theatre,” DA places fragments of participants' texts on the operating table, where analysis is performed from the legitimised position of the researcher. Inspired by feminist epistemologies, NPM emerges,

75. Tomás Ibáñez and Lupicinio Iñiguez, eds., *Critical Social Psychology* (London; Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 1997).

76. Joan Pujol, “The Methodological and Epistemic Narrative of Narrative Productions,” in press.

then, in an attempt to generate more responsible methodologies that would maximise the agency of the research participants. Instead of placing them on a proverbial operating table, NPM proposes a methodology in which the voice of the researcher is one more view of the phenomena at stake, together with those other voices of participants involved in research.

Since the first publication discussing NPM two decades ago by Marcel Balasch and Marisela Montenegro,⁷⁷ NPs have been used in numerous investigations within and outside the discipline of critical social psychology, mainly in Spain and Latin America, appearing in doctoral theses and other academic publications.⁷⁸

77. Marcel Balasch and Marisela Montenegro, "Una Propuesta Metodológica Desde La Epistemología de Los Conocimientos Situados: Las Producciones Narrativas," ed. L. Gómez, *Encuentros En Psicología Social* 1, no. 3 (2003): 44–48.

78. Some examples of these are: Catalina Álvarez Martínez-Conde et al., "Memories of the Struggles for the Rights of Immigrant Women in Barcelona," *Critical Social Policy* 40, no. 2 (2020): 215–33, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0261018319895499>; Jaime Andrés, "Participación, comunidad y transformación: reflexiones desde el Centro Social Comunitario Luis Buñuel," *Revista Espaço Acadêmico* 17, no. 198 (November 3, 2017): 25–36; Rubén Ávila, "Bareback Sex: Breaking the Rules of Sexual Health and the Assumption of Risks," *Sexualities* 18, no. 5–6 (September 1, 2015): 523–47, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460714550903>; Karina Fulladosa-Leal, "Mujeres en movimiento: ampliando los márgenes de participación social y política en la acción colectiva como trabajadoras del hogar y el cuidado" (Ph.D. Thesis, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, 2017), <http://www.tdx.cat/handle/10803/455567>; Itziar Gandarias Goikoetxea and Joan Pujol, "De Las Otras al No(s)Otras: Encuentros, Tensiones y Retos En El Tejido de Articulaciones Entre Colectivos de Mujeres Migradas y Feministas Locales En El País Vasco," *Encrucijadas: Revista Crítica de Ciencias Sociales*, no. 5 (2013): 77–91; Nagore García Fernández, "Difracciones amorosas: deseo, poder y resistencia en las narrativas de mujeres feministas" (Ph.D. Thesis, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, 2017), <http://www.tdx.cat/handle/10803/457570>; Lelya Troncoso, Catherine Galaz, and Catalina Álvarez, "Las Producciones Narrativas como metodología de investigación feminista en Psicología Social Crítica: tensiones y desafíos," *Psicoperspectivas. Individuo y Sociedad* 16, no. 2 (July 14, 2017): 20–32, <https://doi.org/10.5027/psicoperspectivas-Vol16-Issue2-fulltext-956>.

Each of the following three chapters are NPs produced by the three Participatory Action Research (PAR) Groups, which constitute the BRIDGES project: the PAR Group in Barcelona (Chapter 4), in Athens (Chapter 5), and in Giessen (Chapter 6). However, as we will explain below, given the PAR framework that inspires the project, in which teams bridging research and civil society organisations collaborate as a unit, the way in which the methodology is applied to the project brings with it new challenges that question the original formulation of the methodology and require a reformulation of it. The purpose of this chapter is, firstly, to conceptualise the methodological procedure and the epistemological-political principles behind it. Secondly, we explain how the BRIDGES project diverges from the original principles of the methodology, leading to particular adaptations in the context in which we have worked.

Narratives

To say that science is a story, argues Donna Haraway, is no insult.⁷⁹ By this, she refers to how narrative practices are embedded in the cultural practices that make up science. Such an account of science, enunciated in response to universalist positivist claims of truth, is also a first starting point for NPM. The crafting of narratives is as a theory building, world-enacting practice. A second starting point for the methodology is the diverse tradition of narrative research

79. Donna Haraway, "Enlightenment@science_wars.Com: A Personal Reflection on Love and War," *Social Text*, no. 50 (1997): 123–29, <https://doi.org/10.2307/466820>.

in the social sciences, which is nowadays more alive than ever.⁸⁰ Narrative research is based on the premise that human beings, in general, use narratives to make sense of the world around them. Narratives constitute the most elemental level in which human experience is given meaning through language.

A narrative, thus, may be understood as that which results from the act of narrating, that is, of situating experience in a semiotic web of relations and performing an operation by which we articulate a plot that involves different elements (human and non-human) that ultimately makes it intelligible.⁸¹ Scholars inspired by Hannah Arendt's take on narratives call this ability of narratives to turn events into an "action." That is, narratives transform isolated facts by giving them meaning and turning them into something recognisable. It is in this ability to turn (private) events and bring them to the public,

80. See: Molly Andrews, Corinne Squire, and Maria Tamboukou, eds., *Doing Narrative Research* (Los Angeles ; London: SAGE, 2008); Barbara Biglia and Jordi Bonet-Martí, "Narrative Construction as a Psychosocial Research Method: Sharing Writing Practices," *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 10, no. 1 (2009), <https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-10.1.1225>; Jerome Bruner, "The Narrative Construction of Reality," *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 1 (1991): 1–21; D. Jean Clandinin, ed., *Handbook of Narrative Inquiry: Mapping a Methodology* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2007); Jeong-Hee Kim, *Understanding Narrative Inquiry: The Crafting and Analysis of Stories as Research* (California: SAGE, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781071802861>; Donald Polkinghorne, *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988); Nicolás Schöngut and Joan Pujol, "Relatos metodológicos: difractando experiencias narrativas de investigación," *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 16, no. 2 (2015): 24.

81. Teresa Cabruja, Lupicinio Íñiguez-Rueda, and Félix Vázquez, "Cómo construimos el mundo: relativismo, espacios de relación y narratividad," *Anàlisi: Quaderns de comunicació i cultura*, no. 25 (2000): 61–94; Schongut and Pujol, "Relatos metodológicos".

where the political status of narratives emerges.⁸² This emphasis on symbolic construction provides narratives with a privileged position, since it situates them in domains that find themselves in between the personal and the social, shedding light on how meanings are always situated in a particular cultural context, co-created in multiple interactions.⁸³ In this sense, narratives are both constructed by, and are constructors of relational frameworks that make up our reality.⁸⁴

Because of this, we argue narratives are not just a way of apprehending reality—they also have the political potential to transform it, insofar as they can reinforce or destabilise pre-established notions of a given phenomenon.⁸⁵

The NPM assumes the above principles as axiomatic, placing a special emphasis on the dialogically constructed character of language. NPM draws inspiration from Russian linguist Mikhail Bakhtin.⁸⁶ Bakhtin argues that the assertions that characterise human action are always produced in a social context to which they refer to and, in turn, by which they are constituted. In addition to this, Bakhtin's conception of language as heteroglossic is an important

82. See Adriana Cavarero, *Relating Narratives. Storytelling and Selfhood* (New York: Routledge, 2000); Claudia Galindo Lara, "Hannah Arendt. Narratividad y restitución de la política," *En-claves del pensamiento*, no. 17 (2015): 113-134, <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/descarga/articulo/5158318.pdf>.

83. Bruner, "The Narrative Construction of Reality."

84. Cabruja, Íñiguez-Rueda y Vázquez, "Cómo construimos el mundo."

85. Schongut and Pujol, "Relatos metodológicos."

86. Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011).

influence for NPM. “Heteroglossia” refers to how any enunciation is always made in response to other voices that are present in the context in which it occurs, something that for Bakhtin shows how the narrative is constituted by the coexistence between different “genres of speech” within the same language.⁸⁷ Any voice, from this perspective, always incorporates other voices with which it engages or to which it responds.

Likewise, NPM also takes some elements from the hermeneutic tradition of Hans-Georg Gadamer, who argues that the act of interpreting becomes possible only if there is a distance that separates our horizon from another that we intend to approach; it is by seeking to merge horizons that we give meaning to our reality.⁸⁸ Narratives can, then, be understood as an interrelation of positions of knowledge, generating an account that contains a new horizon. It is in this sense that the distance between different subject positions can be understood as a “productive distance.”⁸⁹ The notion of “productive distance” underlines the fact that we need to generate connections in order to create new knowledge(s). This links to another key influence in the construction of the NPM methodological apparatus: the feminist epistemology of “situated

87. Mijail Bajtín, *Estética de la creación verbal*, 10ª edición (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 1999), 248-293.

88. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Vérité et Méthode: Les Grandes Lignes d'une Herméneutique Philosophique* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1976).

89. Joan Pujol and Marisela Montenegro, “Producciones Narrativas: Una Propuesta Teórico-Práctica Para La Investigación Narrativa,” in *Coloquios de Investigación Social* (Córdoba, 2013), 15-42.

knowledges" developed by Donna Haraway, which we discuss in the next section.⁹⁰

Situated knowledges

The epistemology of "situated knowledges" is based on the principles of responsibility and the partiality of the scientific gaze. Haraway's proposal seeks a version of scientific objectivity that is both critical of the universalising effects of both realist and relativist positions with regards to science. On the one hand, realist positions argue that science is enunciated from a supposedly neutral perspective, what she calls "a view from nowhere"; on the other hand, relativist positions assume that all perspectives are equally valid by proposing there's no absolute truth, thus resulting in what she calls "a view from everywhere equally".⁹¹ For Haraway, the problem lies in the fact that the gaze proposed by each perspective is impossible to locate and, therefore, it is a gaze that cannot be held accountable for its knowledge production practices. The alternative that Haraway proposes to this—namely, the idea of situated knowledge—seeks to keep an attentive eye on the very semiotic technologies that we use when constructing knowledge whilst committing with a desire to achieve a version of objectivity that makes it possible to realise more promising visions of our world.

Unlike the realist and relativist positions, the new feminist objectivity

90. Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 575–99, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3178066>.

91. Haraway, "Situated Knowledges," 584.

proposed by Haraway does not seek to encompass everything from a totalising point of view. On the contrary, she argues, “only partial perspective promises objective vision.”⁹² Paradoxically, the partiality of knowing subjects, Haraway argues, which are always unfinished and imperfectly stitched together, is precisely the condition of the possibility for establishing connections with others. Precisely because our gaze is partial, we need to articulate ourselves in relation to other positions. Thus, she proposes, the alternative to relativism “is partial, locatable, critical knowledge sustaining the possibility of webs of connections called solidarity in politics and shared conversations in epistemology.”⁹³ Inspired by this vision, the texts resulting from NPM are the result of conversations between the different positions of researchers and participants, carried out in virtue of the existence of the productive distance that makes this connection possible.

These texts, however, do not intend to reflect reality, but rather to diffract it. Haraway borrows the metaphor of diffraction from physics in order to contrast it with the celebrated notion of reflexivity in feminist science studies.⁹⁴ She argues that, like a reflection, “reflexivity only displaces the same elsewhere, setting up the worries about copy and original and the search for the authentic and really

92. Haraway, “Situated Knowledges,” 584

93. Haraway, “Situated Knowledges,” 584

94. As outlined in Chapter 1, here we depart from Haraway’s argument since we do align with an understanding of reflexivity as a collective practice of interrogation regarding our practices of knowledge production, amongst the different voices involved in the process.

real.”⁹⁵ In contrast, the epistemological proposal of Haraway does not seek to represent reality, but rather to “make a difference in material-semiotic apparatuses, to diffract the rays of technoscience so that we get more promising interference patterns on the recording films of our lives and bodies.”⁹⁶ Like light entering into a crystal prism, a researcher’s semiotic devices transform the monolithic haze of light into a myriad of colours, of visions on a given phenomenon. Thus, NPM is not concerned with finding a more truthful account of reality, but with paying attention to the political effects of the produced knowledge, trying to find patterns of interference, of deviation, and new possibilities for the articulation of difference.⁹⁷

Articulation

It is common, nowadays, in the qualitative and critical social sciences to see research projects whose aim is to give space to subalternised groups in academic spaces. This is generally a politically desirable practice since, as we showed in Chapter 2, academic spaces are often opaque and inaccessible to those bodies and knowledge(s) that are reproduced as being out of place. NPM pursues these same goals, but is nonetheless critical of the idea underlying many of these methodologies that the purpose of research is to “give a

95. Donna J. Haraway, *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium. FemaleMan_Meets_OncoMouse: Feminism and Technoscience*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2018), 16.

96. Haraway, *Modest Witness*, 16.

97. Balasch and Montenegro, “Una Propuesta Metodológica.”

voice" to research participants. This idea is problematic, because it presupposes, firstly, that those with whom we seek connection "have no voice"; and secondly, because it places the researcher in the place of "the expert," endowed with the capacity to give voice, reinforcing an asymmetric power dynamic within the same research.⁹⁸

One of the epistemological implications of the perspective of situated knowledges is that knowledge always emerges in connection with other positions. The fact that our views are partial and incomplete is the reason why we need to articulate our own with other positions. Thus, Haraway proposes the creation of "political semiotics of articulation."⁹⁹ For Haraway, this process has to do with escaping from the totalitarian claims of representation implicit in positivist knowledge. Representation, Haraway tells us, relegates what is taken as an object of knowledge to a passive and submissive position. Through distancing operations, "the represented must be disengaged from surrounding and constituting discursive and non-discursive nexuses and relocated in the authorial domain of the representative."¹⁰⁰ Conversely, a "political semiotics of articulation" refers to practices that pay attention to the differences and connections between the elements that are articulated, as well as the way these differences and connections are constituted

98. Pujol y Montenegro, "Producciones Narrativas."

99. Donna Haraway, "The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others," in *Cultural Studies*, ed. Lawrence Grossberg (New York: Routledge, 1992).

100. Haraway, *Promises of the Monsters*, 312.

as such.¹⁰¹ In other words, articulation is not an innocent practice; rather, it tries to make visible the socio-historical locations—and relations of power constituting those locations—from which we seek connection with others.

The metaphor of articulation is also useful for us to understand the transformations that take place through the partial connections that are established through research. Using a simplified definition by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, who place the notion of articulation at the centre of their political theory, an articulation is a relationship whose result modifies the parts involved.¹⁰² In this sense, thinking about the production of narratives in terms of articulation directs the researcher's attention towards the changes that have occurred in their position as the result of partial connections, as well as the possible transformations that are being triggered in the context where they are investigating. Like other approaches within narrative research,¹⁰³ NPM opens up the possibility for the creation of a space for political action wherever it is deployed, making it possible for alternative representations of the studied phenomenon

101. Silvia García Dauder y Carmen Romero Bachiller, "Rompiendo viejos dualismos: De las (im) posibilidades de la articulación," *Athenea digital*, 2002, 42–61.

102. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, 2nd ed (London ; New York: Verso, 2001).

103. Corinne Squire, *HIV in South Africa: Talking about the Big Thing*, 1st ed. (Routledge, 2007), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203946503>.

to circulate,¹⁰⁴ and even modifying the materiality of relationships as a result of the articulation process.¹⁰⁵

Procedure

Here we present an outline of the steps involved in the methodology that illustrates some of the principles mentioned so far.

1. Script: The starting point for carrying out a NP is an interpellation made by the research team, who poses a series of questions, important issues, controversies or comments on the phenomenon that they are interested in studying. These elements do not necessarily have to be formulated mechanically following the question-answer format, but rather they are to be considered as a conversation guide for the first meeting.

2. Mapping: A finished narrative production constitutes a subject

104. Gandarias Goikoetxea and Pujol Tarrés, “De Las Otras al No(s)Otras”; Katherine Johnson and Antar Martínez Guzmán, “Rethinking Concepts in Participatory Action Research and Their Potential for Social Transformation: Post-Structuralist Informed Methodological Reflections from LGBT and Trans-Collective Projects: Rethinking PAR in LGBT and Trans-Collective Projects,” *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology* 23, no. 5, 2013: 405–19, <https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.2134>; Antar Martínez-Guzmán and Marisela Montenegro, “La producción de narrativas como herramienta de investigación y acción sobre el dispositivo de sexo/género: Construyendo nuevos relatos,” *Quaderns de Psicologia* 16, no. 1 (2014): 111–25, <https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/qpsicologia.1206>.

105. Álvaro Ramírez-March and Marisela Montenegro, “On Narrativity, Knowledge Production, and Social Change: A Diffractive Encounter between the Narrative Productions Methodology and Participatory Action-Research,” *Qualitative Research in Psychology* (2021), 1–12, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2021.1994678>.

position, a partial position resulting out of the precarious connections that take place during the research process. Because of that, in an initial phase, a narrative researcher should consider what subject positions it is interested in exploring, and why, with respect to the phenomenon at stake.¹⁰⁶ This is an important point to consider, since what is sought through the process of crafting a narrative is to make visible the effects of the articulation during research. In this way, it is important that these positions are made explicit (both that of the researchers and that of the participants) and that they become an element of analysis during the narrative research.

3. First meeting: The researcher(s) and participant(s) hold a first meeting (this can be physical or virtual) where the topics, questions or controversies raised in the previously defined script are introduced. A record of this meeting is kept in the form of an audio recording that is later on transcribed; alternatively, researchers may choose to take notes from the meeting.

4. Textualization: After this first meeting, the conversation is textualized. This is a process that always involves some sort of interpretation. It involves that the researcher reviews and reflects on the first register of the session, constructing a text that reflects its content. The new text, structured and communicable, will reflect the positions and arguments developed by the participants throughout the session. The objective is not to capture “the (literal) words of the participant, but the way in which she wants her vision of the

106. Pujol y Montenegro, “Producciones Narrativas.”

phenomenon to be read.”¹⁰⁷

5. Review: Subsequently, this first version of the text is sent to the participants for review. They will be able to modify what they consider necessary. Later on, the research team can propose another meeting to include in the conversation new aspects that have arisen as part of the process of reflexivity initiated from the first meeting and during the textualization phase.

6. Feedback and validation: This feedback cycle is repeated as many times as necessary until both parties are happy with the resulting text. When this happens, the narrative will be considered validated by the participants and will be ready to see the light. Once finished, narratives may be used in various ways depending on the initial intention of the connections made. Some of them are published online, available for use by both participants and researchers for use;¹⁰⁸ or become part of other publications, as is the case of those included in this monograph.¹⁰⁹ This procedure is visualised in Figure 1.

107. Balasch and Montenegro, “Una Propuesta Metodológica Desde La Epistemología de Los Conocimientos Situados: Las Producciones Narrativas.”, 45, our translation.

108. Álvarez Martínez-Conde et al., “Memories of the Struggles for the Rights of Immigrant Women in Barcelona”; Álvaro Ramírez-March and Marisela Montenegro, “Volem Acollir: Humanitarismo y Posiciones de Sujeto en la Articulación de la Solidaridad en Cataluña,” *Dados* 64 (February 8, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.1590/dados.2021.64.1.227>.

109. Lucía Egaña Rojas and Paulina Varas Alarcón, *Una Cartografía Extraña: Producciones Narrativas Entre La Migración y El Arte* (Santiago de Chile: Ediciones Metales Pesados, 2021).

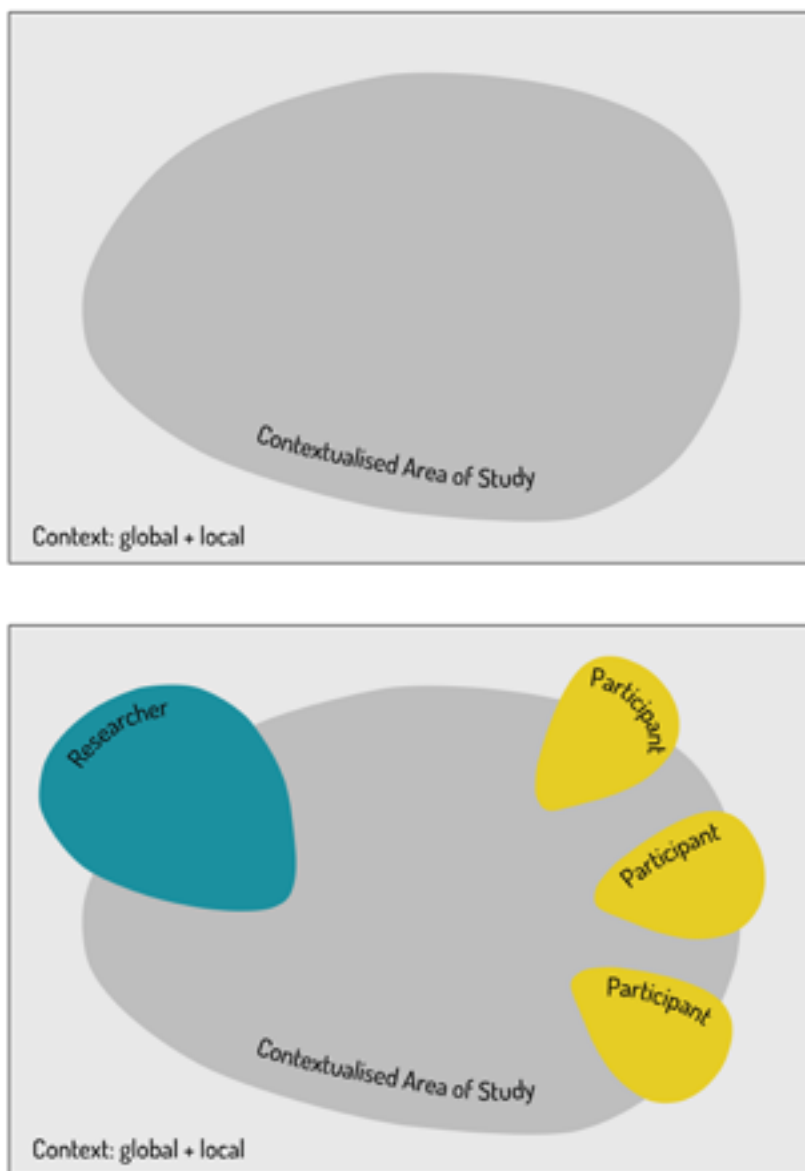
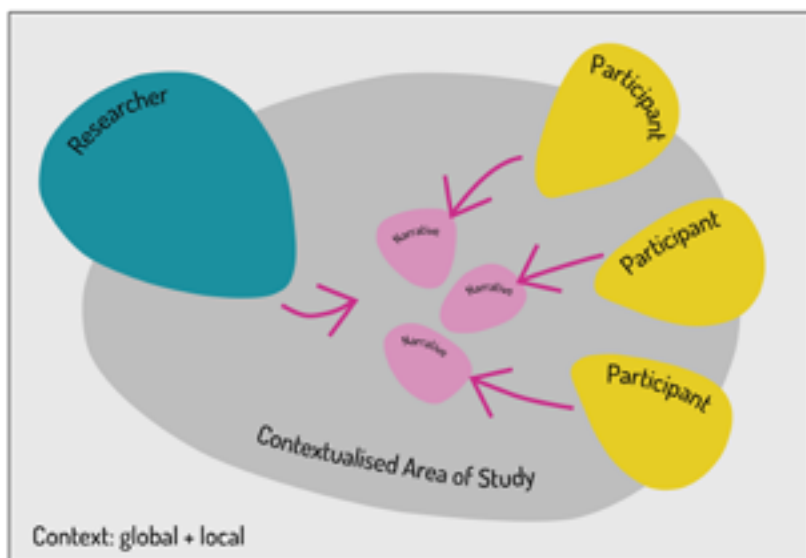
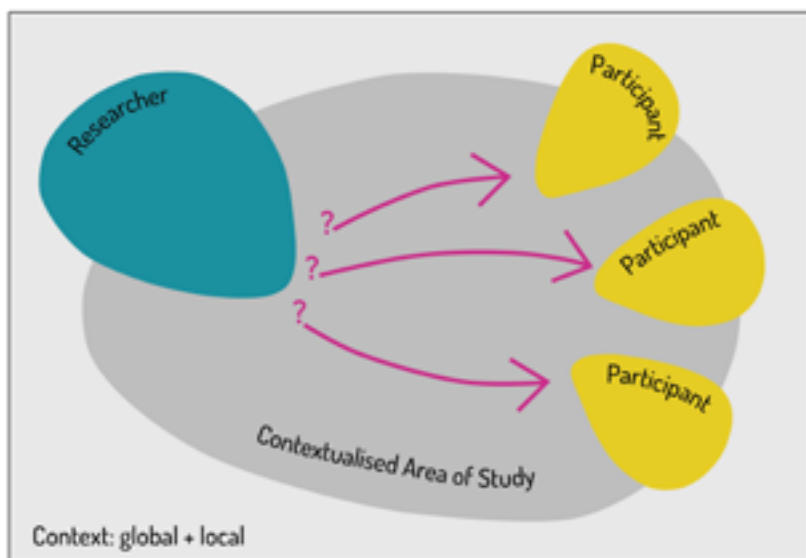


Figure 1. The narrative production process



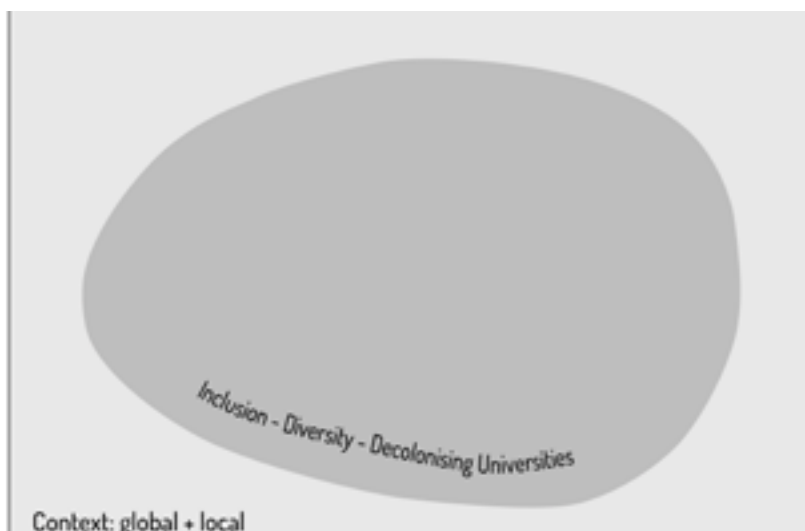
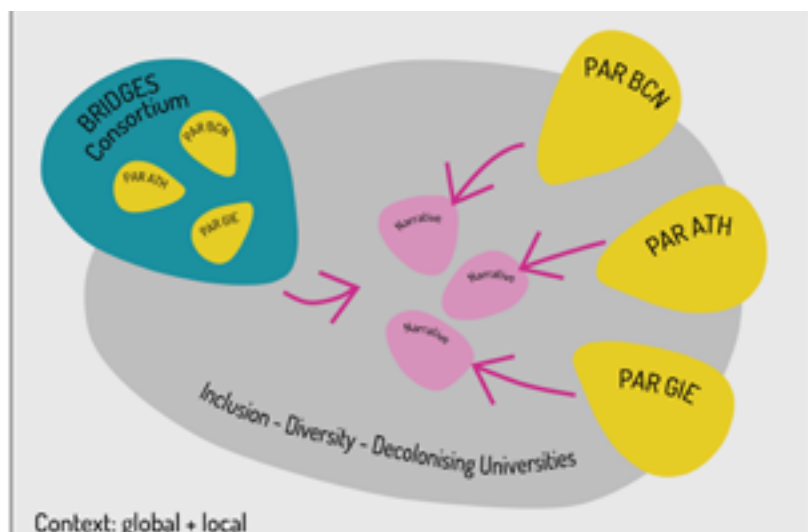
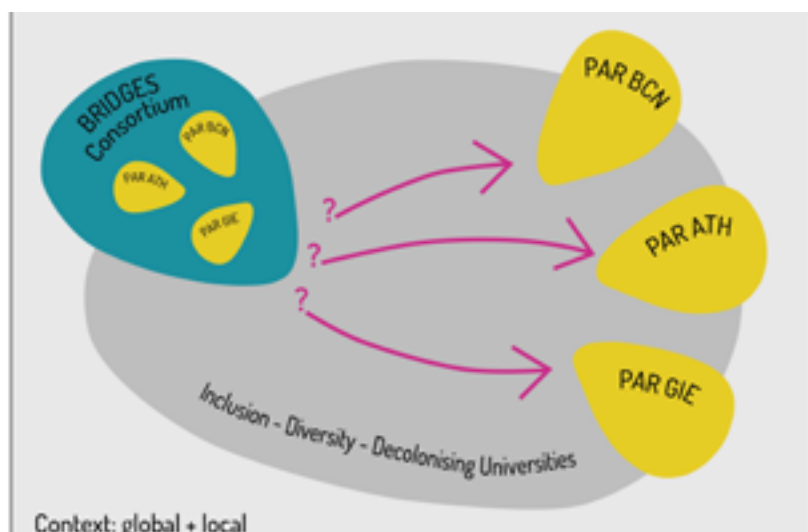


Figure 2. Modifications to the NP procedure in the BRIDGES Monograph



NPM in BRIDGES: Modifications of the procedure in the context of PAR

As we explained in the Introduction of the book, BRIDGES draws on the methodological framework of PAR, characterised by the importance given to the reflexive cycles between theory and collective practice throughout research.¹¹⁰ The foundation of the project is our desire to bring together organisations dedicated to research (three universities and one autonomous research centre) with civil society organisations (CSOs) dedicated to promoting the rights of migrants and refugees. In so doing, our intention is to reverse the underlying logic of certain social research and interventions for/with migrants that construct them as subjects “lacking” something.¹¹¹ On the contrary, BRIDGES argues that these subjects have valuable knowledge due to their proximity to the social context, which can help reverse some of the epistemic and material inequalities in HEI resulting from intersecting axes of oppression based on gender, sexual orientation, “race,” ethnicity, and administrative status, among others. These were the principles we started working with in 2019, when we organised the three local PAR Groups.

110. Maritza Montero, *Hacer Para Transformar. El Método de La Psicología Comunitaria* (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 2006).

111. Marisela Montenegro et al., “Dinámicas de subjetivación y diferenciación en servicios sociales para Mujeres inmigradas en la ciudad de Barcelona”, *Athenea Digital* 11, no.2, 113-132, <https://raco.cat/index.php/Athenea/article/view/244714>.

In the first two years of the project we worked collaboratively to produce knowledge that responded to the political desires/urgencies that the project members raised in the four local contexts of BRIDGES. In that sense, in line with PAR, the script with which we began the process of interpellation to build the three narratives that follow this chapter emerged within a back and forth process of reflection within each of our PAR Groups, as well as in our consortium meetings.

At this point, it is becoming clear that performing NP in the context of BRIDGES has had a series of particularities that complicate the procedure typically used in NPM (explained above). The first of these complications, or divergences from the prototypical procedure of NP refers to the implicit differentiation established in the methodology between researchers and participants; that is, between those who initiate the dialogical process and those who respond to it. Likewise, the radical tradition of the Latin American PAR,¹¹² which we take as a methodological reference, has historically distinguished between “intellectuals” or researchers, and the subalternised communities that researchers approached to facilitate transformation processes that started from the needs of such communities. In our case, however, following a politics of articulation, these possible distinctions have been transformed in the process of carrying out the project. Thus, as each of the NPs that

112. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30th anniversary ed (New York: Continuum, 2000); Orlando Fals-Borda, “The Application of Participatory Action-Research in Latin America,” *International Sociology* 2, no. 4 (December 1, 1987): 329–347, <https://doi.org/10.1177/026858098700200401>.

follow explain, although the participants in each location entered the local research collaboration belonging to one of two different organisations, over time, we have come to think of ourselves as 3 PAR Groups: as three articulated units, each with its own voice as a result of these years of joint work. What does this mean for the methodology that has been described in this chapter? How can we think about the NPM in this scenario? What would be the position of the researcher and the participant in the case of the BRIDGES monograph? Where would, then, be, the "productive distance" that feeds the production of knowledge? These questions led us to propose modifications in the diagram shown in Figure 1 and in the procedure of the methodology, which we have visualised in Figure 2.

Thus, through our experience of creating the three narrative productions (Chapters 4, 5, and 6), we have considered that the participants, the subjects speaking, are the three PAR Groups that constitute the project. We have understood that the interpellation with which the productive dialogue of the NPs begins comes from the joint journey that we have made as a consortium during these three years of PAR. In this sense, the collective script by the whole consortium represents a fictitious group position that seeks to be diffracted by interpellating the three different contexts of the PAR Groups.

Each of the three PAR Groups took the task of creating a narrative production and adapted it to their local context, possibilities, and creative preferences. PAR Group Athens had three meetings in

which they discussed the main questions of the script; then, each of the six individuals that make up the team created a text based on their recollection of their conversations; finally, they crafted an interwoven collective narrative that merges these six voices. PAR Group Barcelona had a first meeting that was facilitated by two of its members, who also took the role of textualising the content of the meeting. Later on, they had two subsequent meetings to read the narrative together, clarify, and add new angles to it, until everyone agreed. Similarly, PAR Group Giessen gathered all of those who participated throughout the project in a first online meeting; following this, two members created a narrative with which the whole PAR Group could identify; they shared the first draft with all present and prior team members, and discussed suggestions for a final draft.

In the process of writing, editing, and revising this monograph, new methodological questions arose. Given the process of peer review and revision of academic publications, to what extent can the anonymous reviewers who reviewed this monograph critique the content of NP? Who should integrate this feedback? Once we had a first draft of the three NPs, we held a collective editing workshop. That day, we discussed each of the chapters, including the three NPs. In this instance, we performatively enacted, once again, the fictitious position of the consortium who interpellates each of the three PAR Groups. We shared the diverse approaches we had taken to construct our narratives, and also discussed clarifications and disagreements with the work we had produced as a collective. As a result, we came back to our different PAR Groups and held subsequent meetings in which we discussed new topics that emerged out of this new cycle of feedback, revising our work so we could meet each others' expectations and sharing a final second draft, which was then anonymously reviewed by two colleagues external to the collective. We repeated the process of workshopping revisions to integrate their feedback.

We understand these collective conversations as taking place in response to a particular moment in history that is present in our exploration, in which other "genres of speech" come into play and are part of the discussions we engage in.¹¹³ This context, represented in the diagram as a cloud that envelops us (see figure 2), refers to the overarching terms that inspire public policies, such as

113. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*.

diversity or inclusion, which we have had to discuss to elaborate the proposal of this project; as well as other ideas, such as "decolonising the university," present in the academic and social debates in some of the places where we live. As seen in Chapter 2, far from having a single meaning, these broad ideas are subject to debate. BRIDGES engages in these debates, and this book responds to a specific moment in the debates around antiracism, feminism, queer politics, and decolonising public and neoliberal HEI on the European continent, nonetheless taking into account the enormous differences between our various contexts. Thus, the three narratives we have below are the result of the work of the three PAR Groups, a process that, however, was made possible thanks to the interpellation of the BRIDGES consortium. It is important to make clear that we do not consider these texts to be simply "empirical material." On the contrary, they are considered to be theoretical accounts of reality and, as such, analyses in themselves,¹¹⁴ each of which gives an account of how each PAR Group has faced the challenge of creating local alliances to transform higher education.

114. Following Michael Bamberg, we can make a distinction between methodological approaches that propose to do research on narratives, and those that do research with narratives. That is, between those that understand narrative research as the application of a series of techniques on a narrative text, and those that see narratives, in themselves, as a research tool, which he identifies as *narrative analysis*. Narrative Productions ascribes to the latter way of understanding narrative research, and understands that the analysis takes place during the dialogic process of narrative-making itself. This is an approach that tensions the boundary between collection and analysis. See Michael Bamberg, "Narrative Analysis," *APA Handbook of Research Methods in Psychology Vol. 2: Quantitative, Qualitative, Neuropsychological, and Biological*, ed. H. Cooper (Washington: American Psychological Association, 2012); Schongut and Pujol, "Relatos metodológicos." Similarly, here we are picking up again on Haraway's remarks on science as a storytelling practice based on partial connections. Like other storytelling practices in the sciences, narratives aim at being semiotic-material devices that account for reality. See Haraway, "enlightenment@science_wars.com."

Since its initial formulation two decades ago, the NPM has not been exempt from criticism. Practitioners who have drawn on the methodology have pointed to some problems, such as its excessive logocentrism, and the difficulty in introducing corporeality into Narrative Productions.¹¹⁵ These issues have been present in the process of creating the three Narrative Productions that follow. Even so, we believe in the potency of the three stories generated by the PAR Groups. Our idea was to capture what we have learnt over these two and a half years, lessons that may be useful for other initiatives that seek to question Eurocentrism, structural racism, heteropatriarchy, and other intersecting systems of oppression in European universities, generating connections between universities and civil society. BRIDGES is one of many seeds sown and germinating in the cracks of neoliberal Europe; our goal was not only to grow something useful and beautiful, but also to inspire others to start similar processes based on localisation, alliance-building, and antiracist feminist solidarity.

115. Troncoso, Galaz, and Álvarez, “Las Producciones Narrativas.”

04





Chapter 4

Transformative Alliances: Reclaiming the university through antiracist feminisms

PAR Group Barcelona

*Hay que quemar,
Hay que quemar,
Hay que quemar el sistema.*

*Hay que quemar el sistema
por racista y colonial
¡Y patriarcal!*¹¹⁶

This narrative¹¹⁷ is the result of a group conversation among the different members of the PAR Group in the city of Barcelona about our experiences and learnings in the BRIDGES project: Building Inclusive Societies and Tackling Discrimination through Civil Society Participation in Universities.¹¹⁸ It seeks to be a contribution to reflections

116. Song of the feminist antiracist mobilisations in Barcelona. It is sung to the rhythm of the song *When the Saints Go Marching In*, by Louis Armstrong.

117. This text has been developed following the methodological proposal of Narrative Productions, discussed in Chapter 3. The methodology was first developed by Marcel Balasch and Marisela Montenegro. See the original publication: Marcel Balasch and Marisela Montenegro, "Una Propuesta Metodológica Desde La Epistemología de Los Conocimientos Situados: Las Producciones Narrativas," ed. L. Gómez, *Encuentros En Psicología Social* 1, no. 3 (2003): 44–48.

118. More information about the project and access to resources and tools resulting from the work carried out within the framework of the project can be found at <https://buildingbridges.space/>.

on the political power of generating knowledge through alliances between universities and activist organisations. This text, translated into written words, would not have been possible without the laughter, yawns, and meals that accompanied our reflection. Our way of working has generated concepts, activities, and products, but also a space to inhabit comfortably to create together. The bridges of BRIDGES cross us, and we cross them.

Today, it is easy to name “us” in the plural. We see our work and we know that it is the result of the commitment, reflection, and partnership that we have built through all these years. But we were not always a “we.” Recognising ourselves in this way comes from a longer process, of projects and initiatives previous to BRIDGES, but which were continued and deepened through it. We think it is important to say that we did not start from scratch, but that some of us already had a base of shared experiences that supported the consolidation of our team.

The BRIDGES project aims to generate tools to address discrimination in Higher Education through the link between the university and civil society. Its methodology is based on Participatory Action Research (PAR), which aims to bring together actors with initially different positions to form a working group (PAR Group) to address a social problem. In our case, we address racism in the university from a feminist antiracist perspective; and our PAR Group is composed by members of the research group Fractalities in Critical Research, of the Department of Social Psychology of the Autonomous University

of Barcelona (UAB), and of the Sindillar/Sindihogar Union of Household and Care Workers.

Early on, we agreed that the university generated exclusion, both in terms of access and professional training, and in lacking a feminist antiracist perspective. This common vision, which we also shared as a consortium, quickly led us to feel like "the Barcelona team": a team that focuses its reflection and action on issues that concern us in the city, understood as a physical, social, and political space that is different from the other BRIDGES PAR Groups. This is something we see in the shared notions we use, related to the debates that take place in our context. In Barcelona, there is a very strong feminist positioning at a social, political, and institutional level, which does not necessarily consider antiracism in its foundations. We understand that feminism should be antiracist, and vice versa, so when we position ourselves within one of these two, we do it simultaneously within the other. But we also consider that in the city we live in, it is important to specifically mention antiracism, again and again, because even within feminism it is frequently forgotten. This invisibilisation shapes the terms we use, how we use them, and the emphasis we give them.

The initial design of the project implied as a starting point established positions and roles, largely related to the terminology of the Erasmus+ Program,¹¹⁹ which, in the case of our application, set as a basis the "cooperation between Higher Education Institutions

119. See "Home—Erasmus+," accessed March 22, 2022, <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/>.

and Civil Society Organisations." This distinction caused discomfort for the members of our PAR Group, as we did not fully recognize ourselves in this dichotomy. Those of us who came from UAB had a critical view of Higher Education and academia, having generated projects in the past that proposed other ways of producing knowledge that we also considered activist. Those of us who came from Sindillar/Sindihogar also had connections with the university, some of us being researchers, and we also considered that our activist experience was a form of knowledge, even if it was not recognised as such by the institutions.

In our first meetings, we discussed intensely about what this distinction meant for us. Then, we problematised the stereotyped understandings of academia and activism, seeking to blur the boundaries between the two. We thus inquired into what this meant for us in the case of this project and in our previous experiences. Constructing a "we"—as the Barcelona PAR Group—was a process in which we considered our particularities and common spaces, our contradictions and dilemmas. In order to find ourselves, we first had to see ourselves from the difference and the tensions the process of bringing us together generated. It is easy to fall into the trap of seeing differences as a threat to building a collective project, even to think that we have to eliminate the differences between us, but that was not our objective. The tension inherent in difference is productive: it tells us about limits and exclusions taking place and, in doing so, it lights the way forward. In fact, it was these differences that generated possibilities for cooperation. But in order to do so

we had to go through the discomfort of seeing ourselves through the eyes of others, of going through the fear of being identified as "the other". We had to be generous and give us time to get to know each other in order to find ourselves in a common approach. In order to be us, we first had to be who each of us were.

This also entailed tensions regarding horizontality. What did horizontal work mean in our PAR Group? In the way we approached the project, it was a challenge to avoid reproducing the very same hierarchies concerning the distribution of tasks between universities and civil society groups that are present in many of the research calls we are critical of. For us, horizontality means considering the differing material and living conditions of the members as well as rethinking the way of assigning tasks. This implies being aware of the limited resources of social organisations without falling into paternalistic attitudes, and not forgetting the precariousness that also crosses the lives of the team members working at a university. In this context, Sindillar/Sindihogar has been doing a lot of pedagogy on its vision of horizontality: breaking the hierarchy of tasks does not mean that we all do the same things; but rather, it is to value all the work we do and recognise the importance of our different roles in an equitable way.

We have only been able to resolve these dilemmas in the process of carrying out the project, and only once we identified that the very composition of the PAR Group questions them. We all have migrant histories, histories of activism, as well as relationships with

the university and knowledge production. Being able to look at ourselves in our complexity allows hierarchies to dissolve—"not only do I come from the university, I am also a woman, young, migrant, I also have a precarious job..."—in ways that are specific to each of our realities. Despite having different positions and trajectories, we have built a working methodology that feels as our own.¹²⁰

It was important to have our own self-organised space where we could meet, prioritising that this was a place where we all felt comfortable and that made our work more pleasant. We cherished the meals we cooked, the laughter we shared, and other informal meeting spaces such as celebrating birthdays and the beginning and end of the year. This is something that we have taken into account and that translates into our way of working as a group, something we link to the concept of *Mimopolítica*,¹²¹ a belief in the fact that taking care of people's lives implies centring their different needs, availability, and rhythms. This has also allowed us to adapt to the changes we have experienced in recent years, such as the virtualization of our work due to the pandemic, by generating new strategies and respecting the time and fatigue of the team; we also chose to keep having face-to-face meetings, when possible, under the safest conditions for all. To continue meeting together was political, we felt.

120. To see an example of our methodology, see "Barcelona – Common Conceptualization Process – Bridges," accessed March 22, 2022, <https://buildingbridges.space/bcn-ccp/>.

121. *Mimopolítica* is understood as a form of care politics. This concept represents one of the fundamental axes of Sindillar, as a vindication of the right to take care of our own bodies. "Mimo" refers to an expression or sign of love or affection.

As a way to continue building alliances, we needed to be together to address the crisis.

These processes allow us to think as one voice, contained within a multiplicity of positions. PAR is a concrete example of how to build alliances and of the complexities and discomforts that this implies. There are many voices and multiple positions that appear in our work. This makes our own approach to the university more complex, understanding that to approach it is also to approach society in general, because in the end we are facing the same structure of domination. This path, which has not necessarily been explicit for us, speaks of what it means for us to think of a feminist and antiracist university.

Practical learnings

The lessons learnt during these years of the BRIDGES project do not translate into a single recipe; we present them as recommendations based on our experience, understanding that these may take particular forms depending on the contexts and groups that receive them.

We learnt how to develop a working methodology to generate a critical project, capable of producing tools that make sense to us in order to transform the university. We learnt, in practical terms, how to move in an externally-funded project, identifying the loopholes

in the tightness of the institutional framework, slipping through them. There is, of course, a structure within the project, with clear objectives and outputs, but at the time of working we tried to be flexible. We tried to identify which situations suited us and which did not, trying not to fall into the trap of bureaucracy and mandatory formats, and looking for the best way to translate our way of understanding pedagogies and knowledge into something that fit this tight structure. This, for example, perhaps implies a shorter written report for the funding entity, more specific, but which represents our own learning. In this sense, it is important to have clear and consensual objectives so that some kind of flexibility in rhythms and responsibilities can emerge.

We have learnt about the importance of valuing our different kinds of knowledge within the group. We are multidisciplinary, and all forms of our knowledge had a place in the project: be it in the form writing, the audiovisual, performance, or care. The fact that all this knowledge is part of our PAR Group is for as a clear example that we have been able to put our initial objective into practice, and it was not merely a matter of discourse. In this sense, it is important to recognise that there are other ways of communicating knowledge, not only through writing. When written expression takes precedence, asymmetries are reproduced, something that we did not think of at the beginning of the project as part of a practice of horizontality. Sindillar has provided other ways to allow the voice of all our women colleagues to be heard, reaching beyond those

of us who are more involved with the project. The podcasts,¹²² the Antiracist Care Route,¹²³ the Activist Knowledge Workshop¹²⁴—these were all tools that we used beyond writing. It is important to leave open spaces to be able to think along the way, evaluate practices that do not work and change them or include others.

It is also important for our PAR Group to find ways to manage economic resources in a transparent and horizontal way. We consider that this implies considering what these resources can mean for the different organisations. Generosity should thus be part of horizontality, especially when there are people who are differentially exposed to vulnerability within such projects. It is important, in that sense, not to overload the project with labour burdens. Due to the precarious conditions of the project's framework, we have invested more time in this project than what we have received in wages, often justifying it because we are politically committed to its objectives.

Finally, we have learnt from our failures. Sometimes there are tools that are not feasible under our conditions, and it is hard not to laugh when we say this, because we remember the headaches that the creation of the Virtual Lab has brought us, for not knowing

122. "Podcast | Sindillar," accessed March 22, 2022, <https://sindillar.org/sindipodcast/>.

123. "T3 – Feminist Anti-Racist Tour in Barcelona – Bridges," accessed March 22, 2022, <https://buildingbridges.space/t3-feminist-anti-racist-tour-in-barcelona/>.

124. "Taller internal: «Construyendo Saberes Activistas» – Bridges," accessed March 22, 2022, <https://buildingbridges.space/taller-internal-construyendo-saberes-activistas/>.

the implications and difficulties involved in developing a digital tool. Another difficult aspect to manage was the language issue. English was the lingua franca of the project, which led to exclusion of those who did not speak it. In our case, we have developed strategies to deal with this exclusion, always demanding that communication in the consortium contemplates and includes other languages, creating spaces for simultaneous translation whenever possible. We recommend being aware of this, not only in terms of absolute language barriers, but also in terms of the ways in which people feel comfortable expressing themselves. This awareness implies a constant exercise of highlighting the importance of respecting languages, such as Spanish, in our case. Not only because it is the language we speak, but also because in that language, we construct knowledge that is different from those that are constructed in English. In the case of this project and in our experience, English was a more colonial language than Spanish, considering that it was the vehicular language of the project, as well as the hegemonic language in which scientific knowledge is produced, something derived from various systems of power present in the globalised academic environment. For this reason it was important to translate what we were doing, as an action towards recognition, but without forgetting that the choice of Spanish as the common language for our PAR Group also implied that other colleagues renounce the use of other minoritised languages in our context, such as Catalan. Being in scenarios where all of our colleagues speak different languages sometimes implies the renunciation of our own language, or that it should remain on a secondary level; that is why we consider that it is still a great challenge to find other ways of communicating.

This experience has undoubtedly been an intense exercise in generating another precedent: demonstrating that there are other possible ways of producing knowledge. We believe that it is important to share our experience and our lessons to account for it, as well as to share our tools to facilitate the multiplication of these alliances and that increasingly, among all of us, we break down more walls and build more bridges.

The bridges we build

*Hay tantísimas fronteras
que dividen a la gente
pero por cada frontera
existe también un puente.*

—Gina Valdés

Bridging is an act of hacking.¹²⁵ It is a practice of disobedience through the connection of shores that we were told were unconnected. It is a way to dye, with the challenging colour of alliances, those invisible strings that link the opposites of dichotomies. Building bridges is a way of inhabiting ourselves and this space that we have created over the years, of producing desires, knowledge, and practices that nurture and build new bridges between knowledge, pedagogies, and transformations. It is also a way to look critically at how we started and with what we are left. In short, building bridges, for us,

125. We understand *hacking* as a practice that fits into a social movement with a specific purpose of breaking into the system in order to intervene it with political objectives, and therefore as a practice linked to the concept of hacktivism, which became well known during the 1990s.

is a political project.

This project has allowed our PAR Group to build bridges between realities, political urgencies, and strategies to confront them. We have been able to see the differences between our context and the other PAR Groups, understanding that antiracism and feminism are neither unique nor homogeneous positions. Thinking and acting against racism in each of these places is different: legislation and inclusion policies are different; the groups that suffer racism are different; the forms of migration change; and, therefore, the strategies that activist groups need to generate change. In this sense, the project has led us to embrace this diversity, to abandon the illusion of a simple answer, a single concept, or a desired action that is the same for every context. We have learnt the value of finding what is common whilst recognising the difference, making its complexity visible and acting on it.

We embrace the challenging question of how to make feminist and antiracist proposals—in their activist and theoretical dimensions—that serve as a lens through which to look critically at the university, knowledge production, and pedagogical practice. The academic machinery often reduces feminist concepts to an abstraction. But feminism, antiracism, or decoloniality do not emerge as intellectual speculation. Their concepts arise because there are people and collectives that are being systematically oppressed, that do not have access to certain spaces because they are migrant women,

who do not have papers, who do not have access to the "padrón,"¹²⁶ who experience their lives being threatened, and therefore need to articulate their own language as a tool for survival. As the dominant language excludes our realities, we understand theory as a tool of denunciation to name and make these circumstances visible. In this sense, we understand theoretical production as a fundamental activist practice.

In this sense, we build bridges between the university and social struggle. The challenge of this articulation leads us to consider the complexities, tensions and nuances of each space, putting in dialogue their diverse ways of doing. The university seems to us to be a spectrum of colours that can illuminate the demands of political struggles, but that can also empty them of content and political force if it does not consider them in their depth. This tension points to the institutional resistance of the university to look at itself as a space of reproduction of the social dynamics of power, to recognise itself as a space in which racism and sexism do exist, in which capitalism and coloniality are reproduced.

In this way, we see struggles not as an object of study, but as a space for the construction of knowledge, betting rather on

126. In Spain, registering in the municipal census registry is a right that allows one to be recognised as a town inhabitant. This register is a gateway to access public services offered by the State, and is also key in administrative regularisation processes, as it is the way to justify residency in order to prove social ties with the place where one resides. However, this right is not always respected by the various municipalities. Due to the precariousness and instability of housing, it is not always possible to provide a definitive address, as required, and not all municipalities facilitate access to registering in the census with or without a permanent address.

the incorporation of their political meanings in the guidelines of the institution. Unfortunately, actions around racial and ethnic discrimination are just beginning in the context of the Spanish State, with a predominantly technical and not very radical approach. This is not only a problem of the university. It is part of the difficult relationship between activism and institutionality, where the latter often misinterprets the deep demands of social justice from the former, translating, for example, into information offices or protocols that do not necessarily have a real transformative impact on our lives. Seeing this makes us wonder what to do when demands for inclusion are co-opted by the institution: should we equally fight for the university to develop antiracist policies,¹²⁷ even whilst being aware of the risk of co-optation, or should we consider the university as hopeless, and radically align ourselves with social movements?

When working from inside the university, these are complicated questions. But both from inside and outside the university, we see that it is necessary to take both paths of action. Because we are aware that the fight may remain with cosmetic results, we must insist that the institution does not abandon its responsibility. Insist that the action plans against violence are implemented. Although they can sometimes be ineffective, they are an opening place, a starting point that allows for a more solid, stronger denouncement of violence and against impunity. Just because some of us inhabit academia, we do not stop fighting against its exclusions. Just because

127. Even though feminist policies exist at the Autonomous University of Barcelona, from our point of view, there is still work to be done to incorporate the antiracist dimension in their approaches.

we search for a radical transformation of the system, we do not abandon the interpellation to the places where decisions about our lives are made; and that is what we have to do: never let go of the street nor the institution.

In the fight against these exclusions, we build bridges between subjects and objects of knowledge, between their multiple knowledges, revaluing them horizontally. Traditionally, the production of knowledge is carried out from an androcentric, objectivist, and scientific logic, destining migrant women to be the object of study, never to reclaim (*okupar*)¹²⁸ the authorised position of knowledge. The university produces knowledge about us, not with us, perpetuating the training of professionals who act under welfarist, paternalistic, and victimising logics, who consider us mainly as “vulnerable” subjects with no capacity for action. This racist and patriarchal distinction reveals an inequality in the valuation of knowledge, expressed both in the difficulties of access to the university to such groups, in the distance between these practitioners and civil society, and in the very forms in the way university education takes place. The aim of this project, which attempts to hack this traditional academic logic, is to set a precedent where the university space can be intervened through alliances, generating new forms of knowledge. When the layers of racism,

128. The Spanish term *okupar*, a word coming from the squatter movement in Spain, is now used in different ways to name the practices of occupying and politically repurposing spaces or ideas. The *okupa* movement, very present in Barcelona since the 1980s, is a social movement that occupies uninhabited houses or premises in order to give them a political use; denouncing speculation and private property and claiming the right to housing.

classism, patriarchy, and other forms of discrimination are so imbricated in the institutional realm, reclaiming (okupar) that space is almost a revolution.

Our revolution builds bridges between theory and practice. The distinction between the two is a trap, and decolonial pedagogies have been crucial in putting experience to theory, and theory to experience. The concepts and activities that emerge from our collective work are representative of the realities that we live in and the political commitment we have to their transformation. We started this process with ourselves, recognizing that we came from a colonial, patriarchal and racist system, and that we reproduce its dynamics because we were educated in it. By focusing on this and moving away from traditional ways of thinking we came up with different concepts which we relate to the university, such as “structural racism”¹²⁹ and “identity.”¹³⁰ By reflecting on structural racism, we see the power relations that limit the life and rights of collectives, marginalising them; we understand higher education as a space in which exclusion is perpetuated via theories and epistemologies. By focusing on identity, we refer to the processes of differentiation between marked and unmarked subjects (by race, gender, nationality, administrative situation, etc.), the exclusions they produce, and how to resist them through other identity configurations and political alliances.

129. “Structural Racism – Bridges,” accessed March 22, 2022, <https://buildingbridges.space/structuralracism/>.

130. “Identity – Bridges,” accessed March 22, 2022, <https://buildingbridges.space/identity/>.

These concepts speak of the system we inhabit. They describe how we construct and identify ourselves in it, how it shapes the educational spaces and the discriminations present in them. At the same time, they allow us to take the university as an object of study and intervention from the daily experience in university spaces. For example, one of the pedagogical exercise we developed, "cards for critical reflection on teaching practice,"¹³¹ which is related to the concept of decolonial knowledges,¹³² promotes reflection on the colonial forms of knowledge and their relation with everyday inequalities in the university. With this aim, we consider access to the university, the curriculum contents, and the materiality and social dynamics of the classroom, we see all these elements as part of this system. All of them are, therefore, potential elements of problematisation and transformation.

Our knowledge comes from political struggles, and the challenge is to transform this knowledge into pedagogical practices. In our work, we understand that pedagogy is always embodied. It is experience in our body and is thus built through it, forming bridges between knowledge and emotion. Theory is built through affect, through the expression of what we feel when we experience exclusion, such as anger, or the feeling of devaluation when we are in certain spaces. An example of this is how we feel when we inhabit academic spaces as women, as young people, migrants, antiracist feminists,

131, 132. "Decolonial Knowledge — Bridges," accessed March 22, 2022, <https://buildingbridges.space/decolknowledge/>.

household care workers, and so on. The pedagogies we have developed seek to put the body at the centre, to share what affects us. We do not understand these experiences as mere psychological phenomena. Rather, we understand them as a form of knowledge that allows us to politically name the problem as structural, not individual.

However, some of these bridges are rocky and difficult to cross. Building this path in the framework of a European project has implied a high cost for us as workers. We are referring to the high administrative burden, the hours dedicated to complying with bureaucratic and logistical requirements, the job contracts that do not cover our needs, the remuneration that is not necessarily commensurate with all that we have done. The financing of this type of project makes university workers precarious, affecting in this case also civil society activists. We consider it relevant to point this out, because how can we fight against coloniality if we are precarious? Is it from precariousness that we start the struggle, and what does this imply for our lives? In this sense, we are also interested in interpellating the university and reclaiming the value of our tasks. We demand equal recognition of our knowledge at a symbolic, political and economic level. Through this, we place our efforts on strengthening tools that allow us to demand a paradigm shift in the production of knowledge, shining a light on the structural and institutional dimensions of the violence that crosses us, moving towards a collective fight against it.

For this, alliances are fundamental, because they show us the value in diverse experiences, in joining efforts to transform our lives. The university must have social concerns as one of its axes so that it can support social movements with its work. We know that in the universities there are politicised individuals and groups that seek to trigger changes; we are part of them. However, we also recognise that there is an institutional resistance to produce radical transformations. Resistance to change within European academic structures is the prevalent norm. It reproduces exclusion and generates proposals that are only obliging to the state and the market. Disconnection from social needs fosters the maintenance of the status quo, contributing to racist, patriarchal, colonialist, and capitalist policies. It is interesting to see that this is happening at the same time that feminisms, antiracisms, and decolonial proposals are gaining strength in the discourses present in our broader society, which makes us wonder, how are then such struggles in higher education spaces being understood? In that sense, BRIDGES is, for us, a chance to affirm that social struggles are a way to connect with what is happening in our reality. We thus connect with what migrant women's struggles demand, with the fight against racism, sexism, classism, and their institutional materialisation. Thus, our PAR Group invites the university to ask itself: what sector of society does your research serve? How do your inclusion policies contribute to the strengthening of social struggles?

Finally, we build bridges between teaching and activism. We understand that activism is done wherever it is possible: in political

assemblies, in our neighbourhoods, in support groups, and also in the university. For this reason, we not only denounce exclusionary practices; but we also look for other ways of doing. We want to generate a learning space in which social struggles are considered as a source of inspiration and knowledge. We use pedagogy as a way to promote political action.

Horizons of change, paths of decolonisation

The concept of decolonisation has been controversial in the BRIDGES project. It has brought us more questions than answers. Is it possible to decolonise an institution that is colonial at its core, and, if so, who is the legitimate subject to do so?

Going beyond these questions, we consider it important to place the university at the centre of such a critical project so that it loses spaces of power and yields them to others. Through BRIDGES, we plant a seed to understand the university as a space for dialogue, questioning it as a hegemonic place of knowledge production. To speak of decolonisation in the university we use the metaphors of reclaiming (*okupación*) and hacking. Decolonising implies that bodies and knowledges that are not legitimised reclaim (*okupen*) the spaces that currently exclude them. Fighting to decolonise implies revaluing knowledge, horizontality and the rupture of the hierarchy of knowledge. In this sense, the university needs decolonial struggles to transform its ways of doing, to offer alternative understandings

to the hegemonic ones. To generate processes of change, the university needs social movements as much as social movements need the university.

Because of this, we consider, first of all, that the issues we have pointed in this narrative should always be addressed in relation to activism. Even if they are approached from the academic world, it is important to broaden the referents of students and teachers and include a multiplicity of voices beyond academia. Secondly, the academic space must be a place to encourage questioning, debate, and the creation of critical thinking for the university community. The university cannot be on the periphery of politics, because it is part of a specific society. It must pay attention to the relations of inequality that cross it. Thus, it is necessary to break the differentiation between intervention and research. It is also important to make visible how the university functions, where the logic of dividing productive and reproductive work is perpetuated: there are jobs that are part of the university and allow it to function, whilst the people doing them are not conceived as agents of knowledge production (such as janitors or cleaning staff). This can serve to point out to members of the university community how this logic is happening not only outside, but also within the university itself, and to identify the mechanisms by which these distinctions and their consequent devaluation are produced.

Finally, it is also important to transform the institutional structure of the university and of the spaces where political decisions are made:

to transform the councils and the people who are in those leadership spaces; to question the leadership and the power relations themselves, so that the university connects with the outside, goes there, and learns from the initiatives of social movements.

In order to approach these changes, it is necessary to create political spaces of transformation within the university that make it possible to create articulations with the different movements. Creating spaces for dialogue is a pedagogical exercise. To this end, it is important to review what is considered valid within the university, promoting that these articulatory spaces are understood as a way of doing and learning with others, and that this is considered a key aspect of education. Along with this, we can look for other ways of generating theory, such as the Sindillar/Sindihogar Antiracist Care Route¹³³—an initiative based on making memory of the street as a political space that shows other ways relating to knowledge practices by working with its corporeal, narrative and physical dimensions. By this we mean that not only what is in books is knowledge, but also what happens in the street. Now, we know that there are things that the university will not be able to do, and that is why alliances are relevant. Resisting inside the belly of the monster, as Donna Haraway used to say,¹³⁴ implies in itself an exhausting challenge. We have to see how to generate inside the university spaces of self-care and resistance that consider the limits we face, especially our own

133. See "T3 – Feminist Anti-Racist Tour in Barcelona – Bridges"

134. Donna Haraway, *Las promesas de los monstruos: Ensayos sobre Ciencia, Naturaleza y Otros Inadaptables*. (Barcelona: Holobionte, 2019).

limits, considering how far we can reach while holding each other.

We envision that a decolonial university would not have to be one, but many.

A pluriversity¹³⁵ composed of different places that are legitimised to generate knowledge, in which the points of view of all the communities that make it up are made visible. It would be an institution sustained on the basis of alliances, multiplying ways of learning, of teaching, of producing knowledge. We imagine it as based in dialogue, fostering critical thinking and articulation with all those who work towards social transformation. We imagine this collective process as something that allows us to identify racism, patriarchy, and classism as structural problems, not as something that concerns only those subalternised by these power relations. A university that confronts the colonial legacy, that offers tools to see how this legacy impacts us even though we enjoy privilege, because coloniality stifles our creativity and disengages us from our bodies. A university that is able to engage those people who think they are not affected by racist, colonial, and patriarchal violence. A university made of bridges that demolish once and for all the walls that separate us.

135. *Pluriversity*, proposed by Boaventura de Sousa Santos, refers to the idea of a polyphonic university, which maintains a plural approach to knowledge and its counter-hegemonic intention. This notion is used by educational spaces and activists to transform the production of knowledge and pedagogical practice. See Sousa Santos, Boaventura de, *Educación para otro mundo posible* (Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2019). See also Barroso Tristán, "Descolonizando/Diálogo con Yuderlys Espinosa Miñoso y Nelson Maldonado-Torres," June 13, 2016, <https://iberoamericasocial.com/descolonizando-dialogo-yuderlys-espinosa-minoso-nelson-maldonado-torres/>.

05



Γυναίκα
χωρίς
άντρα -
ψαρεύω
χωρίς
ποδηλάτο!!!



Ζευγός
Μητέρα
Αδελφή ♀
Κρεμμύδι χωρίς
ΔΕΝ
Α ΜΑΡ



Chapter 5

It's a beautiful thing, the decolonisation of wor(l)ds

PAR Group Athens

I wish I could say all this in albanian, I wish I could decolonise in albanian in a way that my mother and my father could understand, with words that are easy, although hard to pronounce, with dialects that you could only know, if you grew up at the same neighbourhood that my parents were born, because I feel that if I could speak to my parents about decolonisation in their language, I could say I was using a language strong enough, daring enough, and loving enough to be able to decolonise.

In academia we learnt to be experts in a subfield of our discipline. This kind of training defines people, puts them in a position to feel superior, to feel like the experts on a particular topic. We tried to resist the urge to speak with the voice of authority, to reproduce this dynamic between us. We, thus, structured this Narrative Production as a collective discussion, and not as the product of one expert who is conducting the interview. We are all the experts and the participants at the same time; we all ask the questions that we then collectively attempt to answer. And we provide answers not with the certainty of the expert; rather, we discuss our concerns in a way that does not follow the strict logic of problems and solutions.

First, who are we?

Bodies buddies trying to find ways.

Faces in boxes. Where it all started. Prison cells or windows? Asking the walls around. Turning them upside down. Where is my memory? Somewhere east. Am I imagining? Confused dreams. This is a story of moments—have I understood well? This is a story of encounters, crossings, questions, feelings. This is a story of movement and desire. This is a story defying borders. Told and written from virtual squares, pixel rooms and masked mouths. This is a collective attempt to scream.

Our story is quite convoluted: full of deep conversations, workshops, volunteering, teaching and learning, presentations in conferences, summer schools, personal relationships, trust, intense emotions, returns to greece¹³⁶ and strong friendships that took place across and against borders on Lesbos, Athens, and Barcelona.

This collaboration started with a friendship, struck quite serendipitously on an island, before it became a door,¹³⁷ and then a wall. And then, in a city that had become a whole world, people

136. We write “greece” with a lowercase (and not “Greece” with an uppercase as is grammatically correct) in order to reflect and represent our opposition to prevailing power of nation-states and of their borders, as a small act of refusal to the nation, a symbolic recognition of the violence of the border.

137. Emi Mahmoud, “When an island becomes a door, who will answer?” *Bird-watching on Lesbos island* (2016): https://youtu.be/_O8dTLiPJRo.

trying to learn how to live together outside the boundaries of what we had grown to expect: more friendships. And then, on the same island, a year later: falling in love. And then, creating something(s) that was shaped through friendship and love and still seeking to shift the boundaries of what we had grown to expect, at a moment when disillusionment and depression started to set in. Because violence hardened the borders and the island, and the city, and the whole world, it seems, became an open wound.

At a moment in which borders were closing in, and the virus was used as a pretext to enact even more segregation in our city, we all found a sister (not a cis-ter) and exchanged ideas about a world, that we had to believe more than ever, could be possible. (A cosmic relief!) Together we recognised how HEI separate people into classes and disciplines, how they reproduce racial capitalism and enforce obedience and control. We also recognised how we were the products of such educational systems and, at times, we found it difficult to stand opposite them. How can we critique a structure that has offered us a space of belonging? We engaged in a process of unlearning between us, in order to further reflect on the institution inside us. We agreed that the language of discrimination couldn't even begin to capture what is wrong with this racist, patriarchal structure that we call the university.

We had some ideas, and our aim was to decolonise our gaze. Our positionalities? We are located within and outside of higher education institutions. Our desire? To make an intervention within

so-called “higher education” contexts. Our question: With whom do we want to play with ideas in the city?¹³⁸

This is how Zaatar met FAC and from the beginning we knew that we had found allies, co-travelers: we decided that Zaatar is FAC and FAC is Zaatar.¹³⁹ Our collaboration was formed on the basis of respect, admiration, and personal relationships that were tested in moments of crisis. In this Participatory Action Research group, we all have an experience of being migrants, or children of migrants, of moving abroad, coming back. So we all have this in common, in addition to our passion as activists for social justice. It was as if several coincidences took place and brought us together to work on this project.

For some of us, going to university was about class mobility. And migration. We felt we had to go to university in order to secure a job

138. If the approach seems too personal, that's because it is. We refuse to be a bottom line. We cannot be measured on a spreadsheet. Ideas do not hold office hours..

139. Zaatar NGO is a non-profit organisation that provides a safe space for refugees to rest, learn, feel empowered, and grow. Zaatar provides shelter for women refugees, as well as language classes and training programmes for all refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants, together with psychosocial and legal support. Refugees cook, clean, and teach and attend classes to prepare for their future, whilst locals are also involved by offering their products or services. Our vision is that integration works both ways. Not only must refugees and migrants integrate into European life, but Europeans must also change the way they view refugees and migrants coming to Europe. See: <https://tinyurl.com/ZaatarNGO>. The Feminist Autonomous Centre for research (FAC) is a community-based research centre, a space for learning, reflection, collaboration, support, exchange, knowledge production, political interventions, and trouble-making. Working across and against nation-state and continental borders, disciplinary boundaries, and institutional barriers, we return to the feminist roots of autonomous knowledge production, challenging what counts as legitimate knowledge and who is granted the right to produce and receive it. See: <https://feministresearch.org>.

that would give us a good salary with which we could live a better life than our parents. We felt conflicted about this as young people, and we still feel conflicted as still young people.

It was a way to escape from greece. A ticket with which to escape from the homophobia and racism that we experienced during our school years. So, we read and studied a lot, really a lot in order to get good grades. We had to succeed.

But what if we did not “succeed”?

But we did, we became authors.

But isn't authorship connected to authority?

Are we the right people to criticise higher education?

And, in any case, weren't we told at school and later at university that our opinions do not count? That we don't know anything. We feel so small.

We are scared to talk. We are scared to be ourselves. We don't even know any more who our authentic self is—if an “authentic self” can be said to exist—so much have we been disciplined through educational institutions.

Congratulations! You speak very good greek!¹⁴⁰

But this is not easy for us to say. University is smart and tricky. Some of the things that the university has given us we have cherished. For a long time, the university asked things for us and we responded and we created an image of a person that responds to the university and we really thought that this image is an authentic version of ourselves. Very often, it felt good; it felt like the university could love us. But we wonder about all of the things we had to do to our understanding of love, how we had to change and compromise, just so that we can receive some back from the “higher institutions of knowledge.” We ended up “succeeding” at the university, but it doesn’t really feel like success.

140. This phrase reflects our experiences as migrants or as people who are perceived as migrants in greece due to fixed stereotypes around our appearance, names and surnames, perceived accents or because we had a “foreign mother” or “foreign parents.” Although, in some cases, greek would be the language we used to express ourselves in the most authentic way, teachers, classmates, and then employers and colleagues keep on congratulating us about our greek, as if it was something so extraordinary for us to be able to speak this language—only, in fact, to remind us that we could never really be part of what they understood to be the group of people that naturally speak greek, even if in some cases we were born and grew up in greece. Some of us learnt to conjugate all verbs—regulars and irregulars—and acquired the most perfect and delicate accent and although we even went on to study the greek language and literature at the university, they could never allow us to be part of what they understood as greece.

We are all the university. Made in the university. Scratching ticket in the back. Children of the books within and monsters out. Intellectual Frankensteins? Education should be conservative, Hannah said, once.¹⁴¹

Does a division exist between the ones who theorise and think, and the ones who act? Or do we make it up, we ask? Who is supposed to do what? There is no university here. And yet, it is everywhere. You can feel it in the air. Stinky. Shameful? Freudian omnipotent tyrannical despised beloved father. Do we pretend? Do we even care? Isn't this all a great self-sufficient soap-bubblish speculation? As we were taught. Have we achieved the dream of that brilliant creature which we restlessly punch attack insult-of this gigantic horrific power which we protest against denouncing day and night? Are we trapped? Have we gotten inside the whale's stomach? How are we now supposed to get out? Should we? Do we still have time? Are we screaming in the dark?

"I do not belong in the academic world, I belong outside." Who has the position to change the curriculum? You teach about social justice, but inside a place where a certain performance is required, a certain violence is being enacted such as the violence of grades or judgement.

141. In "The Crisis in Education", (originally published in 1954), Hannah Arendt writes: "To avoid misunderstanding: it seems to me that conservatism, in the sense of conservation, is of the essence of the educational activity, whose task is always to cherish and protect something the child against the world, the world against the child, the new against the old, the old against the new." Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future* (New York: Penguin, 1961): 192.

Education in/is a climate of fear. The first thing we are taught is to fear, because without fear there is no obedience. Without obedience there is no hierarchy. And without hierarchy, there is no learning. Because learning needs teaching and the first thing we are taught is to fear. The authority of the teacher is based on the devaluation of the learning position, and its construction as a position of ignorance, lack, and need. Its binary pair, the teaching position, is constructed as a position of benevolent authority, possession, and abundance. The threat of violence (or actual violence) weaves these two positions into a relation of dominance and subordination. But also desire: we want our teachers to love us. A desire which is based on the deeply felt sense that our teachers, always already, don't (love us). Admiring our teachers, the fear normatively morphs into "respect." Gaining the teacher's respect by "not being like the others like me." "Not speaking the language, I had to find ways to survive." But, also: "the system is made for me." Are we disciplined when we succeed? Or only when we fail?

Success, in this system, can also come from rage, anger. Being the only one. Being the good nonwhite subject. The good immigrant. "I'll show them." How do we confront the internalisation of violence and racism, not only when it serves to generate barriers of exclusion, but when it has played a role in institutional success? Am I who I am due to my reaction to discrimination and violence? What if I fit in? When we talk about discrimination in "higher education", what are we talking about? Instances? Or structures? The tip of the iceberg? A sinking ship?

We engaged into this process with our minds, but also bodies and hearts. We engaged with embodied knowledge and feelings, affects. We, thus, talked from our experiences and the shared feeling of wanting to be the teachers' favourite, the teachers' pet. We wanted to be loved by the person we recognised as the figure of authority. And we succeeded, but in the process we lost parts of ourselves. Because this 'love' changed us, disciplined us, colonised us and we had to come a long way to realise it in order to start reflecting on it. Now, we were put in the position of the 'teacher' and it was up to us to choose to reflect on certain dynamics in order to avoid reproducing them and in this way not to entirely reproduce the system in which we were schooled.

What do we do? Do we abolish the university or infiltrate it? Is the university to be kept and revolutionised? Should we study radical thought within the university? Or should we keep radical thought safe from the university by leaving it outside, leaving it to self-study, to communities beyond the university's reach? By definition, whatever enters the university becomes a commodity. So, *should* we be struggling for inclusion of radical ideas in the university? The capital that degrees confer reproduce racial heteropatriarchy. Institutions of capitalism like the university are, in that sense, irredeemable. It's not just the university, but also other institutions: NGOs, the nonprofit industrial complex!¹⁴²

142. INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence, *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Nonprofit Industrial Complex* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2007).

But wait, what we're doing is an example of it: Erasmus+, intellectual outputs, paperwork. "I feel trapped." "Can we hack—are we hacking—the system from inside?" Critique is internal to the system to the extent that it can be commodified.

The university is a colonial project par excellence. In the so-called greek context there is a sinister invisibility of colonisation, which belies greece as a colonised place factually. Understanding this is a belated project. We are not aware of this, or its consequences for reactionary nationalism, for instance. What it would mean to restore the ancient greek civilisation—perceived as the "cradle of democracy" and white western values—as a non-white tradition, as a Mediterranean ancient history? What would it mean to place the epicentre of many modern sciences in non-white hands? How would this shift the dynamics of the narration of the West? In greek it feels unnatural, difficult, or foreign to say the word "decolonisation": απο-αποικιοποίηση. We want to talk about decolonisation in the greek context. But, "greece was never a coloniser." Wait: greece kills hundreds of people at the border and cages people in camps. So let's say: greece *is* a coloniser.

We are really not the university we come from—or maybe we just don't want to be that. We are hurt by the words we use to describe it: "higher education" isn't really higher, taller, or bigger. We understand that there isn't such a thing we could call "higher education" that doesn't involve discrimination. Education has been a place of fear and distrust (and we are who we are because of trust, remember?),

a place where we strived for our daily survival. We went to university for class mobility—because our mothers told us that this is how we are going to show every racist, sexist homophobe that we are better than them—and the university dressed us with its biggest and most shiny hat, which it only gives to true experts. But we cannot wear this hat because it devours us—maybe it's too big; or, maybe, in fact, too small; or, just not in the right colours: the ones that complement us. And we want to share what we were able to claim from the university with our friends and with our parents and with our lovers and with our sisters, and we can't do that, if we are treated as experts, if we have to wear this ugly hat.

Is this another one of those fake revolutions? We wonder in secret, when we even dare to ask: perhaps. In a swallowed whisper. And the truth is we are not sure to have reached a conclusion. Things became confused. Cloudy. Stratospheric? Did we make a point? Did we get somewhere? There is one and only language – the master's.¹⁴³ Conflicted hubbub. Attempts at emancipation. Did we look out? Has the world changed? Or is it just time. Winter has come and we have struggled—in a fishbowl? The sky is still, our bodies hurt. Everything's calm.

So. Decolonise. School. Our bodies, our minds. Africa and Palestine. Deconstruct, word by word, grade by grade. Until every wall has collapsed. Tabula rasa. Is Latin colonial? Pull your tongue out. Now.

143. Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House." 1984. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 1984/2007), 110- 114.

Burn your eyes. Scrape your skin. White. Reset it all. Shut up. Die.
Oh, and, before you go:

Do not forget to like and subscribe.

Academia has, also, helped us. For example, when we came out as a lesbian to our mothers it was not that great; but when we came out as academics writing about these things it was amazing.

Let's invite Virginia to the university.¹⁴⁴ We never get enough of Virginia.

But every invitation is conditioned upon an exclusion. And anyway, we think she is better off outside the library, with the trees and the flowers, in her natural environment. We like her better this way. Will natural scientists listen to her then? Do natural scientists even know about Virginia? Virginia herself said that she doesn't belong inside the library. Do we belong inside the library?

Yes, we said: it is where we feel most happy. Remember? That we

144. Virginia Woolf speaks about her exclusion from the patriarchal library in her outstanding book *A Room of One's Own*: how she did not belong in the institution, that her place was always outside of it. "Only the Fellows and Scholars are allowed here; the gravel is the place for me," she writes. Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*. London: Hogarth Press, 1929), 6. We need to remember her claim about her own room, a claim made from the other side of an institutional border, a claim made by an intellectual exile. We need to remember who cannot make it into the canon, into the library, into the institution. We need to remember that universities are spaces of exclusion. It is important to feel as if you do not belong in such institutions, even if you study or work there.

haven't had enough of school. We haven't been loved enough at school.

Let's invite Virginia to talk about feminism in the university.

No, some of those people who teach feminism and other social justice courses are the most authoritarian: how this is possible? It hurts. We mean: the imposed separation between structure and content. We must admit that teaching was our favourite experience in academia. We miss it.

Are we teachers? We cannot trick students that we are teaching feminism by requiring from them another assignment that will be graded at the end: excellent, average, failed. Students don't get paid for their labour, but they must pay the price...

Fees must fall.¹⁴⁵ Grades must fall.

Are we students? Is this an assignment that we are doing?

No, we are wearing a teacher's hat.

Let's take the hat off then. We cannot take it off. We have forgotten how to take our hats off.

145. #Feesmustfall was an inspiring South African student-led protest movement that began in October 2015 at the University of Witwatersrand, and soon spread to the University of Cape Town and Rhodes University, and elsewhere, with the goal of stopping increases in student fees as well as to increase government funding of universities.

And there is a minister of education and religion.¹⁴⁶ Same pile, same shit.

We feel trapped within BRIDGES. I mean, we are desperately needing the toilet. It is funny that we need to ask permission to go to the bathroom.¹⁴⁷

Pause.

Do we have a dream to offer a different perspective as BRIDGES?

Silence

Silence

Silence

146. Since 2019 the official name of the ministry of education in greece is “Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs”; it includes four general secretariats: the General Secretariat of Higher Education, the General Secretariat for Primary, Secondary and Special Education, the General Secretariat for Vocational Education, Training, Lifelong Learning and Youth, and the General Secretariat for Religious Affairs. Although within the years, since the creation of the greek state, the name of the ministry has changed many times, the component of religion has always been present—originating, among other factors, from the greek constitution, where it is stated that one of the missions of education is “the development of national and religious consciousness.” Hellenic Republic, Constitution of Greece, article 16, paragraph 6, <https://www.hellenicparliament.gr/UserFiles/f3c70a23-7696-49db-9148-f24dce6a27c8/FEK%20211-A-24-12-2019%20NEO%20SYNTAGMA.pdf>.

147. And even when we reach the bathroom, we do not fit neatly in the gents'/ladies' categories, and sometimes our presence there becomes an issue. Decolonisation also means gender neutral bathrooms.

Ok, let's forget about BRIDGES.

We have always had a dream to wear a moustache.

So, let's save theory from the university, from the critique of institutions...!

Is it too late to decolonise? If we decolonise, though, or try to, we have to do it collectively. What do we mean by decolonise? Everyone is about decolonising and the risk of overusing this word all the time is to empty it of its meaning. By merely using the vocabulary of decolonisation, instead of embracing its theory and praxis, universities will think they are decolonising a more and more undecolonisable world. A decolonial capitalist university will not be dangerous, it will be produced, packaged and delivered on your doorway within two working days or less.

Imagine a decolonial university. It is difficult. Does it mean: an anticolonial university? We have been shaped by colonial universities; so can we imagine a decolonial university?

It is funny but one of us first became familiar with the term 'decolonisation' at university, through an MA course in Cultural Studies. Someone else first heard about 'decolonisation' at BRIDGES, isn't that strange? How we wished that at university, in an MA class, or in this matter also in BRIDGES, we could learn how to face up to colonial relationships. To find a space that would allow us not only

to save theory but to be saved by theories, a space where theories can nourish us and hug us. A space where we can support ourselves and one another, together not alone. To do it alone is dangerous. You see, it is again about love; the need to love and to be loved, even by our professors.¹⁴⁸

Decolonise. Everyday, everywhere. Resist. Invent. Breathe. Remember bell hooks. Theories as keys to unlock our chains to free our bodies.¹⁴⁹ Take books out of universities. Take words out in the streets, the parks, our dead living rooms; take words in prisons. University. From mediaeval Latin, *universitas*: “community,” the dictionary says. And they laugh. Πανεπιστήμιο, where all knowledge is to be found. Should we reconquer or abolish the university? Would Virginia have been Virginia if she had pushed open the doors of the faculty or, rather, if the doors of the faculty had been pushed open before her? Should we stay and overthrow the old masters, the great professors or *on se lève et on se casse*? Should we teach and learn in the grass underground? Should we become research outlaws, knowledge hackers, science-terrorists? Knowledge is the greatest weapon of all, we tell the kids before they go to sleep. And we try to believe. And we dream.

We can learn from books that were bombs in their time, and (maybe, still) in ours. The extractive relationship between universities and

148. bell hooks, *All About Love: New Visions* (New York: William Morrow Paperbacks, 2001).

149. bell hooks, “Theory as liberatory practice.” In *Teaching to transgress: education as the practice of freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 59–76.

theories has given theory a bad name. Theories have been there for me, like friends to hug, nourish, comfort me. We've got to differentiate theories from critiques of institutions that appropriate them.

And, like expired food,¹⁵⁰ why should we preserve bad ideas, as the founding fathers do? Sometimes and some things we must destroy. We need to burn it all down. And some see their whole life turning into flames, childhood fantasies become ashes.

Books will be bombs.

We see decolonisation as a movement and not as a practice that can be performed in institutions. As a movement that would render obsolete the kinds of knowledge that are circulating as hegemonic. A movement that would make the white men that are called the "founding fathers" of our disciplines appear like the patriarchs they are. We are in favour of decolonising the ways we interact with others, the ways we express our feelings and connect on the level of the everyday. We advocate a performance of decolonisation in our daily lives, as a community and not only as individuals. A

150. During the BRIDGES Summer School, entitled, "Building Solidarities, Feminist and Anti-Racist practices in Higher Education" (June 29–July 23 2021), we threw a theory picnic, where we asked participants to bring their favorite piece of theory to our picnic. There we tried to imagine theory as food—a metaphor we all enjoyed a lot. Theories can be like food, because they are all around us and they can be delicious, used to heal and appease, show love and care. But also, we can be force-fed theories and theories can be like stale bread. Building theories, just like cooking food, can be something we do as a collective, by consulting older recipes we like, by exchanging recipes with each other and by writing new ones together.

process that would restore on the collective level the need to resist and abolish the violence of neoliberalism.

A “decolonial university” sounds to us, at best a paradox, at worst, a dystopian future, in which capitalism has prevailed and decolonisation has been repackaged and is sold like a product. On the other hand, if we are not seeking just a “better university” but the destruction of the university and the creation of something entirely different, learning would exist anywhere, everywhere at any minute of our lives. It would be a healing or therapeutic activity. It would have relationships at the centre. People would have space to share their emotions and feelings. Going to the university would be making a cheesecake and then eating it, walking with a friend, reading a poem out loud, hugging and kissing and loving. It would be everything, and everywhere: this could be a dance, a party we throw, movements, arts...

Maybe these spaces already exist. Maybe we’ve created them, or we try to create them because we’re not passive objects in colonial dynamics. It’s useless to talk about “decolonising the university” in isolation, if all else remains the same. In a decolonised world, everything would be the university and the university would be nothing. We’d stop using the word because decolonial practice would make it obsolete.

06





Chapter 6

Bridging as Resistance: Destabilising academic institutions through transforming the structures of knowledge production

PAR Group Giessen

This narrative is the result of a group conversation among all those who contributed as members of the PAR Group in Giessen (Germany) to the Erasmus+ project, BRIDGES: Building Inclusive Societies and Tackling Discrimination through Civil Society Participation in Universities (2019–2022). In the text that results from our conversation, we try to show how our teamwork during this time was shaped both by our personal perspectives and by the unique paths of our biographies; but, also, by coming together as precisely those people, who together wanted to contribute to overcoming exclusionary mechanisms of knowledge production—by opening up spaces so that marginalised knowledge can challenge hegemonic knowledge production and shake the hegemonic distribution of epistemic authority.

We are PAR Giessen: members of the civil society organisation An.ge.kommen e.V. and the General Sociology department at the Institute of Sociology of Justus Liebig University Giessen. This chapter has been written using Narrative Productions methodology,¹⁵¹ following a conversation among former and present PAR Giessen team members. An.ge.kommen e.V. is a civil society organisation that supports migrants at their arrival in Giessen. Giessen hosts the initial reception facility for refugees for the Land (regional entity) of Hesse. This facility with an average occupancy of 6,000 people is one of the largest refugee Lager (camp) in Germany. An.ge.kommen emerged in 2015, when in Giessen and the surroundings, refugees were arriving in Germany, as part of the March of Hope coming from Turkey and Greece via the Balkans. This event, known as “the long summer of migration,” channelled the creation of the advocacy group An.ge.kommen. An.ge.kommen established itself as a refuge and a social and cultural hub for these new arrivals and their friends in Giessen. Offering various courses and opportunities to support migrant self-organisation, An.ge.kommen also has created a network of support in legal and administrative matters. Most of those staying in touch with and using the program offered by An.ge.kommen are young migrants, many of whom aim to continue or start their study in higher education in Germany. Giessen, as a university town with one quarter of its population being students, offers several possibilities

151. This text has been developed considering the methodological proposal of Narrative Productions developed by Marcel Balasch and Marisela Montenegro, “Una Propuesta Metodológica Desde La Epistemología de Los Conocimientos Situados: Las Producciones Narrativas,” *Encuentros En Psicología Social* 1, no. 3 (2003): 44–48. See chapter 3 for a detailed description of the steps we took as PAR Giessen.

to study. However, persons in a process of seeking and applying for asylum are legally barred from the possibility of studying. An.ge.kommen and the General Sociology department at JLU started to work together in 2016, establishing the Initiative Branch Out, creating access for persons seeking asylum to the university, in particular, to the Sociology department. The project lasted until 2018 as the funding was limited until then, and no further institutional projects were launched. Yet, An.ge.kommen continues to cooperate with General Sociology, for instance, through BRIDGES.

Like many organisations supporting people who have migrated in the last years, An.ge.kommen lives from voluntary engagement: in fact, only one of the members has a full working contract. Two other persons are employed based on mini-jobs which are limited to a minimum of work hours on a fixed-term basis and do not include social security. All other members in An.ge.kommen are volunteers or political activists. Throughout the project, An.ge.kommen was represented by three different persons. Two of them were already contributing to An.ge.kommen as volunteers prior to entering the BRIDGES project as staff and continued their voluntary work (e.g. accompanying persons seeking refuge in meetings with government authorities) during that time. Both had to leave the project due to life situation changes (one started a full-time position as a teacher, and the other initiated a full-time apprenticeship). The third person had participated in the BRIDGES Summer School and joined the team after witnessing the creative methodologies of the BRIDGES project. This person joined An.ge.kommen and the BRIDGES team

with the motivation to contribute with their own experiences in community organising, facilitation, and political education in various organisations. The life stories of the An.ge.kommen members of PAR Giessen are diverse: Some of the An.ge.kommen members were intrigued to engage with BRIDGES because they had experienced how schools and universities have silenced their own life stories of migration, exile, and diaspora. Others, because of the various forms of discrimination happening to their families and friends, and because they already engaged in struggles against the European border regime; still others, due to positive experiences with the BRIDGES project itself.

The JLU team of PAR Giessen is composed of members of the General Sociology department at the Institute of Sociology of the Justus-Liebig-University in Giessen. General Sociology established an approach to social and cultural theory, focusing on questions of racism, coloniality, and migration from a decolonial, intersectional perspective, informed by Epistemologies of the South. This perspective has guided this area in becoming a learning and teaching space, engaging with the project of decolonising the university in a European setting. This goal raises questions in regard not only to the positionality of Germany in Europe but also to the accountability of Europe's history of colonialism, enslavement, and contemporary forms of settler colonialism. In this regard, General Sociology intends to create practices towards a project of decolonising the university: BRIDGES is such a step. Through the funding of Erasmus+, a 25 percent position for one person and a technician for some of the

part of the project (equivalent to a mini-job) were created; PAR Giessen also committed to realising all the goals of the project by contributing extra hours of unpaid work. However, PAR Giessen has reflected on this commitment and the level of self-exploitation that this entails, because of our engagement with BRIDGES' philosophy and intellectual goals.

Summing up, over the last years, the Institute has sought to contribute actively to defying epistemic violence and institutional racism, sexism, and heteropatriarchy, by opening spaces to include marginalised voices within the university. General Sociology has sought to support students, PhD candidates, and postdocs with a history of discrimination due to racism, migration, class, religion, gender, ability, and sexuality. In particular, students with migration biographies, Black people, and queer people of colour have found here a hub of encounter, exchange, and support. Throughout the project, five persons contributed to BRIDGES: two of us from the beginning to the end of the project, and three others who could only contribute to the project over a short time. One person encountered several institutional barriers due to the homologation requirements of academic degrees, starting their contract four months later than planned. This experience resulted in this person deciding to stop working on this project. Others decided to find a job with more work hours. Though Germany, together with the UK, represents the wealthy countries of the BRIDGES consortium, the working conditions at the university in this country are precarious and have also affected the members of the project. The professor worked

on the project as part of other activities related to their position. Their work for BRIDGES therefore represented additional work not compensated by any teaching reduction or any other forms of compensation.

Our life stories as JLU members of PAR Giessen are diverse, too: most of us have a direct or familial migration history from the Global South or the European South, which has shaped our perspectives on, and experiences with European knowledge institutions, whilst some were inspired by thought emanating from the Global South as a radical alternative to hegemonic thinking. We all understand our work at the institution as inherently political.

Why are we writing this? For one, we think it is important to make visible that behind each “we,” there are persons with unique life stories. Our particular experiences shape how this “we” thinks and how “we” become “one.” We think not as representatives of a school of thought or as members of a social sector in Germany, but we think from where we stand and through our trajectories. It is this standpoint epistemology¹⁵² that makes clear that how this “we” comes to be, should not be made invisible. What we have contributed to the project, and what we talk about in this narrative production, would have been different, if those who compose the “we” had been others.

152. Patricia Hill Collins, “The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 14, no. 4 (1989): 745–73; Donna Haraway, *Modest-Witness@Second. Millenium.FemaleMan_Meets_OncoMouse: Feminism and Technoscience* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Sandra Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986).

The alliance between JLU and An.ge.kommen gave rise to this chapter, as all former team members participated in this collective text production, even though for some of us, our official employment in BRIDGES had already finished. Therefore, this chapter includes various voices that have been in conversation with each other at different times during the project, in changing constellations; some of these perspectives met for the first time during our narrative production workshop. We view this multi-perspective narrative production as a strength and want to embrace the possibilities it gave us to create a narrative that could, in this form, only emerge out of a conversation within this space of already established connections and new encounters

So then, who is PAR Giessen?

Most of us have a migration biography and have experienced different forms of discrimination, based on colonialism, racism, migration regimes, class, and cis-heteropatriarchal capitalism. However, we are aware of the intersectional privileges that we have, too, to different extents; for example, living in a country with a social state providing free education and health insurance (for documented persons). Some of us have privileges along class or whiteness; some have politically engaged parents (some of them organised in migrant parents' associations); and/or a support system, which was able to accompany us in our educational path and has helped us access higher education. These structural and individual

possibilities have shaped our access to, and perception of education and contributed to our educational and professional path.

As PAR Giessen, we have reflected on our positionalities during the workshops that we conducted at the beginning of 2020; but, also, during our meetings—and again in the workshop that led to this chapter. These conversations have shaped our contributions to the so-called BRIDGES project “outputs”—such as the toolkit, the course, or this monograph. We have worked together as members of one team, developing ideas and taking decisions together, based on the dialogue resulting from different perspectives and structural obstacles. For example, that An.ge.kommen is a volunteer based organisation that creates programmes based on the individual capacities of its volunteers and whilst some volunteers can offer programmes like language courses, frequently others can create programmes for a limited amount of time. Working together has not always been easy, considering that we relate differently to the topics of BRIDGES. This depends on our various academic educational and activist backgrounds, but also on hierarchies emanating from our positionalities, that co-create authority: for instance, through age, language proficiency, status, and/or education. One way of dealing with this was to aim in our conversations at translating abstract academic vocabulary and concepts used in BRIDGES into everyday experiences. Another was to seek replacing colonially-based hierarchies through practising mutual respect, checking in with each other on our personal situations outside of the project and caring for each other and their workload.

Our Diagnosis: Perspectives on the university, the production of knowledge and epistemic authority

Engaging in processes of decolonisation must include—or so we think—a diagnosis of the existing forms of knowledge production and epistemic authority. What needs to be deconstructed can be located on the level of (a) knowledge production; (b) along practices; (c) architecture; (d) division of work; and (e) struggles, whilst we build alternative ways of being in institutions of higher education.

Knowledge production: the hegemonic idea of the university as the main site of knowledge production departs from a masculinist, white society, dominated by affluent men: not of formations of non-binary gendered and differently-abled, poor, or racialised people. Thus, the hegemonic idea of the university does not represent the diversity of voices, perspectives, and knowledges that our societies are made of. Maisha-Maureen Auma, a Black German professor, who has recently been threatened by far-right politicians due to her academic work, points out that German universities are predominantly white institutions during the day, whilst she sees “Black life mostly in the evenings or early mornings when the cleaning staff begins their work.”¹⁵³

153. Maisha Maureen Auma, “Struktureller Rassismus an deutschen Hochschulen ‘Nur tagsüber sind Universitäten weiße Institutionen,’” Interview by Christoph David Piorkowski, *Der Tagesspiegel*, (December 18, 2020), <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/wissen/struktureller-rassismus-an-deutschen-hochschulen-nur-tagsueber-sind-universitaeten-weisse-institutionen/26730214.html>.

Practices: To challenge these structures requires a profound structural transformation, reflected in the level of learning and teaching practices and methodologies applied and used by staff, as well as of the curricula used: decolonisation needs to work towards an antiracist, trans, non-binary, queer environment, to which those who until today are excluded from higher education get access. This means integrating theories from marginalised groups within the Global North and theories of the marginalised in the Global South. How different bodies relate to one another in a lecture or seminar reproduces hierarchy as well: one person being in front of the class teaching creates a vertical approach towards knowledge exchange where the focus is on the one person passing on knowledge to those receiving it, instead of understanding knowledge as something that is co-created together.

Architecture: We want to highlight that the current architecture of buildings, in which higher education takes place, contributes to universities as hostile spaces with limited physical space to discuss or reside. Communal spaces are kept to a minimum and narrow hallways produce an environment where bodies in the university are always on the go. Currently, we find classrooms where there is a table located in front for the lecturer, and tables at the side to be used by the students, which in itself is a very lecturing way of approaching the transfer of knowledge. The symbolical power of the professor as the owner of knowledge is perpetuated by the constitution of the classroom. This is a metaphor for how the university is, hegemonically, imagined: as a neoliberal space, where

production and efficiency are centred and the free flow of thought and the collective production of knowledge impeded, whilst the commodification of knowledge thrives.

Division of Work: Universities need to recognise and acknowledge that there are various practices of othering that go along with structural obstacles that especially non-European citizens face. Scholars from outside of Europe in some cases receive lower wages (e.g. because their experience is not being recognized), and, in general, occupy more precarious positions in the institution.

Struggles: whilst these structures remain the reality of universities, resistance against them has also been vital. Although, in Germany, no broad-based movement like in the Netherlands or the UK regarding decolonising the university—such as “Why isn’t my professor Black?”¹⁵⁴—has been initiated, this does not mean that there are no initiatives. To the contrary, we want to highlight here the following initiatives with which we connect and/or to which we contribute, such as Initiative Schwarze Menschen in Deutschland (Initiative of Black People in Germany); Dekolonial e.V. (an association for antiracism, critical postcolonial, and decolonial practice); online campaigns like #campusrassismus (where racialised students and other university members voiced experiences of racist practices in German universities); the Arbeitskreis Herrschaftskritische Friedensforschung (a working group for strengthening perspectives

154. “Why isn’t my professor Black? UCL panel discussion,” YouTube (21 March 2014), <https://youtu.be/mBqgLK9dTk4>.

from feminist, decolonial, and critical race studies within peace studies); and the organisation of precarious university workers (which has addressed inequalities and limited or no access to the university for poor, migrantised and racialised people). These efforts also include the organisation of unions within universities like *unter_bau*,¹⁵⁵ a union that not only calls for more democratic rights and fair wages at universities for marginalised people, but, also, for the establishment of democratic councils at universities that replace the current hierarchical management. The neoliberal university is very good at co-opting approaches like “diversity” and “decolonial” perspectives; but the material reality is still that only 6% of professors in Germany have a migration background.¹⁵⁶

Our horizon: Dreams, hopes, and wishes for building an antiracist, trans-queer-crip-feminist university whilst working towards decolonisation

As mentioned above, “decolonising the university” has become a buzzword recently; but, amongst ourselves in PAR Giessen, we discussed whether this is not a contradiction in itself. This is because, if we think the processes of decolonisation to their logical conclusion,

155. Unter_bau, “Alternative Hochschulgewerkschaft,” last accessed 17 May 2022, <https://unterbau.org/>.

156. Encarnación Gutiérrez-Rodríguez, “Sensing dispossession: Women and gender studies (WGS) between institutional racism and migration control policies in the neoliberal university,” *Women's Studies International Forum* 54, no. 2 (2016): 167-177.

it would mean that the very concept of the university would cease to exist. So, a “decolonial/decolonised university” does not make sense. To avoid engaging in rhetoric rather than in transformative practice, why don’t we, instead, talk about destabilising the institution of the university as part of our horizon?

Activists and scholars from Latin America coined the term “pluriversity” for an institution that emerges within processes of decolonisation.¹⁵⁷ In such an institution, the plurality derives from the plurality of people, knowledges, and bodies that inhabit the spaces of collective learning, creating space for a world where many worlds would fit (as the Zapatistas would say).¹⁵⁸ The purpose of a pluriversity would be to create knowledge as a means of social justice and equality. To decolonise institutions of knowledge production would therefore mean to create spaces that reject both the commodification of knowledge but also the limitation of processes of knowledge generation to an imminent and linear output or productivity, such as is the understanding of the neoliberal university. A decolonised institution would, rather, emphasise

157. Jose Manuel Barroso, “Descolonizando. Diálogo con Yuderkis Espinosa Miñoso y Nelsón Maldonado Torres,” *Iberoamérica Social: revista-red de estudios sociales* 6 (2016): 8–26, <http://iberoamericasocial.com/descolonizando-dialogo-yuderkys-espinosa-minoso-nelson-maldonado-torres>; Catherine Walsh, “Interculturalidad y colonialidad del poder. Un pensamiento y posicionamiento “otro” desde la diferencia colonial,” *El giro decolonial*, eds. Ramón Grosfoguel y Santiago Castro-Gómez (Bogotá: Siglo del Hombre, 2007), 47–62.

158. Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, Indigenous Clandestine Revolutionary Committee General Command of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation Mexico, “Fourth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle,” (1 January 1996), <https://schoolsforchiapas.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Fourth-Declaration-of-the-Lacandona-Jungle-.pdf>

and reward the affective and caring relations we can form with ourselves, other people, and our surroundings within society, but also with nature, as a central dimension of knowledge. These utopian alternatives help us to imagine tools for carving out spaces in the present institutions of universities, where we can work towards a more just institution.

Imagining for what we know as the “university” a path towards decolonisation can be a challenge, considering the history of the institution, its entanglements in colonialism, and its reproduction of social formations embedded in heteropatriarchal, racist, and capitalist power dynamics. A university whose decolonisation is in progress would explicitly locate itself in historical colonial entanglements so that people inhabiting the institution learn about how colonial history affects studying, learning, teaching, and doing research until today—because coloniality affects every academic discipline.

The university must not think of itself as closed unto itself; but rather, it should take a dynamic stance towards knowledge, like the wind: where it is in constant contact and exchange with its environment and is created not only by entitled persons. Part of that is learning from outside of the university, which means that more people need access to the university than is the case now. Within the Global North, not only should more people with precarious economic backgrounds, in particular from racialised, migrant, refugee, and/or diasporic backgrounds, as well as working-class communities gain access to higher education; it is also important to shift the scale regarding the predominant representation of

masculinist, white European thought in higher education institutions. The canon needs to be changed by including voices of the margins: trans, queer, non-binary, crip, Indigenous, migrant, racialised, refugee, and critical progressive voices from the Global North and Global South. The canon of knowledge production and teaching curricula needs to depart from the connection of knowledge and practice, or in other words: thinking and activism. Paulo Freire and the pedagogy of liberation remind us that students are already knowledgeable, and through acknowledging that, academia can establish a more horizontal approach towards an exchange of knowledge.¹⁵⁹ Questions, reflexivity, and forms of theorising about societal conditions and the practices of social change are a central part of knowledge production.

We want the mode of learning to consist of discussions through which different perspectives can be fused, rather than someone lecturing about knowledge that they seem to possess and pass on to students. Envisioning new ways of learning together is to generate new practices, relationships, and possibilities to access space. Decolonisation needs to render the invisible structures of power visible and point out the discriminatory practices of hierarchy; for instance, that manifest in lower wages for scholars who underwent training or had prior work experience in countries outside of Europe.

159. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 2005.

What needs to be done: Changes and trends at universities

Although a decolonised university is a contradiction, that doesn't mean that we think that the project of decolonising the university should be abandoned. On the contrary, decolonising the university is part of our horizon. But striving to decolonise the university must mean, *first and foremost, to embody a feminist, antiracist, and anti-capitalist struggle* against epistemic and other forms of violence, as heteropatriarchy, white supremacy, and capitalism are the main axes that maintain coloniality. We discussed various approaches to actively transform universities, including the reconstitution of the physical space to a more communal one, enabling horizontal approaches to learning and resisting neoliberal architecture; the redistribution of financial resources, accessibility, and the inclusion of new understandings of education and knowledge. The BRIDGES course, piloted at the summer school incorporated this; for instance with the invitation of Women in Exile,¹⁶⁰ a group of migrant women who are organising within refugee camps for the abolition of these camps. Their work is a fantastic example of knowledge exchange, alternate ways of knowing, and building infrastructures under very precarious circumstances.

160. Women in Exile, "Women in Exile and Friends," last accessed 17 May 2022, <https://www.women-in-exile.net/>

bell hooks, who recently passed away (December 15, 2021), taught us to see the university also as a site of society, where heteropatriarchal, white, capitalist structures can be contested and where we can strive to find new ways of being together and create different understandings of how our present and future could look. She sees knowledge as part of our doing and part of our practice. Our practice is connected to our reflexivity and the attempt to decentre what is presented as hegemonic “imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy.”¹⁶¹

Second, contestation and intervention: As a professor in the university, bell hooks also perceived academia as a place of intervention and contestation. All the participants of PAR Giessen—as from the majority of the PARs of BRIDGES—have enjoyed access to higher education, due to their class background or their positionality in a political conjuncture, where education was facilitated for poor, migrantised, or racialised families, or because they migrated to the Global North, or because of all these reasons. The possibility to read, critique, edit, comment, suggest, and request for bibliographic clarifications and commentaries are already gestures and practices of subjects trained in higher education—how to democratise these practices, or how to unlearn them as individual privileges, are points to keep in mind. No one is outside the teaching machine: we are all in it! Maybe a collective project of communal learning, starting with listening and seeing, building collectively our language might be the way. This text is written in English—the *lingua franca* of

161. bell hooks, *Belonging: A Culture of Place*, (New York: Routledge. 2009).

academia; what would it mean to have a *multilingual book* in the languages we speak? It will be translated into Spanish, German, and Greek—but what other languages do we speak that might not even be represented in this collection (starting with Catalan, Portuguese, etc.)? Already on this level, we are dealing with hegemonic forms of authoritative speaking. We can forge new paths by listening, working together, and constructing ideas communally. Furthermore, the university needs to become a space to admit that the lack of knowledge and uncertainties are necessary elements of the learning process; but, somehow, today that is something that peers, colleagues, students, and lecturers alike fear to admit. In BRIDGES, we reassessed many of our predefined goals during our project, based on the obstacles we found on the way; but, also, as a result of creating spaces for doubts and uncertainties in our work together.

Third, critique and pluriversal learning: Critique, in fact, needs to be approached from different angles and open new ways of seeing. Paulo Freire makes the point that we all produce knowledge¹⁶²—a process we understand in line with Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui as dialogical and collective, and that departs from critically interrogating our own practices and positionalities.¹⁶³ Processes of decolonising the institutions are already happening: there are autonomous universities such as the Universidad Autónoma Indígena Intercultural

162. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 69.

163. Cusicanqui, Silvia Rivera, “Ch’ixinakax utxiwa: A Reflection on the Practices and Discourses of Decolonization,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 111, no. 1 (2012): 95-109, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-1472612>.

in Colombia.¹⁶⁴ Most of these projects are taking place in parallel to established universities. However, they are often not recognised by the state as teaching, learning, and/or research institutions, and their financial status is often precarious. By working together as equals in workshops, texts, and meetings the members of An.ge.kommen and JLU tried to value different angles and backgrounds.

Fourth, sensorial corporeal interconnections: Colonialism has created gaps between cognitive thinking and perceiving what is happening in our bodies as well as spiritual poverty. We believe that processes that would take steps towards the decolonisation of institutions would have to bridge these gaps by taking on a more holistic approach to the production of knowledge and include all our senses. A concrete example of how this can be realised was part of the summer school in the exercise “Re-embodying Knowledge,” developed by PAR Athens, where the participants gave account to the various forms of learning that are part of their lives.

Fifth, pluriversal practices: Rather than a discourse without structural consequences, we thus understand decolonisation as a practice that includes a multitude of forms and actions of protest and occupation. Whilst decolonisation is becoming a discourse that is gaining attention in academia and is in vogue, practices are already taking place that may not label themselves “decolonial,” but still do the work. These actions might take the form of occupying the university, strikes, or tearing down monuments, to change the physical space,

164. Universidad Autónoma Indígena Intercultural, <https://campus.uaiinpebi-cric.edu.co/>.

like in movements for decolonisation in South African universities. We can see these practices as forms of resistance in Germany as well: in practices of occupying campus spaces and student strikes in the late 1960s, in 1987, or opposing the Bologna Reform in 2009.¹⁶⁵ They include the occupation of the university, establishing autonomous seminars within and outside of university walls, and critically reflecting on the practices inside the university. We need to continue this creative and critical practice within the university. To engage in struggles like, for instance, those of students in South African universities within the Rhodes Must Fall movement,¹⁶⁶ also means to ask questions such as “who has the authority of knowledge? What are the concrete, material alterations we can achieve?” From our perspective, and concluding this section, we believe that it’s not so much about writing the next book that has “decolonial” in its title, but rather to ask ourselves: what are we *really* structurally changing? In the end, the answer to these questions will not be easy—it is a struggle after all.

165. The Bologna Process was initiated in 1999 and aimed at creating a unified European higher education system by 2010. The educational strikes in Germany criticised how the proposed reforms would create a neoliberal commodification of education, creating pressure for students, limiting access to the university and minimising students’ autonomy for self-determined learning. See Martin Winter, “Bologna – die ungeliebte Reform und ihre Folgen,” *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung* (March 31, 2015), <https://www.bpb.de/themen/bildung/dossier-bildung/204075/bologna-die-ungeliebte-reform-und-ihre-folgen/>.

166. The Rhodes Must Fall Movement included the demand for the removal of the statue portraying coloniser Cecil Rhodes from the Campus of the University of Cape Town in South Africa. Furthermore, the movement tackled various issues of structural injustices rooted in colonialism and the racial and spatial ordering of apartheid. See Roseanne Chantiluke, Brian Kwoba, and Athinagamso Nkopo, A, eds., *Rhodes Must Fall: The Struggle to Decolonise the Racist Heart of Empire* (London: Zed Books Ltd, 2018); Chris Webb, “Impatient for Justice,” *Jacobin* (December 12 2015), <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/12/south-africa-fees-must-fall-jacob-zuma-apartheid/>.

BRIDGES: Our hopes, our struggles, and our lessons learnt

As PAR Giessen, with BRIDGES we wanted not only to foster activist-academic exchange but also to break with the dichotomy that there is activism on the one side, and the university on the other. Instead, we wanted to look critically at the university, but also to acknowledge what can be done from within the university and what are the struggles in doing so. However, the aspiration to connect academia with activism is a double bind that accompanied us throughout our project. The structural inequality that exists between the two cannot be easily resolved through a simple project.

However, the practice of cooperation between JLU and An.ge.kommen has made these inequalities visible and tangible. Our work has not only made possible the naming of mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion at the university; but, also, we created together with the other PARs of BRIDGES our own cooperation tools, that help to recognise the alter-knowledge about this exclusion, produced from their/our own experiences, by those of us who have been excluded from, or are marginalised at the university. Thus, at the centre of our interest as PAR Giessen was a critique of the university as a site where everyday violence is exerted through hierarchisation, othering, exclusion, and marginalisation. Especially from the perspective of An.ge.kommen, which supports young migrants upon their arrival in Giessen, we see the many obstacles they are facing

due to structural racism, be it due to formal language requirements, or because their educational qualifications are not being recognised at the university. This leads to other forms of discrimination at a later stage, for instance, in the working environment. Therefore, from a civil society perspective, it is necessary to create access to university for people who are structurally deprived. Through activist–academic practice, we aimed to develop, as a first step, some tools that help identify, visualise, and denounce these mechanisms. As a second step, we sought to co-construct a space of conscientization together with collaborators who were also othered and marginalised at the university.¹⁶⁷ We wanted to co-create tools for them/us to resist, to build alliances, and together identify and name the mechanisms of discrimination as such, thereby redefining the university as a place that belongs to them/us, too.

An example of how we all are connected and how we can visualise and connect our activism within academia even virtually (!) was the BRIDGES Summer School. We recall the activism of the organisers and the participants at the forefront of the activities and workshops. This became especially evident in two moments: the first was when the delegation of the Zapatistas arrived in Spain and activists were also working in Germany to coordinate their arrival there. We felt

167. Maritza Montero describes conscientization according to Paulo Freire as “a neologism, coming from the Spanish word *conscientización*. It conveys the idea of developing, strengthening, and changing consciousness. It was created in the field of education, specifically of adult education, in the early 1960s, producing at the same time a new conception of consciousness.” Maritza, Montero, “Conscientization,” *Encyclopedia of Critical Psychology* (New York: Springer, 2014), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-5583-7_55.

very much entangled with the activism of other people and how that was connected. The second moment was when the heatwave struck southern Europe and, at the same time, in Northrhine-Westphalia (Germany), the flooding began. In a breakout room, we talked about the environmental impact of coloniality. And whilst some were struggling within the heatwave, in Germany houses were flooded. This fostered a connection and reminded us to humanise the little squares on the screen and to remember that there are three-dimensional human beings, activists and political subjects, behind it and that our struggles are connected.

This makes us remember that, maybe, the effect that a project like BRIDGES can unfold cannot be identified through deliverable outputs and measurable outcomes; nor can its effects be grasped immediately. Instead, its impact may be belated. There is a lot of potential there that can shake our own and other people's minds, too. It will be very interesting to continue working with all of this material; we will see in the future how each one of us will continue learning and growing based on this process, understanding change as organic.

Finally, we do not want to finish this section without a call to honour our achievement and to acknowledge that all of this was work: it has not only been an effort but a beautiful struggle. Often, when extractivist logics come in and take up the results of activists' projects, they don't name the authors as such, or what and how this has been done. This is also a part of extractivism of racialised

and feminised labour. So, we ask you and ourselves to keep this in mind when you/we work with BRIDGES—or any other project for that matter. We need to honour the relationships that were in place that enabled us to do this kind of work. To honour those relationships means also that we honour the people that have done this work.

BRIDGES is not over; this is only the beginning!

Join us in this endeavour!

We see BRIDGES as a process that is not about to end, just because the funding for the project will come to an end. Quite to the contrary: our work is still in progress and will live on. We were able to sow or weave something that will show itself at a later point when opportunities arise to work together again collectively as people who have been part of this project. We are already transforming connections that have been made within the project; for instance, by integrating summer school participants into the team at the end of the funding period of the project, and by staying in contact with people who have left the project for other paths. Ultimately, the substantial effects of BRIDGES are still to be witnessed, and we can't measure the impact of the project immediately. Thus, we are looking forward to seeing its fruits in the future. The toolkit, the summer school, and this monograph are results from this work that will remain, but we also take the relationships we formed, the ideas we developed, and the knowledge we co-created with us.

This is also an invitation to get in touch with the BRIDGES PAR Giessen. We want to invite everybody who identifies with what we discussed, shared, and deliberated about in this text to share these ideas, whilst acknowledging the producers, and transforming them in their own way. We are looking forward to collaborations with people or initiatives to whom these approaches towards decolonisation of the university have had a resonating impact.

07





Chapter 7

Bridges Manifesto

Bridges Collective

Manifestos are written in anger. The university is effective in channelling and defusing our anger. The writing into which we are disciplined as academics shies away from expressing anger, through so many subordinate clauses, passive voices, cloudy concepts.

This is a manifesto written in Zoom break-out rooms: we are faces on a screen. Although it is not a spontaneous manifesto, but one organised within the disciplinary dispositive of a European research project, it emerges from our common passion and need to change current domination at universities and beyond.

We are people with migration and diaspora biographies; some of us work within the academic institutions as professors, researchers, or students. Some of us are politically involved in advocacy and support groups of people on the move and in current struggles of BIPOC trans- and queer-feminisms. We move in diverse worlds, motivated by a dedication to actively denounce the social injustices, inequalities, and structural violence that condition our interactions and that polarise us.

We believe that the tension inherent in difference is productive: it tells us about limits and exclusions. It sheds light on the paths to follow: it generates possibilities for cooperation.

We have met in this project, motivated by the need to work collectively and to generate alliances in the face of patriarchal, racist, homophobic, classist and extremely violent institutions. And, although systems of oppression and their intersections are very different in the nationalised spaces we inhabit, we are united by the will for transformation, inspired by the traditions of antiracist feminism and the critique of the systems of oppression that materialize in the context of higher education.

We propose to think of the university as a site of intervention, as a place that needs to be looked at critically.

We work inside and outside the neoliberal university. We are confronted with the commodification of education, with *racialised and gendered division of work and hierarchies in the knowledge production*. The lack of critical reflexivity within university institutions turns them into a space that constructs itself as free from relations of oppression. The neoliberal university is very good at co-opting approaches like “diversity” and “decolonial” perspectives; but the material reality is still that the access of racialised, refugee, trans, non-binary, and queer people to higher education is often not enabled and precaritised, and these groups are approached with paternalistic and victimising logics: as vulnerable subjects with no capacity for action.

We denounce the neoliberal, racist, colonial and patriarchal character of the university: a space that reproduces domination through the exclusion of subalternized collectives. The devices of university power are based on a particular vision of knowledge, one that is based on the premises of rationality and positivism and that devalues those knowledges and pedagogical processes that do not conform to its canon. The hegemonic idea of the university as the main site of knowledge production derives from a masculinist, white supremacist society, dominated by affluent, white men: it suppresses formations of non-binary gendered and differently-abled, poor, or racialised people.

La colonialidad académica ahoga nuestra creatividad y nos desvincula de nuestros cuerpos.

Academic coloniality stifles our creativity and disengages us from our bodies.

We feel stuck in a loop, where attempts to decolonise the university are then appropriated and co-opted by the institution. We operate in the field of impossibility, where it is impossible to do decolonial work within a colonial institution.

Our Demands

No more professors, no more chairs, no more departments, no more military hierarchies concealed as the possessors of knowledge gifting

their subordinates with knowledge. No more actual military inside the university, no more military contracts. No more pseudoscientific justifications of racism, homophobia, transphobia. No more $\mu\omicron\nu\omicron\varphi\omega\nu\acute{\iota}\alpha$, no more lectures from podiums and no more keynote speakers. No more experts. No more borders between who is talking and who is supposed to be passively listening. No more exams, no more grades, no more quantification, no more awkward meetings, no more office hours, no more offices. No more privatisation and commodification of knowledge and learning spaces. No tuition, no fees, no unwaged labour concealed as the “passive” activity of “studying.” No more racist and gendered divisions of labour between who runs universities, who cleans universities, and who learns in universities. No more institutionalised mansplaining and whitesplaining.

1. We want trans theories, queer decolonisation, intersex representation, and the abolition of the binary system of gender.
2. We want to hear and learn from knowledges systematically suppressed through colonial violence, that have survived the attempted epistemicide.
3. We demand university institutions engage in self-diffraction and critical action, to question the foundations on which university institutions are based. We want to build alternative ways of inhabiting education.
4. We demand that the dynamics of power that sustain the

university be reviewed, that horizontality and alliances be integrated as the basis of the university community.

5. We want freedom of creation, liberated and liberating theories and voices, joy and laughter as modes of learning. We want to think with our bodies and move with our hearts.
6. We demand that people who dedicate their academic practice to activism be concretely supported, instead of being made even more precarious through demands placed on them for enormous emotional, economic, and bureaucratic efforts.
7. As “representatives” of social movements, we are tired of being reduced to mere objects of study. We want archives that include our struggles and describe our lives, open galleries, and the destruction of ivory towers.
8. We demand that university spaces be opened to activist collectives and activist knowledge and experience to be recognised as valid.
9. We demand to stop valuing publications and university careers as parameters of “expertise.”
10. We demand that decoloniality ceases to be reduced to a purely intellectual concept: instead, that it be reflected in consistent actions, in a reorganisation of the academic structure at the levels of faculty and curriculum.

11. Decolonisation needs to work toward creating an antiracist, trans, non-binary, queer environment, which is accessible to everyone, including all those who have been excluded from higher education.

Decolonisation means integrating theories from marginalised groups within the Global North and theories of the marginalised in the Global South. It means forging new paths through sentipensar: by listening, working together, and constructing ideas communally, and bridging the mind/body division in current hegemonic knowledge production. We believe that instead of talking about decolonisation, we rather need to ask ourselves: What are we really structurally changing? In the end, the answer to these questions will not be easy—it is a struggle after all. We believe in building alliances and transformative spaces together, by meeting each other, by discussing together how we form transgressive diagnoses, theories, pedagogies. By creating critical tools rather than grand narratives, dismantling walls, brick by brick, and building bridges within, outside, and against institutions.

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BRIDGES Collective

Catalina Álvarez Martínez-Conde is a psychologist from the University of Chile and a PhD student at the Autonomous University of Barcelona. She participates in feminist antiracist networks, both academic and activist. She has developed research work on collective memory, human rights, gender, and migration.

Marelia Anais Armas Molina is a psychologist from the Catholic University Andrés Bello (Venezuela), has an MA in Psychosocial Research and Intervention from Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona (Spain) and is a specialist in collective memories, human rights, and resistances (CLACSO). She's been part of the research team of Organización y Dinámica Comunitaria (2015-2017) in UCAB and has worked as a teacher in seminars and internships in the department of School Psychology within the same university.

Blanca Callén Moreu is a social psychologist (UAB) and works as a social researcher and teacher at different grades (psychology, design, philosophy) and universities. Her research activity is based in the field of Social Studies of Science and Technology and focuses on collective political action and material cultures. More recently, she explores the community responses to the ecosocial crisis, from posthuman and ecofeminist thinking. She is co-founder and activist of Restarters BCN, dedicated to the promotion of repair cultures.

Anna Carastathis is a political theorist and co-director of the Feminist Autonomous Centre for research. She is the author of *Intersectionality: Origins, Contestations, Horizons* and *Reproducing Refugees: Photographia of a Crisis*. Since 2016, she has lived in Athens, seeking to cultivate roots and extend branches in a feminist community against borders.

María Cárdenas is researcher at JLU, Giessen, and Goethe University, Frankfurt, and co-speaker for the working group Critical Peace Research of the German Association for Peace and Conflict Studies. Her research interests include critical race and ethnic studies, critical peace studies, and peace psychology. She is currently finalising her PhD on the potential of decolonising peacebuilding, based on activist research with Afrocolombian and Indigenous peace activists in Colombia, and is active in the Colombian diaspora for peace.

Emilia Carnetto joined PAR Giessen from February to November 2021, where she represented the civil society association An.ge.kommen. e.V. She has been a member of the non-profit association since 2017 to promote intercultural encounters between refugees, migrants, and the Giessen society. She graduated from Justus Liebig University Giessen with a bachelor's degree in Social Sciences, and in 2020 she started the master's program Democracy and Governance.

Deanna Dadusc is a Senior Lecturer in Criminology at the University of Brighton, where she teaches and researches on the

criminalisation of migration and of practices of resistance to the border regime. Deanna co-coordinates the Research Area Mobility: Migrations and Borders at FAC research. She is also a member of the Watch the Med—Alarm Phone activist network, a hotline in solidarity with migrants crossing the Mediterranean Sea.

Eugenia (Gigi) D'Ermoggine is an activist, educator and researcher. She came to Sindihogar/Sindillar within the framework of the internships of the Master's in Visual Arts and Education of the University of Barcelona in 2019. Since then, she has been actively working on the production of projects of social change through the body and creativity.

Cuso Ehrich is an activist, facilitator, and educator who joined An.ge.kommen in early 2022. They are a board member of the National Association Trans* in Germany and co-produce and co-host the independent podcasts DIASPORA.ASIA and "Hast du Alles?", trying to help develop resources for movements striving for intersectional justice.

Shareen Elnaschie is a spatial designer, creative researcher and design educator working at the intersection of international cooperation, sustainable development and humanitarian aid. In 2016 she co-founded Office of Displaced Designers (ODD), a collaborative design and education platform working primarily on issues of displacement and marginalisation.

Norma Falconi is a militant. Since her arrival in Barcelona in 1996, she has been at the forefront fighting for the rights of migrant people, founding and representing various groups, including the "Papers for Everyone" Assembly (1996) and Sindillar/Sindihogar (2011). In 2001, she was a spokesperson for the confinement of undocumented immigrants in Barcelona, an event that concluded with an agreement in which papers/Residence and Work Authorization were granted to everyone. Since 2012 she has been a member of the board of Women's Cultural Centre Francesca Bonnemaïson—La Bonne.

Ramona Lissette Fernández is a migrant and activist in Sindillar since 2018.

Karina Fulladosa-Leal is a Sindillar/Sindihogar activist and social researcher. She received her PhD in Social Psychology from the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB). Her dissertation is entitled *Women in movement: expanding the margins of social and political participation in collective action as domestic and care workers* (2017). She is a member of the group Fractalities in Critical Research (FIC). She is currently a member of the core commission of the Women's Cultural Centre Francesca Bonnemaïson—La Bonne.

Marina Faherty, M.A., is an advisor in an educational counselling centre and a youth psychotherapist in training. She is a founding member of An.ge.kommen where she has been active from 2015 to 2021, and was part of the BRIDGES Collective from 2019-2021.

Sebastian Garbe is a sociologist and works as a postdoctoral researcher and research coordinator at the University of Applied Sciences Fulda. He obtained his PhD in Sociology in 2021 at Justus-Liebig University Giessen. His teaching and research focuses on post- and decolonial theory as well as on protest, solidarity, and social movements. In the past years, he was engaged in international solidarity and human rights activism with the Mapuche and is part of the frankfurt postkolonial collective.

Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez is Professor in Sociology with a focus on Culture and Migration at Goethe University, Frankfurt am Main. Previously, she was Professor in General Sociology at Justus-Liebig-University Giessen. She has been an early and staunch advocate of decolonial theory in the German-speaking world and has published widely on gender; the coloniality of migration; institutional racism and racial capitalism; care work and affective labour. She has recently published with Shirley Anne Tate the *Palgrave Handbook in Critical Race and Gender* and with Rhoda Reddock *Decolonial Perspectives on Entangled Inequalities: Europe and the Caribbean*.

Lazaros Rafail Kouzelis is a media designer, narrative producer and game developer, currently working on his PhD on immersive narratives and worldbuilding.

Marina Liaki holds a master's in information and communications. She has been passionate about human rights, foreign

languages, and intercultural communications from a very young age, which led her to start her own organisation, Za'atar NGO.

Marisela Montenegro Martínez is a social psychologist from the Universidad Central de Venezuela. She works as a professor at the Department of Social Psychology (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona). Her research activity focuses on the critical and postcolonial analysis of research, teaching, and social work in areas such as social services for migrant women, social movements, and the social construction of gender and sexuality.

Marleno Nika is a migrant from Albania who studies philology at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, with the hope and fear of becoming a linguist some day. In Athens, he likes participating in creating artistic and political spaces for migrants and queer people, as well as making fanzines, appreciating poetry, and taking photos. He has been part of Za'atar NGO as a teacher and coordinator since 2019.

Douglas Neander Sambati holds a PhD in historical sociology from Charles University in Prague and was a researcher at JLU in 2020. Currently he is an independent researcher, interested in sociomuseology, nationalism, representations, intercultural perspectives and anarchist theories.

Francina Planas Piedra is a social psychologist, psychopedagogue, and activist. She is interested in gender, migration and critical social psychology. She has been supporting migrant people in their proceeding to get social and working empowerment and, nowadays, she is working as a psychopedagogue in schools and high-schools and conducts workshops for young people in non-formal education organisations. She has a close connection with her hometown, Sallent de Llobregat, from where she keeps fighting collectively against intersectional oppressions, convinced that changes are produced in our immediate environment.

Álvaro Ramírez-March is a social researcher, activist, and an amateur drummer. He is interested in critical migration studies, social movements, and qualitative and participatory methodologies. His recently finalised PhD dissertation, titled *Solidarity movements in the face of the 'refugee crisis': between humanitarianism and the new infrastructures for the freedom of movement* (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, 2022), deals with the ambivalent role of the migrant solidarity movement in Catalonia when facing the violence of Fortress Europe. He lives, dreams, and organises against borders in Barcelona.

Aude Sathoud is an Afropean explorer of the human condition and existence dancing on borders and trying to make sense of the beauty and chaos of the world through research, activism, and art. In a constant movement between theory and praxis, they

have been studying political humanities and working in NGOs supporting asylum-seekers and migrants in Athens and Paris for the past few years.

Aila Spathopoulou is a postdoctoral researcher in the Department of Geography at Durham University. She is co-coordinator of the Research Area: Mobility: Migration and Borders at the Feminist Autonomous Centre for research in Athens. Aila completed her PhD in human geography, focusing on processes of bordering and governmentality of migrants through the hotspot system in Greece.

Sandra Tejada Mejía is a Colombian transfeminist psychotherapist and social psychologist (UAB). She is co-founder of Psicomigra, an association for therapeutic care and social/community intervention located in Barcelona. As a social practitioner and an activist, she is interested in community-based interventions that aim at fostering the agency of communities affected by intersecting oppressions.

Myrto Tsilimpounidi is a social researcher, photographer, and a transfeminist. They are the author of *Reproducing Refugees: Photographia of a Crisis* (Rowman & Littlefield International, 2020) and *Sociology of Crisis: Visualising Urban Austerity* (Routledge, 2017); and editor of *Street Art & Graffiti: Reading, Writing & Representing the City* (Routledge, 2017). Myrto is co-director of FAC research in Athens.