Epistemic-corporeal workshops: putting strong reflexivity into practice

Marisa G. Ruiz-Trejo a and Dau García-Dauder b

aUniversidad Autónoma de Chiapas, San Cristóbal de las Casas, Mexico; bUniversidad Rey Juan Carlos, Madrid, Spain

ABSTRACT
The approaches of decolonial anthropology and feminist epistemologies have allowed new reflections on ethnographic practice. Drawing from this framework, we propose epistemic-corporeal workshops as spaces focused on the body and emotions for researchers to discuss their work, and as privileged methodologies for a collective and embodied “strong reflexivity” (placing the subject on the same level than the object of research [Harding 1991]) about the purpose of ethnographic work: not only about “knowing what” but also about “knowing how,” as well as about aspects of research that have traditionally been discarded. In the article, we bring together the description of the exercises of the workshops, the collective reflections arising from them, and three theoretical artifacts for their analysis: “corporeal practices in research”; “committed articulation”; and “off-field epistemologies.” As a result, we analyze the role of the body and emotions in the research process; the networks and attachments that are generated, how and from where we commit ourselves to what we research; relations of power and epistemic violence in research practice; and the dilemmas, encounters, and tensions between research and activism. This article is a preliminary approach and an explanation from the designers and facilitators of the workshops who do not have the proper knowledge themselves, but who create said knowledge with the participants of these spaces as well as developing new tools for questioning power relationships between the participants and the researcher.

Oficinas epistêmico-corporais: pôr colocar em prática a reflexividade forte

RESUMO
As abordagens da antropologia descolonial e das epistemologias feministas permitiram novas reflexões sobre a prática etnográfica. A partir desse quadro, propomos as oficinas epistêmico-corporais como metodologias privilegiadas de “reflexividade forte” (que são aquelas que colocam o sujeito no mesmo nível que o objeto de pesquisa [Harding 1991]), coletiva e encarnada, sobre o trabalho etnográfico, não apenas sobre “saber o quê sabemos,” mas principalmente sobre...
“saber como sabemos,” assim como abrange aspectos que são tradicionalmente descartados da pesquisa. No artigo, combinamos a descrição dos exercícios realizados nas oficinas, as reflexões coletivas decorrentes dos mesmos, assim como três artefatos teóricos para sua análise: as “práticas corporais na pesquisa,” a “articulação comprometida” e as “epistemologias do fora decampo.” Como resultado, analisamos o papel do corpo e das emoções no processo de pesquisa; as redes e os vínculos que se geram, quer dizer, como e desde onde nos comprometemos com o que pesquisamos; as relações de poder e as violências epistêmicas existentes na prática da pesquisa; assim como os dilemas, encontros e desencontros entre pesquisa e ativismo. Este artigo é uma primeira aproximação e uma explicação para os designers e facilitadorxs das oficinas que não possuem um conhecimento correto, mas que criam esse conhecimento durante os encontros junto aos participantes desses espaços, bem como novas ferramentas que úteis para questionar as relações de poder entre os participantes e quem pesquisa.

**Talleres epistémico-corporales: poniendo en práctica la reflexividad fuerte**

**RESUMEN**

Los planteamientos de la antropología decolonial y las epistemologías feministas han permitido nuevas reflexiones sobre la práctica etnográfica. Desde dicho marco, proponemos los talleres epistémico-corporales como metodologías privilegiadas para la “reflexividad fuerte” (ubicar al sujeto al mismo nivel que el objeto de investigación [Harding 1991]), colectiva y encarnada, sobre el quehacer etnográfico, no sólo sobre “el saber qué” sino sobre el “saber cómo” y sobre aspectos de la investigación tradicionalmente desechados. En el artículo, conjugamos la descripción de los ejercicios de los talleres, las reflexiones colectivas surgidas de ellos, y tres artefactos teóricos para su análisis: las “prácticas corporales en investigación,” la “articulación comprometida” y las “epistemologías fuera de campo.” Como resultado, analizamos el papel del cuerpo y las emociones en el proceso de investigación; las redes y vínculos que se generan, cómo y desde dónde nos comprometemos con lo que investigamos; las relaciones de poder y las violencias epistêmicas en la práctica investigadora; y los dilemas, encuentros y desencuentros entre investigación y activismo. Este artículo es una primera aproximación y una explicación para lxs diseñadores y facilitadorxs de los talleres que no tienen un conocimiento correcto, pero que crean dicho conocimiento en conjunto con los participantes de estos espacios, así como nuevas herramientas para poner en cuestión relaciones de poder entre los participantes y quien investiga.

1. **Introduction**

In this article, we propose a preliminary approach to the idea of *epistemic-corporeal workshops* focused on body and emotions as spaces for researchers to discuss their work, and as methodologies for collective reflection and embodied ethnographic practice. Following the work of Tuana (2006), we understand “epistemic-corporeal”\(^1\) as the taking back of our

\(^{1}\)We comprehend “epistemic-corporeal” in a broad sense, not as something that draws a distinction between the body, the subjective and the social or between the body and emotion. We do not understand the body in a dualistic sense, as
bodies and emotions by returning the knowledge into our own hands. “Epistemic-corporeal” does not simply consist in consulting academic books to understand the body or emotions, but in turning to our bodies. The corporeal exercises that we propose in our workshops are an epistemic practice that feminist researchers use to challenge ignorance. As Tuana (2006) understands, politics demands embodied knowledge, which in turn illuminates the profound ignorance of standard accounts.

The workshops which the article describes are relevant spaces being created to facilitate conversations among researchers and are of great importance for the academic community against a background of the capitalist productive dynamics that saturate academia, resulting in a lack of essential conversations that tackle the role of researchers, the impact researchers have in communities, the wellbeing of researchers and participants and the importance of paying attention to the body and emotions.\(^2\)

To this end, we choose feminist epistemologies and activist research\(^3\) that converge on the questioning of epistemic individualism and a non-representational vision of knowledge, on the relevance of the subject and subjectivity in the research process, on the recovery of embodied and experiential knowledge, and on the knowing to transform. These perspectives understand “objectivity” as situated, committed, and responsible knowledge that by necessity passes through exercises of “strong reflexivity” regarding research processes (Harding 1996; Guber 2014). “Strong reflexivity” requires the development of critical research that sees the need:

- to study and learn about our dominant group selves and our culture without either replicating the conventional ethnocentric perspectives that rely on our spontaneous consciousness of the experiences in our lives, or inappropriately appropriating the experience of those others whose voices have led us to see the need to rethink our views of ourselves. (Harding 1991, 271)

We created the epistemic-corporeal workshops precisely to carry out the practice of said reflexivity concerning ethnographic work – as collective spaces that allow auto-biographical narration – but also intersubjective dialogue, aiding in both the locating of discourse as well as the recognition of relationships of power.\(^4\) The workshops permit theorizing from lived practices and experiences and from collective and embodied reflection. They are

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\(^2\)We locate this work in the study of the body in Social Sciences or in the social theory of the body, which has been a focus of various classic authors including Bryan Turner, Pierre Bourdieu, Marcel Mass, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Mary Douglas, Michel Foucault, Nacy Scheper-Hughes, Thomas Csordas, David Le Breton, among others. For some of the discussions rooted in the field of body studies, see Esteban (2004).

\(^3\)We move at the intersection between the contributions of feminist epistemologies (from different contexts of production, but especially from the Global South) and the contributions from different exercises of committed activist research (whether participatory-action, cooperative, or co-labor, for example). We understand by “activist research” the construction of collective knowledge with an explicit political intention, to the service of critical processes and social transformation. This implies addressing the tensions between the committed academia and alter-/anti-activism (Leyva 2015), but also recognizing different knowledge practices that do not necessarily go through academic avenues or the research itself, but which are generated from women’s organizations and social movements (Bastian and Berrio 2015). The incorporation of these approaches to anthropology has given the discipline tools of intervention toward the decolonizing and depatriarchalizing of academia and scientific knowledge. These tools, even if not legitimized, allow the analysis of how different oppressions intersect in research practices.

\(^4\)Following Sandra Harding’s work, in these workshops we collectively reconsider if “is it only the lives of the oppressed that can generate knowledge, especially liberatory knowledge? What can the role in knowledge-seeking be for the lives of those of us who are or would be white antiracists, male feminists, heterosexual anti-heterosexists, economically overadvantaged people against class exploitation and the like? And is articulated experience the grounds or the precondition for knowledge?” (Harding 1991, 271).
stoppages or “parentheses” in research used to reflect collectively on the “knowing how” our practices, our bodies and emotions within said research, our relationships of power, and our conflicts and tensions surrounding the position of the researcher all manifest. In that sense, the workshops break silences and solitude in research processes, generate knowledge, and sometimes even have “cathartic” effects.

Three theoretical-political artifacts have helped us conceptualize the workshops: “corporeal practices in research,” “committed articulation,” and “off-field epistemologies.” The concept “corporeal practices in research” not only refers to the epistemic value of the body, to embodied knowledge, but also serves to give thought to how the exercise of research and the academic in general tries to discipline and regulate bodies (understanding bodies from a physiological, subjective, and social viewpoint and as crossed by social structures and axes of oppression that intersect) in such a way that certain bodies (which are both marked and unmarked, masculine, white, heterosexual and so forth) seem to hold a certain epistemic privilege, while others are at a disadvantage (although they always produce resistance). In another vein, “committed articulation” allows us to imagine other forms of accompaniment and engagement within research. Many traditional methods and techniques have difficulty reflecting “bodily commitments” and the emotional implications generated within activist research, from which point knowledge is co-produced in relation (Esteban 2011). With this tool, it is not only the intention to break or interrupt the rigid and unequal separation between “subject of research” and “object of study,” but also to suggest alternative forms of articulation for positions that are heterogeneous, unequal, and conflicting from which committed and responsible knowledge may be generated. Finally, “off-field epistemologies” help us think about the surplus of research and the ignorance that may be generated, but which makes up the hidden frame of what is made visible.

In the article, we will conceptualize these three artifacts by combining the description of the practical exercises of the workshops, the collective reflections arising from them, and the theoretical tools proposed for their analysis. In short, the workshops allow us to put “strong reflexivity” into practice with regard to the production of situated knowledge, and to create spaces for reflection concerning the conflicts and tensions related to the position of the researcher.

2. Methodologies for reflection of processes

Following the feminist objectives of decolonizing and depatriarchalizing academia we have created the epistemic-corporeal workshops that are oriented not only to academic research but to any practice of knowledge generated from social struggle. These workshops have been organized in different universities, congresses, and social centers, including artistic practices.

5The first workshop was carried out at the Autonomous University of Chiapas (UNACH) in 2013 and subsequently, in 2014, at the Autonomous University of Madrid (UAM); several took place in the “Eskalera Karakola” and in other feminist organizations of Madrid in 2015; in 2016 at the Center for Higher Studies of Mexico and Central America (CESMECA), at the Faculty of Social Sciences, UNACH, at the Center for Research and Higher Studies in Social Anthropology (CIESAS) in Mexico City, as well as at the Center for Research and Gender Studies (CIEG), and the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). We also organized another workshop at the Congress of Science, Technology and Gender, at the University of Costa Rica. Three of the most recent workshops were held in “Punto Gozadera,” a Feminist Space in Mexico City (2016), at the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB) (2018) and at the Central American Sociology Congress in Guatemala (2018).
mainly directed at researchers who work in contexts of violence in Latin America, fundamentally through activist research. The workshops have largely been attended by feminist researchers, as well as anthropologists who dedicate themselves to ethnographic practice. Notably, we have facilitated several modalities of workshops, some lasting 2 hours, others 4, and others 15 (adapting the format and the exercises to the length of the workshop as necessary). We have developed practical exercises for each of the three theoretical–methodological artifacts previously mentioned, with the general objective of self-knowledge and collective reflection. Through the workshops we emphasize the importance of the knowledge of our lived realities and experiences – of privileges and oppressions – as the point of departure for research and political struggle. In addition, we are interested in reflecting about changes in complex research processes (rather than on products or publications) and about what is left out or treated as waste in any given research. We focus on the role of the body, subjectivity, and emotions in research, relations of power and the position from which we research and attach ourselves, the tensions between research and activism, and how all this is part of and traverses research processes, the actions and decisions taken and the joint co-production and transformation of the “subject/object” of study. Also, another objective that we pursue is the consideration of how to care for others and exercise self-care in research processes.

We understand the workshops as embodied spaces – no readings are discussed, rather we conceptualize feelings. Therefore, we intersperse dialogical exercises with others focused on corporeal interaction, taking care especially in the first moments of the presentation of going over previous agreements for safe spaces. The idea is to create a climate of trust that opens dialogue, intersubjective awareness and, at times, the relief of the non-spoken. In this manner, they become spaces of exchange where embodied knowledge and committed methodological processes are considered and discussed. In addition, the workshops are tools that help us to rethink ways of producing hybrid knowledge (alternatives to the distinction between “subject/object,” “expert/lay-person”) and different practices of articulation with those who are researched. In the following sections, we will present the three theoretical-methodological artifacts in more detail, with the goal of offering some of the contributions that we have recovered from the workshops organized in different spaces over the course of these years.

3. Corporeal practices in research

With the term “corporeal practices in research,” and following the work of feminist anthropologist Mari Luz Esteban (2004, 46), we are interested in “making the intertwining between one’s own corporeal experience with research conscious and explicit” in the workshops (what she calls “embodied anthropology”), in this way, breaking with that idea that the production of knowledge passes only through the mental dimension. These are exercises of “strong reflexivity” about experiences throughout the research process in which our body has been exposed in a more conscious and relevant way. These bodily and reflective exercises allow us to rethink the epistemic value of the body and of embodied knowledge, how bodies within research are regulated and standardized, and finally, the inter-corporeal “subject/object” dynamics. Furthermore, they allow us to analyze how certain bodies are at an epistemic (dis)advantage and are attributed more or less cognitive authority or legitimacy to be heard. We refer to social bodies
intersected by different axes of oppression (gender, race, class, sexual orientation, diversity of ability, and so on) and the reality of experiencing different forms of epistemic discrimination. In the workshops, multiple examples emerge of women researchers who are underestimated as “young” in research owing to their bodies, and it goes without saying that if these researchers are indigenous, their knowledge is rarely recognized as that of an expert and often, instead, as a testimony (Cumes 2015). In other cases, “compulsory heterosexuality” places those whose bodies and desires do not adapt to the norm in violent and uncomfortable positions (Rich 1980).

Thus, embodied subject positions are epistemologically relevant, not only because the body grants or negates legitimacy, but because the corporeal experience generates a point of view that opens or closes fields of ignorance, depending on their degree of comfort or discomfort in the social system of which one forms a part (Ahmed 2015). The subject position of “women” is a privileged starting point, albeit without guarantees, to ask research questions about gender inequalities (and conversely, normative positions are often blinding). It is not only that the epistemological approach itself can “mold” a corporeal attitude. The corporeal attitude of the positivist researcher, who understands objectivity as “distance” and “neutrality,” cannot be the same as one who understands research as a committed articulation. Research also does bodies in relation, from the academic-researcher habitus,7 to how we react to a body-other while reifying it.8 In our workshops, we usually start with two exercises in which the objective is this type of reflexivity about the body in research: “life lines” and “bodily itineraries in research.” The “life lines” activity emerged as a way of implementing “strong reflexivity” – that is, the “subject” of research is examined in the same terms as the “object” of knowledge (Harding 1996). This implies that the researcher herself/himself experiences the sensation of being located as “object,” either in the form of self-knowledge or through another’s gaze. From this perspective, objectivity is not possible from a disembodied position that has not been self-observed, without self-knowledge – on the contrary, “it is pertinent to start from oneself to know others” (Esteban 2004). In the words of Black lesbian feminist Audre Lorde (1998, 93), it is necessary that we: “reach down into that deep place of knowledge inside ourselves and touch that terror and loathing of any difference that lives there. See whose face it wears. Then the personal as the political can begin to illuminate all our choices.”

Concretely, the “life lines”9 exercise consists of the construction of a biographical narration, through self-observation and reflexivity. Said narrations, however, must be guided by an awareness of the privileges and oppressions that have been experienced (with regard to the latter, also emphasizing resistance). To achieve this, in the workshops we give the following instructions: “trace an imaginary life line, identify violence/oppression that you have experienced at different times (with their corresponding vulnerabilities); reflect on the resistance strategies that you have adopted; and finally, identify privileges that you

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7 Composed of an androcentric space that generates a male and social class habitus. Many researchers learn to develop “corporeal authority” through certain gestures or body postures: hyper-straight backs, high chins, shoulders back, etc. To others, the masculine, class and heterosexual habitus produces the opposite: arched backs, shrunken shoulders, low voice, sweaty hands, etc.

8 And whenever we consider research as knowledge of an “Other.”

9 This exercise is indebted to other training courses in which we have participated, such as those organized by the Latin American Study, Training and Feminist Action Group (GLEYFAS), in which Ochy Curiel and Yuderkys Espinosa emphasize the importance of reflecting on one’s own privileges; also those organized by Marcela Lagarde with her insistence on analyzing not only violence but also the possibilities of resistance.
have enjoyed.” Afterwards, the individual writing is read as a group, depending on the needs and care required by each participant and ensuring that no one feels judged. Finally, a sharing of the main ideas is done as part of a process of a collective construction of knowledge about lived experiences. With this exercise in our workshops, participants often realize for the first time that they are white, heterosexual, or they become conscious that they have privileges because they are white antiracists, male feminists, heterosexual anti-heterosexists, etc. Sometimes, they discover that their own lives as researchers are at the center of the social order and that they don’t have the same experiences and lives of racially marginalized people, the poor, sexual dissidents, and/or women. In other cases, when the participants are feminist, lesbian, working-class, trans or Afrodescendent people, they discover that they may have an epistemic advantage because their experiences and their lives, traversed by sexism, lesbo or transphobia or racism, could give them (not as a guarantee) a better understanding of injustice and violence.

After that, usually in another session, we carry out the exercise of “bodily itineraries” in research, based on the theoretical–methodological proposal of Esteban (2004). In this case, they are bodily itineraries written by researchers about their own research processes (depending on the specific topics they work on), with the aim of reflecting on their “bodily commitment” within the research – following Esteban (2008) herself. The objective is to apply corporeal theory to research practice in a reflexive exercise of self-knowledge (understanding “research” in all its extensions, not only as field work). The itineraries do not mean linearity, but rather significant corporeal “fragments.” It is about addressing the tension between the individual, social, and political body, since, although they are narrated as individual processes, they always refer to a collective. The body is analyzed as a place of social inequality, but also of empowerment, from a “conflictive, interactive and resistant embodiment” (Esteban 2004, 47–48).

For this self-reflection about our bodies within research, we give the following instructions in the workshops:

- identify scenes, moments or situations of the research process (or of your research career) where your body has been exposed or you have experienced it with greater intensity or

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10 After the writing exercise, creative materials can be used to complement the lifeline (drawings, collages, performances, songs, theater, etc.).

11 For example, once in Chiapas, a participant of our workshop identified her vulnerability as a white economically over-advantaged person and we had an extensive discussion where we questioned if being white in a racist society could be possibly considered as oppression. We made a proposal to the participant to think about being white as a privilege at the center of a social structure. On a number of occasions, there have been participants of the workshops who have felt attacked when asked to recognize their privileges. Many of them claim that it is not right to speak in terms of “being white” or “being Black,” “being straight” or “being a lesbian” because “differences do not exist,” “we are all equal,” “I was taught to treat everyone the same,” “Racism doesn’t exist,” “I am not racist,” “I know people of color, queer people or poor people.” Many consider talking about differences to be dangerous. As such, in the workshops, we aim to transmit that it is one thing to recognize that differences are socially constructed and another thing to deny that racism, classism and (hetero) sexism operate in a neoliberal society. In that sense, we analyze vulnerabilities, violence and oppression on two different levels: (1) a level which implies an analysis of structural historical oppressions and (2) a level which involves a reflection about the different contexts and times in which we perceive vulnerability. These types of exercises aid us in understanding our places of articulation or our positionality (to be conscious of our own biases, worldview, values, and experiences and how the influence of our own background affects the research). For an explanation of positionality, see Alcoff (1988) and for an interesting study on white privilege, see DiAngelo (2018). Various significant debates concerning racism in feminist and queer movements can be found in Puar (2007) and Rojas (2017).

12 Reflection often also serves for the corporeal empowerment of female researchers.

13 For Esteban, the bodily itineraries involve the paradox of “narrating the body,” for which she recommends the complementary use of other more corporeal techniques.
awareness; describe it in detail, prioritizing physical/corporeal sensations or practices; write it in two or three pages moving from the corporeal to the subjective and the social, from the micro to the macro, placing experiences in contexts.14

After both individual consideration and the group reading of the itineraries, the discussion and collective reflection is oriented towards “embodied” and “emotional” power relations in the research process. Two exercises are related to this: how the privileges and vulnerabilities of the researcher herself are incorporated or become embodied in the research process, and the committed articulation with what/who is being researched.

With this exercise the participants of the workshops manage to have a space to reflect on their experiences in field work, and to do an exercise of deep recognition regarding the power relations they face when conducting research. For example, through this exercise, a girl who worked in a men’s prison realized how her female body was exposed every time she entered the prison. However, she also perceived her experience of the privilege of freedom every time she left the center. On another occasion, for one of the participants this exercise served as an opportunity to talk about a situation of harassment that she had experienced during her field work, since during her research she had not had the space to be able to talk with anyone about the violence she had gone through. She was simultaneously able to elaborate upon her identity within that context as a white, educated and urban woman working in a rural Indigenous community. This experience allowed us to further discuss situations in which we may be involved; situations of sexual violence, harassment, and concerns for safety as well as the privileges that we experience when doing research but which are, at the same time, difficult to narrate in academic spaces, seeing as that for androcentric objectivity (as opposed to “strong objectivity”) these types of experiences do not alter results nor are considered to be a part of them.

4. Committed articulation

“Committed articulation” is a type of qualitative research method employed, not to simply collect data or study or learn from the culture of others, nor to aim to truly represent people’s mentalities, but to explain the non-neutral, located, partial, responsible, critical and committed way with which we approach the people with whom we work; to expose how our subjectivity, our context and our emotions influence results and to communicate how it is possible not only to engage in participant observation, but to engage and articulate ourselves with and within the groups, communities or individuals involved in our work. We propose “committed articulation”15 as a theoretical artifact that alludes to a particular type of ethnographic research methodology, focused more on processes, practices, and accompaniments than in concrete or specific techniques of information collection. With the concept of “articulation,“ we attempt to break with the rigid and hierarchical distinction between subject/object of research as well as with individualist and

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14We use the text “The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action” by Lorde (2003) to “warm up” the voice and explain the importance of telling our own personal experiences.

15This work is indebted to other uses of “articulation” in research: García-Dauder and Romero-Bachiller (2002), Montenegro and Pujol (2014), Cruz (2015) and Ruiz-Trejo (2015).
representationalist views of science. In addition, we suggest working in a “committed” manner with those with whom we collaborate in our research, that is, to assume a transformative character within the research, not neutral. This concept arose from feminist criticism regarding the insufficiency of certain techniques, such as the interview or participant observation used to apprehend research processes in which intersubjective or related knowledge is produced. This insufficiency is observable in less concrete situations than hitting record on a tape recorder – more diluted in time – from the point of “making attachments” or “corporeal commitment” (Esteban 2011).

With “committed articulation,” we aim to question epistemic individualism. Knowledge is not a product, but a collective process, a community activity that arises from social practices. Further, and as previously mentioned, not all positions are equivalent and possess different conditions of possibility for the development of an accepted or legitimated knowledge. Faced with the isolated discoverer, we emphasize the importance of linking the material conditions of knowledge production with its generation: for example, contexts of crisis and war and “other knowledge practices” (Leyva 2015).

Articulation also breaks with the idea of an autonomous subject of knowledge. Faced with notions of “static objectivity,” based on defensive distancing and on control and domination between the subject/object, we start from a “relational objectivity” that makes use of subjective experience in the search for knowledge and recognizes the differentiation between self and other as an opportunity for a deeper and more articulated relationship, to affect or be affected (Keller 1991). In this way, the epistemic potential of experiences of emotional or – why not – passionate involvement, is highlighted: the uses of the erotic (desires, dances, meals, and so on) as a source of power and knowledge (Campbell 2001; Lorde 2003).

This relational objectivity clashes, for example, with a hierarchical model of conducting interviews based on the distinction and distancing between interviewer/interviewee or subject/object (easily converted into object-that-is-used). This becomes somewhat complicated when both sides of the communication have shared life experiences (as often happens in activist research). The articulation thus implies forms of processual accompaniment, conversations and bidirectional questions, and reciprocal and shared vulnerabilities that, far from being biases that threaten objectivity, open the confidence for intersubjective and dialogical knowledge (Oakley 1981). When we talk about emotional involvement or care with what/whom we research, we also refer to responsibility (in voices or partial perspectives, in writing) and this also implies knowing to what extent the research has modified their experiences and affected them.

16The representationist view from philosophy of science alludes to a way of understanding knowledge in terms of an individual-subject that represents an object “as a mirror.” This implies the absence of values or any emotional involvement which mediates said knowledge and may distort it.

17Following Aparicio (1998) and his “mixture of deconstruction with dance,” using the cry of Emma Goldman, Ruiz-Trejo (2015) shows in her doctoral thesis on the political economy of love in Latin radio that “if you cannot dance it is not my research.”

18Among others, it answers the question: “why are we interested?”.

19With their associated anxieties, sometimes blocks in writing are reached or the decision not to write because doing so can cause harm.

20Blázquez, Bustos, and Restrepo (2010) analyzed, for example, the transformative nature of their interviews with academic women who, in their vital retrospectives, were surprised to become aware of the gender discriminations they had experienced in their trajectories and their own resistances.
With committed articulation, we aim to avoid references or visual metaphors – such as observation – charged with connotations of distance and representation. The promise of objectivity through the visual has been based on the subject/object separation between an individual who perceives/knowledges and an object that is perceived/known. From the perspective of Western philosophy, vision connects us with truth, with the eye seen as a model of the intellect, of the mental, paradoxically dissociated from the bodily/sensory, as a passive and transparent lens of reality (Keller and Grontkowski 1983); and, at the same time, “as the regulatory eyes on racist and civilizing practices” (Chivalan 2015). In addition, vision is associated with objectivity due to its apparent “timelessness,” as in a fixed photo, and its apparent “dynamic neutrality” – one can look without touching or being touched, one can distance oneself from the action, from the interaction, and even depend on distance to be able to see. Some authors have criticized this “masculine” and “Western-modern” logic of vision as a privileged epistemic sense, in relation to other “minor” feminized senses, such as the tactile or voiced-heard (Irigaray 1980; Esteban 2016).

With our workshops, we extend an invitation to reflect on how our conception of knowledge would differ if it were based on other sensory metaphors. For example, knowledge linked to the sense of hearing would connect us further with relational and dialogical notions of reality – “knowing by hearing” – listening, and asking (Bastian and Berrío 2015). Not only can knowledge united with orality be recovered, but the potentialities of voice as representative of different subject positions can be analyzed (Esteban 2016). As an additional example, knowledge of how to interpret silences can be developed. In another vein, knowing invokes the experience of touching, of corporeal mediation. Unlike the gaze, which does not require being part of the material world, knowing-feeling through touch necessarily implicates the object, processes of “knowing how” and of “knowing doing,” of combining intellectual tools with manual tools (Rivera-Cusicanqui 2014), knowing-feeling (sentir-pensar) (Méndez-Torres 2013), and the conjunction of “hand, brain and heart” (Rose 1987).

With the term articulation, we recover touch but, in turn, the potential of “epistemic synaesthesia,” or the unexpected interference between some senses and others, instead of choosing one as privileged: knowing through the partial gaze but also through listening to the other, through contact, and with sensitivity. This can be exemplified by, and following Haraway (1995), other models of vision that touch, connect, or communicate – looking in the eyes, touching with the gaze. In this way, the embodied nature of sight is reclaimed – the partial vision from a complex and contradictory body. Hence the responsibility of the gaze, of how we look. Sight and voice respond to positioning in relation to, and depend on, recognition, legitimacy, and power struggles: an articulation of partial vision, from somewhere in particular, and halting voices in a collective subject position. We can also speak of a visionary vision: the hope of transforming knowledge (Haraway 1995). In short, articulation helps us to revise and re-signify the concept of scientific objectivity, rethinking the notion of transcendent neutrality, of the invisible and unmarked “modest witness” of modern science (Haraway 1999). This is linked to “strong objectivity” – situated and responsible knowledge – but it is also open to partial connections (Haraway 1995; Harding 1996). It is about generating knowledge, not as a form of representation of an

21For a large part of feminist theory, silence has been associated with oppression. However, silence must also be considered as a strategy of resistance to situations of risk, danger, and vulnerability, not so much as an “absence” but a “presence.”
already given object, but as articulatory practices where dialogical knowledge emerges, from a point of respect, deep listening, and awareness of a plurality of positions, although it sometimes may be a person – or team – who/that writes and articulates, in turn, with the reader (Leyva 2015).

This breaks with the “semiotic politics of representation” (Haraway 1999), whose effectiveness is based on distancing operations, which implies an absence of values or of any emotional involvement that may cause distortion. “The represented is reduced to the permanent status of a recipient of the action, never able to be a co-actor in an articulated practice among unlike, but joined, social partners” (Haraway 1999, 138). For example, through “colonial ventriloquism,” “the agency of othered subjects is kidnapped and their voice only exists through the voice of another” (Méndez-Torres 2011, 6).

Within “semiotic politics of articulation” (Haraway 1999), knowledge does not emanate from the power to represent at a distance, but from forms of articulation and accompaniment from unequal positions where the subject/object of research is constituted. In this social and relational way, objects of knowledge are created. Reality or objects do not precede research practices, but rather they are what make up said practices, and their borders emerge from social interaction (Mol 2002). Faced with the idea of a “modest witness” or impartial observer, the researchers interfere with the research while researching it. Hence the importance of reflexivity, not the effects of distance, but the effects of connection, of embodiment, and of responsibility (Haraway1999, 122).

One exercise that we do in our workshops is to ask the researchers to draw their “object of study.” In most cases, the “objects” are subsequently exposed as if in a photo aiming to capture an “original representation” and the researchers themselves almost never appear as part of the drawing. After explaining the concept of committed articulation, exploring how traditional science has constructed a strict separation between the subject/object of study, we ask the participants if they would change their original creation somewhat: this results in them introducing themselves or their teams into their drawings in an exercise of reflexivity, thus representing different ways of bonding. With this, we want to explain a key idea of feminist epistemologies: that the subject of knowledge must be on the same explanatory and analytical level as the object of knowledge. Far from presupposing an aseptic distance, “strong reflexivity” (Harding 1996) implies a committed participation through which the subject of knowledge is not disassociated from the research process and the effects it causes. Therefore, with transformation we talk more about commitment – corporeal or emotional – than about participation.

To articulate means creating terms of agreement, or “putting things together, scary things, risky things, contingent things” (Haraway 1999, 150). This involves building and reconstructing research tools in joint action, which enables us to make visible that part of the fabric we have been weaving (Rivera-Cusicanqui 2014); for example, to construct dialogical research with alliances between organized groups of women and researchers, where reciprocal devolution takes on great importance (Bastian and Berrío 2015). It may also involve generating “mutuality” and “shared support systems” as an alternative to dominant relationships. Thus it is of great importance to reflect about how we relate to what/whom we research, from where, for what, and for whom (and against whom), as well as the productive tensions between academia and various activisms (Leyva 2015). Within activist research, commitment and social transformation are ethical principles that require the creative construction of tools to generate dialogues rather than
otherness(es), to know partially, and weave threads and connections between emancipatory projects in the search for knowledge. It also involves collecting the production of knowledge outside of academic research, in meetings, assemblies, workshops, dialogues, pamphlets or manifestos, videos, and so on – breaking the dualism between academic theorizing-writing and “doing” activism (Bastian and Berrio 2015). Haraway (1995, 329) talks about “partial, locatable, critical knowledge sustaining the possibility of webs of connections called solidarity in politics and shared conversation in epistemology” – the articulation of different voices and points of view around shared objectives, from the tensions generated by the heterogeneity of experiences associated with oppressions that intersect. It is about articulating these multiple and contradictory social positions in which tension and conflict produce a more reflective and therefore more critical and objective knowledge: from “the knots of feminist wisdom” (Vargas 2015) or, as Aura Cumes points out (2015), “to create from disadvantages.”

5. Off-field epistemologies

The concept of “off-field” has its origin in cinema and allows us to build a simile of scientific writing as a camera or peephole that limits the space with focus, that frames the research reality and leaves what is considered “off-field” – part of reality too – outside the frame. At the same time, “off-field” refers to moments beyond what is considered “field work,” those that are not even described in the methodology, but that make up its hidden framework. It is that invisibility that surrounds the visible, where the life of the “characters” who leave the scene and the privacy of the researchers and their environment continues. Just as the attempt in cinema to hide the traces of how the production is carried out (except in the “making of” or false takes), many elements of the process are also erased in the publication of scientific research, which remain as epistemic residues of the technical apparatus, outside of the written. The difference is that while in cinema the spectator participates actively in the re-creation of what is left out – based on the information of what is inside, what is suggested, what is intuited – in research the frame is presented as closed – the imagination of the reader is cut off, the environment is neutralized. Being off-field is almost never neutral, as it conforms to the default values of science, the waste or surplus of science.

One part of the off-field epistemologies would constitute what Tuana (2006) has called “epistemologies of ignorance”: what we do not know or what we do not even know we do not know; what is not known because it does not matter or due to negligence; what they do not want us to know, or when we do not want to know because this implies affecting our privileges and interests. Off-field is often the knowledge produced by subjects with an epistemic disadvantage, invisibilized as non-knowledge. In the workshops, we sometimes introduce this concept as associated with “undone science” and link it to reflexive exercises about what is not known in each research process. However, as previously noted, the off-field is not only the production of “non-knowledge,” of “ignorance,” but its surplus, the detritus of research: what remains outside the writing process, of the communicable as defined under methodological norms, but with recyclable value as knowledge for research. The clearest example in a research process, that is often ignored, would be reproductive work, that which makes the material production of knowledge possible via
a subject with a body that, among other things, is fed. Not only that, the off-field is composed of conversations, confessions, cafes, or meals where the confidence necessary for generating knowledge is created and daily life is sustained. When we ask the participants about the off-field, they realize that they have walks, dances, and demonstrations with the groups or individuals with whom they do their research, they take care of the children or the dog of the person they want to interview; they share laughter, tears, silences, indignation, shame, anguish, hope, disappointment, and common pain – the whole range of emotions that make up a research process. These are the links that bind us to the people with whom we research, and through which we fight the recognition of our privileges and the externalization of our dilemmas. In our workshops, we propose to work on off-field epistemologies through the analysis of five axes: body, emotions, power, collectivity, and activism, as explained below.

The first axis consists of trying to identify any moment(s) in the research process where our bodies have been more evident, or we have been more aware of them (in the style of the body itineraries previously described). The off-field reflections around the body attempt to recover and remember the senses – for example, the role of touch, hearing, or smell in our research or any situation where they have been relevant. As we have already pointed out, we try to decentralize sight as a privileged sensory metaphor of knowledge, more disembodied than other senses, and thus break with “epistemological anesthesia,” the loss of sensitivity in knowledge. The idea in the workshops is to think about the possibilities of other senses: for example, considering touch as a sense that breaks the subject/object distinction of knowledge and links it to a more affective sense, to sensitivity. In addition, the off-field reflections serve to examine how “ideologies of voice” operate as mechanisms of power at specific moments of research (when the voice is usurped or raised, when voice is given, listened to, ignored, hushed, or silenced), voices at an epistemic disadvantage (“shrill”/feminine, “accented”/racialized) or understood as representatives of situated knowledge (Esteban 2016; Villaverde 2016). Or to consider the importance of recovering oral sources to counteract relations of power and the invisibility of certain voices in writing (“women have said more than they have written”) (Bastian and Berrio 2015). One can also “play” with “epistemological synesthesia,” the potential of the interference of the senses, as when one touches with the gaze, or understands how some senses are articulated with others. Ultimately, with this axis we intend to reflect – following Spinoza – on “what can a body do” in relation to knowledge.

A very powerful reflection that emerged in one of the workshops that we organized was manifested by a flip chart, where the participants drew a body upon which they specified some of the experiences they had lived in their research processes and how they were reflected corporeally. For example, the moments of tension in which a load had accumulated upon someone’s back, or a specific event in which the participants had experienced fear and their legs trembled, or bags under eyes were formed from the insomnia of writing nights, as well as the experience of migraines or stress cramps, containment or gagged

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22Who cooks, cleans, and cares while someone does research? We refer, for example, to the book by Gabriel (2014) on the invisibilization of the labour, care, and love of Jenny Marx and her children so that Karl Marx could write Das Kapital. A reproductive work intersected, in turn, by gender and class relations. But we also refer to the reproductive work that we can do as researchers, when we cook for those who are researched or collaborate in the work of feeding with those who work on “field.”

23For example, the interferences between sight and hearing, exemplified by skin and accents: how the voice can modify the perception of an appearance or how an appearance can modify the perception of a voice.
words, more gray hair and more dioptres. Although all of these experiences are usually considered outside the publishable, the researcher keeps them written in and on the body. A drawing such as this could illustrate an original manual of prevention of occupational hazards for researchers.

Our second axis of reflection is the connection between knowledge and emotions: the emotional experiences of the researchers or how the research affects us or how we feel about it (feelings towards the participants and team members, feelings towards the topic of study, feelings about how they affect us or affect the investigation, or if feelings are represented in publishable narratives, for example). One technique is to try to identify certain emotions or emotional moments that have been present or relevant in the research process, albeit as a non-publishable background: for example, shame, guilt, anger, fear, or disgust. These can be worked with as a “journey through the emotions” throughout the entire research process (Blakely 2007). Campbell (2001) speaks of “emotionally involved research,” for example, when working with sexual violence, in which the emotions of the researcher are both research tools and sources of information.24

Another modality is to focus on a single emotion, for example indignation or shame, and analyze how it has intersected or moved through different moments of the research process and its importance in the generation of knowledge in a “thematic” way. In particular, we follow the work of Ahmed (2015) on the cultural politics of emotions, applied in this case to feminist research. In her words, feminism takes the form of an emotional response “that involves a reorientation of our bodily relationship to social norms” (Ahmed 2015, 259). In the workshops, we work with the emotions that Ahmed considers to be the forgers of feminist attachments: indignation with injustice; pain25 as the effect of different forms of violence; love, desire, and joy in networks with other women; the astonishment that feels the ordinary as surprising; and the hope that structures the desire for change, as a thinkable openness to the possible. By uniting the two axes of the workshops, we also reflect on how emotions shape bodies and objects. And, following the same author in what she calls “queer feelings,” we address the epistemic potential of discomfort or disorientation and, conversely, the potential for ignorance stemming from comfort or convenience (especially with regard to embodied knowledge).

The third axis on which we work off-field epistemologies is power: the recognition of power relations and the dialogue about them. To this end, we introduce an exercise where the researchers reflect on situations in which they have been capable of exercising epistemic violence or, conversely, in which they have experienced situations of vulnerability in the research process. From this collective exchange, attempts are made to rethink the possibilities of more horizontal and less violent methodological experiences (from a point of mutual recognition and dialogue) between researchers and participants. This implies taking special care in recognizing heterogeneity and becoming aware of who we decide to dialogue with and who we legitimize (and who we do not) and why. Additionally, we recognize who speaks for whom and who has the authority to be heard. Further, the networks and links that are created in the research process are also

24 Sometimes generating “secondary victimizations” in researchers with fears and nightmares for example. In other cases, sensitizing via a saturation of violence.
25 Espinosa (2016) has analyzed the role of pain in ethnography: how the pain of the speaker is managed, when the researcher acts as a container for that pain or when she relives the pain she hears. Sometimes, in research processes, shared pain exchanges occur in exercises of reciprocal vulnerability which, in turn, generate knowledge.
important elements of the field. In the workshops, we try to discuss and reflect on how and from where we create said attachments (relate, engage, and so forth) with those we research, how our positioning affects the knowledge we produce, but also, how what we research questions us. In this way, we try to establish what the conditions of possibility would be for committed articulation, such as those already stipulated in the previous section.

Finally, and following the postulates of feminist epistemologies, it is essential to contemplate social transformation in the construction of knowledge. For that reason, the last axis on which we work off-field has to do with the political and ethical dilemmas that are outside of the publishable in activist research, but that are nonetheless an important tool of knowledge: when activism is disengaged with academia “at a highly stressed intersection” (Leyva 2015). In this axis, we work on social transformation versus the co-option and depoliticization that university institutions often produce; we ask who benefits from our research, in what circles and languages do its products circulate; we ask how we can and do simultaneously handle times, languages, and academic as well as activist formats; we ask what to do to incorporate more experiences, voices, and perspectives in academics as a strategy of transformation; and, finally, we ask how to avoid running the risk of co-opting the possibility of social transformation outside the academic space.

6. Final reflections

In summary, the “bodily-epistemic” workshops allow the verbalization and collective reflection about what the academic space and its scientific publications omit, exclude, or discard. In that sense, they turn silence into language and action (Lorde 2003). They constitute safe spaces where different researchers can talk about what is not talked about, their research processes, emotional and corporeal commitments, violence, and care. From these exchanges of “strong reflexivity,” much knowledge is generated, although delegitimized by dominant scientific research. The workshops thus become spaces for security and self-care, but at the same time they expose weaknesses and vulnerabilities, which can distance researchers who are resistant to exposing their subjectivities in the skin, under a mask of an apparent neutrality, rationality, and scientific incorporeality. This would imply losing power and becoming aware of how privileges mark a research process.

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Notes on contributors

**Marisa G. Ruiz-Trejo** (1984) is a feminist anthropologist from Chiapas, Mexico. She is the person responsible for the Cultural Diversity Studies and Social Spaces Master Program and professor at the Indigenous Studies Institute, at the Autonomous University of Chiapas (UNACH). She has participated in the elaboration of historical-anthropological reports in trials concerning racism, genocide and sexual violence against Indigenous women in Guatemala. Currently, she analyzes epistemologies, theories and decolonizing feminist practices in Chiapas and Central America. She is part of the Feminist Pluridiversities Collective (Colectiva Pluriversidades Feministas), an autonomous and self-managed feminist educational endeavor.

**Dau García-Dauder** (Madrid, 1973) holds a PhD in Psychology and is a professor of social psychology at Rey Juan Carlos University, Madrid. S/he has participated in various research projects on science, technology and gender and has published several articles on the relation between psychology and feminism and on pioneering women psychologists and social scientists. S/he is the author and co-author of the books *Psicología y Feminismo. Historia olvidada de mujeres pioneras en Psicología* (2005), *El eje del mal es heterosexual. Figuraciones, movimientos y prácticas feministas queer* (2005) and *Las mentiras científicas sobre las mujeres* (2017).

**ORCID**

Marisa G. Ruiz-Trejo [http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4012-5601](http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4012-5601)

Dau García-Dauder [http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7978-5263](http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7978-5263)

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