RePLITO

Solidarity

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Published on: Jul 20, 2021

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The expression of solidarity can be understood as a core element of living together, through which togetherness characterized by acceptance, mutuality and reciprocity is promoted. However, solidarity can as well demonstrate a unifying oppositional attitude toward political and social conditions. It is frequently evoked in contexts of resistance to the normative order. The emergence of an “oppositional consciousness” ([Mansbridge & Morris, 2001: 240](#)) requires an understanding of injustice as systemic, at least a partial identification with unjustly subordinated groups and the drive for collective action. Accordingly, it is one of the defining characteristics of social movements. It is considered an essential motivation for joint action, since it collectivizes what would otherwise remain individual experiences and emotions ([Stewart & Schultze, 2019](#)). However, solidarity creates networks but does not necessarily facilitates egalitarianism, it is a relation that is negotiated across power imbalances ([Mohanty, 2003](#)). Dynamics are often contradictory. Regarding the media and performative dimensions of solidarity, the social discourse at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic conjured up global solidarity in many ways. At the same time, its exercise has been called into question, for example, by the unequal distribution of vaccines. Further noteworthy is the invocation of transnational solidarity in postcolonial contexts, both in anti-colonial solidarization ([Craggs, 2014](#)) and in the understanding of postcolonial global feminist solidarity ([Mohanty, 2003](#)).

In the following, the relationship between social movements, media and solidarity will be the main focus.

“Solidarity often acts as a conceptual bridge between imagined siblings: ‘fraternity’ was the original conception of political modernity (as per the French revolution) before ‘solidarity’ took its place, suggesting a move away from family and the immediate Gemeinschaft [community] towards the broader political community of the Anthropos. This wider humanistic sense allowed the imagining and encompassing of remote relations in a polity whose scope transcended immediate, face-to-face allegiances.” ([Rakopoulos, 2016: 146](#))

The political origins of solidarity are especially found in struggles of the antifascist, anticolonial, antiapartheid and civil rights movements. As noted above, transnational solidarity is often evoked in postcolonial context, i.e. in the Tricontinental that founded the Organization of Solidarity of the Peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America (OSPAAAL) ([Mahler, 2018](#)) or the Non-Aligned Movement ([Arnold, 2010](#)).

According to Hannah Arendt, solidarity is the alternative to pity – conceived by her as the perversion of compassion. It is through solidarity that a community of interest with the marginalised, oppressed, and exploited is (deliberately and dispassionately) established. The common interest can be summarized as ‘the dignity of man’ ([Reshaur, 1992: 724](#)). Terminologically speaking, “solidarity is a principle that can inspire and guide action” ([Arendt, 2006](#)).

Arendt identifies four categories of solidarity. The first one is *exclusive solidarity*, by which she describes sharing a commonness of situation or circumstance. This form of solidarity comprises joint struggles of the oppressed and marginalised to remove or improve circumstances that place certain groups at risk or deprive them of social and political opportunities. It could be understood as an act of “self-help” ([Reshaur, 1992: 725](#)). The second form is *inclusive solidarity* and includes those who suffer and those who attempt to make common cause with them. This is perhaps the most widely practiced form of solidarity and recent social research particularly pays attention to it in terms of solidarity with refugees arriving in Europe ([della Porta, 2018](#), [Sajir & Aouragh, 2019: 550-77](#)). The other two categories are *universal solidarity* as a fundamental and unavoidable articulation of the plurality of humankind and the highly contested conceptualization of *natural solidarity* as based on a given affinity towards one’s “own kind” ([Reshaur, 1992: 733-735](#)).

Solidarity and social activism

Solidarity is often evoked in response to political, social and economic crises in emphasizing a new connectedness and politized claims to reciprocity. It is not an exogenous analytical concept but “an idea inspiring people in contexts of everyday life in crisis” ([Rakopoulos, 2016: 142](#)). Therefore, Cabot defines solidarity as the “other side of crisis” ([Cabot, 2016: 152](#)). In a variety of sociopolitical contexts, solidarity strategies reinvent pre-existing repertoires. Practices of resource pooling, community kitchens, or mutual aid as a guiding principle of village culture are invoked with the intention of forging solidarity.

Rakopoulos establishes solidarity as a concept that bridges – “that is, captures loosely and yet in tension – diverse modes of practices, forms of sociality and mechanisms of envisioning future prospects for people’s lives. It links diverse networks of people and sometimes contradictory meanings” ([Rakopoulos, 2016: 142](#)). Collins, in turn, emphasizes emotions as the “glue of solidarity” ([Collins, 1990](#)), that is particularly important within contemporary fluid, network based movements that rely on non-traditional modes of identification and commitment ([Juris, 2008: 63](#)). Earlier,

Hochschild referred to “emotion management” ([Hochschild, 1979](#)) as necessary to maintain commitment and participation among protesters and supporters. Solidarity in social movements is thus shaped around the public display of emotion facilitated by ways of storytelling – increasingly through social media engagement – and “feeling one’s way into events”, creating “affective publics” ([Papacharissi, 2014](#)).

Mediating Solidarity

The discussion on how solidarity is mediated relates in many ways to the above-mentioned conceptual approaches. Media, social movements and solidarity are entangled in multilayered ways. Roughly, three constellations are distinguishable:

1. Mass media representation: Reporting in favor or critical of movements can elicit or reduce solidarity.
2. Activist self-mediation: The production and circulation of counter-narratives via (independent) media generates collective identity and supports solidarity among participants and sympathizers. Activist self-communication is empowering and signifies the strong interrelation of solidarity and agency.
3. Mediating solidarity via digital media by (external) sympathizers: Despite being often dismissed as ineffective, “clicktivism”, Cammaerts argues, “is highly relevant in terms of mediation and seems to resonate with many citizens who often fail to make time in their everyday lives for ‘active’ activism. From this perspective, such forms of internet-mediated resistance bearing witness to injustice do contribute to the building of collective identities and global awareness.” ([Cammaerts, 2012: 128](#)). Additionally, social networking sites and mobile technologies are effective tools of facilitating, coordinating and organizing resistance and thus generating solidarity.

For instance, sharing images is functional to activism and solidarity, because it illustrates and disseminates the underlying message of those protesting or suffering. ([Sajir & Aouragh, 2019: 560](#)) Practices of remediation ([Bolter & Grusin, 2002](#)) correspond in this respect with Arendt’s definition of inclusive solidarity as establishing a community of interest with the oppressed and exploited. The circulation of emotionally touching content enables connective emotions which stipulate activism ([Sajir & Aouragh, 2019: 559](#)). Although some content awakens compassion, they do not all lead to solidarity. This is why Arendt distinguishes between solidarity (principle) and compassion (passion) ([Arendt, 2006](#)).

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