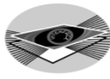
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Shifting Conceptions of Solidarity: From Immigration to the Pandemic

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Abstract

We examine how our notion of solidarity is utilized and understood. Through an observation of how solidarity was called forth during the Covid-19 pandemic and an analysis of how the term is used in immigrant discourse, our research shows that the definition of the term solidarity changes. However, we seem to treat it as if it is based on something concrete such as national belonging, shared history, same language, and the like. While this may be true, the wielding of the concept of solidarity is so much more complex and nebulous than the ideas with which it was built upon.

Solidarity was a buzzword during the pandemic, but there are several ways it can be interpreted both in words and in deeds. In migration studies, solidarity undergoes alterations because of shifting spaces, loyalties, and experiences. We use the theoretical framework of Rahel Jaeggi in her work on this theme but we peruse the works of other philosophers as well to show that solidarity is an ethical concept, not just a political one. Examples of how Japan called for solidarity during the pandemic and how the Filipino concept of bayanihan is used when they move abroad grounds these discussions.

Keywords: Covid-19, pandemic, immigration, solidarity

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Shifting Conceptions of Solidarity: From Immigration to the Pandemic

How do we usually conceive of solidarity? In its everyday usage, it is an aesthetic sense of brotherhood, a moral sentiment which recalls one's belonging in a community. It is an ubiquitous term in developed countries where calls for welfarism are being debated on. Meanwhile, in developing countries, solidarity comes in various forms. There are times when the call for communal or national cohesion is usually a battle cry for when disasters strike or when a crisis threatens. Terms such as resilience go hand in hand with calls for solidarity. Thus, there is a practical use for the notion. It seems as if the tenuous authority of political structures during these times heralds calls for such cohesion. This practical purpose may even be utilized for propaganda, wherein symbols, culture, and tradition serve as essential elements. These points only underscore the fact that there in much to unbox in understanding the concept. It begs the following questions. If we have different visions of community, nationality, and other associations, how does one define solidarity? In this increasingly cosmopolitan world, where do we base our conceptions of loyalty and solidarity? With whom are we supposed to be united and what are the shared goals of such vision?

In this paper, we give examples of how our present realities have forced us to rethink our definition of the term. To do this, we first present how the notion of solidarity has been defined and understood in social and political philosophy. Then, we examine some examples of solidaristic acts as well as calls for solidarity that occurred during the Covid-19 pandemic and in the face of immigration. We believe that the pandemic rekindled discussions of solidarity in the same way that it revived the discourse on vaccine apartheid and other healthcare concerns. However, whereas there are numerous scientific research on such topics, the issue of solidarity is largely ignored. Aside from the pandemic, we also

delve into how immigration or the global movement of people shook the ground on which the classic notion of solidarity is founded. We then conclude the paper with an iteration of how our definitions of solidarity are modified or revised in the wake of such phenomena.

The significance of this study rests on how the abstract notion of solidarity seems to become real when some sort of crisis, such as the pandemic happens or when our homogenous concepts of identity are challenged. This shift from something abstract to something tangible, i.e. from calls for solidarity to *acts* of solidarity, is more than a token example of philosophical praxis. This shift or this phenomenon shows how our ideas have the power to initiate change and create opportunities. While solidarity seems like a mere notion, the wielding of it is as a concept is worthy of examination.

As a theoretical framework, we will use the conceptual structure of solidarity argued by Dr. Rahel Jaeggi in her work "Solidarity and Indifference" (2001). Analyzed within the context of healthcare systems, she posits that solidarity be considered as an ethical concept, rather than a homogenous given. This perspective helps us expand our understanding of the term so that we can see novel ways of examining it.

As mentioned, we then show instances wherein solidarity is expressed in various ways during the pandemic and as challenged by immigration. Through these explorations, we can then conclude that expanding our notions of solidarity is to our advantage in ethical and political discourse. We should recognize that the nature of these ideas—whether we understand them as moral virtues, social outcomes, or as rational concepts—are not fixed and therefore open to investigation.

1 Philosophizing Solidarity

According to Richard Rorty, we humans attempt to infuse meaning in our lives using two principal methods: the first is via a sense of solidarity and the second is through objectivity. He explains,

> "The first is by telling the story of their contribution to a community. This community may be the actual historical one in which they live, or another actual one, distant in time or place, or a quite imaginary one, consisting perhaps of a dozen heroes and heroines selected from history or fiction or both. The second way is to describe themselves as standing in immediate relation to a nonhuman reality. This relation is immediate in the sense that it does not derive from a relation between such a reality and their tribe, or their nation, or their imagined band of comrades. I shall say that stories of the former kind exemplify the desire for solidarity, and that stories of the latter kind exemplify the desire for objectivity. Insofar as a person is seeking solidarity, he or she does not ask about the relation between the practices of the chosen community and something outside that community."
>
> (Rorty, 1989, p. 167)

In the article, Rorty is not simply talking about solidarity as discussed in the political sphere but rather solidarity in epistemological terms. He will expand his claim to "the idea of Truth as something to be pursued for its own sake, not because it will be good for oneself, or for one's real or imaginary community." (ibid.) Rorty here analyzes the importance of community in relation to belonging and how there is a "desire" for solidarity. What we find interesting in his deliberations is that he does not use the term solidarity to refer to political loyalty but rather a rhetorical tool to discuss truth and his own philosophy. Solidarity can then be described as a philosophical tool, it signifies not just an abstract sense of loyalty but grounds the discussion through a sense of space, a sense of reality. What we learn from Rorty is that one can use the notion of solidarity to bridge the gap between what is a nebulous idea to something that is more concrete and thus easier to explain, market, utilize, or even sell. It is no wonder then that, when wielded properly, it is an effective tool.

Meanwhile, Emile Durkheim famously distinguishes between two types of solidarity.

> "Mechanical solidarity is the social integration of members of a society who have common values and beliefs. These common values and beliefs constitute a "collective conscience" that works internally in individual members to cause them to cooperate.… In contrast to mechanical solidarity, organic solidarity is social integration that arises out of the need of individuals for one another's services. In a society characterized by organic solidarity, there is relatively greater division of labor, with individuals functioning much like the interdependent but differentiated organs of a living body. Society relies less on imposing uniform rules on everyone and more on regulating the relations between different groups and persons, often through the greater use of contracts and laws."
>
> (Encyclopaedia, 2010)

Durkheim's classic distinction shows how in mechanical solidarity there is an emphasis on commonalities, sameness, and shared spaces whereas in organic solidarity, it recognizes differences. We learn to value this plurality as something useful. These two types of social organization has been used throughout the years to distinguish and make sense of social cohesion as observed throughout history.

In the contemporary period, Axel Honneth links his theory of recognition to solidarity, i.e. as seeing the other in the sphere of solidarity. However, it goes even beyond that.

> "'Solidarity' is the term Honneth uses for the cultural climate in which the acquisition of self-esteem has become broadly possible. Although 'being in solidarity with someone' is sometimes equated with feelings of sympathy, Honneth's view is that one can properly speak of 'solidarity' only in cases where some shared concern, interest, or value is in play. What he is concerned with here is not so much the collective defence of interests or the political integration of individuals, but rather the presence of an open, pluralistic, evaluative framework within which social esteem is ascribed."
>
> (Anderson, 1996, p. xvii)

This means that the search for meaning that Rorty was referring to earlier finds true expression in the sphere of solidarity, according to Honneth. Not only that, but esteem is also a prerequisite to solidarity, the recognition of the other individual. (Honneth, 1996, p. 129) Solidarity then is to recognize the other in the "space of appearances", to borrow a term from Hannah Arendt. The recognition of the individual ties in with the idea of pluralism and togetherness.

Meanwhile, Will Kymlicka states that calls for social justice is premised on calls for solidarity, specifically national solidarity. National solidarity is utilized in several ways, in calls for welfarism for example. Welfarism, as an answer to social inequality and other ills, is founded on community-based solidarity. But what kind of solidarity does it call for? According to Kymlicka,

> "(a)s a result of a neoliberal type of multiculturalism, many citizens experienced multiculturalism and neoliberalism as a single phenomenon, as two sides of the same coin that threatened inherited schemes of national solidarity. And understandably, many citizens recoiled from this image of neoliberal multiculturalism, and mobilized to defend national solidarity and the welfare state. But all too often, this mobilization has taken the inverse form of neoliberal multiculturalism: that is to say, welfare chauvinism, or solidarity without inclusion."

(Kymlicka, 2015)

The problem with this type of solidarity is that it can be quite exclusive. It follows a "narrow definition of national belonging." While in a welfare state, this translates to "delayed or deferred" access to welfare protection and social rights. Later, it is interesting to compare this against Jaeggi's conception of solidarity through social healthcare. The crux of this paper problem lies within this tension, i.e. community-based, history-laden solidarity contra solidarity as an ethical concept. If Kymlicka's critique is correct, that citizens have recoiled from multiculturalism and have reacted by "protecting" traditional notions of national solidarity, then it is not farfetched to assume welfarism may be trapped in an us-

them discourse.

Despite this rich discourse, Will Kymlicka claims that, “the very concept of “solidarity” has been neglected in social sciences and political theory” (2015). Tangentially, Martha Nussbaum agrees with him. She says that fascist regimes know how to utilize emotions to further their agenda and so they have done a better job of studying it thoroughly. This is why in her book, Political Emotions (Nussbaum, 2013), she said that we cannot leave the study of emotions to fascist regimes, and we can believe that the same principle applies to the notion of solidarity. Solidarity appeals to emotions and it is able to draw upon these emotions as surely as premises appeal to the rational mind. Incidentally, Nussbaum believes that emotions can be based on rational judgments. If what she says is true, then this means that solidarity can draw both the emotions and the mind. This is why fascist regimes in the past are able to use notions such as homogenous identity, belongingness, or shared histories as the basis for a sense of loyalty and togetherness. It is quite effective as it is able to fascinate both the heart and the mind.

However, history tells us that it might actually foster polarity and its byproduct is a very limited, insidious form of solidarity. The Nazi party did it to fortify their power in Germany before inciting the WW2 and more recently, in the Philippines, the son of the former dictator and the current president, won the election on a convoluted idea of “unity”. This type of unity, instead of truly gathering people together for a common cause has instead further divided the political and social spheres—leading to a more divisive sense of us versus others. These are only some examples of how we view solidarity as a political tool, how about in other cases?

2.0 Solidarity during the pandemic

So far we have presented various ways that the notion of solidarity as a political tool can be articulated. But there is also an ethical layer to the notion. Working together to fight the pandemic was a battle cry for all

countries during the worst of Covid-19. It was interesting to note that on the one hand, most nation-states closed it borders but on the other hand it called for its people to work together. While international travel shut down, never has there been a time when we empathized with one another more as we hunkered down in our homes and collectively felt fear and uncertainty. There is solidarity in shared suffering even as we all kept apart. Interestingly Jürgen Habermas says, “Nationalism confuses two forms of solidarity that we must distinguish today. We should not confuse the informal solidarity that habitually develops in families and prepolitical communities with legally constituted civic solidarity.” (Habermas, 2017, p. 10) While we may have felt one with the world during the pandemic (informal solidarity), there are also loud calls for “legally constituted civic solidarity.” In the case of Japan, language played a philosophical role.

> “In January 2021, when the second state of emergency was first declared (in Japan), Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga expressed this sentiment: “感染防止のため政府と国民が一丸となっての対応” (Kansen bōshi no tame seifu to kokumin ga ichigan to natte no taiō, The government and the people [must work together] as a whole to curb infections). The term 一丸となる (ichigan to naru, to become one) represents the idea of 心を一つにしたひとかたまり (kokoro o hitotsu ni shita hito katamari, one whole united in heart) and 一つにまとまること (hitotsu ni matomaru koto, collected as one), but it’s not interchangeable with the similar 一体となる (ittai to naru, to become a whole). The difference? 一丸 (ichigan) is composed of several individual parts that can be separated, while 一体 (ittai) implies oneness via fusion; the parts become inseparable. So when calling for solidarity or cooperation, 一丸となって ichigan to natte, is a particularly useful phrase to mean “unite.” (Takahasi, 2021)

Takahashi highlights the importance of nuance. A single word can make all the difference in inspiring solidarity because one may be separated while the other implies a process of unity took place, therefore, it cannot be easily broken. This process is based on shared experiences,

but not necessarily sharing the same space. This was clear during the pandemic when we were all required to distance ourselves from one another. When one is literally safer by keeping one's distance—the human need to touch, to converse, and to belong in the same space—acquires a deeper significance. During the lockdowns, it became clear that the notion of solidarity is not simply founded on space but is rather a choice. We choose to wear masks to protect ourselves and others. The symbol of distancing one's self via the mask may be seen as a deep commitment to the safety of others and the community. There is a clear oxymoron in distance and unity here but, at least during the pandemic, 一丸となって ichigan to natte, captures the figure of speech in terms that can be clearly understood and can thus be easily followed. If wearing a mask is a form of solidarity and it is a choice to do so, then it is becomes easier to think of solidarity is terms of ethical choices.

Honneth's perspective of solidarity as something that is beyond mere sympathy is of interest here. As mentioned earlier, he stated that one can only speak of solidarity where there is "shared concern, interest, or value." He speaks of sharing but highlights the term "social esteem". Wearing a mask is indeed a choice but the choice may be due to several reasons. It can be a normative reason, i.e. an ethical choice based on rational grounds. One can choose not to wear a mask since the perception in parts of the United States of America, for example, is that it impedes personal choice. Social esteem then plays a factor in these discussions. If Honneth is concerned with the "presence of an open, pluralistic, evaluative framework within which social esteem is ascribed" (Anderson, 1996, p. xvii) then esteem as a prerequisite of solidarity is balanced by a moral sense of recognizing the other, which includes the needs of the other.

2.1 Welfarism, Healthcare, and Solidarity

In a book section entitled, Solidarity and Indifference, Prof. Rahel Jaeggi analyses the concept of solidarity by delving into forms of associations and attitudes. She compares these with other social relations and

attitudes, which led her to prescribe that there is virtue in conceiving of solidarity “as a certain kind of cooperation that can be related to Hegel’s concept of ‘ethical life’” and proposes Durkheim’s notion of organic solidarity to further provide a multilayered conception. (Jaeggi, 2001, p. 287) Examined within the context of welfare arrangements in general and health care systems in particular, she critically assesses solidarity as “an ethical concept”, i.e. “being solidaristic might be understood (as) an expression of one’s own identity, as it is related to others (to communal life).” (Jaeggi, 2001, p. 295)

This open but critical account of solidarity paves the way for a wider understanding of the term, especially if viewed within the discourse of social healthcare in countries, like hers, in Germany, as in Japan where people do have access to social healthcare. These philosophical notions of solidarity in healthcare, not only establishes the relational aspect of healthcare, it also underscores the internal and, thus, reflective aspect of the term. These notions direct us to Jaeggi’s conclusion that,

> “Consequently, social rights (including the fight for equal access healthcare) should not be considered as somehow opposed to solidarity—or as a threat to ‘grown’ solidarities and ‘face to face’ relations—but as its very prerequisite, taking into account the characteristics of individual liberty in modern societies.”
>
> (Jaeggi, p. 305)

What does this all mean in terms of our healthcare, for example? We may interpret this on two levels:

1. The first—and this is the most obvious one—means that that my personal health and hygiene, for example, is connected to other people. It’s funny when we think about it in terms of hygiene. BUT the pandemic made this point very serious, that my good or bad health literally affects everyone else’s.

2. The second translates this notion to social systems and community, the access to healthcare should be thought of in terms of the ethical concept of solidarity.

And in truth, we have yet to think of our health in this way. We are always so selfish with our health. We think that our lifestyle choices only affect ourselves. The modern notion of the self is interpreted as sole ownership of our bodies. This is the argument that we use in reproductive health. While it is true, this pandemic has also shown how my choice to wear a mask, for example, affects all of you. Is this not the best time to think of our health and well-being as connected to others, as a form of solidarity?

Agency over one's choices and the body is the cornerstone of bioethics. While the idea of Jaeggi recognizes the interconnectedness and social aspect of healthcare, it is still based on the individual and autonomy. Making solidaristic choices requires individual expressions of autonomy.

2.2 Immigration and Solidarity

If it is true that solidarity is an ethical concept, it means that all of us have notions of solidarity. These moral concepts may be a product of our personal, familial, communal, and even national, universal contexts but it does not mean that it is fixed. Which is probably why we show solidarity through actions—for example helping our neighbors. For others, they show it by staying to your culture and to the social rules that make sense for each and every locality. Most people look at solidarity in terms of nationalism. We equate loyalty to our country as being united with our fellow-people.

However, in this day and age, these definitions of solidarity may raise questions. For example, yes, we want to help our neighbors. But what if our neighbors look different from us—what if they have a different color of skin or it's difficult for us to communicate with them because your language is not their native language? What if the cultural practices and social rules that are established in our communities are against some universal norms—such as how a tribe may treat its women when the feminist agenda has progressed everywhere else? What if your coun-

try has opened its doors to "others" so it has changed—will we hold on to an essentialist view of solidarity? For example, Japan is one of the foremost employers of Filipino nurses, since we talked about how healthcare is nurtured in a shared, communal space, is there room for divisiveness?

What we may learn from Jaegggi, is to entertain the idea that what we consider as threats to our homegrown solidarity may not be threats at all. It is possible that these are common or even universal desires, needs, claims that we all have. If we think of solidarity as an ethical concept—it means that it is a moral choice we make rather than something essential that only a certain group of people—a certain community may share. What Habermas says is proven more poignant.

> "Thus, the perspective complementing that of equal treatment of individuals is not benevolence but solidarity. This principle is rooted in the realization that each person must take responsibility for the other because as consociates all must have an interest in the integrity of their shared life context in the same way. Justice conceived deontologically requires solidarity as its reverse side….. Justice concerns the equal freedom of unique and self-determining individuals, while solidarity concerns the welfare of consociates who are ultimately linked in an intersubjectively share form of life…."
>
> (Habermas, 1989)

Using Durkheim's distinction, we may surmise that migrant forms of life, if so analyzed, may be characterized as organic solidarity in that the cultural variances of various types of residents demand "interdependent but differentiated organs of a living body" and relies more on contracts and laws that are designed to fit the particular needs of a more diverse community. These contracts and laws show the importance of preserving ways forms of life that are differentiated but exist alongside one another. Meanwhile, Covid-19 calls for solidarity is similar to mechanical solidarity since it depends on the "social integration of members of a society who have common values and beliefs." Such com-

mon values and belief, which constitute a "collective conscience" leads individual members to cooperate. To go back to the example of wearing a mask, Durkheim's idea that uniform rules characterize mechanical solidarity is clearly exemplified. (Encyclopaedia, 2010)

2.3 Homegrown Concept of Solidarity: A Filipino Perspective

At this point, let us analyze a Filipino concept of solidarity. Filipinos call it *bayanihan*. The term is,

> "derived from the Tagalog word *bayan*, a town or nation…. *Bayanihan* is also known as *tulongan* or *damayan* (tulong—help; damay—aid), a system of mutual help and concern which has become the backbone of family and village life throughout the Philippine archipelago. It may also be expressed as *pagkakaisa* (to be one; to be united)."
>
> (Ang, 1979)

The word *bayanihan* is usually followed by the word, "spirit". The usual catch phrase is thus, "the *bayanihan* spirit is alive", for example. This terminology highlights its abstract nature. Even though its etymology comes from a concrete space (town) and it has a practical definition (help or aid), there is still an intangible quality attached to its usage. This intangibility makes it difficult to "return" the favor, that is, if you are the recipient of this *bayanihan* spirit. It also makes it a challenge to study.

To concretize this notion even further, the common image of *bayanihan* during the olden days is when people from the entire village literally transfer a nipa hut (a house on stilts made of indigenous materials like bamboo, coconut, and palm leaves) for their neighbor. The owner shows her gratitude by cooking a feast for the entire village. This idyllic notion may not be applicable in the present times but the *bayanihan* spirit is always called upon whenever, for example, a typhoon devastates the Philippines and it becomes necessary to rally the citizens for charity or

for assistance.

However, what is interesting to note here is that even among Filipino communities abroad, *bayanihan* is a common word. In fact, it is safe to assume that the ethical concept is even more philosophically significant when it is invoked in Filipino communities abroad or when it is exercised among Filipino immigrants. It is interesting to study because once the element of space has changed, then what remains is the practical aspect (in terms of aid/assistance). What happens to the abstract notion of "spirit"? Has it changed? Has it acquired a different meaning? How are we then supposed to situate the notion of *bayanihan* as a form of solidarity? Is it fair to think of such terms in this way?

The question we are asking is whether *bayanihan* translates to a form of solidarity that befits the society that they are currently in even though it is embedded in a Filipino context. If it is a separate concept—i.e. if Filipino migrants do not think of *bayanihan* as a form of solidarity in their current form of life as a migrant—then this is worthy of study as well. This is because it might imply that identity and the aspect of relations to others comes from a completely different foreground.

This is far from the notions of solidarity that have been stated in the beginning. This is because, following the notion of solidarity from Dr. Jaeggi, it is "explicitly set against an essentialist notion of cultural belonging." We argue that even though some ethical concepts may have origins in a particular culture, they acquire iterations due to changes in circumstance and forms of life. This is related to how Kymlicka discusses shared value, the value of this form of solidarity this way, "Shared values and an inspiring history no doubt help sustain solidarity in a multination state, but it is doubtful that either is sufficient by itself." (Kymlicka, 1995, p. 189) In this, Kymlicka helps us recognize that an essentialist view of solidarity will isolate it from an ethical grounding, which leads to exclusive notions of solidarity, barring others from the benefits of the communal life.

3 Conclusion

This ties into our overall hypothesis that solidarity is not an essential term whose clarity and scope are dependent on something concrete like national belonging but is actually a nebulous term, something that is more flexible because it is responsive to the needs of our times. And this openness to iteration is actually indicative of its character, its quality as a moral concept. Seyla Benhabib (2004, p. 173) states it in this manner,

> "… because there is a widespread trend in contemporary political thought to look upon the formation of collective identities and the evolution of cultural identities not as having been attained through long, drawn-out, and bitter social and political conflicts, but as if they were stable givens . It is this static vision of collective-identity formation which makes it plausible for Michael Walzer, and following him John Rawls, to assume that aliens and others may pose a threat to, dilute, or overrun an already attained community of solidarity."

Apart from this, we hypothesize that regardless of their origin, various concepts of solidarity (if there are any differences that may be found) must find expression in the social structure, i.e. in social norms and conventions, even institutions. Otherwise, it is antithetic to the very idea of solidarity. Of course, we have to account for the possibility that these ethical concepts upon their transmissions may undergo iterations. Maybe the basis of their associations for solidarity is not applicable anymore. For example, a group of refugees forming a bond during their perilous crossings might have a sense of solidarity after having gone through the experience. Upon stepping onto foreign soil or safer terrain, the bonds that may have formed, while not necessarily severed, may not be as expedient. Therefore, the solidarity that remains, if it does, is now slightly different.

Through this study we invited readers to look beyond their constitution as a communal virtue or value, instead, the exercise of these ethical concepts on a different social setting should be seen as *individual* ex-

pressions of ethical frameworks. The freedom to express these ethical concepts enables and, may even, empower immigrants to conceptualize a notion of solidarity that is not only unique to their experience but is also in keeping with the relational aspect needed for them to settle in their new-found homes. This relational aspect should be reflective as well as open to a more cosmopolitan iteration.

We conclude that it is highly probable that, for example, immigrants have within them various notions of solidarity. Rather than diffusing or challenging these possibly ethical and political concepts of solidarity, these fresh views may help in providing more robust definitions of associations and attitudes. These may even help expand our discourses on solidarity within migrant-receiving nations. After all, "the project of post national solidarity is a moral project that transcends existing state boundaries", (Benhabib, 2004, p. 17) even as our discussions are necessarily framed within the context of, for example: state welfare, notions of rights claims, and the like.

It is not always the case that these "communal values" will be accepted or maybe even applicable in the present setting but the familiarity of immigrants in these shared ethical concepts should not be discarded. It may take a different form or it may be subject to scrutiny. However, the framework of solidarity as an ethical concept, that is an expression of identity relating to others, is, we believe, a very promising setting in light of these ethical concepts.

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