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Organizing Solidarity in Difference

Challenges, achievements and emerging imaginaries

Abstract

This special issue explores how solidarity in difference can be organized as a mutual relation that is based on participation on equal footing, fostering bonds of heterogeneity beyond conceptualizations of solidarity that depend on homogeneity. In this editorial and the five articles comprising this special issue, not only are the challenges to such an endeavor explored, but also the achievements in the present and emerging imaginaries of organizing solidarity beyond an exploitative understanding of difference. The perspectives this special issue brings together include re-centering the Eurocentric concepts of organizing and solidarity, solidarity in research, solidarity as affective practice as well as the political and socio-economic relations that frame them. In addition to promoting an understanding of subjectivity shaped by power relations embedded in multiple social experiences, the articles in this special issue elaborate on solidarity in difference rather than a benevolent solidarity with difference and contribute, accordingly, to an understanding of organizing solidarity that starts from principles of radical interdependence, mutual recognition, and universal participation. Without neglecting the pitfalls and obstacles to organizing solidarity, this special issue hopefully sparks new debates on and informs new practices of solidarity in difference as there cannot be one single way to achieve this.

When it was distributed in June 2019, our call for papers sought to explore how solidarity in difference may be a way to address the adverse consequences of a globalized neoliberal capitalism that fueled both the financial and the climate crises, the widening of inequalities and the exploitation of workers as well as the marginalization of the Global South. More than two years later – amidst the ongoing global Covid-19 pandemic – the dominant capitalist model has become even more pervasive and aggressive. Reflections on existing and possible forms of solidarity within and among organizations, also within our academic communities, are now more necessary than ever. This special issue collects, accordingly, alternatives to an exploitative understanding of difference to add to the emerging imaginaries of organizing that are characterized by solidarity.

Facing the Covid-19 pandemic, countless examples of solidarity and empathy have emerged in local communities and across borders, as support has been extended from one individual to the other and among members of different communities, often with marginalized groups leading the way (Dziuban, Moźdzreń and Ratecka, 2021; Reiss, Kozhevnikov and Muhr, 2021). Yet the term ‘solidarity’ has also been overused and under-practiced, especially by representatives of key institutions of society. Even though the United Nations proclaimed that “[a]s the coronavirus outbreak spreads to more countries, so does solidarity among people everywhere” (UN, 2020), in fact it was not solidarity that seemed to guide political decision-making, but rather, the race to protect the richest and most privileged individuals, organizations, and countries. Thus, wealthy countries shut their borders, hoarded protective equipment, lung respirators and, eventually, vaccines (Paiva & Miguel, 2022). Further, they offered economic support and recovery packages to established corporations while lockdowns impacted individuals disproportionately, allowing some to work comfortably from their homes whilst frontline staff and other so-called ‘essential workers’ were incessantly placed at risk (Mezzadri, 2022). Pandemic policies, then, have neither relied on nor promoted solidarity as anything but a cover for measures that are based on and exacerbate long-standing trends that quantify the value of human beings on the basis of their ability to generate profit – the opposite of solidarity in difference.

With this special issue we not only seek to discuss the challenges to – and, indeed, misuse of – solidarity in contemporary societies that Covid-19 made apparent, but also expand the hopeful emerging imaginaries of solidarity in difference.

Challenges

In broad terms, solidarity can be defined as “a collective relation that mediates between the individual and the community” (Scholz, 2015: 725) and distinguished into three forms: first, ‘civic solidarity’, which connects citizens and democratic institutions and offers the hope that all members of society will be guaranteed the means to flourish; second, ‘social solidarity’, which brings members of a community together based on their mutual recognition of interdependence; third, ‘political solidarity’, which brings individuals and/or groups together around a common demand for social change (Scholz, 2015). Encompassing both a sense of individuality and a sense of community, solidarity is associated with a “we-thinking” that can “be separated from not only anti-social egocentrism, but also from one-sided ‘thou-centrism’ such as altruism, sympathy, caring, or Christian charity” (Laitinen & Pessi, 2015: 2).

Traditionally, solidarity has been conceptualized and discussed primarily in terms of work and workers’ solidarity, in other words, as the basis for raising class consciousness and discovering common interests that may support collective action and lead to organized representation (most notably in the form of trade unions). A simple focus on class solidarity tends to entail, however, a conceptualization of solidarity that risks to exclude subjects outside the norms of the (white, male, and heterosexual) ‘mass worker’ (Beck and Brook, 2020; Hyman, 1999; Simms, 2012). While internationalism and international solidarity have always been part of a socialist narrative, established workforces have often expressed hostility towards the inflow of new workers, and unions have had a restrictive stance towards representing and advocating on behalf of precarious and migrant workers (Herry and Abbott, 2000; Hyland, 2015). Efforts to represent broader categories of workers, traditionally overlooked by trade unions, have emerged over time (see Gumbrell-McCormick, 2011; Paret, 2015; Doellgast, Lillie and Pulignano, 2018), but have often failed against corporate interests. At the same time, and in step with the promotion of an enterprise culture, which has led to the formation of neoliberal subjectivities and introduced market principles also into employment relations (Moisander, Groß, and Eräranta, 2018; Mondon-Navazo et al., 2021), the traditional

foundations of (worker) solidarity are eroding, and the world is generally experiencing declining union membership (Beck and Brook, 2020).

These developments have arisen alongside what Nancy Fraser (2017; 1) calls 'progressive neoliberalism', which promotes the "lethal combination of austerity, free trade, predatory debt, and precarious, ill-paid work that characterize financialized capitalism today," while joining forces "with mainstream currents of social movements (feminism, anti-racism, multiculturalism, and LGBTQ rights)". Thus, big business, today, advocates ideals of diversity and empowerment based on a liberal-individualist interpretation of progress, which is used to gloss over and legitimate 'financialized capitalism' (Fraser, 2017). Indeed, the notions of diversity and diversity management that in their effort to include individuals from all walks of life could be interpreted as present-day sources of 'corporate solidarity', are based on a liberal-individualist rather than a collective understanding, as emphasised by Fraser (2017). Hence, rather than acting in solidarity with marginalized individuals, 'managing diversity' becomes equated with the 'emancipation' of a small elite of 'talented' women and (other) minorities cracking the glass ceiling, but this promotion of the select few blocks overall solidarity between workers of different hues.

Diversity in business, with its focus on unleashing and utilizing sociodemographic differences, is thus an approach compatible with neoliberal capitalism in contrast to the preceding social justice notions of equal opportunities and affirmative action promoted by the civil rights movement of the 1960s and 70s (Romani, Zanoni and Holck, 2020). When recast as diversity, difference becomes a potential source of economic value for companies to tap into (Özbilgin & Tatli, 2011) – and it is further removed from any meaningful notion of solidarity, whether as a cause or an effect. Accordingly, critical diversity scholars have attacked the instrumental nature of diversity management, documenting how gender, race, able-bodiedness, age, and heterosexuality (jointly) function as principles of the unequal organization of work (van den Brink, Holgersson, Linghag, & Deé, 2016; Bendl, Fleischmann & Walenta, 2008) while legitimizing an unequal social order (Holck and Muhr, 2017; Romani, Holck, & Risberg, 2019).

Against this backdrop, this special issue collects articles that identify alternatives to an exploitative understanding of difference to inform ways of organizing that are characterized

by solidarity. In mediating between the individual and the collective (Scholz, 2015), difference represents both an essentially contested precondition of and limitation to solidarity. While solidarity has been associated with similarity and uniformity (e.g., May, 1996), Hyman (1999) sees difference as a primary precondition of solidarity, as acts of solidarity within a completely homogenous group would not be necessary. Banting and Kymlicka (2017) put forward a similar argument from a macro perspective of political sciences as they see solidarity as ‘bridging’ different interests. At the same time, difference may challenge the sense of recognition of and identification with the other around which collectives are typically established. With difference becoming the norm in societies coined by “super-diversity” (Vertovec, 2007), developing an enhanced capacity for solidarity in difference, or ‘translocal solidarity’ (Gilroy, 2005) that enables recognition of the other *as* other, is an ever more pressing scholarly and practical task. At the national level, the apparent contradiction between solidarity and difference has been framed in terms of diminished solidarity among citizens due to increasing levels of heterogeneity. For instance, the Scandinavian welfare state model was built on values of solidarity based primarily on racial homogeneity to ensure citizen support to redistribution of income and high levels of state guaranteed social security (Holck and Muhr, 2017). Here, the increasing diversification of society reveals an ‘unequal solidarity’ where redistribution is premised on preconceived – and limited – recognition of the racialized other (see also Fraser, Honneth, & Golb, 2003). The challenge, then, remains to reconcile economic, i.e., class-based, interests of equality and cultural, or, perhaps more precisely, identity-based, interests of difference. Seeking to meet this challenge, the special issue explores conceptualizations and practices of solidarity based in difference. As underlined by Callinicos (1999, cited in Oosterlynck et al., 2016), there is, today, a general “lack [of] any all-encompassing collective consciousness or obvious patterns of interdependence” which traditionally has been perceived as a key source of solidarity. Accordingly, scholars talk about solidarity as being ‘thin’ rather than ‘solid’ as people’s involvement in joint political action is temporary, voluntary, and revocable (Bauman, 1993). The erosion of the traditional sources of organized solidarity calls forth alternative or new ways of organizing solidarity in difference.

Achievements and emerging imaginaries

Indeed, the present situation is not just one of despair. As ‘all that is solid melts into air’ we are not only charged with, but become also able to image new modes of mutual recognition

that raise up rather than blot out our differences, new modes of mutual recognition based on respect, mutual aid and support (Laitinen, Laitinen, and Pessi, 2015). While the challenges outlined above erode traditional sources of organized solidarity and might bar the development of new solidarities, there are also achievements to acknowledge. On the one hand, work-based solidarity must not necessarily rely on bringing workers together to lessen the adverse effects of exploitation, it can also be carved out of work *itself*, when the political potential of work is focused on so that work itself is permeated with solidarity (Strauß & Fleischmann, 2020). On the other hand, rising insecurity and precariousness, not only of work and employment, but also of people's lives, has inspired resistance and generated new forms of solidarity in difference (Butler, 2015). These achievements in terms of alternative organizations, arising within and beyond trade unions and existing social movements are faced with the challenge of building cohesion out of diversity (Borghetti et al., 2021; Hyman and Gumbrell-McCormick, 2017).

Oosterlynck, Loopmans, Schuermans, Vandenabeele, and Zemni (2016) argue that the four traditional sources of solidarity – interdependence, shared norms and values, struggle, and encounter – that were traditionally all geared towards homogeneity are still relevant to conceptualize alternatives, but they need to be rethought and reimagined to embrace heterogeneity. Accordingly, this special issue explores the emerging imaginaries needed to enact solidarity in difference. Indeed, as Hyman (1999) argues, “any simple conception of solidarity [...] is and was imaginary in the first sense”, but even as a mythical idea(l) it helps mobilize political action. The focus on solidarity as a means of reconciling individualistic interests and universal aspirations for justice is, therefore, not a new conundrum. In light of the pluralization of societies that had already become apparent at the end of the last century, Hyman (1999: 94) advocated the search for “new forms of strategic imagination” that might form collective and inclusive solidarity ties. Beginning from the multifarious issues of racial, ethnic, gender, sexuality and migrant struggles, rather than from the singular goal of subverting neoliberal capitalism, radical democracy theorists have also opened up new avenues for thinking and doing solidarity in difference (Butler et al., 2010).

As movements for social justice and equality are brought to the centre of solidarity in difference, feminist, anti-racist, and decolonial conceptualizations gain traction. In this

context, Mohanty (2003: 7) argues that solidarity in difference becomes possible when we establish “mutuality, accountability, and the recognition of common interests as the basis for relationships among diverse communities”. Solidarity is, hence, no longer assumed to be grounded in a common identity or a common form of oppression, but is rather an accomplishment of “communities of people who have chosen to work and fight together” and “the result of active struggle to construct the universal on the basis of particulars/differences” (Mohanty, 2003: 7). This also involves a shift from local oppositional solidarity against oppressors towards global solidarity in opposition to nationalism, colonialism, white supremacy and other structurally imposed limitations on solidarity (see e.g., Klímová, 2012). The rise of the Black Lives Matter movement is one example of such a global solidarity movement. Blackness is a political identification, not an epidermal designation. The movement rallies together people with immensely different relationships to race, ethnicity, religion, nation, colonization, class, gender, and sexuality around the common recognition that Black lives matter. Its participants are committed to dismantling the systems that enable anti-Blackness around the world and transforming the institutions such as policing and the law that maintain the destruction of Black lives (Andrews, 2018; Yancy, 2017).

In documenting challenges, achievements and emerging imaginaries to solidarity in difference, the articles in this special issue connect to feminist and decolonial conceptualizations of solidarity in manifold ways. Marcelo Vieta and Ana Heras (this special issue) elaborate on Bolivia’s *campesino-indígena* and Argentina’s *empresas recuperadas por sus trabajadores* to re-center both the Eurocentric concepts of organization and organizing as well as the one on solidarity. Indeed, feminist scholars have pointed to the necessity to create “forms of solidarity in which there is room for difference” and to acknowledge that vulnerability and dependency are “part of human existence” (Sevenhuijsen, 1998: 147). The contributions by Buchter, Fotaki as well as the one by Van Portfliet and Kenny (all this special issue) highlight the notion of “affective solidarity” drawing on a broad range of authors from Butler (2004) to Ettinger (2006). Such a feminist understanding of affective solidarity (Hemmings, 2012; Raghavan, 2017) or “social solidarity” can stem from witnessing suffering or pity (Chouliaraki, 2006), but goes beyond it by advocating to form symmetrical solidarity ties. Connecting to the notion of *dividuals* (Appadurai, 2015, 2016; Smith, 2012),

Schwabenland and Hirst (this special issue) promote an understanding of subjectivity coined by openness and plurality.

Rather focusing on deliberation as a source of solidarity in difference, other scholars have developed the concept of reflective solidarity as shared accountability to each other (Dean, 1996), and underlined “the responsibility to act combined with the responsibility to otherness” (Jones, 1993: 229, see also Loacker and Muhr, 2009; Muhr 2008), emphasizing that difference is not annihilated in solidarity ties. This conceptualization of solidarity promotes forms of mutual support grounded in an intersubjective understanding that people are equal and barriers to equality should be eliminated (Fraser, Honneth, & Golb, 2003).

Core to the understanding of solidarity to which this special issue contributes is, hence, the foundational principle that everybody is a possible agent of solidarity, not a recipient exposed to the benevolence of a charitable patron (Romani et al., 2019). We adopt this position against charity because it all too often leads to a sort of saviourism that takes place within – and reproduces – an unequal social relationship. This unequal relationship builds upon solidarity with the other whose difference is simultaneously accepted and denied, as it becomes the privilege of the benefactor to extend solidarity to the less fortunate (Romani et al. 2019). Benevolence thus inscribes actions in the frame of kindness and fight against social injustice: but it builds upon an unequal social relationship – solidarity *with* difference rather than *in* difference. Solidarity, then, is never charity; rather, it is the reciprocal and mutual reliance on one another that we extend to each other on equal terms. The articles in this special issue consider acts of solidarity in and beyond work as solidarity is rarely disconnected from or unrelated to workplaces (Beck and Brook, 2020). Beginning from principles of radical interdependence, mutual recognition, and universal participation, we might begin to organize for solidarity in difference, which the five articles in this special issue explore.

Overview of the special issue

Lisa Buchter's article investigates the relation between solidarity in difference and benevolence by exploring the fine line between symmetrical solidarity and unsolicited help, which would reinstate a hierarchical division between benevolent helpers perceived as able-bodied and those deemed disabled. Drawing on extensive ethnographic work in two disability

rights organizations run by visually-impaired activists, her article contributes to conceptualizations of the micropolitics of solidarity. Her analysis shows how activists at the local level challenge social relations through embodied interactions.

Buchter intriguingly questions common enactments of hierarchical solidarity, i.e., help performances that even in an assumed well-intendedness have detrimental consequences. They fixate hierarchical differences in terms of benevolent charity of the generous helper from a majority group towards the helpless and dependent disabled. Her study shows how disabled people often feel obliged to reciprocate unwanted help in order to avoid hurting the feelings of 'good intentions' of those offering it. In such a hierarchical help situation, disabled people are put in a position to "help non-disabled people manage their emotions—feelings of guilt, embarrassment, pity, awkwardness, superiority, or disgust". Hence, even though help is often necessary in current disabling societies, Buchter's article explores possibilities for solidarity in difference beyond hierarchies. By interrogating current debates on solidarity against the backdrop of critical disability studies, she not only shows how different performances of help may enact microaggressions and sustain social hierarchies, but also how new social scripts can prefigure local interactions that become an "enactment of symmetrical solidarity". Hence, her article enriches this special issue by developing an understanding of solidarity that focusses on its symmetrical foundation enacted between equals and shows how critical disability studies offer insights into the limitations of asymmetrical solidarity. Her findings show how playfulness, jokes and metaphors embedded in formal discourses allow to establish symmetrical and reciprocal encounters of solidarity, how new interpersonal scripts can create bonds that do not create adverse effects.

Christina Schwabenland and Alison Hirst explore how solidarity in difference is organized through a women's catering social enterprise in a Palestinian refugee camp in Beirut. Drawing on Allen (1999) and Mohanty (2003), their article elaborates on an understanding of solidarity as an accomplishment that does not rely on prior shared identities. Rather than seeing solidarity in difference as an achievement of 'whole individuals', they emphasize the notion of *dividuals* (Appadurai, 2015, 2016; Smith, 2012), which establishes an understanding of social actors defined by plurality and openness.

Studying the women's social enterprise Soufra, Schwabenland and Hirst conceptualize solidarity as an achievement of overlapping and differing *dividualities*, like businesswomen, chef, wives, mothers and women working for a betterment of the socio-economic foundations of their communities. Solidarity in difference is, hence, encountered from a "plurality in terms of dividuality" as social actors display forms of similarity that are simultaneously complicated by foregrounding the "women's dividualities of 'difference'". Clear-cut boundaries are also blurred in Soufra's mix of on-site material solidarities and distal modes. The boundaries of the Palestinian refugee camp in Beirut are transgressed to form material solidarity ties, such as Kickstarter campaigns and social media activities as well as a documentary about the social enterprise to allow "distal encounters" of solidarity in geographically remote locations. Their analysis shows how this spans a wide net of solidarity with varying degrees of thickness, which allows the authors to question the binary distinction between 'thick' and 'thin' forms of solidarity. Their study shows how even through rather 'thin' encounters deeper transformations can be achieved. Hence, their article adds to this special issue by analyzing the purposeful organization of solidarity based on material and immaterial exchanges between those marginalized and their supporters and puts forward a conceptualization of solidarity as a 'joint action' in what Amin (2002) calls 'micro-publics'. Moreover, in elaborating on the solidarity exchange between themselves as researchers and the women of Soufra – that not only included a research collaboration but also fundraising activities –, Schwabenland and Hirst reflect and question their own assumptions as researchers in such a solidarity setting.

Marcelo Vieta and Ana Heras study Bolivia's *campesino-indígena* movements that self-organize socio-political spaces and Argentina's worker-led *empresas recuperadas por sus trabajadores* (worker-recuperated enterprises) to explore solidarity and coalitional forms of organizing in the place known as Latin America. Based on an in-depth reflection on the very term 'Latin America' "as place holder and shorthand for a lived, performed, but also imagined region", Vieta and Heras's cases illustrate a broad array of approaches to fight (neo)colonialist and neoliberal settings in this region, a region in which – without negating differences – coalitions are formed in response to decade-long pressure to establish a "neoliberal hegemony in a context of extreme poverty and recent state terrorism via military dictatorships".

Their concept of “organizational solidarity in practice” highlights how emancipative struggles in a “politics of demand” are combined with a “politics of self-determination” in a liberational sense of organizing beyond capitalocentric logics. In doing so, Vieta and Heras’s article adds substantial value to the special issue by collecting empirical evidence of practices and thoughts that are oftentimes overlooked in Eurocentric organization studies. Situating their article in the work of Gibson-Graham (2006) and colleagues (Gibson-Graham & Dombroski, 2020) on diverse economies as well as in Latin American organizational studies that ‘dislocate’ and ‘decenter’ Anglo-European management knowledge (Mandiola, 2010; Dussel & Ibarra-Colado, 2006; Ibarra-Colado, 2006; Rodriguez et al., 2019; Wanderley & Barros, 2019), they provide a thick description to deliver weak theorizing. By looking at the so-called “margins” of capitalistic systems, Vieta and Heras focus on the “*diverse and pluriverse ways in which humans and non-humans build and organize conditions for living well*” and show how Indigenous peoples and working-class groups are “reinventing new forms of millennia-old organizing practices”. In doing so, Vieta and Heras not only work towards re-centering the Eurocentric concepts of organization and organizing, they also substantially expand the understanding of solidarity in difference: In analyzing the “double-movement of resistance and invention” they show how solidarity can be performed in oppositional terms as “*anti-capitalist, anti-patriarchal, anti-colonial, and anti-domination*” while at the same time unfolding the productive force of prefiguration. Vieta and Heras’ contribution reminds us that in coalitional processes to organize solidarity in difference one cannot look for “one single way of organizing” but rather “a picture of diversity in situated and conjunctural practices arises”.

Marianna Fotaki shows how solidarity fluctuates between particularism and universalism by looking at how local communities on Greek island responded to refugees and forced migrants between 2015 and 2018. Seeing solidarity as oscillating between membership in a defined community and based in everyone’s fundamental human rights, this article delves into the ambivalences that are characteristic of both solidarity with and hostility toward refugees and forced migrants in Europe. Her analysis shows how in light of the anti-migration politics promoted by the European Union and the border struggles it ensued “examples of compassionate behavior co-existed with displays of indifference and callousness bordering

on cruelty". But rather than attributing this ambivalence to individuals, Fotaki takes Butler's (2004) work on shared vulnerability and precarious subjectivities together with Levinas (1987) idea of ethical obligations towards unknown others and combines them with macro-sociological analyses provided by Bauman (2006) and Sassen (2014) to highlight how neoliberal capitalism frames subjectivities and their response to vulnerable others. Accordingly, her article adds to this special issue by providing a feminist conception of solidarity that goes beyond both common notions of solidarity as grounded in shared interests as well as those that see it grounded in an ideal of homogeneity.

Based on field work on the Greek islands of Lesbos, Chios, Leros, and Samos, Fotaki develops her conceptualization of situated and embodied solidarity analyzing how it "thrives and wanes" in these local communities exposed to broader political changes, in particular the neoliberal economic crisis and the austerity politics it ensues as well as anti-migration policies such as the EU-Turkey deal. Analyzing the specificities of the Greek case also allows to position both those presumably 'in need of solidarity' and 'those who give' in a political and socio-economic context coined by austerity, debt management and border control. Hence, Fotaki proposes to see solidarity not as an "economic-technical concept" but highlights its social and ethical as well as embodied and situated dimensions. Her use of the Butlerian concept of vulnerability allows to see how the precarious condition of human life is shared "while recognizing that precarity is unequally distributed between groups of people within/across different societies". Solidarity in difference is for Fotaki, accordingly, based on a shared vulnerability that at the same time accounts for differences.

Meghan Van Portfliet and Kate Kenny bring our attention to "difference-in-solidarity" by researching whistleblowing and whistleblower support networks. Also drawing on a feminist understanding of solidarity that focuses on interdependency, care and ambivalent affects, Van Portfliet and Kenny's article asks how collective struggle can be energized and enlivened by affective encounters with others. Drawing on Ettinger's (2006) concept of matrixial trans-subjectivity, they elaborate on solidarity without downplaying or even overcoming difference. In their analysis of interviews with whistleblowing advocates and supporters, they identify instances where "difference [is] simply [...] present – neither glorified nor erased". What brings these social actors together is their work towards a common cause, connecting not

only advocates and whistleblowers, but also members of a broader audience interested in the topic. With difference being present, Van Portfliet and Kenny acknowledge that in encounters of solidarity – that always need to be reestablished – difference can also lead to misunderstanding and ambivalence, not only to compassion and to relations that are based on an impetus to help. Drawing on Ettinger’s notion of “fascinace”, they focus on the affective impulse to care for each other that emerges in encounters of intertwined subjects.

Their analysis of whistleblowing advocacy contributes to this special issue by revealing how solidarity “involves practically and emotionally-complex labour towards a common cause” where difference takes the ambiguous role of both constraining and enabling the connection to the common cause. Whistleblowing advocates, accordingly, depend in their work on “their ability to encounter vulnerability alongside inescapable foreignness and difference”. Hence, their article establishes an understanding of solidarity in difference by showing that “meaningful solidarity” is achieved without the attempt to overcome or even erase difference, but rather through active engagement with it in terms of matrixial trans-subjectivity.

Lines for future research

Taken together, the five articles collected in this special issue show the rewards of conceptualizing solidarity in difference as a mutual relation relying on participation on equal terms focusing on bonds of heterogeneity that disregard a traditional focus on full similarity. Accordingly, in demonstrating how solidarity might blossom based on political and affective bonds going beyond a traditional understanding of the individual they not only make a highly relevant and timely contribution to the literature on solidarity beyond similarity and homogeneity, but also point to future research in this area. For this purpose, we suggest a non-exhaustive list of avenues for possible future research: *Alternative ways of organizing solidarity in difference*; *Solidarity in difference in relation to political and socio-economic setting* and finally, *A critical interrogation of the concept of solidarity*.

Alternative ways of organizing solidarity in difference

As the articles in this special issue demonstrate how new ways to mobilize solidarity deserve scholarly attention, future research may delve deeper into exploring how new alliances could

be formed and promoted to pursue collective action for a plurality of people. The contributions by Schwabenland and Hirst as well as Vieta and Heras in this special issue highlight the growing impact of alternative governance, solidarity economies and collective action, which is receiving growing support across the world - e.g., Mondragon, Spain; Sao Paulo, Brazil; United States (see also Bell et al., 2018). These movements embrace forms of worker cooperatives, where workers invest in and own the business and participate in decisions about the business on a one worker – one vote principle – to mobilize “alternative organizational forms, those with goals of solidarity, social equity, sustainability, democracy, and pluralism as founding principles, [that] may provide new spaces of hope for the future” (Bell et al., 2018: 238). Future research should explore the potentiality of these new, alternative forms of collective economic organizing founded on solidarity in difference and their capability to shape future varied mix of organizational types like workers collectives or centres, NGOs etc., joining forces with traditional sources of solidarity like trade unions and left-wing parties (Fine, 2015).

Solidarity in difference in relation to political and socio-economic setting

Accordingly, another relevant line of future studies relates to the issues raised by Fotaki in this special issue, i.e., to explore how the political and socio-economic setting can foster or inhibit solidarity ties. This could, for instance, rely on studies of solidarity in difference in times of crisis and in particular the current Covid-19 crisis, which has been described as unprecedented in our life span overshadowing even the global financial crises of 2008 and 2009 when it comes to severity, speed and impact on institutional change (Hwang & Höllerer, 2020). Growing precarity, lack of security in employment caused by gross employee reduction, and accumulative political and economic instability are some of the consequences that we are now witnessing worldwide because of the Covid-19 crisis. This political and economic situation might lead to deteriorating solidarity among different groups of people and workers with declining trade union membership as a consequence or – vice versa – a growing need for solidarity in difference and the mobilization of vulnerable citizens and workers in search of institutions and organizations to promote greater stability and security in communities and at the labor market. We still cannot predict the far-reaching consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic – or the accelerated climate crisis – on ties of solidarity among different citizens, workers, communities etc., but vulnerable groups are

often the first ones to lose out when there is political and economic volatility and uncertainty. Accordingly, studies of the possibility of solidarity in differences in times of crisis is as timely as ever.

A critical interrogation of the concept of solidarity

Finally, a highly relevant area of future research is the critical interrogation of solidarity and how it may be (inadvertently) misunderstood and misused in ways that reproduce oppressive norms (Chesler, 2002) like the studies of Van Portfliet and Kenny as well as Buchter in this special issue explored. Given that solidarity has been a mainstay of feminist, anti-racist, and decolonial organizing, future research has the potential to delve into the practical challenges and possibilities for solidarity in difference among grassroots activist collectives and movements, as Vieta and Heras already showed in this special issue de-centering a Eurocentric understanding of solidarity. This means to make solidarity practices visible that often operate in the peripheries of organizations and society, occupying liminal spaces where alternative approaches to organizing and leadership may be improvised (Liu, 2020).

Conclusion

With the decline of traditional sources of organized solidarity – in terms of collective actions of unions and workers' mobilization – multiple forces organizing for solidarity in difference must be explored, like the articles in this special issue so eloquently demonstrate. Indeed, we are confident that the concepts brought forward in this special issue provide a solid basis to not only rethink solidarity in difference but also to practice it in the here and now. We are grateful to bring together articles that delve into solidarity in difference spanning from political and socio-economic relations to affective bonds, showing how solidarity is possible on equal footing between individuals characterized by plurality. Without neglecting the pitfalls and obstacles to organizing solidarity, we hope that this special issue sparks new debates on and informs new practices of solidarity in difference.

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