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DOES DEMOCRACY NEED SOLIDARITY? THE REASONS FOR A QUESTION

1. *Dangerous or redundant?*

As this special issue takes shape, the Global Sumud Flotilla is approaching the coast of Gaza to bring aid and eye-witness solidarity to the Gazawi. At the same time Italian squares and cities are being filled with protest demonstrations, rallies and marches organized by what has styled itself the "land flotilla". Against politics construed as violence and colonial occupation— a kind of politics that, for more than a century now, since the beginning of the British Mandate, has taken root in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and that since the massacre of October 7th has taken a openly genocidal form[1],— the flotilla staged a return to politics seen as innovative, pluralist, and transnational action, as movement, grassroots mobilization, and non-violent resistance. The blithe violation of all legal, moral, and political restraint, is being contested – as has happened many times against colonialism, racism, patriarchalism, exploitation – by a courageous, pluralist and resolute movement in defense of the rules that protect plurality and make coexistence possible. Similarly, after the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the massacre of Ukrainian citizens European countries witnessed an unprecedented wave of passionate mo-

[1] While a judgment by the International Court of Justice on whether Israel is committing genocide in Gaza has yet to be rendered, I use this expression in line with, among the many, the *Statement of Scholars in Holocaust and Genocide Studies on Mass Violence in Israel and Palestine since 7 October* issued on December, 9 2023. On the other statements on the matter and on the chasm that has formed among Holocaust and Genocide scholars concerning this question: see Klein (2024). Other sources in this debate are: Segal (2025); Moses (2025); Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2025); Segal, Daniele (2024); El-Affendi (2024); Khoury (2025). I am grateful to Beata Paragi for drawing my attention to this debate.

bilization, spontaneous individual action and collective initiatives of support across borders, with the activation of formal and informal networks providing first aid and organizing hospitality for Ukrainian refugees.

It is difficult not to note echoes of Arendt resonating both in the emergence of political action understood as a "new beginning"—as an unpredictable response to contingency, as a pluralistic and collective discourse—as well as in the defense of the value of "limits" as an essential condition for the existence of plurality and the world (Arendt 1968).

Although it is not a central theme in her thought, another Arendtian echo concerns the function and possible limits of solidarity, to which she returns several times in her writings. Unsurprisingly, Arendt is in fact highly critical of forms of compassion and humanitarianism toward the oppressed that emerge in invisibility, in "dark times", because, in her view, like all emotions, they are passive, they do not generate action, and they «tend to muteness, and while they may well produce sound, they do not produce speech and certainly not dialogue» (Arendt 1968: 16).[2] These forms of solidarity, moreover, do not concern those who are not in the same condition as the oppressed, and are based on the idea that what is shared is a certain variable idea of humanity, rather than the visible and common world. Such feelings, Arendt continues, are in fact quickly swept away by liberation, by the return to normality and visibility, to the public sphere (*ibid.*). The crucial point for her is that a feeling of brotherhood, while not insignificant in itself—since it brings comfort and warmth to those who suffer violence and are forced to live in darkness—is, from a political point of view, «absolutely irrelevant» (*ibid.*) precisely because it does not concern the world. Following Lessing and drawing on Greek thought, Arendt highlights by contrast the political pregnancy of friendship which consists in discourse, is sober and cool, and not sentimental, «makes political demands and preserves reference to the world» (ivi: 25).

[2] This reflection is consistent with the well-known critical analysis of the merely humanitarian—and therefore non-political—approach to, human rights that Arendt develops in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1973: 290–302).

While the flotilla seems amply to demonstrate that action moved by solidarity can actually be vocal, visible and aimed at preserving the world – and may actually substantiate actions of civil disobedience such as Arendt praised and defended (see Arendt 1972) – , the literature on solidarity is full of similar criticisms, oppositional analyses and assumptions, frequently based on confusion between solidarity, brotherhood, humanitarianism and similar concepts.

In this regard, Sangiovanni has for instance highlighted that, for many, solidarity is not a necessary requirement in a liberal, individualistic society for reasons ranging from its being «illiberal» or «exclusionary», to being «empty» or «redundant» (Sangiovanni and Viehoff 2023; Sangiovanni 2024a).

While our (even very recent) history provides evidence for the fact that solidarity can be enacted as an exclusionary and illiberal principle *against* (variously defined) others, another limitation would thus be that we do not need to assign a particular value to solidarity because its definition remains hard to pin down and we already have a plethora of similar concepts - e.g., fraternity, compassion, altruism, empathy, justice, community, humanitarianism, etc.. By that logic, that resonates with Arendt's sceptical analysis, solidarity is, at best, politically speaking a useless or redundant concept, or, in the worst case, a dangerous one because it could potentially reinforce those very same phenomena – nationalism, parochialism, exclusion, racism and xenophobia, fragmentation – that deplete democracy from within.

Against this position, the starting point of this special issue[3] is that the question as to the relationship between solidarity and democracy is a politically relevant one and, more specifically, one that can be effectively investigated by looking at its origins and contemporary manifestations through multiple disciplinary lenses. In particular, the assumption is that one of the

[3] This special issue represents, at least in part, the continuation of the dialogue initiated during the seminar entitled *"Does democracy need solidarity?Reflections across disciplines"*, organized within the framework of the PRIN project *"Historical investigations on the crisis of political representation and on the evolution of the modes of participation in Early Modern and Modern societies – EADEM"*, which took place in Ravenna on April 29, 2025.

stronger arguments against the dismissive treatment of the political role of solidarity is to be found in the many histories and contexts of solidarity that have shaped, and are still shaping, the European history of democracy, while being shaped by it.

2. The product of modernity, an answer to modernity

As with Arendt's analysis, solidarity is very frequently conceived of as a mere synonym for fraternity, altruism, compassion or other similar notions. If it is true that «it is only that which has no history, which can be defined » (Nietzsche 1913: 94), the elusiveness of solidarity can easily be seen as the result of the richness of its history or, better, of its histories.

The beginning of the modern history of solidarity is commonly set in the 19th century in France, when the word "solidarity" underwent a radical semantic shift, passing from designating a legal collective obligation to honour a debt or repair damage (according to the Latin expression *obligatio in solidum*) to denoting an autonomous concept, distinct from those of charity and fraternity, and fraught with dense political, social, moral and religious implications (Hayward 1959; Blais 2012)[4].

The "pulverized", unstable and conflictual historical context in which this shift occurred was the result of a variety of changes and factors that need to be at least very briefly mentioned: the dramatic problems posed by the social question and the disordering, atomizing changes impressed on society by the advent of the capitalistic mode of production; the centrality of "the question of work" and of the ideas, practices and forms of organized resistance developed by worker organizations; the shared and destabilizing condition of anxiety and disorientation produced by the collapse of the *Ancien Régime* and the end of the Restoration; the influx of Romantic humanism, utopian doctrines, as well as of the religious revival that characterized French society following the July Monarchy; the impact of science and technical inventions on the ways in which (social) problems started to be investigated and nature, society, and history to be conceptualized and interpreted. All these broad

[4] On the meaning and role of fraternity during the French Revolution, see among many: Ozouf (1988, 1992), Vetter (2019), David (1987), Lanza (2014).

dynamics contributed, together with the influence of the doctrines of Saint-Simon and Fourier (and Owen), as well as of counter-revolutionaries, to nourishing the breeding ground from which solidarity gradually emerged and became pivotal in the 1830 and 1848 revolutions (Lanza 2006, 2010; Blais 2012; Sewell 1980; Drolet, Frobert, Schwanck 2024).

Against the despair produced by the modern dissolution of traditional bonds, the evocation of solidarity in the many pamphlets, journals and projects published between the two revolutions and around 1848 expressed the attempt to address the challenges posed by the new social and political context, that is, to address the question of poverty and material inequality and to rethink the foundation and legitimacy of political order, to (re)establish social cohesion and unity in a modern, individualized world. In one sentence: it expressed the need to harmonize «the *political* principle of democracy and its *sociological* principle» (Rosanvallon 2006: 45; Habermas 1998)[5]. Against new and ancient forms of exploitation, subjugation and oppression, solidarity was also enacted in the (old and new) practices, rituals and forms of organizations and collective action involving workers, women and common people (Sewell 1980; David 1992).

In this regard, a rich and eloquent example of the role played by solidarity in this conxtet is offered by the writings of Pierre Leroux[6] – who styled himself the inventor of the term "solidarity" (1863: 254-5). In Leroux solidarity emerges as the invisible law governing life, nature, and history. In his perspective,

[5] Further to the lexical innovation represented by the word "solidarity", the point here is to highlight that the notion of solidarity encapsulated and expressed, with regard to fraternity, a moment of profound discontinuity in terms of practices, as well as of material and intellectual conditions. For this reason, even though fraternity and solidarity are obviously closely related and would continue to coexist and be used interchangeably at the time, and still today, I contend that they should not be regarded as synonymous.

[6] Pierre Leroux (1797-1871), a self-educated intellectual of humble origins who worked as a typographer and founded many important journals, was an exponent of so-called republican, fraternal or utopian socialism and exerted a great influence upon his contemporaries at least until the second phase of the Second Republic. For a short biographical note on Leroux, see *Le Maitron. Dictionnaire Biographique. Mouvement Ouvrier, Mouvement Sociale*, s.v. 'Leroux Pierre', https://maitron.fr/spip.php?article33921 (accessed July, 26 2024).

which is particularly indicative of the thought maturing within the so-called fraternal socialist milieu, solidarity combines not only a crucial attitude of human nature and a natural law to be recognized in history, but also a principle of political action and social organization[7]. In this light, solidarity for him is, at the same time, the overcoming and realization of the 1789 revolution, the new dogma of a new, secularized «religion of praxis» (Lanza 2023) expressing the attempt to keep together «the progressive development of self-consciousness, (…) practical-critical activity, and the self-transformation of society itself» (ivi: 416). As we will see, the centrality of knowledge and information, the role of the press, associations, and forms of social organization, alongside the conception and logic of sovereignty, the organization of representation, and the function of the State, constitute some of the elements he engages with and fundamentally subverts in his projects, writings, and speeches, in the name of solidarity.

In contrast with the sense of abnegation and acceptance implicit in Christian charity, to Leroux solidarity is an active principle of organization and resistance, a virtue that is «neither aggression, nor martyrdom; it is resistance against oppression» (Leroux 2007a [1849]:360; Leroux 1840, vol. I) that will allow the final realization of Christianity and Christian fraternity (Leroux 1978a [1850]; Lanza 2023). It is a principle that is to be apprehended in both a scientific and practical way in its specific logic and content; and it leads to organizing the best possible social state on earth, to establishing a just society, «the religious democracy of the future» (Leroux 1978a : 319 [1850]; Le Bras-Chopard 1992). Association – which he considered a synonym for solidarity or socialism - is the ultimate realization of human history, the «Rubicon to cross or not, and beyond which everything changes appearance». «From now on» – he would write – «society is entering a new era, in which the general tendency of laws, instead of being aimed at individualism, will be aimed at association» (1978b [1841]: 195).

[7] On a small scale in the community of Boussac, Leroux, like many at the time (Owen, Fourier, Cabet), tried to implement his model of social coexistence alternative to capitalism; on this see Frobert (2023).

In this context solidarity is thus clearly something more than a mere synonym for fraternity or for a charitable or altruistic disposition. While it has an emotional content, Leroux's solidarity does not imply instinct or abnegation (like charity), still less asymmetry or paternalism. It does not derive from an episodic disposition, nor from an imposed obligation or an artificial convention, but from knowledge and organization informed by correct understanding –beyond the simplistic opposition between altruism and self-interest – of our nature and interest, and of the law that governs nature and explains history (Le Bras-Chopard 1992; Lanza 2010).

In his view solidarity is both universal, expressing our relational nature and common belonging to humanity, and particular, as it manifests primarily in the family, workshop (or property) and government (or the State), which constitute the three founding, natural, and radically to be reformed, institutions of human sociability. It is, at once, strictly egalitarian and based on the recognition of *difference*, of individualities, from whence friendship, for instance, develops (Le Bras-Chopard 1992)[8].

If particular solidarity is spatial, grounded in proximity and closeness, the universal dimension of solidarity may be grasped in the temporal connection that exists between generations as well as in the exchange and mutual benefit between branches of knowledge that foster progress (Le Bras-Chopard 1992). In this sense, solidarity involves comprehension of the unity and plurality of knowledge, of the constant communication between individuals and generations, between tradition and innovation, of

the link that unites all these spirits, the law of their successive generation, the law of their affinity and their common movement at the same time, of their difference and their contrasts from one period to anoth-

[8] In line with his triadic interpretation of reality, Leroux argues that each individual is simultaneously animated by *sensation-feeling-knowledge*, which all have the same value and cannot justify any form of hierarchy or exclusion. This does not mean that there are no differences among them for individuals feel affinity and develop friendship with some and not with others because they are sensation-feeling-knowledge in variable percentages and therefore search for those companions who can complement their own characteristics.

er... this chain of spirits, in a word, without the knowledge of which you have nothing left but loose and useless rings (Leroux 1978c [1833-35]:9).

Solidarity for him is also the idiom, practice and organizational principle reflecting the centrality of work for legitimation and government of the republic to be established and stabilized. It is a practice he directly experienced and enacted as a typographer and founder of many journals[9], aimed at radically transforming society. To do so he fiercely criticized the scientific viability of English political economy and Malthusianism and the existing regime of private property, while promoting concrete reforms in favor of workers as a member of the National Constituent Assembly first, and then of the Legislative Assembly. In his view, the social and political question are, in fact, one and the same thing (Viard 2007a; Furia 2022): as aptly summarized by Lanza, «Democracy and work are two sides of the same social transformation; citizen and worker two figures of the same revolution» (Lanza 2010, kindle ed.)[10].

Solidarity, to Leroux, thus does not simply indicate the existence of social relations to be scientifically investigated and organized so as to remove exploitation and conflict but implies a new epistemology, neither organicistic nor individualistic or contractarian, capable of acknowledging the founding, "natural" value of the interpersonal dimension of life as well as the real nature of individuals, which is based on integration of reason, sensation and feeling:

No man exists independently of humanity, and yet humanity is not a real being; humanity is man — that is, men — that is, particular and individual beings. [...] There is an interpenetration between the particular being, man, and the general being, humanity.
And life results from this interpenetration (Leroux 2007c [1840]: 147).

[9] In 1839 the typographers created a clandestine mutual aid society which managed to obtain some important concessions as regards social security for the sick, disabled and strikers (see Sewell 1980). Leroux founded or co-founded many journals, among which the influential *The Globe* (1824) and the impressive *Encyclopédie nouvelle ou Dictionnaire philosophique* (1833-1842). For more details on Leroux's activities see Viard (2007a), Furia (2022).
[10] On Leroux's conception of work and private property see Lanza (2006).

Solidarity, as has been written with regard to the fundamental influence of counter-revolutionaries in this regard, thus becomes a new principle of order implying a major «shift in the conceptualization of politics» (Chignola 2018: 303), a shift from «an ontology of reflexivity to an ontology of relation» (*ibid.*).

In the socialist debate this new principle of order assumed a progressive declination, in contrast both with revolutionaries and with conservatives (ivi: 311), was seen as the most effective and realistic way to remove the root causes of conflict, economic exploitation and alienation, and translated into a number of diverse projects of economic and political reform concerning the role and function of the State. These included the suppression, limitation or regulation of private property; recognition of the centrality of work and the need to regulate it; the reforming of representation, the role of education, the press and social actors, as well as the material organization of public spaces (Lanza 2006, 2010).

In the case of Leroux, who kept a distance from extreme positions like that of Proudhon, on the one hand, and Blanc, on the other, the realization of solidarity was the essence of his definition of socialism as a middle way between revolution and moderation:

I am therefore not a *socialist*, if by this word is meant an opinion that would tend to involve the State in the formation of a new society in which …our fathers' immortal motto would be truly realised: *liberty*, *fraternity*, *equality*. No, it is not to bring about a new society in every respect that you have received a mandate from the people, but to enable this new society to be brought about by the individual efforts of citizens escaping from the nothingness of individualism, and converging, through attempts at association of every kind, towards the true society of which humanity has hitherto had only an imperfect and crude image…

But between the intervention of the State in social relations and the denial of all mediation and all tutelary rights on the part of the State, there is a vast field in which the State can walk and must walk, without which there is no more State, there is no more collective society, and we fall back into chaos. The State must intervene to protect the freedom of contracts, the freedom of transactions, but it must also intervene to prevent despotism and licence, which, under the pretext of freedom of contracts, would destroy all freedom and society as a

whole… Two abysses line the road that the State must follow; it must walk between these two abysses: *inter utrumque tene* (Leroux 2007d [1848]: 347).

Together with contesting the capitalistic exploitation of workers, in both theoretical and practical terms, the attempt to "walk between two abysses" in institutional terms would mean, for him, radically reconceptualizing sovereignty as «*triple et indivisible*» (Leroux 1978b: 164 and 160-5, 1948: 13-14) – at the same time individual, social and public/institutional (state-owned) –, but still unitary, thanks to the constant communication and confrontation between the individual and the public sphere ensured by the press, associations, intellectuals, education, frequent elections to prevent indifference and depoliticization: that is, by the progressive recognition and working of the social sphere of solidarity (Le Bras-Chopard 1991; Furia 2025).

Convinced that the recognition of universal suffrage – granted to men in 1848 – did not remove the causes of inequality, he also proposed a radical reengineering of national representation by organizing it, in keeping with his "triadic obsession", into three chambers – *Corps Judiciaire*, *Corps Législatif* and *Corps Exécutif* – each of which would be composed of representatives of the three main professional categories (industrialists, artists and scholars) and would be autonomous while forming, here again through communication and confrontation, a unitary *Représentation nationale* (Leroux 1848: 37-9 and 59)[11].

Apart from the bizarre obsessions for which he was also often teased, to Leroux solidarity clearly informs the individual, social and political sphere, albeit in the different ways. It translates into a radical reconfiguration of political institutions, which are seen as emanating from society but remain distinct from it and are not absorbed by it, as Proudhon or Blanc, in one way or another, would want, for instance (Le Bras-Chopard 1991). By ensuring conciliation and distinction Leroux's solidarity would thus crucially contribute to creating the conditions for the realization of democracy, for self-rule to take place

[11] In 1832 following Reynaud, Leroux had strongly supported the need for special representation of the proletariat. On the meaning and logic of this peculiar form of corporativism see Lanza (2006).

through conciliation «between *each person* considered as sovereign, and *all* considered as sovereign»(Leroux 1978b: 155), between individual freedom and collective order.

3. Historically grounded answers…

While particularly influential and articulated, Leroux's conceptualization was one of many elaborated around 1848, it was challenged and contested during Leroux's lifetime, and it lost relevance quite quickly after the coup d'état of 1851 (La Puma 2007). Leroux's "religious" and political conception was for instance strongly criticized by Proudhon in the name of its belief in the independent, spontaneous, self-governing organization of workers (see Proudhon 1840, 1849)[12]; and also, on the other side of the political spectrum, by illiberal or anti-liberal Catholics, as well as liberal ones, who supported a religious (in the traditional sense) conception of solidarity (Blais 2012).

The plurality of definitions and possible conceptions of solidarity, which is widely acknowledged in the literature (Blais 2012; Sangiovanni and Viehoff 2023; Bayertz 1999 Bayertz and Baurmann 2002), frequently originates from the diverse "political anthropology" and epistemological grounds upon which the notion of solidarity is developed.

In this regard, Niall Bond's contribution outlines how varied and variable the definitions of solidarity can be and have been. From a counter-revolutionary religious foundation upon the notion of sin, to the moral connotation assigned to it by Bouglé and Bourgeois, to Durkheim's distinction between organic and mechanical solidarity, the constellation that surrounds the notion of solidarity, and is intersected by it, is broad and extremely ramified. Particularly interesting in this regard is the reconstruction, presented in Bond's article, of the polemic interaction between the most prominent French and German sociologists between the late 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. The distance between Durkheim's functionalism and Tönnies' (who did not use the word solidarity) critique of rationality

[12] As highlighted by Lanza (2023), Proudhon did not understand Leroux's specific form of religion, which was radically distant from tradition and caused his excommunication.

in the analysis of the ongoing process of transformation of relationships, together with Weber's rich categorization of solidarity as a possible, temporary characteristic of a set of relationships (and not as a necessary or probable consequence of human coexistence), is indicative of the fact that the peculiar historical context, together with the epistemological and anthropological stances adopted, clearly have a huge impact on the framing and understanding of solidarity.

While the assumption that solidarity is inherently pluralist forms the starting point of all the contributions to the issue, Elena Musiani's comparative analysis of the practices developing in France and Italy in the second half of the 19th century demonstrates the centrality of those experiences, and the claims they voiced, in the multiple, context-specific, historical processes that shaped women's social identity and subjectivity, as well as material conditions, giving birth to a rich variety of projects, forms of association, organizations and networks. In the terrain nourished and opened up by the Saint-Simonian doctrine of social and political renovation, and by the intention to go beyond it, a collective "female associative space" and women's social and political subjectivity started to grow and flourish in France; journals were published and organizations and associations set up by pioneering activists including Jeanne Deroin, Désirée Gay, Jeanne-Marie Poinsard and Flora Tristan. As Musiani's paper highlights, Saint-Simonianism, in this case filtered through Mazzinian tradition, had a sizable impact on Italy where a similar process developed from within friendly societies and worker movements, and led to the configuration of a new egalitarian, mutual, and no longer paternalistic or philanthropic, form of solidaristic associations (alongside the old models of association) promoting the education and vocational training, material well-being and economic emancipation of women.

Elena Irrera's and Beata Paragi and Ewa Ślęzak-Belowska's essays, on the other hand, while further enriching the debate around the meaning and common understanding of solidarity, shed light from two very different perspectives on the communitarian vocation of solidarity, as well as on its potentially contradictory effects.

Focusing on Aristotle's thought and drawing on Habermas' idea of solidarity as the "reverse side" of justice, Irrera illustrates how φιλία (philia), and its relationship to justice, can be seen as a perspective enriching the understanding of solidarity. Aristotle's *philia* is not an abstract or universal ideal, but a practice based on the sharing of common goods, reciprocal concern, and also the capacity for joint deliberation. Founded upon equality and shared decision-making, civic *philia* enhances justice while strengthening the sense of community. Equal and broad participation in political and legislative activity also seems, as the paper points out, to guarantee a degree of stability and a richer and more nuanced debate than might be found in constitutions founded upon ethical and political excellence. Irrera shows how friendship, justice, and civic participation – while positing a sort of embryonic form of solidarity – converge toward the building of a stable and cohesive community. In the end, as the analysis of the role of friendship highlights, the construction of a just and inclusive society depends not only on impersonal rules or institutional structures, but also on solidarity, on the citizens' capacity to recognize one another as co-participants in a common project founded on care, dialogue, and shared responsibility.

Focusing their attention on the ways in which the welcome and hospitality given to Ukrainian refugees in the Central East European States (namely, Hungary and Poland) have been framed as an exemplary case of "selective solidarity", Paragi and Ślęzak-Belowska challenge this assumption, and the categories based on racism and/or postcolonial deconstruction commonly used to support it. Starting from the distinction between "international solidarity" (among states), – which is in theory what substantiates foreign aid or humanitarian enterprises (even though in reality this is hardly confirmed by the literature and ethnographic studies) –, and "transnational" or "global solidarity" (solidarity between non-state actors), the paper shows how the debate on solidarity was further revitalised as a consequence of migrant and refugee flows after the invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and became a contested domain of action for civil society actors, who have been increasingly torn between moral imperatives in the name of transnational solidarity

and the still ongoing process of criminalizing solidarity. Adopting a methodology based on desk and field research, the essay shows how, if we are to understand the reasons behind the application of a double standard toward Ukrainian refugees, we need to contextualise the issue both within the history of the borderlands of Poland and Hungary with Ukraine, and within the CEE States with their history of subjection to Western imperialism and great power rivalry over the centuries. Paragi and Ślęzak-Belowska show how the idea of solidarity develops historically and in parallel with the emergence (and consolidation) of communal ties; thus the historical dimensions of (missing) solidarity are at least as important as the spatial factors determining it.

4.…to contemporary questions?

Besides the interest of a doctrine which cemented «a veritable body of doctrine of solidarity» (Leroux quoted in David 1982: 18), Leroux's conception is also relevant because, as already briefly mentioned, on his view acknowledging, sustaining and organizing solidarity would be the only way to finally achieve democracy – which he often calls " religious" or "social" democracy.

In this sense, his analysis provides a useful, preliminary map for the investigation of the possible historical trajectories that link solidarity and democracy. The contributions to this issue briefly summarised above seem to reinforce, and actually enrich, the hypothesis, taken from Leroux's doctrine of solidarity, that talking about solidarity may mean, in different ways depending on the author and historical context: talking about the foundation of political order and the form of social integration; practicing and demanding justice, forms of redistribution of valuable social and political resources (including access to political communities); and calling into question the "political anthropology" and the cognitive, epistemic and self-educating requirements upon which the shared identity of political communities is commonly grounded.

In this attempt, it thus seems that the first point that emerges from the historical overviews presented in this issue, is

quite obviously the connection between solidarity and the establishment and legitimation of political order. Playing the same role as religion but in the above-described radically new and secularized way – Leroux would actually say that solidarity «is the basis of religion and of all religions» (Leroux 2007e [1841-42]: 265) – in 19th-century France solidarity provided a scientific and practical answer to the need to re-establish unity, in its material, intellectual and symbolic dimensions, as well as to integrate individuals in a modern context, based on equal sovereignty and individual rights, in which integration was no longer a 'given' (Rosanvallon 2006). As Jacques Donzelot put it, while until 1848 «the Republic indeed appears as a global response to the problems of life in society», after 1848, with the evident contradictions inherent in democratic sovereignty, it will no longer appear as a response «but as a problem: less a remedy than a challenge to be met» (Donzelot 1994:15-16):

> As the incarnation of the sovereignty of all, the expression of the general will, and the manifestation of society's 'common self,' all of this situates the State within an unbounded conception of its role, inevitably eliciting pressures from the people upon the Assembly, as in April 1848. Any restriction on the actualization of a rigorous and uncompromising fraternity encompassing the entirety of society toward the oppressed—both internally and externally—fuels the specter of a reactionary conspiracy... Yet this very conception of sovereignty simultaneously engenders the fear of the emergence of a new form of despotism. Among the upper classes, the fear of state socialism is nourished by the absence of any effective constraint on the power of the State, granted by its newly acquired political legitimacy. As an emanation of each individual's sovereignty—of that divine particle now equally shared—the power of the State becomes nothing more than delegated power and may therefore be rejected by all. …It is from this perspective that one must view the June 1848 insurrection, the Paris Commune of 1871, and the anarcho-syndicalist movement. …This oscillation between two opposing understandings of the notion of sovereignty makes the Republic appear at once frightening and disappointing (ivi: 63).

In reply to such a challenge, Donzelot argues, the French Third Republic "invented" solidarity to guarantee unity and social order, to establish and, at the same time, limit the role of

the State with regard to society. While Donzelot aptly investigates the contributions of Émile Durkheim, Léon Duguit, Maurice Hauriou and Léon Bourgeois as the champions of solidarity, it seems fair to say that the role and implications of solidarity for the conceptualization of political order were already being vigorously discussed and experienced at least fifty years before.

In this light, solidarity can thus legitimately be seen as a historically produced answer to the question of political order and social integration, as a way to rethink the conditions of political obligation over and above any contract-based conception (see Marcucci 2014: 70), which has been institutionalized, after the tragic failure of the Weimar experiment, in the contemporary constitutions of European democracies (see Gozzi 1992; Borgetto 1996; Herrera 2008, 2011; Losano 200; Supiot 2013; Rodotà 2014). If solidarity is thus part of the European history of democracy, one should not downplay the intrinsic tension that exists between its universal and its particular side – clearly visible in Leroux's conception and emerging in all its complexity in Paragi and Ślęzak-Belowska's essay – which has been the object of a long, multidisciplinary and rich debate on the subjects of global justice, transnational solidarity, migration and the limitations of citizenship, difference and inequality, postcolonial practices and spaces of solidarity (see O'Neill 2000; Singer 2002; Pogge 2002; Fraser 2008; Marion Young 2011; Brunkhorst 2005; Crawford 2002; Bauböck 1994; Benhabib 2004; Sangiovanni 2013, 2017; Banting and Kymlicka 2017; Spivak 1994; Mohanti 2003)[13].

To come to terms with this difficulty, the distinction between "solidarity with" and "solidarity among" (O'Neill 1996), and between "solidarity of community" and "solidarity of fight" (Bayertz and Baurmann 2002), together with many other such distinctions have been introduced in the debate on solidarity in the attempt to identify what qualifies certain actions as «*genu-*

[13] In his theory Leroux acknowledges this duality and, recalling the classical civilizational argument, asserts that France's mission and guidance would allow solidarity – as the guarantee of peace – to become universal also in practice by projecting (or exporting) it outside, at the European and international level (see Leroux 1978b: 227-232, 254-288). On the limitations of Leroux's criticisms of colonialism see Le Bras-Chopard (1986).

ine solidarity» (Sangiovanni and Viehoff 2023). While the debate remains open, and the question of the nature and boundaries of solidarity tragically relevant, both in practical and normative terms, it seems possible to say, drawing on Leroux's, Musiani's and Paragi and Ślęzak-Belowska's arguments, as well as on Arendt's notion of civil disobedience, that the tension between a bounded practice and a universal aspiration is probably one of the grounds upon which solidarity – especially when seen as a horizontal, creative and vindicatory social practice still more than an institutional duty –, can reaffirm its crucial role in keeping democratic communities open, responsive, inclusive and 'alive' in substantial, and not only in formal, terms[14].

This relates directly with the oppositional content of solidarity (Scholz 2008), the demands and "redistributive" (in a broader sense) goal that have given substance to acts of solidarity. Whereas Bond and Irrera highlight the close, definitional link between (certain conceptions of) solidarity and justice, the same connection emerges, at a practical level, in the contexts analyzed by Musiani and Paragi & Ślęzak-Belowska. The centrality of solidarity when it comes to contesting the exploitative and lacerating logic of capitalism, and proposing alternative forms of political, economic and social organization, is clearly demonstrated by the history of worker movements (Sewell 1980) as well as of feminist, antiracist, and anticolonial ones (Mohanty 2003, Guerra and Musiani 2025). As these analyses demonstrate, mobilization, social movements and networks create the grounds for the emancipation of marginalized political subjects, as well as for resources to be activated and alternatives devised; it hardly needs saying how vital these processes and dynamics are for democratic life and resilience.

Lastly, the third possible trajectory that seems to emerge from the analysis lies in the fact that for solidarity to be acknowledged and achieved in practice, a shared cognitive, emotional and moral apparatus is needed, to acquire which we also need to enlist a variety of social actors, practices and forms of organization. In these sense, in European history solidarity

[14] For an analysis—developed through the notion of « religious democracy »—of Leroux's idea of solidarity as the link between the universal and the particular, between *homme* and *citoyen*, see Fedi (2001).

has provided an effective way to combine individual and collective (self-) understanding, (self-)education and (self)transformation for the progressive achievement of democracy (see Lanza 2023).

It is commonly acknowledged that communities of any type, and even more so political communities, need forms of commonality and vectors of integration to be stable and durable. These common «horizons of value and understanding capable of unifying a community» (Tietz 2020) have been named in different ways over the centuries. "Common sense", "tradition", "customs", "the common good", "public ethics" are some of the concepts that have been used – together with that of religion and nation/nationality/nationalism, which represent the semantic constellations that have catalyzed most of the attention. It is particularly relevant for our discussion to note that also the market (economic exchange) has been, and still is, identified as the most effective agent of social integration by classical economists, starting with Smith, up to the neoliberals (Rosanvallon 2006).

While, as we have seen, solidarity intersects, and partially overlaps with, most of the notions mentioned above, it tends to deny the integrating function of the market, and its epistemological apparatus. More broadly, it seems fair to say that solidarity, at least in certain configurations, challenges the modern, rationalist and economistic representation of human nature and life. Solidarity implies a relational, embodied, vulnerable and situated notion of individuality and, in this sense, aligns with the some of the tenets of feminist and postcolonial critiques, as well as with approaches centred on gift-giving, as they challenge the idea that the logic of economic exchanges and the "Rational Action Theory" can explain not only economic exchanges but any sort of interaction; solidarity likewise challenges the abstract, individualized, self-sufficient, autonomous representation of human nature, and related epistemology, as being illusional, functional to preserving privilege and inferiorizing certain groups, and dangerous for democracy (Fistetti 2012; Casalini 2016).

In this regard, it seems fair to say that the ongoing neoliberal "transfiguration" of democracy – characterized by its compet-

itive and highly individualized logic, the delegitimization of politics and the Welfare state, the centrality of a consumerist, private and privatized, way of life, and the increasing levels of marginalization and inequality (Urbinati 2020; Brown 2011; Harvey 2005) – , combined with the spread of openly illiberal forms of democracy, has created strong grounds for challenging the economization and marketization of life, knowledge, and society. This context also revives the central debate on the conditions for democracy (and its institutions) and collective life, as reflected in the recent resurgence of scientific interest in solidarity (Furia 2022).

The current crisis of democracy has been described as a result of the simultaneous processes of «Deconstitutionalization» (Ferrajoli 2013), «De-democratisation» (Brown 2011: 46), and more recently, starting from the oppression, violence and exclusion meted out to migrants, of «a tendency toward *desolidarity,* understood as the critical dismantling of solidarity as a concept, obligation, or practice» (Okafor 2019:7).

Of course, solidarity cannot be regarded as a panacea for all ills but, as this issue has shown, it has shaped the history of democracy and its loss is hardly likely to have no consequences.

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Abstract

DOES DEMOCRACY NEED SOLIDARITY? THE REASONS FOR A QUESTION

Keywords: solidarity, Pierre Leroux, democracy, social practices.

Is solidarity necessary to support democracy? What has been its historical role and political function in this regard? How can the particularistic, and potentially exclusionary, aspects of solidarity be reconciled with its universal aspirations? While our (even very recent) history provides evidence that solidarity can be enacted as an exclusionary and illiberal principle against variously defined "others," the starting point of this special issue is that the question of the relationship between solidarity and democracy is politically significant and, more specifically, one that can be effectively explored by examining both its historical origins and contemporary manifestations through multiple disciplinary lenses.

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