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DOES DEMOCRACY NEED SOLIDARITY?

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Does democracy need solidarity?

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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 co-existence possible. Similarly, after the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the massacre of Ukrainian citizens European countries witnessed an unprecedented wave of passionate mo-

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[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).

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[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

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[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

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[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,

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[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).

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[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-

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[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).

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[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

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[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

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[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 co-existence), 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-*

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[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

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[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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ELENA IRRERA

A PROTO-SOLIDARITY?
FRIENDSHIP, JUSTICE AND POLITICAL
PARTICIPATION IN ARISTOTLE

1. *Setting the issue*

Solidarity is increasingly regarded as a normative ideal of considerable theoretical and practical significance within liberal democratic contexts, being frequently invoked for its potential to mediate the complex relationship between moral motivation and political commitment[1]. If considered from the point of view of political theory, such an ideal might be thought to offer a promising perspective of analysis for a wide variety of demands for social justice that can be addressed at the institutional level – i.e. demands that could be framed as "claims for solidarity". To those same claims, it might encourage responses consonant to principles of mutual recognition, respect of individual and group rights – and suggest the need for a sense of shared responsibility towards the redress of certain conditions of asymmetry, exclusion, or systemic disadvantage[2].

Within contemporary political theory and moral philosophy, solidarity is often conceptualized as a factor of public cohesion, and also as an ideal whose normative strength develops against the backdrop of a shared awareness of human interdependence and of the risk of widespread vulnerability[3]. If operationalized through appropriate legal and institutional mechanisms, it may foster the creation of a sense of unity not only within relatively homogeneous political communities – such as Nation-States bound by (relatively) shared cultural, religious, or ideological commitments – but also within pluralistic societies characterized by deep diversity and normative pluralism[4]. As a normative

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[1] On this perspective on solidarity see Blais (2017).
[2] See Sangiovanni (2013, 2015, and 2023).
[3] See Blais (2001: 175, and 2007).
[4] See Banting & Kymlicka (2017).

principle, it calls not merely for affective identification or empathetic concern for certain conditions of vulnerability and distress, but also and especially for various kinds of collective agency and coordinated action – both within civil society and institutional systems.

Facing the issue from an exquisitely historic-philosophical *côté*, it might be said (in agreement with a vast majority of scholars) that the idea of solidarity seems to have found proper theoretical articulation only in the modern age. Having developed in the aftermath of the French Revolution[5], that concept experienced significant success across the entire nineteenth century – e.g. in the leftist milieux before the revolution of 1848, and also in the growing intellectual and ideological movements that opposed the imperial regime from 1852 to 1870. Solidarity notably gained political consecration in the 20th century, especially through thinkers like Léon Bourgeois, who considered it to be an alternative between an atomizing liberal individualism and collectivist socialism[6], and Pierre Leroux, who believed that the notion of *solidarité* could play a crucial role in rethinking the distinctive aims and strategies of political (democratic) activity[7].

Despite the distinctively modern development of that notion, it might be supposed that some of its core elements can be detected in embryonic form in ancient political thought – most notably in Aristotle's philosophy[8]. In this essay, I will suggest that some features of Aristotle's ethical and political reflections provide fertile ground for rethinking modern and contemporary notions of solidarity. My approach is twofold: on the one hand, I

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[5] See Blais (2001: 175). As the author contends, solidarity was seen at that time as a possible remedy against the risk of citizens free and equal in law, but isolated from each other and unaware of their reciprocal needs.

[6] See Blais (2001 and 2007).

[7] See Furia (2022). At pp. 16-17 the author points out that Pierre Leroux calls himself the inventor of the term "solidarity", being one of the first authors to make systematic use of it since he makes it a pivotal element in the architecture of his political thought and his vision of democracy.

[8] This has been noted by Bayertz, who speaks about a natural sense of human sociability in Aristotle (See Bayertz 1999: pp. 9-10). See also Jang (2018), who speaks about Aristotle's idea of "political friendship" as a form of solidarity in the modern sense.

will consider how modern theories of solidarity can illuminate certain aspects of Aristotle's political thought; on the other hand, I will examine how Aristotelian insights might, in turn, enrich and refine contemporary understandings of solidarity. In the following section I offer a cursory overview of the relationships between solidarity and justice in contemporary political theory – with special focus on the ideas of solidarity as "joint action" and "justice within a community". In the following sections I take issue with some aspects of Aristotle's political philosophy, starting from an examination of his theory of friendship (φιλία) and its connections to the ideas of "justice" (δικαιοσύνη) and "community" (κοινωνία). In the last section, I will propose that Aristotle's idea of civic friendship as a "community-based justice" resonates with some of his views on the possibility of an inclusive citizenship (this to be understood as active participation of "equal", although not necessarily virtuous, people in the political life). I will contend that a special form of solidarity might arise between people endowed with equal access to political participation.

2. Solidarity and community. A provisional definitory attempt

In everyday understanding, solidarity is generally conceived as an other-regarding attitude, which might be expressed in practice through words and/or actions designed to offer material support and/or recognition to people in vulnerable situations. The concept of "solidarity", however, is notoriously elusive and can assume different (and often incompatible) shapes, provided that it can be operationalized though initiatives that intercept a heterogeneous variety of actors, dynamics, and contexts, at the private, as well as at the public level[9]. On the one hand, solidarity can be compared to individual altruistic behavior which does not demand reciprocity; on the other, it can be conceptually framed as an ideal capable of informing juridical dispositions which, as a consequence, commit the concerned subjects to reciprocal justice. Addressing the issue from a normative point of view, it might be conceptualized as a duty –

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[9] See Furia (2022: 8); Bayertz (1999: vii).

moral and/or legal. From an analytical one, instead, it might be described either as a private, subjective inclination – one which does not presuppose any juridical regulation – or as a principle that guides and shapes the inner organization of informal groups and contract-based partnerships. Leaving aside the idea of solidarity as unilateral and spontaneous individual initiative, it is perhaps more fitting – especially from the perspective of political philosophy – to understand it as a network of reciprocal practices within groups and associations, sustained by mutual care and concern, as well as by attention to the well-being of the collective to which each individual belongs. Even so, however, some distinctions are in order. As the sociologist Jodi Dean for instance contends, group-solidarity might be based on features like a shared identity, value-grounded similarities, or common experience. In that case, solidarity would exclude difference, and would prove to be a bond of cohesion strengthened by conformity. A similar view of solidarity, as she notes, risks to marginalize those who do not fully fit the identity and/or the experience of a certain group[10]. A second – and more promising for the scopes of contemporary liberal democratic theory – is what Dean names "reflective solidarity". This second form of solidarity, which fits pluralist societies marked by various kinds of disagreement, relies on reciprocal communicative commitment. Solidarity, in this respect, evokes a sense of responsibility, responsiveness and accountability, rather than homogeneity of views[11].

A further conceptualization, proposed by Sally Scholz, emphasizes how, within associative forms characterized by substantial homogeneity of views, we can speak of *social solidarity* – one that does not involve particular adversities, struggles, or unrecognized demands. A different form of solidarity, which might be named *political*, is the one arising from a shared experience of exploitation or oppression, being based on a shared commitment to combating various types of injustice. This form of solidarity, which we might consider "horizontal" (in that it can be structured between individuals united by a shared situation), generates bonds of cohesion that, depending on the in-

[10] See Dean (1995: 117-123).
[11] Ivi: 123-137.

tensity and closeness of the members of the structured group, will in turn constitute a source of moral obligations[12]. A third type of solidarity, one not necessarily related to the prospect of homogeneity of views, is named by Scholz *civic solidarity*. Being "vertical", it finds expression in the obligation of civic institutions to protect citizens from various kinds of vulnerability – mostly through welfare measures[13].

The tendency – documented in recent academic scholarship – to articulate the semantic scope of solidarity by differentiating meanings and contexts of application does not appear to be driven by mere speculative curiosity. Such differentiations are rather due to the urgency – both metalinguistic and ethical – of selecting and formulating a definition of solidarity that proves epistemically valuable and efficient in addressing issues of justice within specific domains of inquiry (whether empirical, sociological or distinctively philosophic-political)[14]. If understood as a social and/or political force, solidarity can be defined as "cooperative action", which is to say, a form of acting together to overcome significant adversity, where participants identify with one another and display a shared willingness to come to each other's aid in the pursuit of group-goals. A similar way of understanding solidarity involves reciprocity[15],

A theory of solidarity as "joint action," such as the one formulated by Andrea Sangiovanni[16], requires that the subjects involved in cooperative agency consider each other to be equally endowed with a certain threshold of epistemic capacity to contribute to the process. Reciprocal accountability and recognition of the moral (as well as intellectual) authority of the persons involved underlies a communicative dimension enervated by the use of mutual respect and public reasons – i.e. justifications consonant to liberal principles that reasonable citizens

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[12] See Scholz (2008: 5).

[13] *Ibidem.*

[14] This aspect of academic research on solidarity has been stressed in Sangiovanni (2025).

[15] See Sangiovanni (2025: 35).

[16] Sangiovanni (2015).

would recognize, regardless of substantive reciprocal disagreement[17].

In Sangiovanni's view, persons displaying solidarity as (and also in the context of) joint-action are (aware of being equally) committed to the achievement of a shared goal. To this purpose, they are ready to overcome some significant adversity[18], to display the intention to do their part in achieving the shared goal in ways that converge to it. This is not to say that each of the committed subjects should perform the same actions, nor that they should be endowed with an equal, specific and measurable degree of epistemic capacity and authority to intervene in a shared process.

It is interesting to note that, among the various theoretical and normative requirements applicable to a view of solidarity as 'joint action,' Sangiovanni also includes the tendency to "share one another's fates in ways relevant to the shared goal"[19]. Reciprocity in commitment, as well as the awareness of a shared goal, would seem to cement a bond that does not necessarily have to do with pre-existing and similar identities, but which finds in the very undertaking of the goal a reason for structuring and development.

If understood as a process able to activate joint, collaborative and reciprocally respectful dialogue, solidarity could be framed as a form of justice empowered by a sense of "community", i.e. partnership. The idea of solidarity as a principle that develops contextually to the emergence (and consolidation) of communal ties, rather than through abstract rules. In short, practices that might be defined as "solidaristic" do not simply concern the performance of just acts from a neutral, impersonal detached

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[17] On the idea of "reasonableness" as an individual attitude concerned with respect of fairness, reciprocity, and the willingness to propose and abide by fair terms of cooperation in a liberal democratic society (given the assurance that others will likewise do so) see Rawls (1993: 48-54). On his idea of public reason see pp. 212-247, especially p. 213: «public reason is characteristic of democratic people: it is the reason of its citizens, of those sharing the status of equal citizenship».

[18] On this point see Sangiovanni (2015: 343), who allegedly diverges from Rawls. Rawls believes instead that cooperation among citizens in liberal democratic societies should not be based on actions that impose significant costs on those who undertake them (See Rawls 1999: 294).

[19] See Sangiovanni (2015: 348-354).

perspective; they rather engage people in forms of communication concerning how to live together, acknowledging both individual and collective needs, and working towards solutions that reflect the lived experiences and desires of the community as a whole.

A well-known conceptualization of a (possible) correspondence between justice and solidarity is notoriously the one outlined by Jürgen Habermas. The author's interest in solidarity is part of a decades-long investigation into the factors that undermine the legitimacy of contemporary democracies. Habermas specifically questions the role that a communicative rationality between citizens and institutions, informed by principles of respect, tolerance, and the sharing of experiences and needs, can play in structuring bonds of political friendship (both nationally and transnationally). The formation of such bonds, in turn, will hopefully lead to a reduction in conflictual tensions and margins of disagreement between the parties involved. In the attempt to search for the principles able to determine and justify a deontological ethics of public discourse, Habermas initially presents solidarity as a universal moral value, which can be theoretically framed within a deontological discourse ethic, without, however, eliminating references to the dimension of care for specific individuals and groups in particular cultural, social, and value-based contexts[20]. In his exploration of the concept of solidarity, he theorizes solidarity as a normatively binding value, which can be consolidated through the exercise of democratic citizenship rights within specific political entities. More specifically, Habermas frames solidarity as an ideal capable of guiding and strengthening the exercise of such rights in the direction of authentically democratic social policies[21].

Regarding the relationship between justice and solidarity, his following statement is well known:

[J]ustice conceived deontologically requires solidarity as its reverse side. What we are dealing with here is not so much two moments

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[20] Habermas (1990a).
[21] See Habermas (1990b).

which supplement each other, but rather, and much more, two aspects of the very same thing[22].

Although acknowledging the limits of a philosophical-deontological approach to the problem of solidarity in a second phase of his reflection[23], what is argued in the above-mentioned sentence expresses a principle that is also valid for research on solidarity that does not attempt to qualify it as a source of political obligations.

Justice and solidarity, in fact, should not necessarily be understood as complementary dimensions of civil coexistence and political cooperation, as if each lacked certain qualities that the other virtually filled. On the contrary, solidarity can be interpreted as a specific and privileged mode of observation of justice—that is, its prospects, critical issues, and potential developments. This mode, in Habermas's reflection, is linked to the vision of solidarity understood as a true "form of justice", capable of developing within a framework of human coexistence founded on the sharing of fundamental values such as equal respect and the recognition of human dignity in its many facets: bonds of citizenship, rights, and mutual responsibilities. The framework in question should not be understood as a reality characterized by homogeneous views on certain areas of human life (such as religious communities or specific cultural groups), but as a terrain of civic coexistence and cooperation governed by a shared political-legislative system, and inspired by specific public values. It is in this sense, as I will suggest throughout this paper, that solidarity can be characterized as a form of "enhanced justice", that is, as justice that is not impersonal, but rather grounded in shared experiences of citizenship that also encompass a distinctly deliberative and political dimension.

3. *Aristotle's view of friendship (φιλία). Its relationship to justice and community*

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[22] See Habermas (1990a: 244).
[23] See Carrabregu (2016).

Aristotle's examination of the idea of friendship (φιλία) is part of a metaethical discussion[24] on the nature of human good and its relationship with the development of attitudes and corresponding forms of virtuous conduct. The human good is notoriously identified with εὐδαιμονία, i.e. a condition of well-being that resides in the active exercise of the human rational faculty[25]. Being conceived as the highest and ultimately desirable goal (cf. *NE* I, 5.1097a14-b7), that good elicits a natural individual tendency to bring the human ethical and intellectual potential into actualization. The realization of individual flourishing calls into play not only a propensity for speculative knowledge relative to the principles of human and natural reality, but also the inclination to establish righteous paths of evaluation and judgment with a view to virtuous decision-making (i.e. the process of human reasoning leading to the realization of what is good in specific contexts, and in an objective sense – a condition which Aristotle names "practical truth" in *NE* VI, 1.1139b21-31).

As Aristotle makes it especially clear in Books V-VIII-IX of the *Nicomachean Ethics* and Book VII of the *Eudemian Ethics*, the pursuit of the practical good, as well as the one of knowledge, can be characterized as a joint enterprise. Friendship is initially presented (in agreement with common understanding[26]) as an ingredient of the happy life. In the first place, it is described as «a kind of excellence, or goes along with excel-

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[24] See Garver (2006), who explains that Aristotle's ethical writings are not specifically designed to offer concrete and context-related solutions to practical problems.

[25] A detailed treatment of human happiness in Aristotle's philosophy goes outside the scopes of this paper. Suffice it to say that, at *NE* I, 6 (especially at 1097b24-a18), happiness is presented in terms of the actualization of a distinctively human "function" (ἔργον), that resides in the practical use of reason (1098a2-3). Happiness is described as an activity of the human soul according to virtue (1098a15-16).

[26] Aristotle's investigations in ethical matters (as well as those in physics and metaphysics) adopt as a starting point generally held opinions (ἔνδοξα), or views held by intellectuals, some of which are generally "saved" through critical examination, as Aristotle himself explains at *NE* VII, 1.1145b2-7. On this method (which might be called "dialectical" or "diaporetic", given that it develops the consequences of opposed views; See Aristotle, *Topics* I, 2 and *Metaphysics* III, 1), see Berti (1989: 125-139).

lence»[27] (*NE* VIII, 1.1155a1-2), and also as an extremely neces-
sary (ἀναγκαιότατον) – but not for this reason, purely instru-
mental – aspect of the human life, given that «no one would
choose to live without friends, even if he had all the other good
things» (*NE* VIII, 1.1155a5-6). What is more, people generally
believe that φιλία belongs to the domain of fine things (τῶν
καλῶν), i.e. one that Aristotle keeps conceptually separate from
what is purely necessary (*NE* VIII, 1.1155a29-32). Indeed, fine
things can virtually be situated beyond the sphere of material
urgency, and "the fine" itself is treated by Aristotle as a sort of
"end", and as the mark of that which achieves its formal com-
pleteness and perfection[28] (completeness which, generally, is an
end in itself and the object of intellectual contemplation, rather
than something instrumental to the achievement of further
ends)[29].

It is a value which, by presupposing an open display of re-
ciprocal benevolence (εὔνοια)[30], is by nature other-regarding,
and extends over a wide variety of relationships – such as those
that can be established within the sphere of the family, as well
as the one between people who share specific group-
experiences, values and life projects. As Aristotle says for in-
stance at *NE* VIII, 11.1159b27-32, «people address as 'friends'
those sailing with them or on campaign with them, and similar-
ly too with their partners in other kinds of sharing community».
Most crucially, "φιλία" is considered to be a relational structure

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[27] Trans. Rowe in Rowe and Broadie (2002) (from which all the passages of the *Nicomachean Ethics* will be taken, unless differently specified).
[28] This idea is especially evident in Aristotle's *Parts of Animals* (*PA* I, 5. 645a23-26), where beauty is presented as a property of living things that have achieved their full-fledged biological form.
[29] On the idea of (moral) beauty as an inherently desirable object of contempla-tion (which is also stressed by Aristotle in *Rethoric* I, 9. 1366a33) see Richard-son Lear (2006). Richardson Lear believes that Aristotle's reference to beauty in the sphere of morality and politics sheds light on the approximability of the rel-evant objects and methods of inquiry to those of metaphysics and speculative science. A different view (one I disagree with) is held by authors like Irwin (1988: 349-350) and Engberg-Pedersen (1983: 37-93), who believe that Aristotle uses the idea of beauty as a synonym for "common utility".
[30] See *NE* VIII, 2.1155b33-1156a5, where Aristotle explains that benevolence, reciprocity and openness in the expression of benevolence are requirements of any kind of friendship.

(either symmetrical or hierarchical) underlying the *polis,* which Aristotle considers to be the most complete, self-sufficient and all-encompassing community[31].

It is noteworthy that Aristotle's discussion of friendship in *NE* VIII is conducted against the backdrop of a constant critical comparison with the ideal of justice. The issue of the possible relationships between justice and friendship, which spans the whole book, is a complex one, made of spaces of correspondence and conceptual differentiation. Notwithstanding the claim that justice and friendship concern the same persons (*NE* VIII, 11.1159b25-26; *EE* VII, 10.1242a19-22), several conceptual differences exist between justice and friendship in general (which is to say, independently of the specific qualifications that Aristotle outlines in his ethical works for the two separate notions). In the first place, being conceived as a subjective attitude, justice does not necessarily presuppose reciprocity, nor the intimacy and shared experienced from which friendship instead arises. That difference also appears particularly evident with regard to his account of "perfect" justice, which is presented as lawfulness – i.e. a conformity to laws that, in their most efficient configuration, are not simply meant to promote a vague idea of common interest, or the exclusive benefit of the best people, but also the acquisition and the stable consolidation of each virtue of character (cf. *NE* V, 3.1129b14-27). Viewed in this light, justice is "perfect virtue" (τελεία ἀρετή) and, as such, those who possess it use virtue in regard to another person (πρὸς ἕτερον) (*NE* V, 3.1129b31-35).

Despite the structural link between that kind of justice and concern for others, no explicit mention is made of reciprocal interactions or exchanges of benefits. This also applies to Aristotle's view of particular justice, which is described as a circumscribed section of complete justice and, just like the whole of which it is part, presupposes both other-regardingness (*NE* V, 4.1130b1-3) and abidance by established public norms. Partic-

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[31] See *NE* VIII, 11.1160a8-30, where Aristotle notes that the political community, unlike the others, does not pursue a partial goal or benefit. Being the community to which the others are subservient, the political one does not aim at immediate utility; by contrast, it tends to the one extending to human life in its entirety and complexity. See *Pol.* I, 1.252a1-8.

ular justice is notably illustrated in *NE* V, 4 through two distinct definitory approaches: on the one hand, one that focuses on justice as an individual disposition of character [named ἰσότης and implying a subjective tendency to avoid greediness (πλεονεξία) – i.e. pretending more than is due to one (*NE* V, 4.1130a19-20) – in the field of public honours, wealth, and security; *NE* V, 4.1130b2-5]; on the other hand, one which frames justice as an institutionally determined state of affairs[32]. In the latter case, justice would concern either the distribution of offices according to established criteria (such as the case of distributive justice, which follows a principle of proportional equality according to value; *NE* V, 4.1130b30-1131a1), or the rectification of damages, (which, by contrast, looks just at possible inflicted damages, and adopts a principle of arithmetical proportionality in the restoration of broken balances in giving and taking; *NE* V, 4. 1131a1-9)[33].

The only kind of justice that directly implies reciprocity in human interaction – one which Aristotle does not seem to ascribe to the domain of particular justice[34] – is one that might be defined "commutative", and is generally found in economic exchanges. This type of justice requires public agreements and criteria of mutual giving and benefit that follow a geometric proportionality (*NE* V, 8.1132b22-1133b28)[35]. When compared to commutative justice, friendship would seem to share the fundamental presence of reciprocity – and, as we might assume, also transparency in the terms in which the relationship is established. In its broadest and most widely accepted sense, however, friendship based on common values, shared experiences, and altruistic benevolence seems to extend over and above the domain of a purely material exchange. For the ex-

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[32] On the two approaches of particular justice see Ritchie (1894).
[33] On the idea of "the equal" according to "arithmetic" proportionality see *NE* V, 7.1132a29-b20. This sort of proportionality does not contemplate that shares are given in proportion to merit or contribution.
[34] See Ritchie (1894: 185-186).
[35] As Aristotle explains, the goods to be exchanged, being qualitatively different, are "equalized" in such a way that a higher quantity of qualitatively inferior goods would correspond to an inferior quantity of qualitatively superior ones. When the exchange is not directly a barter, money enables the evaluation of each good and comparison in value with others.

change of benefits that can occur within a friendly relationship involves a display of mutual benevolence that, however tied to a certain extent to the pursuit of profit[36], appears to transcend the realm of a purely instrumental agreement.

A further – and noteworthy – aspect of analogy, although not full identification, that might seem to unite commutative justice and friendship resides in the fact that both relations refer to the perspective of a cohesive *polis*. The idea of a commercial exchange is associated to the fact that the people committed to it have needs, and need (χρεία) is what keeps the *polis* together (συνέχει) (*NE* V, 8.1133b6-7). Similarly, the idea of friendship as a force able to promote cohesion between the parts of the city stands out in the opening section of *NE* VIII, where Aristotle draws on a common understanding of friendship to express the view that

> [F]riendship also seems to keep cities together (ἔοικε δὲ καὶ τὰς πόλεις συνέχειν ἡ φιλία), and lawgivers seem to pay more attention to it than to justice (*NE* VIII, 1.1155a23-24).

While the bond created by need in commercial exchange primarily refers to the idea of an "impersonal" interdependence between commodities, the technical skills needed to produce them and the individual necessities experienced by the skill holders, the binding power of friendship in the *polis* appears to have a broader scope. As the passage above appears to suggest, the alleged axiological priority that lawgivers are expected to attach to friendship with respect to justice points to a fundamental limit of "sheer" justice. For when justice is understood as a purely formalized institutional order, it is not in itself an ideal capable of ensuring the stability of the city. Unlike pure justice, understood as abidance by laws, φιλία in the *polis* encapsulates

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[36] This is for instance the case of the kind of friendship which Aristotle qualifies as "by utility". This kind of friendship is the one of those loving each other in view of an individual benefits. Such people do not love another for what the other is in essence, but simply for the benefit that accrues to the lover (a notable example is the friendship between oldw-aged people, who need to live together to have mutual assistance (*NE* VIII, 3.1156a9-32). Utility-based friendship, however, does not reject the idea of mutual benevolence. On this view see Cooper (1977: 625-626), and Riesbeck (2016: 45-96).

an ideal of concord (ὁμόνοια), i.e. a form of "like-mindedness" which can be obtained only when its members converge on substantive issues (e.g. who should rule, what should be done in specific occasions, consonantly to the resources of its city). In fact, straight after noticing that lawgivers appear to devote more attention to friendship than to justice, he says:

[F]or like-mindedness seems to be similar, in a way, to friendship, and it is this that they aim most at achieving, while they aim most to eliminate faction, faction being enmity; and there is no need for rules of justice between people who are friends, whereas if they are just they still need friendship – and of what is just, the most just is thought to be what belongs to friendship (*NE* VIII, 1.1155a24-29).

The idea of ὁμόνοια evokes a sense of joint adhesion and participation in various dimensions of the life of the *polis* on their members' part. Concord in itself does not presuppose the cultivation of affectionate feelings; as an essential feature of political friendship, it contributes to shape it as a stable relationship between people who share meaningful views on the way in which their joint-life should be organized within the community[37]. It is also noteworthy that ὁμόνοια is identified as a distinctive trait of a particular kind of friendship: the one which Aristotle relates to people similar or equal in virtue. This sort of friendship (named "perfect" [τελεία] at *NE* VIII, 4, 1156b7, b34 and 7.1158a11), binds persons who, by sharing their love for virtue and by using virtue as a well-established attitude, are inclined to love their friends and, accordingly, to perform reciprocally good actions for their friends' sake without the need of coercion[38] (and independently of the benefits that inevitably a simi-

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[37] See Lockwood (2020); Bartels (2017).
[38] See *NE* V, 4. 1156b7-17. The correct translation of the Greek phrase at lines b7-9 is debated (τελεία δ᾽ἐστὶν ἡ τῶν ἀγαθῶν φιλία καὶ κατ᾽ἀρετὴν ὁμοίων: οὗτοι γὰρ τἀγαθὰ ὁμοίως βούλονται ἀλλήλοις ᾗ ἀγαθοί, ἀγαθοὶ δ᾽εἰσὶ καθ᾽ αὑτούς). While some scholars translate it as implying that virtuous love is sparked by the virtue of the beloved ones, others (in my view, more consonantly to the relevance that Aristotle attaches to active virtue, especially in *NE* VIII, 10.1159a33-35), interpret it as entailing that the active virtue of each person "as lover" is what prompts them to perform correspondingly virtuous actions towards people who share the same values. For a detailed treatment of this kind of friendship see Gillet (1995: 58-77).

lar kind of friendship generates in terms of general well-being, ethical and intellectual growth[39]). The shared love for virtue appears the ground of their altruistic, reciprocal benevolence.

Being also applied to friendship within the city, concord might appear to play a central role in what Aristotle considers to be primarily (μάλιστα) – but perhaps not exclusively – a friendship based on utility: the political one (*EE* VII,10.1242a6–12). This latter type of friendship, although predominantly focused on the pursuit of individual utility, requires stability and an expression of joint adherence to the goals of the *polis* that cannot fail to take into account the necessity to strike a balance between individual needs and the needs of one's fellows (given the awareness that the satisfaction of individual needs depends on the satisfaction of other people' needs)[40]. The shared quest for justice in the city extends over and above contingent desires and acquisitive propensities, and encourages agreement on forms of justice that, in the best possible degree, pursue the common well-being and encourage the development of virtuous other-regarding habits in its citizens.

4. Justice, Friendship, and Community: different ways of looking at the city

The commonsensical view about civic friendship introduced in *NE* VIII, 1 finds its conclusive formulation in the following remark:

[T]here is no need for rules of justice between people who are friends, whereas if they are just they still need friendship – and of what is just, the most just is thought to be what belongs to friendship (*NE* VIII, 1.1155a28-29).

This passage attests to a profound conceptual affinity between justice and friendship. By declaring that the highest form of justice is somewhat "related to friendship", Aristotele paves the way for an idea which he will fully develop in a more sophisticated way in sections 11-14 of *Nicomachean Ethics* VIII: the

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[39] *NE* VIII, 1.1155a12-16.
[40] See Riesbeck (2016).

view that a tight correspondence can be outlined between different kinds and degrees of justice and friendship. In fact, he often suggests that justice and friendship coexist in different ways within certain communities. What is more, in the context of a discussion of the issue of political friendship, he points out that several constitutions (as well as their respective institutional settings) can be referred to particular kinds of φιλία – symmetrical (such as those underlying democracies and timocracies/polities[41]) and asymmetrical (such as monarchies and aristocracies among those constitutions that pursue the common interest, and oligarchies, which, by contrast, structurally aim at the preservation of the ruler's power, often at the expenses of the common interest). To understand the inner dynamics of various forms of political friendship, Aristotle notably adopts various models of family-friendship and uses them as a *ratio cognoscendi* for each specific constitution (for instance, the pattern of friendship between husband and wife, which helps to understand aristocracy, the one between a father and his children, which, if based on correct conduct, can evoke the idea of monarchy, or the one between brothers, which could be compared to a democracy, which does not presuppose correct education, or a timocracy, in which the relationship between citizens can be compared to the one between brothers within a family with a head of the family; see section 13 of *NE* VIII).

It is noteworthy that the idea of a correspondence between justice and friendship could, at least *prima facie*, collide with the idea that friends would have no need of justice. A tentative harmonization of the two ideas could rest on the assumption that, in a solid friendship, we find interiorized those criteria of ethical conduct and reciprocity which an impersonal justice, i.e. one rooted in coercive respect of laws, would not possess by its own nature. In that case, friendship would not simply rely on a correspondent kind of justice, but it might supposedly bring

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[41] Aristotle refers to polity and timocracy as interchangeable notions, which design a constitution in which government is attached to a rich number of people of decent quality. See especially *Pol.* III, 13.1297b13-27, where Aristotle presents it as a constitution made by people who served and currently serve as middle-class hoplites. Moderate wealth and military training in a well-organized group might contribute to a characterization of *polity* as a multitude of decent, law-abiding and cooperative (although not fully virtuous) people.

such justice to a higher, potentiated level: i.e. the one of a justice between people who share a community-dimension and recognize each other as subjects committed to a joint endeavor.

It is therefore reasonable to suppose that political friendship, in its most perfect shape, cannot express itself as a pure alliance based on legal agreements that are destined to disappear once the specific reason for the stipulation of covenants has ceased to be meaningful and urgent[42]. As we read for instance in *Pol.* VII, 8.1328a35-37, where Aristotle speaks of the *polis* in terms of its highest ambitions,

> the city is a community of similar persons, for the sake of a life that is the best possible
> (ἡ δὲ πόλις κοινωνία τίς ἐστι τῶν ὁμοίων, ἕνεκεν δὲ ζωῆς τῆς ἐνδεχομένης ἀρίστης).

The theoretical image of similarity, which recurs in Aristotle's theory of virtue-based friendship, might seem to support the idea that even a utility-based friendship like the political one can and should admit the use of virtue. This is made especially clear in *Pol.* III, 9.1280b7-13, where he insists on the fact that the city should not only care for virtue, but also avoid to be reduced to a pure alliance – i.e. something far from perfect friendship:

> [I]t is [thus] evident that virtue must be a care for every city, or at least every one to which the term applies truly and not merely in a manner of speaking. For otherwise the community becomes an alliance

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[42] In *NE* VIII, 15.1162b25- and *EE* VII, 10.1242b35-1243b39 Aristotle speaks of "legal friendship" in terms of a utility-based friendship that, by virtue of the clear terms out of which it is generated, avoids recrimination – unlike "moral utility-friendships", which, being based on unspoken ethical commitments, might engender recrimination. Despite its positive character of legal friendship as a suitable basis for clear covenants, Aristotle does not argue that it exhausts the scope of civic friendship. Indeed, it risks to be compared to a pure alliance based on a convergence of contingent and temporary needs. This is for instance the case of a civic friendship compared to a pure economic exchange in *EE* VII, 10.1242b23-29: «But civic friendship [...] is based on utility; and just as cities are friends to one another, so in the like way are citizens. 'The Athenians no longer know the Megarians'; nor do citizens one another, when they are no longer useful to one another, and the friendship is merely a temporary one for a particular exchange of goods».

which differs from others – from alliances of remote allies – only by location, and law becomes a compact and, as the sophist Lycophron said, a guarantor among one another of the just things, but not the sort of thing to make the citizens good and just.

In this light, civic friendship stands out as a virtual terrain for the development of care-based forms of reciprocal justice. This involves not only the existence of a good legislative apparatus in the city, but also conditions (institutional and, all the same, education-induced) that make its members ready to abide by them[43].

Reading Aristotle's theory of political friendship through a "Habermasian" lens, it might be supposed that justice and friendship, like justice and solidarity, represent two different ways of looking at the same issue – where friendship can be framed as justice within a community teleologically oriented to the good life. As for the correspondence between, justice friendship and community (or "partnership"; see the Greek κοινωνία), this has often been interpreted by Aristotle's scholars as "coextensiveness". In the first place, as we have already seen with reference to the specific analogies between constitutions and corresponding forms of friendship, Aristotle establishes a strict correlation (if not a full identification) between the ideas of "friendship" and "community". In *Pol.* IV, 11.1295b25, for instance, community is described as something "related to friendship" (ἡ γὰρ κοινωνία φιλικόν), and in *NE* VIII, 12.1161b11 it is claimed that every friendship resides in community (ἐν κοινωνίᾳ μὲν οὖν πᾶσα φιλία ἐστίν). Along a similar line, however, the idea of an existing community implies not only friendship, but also the existence of a corresponding type of justice. This is explicitly claimed in *NE* VIII, 11. 1159b29-31:

And to the extent that they share in it [i.e. the community], they are friends; for that is the limit of the justice between them too.

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[43] On the institutional and the personal dimensions of the good government, See *Pol.* IV, 8.1294a3-7.

In the same vein, friendship is said to vary in kind according to the specific structural order of each constitution – which presupposes a certain kind of justice:

Corresponding to each kind of constitution there is evidently a friendship, to the extent that there is also justice (*NE* VIII, 13.1161a10-11).

By taking issue with these passages, several scholars have argued that the co-extensiveness between justice and friendship can mainly be interpreted in terms of conceptual affinity between the two notions – therefore, without necessarily presupposing the existence of a causal relation between the two[44]. Another standpoint is the one of those who contend that, in Aristotle's ethical writings, justice and friendship in the city are simultaneously generated by an already existent community-bond between "fellows"[45]. A different elaboration of the "causal" reading is the one of Riesbeck, who suggests that, rather than shared membership in already existing community, it is individual need that prompts people to join together and establish bonds of justice and concord[46]. In line with this view, a not-fully explored possibility within the "causal interpretation" of the relationships between justice and friendship is that not only justice and friendship, but also community itself can be understood as a reality that gets structured across time and progressive steps. A similar possibility, in my view, would find support in the above-mentioned passages at *NE* VIII, 9. 1159b29-31 and *NE* VIII, 13.1161a10-11).

Reference to justice, in the two passages in question, could plausibly suggest that justice delimits (and, in this respect, also enables) the activity of sharing things in common – thus promoting friendship, which arises precisely when people share those things. The causal connection between justice and friendship might perhaps find better support in a passage of the *Eu-*

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[44] On this view see Riesbeck (2016: 81), who attributes it to Pakaluk (1998: 106-111), and Lockwood (2003).

[45] See Riesbeck (2016: 81), who attributes (correctly, in my view) to Stern-Gillet (1995: 154); Yack (1993: 34), and Konstan (1997: 70-72).

[46] Riesbeck (2016, especially 85-88).

demian Ethics. In *EE* VII, 9.1241b12-16, Aristotle handles justice in terms of equality – an ideal which justice itself shares with friendship[47], and describes justice itself in terms of a device able to make community possible:

[I]t is thought both that justice is a kind of equality and that friendship exists in equality, unless it is said to no purpose that "friendship is equality". All the constitutions, too, are a form of justice; for there is in them community, and every common thing is established through justice, so that there are as many forms of justice and community as of friendship[48].

Provided that justice is a means for the establishment of community and partnership, an already settled community will not get rid of justice once achieved its completion and self-sufficiency. By contrast, it will incorporate it as its foundational order. This might be evinced from *EE* VII, 10.1242a19-22, where justice can be used as a *ratio cognoscendi* of friendship:

[T]o inquire how one should relate to a friend is to inquire about a sort of justice; for in fact, quite generally all justice is in relation to a friend, since justice exists among particular people who also share something in common, and a friend is a person who shares something in common, one sort sharing in family, another in a way of life.

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[47] For the idea of friendship as ἰσότης see *EE* VII, 3.1238b15-17; 4.1239b1-4 (See *NE* VIII, 6.1158b1). In that context of examination, friendship by equality (καθ᾽ἰσότητα) (which appears to be rooted in substantial similarity of personal qualities and pursued values, such as in virtue-based ones, and/or motives, such as in the pursuit of respectively utility and pleasure) is distinguished from friendships based on asymmetry and superiority (καθ᾽ὑπεροχήν). In *EE* VII, 3.1240b, however, friendship is identified as ἰσότης in its broad sense, and in *EE* VII, 9.1241b10-40 every kind of friendship (even those based on superiority) is said to incorporate a form of ἰσότης. For in this second context of investigation, asymmetry-based friendships are treated as relations rooted in forms of proportional equality, unlike democratic friendship and friendship between companions (κατ᾽ἀριθμὸν μὲν γὰρ ἡ δημοκρατικὴ κοινωνία καὶ ἡ ἑταιρικὴ φιλία; 9.1241b35-36), which presuppose arithmetic equality (See *NE* VIII, 7.1158b32-1159a3).

[48] Trans. Woods (1992) from which the passages of the *Eudemian Ethics* cited in this paper will be taken.

5. *Solidarity as "inclusive participation"*

In *Nicomachean Ethics* VIII, 7.1158b29–35, Aristotle gives the relationship between justice and friendship a turn that goes beyond mere correspondence. Equality does not appear in the same way within the sphere of justice and the sphere of friendship. While in matters of justice equality is primarily based on proportion to merit (κατ᾽ ἀξίαν) equality "according to quantity" (κατὰ ποσόν) – i.e. arithmetic equality, which not look at the merit of people – is only secondary. In friendship, however, the reverse is true: equality according to quantity comes first, and proportion to merit is secondary. Aristotle points out that the priority of friendship over justice becomes particularly evident when there is a large difference in excellence, vice, wealth, or anything else between the parties that, if considered as criteria of justice, would not allow stability.

Aristotle appears well aware of the existence of a profound tension between the need for an inclusive participation in the political community (one based on a form of solidarity) and the respect for the skills and civic virtue of individuals that ought to be praised for their outstanding excellence. Nor is he insensitive to the fact that, in a condition of political coexistence far from the ideal one (e.g. the one of an aristocracy of equally virtuous citizens depicted in Books VII-VIII of the *Politics*), civic friendship between excellent and non-excellent individuals can reach such levels of asymmetry that it jeopardizes the very functioning of the city. In that case, it is preferable that the relationship of civic friendship involves equal people, even if they are not necessarily virtuous. In that context, it is possible that an equal and broad participation in political and legislative activity guarantee a degree of stability that, instead, might not be found in constitutions inspired by the use of ethical and political excellence. Evidence of this could be reasonably found in *EE* VII, 10.1242b9-16, where Aristotle conceptualizes civic friendship in terms of a relationship "mostly by utility", but also arising from desire for human sociability. Interestingly enough, he speaks of such friendship – and its "degeneration" (παρέκβασις; b9-10) as "real" friendships, inasmuch as they contemplate the possibility that friends share things in common (ὡς φίλοι

κοινωνοῦσιν). In this respect, as he notes, those friendships differ from the ones based on superiority (b11). In all likelihood, the degeneration evoked in the passage concerns democratic constitutions, which encourage participation of non-excellent people in ruling activity, without necessarily guaranteeing a correct pursuit of the common interest[49]. The admission that a positive factor like φιλία can be present even in a "deviant" constitution resonates with the idea – explicitly laid down in *Pol.* III, 1.1275b7-8 – that the concept of "citizenship" – which Aristotle conceptualizes in terms of participation in deliberative and judicial activity[50] – would most eminently suit the case of democratic cities, for these confer a multitude of citizens the authority (*Pol.* III, 1.1275b18; ἐξουσία) to contribute to the ruling (and legislative) process. Despite their imperfect nature, democracies undeniably legitimize the exercise of a set of powers which human beings by their nature possess (regardless of the possible degrees of excellence in which such powers can be exhibited). The powers at stake, as it is made clear at *Pol.* I, 2.1253a8-18, are the same that qualify man as a (rational, as well as sociable[51]) "political animal" (πολιτικὸν ὁ ἄνθρωπος ζῷον), and also as one whose political nature differs from the one attributed to other (gregarious) animals[52]:

> That man is much more a political animal than any kind of bee or any herd animal is clear. For, as we assert, nature does nothing in vain; and man alone among the animals has speech. The voice indeed indicates the painful or pleasant, and hence is present in other animals as well; for their nature has come this far, that they have a perception of the painful and pleasant and signal these things to each other (τοῦ ἔχειν αἴσθησιν λυπηροῦ καὶ ἡδέος καὶ ταῦτα σημαίνειν ἀλλήλοις). But speech serves to reveal the advantageous and the harmful, and hence also the just and the unjust. For it is peculiar to man as

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[49] For the idea of democracy as a deviant constitution see especially *Pol.* III, 7.1279a29-32 and 37-39.

[50] The issue of a correct definition of citizenship is initially introduced in *Pol.*, III, 1, especially 1274b33-1275a32.

[51] On the issue of human sociability See *NE* IX, 9.1169b18-19, where man is described as a "political animal" and "naturally inclined to live with others" (πολιτικὸν γὰρ ὁ ἄνθρωπος καὶ συζῆν πεφυκός).

[52] On the political anthropology expressed by the passage (and an overview of the annexed scholarly debates) I refer readers to Knoll (2017).

compared to the other animals that he alone has a perception of good and bad and just and unjust and the other things of this sort; and community in these things is what makes a household and a city (τοῦτο γὰρ πρὸς τὰ ἄλλα ζῷα τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἴδιον, τὸ μόνον ἀγαθοῦ καὶ κακοῦ καὶ δικαίου καὶ ἀδίκου καὶ τῶν ἄλλων αἴσθησιν ἔχειν: ἡ δὲ τούτων κοινωνία ποιεῖ οἰκίαν καὶ πόλιν).

As the passage reveals, the capacity for "perception" (αἴσθησις) on the just, the advantageous and their contraries is complemented by the one of reciprocal communication of personal views. The idea of a "sharing" (κοινωνία) of views, rather than pointing to an initial condition of homogeneity, could rather indicate the possibility of communicative processes designed to achieve a state of concord.

On the one hand, as Aristotle declares in *Pol.* III, 4, a distinction should be made between the cognitive states (and corresponding virtues) that respectively good citizens and good rulers are expected to possess. For while the distinctive virtue of rulers is practical wisdom (φρόνησις) – which involves a capacity to autonomously and correctly deliberate by rational evaluation of the particular condition of each specific context and mastery of ethical virtues[53] (*Pol.* III, 4.1277b25-26)–, the one of good citizens, who are expected to conform to the specific constitutional prescriptions in force in the city, is a "true opinion" (δόξα ἀληθής). Although the capacity to rule and the one to obey are said to require different forms of training (*Pol.* III, 4.1277a22-24), several are the occasions in which he points out that, generally speaking, a good citizen should be able not only to appropriately obey orders, but also to know what is required for a proper exercise of ruling activity (at some unspecified level) (*Pol.* III, 4.1277a25-32; 1277b13-17).

The exercise of citizens' powers of practical reasoning and deliberation, regardless of their level of competence, is also underlying a theoretical experiment that Aristotle conducts in *Pol.* III, 11. In this context, he justifies the possibility that a gov-

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[53] A detailed treatment of the nature of φρόνησις and the (highly debated) issues concerning its specific role in righteous practical agency goes outside the scopes of this paper. On the structural link between φρόνησις (which in Book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle classifies as an agency-oriented intellectual virtue), and ethical virtues See *NE* VI, 12.1144a 34-36.

ernment of the many, even if not virtuous, can contribute to a richer, more nuanced and more fruitful debate than the one which can take place among members of a small elite of excellent men. At *Pol.* III, 11.1281b1-7, just after pointing out that such an idea could involve some truth, he claims:

The many, of whom none is individually an excellent man, nevertheless can when joined together be better—not as individuals but all together—than those [who are best], just as dinners contributed by many can be better than those equipped from a single expenditure. For because they are many, each can have a part of virtue and prudence, and on their joining together, the multitude, with its many feet and hands and having many senses, becomes like a single human being, and so also with respect to character and mind.

The development of individual faculties concerns not only decision-making, but also the ability to evaluate and judge specific situations — such as musical works and the creations of poets, for which it would seem that the many judge better, as each focuses on one aspect. Therefore, it remains that they participate in the functions of counselor and judge. Although the remainder of section 11 might suggest that a better politics is the one in which the highest (and more complex) charges are to be held by outstanding individuals (cf. especially *Pol.* III, 11, 1281b26-35)[54], Aristotle insists on the idea that wise legislators such as Solon understand the need to integrate the contribution of the many in a cooperative manner – by entrusting them with "minor" offices, such as the task of electing magistrates and holding them to account.

6. Conclusive remarks

Reading Aristotle through the contemporary lens of solidarity contributes to highlighting a significant dimension of his ethical-political thought, in which friendship, justice, and civic participation converge toward the building of a stable and cohesive community. Although solidarity is a modern concept, an embryonic form of such an ideal can be found in the Aristotelian

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[54] This aspect is especially highlighted by Nichols (1991).

treatment of φιλία and in its relationship to justice. Like Habermas' view of solidarity as "a different way of looking at justice", Aristotle's φιλία is not an abstract or universal ideal, but a practice rooted in the sharing of common goods, in reciprocal concern, and also in the capacity for joint deliberation. In this sense, solidarity does not merely supplement justice, but enhances it constituting a way of living together that incorporates care, responsibility, and concord.

On the other hand, a comparative examination of Aristotle's treatment of φιλία and certain contemporary formulations of solidarity might contribute to enrich the scope of the conceptual connection between political friendship and justice. For such connection would show that social bonds cannot be reduced to the mere observance of laws or to contracts of mutual utility, but require a fabric of relationships oriented toward the common good – something that calls for adoption of joint responsibility in (concern for) political activity. Similarly, Aristotle's reflections on the wisdom of the many might reveal the possibility that a community of citizens, even if not individually excellent, generate richer forms of judgment and shared justice. Understood in this way, Aristotelian "proto-solidarity" would not just appear as a historical precedent; it would rather stand out as a theoretical horizon capable of enriching the vocabulary of contemporary political philosophy. It reminds us that the construction of a just and inclusive society depends not only on impersonal rules or institutional structures, but also on the citizens' capacity to recognize one another as co-participants in a common project founded on care, dialogue, and shared responsibility. From this perspective, Aristotle's ancient lesson does not lose its relevance: it still offers valuable conceptual tools for thinking of solidarity as a living form of justice.

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Abstract

A PROTO-SOLIDARITY? FRIENDSHIP, JUSTICE AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN ARISTOTLE

Keywords: Solidarity, Friendship, Aristotle, Joint-Action

While solidarity is a modern notion, often tied to collective action for justice in plural societies, Aristotle's civic friendship sustains justice by binding the *polis* through reciprocity and concord. Engaging contemporary theories of solidarity, especially Habermas' idea of solidarity as justice's "reverse side", this paper highlights affinities between modern debates and Aristotelian thought. Civic *philia* emerges as a participatory practice where equality and shared deliberation enhance justice itself, alongside the strengthening of a sense of community. Thus, Aristotle's ethics and politics reveal an embryonic solidarity, especially in contexts of inclusive political participation.

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SHAPING A "NEW SOCIAL HUMAN SUBJECT":
WOMEN'S SOLIDARITY NETWORKS IN EUROPE IN THE
FIRST HALF OF THE 19TH CENTURY

1. *Introduction: New practices in chronologising revolutions*

    «We are Saint- Simonians» – read the first issue of *La Femme libre*, published in 1832. The journal, «written and published by women», continued by affirming «our aim is association» planned for providing women «of all ranks, religions, opinions» with «social regeneration work»[1].

    This quote provides the starting point from which to outline how this essay intends to develop the theme of "women's solidarity" in the first half of the 19th century. There are two main issues: the first is that of the delineation of the term itself, "solidarity", to be understood in this case both as the construction of networks that gradually led to the formation of a political movement of women in a transnational perspective, and as the development of ideas and social practices.

Thus continued the text in *La Femme libre*:

At a time when peoples are struggling in the name of Liberty, and when the proletariat is demanding its liberation, are we, women, going to remain passive before this great movement of social emancipation that is taking place before our eyes? Is our condition so happy that we have no demands to make? To the present day, women have been exploited and subjugated. This tyranny, this exploitation, must stop. We are born as free as men, and one half of humankind cannot be, unjustly, enslaved to the other[2].

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[1] "Appel aux femmes", *La Femme libre. Apostolat des femmes*, (1832), n. 1.
[2] *Ibidem.*

The second decisive aspect to underline is chronology: a chronology that, although limited to the first half of the 19th century, should in my opinion be interpreted as an interval 'between revolutions': those of 1789 and 1848. While the Enlightenment and the Revolution of 1789 had certainly contributed to putting the individual back at the centre, the liberal tradition was soon opposed by projects that added the collective dimension to the individual and proposed new models for reorganising society that the great principles of 1789 had fragmented and "pulverized" (see Moses 1993; Planté 1983; Ead. 2019).

The magazine was short-lived: founded in the summer of 1832, *La Femme libre* was in print for only two years until April 1834, during which time it published 31 issues. And yet, its story can also be read in the "long" season of contemporary revolutions, which witnessed the simultaneous progress of a women's political and social movement (see Ferrando, Kolly 2015).

There is another interesting point to highlight: the importance of the press as a means of individual and collective affirmation. The first issue of the magazine proposed the creation of a union that was to be neither hierarchical nor authoritarian. A solidarity aimed at serving all women, in a horizontal union designed to combat the exclusion of the female sex from political and democratic processes.

Finally, the theme of this first collective expression also highlights the emergence of transnational networks: the intertwining of Saint-Simonianism, Fourierism and Owenism was evident during this period, even when viewed from a gender perspective.

From the first experiments in France in the 1830s, to dialogue with Owenism in Great Britain, to the creation of the first mutual aid societies, there was, in that first half of the century, a constant entanglement of the political and the social.

The keywords were expressions of individual rights advanced and claimed in the aftermath of the revolutions of modernity. And yet these early experiences of solidarity sought at the same time to forge unity in plurality, attempting to initiate new and different interpretations of the concept and idea of freedom.

Liberté had, moreover, been the central idea orienting revolutionaries since 1789, but it had yet to become reality (Agulhon 1980; *La libertè guidant les peoples* 2013).

2. *"A Light from the Darkness." Following the July Days, 1830*

The first issue of *La Femme libre* came out, as mentioned, in 1832. France had just gone through another revolution that had led to the definitive fall of the restored Bourbon monarchy. The revolution brought a "bourgeois" king, Louis-Philippe d'Orléans, to the throne, and launched a new political, economic, and social project, at the head of which was a ruling class of a clearly liberal stamp (see Pinkney 1988; Charléty 2018).

In the July Days of 1830, women had been active and present at the Parisian barricades – their names lost among the masses of revolutionaries – and yet the new Constitutional Charter still saw them denied fundamental civil and political rights. However, the *Charte* did not prevent freedom of the press or of association and it was in that climate, thanks also to the evolution of a Saint-Simonian doctrine, that original voices interpreted the ideas of social and collective emancipation, in particular through the pages of their newspaper *La Femme libre*, which opened with that "Appel aux Femmes".

The foundations of the Saint-Simonian doctrine, the writings of Comte de Saint-Simon, were the idea of progress that, at the heart of industrial society, would improve the condition of the working class. This envisaged the abolition not of private property but of the inheritance of goods, with calls for forms of collectivisation and a substantial agreement between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. It was a project that envisaged the foundation of a new social bond destined to take on the features of a "new Christianity". A new social doctrine, based on practised experiences of solidarity, common to all human beings. A new social order aimed at progress, albeit not egalitarian, the Saint-Simonian project was in fact elitist, even if it was marked by a modern hierarchy at the top of which was the class of *savants*, followed by that of the entrepreneurs, who would act as guides for the lower classes. On this basis, Saint-

Simon's disciples established a new church and the Saint-Simonian "family" was founded on the essential bond of the love of one's neighbour. Proletarians would have the means to educate themselves and come together in forms that provided for cooperation between classes and between the sexes, according to the fundamental principle of the doctrine: "from each according to his abilities, to each according to his work" (see Reybaud 1979; Picon 2002; *Le siècle des saint-simoniens* 2006).

Within this conception of societal reorganization, emancipation of "the woman" had a no lesser role. Strictly used in the singular, this too was to be defined in terms of association to be managed according to the principle of capacity. The Saint-Simonian individual was a social individual with the duty to find a way to organize a new society based on the competences of the individual, starting from the utility principle. Without attributing a specific role to women in his doctrine and dedicating only a few fragmented passages to women, Saint-Simon opened up – it could be said – to the possibility of developing emancipation ideas (Albistur, Armogathe 1977).

Man and woman are THE BEING created by God; the man and the woman are THE INDIVIDUAL in social terms. There exist two types of union: those between individuals who sanctify and those between individuals who are sanctified. As in Christianity, there exists ORDER and MARRIAGE, or rather, there exists union with a SOCIAL aim and union with an aim to build a family[3].

A woman who joined the Saint-Simonian family became a part of it and was certain to have a defined, though not a leading, role. However, she would increasingly become a messianic figure. To women, Enfantin entrusted the task of contributing to the organisation of society but, to do so, she could not overstep certain limits and above all not question male authority. Saint-Simonianism proposed a moral emancipation of women

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[3] «L'homme et la femme, voilà l'ÊTRE que Dieu a créé; l'homme et la femme, voilà l'INDIVIDU social. Il y a deux espèces d'unions, celles des individus qui sanctifient, celles des individus qui sont sanctifiés. Il y a, comme dans le christianisme, l'ORDRE et le MARIAGE, c'est-à-dire l'union dans un but SOCIAL et l'union dans un but de FAMILLE» (P. Enfantin, *Lettre à Charles Duveyrier*, Août 1829, in Bulciolu (1980 : 48).

but in the doctrine of Charles Fourier emancipation of women assumed a character of social progress. For Fourier, society would not have been able to progress unless women were emancipated both in their private and working lives (see Pilbeam 2000). However, from the perspective of the development of the idea of association, the context of the early doctrines, whose aim was society's progress, allowed women to progressively build a defined role within society.

In this chronology, centred on the theme of solidarity, Saint-Simonianism certainly represented a central moment in the evolution from the individual to the collective and became a powerhouse of ideas that would assume the features of a political movement in the second half of the century. The 1830 Revolution also played its part in this and helped to bring together the people and the doctrines, and drive the social movement. The social question was, moreover, central also when taking into account the voices of the leading figures of this experience.

The ground trembles beneath our feet; everything shakes, everything collapses around us; religious and political institutions look like old buildings whose foundations are crumbling beneath them. We are in a century of light but darkness reigns: everywhere is disorder and confusion; everyone is fumbling around in the dark anxiously asking themselves: where are we? Where are we going? From the ruins, from the heart of darkness, comes a ray of light, Saint-Simonianism appears.[4]

In this world that was undergoing constant transformation – «tout se transforme autour de nous», wrote Jeanne Deroin – initial women's voices were of women searching for their own social identity. And if the barricades – at least in those July Days – were a domain as yet prevalently male, women's writing, on the other hand, was on the rise. Addresses, petitions, ap-

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[4] «Le sol tremble sous nos pas; tout chancelle tout s'écroule autour de nous; toutes les institutions religieuses et politiques ressemblent à de vieux édifices minés par la base. Nous sommes dans un siècle de lumière et l'oscurité règne; tout est désordre et confusion, chacun marche à tatons et se demande avec anxiété, ou sommes nous? Ou allons nous? Du milieu des débris, du sein des tènèbres, s'echappe un rayon de Lumière; le Saint-Simonisme apparait!» [*Profession de Foi de Melle Jenny De Roin (Jeanne Deroin)*, in *De la liberté des femmes. Lettres au Globe (1831-1832)*: 116].

peals … were all forms of expression that also enabled women to engage in society and politics, and their engagement was testimony to a growing desire to participate in the building of a new social order (See Riot-Sarcey 1992; Ferruta 2007).

The decade that followed thus represented a moment in which an attempt was made to understand and analyse a society whose economic and social components were rapidly changing. In Paris in 1831, it was the two key figures of Saint-Simonianism, Claire Bazard and Henri Fournel, who launched the *Degré des Industriels*. This was a militant, highly hierarchical organisation, whose main objective was to «convert workers to the Saint-Simonian religion and help workers create their own associations according to Saint-Simonian ideology» (Démier 2004). The idea was to bring material aid to the working-class population, which was in difficulty and, at the same time, to rebuild society by addressing the damage done to the labour market by liberalism. It was within society that a "couple" – an exemplary unit of the Saint-Simonian family – would launch an enquiry into the capitalist world of work in the aftermath of the July revolution, an enquiry driven by the desire to bring the working class into the mainstream of the doctrine.

The environment in which Bazard and Fournel worked was made up of an urban middle class and artisans, who were ideal "tools" for the spread of propaganda. The Saint-Simonian inquiry was, however, limited: it strove to search for individuals, psychological profiles, and singular personalities that – moving beyond their condition as workers – could embody those moral qualities that would render them "worthy" of Saint-Simonian association. It was an association of a particular nature since class identity was not to be at its core but rather was to be representative of the "man-woman" couple, of that "family", the foundation of Saint-Simonian society (Démier 2004).

As a starting point, I propose Brion and Lenz. Both are married and very moral. The former: his wife is now very happy with him; he spreads the doctrine. The latter: tireless disseminator, and once very lively, his wife is now of poor health: both are Saint-Simonians.[5]

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[5] «J'ai à vous proposer pour le degré d'initiation, Brion et lenz, tous deux mariés et trés moraux; le premier: sa femme est maintenant très heureuses avec lui, il

Notwithstanding, the association remained central to the Saint-Simonian religion: «It would be necessary to establish the association as soon as possible so that the half-hearted might be completely transformed by living the lives of those who have understood us well», maintained Eugénie Niboyet in the *Globe* (29 October 1831).

And yet, even from this experience, some of the contradictions destined to undermine Saint-Simonianism began to emerge, even in the social sphere, thus highlighting the doctrine's limited impact on the working class. The strong hierarchical structure, the evolution towards industrialism and the struggle in favour of a project for the moralisation of the working class translated into projects that did not take long to evolve into forms of charity, or philanthropism. These ended up re-proposing, even in relations between the sexes, the paternalistic traits of a society in which the "ladies of the doctrine" in fact set out to educate the subordinate classes.

These aspects highlighted a form of solidarity that maintained a traditional structure, while women's relational networks were a mark of progress. If in fact some of the central figures of Saint-Simonianism, the first being Claire Bazard, ended up distancing themselves from the movement, others developed new forms of solidarism destined to take on a transnational dimension.

Exemplary then is the choice of the group of women workers who launched *La Femme libre* in 1832. The authors, who signed themselves «women of the people», were in fact all from the working class and petty bourgeoisie. The evolution of the publication, the first to take on the character of a women's intellectual space, is significant for understanding the transition to a specific women's line of thinking within Saint-Simonianism. First published in August 1832 under the title *La Femme libre,* from issue 3 it became *La femme de l'Avenir* and then *La Femme nouvelle*. Even more significant was the subtitle, which

propage la doctrine; le second: propagateur infatigable, une fois très vive, la femme est toujours malade; elles sont toutes deux saint-simoniennes» (Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, Fonds Enfantin, b. 7815/39, Lettre de Clouet à Monsieur Holstein, 10 septembre 1831).

was changed from *Apostolat des femmes* – in line with Enfantin's doctrine – to *Tribune des femmes* in the last issues.

What is also interesting is the provenance of the authors – all "women of the people" or "proletarian women" as they signed themselves – and eager to claim their independence once the newspaper would be able to finance itself solely through the wages of the seamstresses or subscriptions. A social characterisation that also emerges from the chosen themes was the core issue of women's emancipation, which was prioritized over that of the class issue even though the latter was also considered necessary. Inspired by the Saint-Simonian interpretation of the concept of oppression, *La Femme libre* identified the "liberation of women from the tyranny of men" as a fundamental aim. Starting from the private sphere and its critique of marriage, *La Femme libre* moved on to address other issues denouncing inequalities in terms of education and economic treatment. What was pursued by the women who gathered in the editorial office was a universal and interclass cause: the struggle in favour of all oppressed communities, but at the same time also the assertion of a specific demand, and the Saint-Simonian women rose up against the exploitation they suffered as women:

For too long men have advised us, directed us, dominated us: it is up to us now to proceed push for in the wheel of progress without protection. It is up to us to work for our freedom, relying only on our own strength, without recourse to our masters[6].

Another fundamental aspect of the journal was the affirmation from the very first issue of a "right to plurality", witnessed not only by the change of title, but also by the writing in "collective" terms: they speak of "sisters" and "we". A solidarity and plural thought which was accompanied by the affirmation of a difference, of a *non-mixité* also supported by the choice to publish only articles written by women, according to a desire for emancipation valid within the movement but also in society itself. What eventually emerged from the magazine's texts were the characteristics of a women's association or an association within which women could build networks to shape collective ac-

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[6] "La Femme nouvelle", in *Tribune des femmes*, vol. 2, (1833), p. 58.

tion, aimed at bringing together "privileged" women and those of the "people". The newspaper thus ended up adopting the character of a female "associative space", capable of freeing both the speech and the expression of a plurality of women who opposed the idea, prevalent in common thinking, of a female sex whose uniqueness and typicality ended up fuelling exclusion from political and social action.

Although *La Femme libre* ceased publication in 1834, it remains a precious testimony not only of a different campaign method, but also of the influence that Saint-Simonianism had on other utopian socialist movements. In 1833, Désiré Véret travelled to England where she met Anna Wheeler who had an *Appel aux femmes* published in *The Crisis* newspaper – founded by Robert Owen and Robert Dale in 1832 – to which she added her comments. Across the Channel, Véret updated the readers of *La Femme libre* on the evolution of English socialism (see Siméon 2023). The ideas of Anna Wheeler and William Thompson, with whom Wheeler wrote the essay *Appeal of One Half the Human Race*, were rooted in the philosophers of the Enlightenment and in English liberal radicalism. They put forward the most advanced proposals in terms of egalitarianism and civil and political rights, as well as equality between the sexes, and it is possible to identify a real interconnection between their ideas on social organisation.

While Mr. Owen was in Scotland, at New Lanark, practically experimenting on the principles of the new Social System of Mutual Co-operation, a French writer, M. Charles Fourier (with whose eccentricities of speculation we are not here concerned) was studying the same subject at Lyons. As the result of the observations and meditations of 30 years, he has published in Paris two large volumes, which he calls a "Treatise of Industrial Association." In the great leading features of the Co-operation of large numbers for the production of wealth and social happiness, and the improved, and industrious, and equal education of all the children, Fourier agrees with Mr. Owen. But inequality of distribution is a leading feature of Fourier's system of Co-operation; while equality of distribution of wealth, as of all the means of happiness, seems to be the ultimate object of Owen's. Under the systems of both, under all systems of just Co-operation, not only will equal protection of Institutions be granted to women with men, but equal means

of happiness from all sources will be insured to them (Thompson 1825: 204-205).

It could be argued then that the *La Femme libre* project represented perhaps the most radical part of the Saint-Simonian movement, whose influence was destined to continue in years to come, developing different forms, projects and destinies. Some of the protagonists made tragic choices, others continued their work as writers, as educators, while still others decided to share the working-class condition.

As for the developing social discourse, it is interesting to follow some of the trajectories of certain women who established friendly societies. Suzanne Volquin was "daughter of the people" and had followed "le Pére Enfantin" to Egypt in 1834, and in 1838 she founded a friendly society for mothers. Meanwhile, Eugénie Niboyet, together with Alphonse de Lamartine, was involved in the *Société pour la morale chrétienne*.

Even more interesting is the case of Flora Tristan. Daughter of a rich Peruvian nobleman, who married a French woman in Spain, she had felt "foreign" from birth since France never recognized her parents' marriage. This precarious situation forced her to earn a living but which at the same made her more sensitive not only to the injustices against the condition of the working class but also against women (see Desanti 1972; Michaud 1985; Krulic 2021). Although she defined herself as being «neither Saint-Simonian, nor Fourierist» (Tristan 1842), she developed a political and social ideas where the concept of association was a central element. In 1835, upon returning from a trip to Peru in search of her paternal family, she gave the press a brochure entitled *Nécessité de faire un bon accueil aux femmes etrangères* (Tristan 1835) in which she anticipated some central themes of her thinking and writing: the condition of the more needy classes and the need for association as the best means to help society progress. In her writing, Flora addressed what she defined «a class that forms one half of humankind» and, in her desire for human improvement and progress, she proposed to commit herself specifically to the fate of «foreign women» (Tristan 1835: 3) The solution Tristan proposed was that of creating a friendly society that would be called *Société pour les femmes étrangères*.

We shall start then with a firm hand and raise the banner of mutual aid; we shall found a society, fully hospitable, and ease the pain of some of those individuals who suffer and who will bless us for lifting them out of poverty. Our example shall be followed, our voice shall be echoed in all generous souls; of this we have no doubt. Then our hearts shall feel that pure divine joy only philanthropy and virtue can bring.[7]

With this text, Tristan aligned herself with the interpretation of the female condition as a "social mission" in line with the legacy of the French Revolution and with the cultural and literary climate of French Romanticism and successive developments of Saint-Simonian and Fourierist theory. A thought that emerged with greater force in the brochure entitled *L'Union ouvrière,* (Tristan 1843) published in 1843, aimed at improving the condition of the working class.

I have just proposed to you a general union between working men and women, with no distinctions between trades, who live in the same kingdom; a union that has the aim of bringing together the working class and creating establishments evenly spread throughout France. [8]

Specifically, the «establishments» would have to provide education for children «from 6 to 18» and to welcome, as in the friendly society tradition, the infirm and the elderly. The goal would be the construction of a «Palais de l'union ouvirère» that would serve to «honour work as it deserves and reward the workers who honour the nation» (Tristan 1843: 8).

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[7] «Commençons donc, d'une main ferme, à lever l'étendard du secours mutuel; érigeons une société, toute sainte, tout hospitalière, et soulageons une partie de ces êtres qui souffrent, et qui nous béniront pour les avoir tirés du malheur. Notre exemple sera suivi, notre voix aura un écho dans toutes les âmes généreuses; nous n'en doutons pas. Alors notre cœur goûtera cette joie pure, divine, que la philanthropie et la vertu peuvent seules faire connaître» (Tristan 1835: 16).
[8] «Je viens de vous proposer une union général entre les ouvriers et les ouvrières, sans distinction de métiers, habitant le même royaume; union qui aurait pour but de constituer la classe ouvrière et d'élever plusieurs établissement répartis également dans toute la France» (Tristan 1843: 5-6).

To fund the undertaking, Tristan launched a fundraising campaign aimed «at all those people of intelligence and dedication», signed by socialist and liberal progressive men and women (ivi: XVIII). To spread the word, she decided to do a *Tour de France* since, to quote her own words, a project albeit «magnificent» that had stayed only «on paper» would be destined to remain a «dead letter». What was needed then was to go out in person «from city to city, from one end of France to the other to speak to the workers that cannot read or write or do not have the time» (ivi: 9). Yet, despite Tristan's efforts, it was an experience destined to remain unheard – perhaps, too, for his premature death.

The evolution of Saint-Simonianism towards productivism contributed instead to "distancing" it from the needs of the working class. And despite the formation of a critical tendency, which did not hesitate to denounce the danger of a moralistic and conservative drift, those in charge of the doctrine remained deaf to Saint-Simonian appeals, refusing any concurrence with those who saw the need to renew in line with the revolutionary and republican heritage.

However, it was precisely in the sphere of social reform that the great change and social revolution of 1848 took shape. Between 20 March and 18 June 1848 another *Voix des femmes* "made itself heard", presenting itself as a «socialist and political newspaper, organ of the interests of all»[9] and in which the names of some of the women "brought up" under Saint-Simonianism (or Fourierism) were to be found. And yet the newspaper was new: new in its themes and in its ideological framework.

Although the newspaper appeared in a society still steeped in Saint-Simonian philosophy, where the central nucleus remained the family and which still referred to the principles of '89, it addressed a «social individual, man and woman, different in nature, but united by the same purpose»[10]. The traits of a new solidarism emerged, which broke with philanthropic paternalism and which saw the "total and complete" emancipation of

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[9] «La voix des femmes», 28 April 1848.
[10] *Ibidem.*

the working class and women as the only possibility to defini-tively enter modernity (see Riot-Sarcey 1994).

A solidarism that found an even more concrete form came in the project of Jeanne-Marie Poinsard. Better known as Jenny d'Héricourt, a governess and midwife trained in Cabetist ideas, she founded the *Société pour l'émancipation des femmes* at the outbreak of the 1848 revolution. The idea was born of a desire to support the demands of Parisian women workers and their desire for "material independence", which was not being met by the *Ateliers nationaux*. These had only been open to women since April 1848 but were run by men.

Against this backdrop, in March 1848 Désirée Gay – one of the editors of *La Politique des femmes* – appealed to Louis Blanc to help working women while at the same time calling for the nomination of delegates in the *Commission du travail*. It was hoped that they could provide and organize women's work and create "national restaurants and laundries" where affordable food and services could be found. The idea of freedom deriving from material and moral independence constituted, moreover, the political issue expressed in the *Manifeste* of the *Société pour l'émancipation des femmes* where, without questioning the divi-sion of roles, a real break occurred in the rethinking of the principles of 1789, prefiguring a radical transformation of fami-ly structures.

This particular moment of freedom of expression of women's opinions was, however, short-lived: the victory of the moderates in the elections for the National Assembly on 23 and 24 April 1848 and the first policy decisions restricting the dream of a social revolution ignited the powder kegs and the Parisian streets were once again filled with barricades. The bourgeois republic responded firmly, leading to numerous arrests and tri-als. The months of the Cavaignac government, which served to write the republican constitution, saw France plunge back into the harshest of reactionary times with the main victims being freedoms: clubs were banned, as were the most radical news-papers.

This did not stop women's attempts to follow in the footsteps of the principles of the revolutions and to make their voice heard. When the *La voix des femmes* closed, Jeanne Deroin de-

cided to create a new publication with the title *La politique des femmes*, which would soon become *L'Opinion des femmes*" (Ranvier 1908). Gay, instead, followed in the tracks of supportive association and in the summer of 1849 she worked to realize the project *Association des travailleurs de toutes les Professions et de tous les Pays*. Inspired by Saint-Simon's and Fourier's ideas, the association's goal was to create a community "of a civil and business nature" where all members would be "jointly responsible". Moreover, the Statute read,

Equality shall truly reign on earth when goodwill shall be its inseparable partner. Only when the Association itself, like a mother, shall take care of the education of members' children will they become equal, brothers, and sisters. It is necessary that each one, independent of their function, of their profession, their sex, should have an equal say in the decision-making process concerning social issues and redistribution. Only then will we be associates and equal[11].

Moreover, within this partnership, men and women enjoyed the same rights.

The aim of the Association is to guarantee to all members the physical and moral wellbeing and enable them to enjoy fully the fruits of their work. The strengths of the Association lie in the industriousness and talent of its members. And it will grow as more individuals from different professions or certain public functions join[12].

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[11] «L'égalité ne régnera véritablement sur la terre que lorsque la fraternité sera son inséparable compagne. Ce n'est que lorsque l'Association elle-même, comme une mère commune, se chargera de l'éducation des enfants de ses Membres, ce n'est qu'alors que nous deviendrons égaux et frères. Il faut encore que chacun, quelle que soit sa fonction, quelle que soit sa profession,quel que soit son sexe, ait les mêmes droits dans la décision des affaires sociales et dans la répartition. Ce n'est qu'ainsi que nous serons associés et égaux » (*Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Statuts de l'Association des travailleurs de toutes les professions et de tous les pays. Fondé le 19 Julliet 1849, à Châtillon, per Montrouge, départiment de la Seine* : 4).

[12] «Le but de l'Association est de procurer à tous ses Membres le bien-être physique et moral, et de les faire jouir intégralement des fruits de leur travail. Les moyens de l'Association consistent dans la mise en œuvre de l'industrie et des talents de ses Membres, à mesure qu'elle s'agrège des individus capables d'exercer les différentes professions ou certaines fonctions publiques» (*Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Statuts de l'Association des travailleurs de toutes les*

This was an association that brought together the principles of equality and solidarity, the heirs of the 1789 revolution and early socialist thinking, with the added ideal of universalism. The Association put forward demands for social and economic progress, and such demands would become a feature of future associations. It was in these years "between the revolutions", a time of political and social crisis, that the foundations were laid for the building of networks of relations and activism which were destined to cross national borders and for the building a women's political movement (see Guerra, Musiani 2025).

3. *The Italian peninsular: an example late in coming*

Despite starting later compared to other European nations, in the story of *associazionismo* the Italian peninsular represents an interesting example. Of course, here too the ideas and thinking of Saint-Simonianism, which were filtered and transmitted also through the Mazzinian tradition, played a key role. It was from the second half of the 19th century, and in a now largely unified Italy, that democratic associations developed new forms of activism, and alongside the old models of association appeared new forms of solidarity and emancipation (see Cherubini 1991; *Le società di mutuo soccorso italiane e i loro archivi* 1999).

Alongside the now consolidated friendly societies appeared groups in other forms: worker action groups, leagues, local trade union organizations (*Camere del Lavoro*), syndicates and cooperatives. The last two decades of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth, saw a rise in democratic *associazionismo*: that is new associations pushing for worker solidarity and emancipation established alongside older organizations.

Words too changed, or rather multiplied: and alongside "fraternity", "philanthropy", "care", "assistance", and "charity", appeared "emancipation", "claim", "class struggle" and "cooperation" (see Tarozzi 1980).

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professions et de tous les pays. Fondé le 19 Julliet 1849, à Châtillon, per Montrouge, départment de la Seine: 8).

Associazionismo increasingly came to mean not only solidarity but also the capacity to intervene in support of members' needs in the knowledge, of which working men and women were becoming increasingly aware, that they were gaining control over their working lives. In all these institutions, women appeared to be in the minority but recent research shows that women were capable of looking after their own social, economic and political development, and were so precisely for their increasingly active participation within these new groups. Even as early as the second half of the nineteenth century there were women of a certain stature who set up women's friendly societies and women who would later become important players in the trade unions (see Ravà 1888).

Of all these different organisations, only one in fact had a low level of female membership, and I am referring here to the cooperatives. This was because membership was mandatory and only one person per family could become a member, and obviously this would be the head of the household.

The opposite was true of the participation of women in friendly societies. In Italy, men's friendly societies had begun to develop as early as the 1840s, and the second half of the century saw the creation of women's friendly societies. These initially developed as branches of their respective male organizations but would become increasingly independent. Albeit later than the major European states where friendly societies had been established (Great Britain and France), in Italy working men and women began to organize themselves (Gosden 1963). Their aim was to address problems arising from the development of a production system that, in the absence of direct state intervention or social legislation, tended to increase workers' unease and insecurity. In Italy then, the birth of *mutualismo* fitted into an economic context that, even for most of the nineteenth century, remained largely based on agriculture, and only in the immediate post-unification years would there be the first signs of proto-industrialization. It must be said, moreover, that friendly societies maintained their characteristic as worker assistance providers over time, and this made it difficult for them to assimilate with associations of a pre-union type because it was not in the nature of friendly societies to defend class inter-

ests. The decision to introduce these types of associations into our research derives from their work for emancipation. Initially, their interventions in support of women involved in providing assistance for mothers, and organizing sewing and knitting courses to help women gradually achieve a certain economic independence.

In this instance, it would be interesting to look briefly at the development of friendly societies in Bologna, which can be seen as forerunners. Here, on 9 April 1860, from an idea promoted by Livio Zambeccari, the *Società Operaia Maschile* was founded. This was the first "general" society of its kind, whose members included workers belonging to various crafts and trades. Its main aim was to «encourage fraternity and mutual aid among members, promote their education, morality and wellbeing so that they can cooperate happily towards the common good»[13]. Besides providing mutual aid, credit, welfare and assistance for workers, from the mid-1860s the Society began to promote the early forms of popular education. The Society set up an education committee whose aim was to work towards «the cultural and moral elevation of the workers» by providing courses and lectures for adult workers held by illustrious professors of the University of Bologna. The idea was to «remove the people from the herd-like conditions in which they have so far been kept». And, in reply to an invitation to teach, a professor of the University of Bologna wrote: «Knowledge leads straight to liberty, in serfdom lies ignorance»[14].

The second half of the 19th century saw the start of the creation of women's societies throughout the country. Created initially as sections of their corresponding men's societies, they would later become autonomous. The work of these societies focused on providing assistance to mothers but also organized sewing and knitting courses aimed towards progressive economic emancipation. The women's section of the *Società Operaia di Bologna*, for example, was created in 1875 with an

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[13] Museo del Risorgimento di Bologna (MRBo), Archivio della Società Operaia di Bologna, *Statuto della Società Operaia di Bologna, deliberato dall'apposita commissione il 3 giugno 1860 e approvato dall'Assemblea generale il 10 dicembre.*
[14] *Ibidem.*

initial membership of 105 members – a number destined to increase over time – and whose aim was principally to introduce poverty and sickness benefits. From 1880, the *Sezione Femminile* drew up its own autonomous statute and became the *Società Operaia Femminile*), with its own administration and budget (Ravà 1888: 43).

Another area in which women's friendly societies were active was in providing assistance to working women, those women who were not able look after their children during the day and for whom nursery schools were established (see Musiani 2011). An example of such work is that carried out by the *Società Artigiana Femminile* of Bologna, which was established in 1875 as part of the *Società Artigiana* of Bologna founded in 1864. It became independent in 1880, and elected Marquis Gioacchino Napoleone Pepoli as president and Countess Adele Bingham Gregorini its director. In particular, the *Società Artigiana Femminile* worked in support of working women, work which was begun some years before by Bolognese noblewomen to create modern nursery schools along European lines. In fact, the *Società Artigiana* established a nursery for infants in 1881, whose purpose was to «look after and care for infants during those hours of the day in which their mothers worked away from home»[15]. In the same period, the *Società Operaia* set up a kindergarten inspired by the theories of the German educator Friedrich Froebel (Maragi 1970; Tarozzi 1977). A pioneer of women's friendly societies and early forms of childcare and education for members was Ernesta Galletti Stoppa from the Romagna region.

In this case, biographical profiles help to reconstruct the different paths along which new forms of solidarity were built.

Born in Mezzano (Trentino) on 2 December 1850 to a family of shopkeepers, Ernesta Galletti moved to Lugo where, in 1875, she married Valentino Stoppa, a tailor who had been a volunteer among the ranks of Garibaldi's army (see Bandini 2000; *Ernesta Galletti Stoppa il pensiero e l'innovazione di una lughese illustre* 2013; Pironi 2013). A Mazzini supporter, from 1870 she took active part in the constitution of the *Società di Mutuo Soc-*

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[15] *Statuto per l'asilo dei bambini lattanti* (1881: 5).

corso Femminile in Lugo with the firm conviction that «it was not possible that only men could enjoy the benefits of friendly societies and that they never thought to allow women to participate in and enjoy the benefits of friendly societies». And this after numerous political and legal changes, the creation of new industries where their labour was so greatly sought after that they competed directly with men, but who were low paid particularly in large manufacturing industries. The Society was officially founded on 8 September 1872 with 68 members, and initially Ernesta Stoppa carried out secretarial duties to then become President. The Society aimed to provide sickness and old-age benefits to members' families, but it was in later years that one of its most innovative programmes was launched: that which aimed at educating its members. In 1877, Ernesta obtained her teaching diploma to teach at primary school level and cultivated the idea of creating a private institute of female education within the Society. In spite of the difficulties encountered on an administrative level and with public opinion, in 1881 she managed to establish the *Istituto femminile Stoppa* with its own kindergarten. This was a true schooling system starting with infants' school where children enter at two and a half years of age, through to upper elementary where they leave as young ladies.

A further two years of finishing school was added for those girls who wished to continue their studies (improve themselves or be admitted to teaching schools in order to become teachers). The school came up against stiff opposition at various times and from various directions, but Ernesta Stoppa remained steadfast in her work, to the extent that she won recognition from the Ministry of Public Education which awarded her with various prizes, and to the extent that in the later years of the century she was seen as an institutional reference point of the Froebelian approach-based education system.

Education, and more precisely popular education, were therefore central themes of friendly societies, together with that of women's vocational training. And, this too, deserves a closer look.

The second half of the nineteenth century saw the start of vocational training courses for women. In 1862, for example,

Elisa Lemonnier established the *Société pour l'enseignement professionnel des femmes* in France. From the 1860s onward, these courses multiplied, and specific didactical literature was developed (Prost 2004).

In 1895, the *Società operaia femminile*, female counterpart of the *Società Operaia Maschile*, established the first vocational school of arts and crafts in Bologna, *Scuola professionale Regina Margherita*, later renamed *Istituto Elisabetta Sirani* (Dalla Casa 1987-88).

The school was born as a result of the "outbreak" of a debate that engaged leading intellectual figures of the city and the first women graduates. The focus of debate was the question of women having the same right as boys to secondary education. Female emancipation was supported by the *Lega per l'istruzione del popolo* (League for the Education of the People), whose thinking was that women had the right to an education that was not "a mere ornament" but one which could, or rather had to, provide women with a genuine education, either vocational or university.

The League was born in 1871 of an initiative of some friendly societies with the purpose of "educating and moralizing the people and instructing them on both private and public life". Alongside such initiatives as lessons, lectures, conferences and popular libraries, the League – whose first president was Giosue Carducci – began organizing regular courses in bookkeeping and law, as well as a professional design school for workers. From here was born the idea to create a true vocational school for women based on the type of school that had been established in the same period in Genoa, Milan and Turin. In reality, the League, whose activities concluded in 1886, succeeded solely in its attempt to give life to a number of professional courses in design, bookkeeping and French.

The debate took on a new energy in the 1890s when, in November 1890, in Bologna, an information committee was created to improve the woman's condition. Although it lasted only three years, the Committee carried out intensive political, social and cultural work. It was made up of men from Bologna's liberal class and certain female figures including Gualberta Alaide Beccari, founder of the magazine *La Donna* – the first magazine

written by women for women – and Giuseppina Cattani, one of the first women to graduate from the University of Bologna (see Biadene 1979; Pisa 1982; Musiani 2011).

The Committee's aim was to get public opinion on the side of women, and do everything possible in order to bring real change. They claimed that women's education had to be improved in the most rational and scientific sense. They demanded that women be given a proper, sound education making them capable of exercising a far more beneficial influence in the family and particularly over their children and enabling them to fulfil a life of their own in which, with their special nature, they might achieve the fullness of their dignity and full social and political rights.

This initiative was first supported by the democratic and radical citizenry of the Mazzini *élite*, and women played a primary role by taking on management tasks and relegating their male colleagues to purely representational positions. Furthermore, they contributed to reviving the theme of professional training for women. Thanks to the work of the *Società operaia femminile di Bologna* and the *Società degli insegnanti,* as well as the *Società della regina Margherita*, on 16 September 1895, the *Scuola provinciale femminile d'arti e mestieri* was finally opened, Its «eighty-five pupils were divided into various classes which included cloth cutting, household linen production, dressmaking, children's clothing, millinery, embroidery, knitwear, artificial flowers, ironing, cooking, and chinaware decoration» (Dalla Casa 1987-88: 160).

These experiences show how, in the second half of the 19th century, changes were coming about in the forms of women's friendly societies and in prospects for emancipation. Alongside the early forms of feminism, it is necessary to examine the early movements that developed from within friendly societies and workers' movements, but which, for a long time, had been "omitted" from female biographical research.

At the height of the expansion of friendly societies in the 1880s, changes occurring in the workplace made it necessary to make new choices, including that of establishing trades organizations and resistance funds to help workers in their fight against anti-labour policies adopted by employers. The idea to

set up resistance spread widely among workers and socialist groups, and the aim was to create associations structured along the lines of friendly societies but which were adapted to cope with the consequences of the industrialization process. This meant that these groups not only provided assistance, but adopted methods of defence and attack. The distinguishing aspect of the worker action groups was the fact that they represented for the first time a mass phenomenon which spread through both the major industrial areas and the countryside. Major transformations to the economy, which from being prevalently agricultural moved towards industrialization, brought about changes to society and the workplace. The increasing proletarianisation of the urban class, together with analogous change in the countryside, accelerated the development of the worker movement and created the conditions for the deployment of out and out forms of organized struggle.

In that transitional phase which brought the nineteenth century to a close, and ushered in Giolitti's Italy, was deep economic and social change, which impacted even on female employment and led to the growth in demand for greater forms of civil and political participation. Female employment, in both the countryside and the broad and varied area of domestic work, was in the main little valued socially but became a central issue in campaigns fighting for workers' rights and in the wave of strikes taking place in the early years of the twentieth century.

While highlighting the fact that Italy lagged behind in social issues, a comparative study of these two models allows us to identify certain features of a common discourse. The ideas, but more so the practices, particularly those that enabled the development of networks of international relations, contributed indeed to the growth of a women's political movement. And this movement, from the very beginning, fought for the development of a society founded on the bonds of solidarity.

The first experiences that arose within the context of Saint-Simonism thus contributed to the initiation of practices of solidarity that were destined to continue, albeit along different timelines, throughout the long 19th century.

Different biographies, experiences, political and social developments, determined in part by the different national contexts in which they arose, can nevertheless be interpreted as a dense political and social framework that was essential to the shaping of a modern gender identity.

The intertwining of individual emancipation and the drive towards the construction of a new collective bond characterised the first half of the century, triggering a genealogy of female and feminist activism practices on a political and social level.

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Abstract

SHAPING A "NEW SOCIAL HUMAN SUBJECT": WOMEN'S SOLIDARI-
TY NETWORKS IN EUROPE IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE 19TH CEN-
TURY

Keywords: Saint-Simonians; Feminism; *Associazionismo*; Solidarity;
Freedom.

This essay aims to analyse the emergence of the first forms of wom-
en's associations, starting with the experience of Saint-Simonian wom-
en in France in the first half of the 19th century and their connections
with experiences in Great Britain. It follows a chronology that begins
with the revolutions of the contemporary era in order to examine the
construction of networks of relationships over the long term, with par-
ticular attention to continuities and ruptures. It analyses a solidarity
that arose from collective experiences such as the first magazines, in
search of expressions of individuality that sought to build increasingly
universal expressions and rights.

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NIALL BOND

EXPRESSIONS OF "SOLIDARITY" IN FRENCH
AND GERMAN SOCIAL THEORY

1. *Deciphering the signifier "solidarity"*

The word "solidarity" is frequently used to describe a sense of unity among people with shared or complementary goals or a common sense of belonging to a community of fate, implying a readiness to make sacrifices on behalf of specified others.[1] And yet, for many, such a definition is bereft of consequences and so broad as to encompass an undeterminable range of social and psychological realities. It is timely to analyze through the lens of conceptual history not just convergences in calls for "solidarity" but also divergencies in the use of the term, i.e. to present semantic de-solidarization surrounding the word. "Solidarity" is often used to express moral recognition for a cause without consequences for those doing the expressing. Such expressions can easily become a sort of occasion for virtue-signaling by occasionalists (Schmitt). For others, it only makes sense to evoke solidarity when people put their money where their mouth is given a choice: this was also the original meaning of the term. Its first use in French law implied contractual consequences and the readiness to stand in for partners in a specific undertaking.

Here, we look at the use of the term "solidarity" as a category in French and German social theory, culminating in Max Weber's definition of the term in *Economy and Society*. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the term was being used in France with differing intentions: while some, like sociology's founder, Auguste Comte, were using the term "solidarity" generally to describe social peace or the absence of strife in his

praise of the technocratic progress that attenuated struggles for existence and reinforced solidarity, others, such as the French statesman and Nobel laureate, Léon Bourgeois deplored the *lack* of genuine solidarity notwithstanding Comte's and Durkheim's presentation of "solidarity" as characteristic of the forward march of society. While for Comte, solidarity corresponded to the Is, for Bourgeois the word corresponded to an unachieved Ought, a distinction made by David Hume (Hume 1878: 469). Comte, and to a greater extent Durkheim saw the co-functioning of individuals serving their own interests as the very foundation of solidarity; Bourgeois did not tire of denouncing the absence of genuine "solidarity" – a readiness to engage for one's fellows with no interest in achieving one's own aims. Social theorists in the wake of Durkheim – Marcel Mauss and Célestin Bouglé – developed their own discourses on morality in arguments that emphasized the value of in relationships of reciprocity and equality but did not really pull apart the nitty gritty of real social interactions. Max Weber shed more light on the circumstances and motivations of people acting in solidarity sometimes out of devotion to others, at other times out of self-interest.

The question of whether democracy needs solidarity is pertinent when the term "democracy" is conflated with capitalism and the market, after having been associated with socialism and the State for instance by opponents of democracy in the nineteenth century and proponents of "people's democracies" in the twentieth century. In a brief conclusion, I move from unpacking the word "solidarity" to commenting on the polysemic word "democracy" and arguing that "solidarity" is indeed desirable in a community of citizens as opposed to a marketplace of political lobbyists. Looking at the development of the term "solidarity" from its origins in law, I show how the word was used to describe a variety of forms of and motives for interactions among humans, how it became central to French sociology in the writings of Auguste Comte and Emile Durkheim, how in Germany Ferdinand Tönnies, while not using the term "solidarity", developed discerning terms to describe motives for peaceful and productive interaction, and how Max Weber clarified solidarity by outlining the circumstances and bases for humans

acting *as though* in unity in an empirical science while Durkheim's followers insistently led discussions of "solidarity" back to normative speculation.

2. *Solidarity's place in semantic fields around the theme of sociability*

One of the most insightful pieces of writing on solidarity is Andrea Sangiovanni's essay "Solidarity: Nature, Grounds and Value" (Sangiovanni 2021). In seeking out the difference between solidarity and «related ideas, such as altruism, justice, and fellow-feeling» (ivi: 3), when seen against other «members of the class of associational ethics» (larger social and economic collectivities, such as corporations and social movements, the ethics of family and friendship, and the classical concerns of political justice such as the state, human rights, and international relations), Sangiovanni acknowledges «that many feel the concept to be hopelessly vague and amorphous", bleeding into "other related notions – such as altruism, community, mutual concern, fellow-feeling, justice – and therefore quickly becoming indistinguishable from them» (ivi: 4). He points out that the social solidarity presented in Comte and Durkheim is «taken to be primarily descriptive and sociological in contrast to the other, more normatively oriented concepts» (ivi:5); this corroborates our observation that while Comte and Durkheim are struck with the extent of solidarity among humans who interrelate within society, contemporaries such as Bourgeois in France and Tönnies in Germany deplored the decline in genuine "solidarity" (in the case of Bourgeois) and "community" (in the case of Tönnies), clearly pointing to higher expectations of other human beings. Durkheim's followers in French social theory sought to revert to the normative status of the term. Max Weber believes that the signifier "solidarity" has its place in an apparatus of sociological categories, but only to describe the actions of people who feel bound to specific other individuals in contradistinction to others, whether out of affective or purposive-rational grounds, and who actually act on those feelings. Weber thus brings a lucidity to bear in using the term "solidarity" as descriptive not to describe society in general but to designate

specific relationships which were more compelling than mere juxtaposed anonymous individuals. What is essential for Weber is to use the term "solidarity" as a likely basis for action.

Discussions of sociability underlying notions of solidarity reach as far back as Greek antiquity, notably Aristotle's teleology – the development of organisms from undifferentiated material (or epigenesis). In book 8 of his *Nimoachean Ethics*, (VIII, 1. 1155a.), Aristotle advances the idea that friendship is more important than justice inasmuch it holds a city or polis together (Aristotle 2000). "Concord" is equated with the elimination of civil conflict: when people are friends, there is no need of justice; when they are just, they are still in need of friendship. A connection is drawn between Nicomachean Ethics 9.1159b25-27 and community, which involves "active participation" rather than "passive sharing". "Philia" can be based upon a variety of motives. Aristotle developed a typology of "desire-based", "utility-based" and "virtue-based" friendships. Starting from Aristotle's discussion of the concept of friendship or "*philia*", I argue that in his work *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, first published in 1887, the German social theorist Ferdinand Tönnies develops a logical distinction between relationships based upon friendship, kinship, desire or inclination, which he summed up as community or *Gemeinschaft*, relationships entered into out of utility or self-interest without the inclination to embrace others on their own merits, designated as society or *Gesellschaft*. Relationships based upon "trust and virtue" are of a radically different nature than those that are "utility-based", as emphasized in the second formulation of Immanuel Kant's categorical imperative – a universal moral law that applies to all rational beings unconditionally, regardless of desires or consequences: this second formulation, also called the formula of humanity, enjoins us to "act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of another, always at the same time as an end, and never merely as a means" (Kant 1785). One might question whether Aristotle's "utility-based friendships" really merit the term "friendship". Can relationships which appear to be concord on the surface be adequately described as relationships of "solidarity" when the actions underlying the relationships solely serve the self-interest

of those involved in them and evaporate as soon as the purpose has been fulfilled or is revealed to be unviable?

In the French social theory of Auguste Comte and Emile Durkheim, strictly self-serving actions are presented as "solidarity", as the glue that holds the social fabric together, notwithstanding the fact that contemporaries such as Léon Bourgeois had been describing French society as lamentably lacking in solidarity (Bourgeois 1896), an observation with which Tönnies' analysis of modern commercial society is concordant. Tönnies, who adopted various idiomatic expressions of Durkheim such as social fact (*fait social*, *soziale Tatsache*) in his defense of the legitimacy of sociology as a discipline, was somewhat dismissive of the work in which Durkheim introduced the notion of "organic solidarity", *De la division du travail social*, writing that he had learned little from Durkheim (Tönnies 1929). Bourgeois and Tönnies would have concurred that with the advancement of the normative order of capitalism, the readiness of people to put themselves in the service of others was declining. Tönnies did not adopt the word Durkheimian term solidarity in the collocations "organic" and "mechanical solidarity" even after Tönnies read Durkheim's *De la division du travail social*. Tönnies' dismissiveness and defensiveness are understandable given that when founding sociology in France, Durkheim seems not to have assimilated the salient feature of *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* that was to become so foundational not just for Tönnies, but for later German social theory: that we value certain relationships on their own merits (or out of love for others) and others exclusively for the ulterior advantages they afford us. Having "ulterior motives" is a reproach that is so commonly made, that once it has been shown to be central in human interactions, it is striking when later theorists choose to omit to take account of it in later categories of social interactions.

3. *The origins of understandings of solidarity in law*

The word solidarity was originally derived from the Latin adjective *solidus* (dense, compact, cohesive) in private Roman *law*, particularly in the formula *in solidum*, designating a collective

obligation to honour a debt or repair damage.[2] The expression "*obligation solidaire*" was defined in the second edition of the Furetière dictionary of 1690 as "*commun à plusieurs de manière que chacun réponde du tout*". Where solidarity exists, every individual in the collectivity responds for the whole. Its juridical meaning is laid down in the 1694 Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française: «Etat de deux ou plusieurs personnes dont chacun est engagé pour toutes, et pour le tout, en cas de non-paiement de la part des autres», and a similar definition is found in the *Grande Encyclopédie* de Diderot et d'Alembert of 1765. Article 1202 of the Code Civil of 1804 states that solidarity has to be based upon mutual consent: «La solidarité ne se présume point ; il faut qu'elle soit expressément stipulée». This differs from later use by Comte and Durkheim, in which solidarity is understood to be universal or to suffuse entire societies. And yet in its original acceptation, solidarity is specific to relationships among individuals sharing specific commitments. The derivation of society from *socius* or partner presupposes voluntary participation; a later shift in meaning to encompass everyone, irrespective of any expression of their will, creates moral obligations for individuals derived from their mere existence and can be seen as a semantic sleight of hand. The use of the term solidarity by various authors to imply that there are moral consequences to be derived from our very existence is an instance of the illogic to which Hume was alluding when he insisted on the distinction between the Is and the Ought, between fact and value. Some authors, notably those inspired by Christianity, insinuated that our very existence imposes the moral duty to act in solidarity, entailing unspecified, imponderable and non sequitur moral injunctions. But when Comte and Durkheim argue that solidarity already forms the basis of social coexistence, this has the effect of lowering standards of what constitutes solidarity to a juxtaposition that may be one of mutual indifference. This problem notably in Durkheim's usage induced Durkheim's followers to draw solidarity back into the realm of the normative, while with contrary intent, Max Weber insisted upon the specificity of solidarity as a basis for united

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[2] My thanks to the philologist Heinz Wismann for his explanations of the original use of the term.

action in his deliberately value-neutral dissection of the category.

4. *Solidarity as used by romantics and reactionaries, and the rise of the solidarisme movement*

French counterrevolutionaries related the term solidarity to the notion of collective debt and the notion of original sin as an obligation contracted by humanity towards God, bonding humans prior to and outside any social contract, as in Joseph de Maistre's *Considérations sur la France* of 1796 and his essay *Du Pape* of 1819. In his *Le génie du christianisme* of 1802, Chateaubriand argues that baptism is based upon the fact that «*nos fautes rejaillissent sur nos fils, que nous sommes tous solidaires*»: «*sans décider ici si Dieu a tort ou raison de nous rendre solidaires, tout ce que nous savons et tout ce qu'il nous suffit de savoir à présent est que cette loi (i.e. d'une solidarité originaire) existe*» (Chateaubriand 1802 : 24ff.). Original solidarity, in this reasoning, is founded upon original sin. Sin as a debt towards God is passed down the generations and expressed in social institutions, starting with the family, which is the absolute model of other collective formations. Pierre Simon Ballanche, the theologian, denounced the idea of the social contract in his *Essai sur les institutions sociales* of 1818, in which he wrote that the human species in its entirety is bound in solidarity. Saint-Simon in his *Le nouveau christianisme* argued that there was a quasi-contract between all humans that preceded the stipulated contracts of individuals. While Saint-Simon assumed the universality of contract, Ballanche dismissed the notion of a social contract, asserting that the entirety of the human species was linked through a form of universal solidarity. These apparently normative arguments seem to lay bases for desiderata for human attitudes and behaviour, which however remain lacking in specific consequences. But the term "solidarity" was given a new twist when the founders of solidarity in France, first Comte and then far later Durkheim argued that solidarity could be shown to exist through the very existence of society. Human cooperation was perceived as a sort of miracle by Comte, while Durkheim argued that its modern form was derived from the

readiness of humans to adopt complementary functions, thus creating ties of interdependence, making individuals need one another and use one another.

The social philosopher Pierre Leroux (1797–1871) applied the notion of solidarity in debates on socialism and humanism, rejecting the technocratic tendencies of Saint-Simonianism that Comte would later embrace. Prefiguring Tönnies to a certain extent, Leroux used the notion of solidarity to countervail the individualism of liberal thought, while rejecting the mechanical collectivism of authoritarian socialism. In *De l'humanité, de son principe et de son avenir* (1840), Leroux suggested identifying solidarity with the French revolutionary ideal of "fraternity": solidarity was the bond uniting individuals in a moral community. While Leroux remained clearly in the realm of the normative, Comte would later interpret the notion of solidarity as a descriptive term to designate what factually served as the basis for cooperation among members of a society. The moralist idea that solidarity was based upon contractually validated debt flowed into the later arguments of Léon Bourgeois, the politician during the Third Republic and head of the radical-republican government from 1895 to 1896, in his book *Solidarité*, which founded the "*Solidarisme*" movement (Bourgeois 1896); human society is a system of natural dependence based upon reciprocal debt: «Il s'agit pour les hommes, associés solidaires, de reconnaître l'étendue de la dette que chacun contracte envers tous par l'échange de services» (ivi: 48), because «l'homme naît débiteur de l'association humaine» (ivi: 54). Both debts and benefits are accepted (p. 186); solidarity distributes both evil and good upon all of us (ivi:170). It is in the law of solidarity that we can seek the balance of moral and social things, i.e. justice (ivi: 191). Solidarity, in this tradition, comes from debt, expressed by the German word, *Schuld*, which also means guilt. Both the ideas of guilt and debt imply redemption. The romantic transformation of the notion of solidarity from a relationship that is entered into knowingly by two willing contractual parties (in the *Code civil*) to something that embraces the entirety of society and forces us to adopt an attitude to which we would not arrive if left freely to our own devices should

heighten our awareness of semantic shifts harnessed to artificially create moral obligations which we need not feel binding.

5. *The use of the term solidarité by Saint-Simon and Auguste Comte*

The term "solidarity" was used by Auguste Comte (1798-1857) after working as a secretary for Claude Henri de Saint-Simon (1760-1825), later described by Durkheim as the first sociologist. Both Saint-Simon and Comte were committed to channeling the potential of the French republic into social reform. Comte first used the term "*solidarité*" in the fifth volume of his *Cours de philosophie positive* to describe the interdependence and social cohesion that bound individuals in society (Comte 1837). Doctrines of social *progress* assume that the passage of time is accompanied by improvement, inter alia in relations among individuals interacting in society, and typify the movement to which Comte gave the name positivism. Saint-Simon and Comte shared a broadly optimistic vision of social development. In *Le système industriel*, Saint-Simon had pleaded for a vision of industrial society whose social harmony is based upon a solidarity founded upon expertise and productivity (Saint-Simon 1821). Auguste Comte presented a vision of transition from theological to metaphysical to positive stages of society intended inter alia as a self-fulfilling prophecy aiming at disempowering metaphysicians following their seizing of social power from the theologians to the benefit of more productive members of society with a technocratic legitimacy. The positivists' technocratic faith in progress was focused upon material improvements but also sought to account for what was deemed an improvement in the interactions of individuals in society. For this, teachings of the division of labour and the rise of civility from the Scottish Enlightenment were useful. To describe the "wondrous" functioning of society, Comte adopted the term "solidarity". While adopting this word to describe social interactions in their non-dysfunctionality, Comte did not foreground the motives of the individuals engaged in "society", which appeared to work as though it had been concerted, even if "society" consisted of the discrete actions of individuals who may

have merely been selfishly pursuing their own aims. While the term "solidarity" expressed an admiration for those patterns that accompanied material betterment – an admiration that could underpin religion – a work of social theory published in Germany in 1887 by Ferdinand Tönnies led to a more discerning analysis of what transpired in the minds of humans in social relationships, inducing Tönnies to critique the purposive rationality increasingly foregrounded in human interactions notably in commerce. While Comte, like Smith or Adam Ferguson (1767) saw civility towering on the foundations of enlightened self-interest in polished society as a sort of marvel, Tönnies' more Rousseauesque vision was more circumspect, and he was convinced that calculation based upon self-interest represented a moral decline compared with the instinctive unity holding together the fabric of earlier communities.

In the context of the 1848 revolution, the term solidarity became a catchword in France to promote mutual responsibility and a stronger role of the State in redistributing social wealth. It was used mainly by thinkers in tension with economic liberalism. Hippolyte Renaud's work *Solidarité*, published in 1851 (Renaud 1851), was influenced by Comte and by Charles Fourier, for whom communities or phalansteries should be set up and based upon the passionate mutual attractions among humans which were foundational for cooperation (Fourier 1808). Fourier's utopia was a plea for mutual support and interdependence among individuals within capitalist and commercial society and a criticism of the individualistic tendencies of liberalism, emphasizing the need for collective responsibility and cooperation. Renaud saw solidarity as an Ought rather than an Is, i.e. a utopian ideal rather than existing reality, and offered a diagnosis foreshadowing Tönnies in the wake of Marx: liberal individualism eroded solidarity. The shared use by Renaud and Comte of terms should not obscure the differences: while Renaud presents solidarity as an unachieved state of affairs, Comte presents a vision of society in which solidarity already exists between individuals in the pursuit of their own interest under the scientific supervision of experts. The word "solidarity" was sometimes used by economic liberals such as Frédéric Bastiat but above all to insist upon the primacy of freedom

from State imposition of solidarity: «La solidarité consiste à aider le voisin dans la mesure où on le peut librement ; elle cesse d'être solidarité dès qu'elle devient contrainte» (Bastiat 1850: 371 ff) For him, the term solidarity can only be legitimately used when referring to voluntary redistribution and not forced distribution by the State (*ibid.*). The word, "solidarity" was used differently by Catholic conservatives, such as Juan Donoso Cortés, who, in his *Ensayo sobre el catolicismo, el liberalismo y el socialismo* of 1851, called solidarity «one of the most beautiful and sublime revelations of Catholic dogma»: man «is subject to a dual responsibility – that which is proper to him alone, and also that which belongs to him in common with the rest of men. This responsibility which man shares with others is what is called solidarity… Through solidarity man rises to a higher dignity and more elevated sphere and becomes something more than an atom in space and a moment in time» (Donoso Cortés 1851: 279). In this apotheosis of "solidarity", Donoso Cortés was not thinking of individuals striking deals for their own individual betterment, but altruism.

While Comte's initial discussion of solidarity appears utilitarian, modern and functional, it evolves. In *Passé, présent et avenir social* of 1850, Comte gives the term "solidarity" a religious dimension intended to provide humanity with a moral compass based upon affects, or what he describes as our "three altruistic instincts – veneration, attachment and goodness" The "Great Being" (*Grand-Être*) maintains a direct and continuous culture of universal affection countervailing the distractions of "theoretical and practical tendencies". Comte attributes this to the bond between the sexes:

> Apart from the universal influence of every woman over every man to attach him to Humanity, the importance and difficulty of such an office requires that each of us be forever placed under the particular providence of one of these angels who answer to the Great Being. This moral guardian has three natural types – the mother, the spouse and the daughter… who together embrace the three elementary modes of solidarity – obedience, union and protection, just as they embrace the three orders of continuity, linking us to the past, the present and the future. According to my cerebral doctrine, each one specially corre-

sponds to one of our altruistic instincts – veneration, attachment and goodness (Comte 1850: 278).

In fact, Comte offers *two* sources of solidarity: self-interest (in the wake of the Scottish Enlightenment) and instinct, presented as more feminine, which he ties into a new religion he seeks to promote (*ibid.*).

6. *The Tönniessian distinction between community and society as two types of what Durkheim would later call "solidarity": alternative bases for the social peace.*

In *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* of 1887, Tönnies sought out the basis for social peace, much as Comte had done previously: the underlying basis of social peace, (which approximates both Comte's and Durkheim's understanding of the term *solidarité*) can be either *gesellschaftlich*, which Tönnies associates with the calculation which for him is masculine, or *gemeinschaftlich*, the more feminine realm of instinct or motherly love (Tönnies 2019). Tönnies was asking a similar question to Comte and later Durkheim – that of the basis of peaceable coexistence among humans – but he had inherited it from Hobbes' *Leviathan* rather than from Comte's *Cours de philosophie positive*. The answer Tönnies derived from Hobbes was the individual pursuit of his own advantage tempered by rationality in society or *Gesellschaft*, and the answer Tönnies derived from the Romantics was the loving harmony of genuine community or *Gemeinschaft*. The use of the term *Solidarität* in German would have been unusual and did not seem pertinent to Tönnies. Durkheim published an insightful review of Tönnies' work in 1889 (Durkheim 1889) but omitted to draw consequences from Tönnies' typology in his own works, particularly the distinct bases of orientation that were to flow into Weber's analysis of "social action". In Durkheim's *De la division du travail social* of 1893, Tönnies is not referenced, however we do find what seems to be a hidden polemic against Tönnies' presentation of the evolution of coexistence from "organic" to "mechanical" aggregates. For Durkheim, society evolved, to the contrary, from "mechanical" to "organic" solidarity. With "*solidarité mécanique*" Durkheim meant mechanical in a homogenous social

unit under a repressive order, and with "*organique*" he meant cooperation among individuals in society pursuing their own interests (Durkheim 1893). When adopting the organic-mechanical dichotomy, Durkheim was responding to Tönnies' organicist riposte (inspired by Herder) to the Hobbesian idea that man and the institutions which he engendered were machines: in nature, they are not machines but organisms. In either of Durkheim's hypotheses of mechanical or organic solidarity, there is an element of self-interest: humans interact first to escape the punishment of a heavy-handed repressive order and later to draw the greatest benefits of cooperation within a functionalist mercantile society based upon the division of labour. Durkheim does not present sociability as instinct at any point in his philosophy of history. The founding work of Durkheimian sociology seems indifferent to motives of devotion to other individuals or tradition and habit or social values that transcend self-promotion, foregrounded by Tönnies in his theory of community and Weber in his typology of social action. Durkheim defended this narrowing of the sociological vision by declaring that rationality was characteristic of French society and making it a prism of sociological reflection in France, while German sociology focused on critiques of purposive rationality and ensuing exploitation, pointing to alternative bases of social adhesion such as affects and shared values.

Tönnies drew from Hobbes, Schopenhauer and the Romantics, but also from Comte, notably when he declared his work to be inter alia sociological; his sociological distinction between community and society reposed upon what he referred to as types of will – essential will, rooted in emotion, which founded community, and arbitrary will, the will of free choice, based upon calculation and deliberation – the will of self-interest and the calculation of profit. These two forms of volition underlie moral orders of sharing or giving and moral orders of taking and giving as little as possible in return. They were respectively prefigured in moral thought by Kant's principle of humanity, the injunction never to consider others only as means to an end, but always as an end in themselves, and in economic thought by Adam Smith's injunction never to appeal to the humanity of others, but always to their own self-interest. Hobbes had fa-

mously formulated the question as to the basis of peace in any given society and had concluded that it was fear of the Leviathan or God on earth or a punishing, repressive society which left individuals the freedom to pursue activities that were not harmful and punishable (Hobbes 1651). From this assumption, which prefigured classical economic thought but also utilitarian philosophy, classical economics, and the Durkheimian philosophy of history were derived (Bond 2025). This strict rationalism ignored other bases for social peace, such as simple habit, a readiness to comply with tradition or traditional authorities, or devotion to a charismatic ruler (Weber 1913). Tönnies and later Weber with his vast erudition presented a more comprehensive understanding of the basis of the social peace than Durkheim, leaving a lasting mutual incomprehension between French- and German-language social theorists in their wake.

7. *Tönnies' philosophy of history in Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft of 1887*

Tönnies posited a unilinear rise in rationalism and the reciprocal using by humans of one another, an inexorable supplanting of *Gemeinschaft* (community) by *Gesellschaft* (society). Although he had read Comte, he made no use of the word "solidarity". His concepts were inscribed in the tradition of natural law as developed in the wake of Thomas Hobbes, and he pleaded for a natural law that would take account of the love in which the most essential human relations and the polities of the past were deemed to have been founded: those of community. When Durkheim reviewed Tönnies' work, he had no problem with Tönnies' depiction of community as based upon homogeneity; however, he declared Tönnies' presentation of society, influenced by Marx, to be «ideological» (Durkheim 1889: 420). In the same vein, Weber could not have subscribed to Durkheim's philosophy of history because of his neo-Kantian rejection of speculative readings of the sense of history, but founded upon a different ideology from Tönnies'. But what are the underlying differences between Tönnies' critique of rationality and Durkheim's celebration of it? In Tönnies' intellectual universe, there is a mutual affirmation among humans that springs instinctive-

ly from the breast, engendering self-sacrifice or caritas or risk-taking for others which are not dependent on calculations of pain or gain. Durkheim's generalization of purposive rationalism in organic solidarity leaves no room for sacrifice per se. Tönnies presents the transformation of relationships of sacrifice to others or altruism into relationships in which individuals pursue their own interest as ubiquitous in the development not just of societies following on the heels of communities but also within individual relationships, subject to processes of "cooling off". This is an aspect of Tönnies' thought which I would suggest revising.

8. *Durkheim's Division of Social Labour as a response to Tönnies following his review in 1889*

Durkheim responds to the challenge Tönnies presents with his community-society dichotomy in a review Durkheim published in 1889 (Durkheim 1889). While Durkheim accepts the "general outline of the analysis and description of *Gemeinschaft*", he differs on the theory of *Gesellschaft*, offering a far more conciliatory understanding of the capitalist order (ivi: 416). While Durkheim understands Tönnies as suggesting that the characteristic of *Gesellschaft* is the progressive development of individualism, which can only be checked by the State temporarily and artificially, leading to a mechanical aggregate of which the collective element is not the result of internal spontaneity but the external drive of the State – the society as imagined by Bentham, Durkheim asserts that he believes that:

the life of major social agglomerations is as natural as that of small aggregates. It is no less organic, nor less internal. Apart from purely individual movements, there is a properly collective activity in our contemporary societies which is as natural as that of less extensive societies of the past. It is provided for differently; it constitutes a different type; however, between the two species of the same genus, as diverse as they are, there is no difference in nature. To prove it, it would take a book; I can only formulate the proposition. Moreover, is it probable that the evolution of the same being, society, could start as something organic and end up as a pure mechanism? There is such a solution of continuity between these two modes of being that one cannot conceive of how they might be part of the same development. This way of recon-

ciling the theory of Aristotle with that of Bentham is simply a juxtaposition of opposites. One has to choose: if society is a natural phenomenon at its origins, it will remain such until the end of its career (Durkheim 1889: 421f.).

In Tönnies' review of *De la division du travail social*, he responded to Durkheim's reproach that Tönnies had placed organic and mechanical social life in an illogical order.

I understand both forms of structures in altogether different ways from Dürkheim, Barth and all other sociologists of my acquaintance: I understand them first as an *esse objectivum* ... and trace the ensuing progressive rationalization and alienation of these relationships which peaked in the conceptions of the universal society and universal State. My doctrine is by essence indifferent to the theory that the *esse formale* of social life or 'society' is 'organic'. I have never questioned that reciprocal effects in a developed national economy can be compared to organic reciprocal effects; the idea that governing and other corporations or individuals both in a great nation and in a village or municipal community relate to the whole as do organs to an organism is not ruled out by my concepts. However, I find Mr. Durkheim's presentation of the social types and their relationships to one another hardly instructive. His writings on the division of labour are scholastic and bereft of any of the critical analysis so remarkable in Bücher (Tönnies 1929: 216).

Tönnies concludes his review of *De la division du travail social* with the observation that «Durkheim's entire sociology is a modification of Spencer's» (ivi: 216f.). Tönnies is not impressed by the originality or relevance of Durkheim's contribution to the discipline of sociology and as though through a Freudian slip repeatedly misspells Durkheim's name. Durkheim showed no understanding of the point behind the analogy or metaphor of the organic-mechanical dichotomy, which Herder had promoted to prominence among Germany intellectuals. While Durkheim argues that it is logical that the mechanical lead to the organic, an organic relationship can yield to a mechanical relationship when an adolescent comes to regard their mother as an automated teller machine: the mother-child relationship is initially purely organic, one of unquestioning mutual affirmation, while later, when applying purposive rationality, the mother or child

can regard the other "mechanically" as a means to an end. This is in Tönnies' world set the point of no return for the transition from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*, although I disagree with Tönnies that such transitions are necessarily unilinear: anyone who enters a bakery to buy a loaf of bread and falls in love with the vendor and successfully woos them can show that a relationship of self-interest can be transformed into communion.

9. *Durkheim's less pessimistic vision of modernity*

Conflicts and disorder characterize modern life, absorbed by economic considerations, while societies disintegrate against the background of the disappearance of former principles of structure and order. So Durkheim advocates social reintegration. "It is impossible for people to live with others without developing a feeling for the whole that they form with their association, without binding themselves to it, taking care of their interests and integrating it in their behaviour. And yet this binding to something that goes beyond the individual and the subordination of individual interests to the overall interest is the actual source of moral activity". Solidarity is the source of this bond. Mechanical solidarity, based predominantly upon homogeneity and fear of repression, is transfigured into organic solidarity through differentiation and increasingly complex interactions between human subjects. Without specifying what transforms purposive rational self-interest into the realization of "overall interest", Durkheim declares such transformation to be the «actual source of moral activity» (Durkheim 1893: v-vii). Without mentioning Tönnies in *The Division of Social Labour*, Durkheim incorporates Tönnies' understanding of community, the subordination of individual interests to those of the whole, Kant's understanding of the principle of humanity and Rousseau's idea of the general will into a moral doctrine, declaring that the source of these bonds was *solidarity*.

Durkheim understood Tönnies, but chose to base his own functionalist theory of progressively differentiated societies more on Herbert Spencer – moving from the simple and homogenous to the complex and heterogeneous: initially based upon homogeneity, a mechanical solidarity of interlocking images of a

common model ("a replica of the collective type") expressed in the constraints that guaranteed the unity that Spencer saw as characterizing "militant societies", solidarity was increasingly based upon the functional interdependence of heterogeneous elements. Thus, while Tönnies saw the history of human living together as progressing from the organic to the mechanical, Durkheim described a movement from mechanical to organic solidarity. In contrast to Spencer, Durkheim sees constraint or repressive force not so much as the basis of solidarity, than as an external manifestation of mechanical solidarity. Progress towards organic solidarity is marked by the decline of constraint and parallel ascension of interdependence. While Tönnies' moral imperative is not to regard other human beings as mere means to an end in community, (which is what humans become for one another in society), Durkheim's moral explicitly categorical imperative is for each individual bound to one another in organic solidarity to adopt a useful function (which will allow them to become means to others' ends). While for Tönnies, the term "organic" evokes an inclination rootedness in nature determined by the passage of time, and "mechanical" implied a machine invented by upon human calculation, Durkheim defined mechanical solidarity as based upon homogeneity and repression (as in Spencer's "militant society") and organic solidarity as being based upon the more complex law of cooperation among differentiated individuals with complementary functions (as in Spencer's "industrial society"). While Tönnies opposed sociability based on love and coexistence based on instrumentalization, the Durkheimian distinction between mechanical and organic solidarity is based upon homogeneity in a repressive order and complementary/heterogeneity. Durkheim's distinction was intended to be a descriptive analysis of how human sociability had developed from the beginning of time.

10. *The return from the Is to the Ought in French social theory*

Durkheim's reflections on solidarity were furthered by two of his followers, Marcel Mauss, who was Durkheim's sister's son, and Célestin Bouglé. Yet they both resituated the term "solidarity" in the term's trajectory that meandered between social the-

ory, moralism and religion. My hunch is that they were both nonplussed by the purposive rational implications of Durkheim's functionalism and wanted to create a form of "solidarity" with a human face – Mauss through the notion of reciprocity (and gift-giving?) and Bouglé through the notion of equality. They both sought to bring back the notion of solidarity as a descriptor of an objective condition of social cohesion to anchor it in a more explicitly normative philosophy. In his *Essai sur le don* of 1925, Marcel Mauss insisted upon the aspect of reciprocity: «the gift must be given, received and reciprocated» (Mauss 1925: 88f.). While gifts are not enforced through legal constraint, they do not depend altogether upon individuals' freedom inasmuch as they entail moral obligations of mutual recognition and gratitude: solidarity shifts from interdependence to moral reciprocity. Bouglé, on the other hand, agreed that solidarity is based upon interdependence, but finding Durkheim's theory too descriptive, instead proposed an explicitly ethical principle to moralize interdependence. In the course of writing four works between 1899 and 1912, Bouglé shifted solidarity from its Durkheimian roots in functional cooperation to ethical reciprocity among the equal. In his *Les idées égalitaires: étude sociologique* (1899) he writes that solidarity ceases to be a physical necessity when it becomes a moral law based upon awareness of mutual dependence ("*conscience de l'interdépendance*") and capacity and willingness to reciprocate (ivi: 79). Moral solidarity is based upon the reciprocal recognition of worth and mutual respect among differentiated individuals who regard others' differences as useful and legitimate. At a time at which German social theory is debating the importance of value neutrality, Bouglé transforms French sociology into a moral doctrine on values in his *Leçons de sociologie sur l'évolution des valeurs* (1908) and *Qu'est-ce que la sociologie ?* (1909). Equality is a key point: in his *Essais sur le régime des castes* (1908), Bouglé argues that hierarchical societies lack moral reciprocity. But while seeking to remedy the universalizing of purposive rationalism in Durkheim's functionalism, he succumbs to it, arguing that reciprocity in the recognition of value (rather than e.g. uncalculating devotion to others) should be the basis for human moral solidarity, steering science from

the Is to the Ought, but remaining anchored in self-serving rationality.

When we retrace the concept of solidarity in French sociology and compare it with German social theory, one may be struck not just by the absence of common language references, but the growing gulf between understandings of science per se. A trend in French theory to use the concept of solidarity as an ought linked to emotion and generosity (Mauss) or (debatable) equality (Bouglé) in a society fraught by inequalities generated a corpus of moral teachings in which the phenomena of domination that had been described with such insight by Marx in his economic analysis and such penetration by Nietzsche in his psychosocial analysis remain beyond the grasp of the reader, and which ignores the distinction between love and the pursuit of ulterior motives. French social theory ignored the discussion of value neutrality that marked contemporary German sociology. Max Weber was the most powerful driving force for adopting a position of value neutrality in developing an apparatus of concepts that would eschew both philosophies of history and moral agendas in describing social action (as meaningful action oriented around other humans) as it really played out. This is evident in Weber's discussion of the concept of "solidarity" in his opus magnus, *Economy and Society*.

11. *Max Weber's lexical tidying up*

Max Weber's general habit in using the concepts of social discourse of his day was to do did some semantic tidying up with his characteristic "pedantry", (as he himself referred to it with a hint of self-irony), and the rigor and common sense he applied in defining terms for expedient use. In introducing his categories, he writes

The method of this introductory definition of terms, which is indispensable but inevitably abstract and unrealistic, does not claim to be new in any way. On the contrary, it merely seeks to formulate in a more appropriate and somewhat more correct (and therefore perhaps

pedantic) manner what empirical sociology actually means when it speaks of the same things.[3]

Weber shows that solidarity need not exist where people peaceably coexist, going on to argue that solidarity, or the readiness to act in the interests of others, can be based upon affects and self-interest and presenting a typology of various instances in which people act out of solidarity (although potentially for very different reasons in actions that appear to be actions of solidarity). Max Weber rarely referenced French social theory, not because of his nationalism, but because he assumed that his readers would understand his allusions. In Weber's methodological essays, he wrote that «Comte's positivism was an attempt to create a comprehensive law of history, but it remained an ideological construction lacking empirical foundation» (Weber 1988: 57). Weber, whose methodological individualism cannot be clarified in this space, would have rejected the holism of Durkheim's approach. Weber's major contribution to social theory is summed up in the posthumous work *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft, Economy and Society* (Weber 1980), the culmination of his thought as a "*Sozialökonom*" – a social economist, a term that reconciled his position as professor of economics in the Historical School's tradition and his vocation as a sociologist, an observers of regularities in the meaningful actions of individuals oriented around others. His devotion to guaranteeing himself and others the freedom to evaluate led him more than others to draw radical Nietzschean consequences from epistemological issues that came to a head in the debate over value judgments. His passion for disentangling strains of arguments that imposed values as facts makes his discussion of "solidarity" all the more pertinent. Weber appears to me to be

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[3] «Die Methode dieser einleitenden, nicht gut zu entbehrenden, aber unvermeidlich abstrakt und wirklichkeitsfremd wirkenden Begriffsdefinition beansprucht in keiner Art: neu zu sein. Im Gegenteil wünscht sie nur in – wie gehofft wird – zweckmäßigerer und etwas korrekterer (eben deshalb freilich vielleicht pedantisch wirkender) Ausdrucksweise zu formulieren, was jede empirische Soziologie tatsächlich meint, wenn sie von den gleichen Dingen sprich» (Weber 1980: 2).

the most lucid analyst of social action, which is why I read his discussion of the concept of solidarity with particular interest.

Weber was less involved than Tönnies in the French-German exchanges over establishing sociology as a discipline, and in Weber's *Economy and Society*, while referring to the substantive value of Tönnies' «lastingly significant beautiful work *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*» (Weber 1980: 5), there is no reference to Durkheim, whose absorption with "social *facts*" were not conducive to the perception that social interactions are based upon the subjective meaning of social actors. Yet unlike Tönnies, Weber refers to the term "solidarity". In Weber's writings, all of Comte's and Durkheim's weaknesses are laid bare. Max Weber makes a point of stressing that solidarity is neither a necessary or a probable consequence of human coexistence and cannot be concluded from the mere existence of a social relationship. For a social relationship can afford participants the satisfaction of internal or external interests, either in purpose or according to the result "either through an action of solidarity or through the settlement of interests". Solidarity can be regarded as a means to pursuing interests and instrumentalized. It can be extended for a variety of motives and the motives need not be clear to all participants interacting. Above all, "solidarity" is not a perpetual characteristic of relationships: the meaning of a social relationship may shift, transforming a political relationship of solidarity into a collision of interest.

It is only a question of terminological expedience and the measure of continuity in transformation whether in such a case one says that "a new" relationship has been formed or that the continuing old relationship has been given a new meaning. The meaning can continue to persist, while at the same time remaining open to transformation (Weber 1980: 11).

Depending on the extent to which a social relationship is open or closed, Weber distinguishes it as being relationships of representation and relationships of "solidarity". In the former, the actions of participants or "representatives" are attributed to the other participants (the "represented"); in relationships of solidarity, on the other hand, everyone in the relationship (referred to by Weber as "*Solidaritätsgenosse*") is deemed to act,

whether actively or passively, within the meaning of solidarity. «For the action of the participants, everyone is deemed to be as responsible as oneself, and through their action all participants can make use of the chances secured through the action» (Weber 1980: 25, 23). Weber revitalizes Tönnies' distinction of relationships based upon affect or self-interest by positing two distinct types of solidarity. Depending upon the degree to which the relationship is "closed", and consequently the level of legitimacy and liability, the phenomenon of solidarity can be both the product and the producer of social action that produces or is produced by community-like or society-like relationships, i.e. relationships or social structures based alternatively upon affects, i.e. a feeling of belonging, or the individual perception of self-interest. "Solidarity", in *Economy and Society*, is on the one hand the basis of a community – the domestic communism of the family, comradery in the army, and the *Liebeskommunismus* of religious communities (ivi: 88). At the same time, a solidarity of interest ("*Interessensolidarität*") (ivi:154) may be based upon the material or ideal interests of a group of people such as an administrative staff whose compliance and role in maintaining an existing order is ensured through material remuneration and social honour (ivi: 823); such a basis for ensuring the loyalty of participants in the social relationship strengthens the ruler with regard to the members as individuals, but weakens the ruler with regard to the participants as a whole (*ibid.*). A solidarity of interest thus stabilizes organisations, systems and structures because it contributes to docility and discipline, but it is the test of a ruler to correctly assess the interests of his or her enablers. Weber's comments on "solidarity" in *Economy and Society* make it clear that Weber was prepared to accept that the term "solidarity" could be useful, but only in such relationships and collectivities in which it found expression in action or words. He found the concept of genuine interest, but we can see that while Durkheim assumes solidarity to be so universal as to render the term meaningless, Weber gives the term a meaning to grasp the attitudes and predict the actions of individuals in their configurations.

12. *Implications for democracy*

I can only briefly touch upon the implication of the term "solidarity" for conceptions of democracy thematized in this special issue. It would be futile to attempt an overview of the axiological operator democracy so comprehensively and beautifully presented by Pierre Rosanvallon (see Rosanvallon 1985). One model of democracy that is perhaps most explicitly indifferent to solidarity is the "competitive elitist" model that presents voters as self-interested consumers, laid out in Joseph Schumpeter's *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (1942). Here, democracy is conflated with the market in which each actor is out after his own interest. The "*républicain*" model of democracy rooted in France's political tradition, to which Durkheim as a Dreyfusard was incidentally attached, emphasized the rights and duties of citizenship and civic virtue, solidarity and shared republican values rather than consumer choice. This is the model that Bouglé sought to promote. Its legitimacy is derived from universal participation and the common good rather than enlightened hedonism. Deliberation is collective among equals and promotes a sense of belonging typical of a community rather than the self-seeking attitude of agents in the marketplace. While solidarity, as Weber has shown, can be based upon self-interest, an emotional fusion of collective belonging resumed in Tönnies' word *Gemeinschaft* and Weber's derivative *Vergemeinschaftung*, or simple subscription to the values of a Republic, democracy in the Schumpeter understanding is at its purist when people look out strictly for themselves and are indifferent to "solidarity" in any meaning and for any reason. Yet the human condition is one of interdependence in which compassion resurges. This compassion, the awareness that we are all sentient creatures with a potential for grasping the notion of duty to other sentient creatures, is one of the sources of solidarity in inclusive democracies. Our understanding of democracy has been deepened by our grasping that the suffix "*cracy*" lies in a sovereignty over the selves of individuals that is afforded not just by formal rights and duties, but also by

the realization of material conditions that are not alienating through vast disparities of wealth and hence power, while "*demo*" involves the consideration of all individuals constitutive of humanity, including those who had been previously marginalized and erased. It is with a view to the realization of such a democracy that solidarity is relevant and necessary.

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Abstract

EXPRESSIONS OF "SOLIDARITY" IN FRENCH AND GERMAN SOCIAL THEORY

Keywords: solidarity, mechanical, organic, normative, descriptive

The present article offers a survey of the history of the term "solidarity" from its origins in law. The word is applied normatively to evoke a utopian desideratum or descriptively to designate the mère absence of strife in classical French sociology. Evocations of solidarity are founded upon self-interest in modern "society" or an instinctive sense of common belonging in "community". While social theorists in the wake of Durkheim attempted to lead social theory towards normative philosophy and speculation on what "solidarity" *should be,* taking an empirical approach, Max Weber pragmatically asks what leads people to behave as though united, uncovering a range of motivations.

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AMBIGUITIES OF SOLIDARITY IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN
EUROPE: PROXIMITY, POLITICS OF INCLUSION AND EX-
CLUSION IN FORCED MIGRATION CONTEXTS*

1. *Introduction*

While the concept of the global solidarity emerged as a «re-
sponse to a deeply divided world which has failed to realise
the promise of the United Nations *Declaration of Human
Rights*», the political and material interests of great powers are
recognised as impediments to its realisation (Wilde 2007:
176). Although global solidarity has its origins in the Europe-
an political thought, the European Union (EU) and members
states from Germany (Uhr et al 2025; Bojadžijev et al 2025) to
Central Europe (Remenyik et al 2022; Goździak and Main
2020) have been widely accused of selectively demonstrating
solidarity towards close and distant others. Critical migration
scholars and criminologists have long investigated how migra-
tion governance in EU member states favours those who are
privileged enough to travel freely, even amid military conflicts
and mass displacements, while criminalising and "illegalising"
those arriving from the Global South without adequate reason
and proper documentation (Franko 2020; others). It has also
been widely addressed how solidarity with illegalised migrants
had been increasingly criminalised prior to the Ukrainian war
(Carrera et al 2019; della Porta and Steinhilper 2021). As a
result, the differences characterising societal, political and le-
gal responses to the *refugee (response/protection) "crisis"*

(2015)[1] and the Russian invasion of Ukraine (2022) have been described by labels ranging from preferential, differential or discriminatory (Kienast et al 2023; Blomqvist Mickelsson 2025) through the lenses of selective solidarity (Paré, 2022) to selective dehumanisation (Bueno Lacy and van Houtum 2023).

The mass displacement of Ukrainians triggered the activation of the EU's Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) mechanism, marking a historic shift in the EU legislation towards forced migration (Kienast et al 2023; Schrooten 2025). Despite the EU-wide welcoming legislative framework toward Ukrainians, the practical implementation of TPD differed between the EU member states. As it became evident that the war would last longer, governments implemented domestic solutions related to long-term integration, while constant discussions on both temporary protection and resettlement began (Schrooten 2025: 2).

While the EU used the rationale of "geographical proximity" to justify the implementation of the TPD, critical scholars contemplated whether this approach may be considered racist (Skordas 2023; Kostakopoulou 2023). On the one hand, the warm official reception of the Ukrainian refugees stood in sharp contrast with the securitising and "illegalising" logics that have been characterising EU migration policy and visa regimes for more than a decade (Stępka 2022). On the other hand, the societal responses also reflected two extreme mindsets, with "heroic solidarity" for desirable Ukrainians being contrasted with 'repugnant racism' (targeting undesired non-European individuals in equal need of protection) (Skordas 2023; Kostakopoulou 2023; Breda and Potot 2024). The implementation of the TPD provided Ukrainians with far greater

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[1] In 2015 the EU witnessed an unprecedented migration wave from South-East Europe, dubbed as refugee (response/protection) crisis. However, each component of this term became contested. While people mostly associated with the political right doubted whether the arrivals were indeed refugees meriting legal protection as victims of persecution (in line with the provisions of the UN Refugee Convention, 1951), social scientists either preferred the term refugee response/protection crisis over refugee crisis or criticised the term 'crisis', arguing that it is the normal state of world affairs which actually means a crisis from the perspective of Global South citizens whose cannot move as freely across borders as Global North citizens do.

legal protection than other migrants fleeing conflicts or perse-
cution from outside Europe. While the reception of Ukrainians
could be characterized as restrictive, liberal, selective or uni-
versal in practice (Hernes and Łukasiewicz 2025), the rhetori-
cal justification of "geographical proximity" was perceived as
hypocritical fallacy not just in the Global South, but also by
critical scholars (Bueno Lacy and van Houtum 2023: 452).
The double standards have become even more visible since
many countries, such as Hungary and Poland, have not only
believed in erecting fences or enforcing pushbacks along the
EU's external border as a solution since the 2015, but also
opposed the idea of 'promising, but controversial solutions',
such as (tradeable) refugee quotas (Sangiovanni 2023).

Racialised attitudes towards different groups of migrants
were often used to explain such political (and public) stances
in various EU member states (Bueno Lacy and van Houtum
2023 Skordas 2023; Kostakopoulou 2023; Breda and Potot
2024). Focussing his attention on EU members in CEE and
contemplating the roots of such perceptions, Branko Mila-
novic – a renowned World Bank economist of Serbian origin –
attributed such dispositions to entrenched ignorance and
post-imperial arrogance of the East European intellectual
elites, arguing that they remained largely disengaged from the
historical trajectories of the Global South, including decoloni-
sation, anti-imperialist movements, and the rise of non-
Western powers (Milanovic 2024). This epistemic detachment,
exacerbated over the past three decades by EU accession, has
prompted a sense of Western belonging among elites who have
historically suffered from inferiority complexes, promoting ex-
clusionary and hierarchical worldviews according to Mila-
novic. As implied, not only elites, but also «nations in CEE
were able to imagine themselves as white and tapped into the
larger European colonial projects» (Balogun and Ohia-Nowak
2024: 3).

These interpretations resonate well with critiques attribut-
ed to decolonial scholars who tend to divide the world accord-
ing to the logic of dichotomic colonisation histories, i.e. politi-
cal entities and individuals are heirs of either colonisers or the
colonised (following or inspired by Sartre [1964] 2006 among
others). Such criticism indirectly applies "racist lenses" by as-
suming that CEE states belong to the former category based

on skin colour, EU membership, or simply geographical proximity. Such approaches, however, either overlook or neglect the complex historical experiences that CEE societies have accumulated in their relations between East and West. In absence of conventional "colonisation records" (territorial conquest, exploitation of manpower, extractivism of natural resources), contemporary selective solidarity requires an explanation other than well-known tenets like ignorance or hypocrisy. According to the anthropologist Nina Glick Schiller's (2017: 2) observations formulated after the *refugee crisis*, but before the war in Ukraine commenced:

historical reflexivity has become curiously lost in recent writings about migration, integration, and social cohesion despite the emergence of a generation of authors steeped in the deconstructionism of variants of post-modern theory that question any uncritical stance towards hegemonic "truths".

Glick Schiller's goal was to defend "cosmopolitan sociability" – which is focused on recognition of commonalities rather than on passive tolerance of differences – against arguments praising welfare solidarity produced and secured by the nation state (Schiller 2017: 6). CEE, however, is one of those regions of the world, where the borders of the territorial state and the frontiers of the nation (as an ethnic-linguistic community) do not necessarily overlap; nor could people take it for granted that state borders remain fixed or permanent (Lee and Bideleux 2012). As a result, defining the domains of commonality and differences is a somewhat more complicated task in the region than in other Western welfare states, the borders of which were more stable during the 20th Century. While the TPD as a legal instrument can be criticised on political grounds or from the perspective of human rights promising universal standards of protection, the mass societal mobilisation for providing humanitarian aid in the region (Moroń et al. 2025; Ślęzak-Belowska et al. 2026) was by no means obvious, and the widespread solidarity with Ukrainians was more than remarkable (Saracino 2024), considering the historical experiences accumulated by people living in the region.

To further complicate this jigsaw, it is worth to include in the analysis some perspectives from critical humanitarian

studies that have examined race and ethnicity in the context of neoliberal interactions. One of the strongest arguments against mainstream humanitarian practice, with the bulk of aid being delivered to victims of disasters, emergencies and conflicts in the Global South by humanitarian organisations registered in the Global North, frames contemporary humanitarianism as a legacy of colonial philanthropy reflecting "white supremacy". Recalling Polly Pallister-Wilkins (2021:102):

it is necessary, for scholars and practitioners alike, to acknowledge that humanitarianism, with its universalist claims, acts as a salve for sustained racial discrimination and violence, working if not to entirely invisibilise racial hierarchies within suffering, then to make the racial underpinnings of such suffering acceptable through supposedly universal practices of care.

Obviously critical scholars negatively assess not only "white supremacy" embedded in the foundations of contemporary humanitarianism, but also the commercialised nature of contemporary ironic spectatorship, which is more concerned with the privileged (mostly "white") giver's self-esteem and well-being than true solidarity with ("non-white") victims (Chouliaraki 2013). Such ambiguities characterise not only aid relations between Global North donors and beneficiaries in the Global South, but also interactions at EU borderlands and hotspots, demonstrating the negative effects of philanthropy, charity work and humanitarianism in general (Mitchell and Pallister-Wilkins 2023). Ethnographic studies show that (commercialised) universal humanitarianism is very far from the ideals of authentic solidarity, not only in critical scholarship, but also at the level of local perceptions (Theodossopoulos 2016). Thus, scholars have advocated for a more nuanced approach to diverse forms of citizen aid mediating contemporary solidarity and care (Fechter and Schwittay 2019). While Julia Eckert (2024) proposed the citizens' support provided to Syrian migrants in Germany to be interpreted as "radical politics of helping" reflecting cosmopolitan solidarity (as opposed to national solidarity), others argued that autonomous or radical solidarity should be distinguished from (mainstream, institutionalised) humanitarianism, which is far too often complicit in practices of military and political control (Dadusc and Mudu 2022).

Interestingly, if not ironically, while critical migration studies have widely accused the EU in general, and CEE in particular, of selective solidarity favouring Ukrainian forced migrants over migrants and refugees of Global South origin, critical humanitarian studies tend to advocate for local "practices of care", which should be prioritised in emergencies and disasters (Pallister-Wilkins 2021). Hence, the somewhat rhetorical question arises as to whether the advocacy for "local practices" – where the "local" is defined by the logic of proximity – should (or should not) apply to European contexts. Hence, the goal of this paper is to provide a more comprehensive understanding of CEE-based solidarity by answering the following questions:

• How does the historical backdrop frame contemporary solidarity in the context of the migration in Central and Eastern Europe?

• How do institutionalised-official and civilian forms of „local care" reflect regional solidarity?

Drawing on studies mapping the impact of earlier population transfers in the region (Becker et al 2020), at the Polish-Ukrainian (Reid 2020) and Hungarian-Ukrainian borderlands (Erőss 2024; Erőss et al 2025), this paper argues that temporal dimensions, such as historical legacies and personal and political memories of past atrocities, are at least as significant for explaining (absent) solidarity as spatial factors (contemporary arrangements in the field of migration governance, human rights and humanitarian practice), including political alliances (Karageorgiou and Noll 2023: 410-412). It demonstrates that notions of distance and proximity are more nuanced than those typically used by scholars focusing on decolonisation and racism. The paper unfolds in the following manner. The methodologies section is followed by an explanation of the term "solidarity" and a brief introduction to the history of CEE. The main section examines the responses of Poland and Hungary, two CEE countries neighbouring Ukraine, by scrutinising solidarity in three domains: institutionalised hospitality and integration practices; official aid transfers (ODA, military aid); and examples of cross-border civilian aid.

2. *Methods, sources and ethical concerns*

This paper mainly provides an interpretative analysis but is also empirically informed by earlier interdisciplinary research conducted by authors[2] in the context of the war in Ukraine, the displacement of the Ukrainian population and their reception in CEE and Israel (Ślęzak-Belowska et al. 2026). Thus, data was gathered by reviewing the literature on responses to the refugee crisis (in 2015) and the war in Ukraine (since 2022) in CEE, as well as doing fieldwork in Poland (2022-2025) and Hungary (2024-25) to bolster narratives about forced migrants and refugees.

The literature review included academic papers and grey literature, such as reports from international agencies (UN-HCR, IOM), national authorities (immigration offices, aid agencies), NGOs, and policy documents on the subject. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives of civil society organisations (CSOs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), UN offices in Budapest and Rzeszów, and public authorities (officials) who helped forced migrants at the governmental or local (municipality) levels. The majority of interviewees were "practitioner experts", including state and local administration officials, decision makers, policymakers, NGO staff, and academics, representing a wide array of individuals who interacted with migrants professionally. The individual interviews were reinforced by panel discussions with various groups of stakeholders in Poland (two rounds in 2023 and 2025), as well as numerous informal conversations with activists and participants of solidarity-based, humanitarian initiatives for Ukrainians.

The themes associated with the solidarity in the context of migration and forced migration were identified via (critical) narrative inquiry (Pino Gavidia and Adu 2022). We looked for relevant topics during both the literature review, and the fieldwork. Echoing the teachings of migration studies, this approach has allowed us to learn about experiences that are

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[2] The study, as part of the authors' research projects was approved by the ethical boards of both institutions, for a detailed description of the data sources *see* Ślęzak-Belowska and Paragi 2026.

distinctive to time and space, even though we had limited access to all places and people. Those narratives were valuable in learning about the diversity of actions and actors who mediated as acts of solidarity with Ukrainian forced migrants. The narrative analysis in this case begins with the assumption that meaning is attributed to phenomena through the experience of displacement and related solidarity. Learning about experiences comes from the expressions assigned to these experiences. All these experiences can shape and formulate narratives, organise and provide significance to stories about individual acts of solidarity (see Goździak and Main 2020: 3).

3. *Solidarity in a nutshell*

Without a doubt, the concept of solidarity, which has long been rooted in Western intellectual and political traditions, has served as a potent rhetorical and normative tool (Bauder and Juffs 2020). Originating in legal discourse (Karageorgiou and Noll 2022), it underwent a paradigmatic shift in the 19th century, becoming central to philosophical debates in which humanitarianism, philanthropy, and the ethos of *social love* were foregrounded. However, as Kobyliński (2009) argues, the term has since been subject to semantic inflation and instrumentalization, leading to its conceptual dilution and, at times, ideological misuse. It also pertains to the current migration discourse on selective solidarity. Indeed, as noted by Karageorgiou and Noll (2023: 401), it is historically reductionist «to analyse the reception and protection of Ukrainians through the lens of solidarity alone». However, in order to grasp the interplay between time and space, it is inevitable to reflect on the meaning of solidarity first.

Emile Durkheim (Durkheim 1984 [1893]) is credited with one of the first in-depth scholarly reflections on solidarity. He used this concept to demonstrate the institutional and psychological conditions necessary to ensure societal stability amidst «intensifying individuation on the one hand, and the coordination needs of increasingly complex societies on the other» (Weber 2007: 699). Later, in the 1970s and1980s, it found a resonance in the context of the independence and anti-imperialistic struggles, in which communities all over the

world joined and supported struggles for human rights and self-determination of others (Foucault 1994 cited by Tazzioli and Waters 2022: 187).

Despite being long marginalised within the disciplinary frameworks of political science (Wilde 2007) and international relations (Weber 2007), the concept of solidarity has resurfaced from theoretical obscurity to become a key point of research among social scientists. It is increasingly recognised as a foundational mechanism for facilitating social integration, and the provision of collective goods not just *within* the architectural nation-state, but also beyond it. Alternative conceptualisations of solidarity and understandings of its functionality appear to have muted old cleavages, such as beliefs in the exclusivity of «nation states being the quasi-natural side of sharing» (Bourdieu 1977: 166 referenced by Eckert 2024: 3). The rich scholarship exploring the nature and features of the emerging global civil society (GCS), which focusses on arrangements beyond the administrative power of states and (transnational) corporations, has long normalised the use of concepts such as global or transnational solidarity (Kaldor 2003; Keane 2003; Anheier 2005: 328-358) and even created new terms, such as cosmopolitan sociability (Glick-Schiller 2016). The increasing institutionalisation of the GSC-initiatives and the professionalisation of NGOs has resulted in widespread criticism of their credibility, calling into question their roles as genuine mediators of (global) solidarity, particularly in the humanitarian sector (Dadusc and Mudu 2022; Mitchell and Pallister-Wilkins 2023). As acknowledged by scholars and practitioners of new humanitarianism, aid aiming at alleviating suffering can easily sustain the oppressive action as long as it ignores the political context and causes of a conflict under the pretext of neutrality and impartiality (Terry 2002; others).

Regardless of its dimensions (local, national, global) and domains (political, social, humanitarian) the essential principle of solidarity is burden-sharing (Karageorgiou and Noll 2023: 403-406). Originally, it was defined as «the preparedness to share resources with others by personal contribution to those in struggle or in need through taxation and redistribution organised by the state» (Stjernø 2004: 2). The state, however, has never been the exclusive (re)distributor of soli-

darity. As a result, solidarity should rather be viewed as a distinct type of social phenomenon, «a form of joint action [the purpose of which is] to overcome significant adversity, where participants identify with one another and are disposed to come to each other's aid in pursuit of shared goals» (Sangiovanni 2025: 46). This definition captures three crucial elements – collective action, identification with others, and mutual aid in the face of existing adversity (Sangiovanni 2025: 46-56), which characterises the two most basic forms of solidarity actions: gift exchange and hospitality.

Despite its marginalisation in political and international relations theory in the second half of the 20th century, solidarity has been rediscovered as a fundamental component of social order in philosophy and sociology. Jürgen Habermas (1990; 2012), one of the most well-known theoreticians of European solidarity, defined solidarity as the "reverse side" of [legal] justice, emerging from interpersonal communication and enacted within spaces of dialogue free from coercive power relations, while also noting that civil solidarity expresses "joint political will-formation in the EU". Obviously, solidarity unites members of a political community through shared normative commitments, including the willingness to make sacrifices for the welfare of others (Kobyliński 2009). However, such normative manifestations of solidarity are not without contestation. Recent research has revealed the darker undercurrents of solidarity, notably in the context of migration governance. The notion of *crimes of solidarity,* in which states criminalise humanitarian or civilian aid to migrants and refugees demonstrates not only the tension between moral imperatives and securitised state, but also the limits of solidarity within the borders of (nation) state (Carrera et al 2019; della Porta & Steinhilper 2021; Tazzioli & Walters 2022).

Local gift exchanges traditions and hospitality practices are, in some ways, universal and timeless. Whether interested, altruistic or ambiguous, these behaviours presume solidarity between either communities or individuals, often regardless of state involvement, participation, or regulation (Derrida 2000 [1998]; Mauss 2002 [1925]; Adloff 2006; Pyyhtineen 2014, others). However, it must be acknowledged that neither the concept of European solidarity, nor solidarity in the context of colonial relations and postcolonial arrange-

ments such as foreign aid, can be understood without Mauss' conceptualisation of gift exchanges between archaic sovereigns as *total social fact* (Mallard 2019). Traditional, ambiguous gift exchange practices have modern equivalents in international contexts: foreign aid, primarily official development assistance (with humanitarian aid included in ODA statistics).

Since the 1950s, foreign aid has been portrayed as the classic, though not necessarily altruistic realm of *international solidarity* (solidarity between states). "Official" in its name, ODA-financed projects are widely implemented with the participation of non-state actors. Although its normative purpose is either developmental (reforming the recipient) or humanitarian (saving lives, alleviating suffering), there is a wealth of scholarship exploring foreign aid as gift (inspired by Mauss), the primary function of which is more to maintain friendly relations and preventing violence or disorder than delivering development in economic or political terms (Hattori 2001; Hattori 2003; Furia 2015). While Hattori (2001) used the term "symbolic domination by giving" to describe contemporary official aid relations between states, others questioned whether alliance or coalition-building (for example, by providing ODA out of self-interest) can be considered solidarity action at all (Sangiovanni 2025: 48). Recalling that the „devil lies in the details", hospitality, including in-donor refugee costs, may also be included in the ODA statistics.[3] As a result, the matter of refugee admission, within or beyond the framework provided by the UN Refugee Convention (1951), cannot be interpreted

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[3] Recalling the rules: «(1) the rationale for counting in-donor costs as ODA underlines that refugee protection is a legal obligation and that assistance to refugees may be considered a form of humanitarian aid; (2) the eligible categories of refugees imply that categories must be based on international legal definitions. Asylum seekers and recognised refugees are covered; (3) the "12-month rule" reaffirms that expenditures beyond 12 months are outside the scope of statistics on international aid flows; (4) the rule on the "eligibility of specific cost items" explains what cost items may or may not be included in reporting, e.g. temporary sustenance (food, shelter, training) is eligible, but not costs of integrating refugees into the economy of the donor country. Since Russia's war of aggression on Ukraine, the costs of refugees' support have risen, including those provided by one provider country to another one hosting people fleeing the war, such as Poland. This category of costs is identified individually in DAC statistics» (OECD DAC 2025e, see also OECD DAC 2025g).

without taking the goal of alliance-building, as an alternative to war and violence, into account. Indeed, the EU's response and the activation of TDP can be viewed both as a manifestation of international solidarity and a means of alliance-building (Karageorgiou and Noll 2023).

Other labels also reflect existing ambiguities. Acknowledging that international solidarity (between states) is not to the same as *transnational or global solidarity* (solidarity between non-state actors), certain GCS entities, particularly humanitarian and development iNGOs, as well as faith-based organisations (FBOs) affiliated with churches, cultivate ambiguous relations with states and international organisations (such as the UN or the EU). Many of them combine official financing with private donations to implement their projects in the Global South. As a result, "borderless" solidarity can be viewed not only as transnational or global (Featherstone 2012), but also as cosmopolitan (Glick-Schiller 2016; others) highlighting the limitations of state and organisational power in providing welfare, protection and security to people in need.

The aforementioned nuances also apply to domains of (international vs transnational, cosmopolitan, global, citizen) hospitality, specifically support for "aliens" entering European soil. Indeed, the concept of solidarity was further revitalised when migrants and refugees arrived, making it an even more powerful and contested domain than it was before (Ataç et al 2017; Bauder and Juffs 2020: 46; Carrera and Ineli-Ciger 2023). Such solidarity implies a "morphology" of assistance towards people "en route" or in transit, because aid to them is dependent on both geography and temporality. Hence, natural landscapes (e.g. sea, rivers, mountains) shape the practice of solidarity, whereas temporary locations (e.g. camps, shelters) refer to its adaptive nature (Tazzioli and Walters 2022).

To summarise, the widespread and multidimensional meaning of solidarity has been changing both within and outside the borders of the nation-state: from the Durkheimian mutual interdependence and a sense of national or ethnic "we-ness", through support for the welfare state and care for those in need, to joint political activism – beyond nations and nationalism – along with its empirical manifestations. The debated manifestations include bonds between people based on similarities, common identities shared by values and norms,

as well as relationship and interdependence among group members, to name a few. While there is no doubt that solidarity is a prerequisite for serving collective (rather than just ethnic or national) interests, achieving a clear synthesis is difficult due to variety of meanings across the research fields (Koos 2019: 629-633) and the abundance of scholarship contemplating solidarity in migration and aid contexts.

True solidarity seems to be based on mutual identification «with one another based on role, cause, condition, set of experiences, or way of life», and those involved «intend to do [their] part in overcoming *some significant adversity …* by pursuing a shared goal together» (Sangiovanni 2005: 47). Obviously, the term "others" appears both in definitions and in the public discourse on solidarity, implying symbolic boundaries that separate "insiders" from "outsiders", resulting in both inclusion and exclusion. According to Wilde (2007: 173), «the paradox at the heart of solidarity has long been evident»: on the one hand, it has connotations of unity and universality, emphasising responsibility for others and the sense of togetherness, on the other hand, it manifests itself most forcefully in antagonism towards other groups, often in ways that reject the possibility of compromise. This paradox has painful consequences when individuals identify with or considered belonging to multiple groups at the same time based on their diverse group identities (location/origin, language, religion, ethnicity, gender, class, etc.), while the given groups, demanding loyalty from their members, fight each other.

4. *The past shaping contemporary solidarity in CEE*

While countries in Central and Eastern Europe are rarely discussed within the framework of postcolonial or decolonial scholarship, there are studies documenting historical matrices of domination/subordination, exploitation, and forced assimilation – typical for colonial settings – vis-à-vis Russia, Germany, Poland or Austro-Hungary, both in the context of nations and some ethnic groups (Gerwarth and Malinowski 2009; Bakuła 2014; Budryte 2023; Thompson 2000; Polakowska and Skórczewski 2020; Kalmar 2022: 199-226). Hence,

our "decolonial" perspective focuses not only on unequal power dynamics, at the micro and macro levels, but also seeks to deconstruct narratives in order to understand and critically assess the existing differences and shifting roles of victims and perpetrators.

To understand selective solidarity in CEE, both the phenomenon "racism without race" and the depiction of CEE states and societies "as backward" must be problematized for their inherent relatedness. The former emerged as a response to the trauma of the Holocaust in Europe after 1945, with sociological markers replacing biological traits in public discourse. During communism, most Central and Eastern European states, did not register citizens' ethnic or religious origins, such as Jewishness, or other minority status. And because "race" did not appear in official statistics or discourse (Balogun and Ohia-Nowak 2024), anti-racist education could not become part of any curriculum in East Central Europe, namely the V4 countries (Kalmar 2022: 243). Regarding "backwardness", when the "new member states" were not catching up with the "much richer and more powerful West" after the fall of the communism (1990), the EU-accession (in 2004) or during the refugee (protection) crisis (after 2015), they become stigmatized by the EU and its privileged public (Lovec et al 2021). Their "failure" and reactions were not attributed to the "invisible hand of intervention by Western-dominated, global market neoliberalism" – labelled as racial capitalism – rather its societies were labelled as «congenitally, inherently, culturally backward» by many in the West (Kalmar 2022: 5). Acknowledging that Ivan Kalmar himself acknowledged that some of his arguments could be easily appropriated for cynical, populist purposes (Kalmar 2022b), it is worthwhile to recall his overall assessment on the relation between racism *by* CEE and racism *towards* its citizens (2022: 5):

To be blind to this, and instead to blame "Eastern European" backwardness for what is very much the West's doing, is racist.

Furthermore, just as «about every [white] Eastern European knows how it feels to be, if not attacked, then dismissed or demeaned by Western white people» (Kalmar 2023: 1467), the "other" for Central and Eastern Europeans, perhaps with the

exception of the Roma people and some of those with Jewish origin, was also historically "white" – different in terms of language and ethnicity rather than skin colour.[4] Nationalities – often speaking the same language but having different religions, or vice versa, sharing religion, but speaking different languages – lived in multiple states, and states have hosted minorities in addition to the majority population since the end of the first World War (Arendt 2017: 352-379). As a result, neither welfare and solidarity, nor their absence could be interpreted solely within the frameworks provided by contemporary nation states, as they have also been part of diaspora politics.

Historical events (see later) have demonstrated that a person resembling the majority society in terms of physical appearance does not automatically enjoy solidarity among "white" ethnic and class groups in CEE either. It can be illustrated by recent practices on how group identities in the era of citizenships and passports are questioned or denied, even within Europe and *within* state borders until today. An embarrassing example of missing solidarity is provided by a recent legislation in Hungary (Act on the Protection of Local Identity 2025) that in name of protecting „local identity", „cultural heritage" and „community values" enacted municipalities' right to decide whether properties can be freely purchased by individuals (non-residents of the given village or city), or whether preferential purchase rights should be granted to local residents and existing property owners. The proposed law «allows municipalities to exercise pre-emption rights and to restrict or make the registration of residence conditional» (Kamocsay-Berta 2025). As Angela Kóczé (2025) put it, the law normalizing racial exclusion – targeting mostly the Roma and foreigners from the Global South – is «not merely a legal failure but a moral abandonment – a betrayal of the European Union's foundational promise that citizenship and rights cannot depend on local or racialised boundaries». This failure is even problematic because laws may as well be used to mitigate the harmful impacts of human perceptions. Quot-

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[4] This paragraph revisits certain claims published in Ślęzak-Belowska and Paragi 2026, which will be discussed further in this paper.

ing Sandor Fegyir, Ukraine's ambassador to Hungary (Vörös 2025):

Journalist: *Who are you [i.e. how would you define yourself]?*

Fegyir: *Transcarpathian. According to Hungarians, someone who is not Hungarian; according to Ukrainians, someone who is not Ukrainian. To make matters even more complicated: the Hungarians of Beregszász [Beregovo] do not regard the inhabitants of Ungvár [Uzhhorod – 70 km away] Hungarians. For example, Róbert Brovgyi [one of the most decorated officers in the Ukrainian army], even though his ancestors are Hungarian, is not regarded as Hungarian in Beregszász/Beregovo. What about mixed marriages, in which even though they know Hungarian fluently, they are still not [considered] Hungarian?*

The above self-assessment highlights the complexities of identities in Western Ukraine (Kovály and Opioła 2024) and aligns with Ivan Kalmar's (2022: 4) observation that «Central Europeans *should* see the need for solidarity with the Global South» based on a rational analysis. However, addressing the cognitive residue of the past is easier said than done.[5] Locals never needed "distant others" to show suspicion, indifference, hostility, cruelty, or to engage in 'racism without race', as opposed to solidarity based on shared humanity. Indeed, the 20th century was marked not only by military conflicts, but also by mass executions and extrajudicial killings, dispossessions (of rights and property), and exterminations of entire communities based on (manipulations of) ethnicity, religion or class. The most well-known examples include the Ukrainian Holodomor (1932-33), the Jewish Holocaust and Roma Porajmos (1939-1945) (Applebaum 2017; Popieliński and Krzyżanowski 2020; Holocaust-studies), which were preceded, accompanied, or followed by population transfers (of Germans, Schwabs, Slovaks, Hungarians, Jews, Poles etc.) across state borders redrawn upon great powers' discretion and in-

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[5] Proving causality here would require a separate paper, but evidence from disciplines such as neuroscience, psychology and even economic science (Mullainathan and Shafir 2014) confirms a common logic: having less than needed, that is, the struggle for (financial, emotional, time-related, etc) resources – triggered by poverty, deprivation, transgenerational trauma, etc – has an adverse impact on thinking and behaviour, empathy and solidarity included.

terest (Lee and Bideleux 2012; Becker et al. 2018). Ukraine is by no means an exception. That the past is never over is well illustrated by Donald Trump's 'peace plan' that would expect Ukraine give up territories it currently controls to Russia, among others (The Guardian 2025; Harding 2025).

While hundreds of thousands of war prisoners and political prisoners from CEE states were sent to labour camps in the territory of Ukraine (or elsewhere in the former Soviet Union) and many lost their lives there not only during, but even after the Holocaust and WW2, Ukraine's population also suffered exceptional losses during the 20th century (Reid 2000). What is obvious to those dealing with the legacy of the region or the scholarship attributing common roots to the Holocaust and genocides committed in the colonies (Arendt 1951/2017; Gerwarth and Malinowski 2009: 279-280; Zimmerer 2024; others) appears to be overlooked by scholars naively criticising selective solidarity: societies in CEE were at least as much subject to imperialism and great power rivalry over the centuries, with all of its consequences, becoming not only both victims *and* perpetrators (sometimes taking both roles within a lifetime), but also carrying similar burdens of transgenerational traumas, as inhabitants of colonised territories.

As many segments of the civilian population suffered tremendous losses east of the "Szczecin/ Stettin – Triest/Trst" line until about the 1950s (1980s),[6] and as a result of the "end of history" and the arrival of the neoliberal market in the region in the 1990s, survival – not only of the individuals, their families and descendants, but also that of the wider community – required norms and skills different from those in the West. For example, the shared experience of decades of communist rule, including enforced membership in state-controlled organisations has undermined spontaneous or autonomous solidarity by instilling antipathy towards voluntary organisations in the region (Howard 2003). Similarly, racism, illiberalism and populism are neither "out of the blue", nor inexplainable (Kalmar 2022; Kalmar 2023).

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[6] For a collection of atrocities and casualties suffered and committed only in Hungary (in the territory of former Austria-Hungary) in the 20th century, see http://konfliktuskutato.hu/ (in Hungarian only).

Considering the above, it becomes necessary to examine the contemporary configurations of solidarity as well as the emerging fault lines of inclusion and exclusion that are forming in the aftermath of the Russian aggression against Ukraine. This necessitates a critical engagement with both normative and empirical dimensions of solidarity as they are rearticulated within the CEE's socio-political landscapes. The ongoing debate surrounding the war in Ukraine foregrounds the contingent nature of solidarity, demonstrating its alignment with – or detachment from – the political affinities of individuals, groups, and power elites alike. State actors, mediated through governmental institutions and political leadership, may adopt bifurcated approaches: either actively endorsing solidarity-driven responses or exhibiting marked indifference at the rhetorical level (Szabó and Lipiński 2024). Simultaneously, societal actors, ranging from individual citizens to organised segments of civil society, may demonstrate profound empathy and engagement or, alternatively, display apathy and detachment from those in need.

Crucially, the interplay between state and society is determined not only by historical legacies, but also by current socio-political climates. Authorities may either align with public sentiment to enact inclusive solidarity measures or be compelled by civic pressure to carry out solidarity-oriented initiatives, even if their ideologies differ even in Russia. A third option is demonstrated by the case of Hungary, where the government not only manipulated public opinion against refugees and migrants (Tóth and Bernát 2023: 273), but also criminalised segments of the civil society that assisted refugees in name of counterterrorism, national security and public order during the refugee crisis in 2015 (Romaniuk 2022) in the shadow of de-institutionalising official refugee protection (Nagy 2016; Segarra 2023). A similar criminalisation pattern arose in Poland in response to activists assisting migrants from the Global South attempting to cross the Belarussian and Polish border with the support of the Belarussian KGB. Some of the activists were charged with so called 'illegalising migrants' stay' or facilitating their stay, but the District Court in Hajnówka acquitted them (Polska Agencja Prasowa 2025).

5. *Solidarity in CEE in the shadow of the war in Ukraine*

Seven years after the refugee crisis, the initial phase of the Russian invasion of Ukraine left a striking and rather paradoxical landscape in both countries. With the outbreak of war, Polish citizens mobilised *en masse* to assist displaced Ukrainians, temporarily overshadowing historical grievances and geopolitical tensions. This spontaneous civic engagement echoed throughout political institutions, compelling state authorities to align with humanitarian imperatives and collaborate with various actors to orchestrate solidarity-based responses, both formal and informal, including legal solutions. In line with the EU legislation, both Poland and Hungary activated the EU's Temporary Protection Mechanism (TPM), sort of revising their previously restrictive asylum policies amid the 2015 refugee crisis. This legal framework granted fleeing Ukrainians immediate access to housing, employment, healthcare, and education, circumventing the protracted asylum procedures typically required (Łukasiewicz and Matuszczyk 2023; Moron et al 2025). This model by linking asylum and integration, can be seen as simultaneously restrictive and liberal, depending upon who seeks the protection (Łukasiewicz, Yeliseyeu, Pachocka 2025).

Unlike Hungary, the Polish government implemented several strategic support measures aimed at Ukrainian state and its governing authorities, establishing itself as a key regional actor in the coordination of solidarity-driven responses to the crisis (Kopper et al 2023). These measures had both symbolic and material dimensions, reflecting a conscious alignment with Ukraine's sovereignty and resilience in the face of Russian aggression (Hargrave, Bryant 2024). Over time, the initial surge of solidarity – characterised by widespread civic mobilisation and institutional support for Ukrainians, both forced migrants and those living in Ukraine – faded, giving way to a significant shift in public sentiment and state position.

Based on the collected sources, we attempt a scholarly synthesis addressing practices of "local care" – both official and civilian responses – in Poland and Hungary towards Ukraine, as well as Ukrainian forced migrants. Acknowledging that we attribute a broader meaning to the concept local care than the literature usually does (Pallister-Wilkins 2021; Zakariás et al

2024: 3-4), the emphasis is placed on three areas of contested solidarity: institutionalised hospitality and integration practices; official forms of aid (ODA, military assistance), and examples of authentic civilian cross-border initiatives.

A) Institutionalised hospitality: reception and integration

Ukrainians' reception and integration in the region are inextricably linked to differential treatment of borders and bodies. While Hungarian-Serbian and Polish-Belarusian borders became heavily securitised both in regulatory terms and in practice (Caballero-Vélez 2024; Korte 2023; Graban 2023; Polko 2025), the Ukrainian-Hungarian and Ukrainian-Polish borders have witnessed unprecedented solidarity and hospitality[7] since February 2022. Not only has the differential treatment of migrants on different borders been criticised in public discourse and by scholars, but the degree of hospitality enjoyed by Ukrainians and others has differed across the region and even within countries (Tóth and Bernát 2023; Fóti 2024; Moroń et al 2025).

Poland emerged as one of the top host countries for Ukrainian forced migrants, with about a million individuals currently residing there under the TPD-mechanism (Eurostat 2025). Acknowledging that Ukrainians had previously migrated to Poland also in peaceful circumstances, given their origin, favourable regulations (Krystyna and Weinar 2008), the country and its citizens demonstrated a strong institutional response towards Ukrainians. The Polish government, along with EU institutions and NGOs, civil society and local authorities implemented large-scale integration programmes that provided housing subsidies, language training, and employment assistance to vulnerable groups, particularly women with children (DG for Migration and Home Affairs 2022). The overall assessment of the situation shows that the TPD framework – translated into the national regulation, was rather welcoming, but with certain deficiencies. Due to insuffi-

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[7] The official costs of hosting Ukrainians (as refugees) may be included in ODA-statistics to the extent that governments disclose them to the OECD DAC.

cient assistance from the state, international organisations, including NGOs, swiftly filled the financing gap by establishing a network and *ad hoc* programmes to address the needs of forced migrants (Łukasiewicz and Matuszczyk 2023; Bielewska et al. 2025)

The available data show the vast magnitude of this solidarity and hospitality, particularly in terms of access to local healthcare and transportation. As for the former, 1.3 million forced migrants benefited from publicly funded healthcare services from February 2022 to the end of September 2024. The entire cost of treatment amounted to PLN 4.3 billion, with the following services included (National Security Bureau 2025): primary care facilities (more than 1.1 million patients); outpatient specialised care (514,000); inpatient treatments (457,000); psychiatric care (21,000); vaccinations administered to children (77,000); oncology care services (7,000 Ukrainian patients);paediatric oncology and haematology services (more than 1,000 children). In addition, the national railway operator (PKP) allowed free passage for Ukrainian citizens and established reception points at selected stations, including Przemyśl Główny, Chełm, and Warszawa Wschodnia. Finally, a daily humanitarian train (Lviv–Przemyśl) and a medical train (Mościska–Warszawa) were launched to transport aid and injured individuals (Polsko-Ukraińska Izba Gospodarcza n.d).

This hospitality stands in stark contrast to the initially stringent asylum policy adopted during the 2015 refugee crisis. The geographic, cultural, and emotional proximity of the war in Ukraine catalysed a significant normative and policy shift, resulting in a preferential treatment of Ukrainians over others (Letki et al. 2024; Bansak et al. 2023; Moise et al. 2024; Trychomiak and Wróblewska 2022).

Emerging evidence, however, also suggests a growing societal unease (Danielewski 2025) and erosion of initial solidarity amid the intensification of presidential election campaigning and a resurgence of border-related alarmism propagated by some media, political elites, and nationalist activists (Bąkiewicz 2025). Within the securitisation of migration discourses, even Ukrainians – once emblematic of deservingness – are increasingly portrayed as burdensome or "undeserving migrants". This shift is exemplified by the presidential veto of the

legislation aimed at extending social support for Ukrainians, despite the continued applicability of the EU's Temporary Protection Directive. As a result, the government has been forced to seek alternative policy solutions to address the crisis. Recently, a new law has been formulated and signed, but it covers the Ukrainians with protection only until March 2026. The transition from enthusiastic reception to ambivalence reflects the conditional and politically contingent nature of solidarity within the socio-political landscape of Poland.

Hungary[8] has also had a long history of hosting Ukrainians, both with and without Hungarian citizenship or mother tongue, for historical and economic reasons (Çağlar and Gereöffy 2008). While its official solidarity with foreigners was labelled as 'utilitarian' serving the political economy of its foreign and migration policies (Tóth and Bernát 2023: 272, 275-276), the country lacked a functioning asylum system and a cohesive integration policy before the war (European Commission 2024). As a result of the politics of reporting, conflicting data is available to the public in almost every regard (Fülöp 2025): according to governmental communications, 1,38 million border crossings have been registered at the six border crossing points along the Ukrainian-Hungarian border since February 2022, and the government spent about HUF 100 billion (ca USD 300 million or EUR 250 million) on hosting Ukrainians in the first three years. However, as of August 2025 approximately only 39 000 Ukrainians enjoy the *menedékes* status after having registered in line with the TPD-mechanism. Neither researchers, nor media workers are convinced about the reliability of the data (Fülöp 2025).

Just as elsewhere, the state is legally responsible for the protection and temporary integration of people seeking refuge or asylum (in line with the Refugee Convention, 1951) in Hungary too. The domestic legal protection mechanisms have also been aligned with the TPD, which prescribed to grant specific rights and assistance to those receiving temporary protection (Nagy 2023: 152-156; Tóth and Bernát 2023: 273-276). Even though the TPD protection status has been extended until March 2026, the government modified the geographical eligibility criteria, as a result of which parts of Western Ukraine –

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[8] This paragraph builds on Ślęzak-Belowska and Paragi 2026.

which has historically been a home to Ukraine's mostly illiterate Roma population too – have been considered safe from August 2024.

Despite establishing the necessary regulatory framework and providing subsidies, the level of enthusiasm demonstrated by the government and the National Directorate-General for Aliens Policing (NDGAP/OIF) was much lower than elsewhere in the region, for example, Poland (Nagy 2023; Eurofund 2024; Kiss 2022). Though the National Humanitarian Coordination Council (NHCC), led by the Prime Minister's Office, has been involved in coordination, communication and support (HU GOV 2013; Eurofund 2024), the task of implementing official hospitality has been «essentially outsourced .... to five Church-based organisations and the Red Cross that coordinated their activities with the National Directorate-General for Disaster Management» as well as to civil society organisations and initiatives (Nagy 2023: 149). The government not only allowed CSOs, FBOs, the UNHCR and the IOM, and citizens to respond to the needs of Ukrainian refugees proactively in Spring 2022 (Tóth and Bernát 2023: 282-289), but the practical implementation of the legal obligations became somewhat "messy", undercoordinated at the macro level but over-coordinated at the mezo level (Kiss 2022; Ślęzak-Belowska and Paragi 2026: 100-104).

While various aid organisations simultaneously mapped needs, provided up-to-date and reliable multilingual information on rights, obligations and services by translating information from English and Hungarian to Ukrainian, and served as contact points for those Ukrainians who required legal or other assistance to navigate the Hungarian bureaucracy (healthcare system included), the Municipality of Budapest took the lead in supporting Ukrainian forced migrants in the capital, as due to its strategic location most Ukrainians had to stop in Budapest, even if they did not intend to stay in Hungary. It took on this responsibility as a "voluntary commitment" rather than a legal obligation, opening a reception centre and coordinating aid with UNICEF and the private sector (Csoba et al., 2025a).[9] Despite politically strained relations

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[9] Interview with an advisor from the Municipality of Budapest, Sept 28, 2024. In Hungarian «*2. Budapest Főváros Önkormányzata önként vállalt feladatai,*

with the government, the capital city provided assistance to Ukrainian individuals and families registered in the city through UNICEF funding and cooperation with the largest commercial bank (Ślęzak-Belowska and Paragi 2026: 101)

B) Giving: official aid transfers to Ukraine and Ukrainians

Since the refugee crisis and war in Ukraine, not only have migration control and border protection policies become further securitised[10], but so have official forms of international solidarity, such as foreign aid. In addition to the military aid it has received in the context of the war, Ukraine, classified as an ODA-eligible, lower-middle income country (LMC)[11] has also become one of the largest ODA-recipients since the war began.[12] The war also forced it to reconsider its previous legislation, which had prohibited most Ukrainian civil society organisations from accepting foreign funding or benefit from any form of cross-border solidarity prior to the war (Oleinikova 2017).

16. az Ukrajnában zajló háború miatt otthonuk elhagyására kényszerülő személyek megsegítésében való közreműködés, ennek keretében – a rászorulók igénye szerint – átmeneti elhelyezésük és ellátásuk biztosítása, életkörülményeik egyéb lehetséges módon történő javítása» (Budapest 2022).

[10] Securitisation in the humanitarian sector first appeared in the context of the GWOT (global war on terror), 25 years ago. The US' stance had less of an impact on the CEE states, given that the V4 countries only joined the EU in 2004 (but with the EU accession they adopted the EU and OECD DAC's "development policies" with their obsession with security, counterterrorism, and PVE).

[11] LMC, per capita GNI: 1 136 – 4 465 USD

[12] According to the OECD DAC (2025a; 2025b), Ukraine has received the following amounts of ODA in the past years: USD 16.1 billion (2022) and USD 18.215 billion (2023; 8% of the total ODA). In 2024 ODA to Ukraine decreased by 16.7% from the previous year (USD 15.5 billion), accounting for 7.4% of the total net ODA granted by DAC member countries. Counted as part of the ODA, humanitarian aid provided by donor governments amounted to USD 1.8 billion, marking a sharp 43% decrease from 2023. Similarly, spending on hosting Ukrainians in donor countries has also decreased. The EU institutions allocated 53% of their total net ODA (19 billion USD) to Ukraine. General trends:
https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/official-development-assistance-oda.html
and sources of data: https://one.oecd.org/document/DCD(2025)6/en/pdf (OECD DAC 2025a) and full report (OECD DAC 2025b):
https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/cuts-in-official-development-assistance_8c530629-en/full-report.html.

Table 1. Net bilateral ODA from OECD DAC donors to Ukraine
(million USD, 2023 constant prices)

	2021	**2022**	**2023**	**2024 (prelim)**
All DAC donors, of which		16 121	18 215	15 458
… DAC-EU countries (bilateral)		2 635	2 339	2 077
… Poland	105.6	226 (370*)	230	175
… Hungary	23.4	15 (88.7*)	14.5	5.8
EU Institutions		10 616	20 527	18 973

*including in-donor refugee costs; s*ources*: OECD DAC 2024: 13, OECD DAC 2025a: 11; *Hungary*: OECD DAC 2025c: 15; *Poland*: OECD DAC 2025d: 15)

Limiting the discussion to Poland and Hungary, while the proximity of the Ukrainian war explains securitisation sentiments, there are significant differences across the V4 countries, Poland and Hungary included, that are not unrelated to their differing foreign policy considerations (Szynol 2025).

Poland. Its response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine has positioned it as a leading actor in both humanitarian and military support within the European Union, as well as an emerging external contributor (Zalas-Kamińska 2024). Aside from its substantial contributions to ODA, Poland ranks first globally in terms of aid to Ukraine as a percentage of its GDP, allocating approximately 4,91% of GDP to support Ukraine and its citizens (with 0,71% for direct support to Ukraine and 4,2% for forced migrants-related expenditures) (Ukrinform 2024).

2022 marked a significant increase in Polish international humanitarian activity, but it was 2024 that it made the largest-ever contribution to UNHCR, supporting not just Ukrainian refugees, but also humanitarian efforts in Sudan, Syria, and Armenia. This multilayered aid reflects Poland's evolving role as a donor state, with ODA including both bilateral assistance to Ukraine and contributions to global humanitarian operations (Ministry of International Affairs 2025). The total ODA of Poland dropped from USD 3.38 billion (PLN 15.06 billion), representing 0.51% of its GNI (in 2022) to USD 2.1 bil-

lion, or 0.24% of its GNI (in 2024). This era saw a shift in priorities, with Poland spending most on Ukrainians: its net ODA (USD 226 million; 7% of its total ODA) and other forms of official assistance to Ukraine amounted to USD 2.18 billion in 2022. To compare, in 2023 and 2024, the primary focus was on Ukraine and Moldova, with some funds allocated to Africa and the Middle East (e.g., Lebanon, Senegal, Tanzania). In 2025, policy priorities are likely to change towards long-term partnerships with civil society organisations (CSOs), moving away from annual project calls (OECD 2024; OECD DAC 2025f).

Poland distinguished itself as the first to deliver large-scale heavy weaponry to Ukraine, launching the so-called *"tank coalition"* and becoming the first NATO member to supply combat aircraft. Poland provided military aid to the regional defence architecture, including over 350 tanks, 250 infantry fighting vehicles, 100 self-propelled artillery units, 30 rocket launchers, 14 fighter jets, and 12 helicopters, among other assets. The entire value of military aid stands at approximately PLN 15 billion (around EUR 3.23 billion) (National Security Bureau 2025; Ministry of National Defence 2025). Furthermore 20,000 Starlink units were funded and supplied (National Security Bureau 2025).

The Polish state is confirming its strategic commitment to Ukraine's defence with its 46th military aid package**,** valued at approximately EUR 200 million, as well as ongoing military training programs, having trained 28,000 Ukrainian troops, accounting for nearly one-third of all personnel trained under EU auspices (Ukrainska Pravda 2024).

Within months of the outbreak of war, the country began to receive regular transports of wounded Ukrainian soldiers[13]. The change of regulations enabled the cross-border medical evacuation and treatment, including both Ukrainian citizens and foreign nationals fighting in Ukraine, mostly surgical and orthopaedic procedures. By mid-2024, around 300 wounded Ukrainian soldiers had received treatment in Poland. Furthermore, the establishment of the MEDEVAC Hub in Jasion-

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[13] A development made possible by amendments to domestic legislation, including the Nursing and Midwifery Act and related statutes, signed by the President of Poland.

ka, near Rzeszow, permitted the transfer of approximately 3,000 patients to medical facilities in 18 European countries (National Security Bureau 2025).

Poland's location has rendered it a pivotal logistics hub in the trans-European supply chain supporting Ukraine. Over 80% of EU assistance, totalling over EUR 800 million, was routed through Poland's UCPM logistics hub in the first half of 2022 alone, demonstrating the country's infrastructural significance in the EU's coordinated response. To compare, Poland's own in-kind contributions totalled approximately EUR 415 million during the same period (National Security Bureau 2025).

Finally, the Governmental Agency for Strategic Reserves RARS oversaw humanitarian efforts, transporting various goods, e.g. 11,000 tonnes of food products, medicines, 70,000 cubic meters of fuel and 4,000 emergency housing containers (during first two years of war) (JSTOR daily 2025). This operation also includes commodities from all around the world, with 58 countries being handled. 75,000 pallets and over 55,000 tonnes (worth more than PLN 1.5 billion) of products passed through the reloading hub, hauled by 9,000 trucks and several hundred trains. RARS personnel have built 14 container towns for Internally Displaced Persons, IDPs, including four in Lviv. The dozens of towns built so far can accommodate more than 10,000 homeless people. They will be used by refugees until they find new permanent homes (Chancellery of the Prime Minister n.d.).

Hungary. The extent to which international solidarity can be measured by foreign aid transfers, the Hungarian government demonstrated stronger solidarity with Ukrainian citizens than with Ukraine as an ODA-eligible state (see Table 1 above). To provide context, Hungary became a donor country after joining the EU in 2004 and the OECD DAC in 2016 (Paragi 2010). Its international development policy received limited political attention and was underfunded, having a modest role in Hungary's foreign policy until the mid-2010s; since then it has undergone significant changes under Prime Minister Orbán's administrations (Paragi and Szent-Iványi 2024). Its overall net ODA increased from 153 million USD (2011) to 506 million USD (2019) and 489 million USD (2020), positioning Hungary as one of the top bilateral contributors among

CEE EU member states. Although this change reflected Hungary's pragmatism in light of its larger global diplomatic and economic objectives (Tarrósy and Solymári 2022; Szent-Iványi et al, *forthcoming*), its net ODA fell again to 256 million USD (2023) and 197 million USD (2024) (OECD DAC 2025c: 2).

In terms of its composition, almost half of the ODA-budget is consumed by the Stipendium Hungaricum scholarship programme, which targets students from the Global South and East, including Christian students – primarily from the Global South – and young individuals from Hungarian diaspora communities, either Ukraine or overseas (OECD DAC 2025c: 8). Within the circumstances of the war, the Students at Risk Subprogramme for students fleeing the war in Ukraine was established „to facilitate access to scholarships both for Ukrainian students and for other students studying in Ukraine" as early as 2022 (OECD DAC 2023a: 37).

However, when measured by total ODA-transfers (see Table 1) Ukraine was ranked only as the fourth largest recipient in 2023 (after Turkey, Nicaragua, and Lao PRD) – receiving approximately 27% of the Hungarian programmable aid spent in European ODA-eligible countries (OECD DAC 2025c: 8). Not only has not it provided military aid, but Hungary has demonstrated far less solidarity with Ukraine than Poland in terms of its ODA disbursements, which is remarkable for two main reasons.

First, Ukraine has a significant Hungarian-speaking minority in Transcarpathia, and Hungary has supported diaspora communities in the ODA-eligible Ukraine and Serbia since the early 1990s. Indeed, from 2018 to 2020, the 20 largest projects accounted for half of total project financing and were concentrated in three countries (Lao PDR, Serbia, and Ukraine), with Serbia receiving about 48 million USD and Ukraine 18 million in 2020 (OECD DAC 2023a: 21). However, because this nexus of "diaspora politics" and "development policy" approach discriminates against recipients based on their ethnicity, the associated practices (disbursements) have long been criticised by the OECD DAC community (2023a: 32). Contrary to this criticism, only larger Ukrainian beneficiary organisations could meet the conditions imposed by Kiev, which regarded foreign donors as "foreign agents" (Oleinikova 2017). Indeed, only as a result of recent legislative

changes in Ukraine, the Ukrainian population (and smaller local organisations) have been permitted to accept foreign donations from official or civilian donors, explaining why Hungarian ODA was so concentrated benefiting only few local partners and excluding the majority of local NGOs.

Second, the long-time unassuming Hungarian aid policy has finally acquired its "identity" in the years preceding the Russian invasion in Ukraine in supporting persecuted Christian communities in ODA-eligible countries (Paragi 2023; Paragi and Szent-Iványi 2024). As a result, Hungary has been spending increasingly large amounts of money since 2017 to support persecuted Christians communities in the Middle East, Africa and Asia through a programme called Hungary Helps, which provides direct funding to local Christian churches and Hungarian FBOs. The principle behind assisting Hungarian communities in the diaspora and (persecuted) Christian communities in their home countries is the same: to ensure that they remain in their homelands by preserving their group identities (Paragi 2023; Paragi and Szent-Iványi 2024; Tóth and Bernát 2023: 276-277). However, in case of Ukraine, "stay" also signifies a battle over minority rights, since Hungarians in Western Ukraine, just as Russians in Eastern Ukraine, and other minorities, have also had to bear the consequences of legal measures that have limited the use of mother tongue in public life and education for years (Balogh and Kovály 2025; Fedinec 2025).

In the first year (2022), Hungary has mobilised resources to help Ukraine and is hosting a significant number of refugees (see above), marking a positive shift from its previously very strict asylum policy, and, as foreseen by the OECD DAC (2023a: 16; 49-50), «continued support to Ukraine, where a large Hungarian minority lives, will remain high on Hungary's co-operation agenda.» Foreign policy issues, however, have surpassed these expectations (Kopper et al, 2023; Müller and Slominski 2024; Schmidt and Glied 2024). Table 1 shows that Hungary donated just USD 14 million (2023) and USD 6 million of net bilateral ODA (2024) to Ukraine, with "USD 0 million of the amount" declared as humanitarian aid in 2024 (OECD DAC 2025c: 25).

What is also remarkable here is the politics of reporting. OECD DAC members, such as Hungary, can include the costs

of hosting Ukrainian refugees in their ODA. Hungary, on the other hand, decided *ex post* «to remove in-donor refugee costs all together from their final reporting on 2022 ODA ... [as it] wanted to avoid a peak in their 2022 ODA [cf. Table 1], which they saw as potentially misleading for their partners» (OECD DAC 2025g: 3 and 15). A year later, in-donor refugee costs totalled USD 2 million in 2023, accounting for 0.9% of Hungary's gross bilateral ODA (OECD DAC 2025c: 8). Official solidarity, like alliance-seeking, has its limits at the level of statistics too.

C) Giving: cross-border solidarity and civilian aid to Ukrainians and Ukraine

Evidence from Central Europe also demonstrates that during crises and displacement situations civil society acts as a catalyst by responding to needs through ad-hoc partnerships and community engagement. Indeed, civil society actors in the V4 countries, including aid organisations, grassroots initiatives, online communities, and unorganised citizens, played a pivotal role in handling the initial phases of the crisis. However, as previous studies in Germany and Hungary, among others, have demonstrated, the very act of "citizen help" provided to "undesired" or undocumented migrants of Global South origin can also be interpreted beyond pure community engagement or compassion, evoking a hidden critique of domestic politics and populist indifference (Cantat 2020; Eckert 2024). In other words, acts of civilian solidarity are more than just collecting donations or offering in-kind aid to strangers, but may also carry certain political dimension, frequently motivated by personal or family memories of being helped in the past (Grossmann 2015).

Poland. The Russian invasion sparked unprecedented wave of grassroots mobilisation, with more than 77% of the population engaging in refugee assistance and the provision of unpaid services (Bielewska et al. 2025). This civic engagement included a wide range of activities, from hosting forcibly displaced people to organising food, clothing, transport etc. Civil society actors, including NGOs and informal networks, played a pivotal role in compensating for the deficiencies of the state, frequently forging ad hoc alliances that transcended tradition-

al humanitarian relief (Szeptycki 2024). These initiatives were frequently seen as either complementary to state-led interventions or embedded into digital infrastructures to improve coordination and outreach (Ślęzak-Belowska and Paragi 2026).

Over 2.2 million Ukrainian forced migrants are hosted in private homes, demonstrating strong civil activity (Kaufman et al. 2022). This solidarity was considered exceptional, especially when compared to other displaced populations (Ramji-Nogales 2022; Ajana et al. 2024). The scale and speed of this response have sparked scholarly interest, with some calling it a "humanitarian uprising" (Chimiak and McMahon 2025), emphasising its needs-driven, decentralised nature and the emergence of hybrid partnerships between citizens and NGOs. These alliances frequently blurred the boundaries between humanitarianism and political solidarity, as illustrated by crowdfunding campaigns for military equipment intended for Ukrainian soldiers.

The spontaneity and scale of these grassroots efforts, particularly in the initial phase of the crisis, were unprecedented. Train stations, which were filled with individuals, activists, NGOs etc., formed spaces of humanitarian actions – became logistical hubs for informal aid networks and centres of humanitarian actions. Private networks proved indispensable not just for mobilising voluntary engagement, but also for maintaining long-term support mechanisms for Ukrainian refugees

While these partnerships occasionally intersected with state structures, they were predominantly local, typically taking place at the municipal level. Since 2022, scholarly analyses have increasingly focused on these dynamics in the Ukrainian context, frequently involving Polish researchers who are themselves engaged in humanitarian fieldwork. A landmark contribution in this regard is the 2025 report *The First Line of Solidarity: How Polish Cities Supported Ukraine* (Kamiński and Matiaszczyk 2025), which offers a comprehensive account of the modalities and scale of assistance provided by Poland's eleven largest urban centres. This report complements an existing body of empirical research (Ślęzak and Bielewska 2022; Madej et al 2023; Bielewska et al 2025; Kamiński and Matiaszczyk 2025; Sobierajski et al. 2022; Matiaszczyk 2025).

The initial mobilisation was largely grass-root, spontaneous, with examples of empathy-driven hosting experiences and generous, multidimensional support. However, over time stakeholders articulated the need for more systemic and coordinated responses (Dziekońska 2025; Bielewska et al. 2025; Szeptycki 2024). In response, the Polish government eventually introduced much needed policy instruments, such as *Strategia migracyjna* (Kancelaria Prezesa Rady Ministrów 2024), which aims to institutionalise refugee support mechanisms. International organisations such as UNHCR and UNICEF also intervened, primarily providing financial support to municipalities and local NGOs in cities like Kraków and Warsaw. These funds enabled a range of services for Ukrainian forced migrants, including direct financial help, needs assessments, and partnerships with local authorities and specialised institutions like hospitals. Notably, the operational focus of these international actors has been oriented more toward coordination than direct service provision (Ślęzak-Belowska and Paragi 2026).

Finally, any comprehensive account of Poland's response to the Ukrainian crisis must include human narratives and lived experiences from those involved in cross-border solidarity efforts. These stories—often conveyed through informal channels, local media, and ethnographic documentation—form a tapestry of civic engagement and humanitarian commitment. They reveal the emotive dimensions of aid, the moral imperatives driving action (both symbolic and physical), and the relational infrastructures that underpin transnational support. The prevalence of such accounts underscores the significance of narrative as both a mobilising force and a repository of collective memory, locating grassroots humanitarianism within broader socio-political and cultural frameworks (see, e.g. Podgórska et al. 2024).

Hungary. While solidarity has faded over time in Hungary too, the individual members of the society mobilised in an unprecedented manner to provide support to Ukrainians after February 2022 (Zakariás et al 2023; Tóth and Bernát 2023: 290-292). Hungarian civilian solidarity with Ukrainians has manifested as a series of faith-based, secular, and even quasi-military initiatives that underscore both the depth and complexity of regional support. While Hungary's public discourse

on migration remained divided along ideological lines (Reményi et al 2022; Gerő et al 2023), the practical involvement of thousands of individuals – driving buses, translating documents, and sewing children's clothes – testified to spontaneous, bottom-up solidarity regardless of political considerations (Zakarias et al 2023).

Within a day or two after Russia's invasion on Ukraine, grassroots initiatives sprang up on social media, coordinating volunteer rides from Budapest's Keleti station, collecting housing offers from private citizens, and organising pop-up language cafés. Just as elsewhere in the region, some of these initiatives were entirely spontaneous, while others relied on the dual local knowledge of Ukrainian and Hungarian as languages and the Ukrainian-Hungarian diaspora(s) living. One of the most efficient initiatives was the *Segítségnyújtás MOST* (Hungary Refugee Help Digital Network), founded within hours after the war broke out to address two major issues: the apparent lack of capacity among local NGOs to create digital an efficient digital tool, and Ukrainian refugees' reliance of on social media rather than websites (Lengyel-Wang 2023). The fact that it was mostly coordinated by women (young mothers) confirms earlier observations that „helping refugees is unequally associated with those who are already heavily engaged in care duties— that is, women and those working in gendered and underpaid care sectors" (Zakariás et al 2023: 6).

The most autonomous manifestation of solidarity, however, probably came from a more 'masculine' initiative *Karpataljai Sárkányellátó* (*Transcarpathian Dragon Suppliers),* an online fundraising community. Its civilian volunteers raised HUF 500 million in the past three years – an impressive amount when compared to the budgets of more established aid NGOs – from private donors. Initially it purchased dual-used items (thermocameras, tactical communications equipment, etc) and transported them to soldiers fighting in Eastern Ukraine; more recently they also implement conventional civilian projects in Ukraine. Their activities expressed not only solidarity with Ukrainians, but also political opposition to the Hungarian government's military aid policy (Zubor 2023; Paragi 2025).

Cross-border religious, mostly Christian communities in eastern Hungary and Transcarpathia also revived centuries-old networks of parish ties, opening church halls as shelters,

coordinating refugee registrations, and channelling relief supplies directly to sister congregations across the border. Building on this ecclesial infrastructure, as well as networks and experiences gained in Global South countries, Hungarian FBOs in the capital also mobilised substantial donations beyond official government allocations, ranging from clothing and hygiene kits to medical equipment, and established receptions both in Budapest and at border crossings to provide legal advice, psychosocial care, and language courses to arriving families (Marsai et al 2025).

Last, but not least, solidarity has also been demonstrated in alternative ways, particularly through words, as Hungary's official attitude became increasingly pro-Russian (Müller and Shlominski 2024). In line with the mutuality logic that underpins solidarity actions, Hungarian academics, journalists, and cultural figures signed open letters and petitions urging the government to increase asylum quotas, provide long-term integration funding, and unequivocally condemn Russia's aggression. Honoured by the Ukrainian recipients (ICES 2025), the reaction not only expressed gratitude for the 50 000 signatures, but also demonstrated a shared understanding of the complicated historical past:

Both Hungarian and Ukrainian history is marked by a constant struggle for identity – for our language, culture and rights... Today, our resistance to Putin's imperialism is a continuation of that same struggle... We, the Ukrainian nation, which has been divided for centuries, realise how important it is for you, the Hungarian nation, which has been divided throughout history, to be reunited again in Europe (*ibid.*).

Together, these interwoven forms of solidarity illustrate how Hungarian citizens activated their historical legacy, religious heritage, civic inventiveness, and even 'fighting spirit' to sustain a comprehensive civilian response to the Ukrainian refugee crisis.

6. *Do we need solidarity in, with, from or by Central Europe? Discussion and concluding remarks on solidarity-driven responses and practices*

By examining official and civilian responses in Poland and Hungary to the ongoing Ukrainian refugee crisis, this study sought to demonstrate the interplay of time and space, contributing to the vast scholarship on selective solidarity. Inevitably, the responses presented invite comparison – not only across states, but also with the 2015 refugee crisis – emphasising the importance of localisation, ethnicity and racialised perceptions, shared historical narratives, and the role of informal partnerships in shaping both the scope and nature of assistance, as well as the rights provided to displaced populations. These characteristics highlight the embeddedness of institutionalised humanitarian responses and spontaneous solidarity actions within larger socio-political and cultural contexts.

Various facets of the "selective solidarity" concept have been frequently employed in both public discourse and the scholarship (Paré, 2022; Kienast et al 2023; Bueno Lacy and van Houtum 2023; Blomqvist Mickelsson 2025). The terms also refer to the differences that characterised both societal and political responses to the 2015 crisis, the Ukrainian war since 2022 and the reception regimes in EU member states. Selective solidarity – a term capturing the uneven extent of support to different categories of displaced populations – has gained traction in migration studies. Paré (2022) contended that European policies are filled with racialised othering, with non-European migrants being systematically marginalised, revealing solidarity as precarious and exclusionary. This dynamic demonstrates how solidarity is dispensed not as a universal value, but as a privilege bestowed selectively on those deemed culturally close or politically convenient (Paré 2022) or useful in economic terms (Tóth and Bernát 2023). As proximity is also a matter of space, EU member states have invoked geographical proximity to justify the preferential treatment of Ukrainian forced migrants, thereby normalising an exceptionalism that sidesteps core refugee-protection criteria. This rationale presented Ukrainians as more deserving of solidarity based on physical proximity, that is, convenience. While crit-

ics argue that this logic reinforced a tiered architecture of belonging (Bueno Lacy and van Houtum 2023), this line of reasoning ignores the temporal-historical determinants of contemporary responses.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine, and the subsequent displacement of millions of Ukrainian citizens, rather highlighted the paradoxes of solidarity within Central and Eastern Europe. Countries on the EU's eastern flank from the Baltic states (Budrytė 2023) to Poland and Hungary, responded swiftly and generously to the influx of Ukrainians both *for and against* historical memories. When compared to the scenes and public discourse of summer/autumn 2015, the forced migrants from Ukraine were welcomed as "our" people or "true refugees" deserving hospitality both in Hungary (Remenyik et al 2022; Zakarias 2023) and Poland (Zogata-Kusz et al. 2025). This reception revealed not only a selective, but also historically contextual sort of solidarity, one that is at least as much rooted in shared threat perceptions as in historical hostility and racism towards others. Just as the wisdom of "choosing one's battles" is not entirely inclusive, solidarity is at least as much a matter of scarce resources (money, time, cognitive-emotional capacities) as it is of political will.

Empirical studies (Garau 2010, Uhr et al. 2025; Karaçay 2023) and theoretical analysis (Karageorgiou and Noll 2022; Karageorgiou and Nol 2023) equally show that solidarity serves as a strategic notion from Europe to the Middle East, which is distributed along complex lines of race, geography, history, and political interest. Hence, reality appears to call into question normative universalist aspirations, complicating both the legal and moral underpinnings of universal refugee protection as reflected in the Geneva Convention. Furthermore, and remarkably, despite the rise of digital technologies and data-driven governance (Ślęzak-Belowska et al. 2026), physical proximity continues to play a decisive role in shaping both human and social interactions. The borderlands of Poland and Ukraine and Ukraine and Hungary exemplify how geographic proximity facilitated not just logistical support or utilitarian solidarity (Tóth and Bernát 2023) but also emotional and political identification (essential for "joint action") despite historical traumas both crossing and ignoring borders and diametrically opposite foreign policy orientations in Bu-

dapest and Warszawa. Historically linked both to Ukraine and Poland and Ukraine and Hungary respectively by cultural and political experiences, these regions served as conduits for solidarity that is not only spatially, but also temporally anchored. Spatial proximity is amplified by historical ties, cultural affinities, and collective memories of past conflicts *and* alliances, which contributes to a perception of Ukrainian migrants as both "familiar" and "deserving." The continuing importance of *shared* historical memories of traumas and territorial adjacency calls into question notions that digital connectedness, social media ICT technologies can replace physical proximity in generating solidarity and action however ironically (Chouliaraki 2013).

The shared borders allowed for not just logistical support but contributed to strengthening social bonds and political identification between the societies. Recalling the temporal features of contemporary solidarity, which are absent in relation to individuals migrating from the Global South, shared historical experiences, such as territorial adjustments by great powers, played a critical role in shaping responses to Ukrainian displacement. Consciously or subconsciously, they affected risk perceptions and created a sense of 'historical kinship' that influenced contemporary reactions, particularly in the sphere of spontaneous citizen aid. The welcoming of Ukrainian migrants cannot be fully understood without acknowledging the long-standing historical ties between EU member states in CEE and Ukraine. Regardless of how ambivalent they may appear to an outside observer these bonds produced a sense of moral obligation that transcended post-WW2 legal frameworks and international policy instruments in the realm of universal human rights. When migrants from the Global South are portrayed or perceived through securitised lenses in CEE (Nagy 2016; Stepka 2022; Polko 2025) or when they are stripped of their own histories and reduced to abstract data points in migration management systems across Europe (Pelizza 2020), cynical and indifferent political responses or racism may offer necessary, but not sufficient explanation.

To summarise, the paper attempted to answer the question of how historical context shapes contemporary solidarity in Central and Eastern Europe by introducing different forms of

institutionalised or spontaneous 'local care'. The CEE response to the Ukrainian refugee crisis demonstrates how solidarity is shaped by a complex interplay of spatial proximity, historical memory, and internal political dynamics. It is not a neutral or consistent idea, but rather one that reflects the region's distinct geopolitical position and historical entanglements. Recalling Sangiovanni's definition cited at the beginning of this paper, it is obviously easier for the region's population to identify with the Ukrainians' plight because there is a shared, unspeakable understanding of "existing adversity" (perceptions of both Russian and Western imperialism, the cruelty of the Red Army, the adjustments of political borders by great powers, the resulting territorial annexations by neighbouring states, deportations and population transfers). However, nothing is black and white. The cooperation of local elites either with the Nazi Germany (1930-40s) or with the Soviet Union (1940s-1980s) – at the expense of the local population and their own citizens – was also a historical fact, which explains the ambiguities and inconsistencies across official and citizen responses.

Solidarity, as implied, is not just a "spatial construct", but also a temporal one, rooted in the past and mobilized in the present, hence contradicting universalist concepts of global solidarity that ignore historical "path dependence" and demands equal compassion for all migrant groups. Clearly, the interplay of the temporal (how different past and historical memories *do* produce different responses even in the domain of "local care") and the spatial (how common norms and values *should* guide joint action) complicates the notion of global solidarity, which frequently assumes a universalist ethos detached from historical roots. The EU's and CEE's ambiguous response to migration demonstrates that solidarity is not a neutral or uniformly distributed principle, but rather one that is contingent, relational, and deeply political. It is influenced by who is perceived as "close" – not only geographically but also in terms of shared pasts and envisioned futures – when otherwise scarce resources are to be shared and great power interests are to be navigated. So, when politicians or the public in the "established" EU member states blame CEE governments and societies for their selective solidarity and racism, it is not impossible that they do it because they need a "racist

CEE" to divert attention from the means by which they defend their own (white) privileges even from Central European "migrants" (Kalmar 2022; Kalmar 2023). What remains invisible is the likely logic of "learning by doing" whereby practices of racism are passed over to those that are considered victims today.

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Abstract

AMBIGUITIES OF SOLIDARITY IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE: PROXIMITY, POLITICS OF INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION IN FORCED MIGRATION CONTEXTS

Keywords: Central-Europe, solidarity, proximity, local aid actors, migration

The mass displacement of Ukrainian citizens triggered the activation of the EU's Temporary Protection Directive. The warm welcome of Ukrainian forced migrants has also drawn criticism because it contrasted sharply with the treatment of non-European refugees. Earlier studies not only examined the fallacies of 'geographical proximity' cited as a justification but also labelled the EU's selective inclusion as hypocritical. The aim of this paper is to provide a more nuanced understanding of this selective solidarity, by laying the groundwork on the history of the borderlands of Poland and Hungary with Ukraine, arguing that reflections on the temporal dimensions of (missing) solidarity are at least as important as spatial factors determining it.

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