SOLIDARITY ACROSS DIVIDES

Promoting the Moral Point of View

GEORGE VASILEV

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Contents

Introduction

Consider the following items of news:

> Mark Boyd, an 18-year-old Protestant youth, is knocked down by a hit-and-run driver on 'the Shankill', the notorious stretch of road running through West Belfast's Loyalist heartland. Laying in agony with a broken leg, two men approach him to offer assistance. But before doing so, they summon him to sing the Sash, the sectarian song popular among Northern Ireland's Protestant population. Unfortunately, Mark does not know its words. In spite of all his assertions that he is Protestant and not Catholic, he is set upon by the would-be good Samaritans, only escaping a potentially worse fate at their hands by fleeing to a nearby take-away store. (Summarised from McAleese 2007)

> On the outskirts of Skopje, Macedonia, five men on a fishing trip are shot dead in cold blood. As people are arrested, interethnic tensions simmer. Rumours have spread that the suspects are ethnic Albanian and that the murder of their victims, all ethnic Macedonian, was politically motivated. It is not long before tensions erupt. Ten thousand frenzied Albanians gather in front of Skopje's Jaja-Pasha mosque after mid-day prayer. Their indignation has been roused by activists using social media to spread accusations that the police framed the suspects and that the government is vilifying Albanians as terrorists. The crowd marches towards the government building, hurling stones at police and burning dumpsters. They chant 'Allah is great!' and 'Gruevski [the Prime Minister] is a terrorist!' (Summarised from Marusic 2012)

The enchanting Bosnian town of Mostar has a public water company run by two directors. One is a Croat who has an office in the western Croat side of the town, and manages the Croat staff and water supply there. Another is a Bosniak, who has an office on the eastern Bosniak side, and supervises the predominantly Bosniak staff and customers there. 'Only the water itself is common', says one of the directors, everything else is separate. The comment is an ironic reference to the duplication and division running through his company. But it is also an allegory of Mostar more generally. The town languishes at the hands of a bloated and corrupt bureaucracy, parodied by international observers for having 'at least two of everything': one administrative structure for Croats and another for Bosniaks. (Summarised from ICG 2009: 11–12)

A domestic football game is underway at Beirut's Camille Chamoun Sports City Stadium. Football is Lebanon's most popular sport. However, the terraces of the 48,000-seat stadium are empty. The government has imposed a ban on attendance, fearing that sectarian violence between fans might reignite a civil war. Not dissuaded by the ban, leaders of each community continue to fund competing teams, using them to generate support and spread sectarian messages among their constituencies outside the stadiums. (Summarised from Montague 2009)

Belgium sets a new world record. It takes 541 days for a government to be formed after an election, eclipsing the 353-day record previously set by Cambodia. The reason for this history-making delay? The linguistically divided parties cannot agree on the future direction of the country. The Dutch speaking parties would like to see power further devolved to the regions and eventually, the emergence of an independent Flemish state. The French speaking parties would like the status quo to remain. Against the backdrop of the impasse, the communities trade insults. Dutch speakers are referred to as 'tetchy, right-wing nationalist extremists', and Francophones as 'work-shy scroungers'. (Summarised from Chrisafis 2011)

What unites all of these events is their depiction of behaviour that is an expression and outcome of collapsed solidarity. As

an ideal, solidarity concerns the simple but powerful normative intuition that moral obligations should extend beyond particularistic affinities to encompass all who are potentially exposed to the harms and benefits of our actions. It is an aspiration present in the idealisations of democrats of all stripes, who have referred to it variously as: a preparedness of 'taking responsibility' for one who 'has formed his identity under completely different circumstances' (Habermas 1998: 29); a disposition of 'mutual respect and caring that presumes distance' (Young 2000: 22); a commitment by groups to deal justly with others (Miller 2000: 157); the inclination to view all human lives as equally grievable (Butler 2004: 19–49); a sense of duty among 'the powerful to listen and respond' (Tully 2004: 99); the sharing of affiliations and bonds across ethnic lines in the form of 'cross-cutting cleavages' (Lijphart 1969); the readiness to come to the aid of another, even if this goes against one's immediate interests (Putnam 2000: 20–1); the expectation to interact 'on an equal basis with people with whom we might harbour prejudice' (Kymlicka 2001: 299); or the recognition of the legitimacy of another's position, even if one disagrees on its merits (Mouffe 2000: 101–2).

This orientation of attentiveness across difference is absent in the above interactions, as people are conceiving obligations of justice to begin and end strictly at the boundaries of their own group identity. The duty to care for and respect another is being ranked on the basis of arbitrary distinctions pertaining to ethnicity and religion, representing a breach of solidarity's universalist requirement that it extends equally to individuals of all backgrounds, regardless of the circumstances under which they have formed their identities. In one or more of these situations, people are harbouring dehumanising images of those on opposing ends of a group divide, wish to inhabit homogenous spaces defined exclusively by their own group identity, have a desire to marginalise their competitors from political decisions, want to see their rivals remain vulnerable to their own caprices, maintain disparaging attitudes and stereotypes of other ways of life, are calculating and strategising, are reluctant to admit culpability for wrongs committed in the name of their community, and are quick to interpret evidence in a manner that one-sidedly portrays

themselves as victims. Under such circumstances, group contours define the limits of proper human conduct and serve to justify behaviour that leaves certain citizens treated as less than equal.

The presence of this kind of group centrism is morally questionable and has a number of functional repercussions that combine to undermine the success of multicultural democracy. In the absence of ties of solidarity, the commitment to notions of impartiality and equal moral worth will be weak or entirely absent from public life. Instead, joint problems will be approached in terms of 'what is good for me or my group', and not 'what is good for all who have to bear the consequences of my preferences'. That the realisation of one's interests might impact negatively on others will be of marginal concern, or worse still, might be an end in itself where another is regarded as some kind of threat to be controlled or overcome.

Apart from being questionable in its own right, such parochialism and strategising: contributes to legislative stalemates by leaving political actors less willing to compromise and more inclined to pursue committed agendas; takes away from the rational soundness of public policies by rendering collective decision making less informed, less reflective, and therefore prone to straying from what best serves citizens' interests; lays the ground for ethnic outbidding, as opportunist politicians will have an impressionable audience in their depiction of moderate opponents as weak or traitorous; heightens the propensity for identity-blaming, as people will be drawn to blame not an individual or set of individuals for their transgressions, but all members of the opposing identity associated with those individuals; and nurtures legitimacy deficits around the state insofar as people will find it difficult to accept legally binding directives that go the way of their opponents instead of their own.

In short, a society characterised by a breakdown in solidarity cannot flourish. People will care about the fate of their group ahead of the fate of their society, leaving prosperity and security unevenly distributed and incompletely realised, and the practice of governance increasingly strained as citizens resist, rather than consent to, political authority in the face of their disagreements. Where this is an ingrained feature of social life, the spectre of

violent conflict is never too far away, while the interactions characterising inter-group encounters are anything but emblematic of healthy and vibrant multiculturalism.

Given the moral and functional imperatives served by solidarity, it comes as no surprise that governments, social scientists and philosophers devote considerable attention to understanding and promoting the phenomenon. Indeed, as far back as the nineteenth century, John Stuart Mill, Emile Durkheim, Karl Marx and others were seeking to grasp the nature of social attachments under conditions of conflicting values and interests. These scholars were responding to the rapid changes European societies had undergone as they shifted from authority based on religious sources of legitimation and more localised affiliations founded on village, town or regional ties towards mass and anonymous nation-states ordered through secular government, rational public moralities and capitalist modes of production. In recent times, this line of investigation has acquired renewed relevance, resurrected by new kinds of societal shifts and accompanying tensions that have once again put solidarity into the spotlight. Prominent among these transformations have been the growing prevalence of ethnonationalism, secessionist movements, civil wars, far right political parties and xenophobia, particularly since the conclusion of the Cold War. Also of relevance has been the political mobilisation of indigenous peoples, the widening rift between Muslim and non-Muslim populations in Western democracies especially since September 11, and the backlash directed at immigrant multiculturalism in recent times (Kymlicka 2007b).

Yet, beyond statements of necessity, there seems to be little else that unites analyses of solidarity. When one takes the bolder step of assessing how solidarity is ideally pursued, the phenomenon very quickly becomes the site of contestation and controversy, creating more divisions than it is supposed to overcome. At the level of policy making, all governments react with alarm at the sight of national disunity, but employ vastly different strategies to contain this threat. Some governments see it as necessary to further extend the reach of the state by centralising power away from troublesome minorities, ramping up nation-building programmes that reassert the culture of the dominant group, and in some extreme instances,

restricting civil rights so that minorities are denied the freedom to practise and replicate their cultures in all facets of their lives. Others adopt a more relaxed approach, hoping the pacification of the unruly and disenchanted will come about through meeting the demands they are raising over self-government, constitutional amendments, affirmative action programmes, anti-discrimination legislation, language rights, representation quotas, among a host of other group-focused entitlements. Social scientists studying these actions cannot agree on their merits. Some regard a humane version of the former response as more effective, emphasising the monumental success of nation-building programmes in creating a common sense of community across vast territories (Miller 1995). Others endorse the latter response, stressing that many states are in fact multination- or multicultural-states, rather than nation- or monocultural states, held together through the institutional recognition of this demographic fact (Kymlicka 1995).

The result is those looking for a widely shared set of answers to problems of deep division and conflict have nowhere to go. Solidarity remains a core objective of governments and a central component of scholarship on justice and democracy. But there is no universally favoured route for its attainment and no universally accepted theory of its underlying conditions. Instead, studies of multicultural solidarity are characterised by mutually opposing assumptions on its preconditions, with each perspective claiming analytical superiority over the other, and each perspective able to point to historical evidence that casts doubt over the tenability of the other.

In this book, I identify the obstacles and possibilities for the realisation of solidarity in light of the confusion surrounding it. I offer a theoretical foundation from which to comprehend the normative demands of solidarity, and a corresponding set of institutional proposals that can function as guideposts for the reconstruction of societies divided across cultural and ethnic differences so that mutual answerability is patterned into the relations of historical antagonists.

While I provide widely applicable answers to the conceptual and institutional puzzles animating sociological and philosophical debates on solidarity, I do not claim to capture immutable laws

of society, and nor do I believe such laws are out there waiting to be discovered. The empirical world is too disorderly for a tidy set of prescriptions to work equally effectively and smoothly everywhere and always, while as an ideal, solidarity is constituted by pluralist and unifying demands that stand in tension with one another and make its translation into practice a normatively delicate endeavour that dictates different policy interventions for different circumstances in order to avoid the creation of new injustices.

Nevertheless, I do believe certain generalisations can be made about what kind of institutional arrangements are more conducive to the attainment of cooperative and respectful relations. I also believe that certain universally valid suppositions can be made around what solidarity does and does not mean within a philosophical tradition that upholds democracy and respect for the integrity of individuals as foundational commitments to human life. It is with these assumptions in mind that the book proceeds, offering a progressive vision of solidarity in spite of the countervailing tendencies that stand in the way of complete control in social change and final answers on what solidarity ought to mean.

The challenges to theorising and grounding solidarity

It is tempting to conclude that the prevalence of contradictory assumptions around solidarity is a factor of insufficient evidence documenting the effects of different interventions designed to accommodate cultural diversity. From this perspective, disputes over the conditions of solidarity could be settled with further empirical research that compares policies within and across societies and establishes which ones have most successfully contributed to the deepening of bonds between diverse citizens. However, such research already exists, and does so in relative abundance.[1] It has nevertheless failed to provide widely sanctioned and generally agreed upon answers to the expansion of solidarity. The reasons for this are three-fold, each of which remains a challenge scholarship must meet.

First, solidarity is a contingent phenomenon. The causes of its decline are likely to be different from one society to the next. Correspondingly, its regeneration may not always presuppose the same course of action. This context dependence means there are limits to what lessons can be drawn from past experience to guide future attempts towards the realisation of solidarity. Consider consociational arrangements. They might have been pivotal in the management and eventual elimination of deep social cleavages in Western Europe last century. But they have not achieved anywhere near the level of success outside that context since, as attested by various failed and struggling consociations that have followed. Similarly, nationalism might have been a powerful unifying force in the eighteenth century, turning peasants into Frenchmen and Sardinians into Italians. Yet it has also functioned as a powerful dividing force in a number of notable contemporary cases, stimulating secessionist movements and political violence as minorities resist, rather than submit to, the national ideology cast over them (e.g., Kurds in Turkey, Albanians in Kosovo, Albanians in Macedonia, Tamils in Sri Lanka, Muslims in Thailand, Corsicans in France, and so on).

Clearly, there is a multiplicity of causally interlocked historical, cultural, socio-economic and geopolitical factors that influence how ethnic groups relate to one another. As these factors vary from one context to the next, so too will the success of any intervention chosen to render difficult circumstances more amenable to solidarity. The multifactor dimension to solidarity explains why comparative data remains so open to competing interpretations and why the advocacy of institutional reform remains such a vexed topic. Historical specificity between cases ensures a degree of uncertainty remains over what are associations between causes and effects. This leaves open an explanatory vacuum in which analysts squabble over the merits of assumptions and strategies for solidarity.

Second, solidarity is not only context dependent; the pathways for its generation are complex. Policies intended to defuse conflict and generate bonds of reciprocity do not always follow a linear pattern of causes and effects, but can sometimes produce impacts that are unforeseen and unwelcome. This non-linearity has been

well documented through affirmative action programmes. While they were originally introduced to address inequalities stemming from prior or current discrimination by guaranteeing inclusion in the public service, education and the economic sector, affirmative action policies sometimes came with the unanticipated and unwanted baggage of stigmatisation, as quotas designed to equalise representation marked out targeted groups as undeserving recipients of state largesse in the eyes of the wider population (Fraser 1995). Moreover, such policies also worked to further disadvantage marginalised citizens excluded from their benefits. These non-beneficiaries of affirmative action had to compete for the finite social goods being pre-allocated to members of another group, further skewing opportunity structures against their identities.[2]

The extent to which stigmatisation, heighted social divisions or any other unwanted behavioural shift will follow a given application of affirmative action (or indeed other group-based entitlements) cannot be straightforwardly determined with reference to past events. Such policy interventions will always carry a measure of unpredictability. They embody complex cause and effect relations, rather than simply stable linear ones, making it impossible to model the future course of events with absolute precision (Geyer 2003; Little 2012).

The third, and perhaps the most critical, challenge facing the study of solidarity relates to the phenomenon's paradoxical nature. We have already witnessed that solidarity, at its most basic, involves an orientation of mutual answerability. It therefore contains joint demands of accountability and autonomy, which by their very nature, pull in opposite directions. The accountability dimension of solidarity is the requirement that people think and act with a sensitivity to the interests of others. The autonomy dimension is the requirement that respect is being shown for people's integrity and chosen ways of life as they are called upon to show deference to others. Thus, an overzealous desire to have people account for the interests of others can easily become an encroachment on people's freedom to pursue their chosen life-plans. The Jacobin state's uncompromising goal of creating a nation of equals is one such example. Individuals were forced to set aside their particular