

WHAT IT IS ABOUT

*The Strains of Commitments*¹ is an interesting attempt to deal with the perceived tension between solidarity and diversity in modern societies. There is an uncomfortable cognitive dissonance between the intuition that a just society cannot survive without a shared belief in some 'we', and the belief that such disposition could have oppressive effects on minorities and outsiders. The fear is that notional identities are being weakened, without being replaced by a cosmopolitan ideal capable to supply enough solidarity to sustain just institutions. With this aim in mind, Keith Banting and Will Kymlicka bring together political philosophers and social scientists to reflect on the multiple facets of this problem with their different contributions. The scientific core of the book revolves around three sets of questions: first, what solidarity is and why it is important, second to what extent (if at all) increasing diversity undermines solidarity, third how solidarity can be politically activated.

SOLIDARITY THROUGH TIME

The concept of Solidarity has a long heritage, and has been used in different senses. Many key political concepts (like justice, equality or liberty) suffer

¹ Review of K. Banting and W. Kymlicka (eds), *The Strains of Commitments: The political sources of solidarity in diverse societies*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2017.

from similar vagueness, yet they often do so because many people have tried to think about them and come up with different conclusions. If anything, solidarity suffers from the opposite problem: it has been mostly undertheorized. Solidarity is «sometimes used as a nebulous concept that is not defined at all» (Stjernø 2009, 2), and indeed it appears undertheorized in sociology (Alexander 2014; Reynolds 2014, 1), in political science (Stjernø 2009, 20) and in moral and political philosophy (Bayertz 1999, 4; Scholz 2008, 10). This lack of interest may derive from the fact that it has mostly been «confined to the realm of rhetoric» (Wilde 2007, 171) and its theoretical understanding is consequently «overshadowed by its appellative function» (Bayertz 1999, 4). Another reason may be that its intuitive meaning seems incompatible with the conception of «prototypically modern relationships as either vertical or atomized» (Alexander 2014, 303), which leaves no room for solidarity as a horizontal relation among individuals.

The history of the idea of solidarity is thus quite conflicted. Reviewing many conceptions of solidarity, Stjernø concludes that «we are forced to admit that there is a high degree of variation within each variable and that each combination changes the meaning of the concept being studied» (2009, 89). The concept can be traced back to roman law, where the expression '*Obligatio in Solidum*' referred to the obligation to repay the debts of your relatives in full. The original meaning of solidarity is this feeling of belonging with others, which acts as an «inner cement holding together a society» (Bayertz 1999, 9). It stands in opposition to what has been called '*fluidarity*', i.e. a «lack of stable social relationship or bonds or connections, an absence of community or fellow-feeling» (Lukes 1999). Solidarity in this sense is partially grounded on «an interest in the integrity of a shared form of life that includes one's own well-being» (Habermas 2015, 23), which gradually becomes ethically charged referring to the feeling of «being linked in one moral community» (Bayertz 1999), and being 'co-responsible' for the actions and desires, faults and merits of each other (Henckmann 1998, 131). Solidarity does not imply that all should have the same goal, but that they are willing to follow the group regardless of if they agree with its current aims (Kolars 2012).

While the concept of solidarity has a millennial story, the term solidarity is typically modern. It has been invented and employed by Pierre Leroux (1840) precisely in opposition to the universal Christian notion of charity. With solidarity, the subjective and spontaneous dimension of caring for others is abandoned in favour of an institutional design, which can provide more

efficiently for those in need, within the national boundaries. As such, it can be traced back to the concept of national fraternity in the French revolution, and has been formalized in article 21 of the Declaration of Human Rights of 1739 as the «holy duty to support the unfortunate members of society». Modern solidarity has thus become linked to the ‘redistribution of resources in favour of those in need’ (Bayertz 1999) and the national welfare state.

DEFINING SOLIDARITY

Given solidarity’s lack of theorization and its variegated history, it is an important merit of Banting’s and Kymlicka’s book to narrow down solidarity’s definition, and establish a point of reference for future academic scholars. Solidarity is restricted to (1) an attitude, which is (2) political and (3) bounded.

First, solidarity is attitudinal. It refers to «set of feelings» (Parijs 2004, 375) involving «attitudes of mutual acceptance, cooperation and mutual support» (Banting and Kymlicka 2017, 3). Cooperation is seen as both valuable and difficult, because everybody might otherwise be tempted to benefit without paying a price. The evocative Rawlsian expression «strains of commitment» (Rawls 1971, 126), which gives the book its name, is meant to represent precisely the costs that cooperation entails. The assumption is that self-interest alone is insufficient to sustain political cooperation, particularly under conditions of diversity, and thus solidarity as a set of feelings that motivate people to pay the costs of cooperation seems necessary. Others do not follow the same premise, and either conceive solidarity as a rational interest (Coleman 1990, 390; Burelli 2016) or as a set of policies (Rothstein 2017). However, the ground of this attitude can be both moral feeling or self-interest, as the authors are convinced that «any plausible account is likely to combine them in various ways» (Banting and Kymlicka 2017, 8). This allows for an approach to solidarity which can be both bottom up, mobilizing feelings of shared membership to create redistributive institutions (Marshall 1949), and a top-down, where these feelings are the intended outcome of elite-driven reforms (Ferrera 2014). Moreover, solidarity attitudes are qualified in this book along three lines, following Thomas Humphrey Marshall’s theory of citizenship (1949): civic solidarity, democratic solidarity and redistributive solidarity. While many scholars conceive solidarity exclusively in redistrib-

utive terms, Kymlicka and Banting choose to offer a richer understanding, at the price of some clarity. Civic solidarity involves a commitment to live together in peace, and involves a degree of mutual tolerance for diversity. Democratic solidarity involves support for human rights and political equality, as well as democratic institutions.

Secondly, solidarity is societal. It is taken to refer to feelings towards the broad political community. Banting and Kymlicka here follow the tradition of Emile Durkheim (1984) and view it as «glue that binds society and prevents it from disintegrating» (Banting and Kymlicka 2017, 5). They oppose here many sociologists who, following Weber and Marx, talk of solidarity at the meso-level of social movements and groups (Stjernø 2009). Yet this specification is also helpful insofar as it sharpens the focus. Indeed, it is true that common feelings of being linked together in one community can emerge within smaller groups dedicated to a cause: the revolution in France and the communist movements were important historical examples of this dynamic, which extends to today's social groups. Thus, one could raise the issue of solidarity in these contexts. However, there is a graver importance of solidarity at the political level, because the entrance in the political institution is not voluntary as in any social group, and the unravelling of political institutions caused by lack of solidarity are more catastrophic than the withering away of any social movement.

Thirdly, solidarity is bounded: it only applies within a specific group, which is smaller than the whole world. This means that contrary to cosmopolitans' hope, universal solidarity does not seem to be an option (although Van Parijs in the last part of the book challenges this pessimistic conclusion). While justice among members is egalitarian, justice towards strangers is only humanitarian. All existing welfare states rely on bounded solidarity, and removing the distinction between insiders and outsiders risks levelling down social justice for insiders. Strong bonds of solidarity always seem to have an exclusionary dimension, and define a community by distinguishing neatly from others who do not belong to it. As Richard Rorty puts it: «our sense of solidarity is strongest when those with whom solidarity is expressed are thought of as 'one of us', where 'us' means something smaller and more local than the human race» (Rorty 1989, 191). This divisive side of solidarity is often justified by linking it to reciprocity (Sangiovanni 2015): particular mutual ties bind us insofar as we are towards some shared aim (either working together towards a specific goal, like in a social movement, or simply

towards establishing the reinforced cooperation of state society). The problem of boundaries is in this book linked to diversity, which is often assumed to be inversely related to solidarity. Banting and Kymlicka are not entirely pessimistic and argue that empirical evidence on this is inconclusive (Van der Meer and Tolsma 2014; Schaeffer 2013) or small (Stichnoth and Van der Straeten 2013). Thus, they concede that the popular perception of solidarity erosion is to a degree exaggerated as attitude for tolerance and inclusion are not lower than 20 or 40 years ago. However, they agree with the analysis of many contribution of this volume that with regards to the redistributive dimension of solidarity, one can perceive some sensible erosion. While universal liberal values seem sufficient to support civic and democratic solidarity, empirical evidence suggests that redistributive solidarity requires thicker communal feelings.

Banting and Kymlicka, thus, redefine solidarity by viewing it as «attitudinal in nature and societal in scope» and acknowledge its relevance on the basis of its 'functional role in motivating compliance with the demands of justice' (Banting and Kymlicka 2017, 6-7). Therefore, redistributive solidarity fulfils its task only if it is somewhat bounded.

WHY IT MATTERS

The question of how to sustain solidarity within a liberal democracy is not only salient, but particularly difficult because liberal democratic principles undermine two historical vehicles of political solidarity: national identity and religion.

According to the liberal consensus, sharing political principles of democratic justice is enough to sustain solidarity, regardless of the reasonable pluralism about our ideas of the good life (Rawls 1971). However, the problem with this view is that these values are 'nationally anonymous' (Joppke 2004, 253), and as such they cannot account for the bounded nature of redistributive solidarity, but inevitably drift towards cosmopolitanism.

Constitutional patriotism (Habermas 1997, 491-515; 1998, 105-154) and republican accounts (Pettit 1997) solve the puzzle by arguing that solidarity is generated by taking active part in democratic life, which creates a sense of common destiny and mutual respect. However, empirical evidence does not register any correlation between the act of voting and solidarity dis-

positions (Mansbridge 2003; Segall 2005). Even more gravely, solidarity dispositions were shaped by nation states before they developed democratic institutions (Canovan 1996), therefore it is difficult to claim that they depend on it. Indeed, many classic defences of the transition from monarchy to democracy were based on the idea of national self-determination.

However, basing solidarity on nationality is today a risky endeavour, insofar as in its historical interpretation remains highly exclusionary of immigrants and minorities. The normative costs are very high, from a liberal perspective.

For this reason, liberal nationalists (Miller 1995) are those who attempt to follow a third way between classical liberalism, which is adequately thin but insufficient to motivate solidarity, and nationalism, which can ground solidarity but at an excessive normative price. They claim that not every feature of a national culture is exclusionary: while a common bloodline certainly is, a shared language or knowledge of history may not be.

The book therefore captures a vital worry for contemporary liberal scholarship, and promises to shed some light on it by investigating both its theoretical framework and its empirical soundness. Additionally, this work evidently intersects many concerns of current democratic citizens, whose political systems are now polarized around a strong cleavage between opening and closure to different cultures.

HOW IT IS STRUCTURED

The first part of the volume is the most theoretical, and focuses on the philosophical grounding of solidarity, clarifying under what conditions and for which reasons solidarity is desirable.

David Miller opens the first part with an exploration of the value and sources of solidarity. He identifies it as a feeling that sustains practices and institutions of equality and inclusion. Miller characterizes solidarity in four ways: a sense of groupness, of mutual concern, of collective responsibility, and of equality. He then discusses five competing accounts on how solidarity can be sustained: expanding circles; interdependence; associational; national identity; and institutional. Yet instead of arguing in favour of the national identity, as his previous work may have suggested (Miller 1995), he concludes that none of them is sufficient on its own.

Rainer Bauböck argues instead that the three different types of solidarity (civic, democratic and redistributive) should be associated with different levels of political communities: the local level fits civic solidarity, the national level sustains redistributive solidarity and the regional level should support democratic solidarity (the EU being an example of this). Yet, Bauböck also prudently acknowledges that this potential to expand solidarity below and above the state needs to be politically activated, in order to be efficacious, and is not necessarily stable.

Jacob Levy closes the first section critically examining a key premise of the book: the need for solidarity. He argues that we cannot have bounded solidarity, because current societies are too diverse, and fellow citizens are ‘moral strangers to each other, united only by the shared circumstances of inhabiting a common political jurisdiction’ (Levy 2017, 108). Additionally, we should not want solidarity, because the underlying ideology of unity can be dangerous and oppressive. Finally, we do not need solidarity because ‘just institutions are likely to arise or be stable out of nothing but calculative self-interest’ (Levy 2017, 121).

The second section of the book presents empirical analyses of the sources of solidarity in current modern societies, and particularly inquires how much these are impacted by diversity.

Céline Teney and Marc Helbling test the intuition that there is a contemporary divide between cosmopolitan elites, who identify as citizens of the world and are more tolerant of diversity but less favourable to redistributive solidarity, and masses, who cling to national redistributive solidarity but are less open towards outsiders. In this study, German elites are found not to conform to this view: while it is the case that they are more tolerant, this does not negatively impact their inclination towards redistribution. How far this conclusion can be generalized to other countries is at least uncertain, though.

Richard Johnston, Matthew Wright, Stuart Soroka and Jack Citrin distinguish between thin national patriotism or pride and thick nationalism. Their argument suggests that the form of national identity matters a lot for its possibly exclusionary dimension (it can be more aggressive or more inclusive), and this is continuously shaped and steered by elite discourse and by institutions. This evidence could provide an empirical grounding for the liberal nationalist middle ground.

Tim Reeskens and Wim van Oorschot conclude the second part by investigating the possibility of citizenship as an alternative source of solidarity. Viewing other as fellow citizens might have a similar effect than viewing

them as fellow national: both are boundary making concepts, yet citizenship is more open and tolerant of newcomers.

The third and last section of the book explores the way feelings of solidarity are activated and mobilized in public debate. The following comments converge in emphasizing a weakening of inclusive solidarity and the rise of exclusive solidarity.

Peter Hall argues that the identification between solidarity feelings and national identity is oversimplified, because this is just one dimension of the wider cultural imaginaries shaped by political actors. Yet, he worries that those political actors who built solidaristic policy regimes (social democratic parties and trade unions) are now weakened to the point that they can no longer sustain this narrative, let alone expand it.

Zoe Lefkofridi and Elie Michel examine the relation between solidarity and the new populist 'radical right'. They argue that their position is best described as 'left authoritarian', because it supports redistributive solidarity while being hostile towards diversity. This proves to be an effective combination, which is gaining political support in many countries.

Edward Koning inquires whether these parties are the cause or the effect of anti-immigration sentiments, with reference to the particular context Netherlands 2002 election. His analysis suggests that the sudden rise of the Pim Fortuyn List anti-immigration party did not affect the number of people against immigration, but did succeed in making this topic more salient in their voting behaviour.

Bo Rothstein (2017) argues that solidarity as a feeling is not threatened by the diversity of cultural views per se. While it may seem so, a more accurate analysis shows that the true casual factor is a lack of social trust, which is often, but not always, associated with diversity. In fact, wherever welfare institutions are efficient, there is enough social trust to overcome diffidence towards diversity. Rothstein concludes by suggesting that efficient welfare institutions will be able to engender their own political consensus, even under conditions of diversity.

Irene Bloemraad argues that multiculturalism is a realistic goal, because internal diversity has few if any direct effects on redistributive solidarity and indirect effects are too remote to identify. However, external immigrants are very often excluded by this redistributive solidarity. Countries that instituted more inclusive policies towards immigrants, like Canada or the USA, have done so unintentionally by satisfying claims of internal minorities.

Karin Borevi claims that there are different ‘philosophies of integration’ in each country. Interestingly, Danish elites assume a society centric view, that societal cohesion is a precondition of a stable welfare state, while Swedish elites view the welfare state as an engine to generate social thrust. She argues that these elites assume dissimilar positions because of the different history of their own nation-state building.

Patrick Loobuyck and Dave Sinardet study the relation between solidarity and identity in Belgium, finding that three national identities exist there (Fleming, Wallon, and pan-Belgian). While the pan-Belgian identity may be appropriately thin not to compromise diversity, the degree to which it can sustain redistributive solidarity is uncertain. Belgium, they conclude, is the perfect test case to investigate how far diversity can be pushed without affecting solidarity and reversing the stability it provides.

Contrary to the previous pessimistic analysis, the book closes with some optimistic reflections from Philippe Van Parijs, who imagines a future under a more open solidarity. The closure in the historical process that generated the welfare state through «bounding, bonding and binding» (Ferrera 2017, 47) will slowly fade away when confronted with the increased globalization and diversity of modern times. Yet, this need not end in an era of unsolidaristic cosmopolitanism. Van Parijs identifies a possible way out in the civilizing force of deliberative democracy, understood as the need to justify the use of power to all those subjected to it, regardless of how far they are situated. Such a transnational justificatory community would help advance the demands of justice «even under conditions in which enhanced diversity fragilizes solidarity» (Van Parijs 2017, 425). One is left wondering, however, if the existence of such a community does not require the solidarity dispositions that is intended to render irrelevant.

CLOSING REMARKS

The same tension between diversity and unity, aptly diagnosed within liberal societies, is present in this book, which is a successful attempt at multicultural literature’. The different perspectives result in an extraordinary rich kaleidoscopic outlook. As it often happens with collected works, the result is however inconsistent on occasions. As I have previously remarked, Levy and Van Parijs among others expose views in sharp contrast with some of

the common assumption behind Banting and Kymlicka's intent. The reader will thus be required to evaluate conflicting accounts and superimpose his own coherence on a variegated book, but those so inclined will find a well of insightful arguments and data to mine.

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