

Cluster 4 Summary - Key Elements

When we started in our cluster we looked back at the brainstorming pieces that were written prior to building the clusters. In doing so we tried to refer also to "solidarity".

In our exchange we came across (or used) a number of **reoccurring motifs/topics**. These are here summarised not in the form of propositions, rather in the form of questions:

- What does 'doing solidarity' consist of? There are terms that relate conceptually to solidarity, but are they the same: help, support, empathy, agreement, cooperation, comradery, togetherness, charity?
- Are there different notions of solidarity in different socio-historical contexts (along cultural, national lines)?
- What are the social units of/for solidarity? (Family?, Nation?, Society at large?, Trade Union?, Social Movements?)
- How does solidarity relate to social clefs and divisions? Is solidarity possible between people who belong to different units?
- How does solidarity relate to concepts (and acts of) loyalty, obligation, responsibility?
- What is the specific role of children when it comes to solidarity?
- What is the role of death in relation to solidarity? (Is it not a case that death is a natural consequence of life and therefore it is not a tragedy if people who have reached their age of dying actually die? There are in this also questions of the value of life, what it consists of, dignity in living [and dying], autonomy.)
- How to mediate between individual and collective interests?
- What is the basis for solidarity? Shared visions? Shared histories? Shared experiences? How can experiences be shared at all?
- Is solidarity a feeling, an act, a relationship?
- What role do images play in triggering solidarity (as a feeling, or as an act)?

We did not identify a single 'guiding question' (or research question) yet. Accordingly we transferred to topic (solidarity) into a trigger by simply referring it onto the plane of lived experience. The **trigger** read:

A time when I gave/received/experienced solidarity.

This formulation reflected our discussion in which we found that solidarity may include elements of giving and receiving (from one party to another), but there may also be reciprocity, mutuality that might extend beyond the giver/receiver duality.

The texts that were written referred to a number of contexts:

A wedding against family resistance

The occupation of a vacant building by a communitarian group in bid of a settlement project

Thinking about moments of embarrassment when acting/or not acting in solidarity

Taking initiative to organise transport for people stranded after a day at the beach

Supporting refugees in a camp

Starting a support network

*

Comparing experiences in summer camps

Doing Collective Memory Work

A family reunion

Supporting a refugee by offering accommodation

Supporting the occupation of a factory by ordering a collectively produced bike

The first six were the texts that we used for analysis. Each of them was written by a different author. The work we did on/with the six texts is shown in detail in the extensive documentation. It shall not be repeated here. Instead we are going to move beyond the text analyses, as we did in our subsequent discussion.

Outcomes - (intermediate) results

A first observation is that our texts do not relate to work situations (with one possible exception, occupied factory). This is noteworthy against a background of the history of the term "solidarity". The term has been closely associated with the labour movement in the course of industrialisation. In our memory texts we refer instead to contexts like family, public services, migration, housing policies.

While (and after) working with the texts we extended the motifs/topics that came up in our initial discussion. Here is an overview with some explanatory remarks:

- **Concepts - Solidarity, help, support, charity**

We did not come to a conclusion (yet) as to the exact (if there is any exact) differences, overlaps between these concepts. We found that when we were talking about solidarity as a concept we assumed that there is a surplus meaning in it that goes beyond the other concepts (help, support, charity). We were yet struggling to find an expression that captures this surplus value accurately. We thought of shared vision as a possible way of explanation. Yet, we realise that in our stories shared visions are at best implicit, but not explicitly mentioned (with the exception of the communitarian settlement project). The acts of solidarity are helpful to others, they support them in achieving a certain (material) outcome. The acts can also be helpful to oneself, similarly on a material level (a crowd stranded at the beach eventually gets home after one person triggers a collective action to organise a public bus service; a support group is established that deals with a problem that also affects the instigator; etc.).

In that sense the acts of solidarity are in fact supportive, helpful, in some cases also charitable, and they refer to a tripartite relationship (A-B-C). For solidarity to happen it needs:

- A: a protagonist (who has a problem)
- B: an antagonist (who causes the problem)

- C: a solidarity provider (who acts in support of the protagonist)

Whereby the antagonist can be a person, a structure, a natural force.

The question then is still, why should we talk of support, help, charity in some cases, and of solidarity in other cases?

It seems we cannot solve this if we abstract from the political sphere in which a given act is embedded.

It may also be a case that the understanding of the character of an act is different even amongst two parties involved. The refugee who needs a guide to safely cross a border, and the guide who brings the refugee safely across the border may have a different interpretation of this act. (They may as well have a similar one, obviously ...) One may see it as an act of solidarity, the other may see it as an act of help.

- **Motivation**

We thought about the motivation(s) for people to act in solidarity. In this context we came across the motifs of experience, vision, exchange, interests.

- **Experience**

We struggled with the term experience. On the one side it seems so clear ("I have experienced this, that or the other ..." - "me, too" ...), but looking closer it is not possible to have exactly the same experience as someone else. That would only be possible if I was in the skin of the other, but I am not. Hence my experience is always unique.

At the same time there are shared elements in it, I face similar structures. I need a passport to cross a border, just like you. I apply for it, you too. We get our passport by post.

I need a passport to cross a border, just like you. I apply for it, you too. I get mine by post.

You have to undergo an interrogation as to your family descendance, after which you get the passport handed out.

I need a passport to cross a border, just like you. I apply for it, you too. You have to undergo an interrogation as to your family descendance, after which you get the passport handed out.

I am told I can't get a passport because I have no relatives in the country at all.

We faced similar structures, did we have the same experience?

And, what exactly is the experience? To materialise the experience needs acts, it needs a location, I am sitting in my kitchen to fill in the passport application form. This is a different experience to you sitting on train ticking boxes on a screen online. I cannot understand the language on the passport application form, I get my son to translate it for me. You can read it perfectly. We both face similar structures. We both apply for a passport. Do we have the same experience?

Etc.

The point here is the concept of "experience" as the trigger factor for acts of solidarity. On the one hand we completely understand it - on the other hand it is questionable.

- **Vision, image/s**

Acts of solidarity obviously require certain *imagined* allegiances (commonalities, shared visions ...) on the side of the actors. Imagined however is not to be understood as the same as fictional. It is the image as inner representation that it relates to - irrespective at first on what basis that image is created. It may in fact be based on a fictional idea, it may also be based on a material reality. The point is that without the image there cannot be an act of solidarity.

In our stories there was only limited information about the images, visions that trigger the acts described. An interesting aspect that came up in one of the stories was the idea that it is possible for oneself to generate a feeling of solidarity (or also not). This is complex. You generate a feeling, but how do you do that. If a feeling is just a sensual impression I go out the door and get a shiver because it's chilly. I generate a feeling very easily. But that is not

what is meant there. The feeling connects to an image. How do I generate the feeling without having the image? But then, whose image is it and where does it come from? And in this vein also, how much are myths part of what determines our actions? In the dominant narratives in any given unit there are myths of unity that (once investigated closer) are easily dismantled for their lack of a real basis. These myths can be established as "the story to re-tell", in which the (mythical) "we" of the given unit is recalled/reconstructed; they are also enacted in ritual manifestations, celebrations and even routines (wearing the school uniform as a sign of belonging, whether you want it or not ...).

This is not restricted to reactionary, backwards orientated political groups, or to the "ruling class" in the political or economic arena/s (nation-state or multi-national companies). We find the principle on all levels of society, including the left, trade unions, revolutionary movements, etc.

This brings us back to our own constructions. It connects closely to CMW, what images do we construct in and for ourselves, and what are the influences that make us generate this particular image and not another one?

In collectives images play a role, movements have their symbols. We have only scratched the surface of this discussion in our group. It would be worth further examination.

Also, the proposition that it is possible to generate a feeling of solidarity also suggests that solidarity is (or at least can be) something that one feels - in contrast (or addition) to acting. The supporters of the refugee camp bring a gas cylinder to a family who lives in a tent. The family is able to cook a meal. Does it matter, whether the supporters have a feeling of solidarity when they source the gas cylinder?

- **Exchange / Interests**

Also in this context we discovered that in the interactions that are part of our stories there is an element of exchange. A couple rents accommodation in a house. They pay rent. The house owners give them their bed to sleep in because they don't have one themselves yet. The house owners attend the wedding of the couple albeit that it is a christian wedding and the house owners are muslims. The couple gives the wedding dress to the house owners as a present. Paying rent starts the exchange, it is a business transaction. Yet, the exchange expands into further areas, albeit that there is no business obligation for it.

The family in the tent in the refugee camp receives the gas cylinder from the supporters. In turn the family invites the supporters to a meal.

Are these acts of solidarity, acts of help, acts of support? Does it actually matter how the acts are labelled? At any rate we note that there is an element of exchange in it.

Giving/Taking is reciprocated.

- **Individual and Collective - Interests**

In our stories there were no scenes from mass gatherings (apart from one story where the author does actually *not* participate in it). We wrote about smaller scale events instead.

We noted that in some stories there was one person who was an individual actor, but when the group in solidarity came to the foreground, collective interests took over and replaced individual agency.

This is a motif that is important also when it comes to the question of 'How to do solidarity'. There may be spontaneous acts, triggered by individual agency (blocking the exit of a bus, calling others to enter the bus, thus "forcing" the driver to take them all home). But there are other acts that are culmination of establishing support structures (infrastructure) and reliability amongst a collective. The latter takes a lot of work. It also has the potential to be more than anecdotal.

This may be called the question of organising.

- **Organising - Distribution of labour - Collectivity and social positioning**

However, we find that the question of organising is implied in our stories, but it is hardly discussed.

And with the question of organised solidarity (solidarity exercised/enacted by 'organisations' - if we accept such a terminology for the moment) there comes the question of internal distribution of labour, roles in organisations and how they relate back to the aims (solidarity) of an organisation. Does solidarity exclude leadership?

We found a video together with the 'Solidarity Song' in which coal-workers march in a demonstration. Their leaders clearly stand out in the front row. Just before a confrontation with police starts another row of workers moves to the front, thus confronting police batons while the leaders are in the second row.

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FTMfqwDXUN4>)

Hence the question about internal structures, discipline, obeying orders.

We found that in our stories whenever collectivity appeared, it was in rather harmonic fashion. That however is questionable when compared to our own experiences in groups. There are always internal struggles (about all sorts of things, division of labour, hierarchies, aims, strategied ...). This brings up the question:

Why do these struggles not feature when we remember stories of solidarity?

In movements, in parties, in trade unions, in groups that are organised people come from different social positions (positioning). A support group for Black Lives Matter in any large European city will most likely be made up of people with different skin colour/s, different passports (nationalities), different class backgrounds, male, female, intergenerational etc. For any group - and for any movement - it is always a matter to find a way to negotiate different social positioning. It becomes a particular matter of interest in a group in which the social clefs that are identified as the problem in the tripartite A-B-C model (as above) are also present in the group/movement itself. How can collectivity be established then? What does in-group-solidarity in this case actually mean?

- **Units/Agencies**

A first observation in the brainstorming pieces was that families played a prominent role (this was about 'Corona times').

In our stories and the ensuing discussions we now found that different structural units/aggregations are actually present: family, nation, religious groups, political groups. In everyday situations the different units can be played out against each other. If solidarity in one unit/aggregation is not available, one can turn to another unit/aggregation. This can even allow for achieving a material aim in a giving historical situation via a unit/aggregation that one would oppose for political, cultural, normative reasons.

- **Voice**

Invariably to express solidarity someone has to raise their voice. Invariably to act in solidarity includes taking the position of actor.

But who can raise the voice legitimately? To express solidarity?

Whose acts in solidarity are seen as legitimate?

This circles back to the question of shared experience, authenticity, interests, motivations etc.

Expressions of solidarity, acts of solidarity can easily be de-legitimised, branded as hypocritical etc. (to the point of rendering them ineffective, or even firing back to the one who expressed/acted in solidarity) - a manoeuvre in which reference to social positioning, missing experience, suspected self-interest etc. can be used.

There is a difference between "speaking for someone" and "expressing solidarity with someone". Nevertheless, if the two are mixed up, and solidarity is refused by those on the 'receiving' end (the beneficiaries), it closes down potential avenues of support.

- **Victims**

Does solidarity need a victim?

In the proposition of the A-B-C model, A has a problem (caused by B ...).

But if the problem is a shared one, and people organise themselves in a group, and act in solidarity amongst themselves, are they victims? Not at all, if they ever were, by organising and acting they de-victimise themselves. Thus the in-group solidarity is an element of de-victimisation.

There is also a relation to the question of vulnerability.

Does it play a role in the willingness of others to act in solidarity if the beneficiary is (or is not) in a vulnerable position?

We realise that children play a role in our stories. Not clearly as beneficiaries of solidarity, but more as persons (groups) to be mentioned. They are part of the squatters group that occupies the vacant building, evoking an image of vulnerability. Which again brings up the question of images as trigger for action. We remembered the picture of Alan Kurdi, the child from Syria who drowned in the Mediterranean Sea, or also pictures of starving children in Yemen. These pictures do have an effect in that they 'go in on us'.

- **Embarrassment**

This is the most surprising element that came up in our cluster. We found that embarrassment played a role in a number of stories.

It can strike in relation to expressing an opinion (in solidarity with someone), or in relation to acting in a certain manner (in solidarity with someone), even in relation to one's own positioning and/or thoughts about positioning oneself.

Embarrassment is related to categories of right/wrong, it presupposes to be caught doing something 'wrong', or being 'in the wrong' (in the widest sense: acting foolishly, childish, unreasonable, not knowing, making mistake/s etc.). To be caught requires 'exposure', the 'wrong' has to be made visible, known. We can catch ourselves, or be caught by others.

Embarrassment also relies on our taking on the normative categories that are behind the qualifying statements of 'right and/or wrong'. We can't be embarrassed if we can't be bothered.

Why would the motif of embarrassment appear in stories about solidarity?

We did not and could not follow this path any further. It would lend itself to a 'dislocation' of the topic for a second round of writing.

Method - A brief reflection

We used a template for text-analysis that is very close to the suggestions by Frigga Haug in her 'rendering of the method'. The focus hereby is on a detailed (linguistic) deconstruction of the texts. We had some discussions in our cluster about the applicability of such an approach in groups with a culturally diverse composition. It was said, that particularly in cases where stories rely on a given (cultural) background to be understood certain aspects that are worked into a text may be lost to readers from other cultural backgrounds. This is a reoccurring question asked of the deconstructive approach in CMW. It may be something for a discussion to have on basis of experiences where it was tried and documented for its effects. (Maybe at the Symposium next year?)

As mentioned earlier, in our cluster we did not decide on one guiding (or 'research') question in our introductory discussion. Instead we transferred the topic of 'solidarity' simply onto the experiential level. Accordingly in our discussions during and after text-analyses we still went in a lot of directions, navigating our way through a vast field of interconnected elements (as is reflected in the summary above).

We did not yet identify an entry point into a new dimension in our discussion. What is meant by that can be explained with reference to a suggestion by Maria Jansson, Maria Wendt and Cecilia Ase. They refer to the term "displacement" that was used in the English translation of the early work of Frigga Haug and her group. There it is used to describe the step of moving from an abstract conceptual level (as in discussing, e.g. concepts of solidarity) to the concrete level of lived experience. Maria Jansson and colleagues pick up on the description in *Female Sexualisation* and further distinguish between two ways of 'displacement'. They call them "transfer"¹ and "dislocation". They use "transfer" for determining a trigger for writing the memory-scenes that brings the conceptual discussion onto the experiential level, as we have done in our cluster ("A time when I gave/received/experienced solidarity").

"Dislocation" means to move the writing topic into an area that is actually removed completely from the concept in question. In their example they mention a seminar on the topic of 'gender and nation', in which they dislocated the writing topic to "A memory of a flag". In our context it would mean, no longer referring to the term solidarity in the trigger while at the same time picking up on a connection to solidarity, e.g. as it came up in the preliminary engagement with the topic.

In the discussions in our cluster we still circled a lot around the question of 'what actually is solidarity, and what is not'? When comparing the notes of our initial discussion (based on the brainstorming pieces, as above) with the notes of our discussions during and after working with our memory-texts it is easy to see that we have expanded quite a lot in our discussions on motifs that were already present at the start. However, we did not break through yet into the territory where *new and unpredictable connections* were explored. There would be openings for it, and this would in fact be quite promising, take e.g. the surprising appearance of embarrassment in our stories (as one example, there may also be others ...).

If we were trying to move on from the abstract level of labelling acts (for what purpose?) and come to a better understanding of our own positioning not as a state of being but as acts in face of structures - hence opening up ways to renegotiate abilities to act - we might go into a next round of writing and analysis.

In our cluster we worked through all six texts. For our purposes here it was helpful, because it paid tribute to all of us as authors also. That was a good thing. However, we did so in a very short period of time. That was somehow disadvantageous. For advancing a topic in CMW it is not necessary to scrutinise every single story. Instead it may be sufficient to detect common threads, then concentrate on some of the stories and give more time to expanding the ensuing discussion/s. Should we return and reorganise for another round of writing/analysis this may be kept in mind as an option.

1 There looms confusion in all of this when it comes to terminology. Transfer can also be used as a term in the context of the deconstructive text-analysis, here referring to the 'topical transfer' at the end of the process of working with a particular memory-scene. At this point the results of the prior steps (empathic understanding, deconstruction, reconstruction) are 'transferred back' to the previous topical discussions.