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Abstract

The Emotional Foundations of International Solidarity: Injustice, Oppression and 'the Other'

The role of emotions in the analysis of solidarity has remained largely uncharted territory, although sociologists have suggested that "collective feelings" constitute the very glue of solidarity. In fact, there have been recent efforts to bring back emotions into the study of social movements. The main argument of the approach is simply that strongly felt emotions (also) matter due to their motivating role. However, the problem is that the term feeling is very ambiguous.

This paper addresses questions on how experiences of injustice, oppression and the 'other' form emotional bridges and barriers within the wider world, and asks if such emotions could be perceived as the very foundation of international solidarity? How is solidarity created into a meaningful idea worth sacrifices and emotional commitment? How is 'we' made relevant in the everyday lives of ordinary people, or how is a 'they' effectively constructed, menacing enough to struggle against? How is difference or similarity made meaningful on an emotional level when it comes to international solidarity?

As one moves beyond a solidarity expressed in the local or national context there is a risk that it becomes a form of "thin" solidarity that is merely based on exchange of information and donating money through worldwide networks. This "thin" solidarity should, according to Aefke Komter, be put into contrast to a "thick" solidarity that is founded on personal responsibility and emotional commitment towards persons within the own community. Can one, however, take for granted that the geographical proximity or distance of those who one expresses solidarity to makes the emotional commitment stronger or weaker?

Such question seem very timely in the context of globalisation and the ongoing transnationalisation processes.