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# Thinking Solidarity and Translation Together: Towards a New Definition of Solidarity

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## Abstract

David Hollinger (2006, p. 26) writes that ‘among the greatest issues of the twenty-first century is the problem of solidarity, the problem of willed affiliation’, while Judith Butler (Nagar et al., 2017, p. 113) aptly notes that ‘there can be no solidarity without translation, and certainly no global solidarity’. This article offers the first attempt to bring together scholarship on solidarity – a complex and ‘nebulous’ (Stjernø, 2005, p. 2) concept – from philosophy, political science and sociology, on the one hand, and from translation studies, on the other. I show that insights from translation studies supplement scholarship on solidarity in the other disciplines, where translation is largely overlooked; I also apply analytical categories from those disciplines to discussions of solidarity in translation studies and demonstrate the *de facto* different understandings of solidarity behind translation scholars’ use of the term, thus initiating a discipline-wide theoretical conversation on the concept.

Moreover, upon noticing that the role of translation in generating solidarity is not captured in any existing definition, I redefine solidarity and foreground translation as its catalyst. Namely, I consider solidarity *a sense of interconnection and commonality in difference, which is developed through caring, careful and inherently incomplete translation, promotes inclusion and impels action towards common good*. Translation is used here in a broad sense of a hermeneutic, interpersonal and semiotic practice. I also argue that the definition can inform our understanding of the interlingual translator as an active agent capable of forging and facilitating solidarity.

## Introduction

David Hollinger (2006, p. 26) writes that ‘among the greatest issues of the twenty-first century is the problem of solidarity, the problem of willed affiliation’, alluding to W. E. B. Du Bois’s statement that ‘the color line’ was the problem of the twentieth century. Solidarity emerges as a vital phenomenon today, as societies continue to become more diverse and people choose their solidarities, rather than relying solely on inherited bonds. Furthermore, growing interconnectedness makes questions of solidarity paramount: the global problems posed by the climate crisis and by the arguably unsustainable economic model of neoliberalism require globalised responses and new solidarities. As the discipline of translation studies engages with these and other critical contemporary issues, the concept of solidarity is also gaining importance in the field. In this article, I examine over a hundred of translation studies publications which refer to solidarity and find that the concept is used in diverse, at times disparate, ways, but is rarely defined. I therefore turn to wider scholarship on solidarity in the fields of philosophy, political science and sociology, to seek theorisations that would allow a more systematic reflection on the varied understandings of solidarity in translation studies. Work on solidarity in these other fields offers useful analytical categories, but hardly registers the relevance of translation to building and sustaining solidarity.

Seeing that solidarity remains under-theorised in translation studies and translation is largely absent from theorisations of solidarity elsewhere, I attempt to think translation and solidarity together and redefine solidarity. The definition I propose is the first to incorporate translation as key to solidarity development. Within the definition, and within this article, translation is understood in a broad sense of a hermeneutic process, ‘a meaning-making practice of human relationality’ (Ergun, 2020, p. 114) and a semiotic practice, which ‘involves the mediation of diffuse symbols, experiences, narratives and linguistic signs’ across modalities, language varieties and cultural spaces (Baker, 2016a, p. 7). The broad sense encompasses interlingual translation as a hermeneutic and semiotic practice that includes crossing a language boundary. The first section of the article analyses applications of ‘solidarity’ in translation studies, the second section examines debates on solidarity in philosophy, political science and sociology, while the third one presents my definition of solidarity and its possible applications.

## ‘Solidarity’ in Translation Studies

This section cannot do justice to all the multifaceted work in translation studies that refers to solidarity; the purpose, instead, is to analyse the main trends and examine the few definitions of solidarity present in the research. The discussion is based on a review of 111 translation studies publications which mention ‘solidarity’: the corpus comprises 47 chapters from reference works and 64 other publications. Reference works were included because they should be representative of disciplinary research trends; I used translation studies handbooks from John Benjamins, Oxford and Routledge (including c. thirty Routledge handbooks on specific areas of translation research) and the encyclopaedia of translation studies published by Routledge. I identified relevant chapters or entries by keyword searches in the online editions. Some chapters or entries thematise solidarity, while others employ the term more marginally, but to avoid arbitrary distinctions and gain a fuller overview, I included all uses. Furthermore, 64 other publications come from two sources: 34 were identified through the largest disciplinary database, Translation Studies Bibliography published by John Benjamins. I retrieved publications which include ‘solidarity’ in the (sub)title, keywords list or abstract, and not anywhere in the text – this sub-corpus therefore includes only texts that thematise solidarity more fully. The remaining 30 publications were identified through general databases (the British Library Catalogue and Google Scholar), references in other publications and my ongoing readings as a translation studies researcher. My interests in ‘cultural’ approaches to translation introduce some bias in this final sub-section of the corpus. Another limitation lies in including English-language texts only. Future analysis of non-Anglophone publications would show how the terms for ‘solidarity’ in other languages are used and theorised.

These limitations notwithstanding, the corpus overall collects representative material, and my analysis yields three main findings. Firstly, the concept of solidarity is gaining importance in the field. Although ‘solidarity’ has not yet earned an entry in a reference work or been central to a monograph, my corpus shows that the number of publications employing this concept has increased in recent years. Publication of this special issue, the first one in translation studies to feature solidarity, further confirms that interest in the concept is growing. The second finding is that translation scholars develop valuable insights on solidarity, which complement the scholarship on solidarity in other disciplines; at the same time, they rarely theorise ‘solidarity’ for its own sake and very rarely define it. Thirdly, ‘solidarity’ appears within the corpus in very diverse contexts. Within that diversity, I note two prominent trends

– feminist approaches to translation and work on translation activism – and two further, salient clusters of publications: on cosmopolitanism and migration and on professional identity. I discuss that research below.

## Feminist Approaches

References to women's solidarity appeared in texts by prominent feminist scholars already in the 1990s. Luise von Flotow (1997) discusses translating the idiosyncratic style of American feminist texts from the 1970s. She argues that the problem of translating wordplay and its culturally bound meanings cannot be solved by general assumptions of women's solidarity: it highlights differences in women's contexts and exposes 'issues of political solidarity' (von Flotow, 1997, p. 51) instead. In a seminal 1992 piece on the politics of translation, Gayatri Spivak (2012, p. 313) dismantles notions of a 'natural or narrative-historical solidarity' between women and argues for engaging with other women's differences through intimate acts of cultural translation. She addresses translators of 'Third world' women's writing and urges them to prepare well for their work, which includes developing nuanced linguistic knowledge and sensitivity to the author's style, and then to 'surrender' to the text in an 'erotic' fashion (Spivak, 2012, p. 315). This combination of cognitive care and affect informs the definition of solidarity I propose later.

Spivak also invites 'First World' feminists to try translation first hand. She warns against merely assuming a 'common experience' (Spivak 2012, p. 322) and suggests:

why not say, humbly and practically, my first obligation in understanding solidarity is to learn her mother-tongue. You will [...] feel the solidarity every day as you make the attempt to learn the language in which the other woman learnt to recognize reality at her mother's knee.

Utopian as a general yardstick, the proposal is a challenge to a monolingual mindset. As with written translation, solidarity here develops from the labour of learning – a labour of love – that heeds the links between linguistic constitution and gendered agency, indicated in the quotation through the matriarchal lineage of language acquisition. While Spivak (2012, p. 322) denounces ideas of 'common' femininity and its attendant expectations of easy translatability, she sees 'tracking *commonality* through responsible translation' (Spivak, 2012, p. 323; emphasis added) as a process that respects and reveals difference. I use the concept of commonality in my definition of solidarity.

The focus on differences between women's positionalities is now firmly embedded in feminist approaches to translation, which champion intersectionality and transnational feminist solidarity (Castro & Ergun, 2017a). In Olga Castro and Emek Ergun's influential work, solidarity is relevant for translation pedagogy and ethics. In a proposal for teaching feminist translation practice (Castro & Ergun, 2017b), the authors recommend that students read texts on women who construct solidarity across borders of caste, culture, religion etc. They suggest that students themselves try building solidarity across difference, e.g. sharing their life stories with fellow students. Furthermore, in her outline of feminist translation ethics, Ergun (2020, p. 119) asks how to translate in pursuit of solidarity, making solidarity one of the outcomes of ethical translation. The ethics include the guiding notions of loving perception, vulnerable hospitality and interconnectivity. Interconnectivity is inspired by Gloria Anzaldúa's (2002, p. 5) view that 'we are interconnected with all life' and is a notion I borrow for my definition of solidarity.



Overall, I agree with feminist scholars that attending to difference is paramount, but I also embrace the idea of salvaging commonalities and interconnections. Furthermore, I consent that the ‘tracking’ (Spivak, 2012, p. 323) of commonality and difference is made possible by translation, where the translator combines affect with cognitive care (Spivak, 2012, pp. 312–315). I also note that within this trend, solidarity is more often discussed as an attitude or relationship than action, although some studies do feature different forms of action (e.g. Abou Rached, 2020; Baldo, 2020). Besides, the scholars seem to rely on a tacit understanding of solidarity and do not define it.

## Activism

Compared to the feminist approaches, research on translation and activism that references solidarity systematically features action as a component of solidarity and includes specific definitions. Different definitions are proposed as scholars examine solidarity of different scope: solidarity between people in the world, as well as solidarity between and within activist movements. The more general solidarity is important, for example, to the vision of ECOS (Translators and Interpreters for Solidarity),<sup>1</sup> an association founded in 1998 in Granada, which hosted an innovative forum on Translation/ Interpreting and Social Activism in 2007. The group offered their skills for activities aligned with their vision of ‘a world which is more [...] solidarity-based’ (Sánchez Balsalobre et al., 2010, p. 14) and they define solidarity, after the philosopher Adela Cortina, as ‘the attitude of a person who shows interest in others and makes an effort towards their undertakings and issues’ (Cortina, 1997, p. 242; quoted in Sánchez Balsalobre et al., 2010, p. 9). This view of solidarity focuses on attitudes but invites action (‘making an effort’), which is similar to what I propose. However, Cortina’s definition could arguably cover cases of not just solidarity but also charity, advocacy, loyalty etc. My definition is more specific about the attitude and how it develops.

Research on translation and activism also zooms in on solidarity between movements. Pioneering studies by Mona Baker (2016a, 2016b, 2016c) employ the view of solidarity as *acompañamiento* (accompaniment), proposed by alterglobalist movements. Solidarity is conceived of as parallel but separate action, which ‘fosters diversity and decentralisation without creating or reinforcing hierarchical relationships between those helping and those-to-be-helped’ (Maeckelbergh, 2009, pp. 175–176). Creating connections between separate actions often requires translation and Baker (2016a, p. 3) demonstrates the activists’ ‘inevitable reliance on different forms of translation to create networks of solidarity’. She reports that actors of the 2011 Egyptian revolution built regional and intercontinental links through translation (Baker, 2016c, p. 9). For example, the activist Philip Rizk recalls that videos and solidarity messages from protesters in Greece and striking factory workers in Argentina were translated into Arabic, whereby translation helped to tie the Egyptian revolt with other protests of a global movement (Baker, 2016b, pp. 229–230). *Acompañamiento* effectively solves the problem of potential hierarchy and paternalism towards the beneficiaries of solidarity by removing direct support altogether. My definition allows cases of direct support, but minimises the risk of paternalism in other ways.

Links between movements are also thematised by Michela Baldo (2020, p. 39), who focuses on socialist solidarity aimed at countering capitalism. Baldo shows that members of Italian

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<sup>1</sup> For more information, see Sánchez Balsalobre et al. (2010) and visit <https://ecosteis.wordpress.com/> (last accessed 13 February 2024).

queer transfeminist circles attempt ‘alliances’ with other collectives to fight precarity, sexism, racism and fascism, but reports that some male activists in allied antifascist collectives perpetrated abuse against women and LGBTQ+ activists. This prompts a cautionary remark that ‘solidarity [...] should be problematised’ (Baldo, 2020, p. 41). I consider the question of inclusion pivotal for solidarity and incorporate it into my definition. Moreover, Baldo convincingly claims that translation can constitute ‘an activist act’ (Baldo, 2020, p. 40) and become ‘a form of solidarity’ (Baldo, 2020, p. 41; see also 2023). She helpfully backs this point with the idea that translation is performative, or a way of ‘doing things with words’ (Austin, 1962).

As well as world solidarity and solidarity between movements, scholars discuss solidarity *within* movements. To Maria Tymoczko (2014, p. 322), politically engaged translators benefit from group membership as ‘solidarity is generally more enabling than relying on the self alone in contesting powerful interests’. Yet, volunteer translators and interpreters are rarely seen as activists in their own right by fellow activists (Baker, 2016a, p. 2; Boéri, 2012; Delgado Luchner & Boéri, 2020, p. 253). Overall, I am inspired by the researchers’ focus on action (parallel action, performative translation) and an orientation towards action features in my definition. Yet, my view is more specific on the conditions of solidarity than that of ECOS (Sánchez Balsalobre et al., 2010) and broader, in terms of who is involved and how, than the definition adopted by Baker (2016a).

## Other Approaches

References to solidarity also appear in other, smaller clusters of publications. The two I find particularly salient concern cosmopolitanism and migration, as well as translators’ solidarity. In the research on cosmopolitanism and migration, Michael Cronin (2006, pp. 14–20) refers to solidarity when developing the concept of micro-cosmopolitanism. Like cosmopolitanism, micro-cosmopolitanism decouples identity from a community of origin, but it reclaims the stronger conception of solidarity associated with communal belonging. To Cronin (2006, p.19), ‘solidarities of various forms, whether based on religion, ethnicity, language, gender or political orientation, help people to make sense of the world’. Importantly, local communities are not homogeneous or insular: the micro-level exhibits as much complexity as the macro-level (Cronin, 2006, pp. 15–16), making intra-group solidarities sites of difference, and micro-cosmopolitanism ‘allows for the trans-local spread of [solidarity] relationships’ (Cronin, 2006, p. 19; for a compelling application of Cronin’s points see Maia, 2017). Another noteworthy study is Mattea Cussel’s (2023) examination of the relationships between migrants and non-migrants, which employs contrastive categories of ethnicity-based solidarity and ‘democratic’ solidarity (Brunkhorst, 2005) based on difference.

Solidarity is also evoked in discussions of the translation profession, usually in positive terms. For example, Duygu Tekgül (2017, p. 64) reports that translators experience ‘feelings of excitement [...] and solidarity’ following collaborative work. Scholars commend practitioners’ solidarity with persecuted translators and interpreters in conflict zones (Tekgül, 2017; Tryuk & Horváth, 2021, p. 297). Solidarity is also included in codes of conduct, for instance the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC) expects members to exhibit solidarity through knowledge-sharing and collegiality where e.g. the ‘off-mic’ interpreter in a booth supports the ‘on-mic’ colleague (Yin & Ren, 2020, p. 206). Yet, professional relationships are not without tensions; e.g. scholars report concerns about undercutting rates and increasing geographical distribution (Künzli, 2023). Furthermore, the

AIIC has been criticised for elitism and restrictive entry conditions by Jesús de Manuel Jerez (2010), an ECOS member involved in training interpreters in the spirit of social solidarity. This shows conflicting visions of solidarity as support within closed groups, on the one hand, and commitment to wider social issues, on the other.

Overall, the analysis demonstrates a considerable breadth of scholars' understanding of solidarity, from casual on-the-job collaboration in the booth, to local and trans-local belonging, to subtitling for activist collectives, to seeking commonality across difference in literary translation. Given the diversity of usage and scarcity of definitions, we might benefit from more dedicated theoretical engagement with the term. The next section turns towards theorisations of solidarity in other disciplines.

## ‘Solidarity’ in Philosophy, Political Science and Sociology

I read scholarship from philosophy, political science and sociology in search of categories that would help me analyse the different uses of ‘solidarity’ in translation studies. Engaging with the scholarship, I noticed that translation was absent from the theorising and decided to propose a new definition. Below I present helpful analytical categories and debates regarding solidarity, structured around questions which should be addressed in a definition: *who* is involved in solidarity and on what terms, *why* it manifests and *what* it actually consists of.<sup>2</sup>

### Scope of Solidarity, or the ‘Who’

Different scopes of solidarity are discussed in Kurtz Bayertz's (1999) oft-quoted article and its re-reading by Sally Scholz (2007): *human* solidarity encompasses all of humanity, *social* solidarity cements relations between members of a society or a group, *political* solidarity unites a group against injustice, while *civic* solidarity is concerned with redistribution of resources among citizens of a welfare state. At a more abstract level, I think that solidarity involves relations within groups and/or between groups. Some scholars, especially sociologists, theorise solidarity primarily as intra-group ties: ‘following Émile Durkheim, the “groupness” of any group may be referred to as its solidarity’ (Hechter, 1987, p. 8). Others argue that ‘solidarity addresses a “they” rather than a “we”’ (Vetlesen, 1994, p. 324) and see solidarity happening between groups or differently situated individuals (e.g. Gould, 2007; Mohanty, 2003; Rorty, 1989) or between people and animals (Harvey, 2007).

These distinctions are helpful for mapping the different approaches to ‘solidarity’ in translation studies: studies of activism tend to discuss political solidarity, although ECOS evoke human solidarity too, while professional solidarity focuses on intra-group ties. Feminist approaches and work on migration and cosmopolitanism escape easy categorisation as e.g. intersectional perspectives on women's solidarity (where gender similarity coexists with differences of class, ethnicity, religion, sexuality etc.) and Cronin's ideas around micro-cosmopolitanism (diversity at local levels, trans-local solidarities) make the boundary between intra- and inter-group bonds blurry. The definition I develop is of global, or human, solidarity working towards ever-greater inclusion, which requires envisioning an enlarged intra-group bond but also navigating inter-

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<sup>2</sup> My reading focused on influential discussions, mostly from monographs, edited volumes and special issues devoted to solidarity. For reasons of space, I reference selected readings, focusing on views which are influential, representative and/or relevant to my definition.

group and inter-personal divides to create and maintain the bond. My idea of solidarity therefore incorporates both inter- and intra-group orientations and, thanks to the insights from feminist approaches and studies of cosmopolitanism, I see the orientations as overlapping and drop them from my definition.

A discussion of who is involved in solidarity prompts the question, ‘on whose terms?’ Risks related to power asymmetries between parties include homogenising pressures on group members, exclusion of non-members from intra-group solidarities and paternalism towards the disadvantaged in inter-group solidarity. The first issue, how to forge solidarity respecting difference within the group, has been addressed by feminist scholars (also in translation studies, as discussed above). A solution I find particularly convincing is to approach the other through a form of non-appropriating affective stance, combined with solid knowledge of their circumstances. For instance, Sandra Bartky (2002) suggests approaching the other through sympathy, which she equates with the concept of *Mitgefühl*, or ‘feeling-with’, by the phenomenologist Max Scheler. Feeling-with avoids emotional merging or mere projection of one’s feelings onto the other (2002, p. 80) and rests on the non-identity of the feelings: ‘I commiserate with your sufferings and take joy in your joys but I experience neither your suffering nor your joy; they are *yours*’ (Bartky, 2002, p. 81; original emphasis). Moreover, an intuitive feeling-with can only succeed if one knows the other person’s circumstances, which involves linguistic and cultural knowledge (Bartky, 2002, pp. 80–81, 83). Drawing on Bartky, Jean Harvey (2007, p. 26) argues that the knowledge required for solidarity is more than information collected in a ‘detached data-gathering mode’. She advocates for ‘empathetic understanding’, which requires empathy combined with learning about others in a mode of openness and from their own accounts, where possible (Harvey, 2007, pp. 25–27). Another interesting approach is Jodi Dean’s (1996) ‘reflective’ solidarity, which invites one to reflect on their blind spots and imagine the perspective of others who are absent from interaction. To intuit an absent other, one should think beyond familiar worldviews and idioms and ‘develop adequate vocabularies’ (Dean, 1996, p. 172). To Dean (1996, p. 180), reflective solidarity can work because ‘it is possible, although it may be rare and transitory, to pass from one language to another’. She thus refers to translation and while the practicalities are not entirely clear (the partner or object of translation is only hypothetical), it is one of just two references to translation I found in my readings outside of translation studies.

The ideas by Bartky and Harvey inspire my definition, but in conjunction with research from feminist translation studies (Castro & Ergun, 2017b; Ergun, 2020; Spivak, 2012), which offers further insight into the actual processes of relating. My definition includes a process akin to ‘empathetic understanding’, but I consider the process a form translation. I believe that ‘understanding’ unhelpfully accentuates, firstly, the perspective of the subject seeking to comprehend an object and, secondly, the completeness of the process. ‘Translation’ can be used to the same effect, e.g. in George Steiner’s (1998) hermeneutic motion, but the term can also draw attention to the people involved in translation as subjects, not objects, and to the process in its open-endedness: a to-and-fro between the familiar and the unfamiliar. That tentative, iterative nature of translation is captured in Dean’s view of translation as transitory, and I stress it in my definition by calling translation ‘inherently incomplete.’

Examining who enters solidarity begs the question who does not. Some types of solidarity presuppose relatively rigid group boundaries, e.g. civic solidarity in a welfare state is limited to eligible residents. Political solidarities remain ‘oppositional’ (Scholz, 2007, p. 41) as adversaries are excluded. However, human solidarity, also referred to as moral (Harvey, 2007) or global (Wilde, 2013) solidarity, should be fully inclusive. Some scholars critique the



very concept, e.g. David Heyd (2007, pp. 119–120; see also Bayertz, 1999, pp. 8–9) considers it impossible to identify with all human beings because there is no shared value or cause at stake. Others envisage human solidarity, e.g. Lawrence Wilde and Richard Rorty, whose views I discuss below. I also think of solidarity at global level; *contra* Heyd, I consider tackling the climate crisis an all-human cause and, as I elaborate below, I consider happiness a shared human value. I recognise that identifying with all human beings at once seems impractical, but I envisage relating to certain people or groups *as* fellow human beings, not to entire humanity as such. I thus subscribe to Gould's (2007, p. 149) view of solidarities as overlapping networks which can grow towards global solidarity.

One more approach should be mentioned here because, unusually, it acknowledges questions of interlingual translation. Scholz (1998) discusses the philosopher Alain Locke's idea of cultures uniting in world solidarity, where artists, not politicians, come together across borders to spearhead and spread solidarity. Scholz draws attention to the problem of communication in world solidarity, where the question of language is not just cultural but also political. Locke's world solidarity, she concludes, would need to avoid imposing one language on all and would require a multi-lingual system and an appropriate theory of translation (Scholz, 1998, p. 8). This is the only reference to interlingual translation I find in all the sociological, philosophical and political scholarship on solidarity I consulted, which is surprising given that many scholars of solidarity talk about intercultural awareness, supranational institutions and transnational protest movements.

A final point on inclusion regards not so much the scope but the ethos of solidarity. Wilde (2013, p. 1) makes it a very condition of solidarity that participants 'pursu[e] social inclusion'. He stresses that his definition is normative, postulating what ought to happen. It thus differs from descriptive definitions, which may cover any cases of group allegiance, even when groups endorse exclusion (Wilde, 2013, pp. 18, 43). My definition incorporates Wilde's condition. I also find this distinction helpful to analyse the conflicting visions of solidarity as an inward-focused professional cooperation and a world-facing professional ethos, which emerge from Manuel Jerez's (2010) text mentioned earlier. A professional association with an inclusive ethos, and reasonably inclusive entry conditions, may count as solidary under Wilde's normative definition, while other types of associations would be solidary in a descriptive sense only. This distinction also sheds light on Baldo's (2020) problematisation of solidarity in light of activists' abusive behaviour: solidarity in a descriptive sense can be exclusionary, while under a normative definition which requires inclusion, the offenders' attitude would not count as solidarity at all.

While intra-group solidarity risks homogenising pressures within or exclusionary attitudes without, inter-group solidarity presents the risk of paternalistic relationships between groups. One response to the problem is the replacement of direct help with parallel action in *acompañamiento* (Maeckelbergh, 2009), mentioned above. The idea is traceable to the Mexican Zapatista movement fighting for indigenous rights; the movement told supporters eager to join the struggle against neoliberalism to 'fight at home' (Onésimo Hidalgo, quoted in Villegas Delgado, 2008, p. 159). Generally, this measure seems effective, but thinking about global solidarity, I do not discount cases of direct help. Another promising countermeasure to the issue of paternalism is the requirement of reciprocity: Bayertz (1999, p. 19; original emphasis) argues that those involved in solidarity have a '*mutual* right to expect help as it may be required'. Similarly, the feminist scholar Chandra Mohanty (2003, p. 7; emphasis added) defines decolonial, transnational solidarity 'in terms of *mutuality*, accountability, and the recognition of common interests as the basis for relationships among diverse communities.'

However, I also agree with Gould (2007, p. 157) that for the most disadvantaged participants, the requirement of reciprocity may be nominal. My definition therefore stresses that in solidarity the participants are interconnected, so any help the advantaged extend is ultimately beneficial to them too and hence a form of self-care and not charity. This admittedly may not fully mitigate the risks of paternalism.

## Causes of Solidarity, or the ‘Why’

There are various explanations of why solidarity arises and they point to utilitarian motives, emotions, values or norms as sources of solidarity (Komter, 2004, pp. 112–116). Given my interest in negotiations between commonality and difference, I see solidarity as stemming from (partial) identification or common interests. Influential ideas on identification as a motive for solidarity come from Rorty. He maintains that shared susceptibility to pain and humiliation helps to enlarge the circle of ‘us’ and one should learn to see others as ‘fellow sufferers’ (1989, p. xvi); that, in his view, can happen when one engages with representations of other people and their pain in literature, film, journalism and ethnography. In addition, Rorty (1989, p. 191) states that the most effective identifications are those ‘where “us” means something smaller and more local than the human race’; his examples include shared citizenship or experiences of parenting young children. To Rorty (1989, p. 192), such specific solidarities depend on which similarities and dissimilarities one finds salient. David Featherstone (2012, p. 22) goes a step further, arguing that Rorty views similarity and dissimilarity as static, while in fact ‘likeness is actively produced’. What I would add to these ideas is that the negotiation and perhaps, as Featherstone suggests, generation of commonality and difference happen through the process of translation.

Rorty’s focus on pain is criticised as overly negative by Wilde (2013, p. 118), who proposes ‘radical humanism’, a virtue ethics based on positive human potentials of rationality, compassion, productiveness and cooperation, as a key to global solidarity. Wilde sees the potentials as innately human, but he seeks to avert risks of cultural imperialism associated with essentialism. He therefore underscores that the potentials are ‘sufficiently general so that they can be realised in a wide variety of cultural forms’ (Wilde, 2013, p. 118, see also p. 141). Wilde (2013, p. 156) also believes that cultural contacts and products can help to increase identification with others and hence solidarity: he calls for language learning, travel and appreciation of other cultures’ art and literature. He does not, however, mention the role of translation in facilitating cultural exchanges. Like Wilde, I believe that human beings share something positive, namely a need and aptitude for happiness. The need is even more general than his potentials and can be realised in different forms across cultures. I also note that both Rorty and Wilde recognise the importance of cultural products for enlarging solidarity, but not the role of translation in creating and circulating them, which is symptomatic of a general neglect of translation in the scholarship on solidarity.

## Components of Solidarity, or the ‘What’

After discussing who is involved and why, I ask what constitutes solidarity. Not all theorists of solidarity name the ‘kind of item it refers to’ (Harvey, 2007, p. 22). Those who do offer various labels, e.g. ‘a feeling’ (Wilde, 2013, p. 1), ‘a bond’ (Habermas, 1992, p. 252), ‘an attachment’ (Bayertz, 1999, p. 3), ‘relation’ (Featherstone, 2012, p. 5), ‘preparedness’ (Stjernø, 2005, p. 2), ‘a disposition’ (Gould, 2007, p. 156) – the terms generally denote attitudes, relationships or states. Some definitions also refer to action, which may arise from the attitude, relationship or state, e.g. ‘feeling of sympathy shared by subjects within and

between groups, *impelling supportive action* and pursuing social inclusion’ (Wilde, 2013, p. 1; emphasis added). In my definition, solidarity also comprises an attitude and potential action. Action, however, can be seen not as following from but as constitutive of solidarity, especially in political solidarity. For example, Featherstone (2012, p. 5, emphasis added) defines solidarity as ‘a relation forged through *political struggle* which seeks to challenge forms of oppression.’

Regarding the attitude, relationship or state, scholars debate whether it is primarily affective or cognitive. Some give more weight to feelings (Hooker, 2009, p. 29; Vetlesen, 1994, p. 328; Wilde, 2013, p. 1), others to reasoning (Habermas, 1990, 1992; Hechter, 1987), while yet others suggest that the two ‘work symbiotically’ (Gould, 2007, p. 163; see also Stjernø, 2005, p. 32) without prioritising one over the other. In translation studies, solidarity is more often discussed in terms of affect (e.g. Baldo, 2023; Spivak, 2012; Tekgül, 2017, p. 64), although some scholars refer to theorists associated with cognitive approaches, e.g. Cussel (2023) draws on Hauke Brunkhorst and Bazzi (2021) on Habermas. I adopt the view of a symbiosis between feelings and reasoning, partly because different people may be better socially and neurologically equipped for one or the other, and partly because I currently lack the knowledge or empirical tools to comment – preliminary readings show that distinguishing between emotion and thought is quite complex (e.g. Matravers, 2017). I now turn to a polemic between Jürgen Habermas and Arne Vetlesen, which evokes translation. Habermas includes solidarity in his discourse ethics, defining it as a ‘social bond’ (Habermas, 1992, p. 252) among discourse participants embedded in ‘shared forms of life’ (Habermas, 1990, p. 274); the bond covers an existing group and may extend to strangers (Rehg, 1994, pp. 110–111). The purpose of discourse ethics is to decide which norms should become universally binding and each participant contributes by evaluating a norm from their perspective but also from the perspectives of others (Habermas, 1990, p. 235) – the perspective-taking stems from solidarity. Habermas (1992, p. 269) argues that to actualise that solidarity, one first employs empathy, or ‘the capacity to transport oneself by means of feeling across cultural distance’. Afterwards, one abstracts from the positions of particular others and from one’s own, and reasons whether the norm is acceptable to all (Habermas, 1992, p. 269). Vetlesen (1994, p. 328) argues that, in solidarity, cognitive processes of imagination enable reaching out to others, but the final move relies on empathy, which ‘brings the initially absent and unknown [...] “back” to us’. Both scholars conceptualise solidarity as bridging cultural distance, which evokes spatially-oriented Western images of translation as ‘carrying across’ (Tymoczko, 2014, pp. 6–7, for non-Western images see pp. 68–75). In my view, translation *is* a process through which solidarity develops, but Habermas and Vetlesen seem to suggest that one can simply transport oneself to inhabit the other’s standpoint or transport that otherness back in familiar terms, leaving the self and the other intact. This full translatability, or transportability, seems implausible and reductive towards the others and I see translation instead as inherently incomplete and potentially transformative.

To summarise, I have analysed solidarity as an attitude or relationship and/or action, which has affective and cognitive dimensions, unites groups (in human, social or political solidarity) and works across difference and may stem from identification and shared interests. Potential risks related to solidarity include homogenisation, exclusion and paternalism. The analytical categories presented in this section shed light on the scholarship on solidarity in translation studies, where the term is applied uniformly to different phenomena, including political solidarity and human or global solidarity, as well as intra-group cooperation. Moreover, solidarity can be defined in a descriptive or normative way (‘what is’ and ‘what ought to be’,

respectively) and these orientations help to analyse some of the tensions around solidarity in translation research.

This section has also shown that scholarship on solidarity in sociology, philosophy and political science hardly refers to translation, two isolated exceptions being Dean (1996) on reflective solidarity and Scholz (1998) on multilingualism in world solidarity. I suggest that the research on solidarity from translation studies productively extends the research in other disciplines, e.g. feminist scholars working on translation inspire me to see non-homogenising solidarity arise not from empathetic understanding (Harvey, 2007) but from translation, Cronin's (2006) micro-cosmopolitanism shows the boundaries between intra- and inter-group solidarity to be blurry, while Baker's (2016a; 2016b; 2016c) work demonstrates that translation is needed to connect the parallel actions in solidarity as *acompañamiento*. Furthermore, I would argue that solidarity can be redefined to make the role of translation in its construction more visible. This is the focus of the final section.

## Defining Solidarity from within Translation Studies

In this final section, I offer my definition and discuss its possible applications within translation studies. My theorising is inevitably informed by my position, which is that of a UK-based translation studies researcher, originally from Eastern Europe, who became interested in questions of solidarity when studying intercultural perceptions through a postcolonial lens (Gołuch, 2013, 2018). I propose to define solidarity as *a sense of interconnection and commonality in difference, which is developed through caring, careful and inherently incomplete translation, promotes inclusion and impels action towards common good*. I consider solidarity a *sense* to signal an interplay of affection and cognition – where sensing means feeling but sense-making connotes thinking. *Interconnection* signifies Anzaldúa's (2002, p. 5) idea of interpersonal and planetary connectedness, included in Ergun's (2020) translation ethics. Because of interconnection with others, one has something to gain upon extending solidarity, even if the others are unlikely to reciprocate: in interconnection, helping one element of the system to survive allows the system to thrive. This reduces the risk of benevolent paternalism and increases effectiveness of solidarity by adding a dose of self-interest, seen as self-care rather than egoism.

At the heart of solidarity is *commonality in difference*, a notion inspired by feminist scholars. For example, Mohanty (2003, p. 225) claims that 'in knowing differences and particularities, we can better see the connections and commonalities' and that 'specifying difference allows us to theorize universal concerns more fully'. My view of commonalities includes shared interests, specific identifications discussed by Rorty, as well as a notion of shared humanity. Regarding the latter, I emphasise human need for happiness as a universal commonality. The need can be called different names – quest for fulfilment, desire for peace, a simple want to feel well – and people may have different visions of how to fulfil it and different obstacles when pursuing it; yet, in my view, the fact of sharing that need guarantees a basic possibility of relating, making solidarity possible even alongside radical differences. The need is also very general and, like Wilde's humanism, can be mobilised without imposing culturally-specific values.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Introducing a universal commonality, I subscribe to ideas that reclaim a version of universalism while rejecting the (mis)use of the concept as, in Chinua Achebe's (1994, p. 60) words, 'a synonym for the narrow, self-serving

*Caring, careful and inherently incomplete translation* refers to a hermeneutic, interpersonal and semiotic process directed towards making sense of others in relation to the self, in line with the definitions of translation as ‘a meaning-making practice of human relationality’ (Ergun, 2020, p. 114) and ‘mediation’ of signs and experiences (Baker, 2016a, p. 7). The translation should be *caring* and *careful*, which signifies a combination of affective investment and thorough knowledge – I draw here on the feminist proposals for combining affect and knowledge discussed earlier (Bartky, 2002; Harvey, 2007; Spivak, 2012). The translation should also be seen as *inherently incomplete* to stress that one cannot fully translate the other into one’s terms, that translation is only an approximation.

The final two elements of the definition are adapted from Wilde (2013, p. 1). The requirement of *promoting inclusion* adds an ethical vector to the definition, whereby attitudes or relationships which exhibit exclusionary characteristics would not count as solidarity. I only change Wilde’s more pro-active idea of ‘pursuing’ inclusion to a more modest requirement of ‘promotion’ and remove ‘social’ from his ‘social inclusion’ to make the definition more adaptable to relationships between people and animals. *Impelling action* means that, while the proof of solidarity is not in the acting, solidarity is more than a ‘sense’ and gravitates towards potential action. I replace Wilde’s ‘supportive action’ with *action towards common good* to underline interconnection.

Below, I sketch the roles of translation and the translator that emerge from my definition and present a few implications of my definition for translation studies and for the interlingual translator. Translation – in the broad sense, encompassing the narrow sense of interlingual translation – matters to solidarity in a few interrelated ways; firstly, the process is what enables solidarity development. Secondly, while the process is key, one cannot always engage with others directly, but may rely during the process on pre-existing representations, i.e. artefacts which are products of translation. Examples include (translated) texts, (subtitled or dubbed) audio-visual materials, recordings of (interpreted) speech. Thirdly, and this point applies to interlingual translation only, availability of such translation products in more languages widens the circle of others with whom one can develop solidarity. Fourthly, in addition to its relevance to developing solidarity, translation can constitute the solidarity action itself.

Two simple examples should illustrate these points. In the first example, the translator is assigned to subtitle a documentary. Working on it, the translator engages in a hermeneutic and semiotic process – caringly, carefully and with a humble recognition that any translation remains incomplete – which creates a sense of interconnection and commonality in difference with the people represented in it. The relationship has an inclusive ethos, and the translator feels impelled to act for common good – in other words, solidarity has developed. From this point, the interlingual translation assignment may turn into solidarity action, as the translator now works with the people’s interests in mind. In another scenario, the translator develops solidarity outside of an assignment, e.g. when talking to members of their community or reading an autobiographical book for leisure. Once solidarity is present, the translator may pursue interlingual translation as solidarity action, e.g. interpret for community members or

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parochialism of Europe’. A particularly useful idea, coined by the thinker Jean-Claude Milner (2011) and introduced to translation studies by Cronin (2013, pp. 117–118), is that of a bottom-up, or ‘difficult’ universal. To arrive at the difficult universal is to think through details rather than accepting abstract or established notions at face value, it is to ‘mov[e] towards a notion of emergent commonality based on difference, rather than similarity’ (Cronin, 2013, p. 118). In the case of a shared need for happiness, the bottom-up movement should involve a detailed comparison of different ideas one and others have on how to fulfil the need. What may then emerge is the commonality of the need itself.



pitch the autobiography to a publisher. Besides, in these examples, the book and the documentary are translation products, artefacts through which the translator developed solidarity. By creating interlingual translations of these artefacts, the translator is enlarging their audiences and hence the potential for new solidarities.

I will now signal possible implications of my definition for translation studies, focusing on the translator's agency and relationships with other agents, the choice of translation strategies, as well as translation training. Firstly, whenever the translator sets to work, they *may* develop or reaffirm solidarity – because translation, in my definition, is where solidarity begins. The translator is not the impartial, impersonal mediator envisaged by many professional codes of ethics, but a social and ethical agent, who may choose to open themselves up to the possibility of solidarity with others. Translators can develop solidarity with different parties, including creators of the source material, the people represented in it, translation users, fellow translators, other translation-related agents (e.g. wider editorial or localisation teams) and other groups relevant to the translators' personal lives.

Solidarity as a relationship can be helpfully explored alongside other widely discussed relationships the translator may enter. These include fidelity, understood as the translator's duty towards the source text and author, and loyalty (Nord, 1997, pp. 123–128), which is owed, simultaneously, to the author, the target audience and the client. Solidarity differs from these relationships as the translator does not enter it automatically – solidarity may or may not develop. Additionally, solidarity presupposes interconnection and at least nominal reciprocity, while fidelity and loyalty are one-directional and imply subservience. Solidarity partly resembles cooperation (Pym, 2012, pp. 133–167; see also Lambert, 2023, pp. 65–73), where the translator aims to ensure that all parties gain something from intercultural exchange; one difference is that solidarity need not involve parties related to both the source culture and the target culture. Given that solidarity develops in selected cases and with selected parties, it is closer to the relationship of commitment, explored by research on translation, ideology and power (for a sample overview see Brownlie, 2010). Yet, solidarity requires commonality, which is not strictly required when one is committed to a cause. Overall, solidarity is a distinct relationship towards others, which may inform the translator's work.

I see solidarity as an interpersonal relation, not a textual or linguistic one, and I do not associate it with any translation strategy. Yet, solidarity can impact on textual or interpreting decisions as the translator may prefer strategies that seem beneficial to the solidarity partner(s). Importantly, the translator is always a solidarity partner themselves, so they should consider their own good, including their reputation if relevant, when making decisions. Another interesting point regards scenarios where the translator wants to bring parties from the source domain and the target domain together, i.e. hopes that their translation will allow the user to develop solidarity with the author or people represented in the source material. The user will become a 'translator', in a broad sense, engaging with the translation product as a proxy for the people related to it. It will be up to the user to give their affect, be willing to learn and realise that they cannot translate the other exhaustively into their terms of reference. However, the interlingual translator behind the product could anticipate what sort of translation strategies might give the user the best chance of seeing commonality in difference. As users' reactions are difficult to predict, studying reception of translations can offer useful insights (see e.g. Cussel, 2023; Gołuch, 2013).

Finally, the concept of solidarity can be integrated into translation training and continuing professional development as a tool of self-reflection. I mentioned scholars who bring

solidarity to translation and interpreting classrooms (Castro & Ergun, 2017b; Manuel Jerez, 2010); ‘solidarity’ also appears in an influential proposal for integrating ethics into translation training (Drugan & Megone, 2011, p. 205), albeit briefly and only with a specific reference to collective action for social change. My definition could be used to reflect more generally on the translation research and process and explore what caring and careful translation means in practice. Trainers and practitioners may also address solidarity in relation to technology, e.g. considering whether the trend to postedit machine translated texts deprives translators of full immersion in a hermeneutic and interpersonal process, closing off opportunities for solidarity. Generally, practitioners may feel empowered by a conceptualisation that places translation at the heart of solidarity but may also explore potential tensions between the demands of solidarity and professional ethics.

To summarise and conclude, the first part of the article shows that solidarity is used in translation studies in manifold, not always commensurate, ways across various areas, including feminist approaches, studies of activism, work on cosmopolitanism and migration, as well as discussions of professional identity. However, few studies define the concept (cf. Baker, 2016a; Sánchez Balsalobre et al., 2010), which suggests a need for a discipline-wide, theoretical discussion on solidarity. To initiate such discussion, in the second part of the article, I analyse debates on the scope, sources and components of solidarity, drawing on scholarship from philosophy, sociology and political science. Moreover, I demonstrate how rarely translation is mentioned in that scholarship and how insights from translation studies can be used to complement it. The final section constitutes my attempt at thinking solidarity and translation together. Drawing in particular on feminist approaches to solidarity and translation, as well as Wilde’s (2013) vision of global solidarity, I define solidarity as *a sense of interconnection and commonality in difference, which is developed through caring, careful and inherently incomplete translation, promotes inclusion and impels action towards common good*. The definition calls for balancing commonality – where, I suggest, human need for happiness guarantees a basic possibility of relating – and difference: that balancing requires translation, which is ‘where [...] difference and commonality, coexist’ (Ergun, 2020, p. 122). The focus on translation has interesting implications for translation studies, notably envisioning the interlingual translator as a solidarity expert of sorts, skilled at the very process that catalyses solidarity. By placing translation, as a hermeneutic, interpersonal and semiotic process, at the heart of solidarity, my definition also implies that anyone engaging in potential solidarity becomes a ‘translator’. This is another reason why, as Judith Butler (Nagar et al., 2017, p. 113) put it, ‘there can be no solidarity without translation, and certainly no global solidarity.’

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