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EDITED BY

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REVIEWED BY

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Old Dominion University, United States
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Old Dominion University, United States, in
collaboration with reviewer KR
Iraklis Dimitriadis,
University of Milano-Bicocca, Italy

*CORRESPONDENCE

Lee Michael Shults
✉ lee.m.shults@uia.no

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Avoiding parasitical uses of global solidarity

Lee Michael Shults*

Department of Global Development and Planning, University of Agder, Kristiansand, Norway

This article critically engages the normative implications of referring to small-scale, “pop-up” aid actors as Citizen Initiatives for Global Solidarity (CIGS) in the context of citizen-initiated disaster and humanitarian response. The force of the term “global solidarity” can be powerful, yet the precise meaning of the concept is often ambiguous. In light of this ambiguity, this article works toward conceptual clarity while questioning whether or not the label “CIGS” is an instance of parasitical solidarity—a rhetorical use of global solidarity that implies more, or different, moral content than is actually present in the practices being described as solidaristic. While answers to that question will differ on a case-to-case basis, the conversations across regions and disciplines that this special issue aims to contribute toward will benefit from a careful consideration of how to avoid parasitical uses of global solidarity. In addition, sensitivity on this front is an important component of decolonizing the discourse of aid by decentering the roles of volunteers. Operationalizing global solidarity with an eye toward “pop-up” humanitarian responses generates a conceptual starting point that is required for these interdisciplinary conversations, regardless of whether that operationalization is ultimately utilized, adjusted, or rejected by those engaging disaster response from different standpoints.

KEYWORDS

global solidarity, Citizen Initiatives for Global Solidarity (CIGS), parasitical solidarity, political solidarity, affective solidarity, mutuality, deference

1 Introduction

This article sketches a conceptual account of global solidarity that captures important features of a subset of citizen-initiated humanitarian organizations that are sometimes referred to as Citizen Initiatives for Global Solidarity (CIGS). More specifically, this article engages several tensions that emerge when attempting to operationalize global solidarity in a CIGS context, while remaining sensitive to the possibility that the use of the term CIGS to describe humanitarian efforts might represent what Sally J. Scholz refers to as parasitical solidarity (Scholz, 2008, p. 48). On the one hand, the term CIGS valuably acknowledges the specific relevance of global solidarity as a motivator of volunteer efforts that embrace a sense of global citizenship and a responsibility to address humanitarian crises across borders (Fechter and Schwittay, 2019, p. 1770). On the other hand, researchers and activists must remain accountable when choosing a label that invokes global solidarity over a more neutral descriptor such as “pop-up organizations” (Haaland and Wallevik, 2019; Frydenlund et al., 2020) or a label that highlights the potential risks of these volunteer organizations, such as “amateur aid” (Schnable, 2021; Kennedy and Venne, 2022). Emphasizing the solidaristic, temporary, or amateuristic qualities of these aid efforts can dramatically influence their perceived legitimacy within the broader aid architecture.

Importantly, when the term CIGS was first coined nearly a decade ago, it was used in a global development context and initially referred to “small-scale initiatives or projects,

set up by private persons in the North, aimed at the improvement of the living standards of people in the global South” (Pollet et al., 2014, p. 3). While the unidirectional flow of development from North to South implied by this early definition has been problematized in more recent work on CIGS (Haaland et al., 2023; Korsvik et al., 2023), the challenge of decolonizing the discourse of aid and the concept of global solidarity can present itself somewhat differently in disaster and humanitarian response. For example, as pop-up organizations can be mobilized from within directly affected, local communities, *global* solidarity is not a necessary feature of all forms of citizen-initiated disaster response. It is therefore important to specify that, in order to critically engage the term CIGS, this article will consider volunteer organizations that arguably exhibit a form of global solidarity—informed by what Ashley Taylor refers to as “expressional solidarity” (Taylor, 2015).

Expressional solidarity describes the commitments of those who are motivated and committed to a cause, but whose motivation is not generated through membership in one of the groups most directly affected by the injustice or crisis that the cause aims to address. Taylor distinguishes between the *motivations* of outsiders engaged in expressional solidarity and the *obligations* invoked among insiders who are bound by robust solidarity. While both robust and expressional forms of solidarity can be central to the identities of the actors involved, Taylor (2015, p. 128) argues that expressional solidarity is both normatively weaker than robust solidarity and often unidirectional. This emphasis on unidirectionality is meant to capture the possibility of acting in a way that *expresses* solidarity with a group in crisis without demanding a reciprocal, solidaristic commitment from the affected group. Expressional solidarity can thereby capture the intense, but often temporary, involvement of pop-ups comprised of people who are *motivated* to volunteer but not *obligated* to sustain long-term relationships in the same way that the members of directly affected communities more often are (Frydenlund et al., 2020, p. 256). Expressional solidarity can be understood as global solidarity as it involves going beyond preexisting, local commitments, while hopefully also recognizing the need for deference toward those most affected by humanitarian crises. Importantly, distinguishing between these global and local commitments requires ongoing, case-by-case evaluations, as the relevant in-groups and out-groups are continually reproduced, expanded, or contested through various forms of political action.

With this in mind, expressional solidarity can be understood as emerging in what Avery Kolers refers to as “nonidentity cases” (Kolers, 2016, p. 84) in which a volunteer is not a member of the community that their attempts at solidarity are directed toward. Within the discourse of humanitarian aid and disaster response, I argue that acts of expressional solidarity in these non-identity cases are the most likely to fall under the category of parasitical solidarity. Put simply, when directly affected communities organize pop-up aid internally, it seems unproblematic to describe such efforts as demonstrations of local solidarity, or robust solidarity in Taylor’s terminology. In contrast, when those not directly affected volunteer to organize a disaster response, the move to characterize these efforts as embodying global solidarity—rather than simply humanitarian aid—appears more tenuous, due to the potential lack of reciprocity. Due to the conceptual orientation of the project as hand, I assume throughout this article that “differentiated

categories of action, such as solidarity and humanitarian work... co-exist on the ground in ways that are more fluid than is often recognized” (Cantat, 2021, p. 1361). Therefore, while acknowledging that humanitarian aid and global solidarity are far from co-extensive, the extent to which humanitarianism offers a path to “de-bordering solidarity” (Dimitriadis and Ambrosini, 2023, p. 438) by combatting exclusion or instead leads to the reproduction of paternalistic assumptions about needy refugees (Rozakou, 2016b, p. 196) or helpless victims must be analyzed on a case-by-case basis.

While expressional solidarity in particular may offer a helpful conceptual tool that acknowledges important features of the motivations and self-presentations of some volunteers, one can legitimately question whether or not unidirectional commitments live up to the relational implications of a term like global solidarity. As one of the goals of this article is to critically evaluate the use of the term CIGS in such cases, my focus will be on the normative implications of referring to outside volunteer efforts as global solidarity, where global solidarity is understood as actively prioritizing the needs of distant out-groups over the needs of one’s previously established in-groups.¹ In order to begin answering the question “Is describing these pop-up volunteer organizations as CIGS an instance of parasitical solidarity?” the next section critically engages Scholz’ concept of parasitical solidarity and her account of the legitimate forms of solidarity that parasitical solidarity undermines. The expressional, global solidarity described thus far can then be evaluated against this conceptual background and brought into further conversation with CIGS research. The task at hand is thus to consider whether or not the expressional solidarity offered by pop-up aid initiatives in non-identity cases can qualify as global solidarity, despite the potential lack of reciprocity from those most directly affected by crisis or injustice. If it cannot, then the label CIGS represents an instance of parasitical solidarity and should be abandoned.

2 Political or parasitical?

By “parasitical solidarity,” I mean that the term “solidarity” is used to connote a variety of feelings or relations that do not themselves count as full-fledged forms of solidarity because they often lack one or more of the key elements or because they are meant to appear as a form of solidarity only for rhetorical purposes. But these invocations of the term... feed off of more developed conceptions of solidarity as a way to imply more content than is in fact present. Solidarity becomes drained of its moral content when parasitical uses predominate (Scholz, 2008, p. 47–48).

In her influential book, *Political Solidarity*, Scholz offers what she considers to be three legitimate forms of solidarity—social solidarity, civic solidarity, and political solidarity. Importantly, each form of solidarity is “political” in the sense that all three are used as motivations or justifications for creating, altering, or maintaining

¹ For a more in-depth discussion of this operationalization of global solidarity, see Shults, 2023.

collective, political identities and practices. However, there are differences in the moral logics at play in these forms of solidarity. Scholz lays out a set of criteria and argues that each of these three legitimate solidarities meets those criteria in its own way. As stated in the passage above, careless or deceptive descriptions of relationships as solidaristic, despite failure to meet the necessary criteria, are characterized as instances of a parasitical solidarity that “sponges off the implied relation it invokes” (Scholz, 2008, p. 20).

The first criterion that Scholz offers is that all forms of solidarity mediate between the individual and the community. This mediation is meant to emphasize the importance of balancing features of individualism and communalism in solidary movements. Avoiding an overly individualistic approach to solidarity entails understanding autonomy as a function of interdependence. This resonates with Kolers’ argument that solidarity involves actively learning how “self-reliant agency is not the only, or often even the best, way to be an autonomous person” (Kolers, 2005, p. 160). In other words, deference to a cause or a community can be an empowering, autonomous choice grounded in collective political agency. At the same time, avoiding an overly communalistic approach to solidarity is equally important. This entails not reifying or hypostatizing a community or a cause in such a way that it becomes separate from the members that comprise it—a “super-entity” (Scholz, 2008, p. 18) that renders the agencies of the individual actors insignificant. Scholz’ criterion of mediation is a matter of maintaining accountability for balancing both the personal and the collective commitments entailed by solidarity. This is an accountability to act against one’s own self-interest when necessary while also not losing oneself in the struggle in such a way that responsibility is anonymized (Scholz, 2008, p. 75).

Scholz offers two additional criteria that apply to all three forms of legitimate solidarity. All solidarities generate bonds that serve to create or maintain a unified group and all solidarities entail positive moral obligations (Scholz, 2008, p. 19). Both of these criteria can potentially problematize the initial operationalization of expressional, global solidarity discussed in the introduction. Requiring solidary bonds to involve a *unified* group can call into question the validity of expressional solidarity in which a unifying reciprocity is not always present. It is important to consider whether or not temporary efforts to aid a community in crisis qualify as constituting a unified group that meaningfully includes the outside volunteers offering expressional solidarity. In addition, Scholz’ claim that all solidarities entail positive moral obligations can potentially suggest that Taylor’s distinction between expressional *motivation* and robust *obligation* might disqualify expressional solidarity according to Scholz’ standards. If the absence of any lasting or reciprocal obligations between pop-up aid initiatives and those affected by crisis is highlighted, any characterization of these relationships as embodying expressional solidarity seems to offer a clear instance of a parasitical use of solidarity. I will return to these concerns after connecting humanitarian aid and disaster response to Scholz’ discussion of social, civic, and political forms of solidarity.

The ways in which social solidarity fulfills Scholz’ three criteria are fairly straightforward. Scholz (2008, p. 21) presents social solidarity as a primarily descriptive measure of group cohesiveness. Her suggestion that social solidarity is primarily descriptive should not be interpreted as a claim that social solidarities do not prescribe

certain norms or obligations; but rather that the strength of the cohesion is what is being measured, while the specific normative content implied by that cohesion is secondary. In other words, social solidarity refers to the durability of the bonds that guide everyday responsibilities within a community or a cause. These bonds mediate between the individual and the community, serve to maintain a unified group, and entail whatever positive moral obligations accompany membership in that group. While social solidarity might certainly be relevant in terms of maintaining group cohesion in the face of a disaster or humanitarian crisis, this form of solidarity offers a poor candidate for capturing the expressional, global solidarity described in the introduction as particularly relevant to a critical evaluation of CIGS.

Civic solidarity offers a more promising candidate in this regard. According to Scholz, this form of solidarity “targets those vulnerabilities that would inhibit or prevent a person from participation in the civic public” (Scholz, 2008, p. 27). This notion of targeting vulnerabilities should be understood as entailing both proactive and reactive commitments. In terms of proactively decreasing vulnerability, Scholz emphasizes the importance of social policy, the welfare state, and the relationship between the citizen and the state in general. In this sense, civic solidarity mediates between the individual and the community, generates a sense of unity, and promotes an acknowledgment of interdependence in which there is a collective obligation to address the vulnerabilities of individual members of a community.

Scholz (2008, p. 33) explicitly connects a proactive civic solidarity to global development policies and the responsibilities of wealthy nations to support vulnerable populations at a more structural level. Addressing global poverty is certainly crucial in terms of facilitating participation in the civic public. However, in the context of pop-up disaster response, a more reactive interpretation of civic solidarity seems most relevant. On the one hand, a globally oriented version of civic solidarity could capture the commitments of volunteer organizations that are motivated by a belief that global citizenship demands collective reactions to the specific vulnerabilities of those experiencing crises. On the other hand, recalling the earlier operationalization of global solidarity as a prioritization of the needs of distant out-groups over the needs of established in-groups, Scholz’ concept of civic solidarity seems to be at odds with the important sense in which outside volunteer organizations and directly affected communities are unevenly positioned. The actors involved are not necessarily members of the same civic public (Gould, 2014, p. 227).

While international policies and global welfare systems are of great importance in both preventing and responding to disaster, I argue that attempts to characterize pop-up volunteer organizations as embodying a global, civic solidarity risk sliding into a rhetoric of *human solidarity*. The notion of human solidarity—a form of solidarity that binds every member of the species—has been resisted due to the difficulties presented by practically applying such a vague commitment (Gould, 2007, p. 166) and due to the potential for essentialized definitions of humanity to further marginalize oppressed groups (Scholz, 2008, p. 240; Young, 2011, p. 36). Scholz’ criteria of solidarity can demonstrate how unwieldy an understanding of outside volunteer organizations as acting on a form of global, civic solidarity would be. In such a case:

- (1) The mediation between the individual and the community would have to include a meaningful mediation between the volunteer and humanity as such.
- (2) The unity formed or maintained by this solidarity would have to include the formation or maintenance of the unity of the human race.
- (3) The positive moral obligations entailed by this solidarity would include a duty to respond to every instance of human vulnerability.

Although one can certainly imagine a *rhetoric* in which these criteria were met—for example, one that casts volunteering as contributing toward universal human rights and shifts the fulfillment of positive moral obligations away from the individual and toward a global civic public—I argue that such an application of solidarity unnecessarily waters down the normative force of the term, and potentially represents an instance of parasitical solidarity. At the level of practice, shifting obligations for disaster response to the level of the species makes these commitments too vague and is reminiscent of an “administrative solidarity” (Scholz, 2008, p. 30; Schuyt, 1998, p. 309) in which accountability is lessened through the anonymization of responsibility. Additionally, casting disaster response as the task of humanity is unhelpful in explaining or critiquing the aid efforts of the specific initiatives that actually take up a cause. Descriptions of CIGS as embodying a form of folk engagement that resists the bureaucratization of aid can also suggest that smaller volunteer responses are motivated by specific, affective connections rather than a commitment to humanity as such (Haaland et al., 2023, p. 32; Haaland and Wallevik, 2017, p. 205).

In the absence of widespread coordination, it seems misleading to suggest that pop-up organizations form a global body that looks to treat vulnerabilities at the level of humanity. The temporary, *ad hoc* nature of these organizations is better described as a response to gaps in specific civic solidarities than as an attempt to establish a global civic public. I agree with Rorty’s argument that “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, p. 191). Not only does this suggest that a rhetoric of human solidarity or global, administrative, civic solidarity might drain solidarity of its moral content, but it also highlights what is morally unique about the expressional, global solidarity offered by pop-up humanitarian organizations. If interactions between communities affected by disaster and outside organizations are understood as taking place within the giant in-group of humanity, this can deemphasize the unique motivations that move volunteers to active commitments that go beyond loyalty to their established, local in-groups. At the same time, the inherent risks of aid processes that involve uneven power dynamics, colonial histories, and potentially parasitical uses of solidarity are obscured when these efforts are understood as directed toward the benefit of humanity as a whole. Thus, in the same way that social solidarity is relevant to citizen-initiated humanitarian responses, but ill-suited to capture the strengths and weaknesses of the specific category of volunteer organization that this article aims to deal with—civic solidarity is relevant in understanding communal, national, and transnational efforts to counteract specific vulnerabilities, but ill-suited to assessing the pros and cons of the label CIGS.

Political solidarity offers the strongest candidate for conceptualizing expressional, global solidarity in pop-up volunteer organizations. This is because political solidarity most clearly distinguishes between the solidary group and the group most affected by crisis, inverting the relationship between the collective moral response and group membership. In other words, while social and civic solidarities produce collective moral responses through appeals to group membership—political solidarity produces groups through collective moral responses. I argue that the characterization of this form of solidarity as political is appropriate, even when citizen initiatives distance themselves from the concept or rhetoric of politics (Rozakou, 2016a, p. 82; Serntedakis, 2017, p. 95). What Scholz refers to as political solidarity captures the possibility of generating collectives that are made up of citizens from across the political spectrum (Karakayali, 2017, p. 11) and thereby highlights the potential for shared affective responses to contest or “de-border” solidarity movements. In addition, considering an active commitment to a cause rather than the experience of crisis or oppression to be the basis of membership offers “a wider, more inclusive understanding of political solidarity, insofar as former oppressors and those people privileged by oppression have the opportunity to join in solidarity” (Scholz, 2008, p. 125). Here we come to a central question which concerns the value and risks of widening the concept of solidarity to include the participation of privileged outsiders—How inclusive can one make the concept of political solidarity without sliding into parasitical solidarity? This question invites a return to considerations regarding the compatibility of expressional solidarity and Scholz’ criteria.

Scholz’ three criteria can be used to delineate the differences between political and parasitical solidarities and thereby determine on which side expressional solidarity lies. The criterion of mediation between the individual and the group is arguably the least problematic, at least at a conceptual level. While accountability for this balance is immensely challenging in practice, political solidarities can meet the mediation criterion by avoiding individualistic self-interest and avoiding an overly communalistic anonymization of responsibility within an organization or cause. The importance of this balanced, relational interdependence is nicely captured by Scholz’ argument that “activism cannot be for its own sake. It must be enlightened by social criticism and enlivened by the multifaceted relations among members in solidarity” (Scholz, 2008, p. 103). A lack of relationality that mediates between individualism and communalism can thus indicate a slide into parasitical solidarity. This emphasis on mediating relationality can serve as a reminder that while the social criticism Scholz refers to is often practiced collectively, it also requires reevaluating individual commitments from the perspective of the collective. In this way, the expressional, global solidarity offered by pop-up initiatives is potentially compatible with Scholz’ criterion of mediation. These initiatives could be characterized as shared moral responses to crisis or injustice and engaged in political action that balances social criticism with individual reflection.

There are also the criteria that a political solidarity must create or maintain a unified group and must entail positive moral obligations. While the creation of a group based on a collective moral response to crisis or injustice does not seem

inherently problematic, the exact nature and durability of the unity generated is less obvious here than in the cases of social and civic solidarities. Allowing for the fact that political solidarities will often be provisional, the idea that the group is formed through a shared moral response begs the question—in what way is the moral response shared? If the prospect of outside participation offered in expressional solidarity is to qualify as political solidarity, “shared” must be interpreted as referring to the collective action motivated by the moral response rather than implying that the moral response is the same for all members. As cooperation is a key feature of political solidarity, while intragroup homogeneity is not, the formation of a group based on a shared moral response can be understood as coordinated, collective action with the goal of addressing a crisis and its structural causes. As Scholz claims, political solidarity “shifts the emphasis for the group from the traits in common to the collective actions” (Scholz, 2008, p. 133). Active commitment and cooperation can thus take precedence over the exact content of the motivating, moral response—as long as this response is oriented toward the experiences of the most affected groups. Thus, as long as the unity referred to is not required to be permanent, the expressional solidarity offered by pop-up humanitarian organizations can meet the criterion of creating a temporarily unified group.

In regard to the final criterion of entailing positive moral obligations, Scholz (2008, p. 83) offers three that are specific to political solidarities—cooperation, consciousness-raising, and mutuality. First, cooperation is a matter of fostering reciprocity and collective autonomy; acknowledging that solidarity represents a commitment to a cause but also to the other members of an organization or group. Second, the obligation to engage in consciousness-raising is both a matter of outwardly directed social criticism and a commitment to the transformative, reflexive process of analyzing the political impact of one’s own actions from the perspective of the solidary group. This offers another example of a way in which political solidarity can *mediate* between the individual and the community, calling into question practices that are performed unreflexively in the absence of relational social criticism. Scholz’ emphasis of the obligation to engage in consciousness-raising and social criticism in political solidarity highlights the potential shortcomings of a rhetoric of global, civic solidarity that portrays aid as treating the vulnerabilities of humanity as a whole rather than taking sides and demanding structural change.

Third, Scholz describes mutuality as a positive moral obligation entailed by political solidarity, writing:

Mutuality also means that those who commit to political solidarity commit to ask. They ask others in solidarity how they might help, how the collective action ought to proceed, what values are most important in informing the solidarity activity, and what about this particular form of injustice or oppression is most troubling... Charity is usually one-sided, but mutuality assumes participants in solidarity are “working with” rather than “working for” those who suffer injustice or oppression (Scholz, 2008, p. 93-94).

I see mutuality as the most important of these three positive moral obligations in terms of evaluating whether or not labeling volunteer, pop-up organizations as CIGS should be understood as a

political or a parasitical use of solidarity. Drawing inspiration from Scholz, I suggest that CIGS can only be considered an appropriate label for such organizations if they are clearly *working with* affected communities and if these organizations *commit to ask* others about how they can help. Applying the term CIGS to organizations that are *working for* suffering others constitutes a parasitical use of global solidarity where “humanitarian aid”, “disaster relief”, or even “charity” would be more appropriate.

Importantly, these positive moral obligations entailed by political solidarity emerge alongside the formation of the solidary group. This allows for a potential compatibility between Taylor’s expressional solidarity and Scholz’ political solidarity. In other words, while a commitment in political solidarity may be expressional and voluntary rather than obligatory and based in antecedent group membership, once the commitment has been made expressional solidarity can fulfill Scholz’ criterion of entailing positive moral obligations. It is crucial to acknowledge that the possible compatibility between expressional and political solidarities does not erase ethical concerns, including a potential slip into parasitical solidarity. This is why I have suggested that mutuality—committing to ask and working with those most affected—is the most essential factor in distinguishing between political and parasitical solidarity in case-by-case analyses of CIGS. The only way for the participation of those privileged by oppression to qualify as expressional, political solidarity would be for those efforts to act on the goals and strategies of those most affected. Only then could an expressional commitment from a pop-up initiative be considered an instance of political solidarity, despite the absence of an equal or reciprocal commitment from those the initiative aims to support.

The analysis of Scholz’ account of solidarity in this section suggests that political solidarity offers a category that can accommodate the expressional solidarity offered by pop-up aid initiatives in non-identity cases, despite the potential lack of reciprocity. The criterion of mutuality offers the central safeguard against applying the category of political solidarity so broadly that it becomes parasitical. Section 3 distinguishes between mutuality and deference in order to explore the role of affective experiences in forming networks of global solidarity. Applications and potential critiques of Scholz’ conceptual framework are considered further, before two alternative strategies for avoiding parasitical uses of solidarity are offered in Section 4.

3 Mutuality, deference, and the experience of dissonance

In the previous section, I argued that if outside, pop-up volunteer organizations can be meaningfully said to be engaging in a form of expressional, global solidarity, this solidarity will look something like Scholz’ political solidarity. This *ad hoc*, political solidarity would require a shared moral response to crisis or injustice that leads to the generation of a unified group that acts on positive moral obligations to *work with* affected groups and to *ask how to help* in a spirit of mutuality. Additionally, as discussed in the introduction, the global form of political solidarity implied by the label CIGS would have to actively prioritize the needs of distant out-groups over preexisting local loyalties. Finally, this

global, political solidarity would need to avoid the extremes of individualism and communalism.

Research at the intersection of humanitarian aid and global development studies, the context in which the term CIGS was first coined, suggests that temporary, small-scale volunteer organizations can fall victim to forms of individualism. In some cases, “citizen aid initiatives tend to display features of small business start-ups, including an entrepreneurial sense of ownership, agency and the ability to choose their issues” (Fechter and Schwittay, 2019, p. 1773). A sense of entitlement to choose one’s own issues can obviously lead to a form of individualism in which control, rather than mutuality, becomes a primary motivation (Fylkesnes, 2019, p. 1808). An overemphasis of control in volunteer organizations can lead to “founderitis” (Linnell, 2004) or “founder’s syndrome” (Block and Rosenberg, 2002) where the central role of the founder of that organization can disrupt its functioning (Kinsbergen et al., 2023, p. 103). In addition, a misguided sense of ownership can lead to a dismissal of local knowledge and competence, as volunteers may choose to “carry out service tasks firsthand (e.g., working in medical clinics, building houses) when local staff might more cheaply or knowledgeably do the work” (Appel and Schnable, 2019, p. 1834). Such instances offer, at best, examples of *working for* others and clearly fail to achieve the mutuality that Scholz calls for in political solidarity.

Avery Kolers explicitly problematizes the notion of choosing one’s own issues, arguing that “solidarity does not allow us to set the terms of our participation” (Kolers, 2012, p. 183). For Kolers, shifting the status quo by engaging in political action on others’ terms is central to avoiding parasitical forms of solidarity in which privileged volunteers simply support social movements that employ strategies that conform to those volunteers’ preexisting moral intuitions. This can be connected to Scholz’ conviction that, if the concept of political solidarity is to be expanded in order to potentially include the participation of those privileged by oppression, the activism required in political solidarities must maintain a structural focus and also target the root causes of crisis and oppression. If volunteers only commit to causes that support their preexisting moral intuitions, “they may also inadvertently entrench some systems or structures of oppression... within the social movement itself” (Scholz, 2008, p. 161). Kolers therefore argues for understanding solidarity as a function of deference—as political action on others’ terms. This connection between deference and political action resonates with Scholz’ claim that mutuality is one of the positive moral obligations entailed by political solidarity. Gould’s description of the requirement of deference in solidarity as recognizing “that it is the people in the oppressive or needy situation who are usually best able to say what support they wish and expect to benefit from” (Gould, 2007, p. 157) can cast a commitment to deference and a commitment to mutuality as fairly coextensive.

Despite the obvious similarities, I argue that there are important differences between mutuality and deference. As mentioned in Section 2, part of Kolers’ work on deferential solidarity is aimed at resisting the assumption, particularly among the privileged volunteers or activists that Kolers refers to as “joiners” (Kolers, 2016, p. 5), that autonomy is always a matter of self-reliance. However, moving from individual to collective autonomy is not

enough to combat this self-reliance. Kolers remains skeptical about the collectives these joiners might defer to. Kolers expresses specific concerns regarding Scholz’ work, categorizing her account of solidarity as a relational approach that risks circularity (Kolers, 2018, p. 563). Kolers’ primary concern is that the shared moral responses that generate groups in Scholz’ account of political solidarity will likely be shared by people with similar commitments and strategies regarding appropriate responses to crisis or injustice. Kolers’ objection is legitimate and shows the parallels between insisting upon setting the terms of one’s own participation in political solidarity and insisting upon choosing one’s own issues in pop-up volunteer organizations. In both cases, the needs and strategies of those most affected are obscured and the appropriateness of the label “solidarity” becomes suspect. Deference or mutuality is necessary to prevent privileged outsiders from forming their own groups based on shared moral responses, claiming to be in political solidarity with the oppressed while reproducing global systems of oppression.

While I applaud Kolers’ nuanced efforts to promote a more collective or structural understanding of autonomous political action, Scholz’ criterion of mediation can be used to question whether or not his account of deference overcorrects for the problematic tendencies toward individualism that can be found within collective political movements. By this I mean that, while prioritizing choosing one’s own issues and maintaining an entrepreneurial sense of ownership over an initiative can promote an extreme of individualism that is contrary to political solidarity (Scholz, 2008, p. 19), an overly structural commitment to deference can resemble the other extreme of communalism. Recalling that Scholz described this extreme as reifying a “super-entity” that anonymizes responsibility, Kolers’ structural, agent-neutral deference can arguably have the effect of anonymizing solidary relations.

Kolers argues that “in solidarity one chooses sides for a reason that applies to people in general, not just to those who are in a certain relationship” (Kolers, 2016, p. 73). The reason or criterion for choosing sides in solidarity, according to Kolers, rests on agent-neutral, structural evaluations of which group is worst off in a given context. Deference serves to counteract an overreliance on individual agency—committing “joiners” to engage in political action that supports whichever group of “callers” (Kolers, 2016, p. 5) is most affected by crisis or inequity. Even when oriented toward promoting deference, I am concerned that this structural focus can solidify a distinction between joiners and callers. Considering the argument that the “emotional distance required to make continuous, agent neutral reevaluations of complex situations leaves the notion of *joining* in solidarity superficial at best, and impossible at worst” (Shults, 2023, p. 19); I argue that an overly rigid approach to deference anonymizes the personal and relational features of activism—oversimplifying solidarity as a matter of always being on the right side. While acknowledging the extent to which living out the kind of commitment that Kolers describes would be incredibly demanding, if at all possible, there is a sense in which solidarity itself becomes an anonymizing super-entity that the individual must continuously defer to.

Importantly, the distinction between deference and mutuality should not be overstated. Kolers’ deferential solidarity is explicitly

aimed at asking about and supporting the strategies that callers advocate, and is in many ways sensitive to Scholz' distinction between *working with* rather than *working for* others.² In addition, Kolers' arguments for conceptualizing solidarity as a moral response to encounters with structural inequity are largely in line with Scholz' concept of political solidarity. The important difference is that, while Kolers considers deference to be a method of fulfilling a non-voluntary, agent-neutral duty, Scholz's mutuality makes room for a wider range of moral responses, highlighting the affective nature of motivation and the voluntary nature of both the initial and continued commitment to political solidarity.

While both mutuality and deference clearly have relational features, there is a sense in which the concept of deference places both too much and too little agency with the deferring joiner. Scholz' criterion of mutuality avoids the reproduction of social hierarchies within political solidarity by requiring *all* those who commit in political solidarity to commit to asking *all* others about the relevant values and tactics at play. While this horizontality can risk ignoring the uneven power dynamics between differently situated members in political solidarity as well as those they aim to support, it can also be a strength by emphasizing relational experience. I argue that mutuality opens the door for something resembling Clare Hemmings' concept of affective solidarity in a way that deference does not.

Hemmings describes affective solidarity as generated by politicized connections between differently positioned experiences of affective dissonance. In Hemmings' account of affective solidarity, affective dissonance provides "the basis of a connection to others and desire for transformation not rooted in identity, yet thoroughly cognizant of power and privilege" (Hemmings, 2012, p. 154). This prioritization of change and connection over identity resonates with Scholz' development of political solidarity as a widening of the discourse of aid and activism to allow for a focus on collective action rather than shared traits. The affective dissonance that Hemmings describes refers to a mismatch between self-narration and social reality—between "whom one feels oneself to be and the conditions of possibility for a livable life" (Hemmings, 2012, p. 149).

Affective solidarity can thus be conceived as connections between different experiences of dissonance. Potentially connected forms of affective dissonance can be experienced by someone directly affected by the barriers and tragedies that accompany crisis or disaster and by someone far away from a disaster who is moved by the tension between a narrative of suffering and their own experience of privilege. One could describe these different experiences of affective dissonance as politicized and connected in an affective solidarity that springs from "the desire for transformation out of the experience of discomfort" (Hemmings, 2015, p. 80). One could equally describe these different experiences as moral responses to

crisis or injustice that can lead to the formation of a unified group committed to ask and connect through mutuality. It is through this relational, experience-based understanding of affective, political, global solidarity that I argue the possibility of a non-parasitical use of the term CIGS potentially emerges—even when describing expressional acts of solidarity in non-identity cases.

4 Two strategies for avoiding parasitical uses of global solidarity

Having critically engaged influential accounts of solidarity to address the concern that using the label CIGS to describe pop-up volunteer organizations may represent a parasitical use of solidarity, I am now in a position to offer two alternative strategies. The first strategy for avoiding parasitical uses of global solidarity in the discourse of humanitarian aid and disaster response is to simply refrain from using the term CIGS. There is a legitimate argument to be made that CIGS is an unwieldy category that requires an exhausting level of attentiveness to the nuanced, moral dynamics of global solidarity. There is also a legitimate argument to be made that discarding the term altogether would offer the most straightforward tactic for avoiding one potential parasitical use of global solidarity in the discourse of aid. However, I want to suggest that careful, purposeful uses of the term CIGS can offer an opportunity for reflexive accountability among activists and researchers interested in the role that a rhetoric of global solidarity plays in motivating and sustaining *ad hoc* responses to crisis and injustice.

Keeping the complexities of global solidarity in mind can increase the likelihood of an experience of affective dissonance in response to parasitical uses of global solidarity. Whether in one's own self-narration or in a broader, institutionalized discourse of aid, the dissonance between practice and rhetoric is worth attending to. This second strategy proposes an accountability for the choice to use the term CIGS that demands attention to affective dissonances and can inspire power-sensitive evaluations of the gaps between discourses of *working with* others, practices of *working for* others, and the risk of a "cannibalization of the other masquerading as care" (Hemmings, 2012, p. 152). Global solidarity, a rhetoric of parasitical solidarity, unidirectional aid, and the exploitation of vulnerable people are all potential outcomes of interactions between pop-up volunteer organizations and communities affected by disaster. To those interested in contextually evaluating the dynamics at play on a case-by-case basis—and to those interested in building upon or contesting the concepts discussed here—I offer an operationalization of expressional, global solidarity in the context of humanitarian aid and disaster response.

Expressional, global solidarity captures the temporary prioritization of the needs of distant out-groups over the needs of one's established in-groups. This form of solidarity can be understood through Scholz' account of political solidarity, as the actions of unified groups that are formed through shared moral responses to crisis or injustice. In particular, a criterion of mutuality is required, which represents a commitment to reflexive transformation and social criticism, a commitment to asking

² For example, Kolers (2016, p. 22) draws a distinction between acting *in behalf* of a group, doing what one thinks would benefit them, and acting *on behalf* of that group, doing what they would do.

others how to help, and a commitment to *work with*, rather than *work for*, those most affected. Finally, I suggest that mutuality in this expressional and global form of political solidarity is better understood as a function of power-sensitive, networked experiences of affective dissonance than as an agent-neutral duty to defer to those suffering inequity. This sensitivity to power is critical in order to prevent an approach based in relational, affective mutuality from leading to the assumption that the participation of privileged volunteers in political solidarity involves participating directly in the feelings of suffering others. Failure to attend to uneven power dynamics can lead to a parasitical rhetoric of supposedly empathic solidary action that appropriates, rather than engages with, the dissonance and injustice experienced by victims of crisis and oppression. When the criteria outlined here are met—and acknowledging that evaluations of whether or not they are met will be partial and fluid—I argue that it is beneficial to refer to this subsection of pop-up volunteer organizations as CIGS.

Author contributions

LS: Writing—original draft.

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