

# ETNOFOOR

---

Introduction: Solidarity

Author(s): Elisabet Dueholm Rasch and Pooyan Tamimi Arab

Source: *Etnofoor*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (2017), pp. 7-10

Published by: Stichting Etnofoor

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26296166>

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

Stichting Etnofoor is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Etnofoor*

# Introduction

## Solidarity

Elisabet Dueholm Rasch,  
Wageningen University and Research

Pooyan Tamimi Arab,  
Utrecht University

Solidarity is a key theme today, as a social phenomenon, a moral appeal, and as a governance policy. Broadly understood as a commitment to the struggles of ‘others’, solidarity operates across local, national and globalized scales. Solidarity’s comeback, as de Koning and de Jong put it in this volume, appears to be inspired first and foremost by the ‘Greek case’, as in Ai Wei Wei’s powerful 2017 documentary *Human Flow*, which combines beautiful aerial shots of fleeing masses with heart wrenching footage of refugees’ lives on the ground; scenes that show individuals such as the Afghan Ismatollah Sediqi, who cries out *‘che kār bokonam’* in the rain – ‘what can I do?’ – after losing five members of his family to the Mediterranean Sea. The film, itself a profound act of solidarity by recognizing the existence of those who are still in the mud, and those who are already gone, shows over 20 countries

grappling with human flow. And yet, it captures but one of many domains that call for solidarity.

In this issue, essays about Greece are complemented by other contexts, such as activist engagements with East Timorese activists through transnational solidarity movements, or reflections on engaged ethnography and Latin-American natural resource conflicts, and theoretical reflection on solidarity itself, relevant for understanding institutionalized forms of solidarity closer to home, such as the so-called Dutch participation society (*participatiesamenleving*). The essays explore how meanings, practices, experiences and representations of solidarity transform in a changing, mobile world, asking questions such as: How can solidarity be described today, in a time of widespread regressions into exclusive nationalism and authoritarianism? How is solidarity forged, performed and chal-

Etnofoor, Solidarity, volume 29, issue 2, 2017, pp. 7-10



lenged, from the local to the supra- and transnational, for instance in dealing with the plight of Syrian, Eritrean or Afghan refugees at the edges of Europe? How can solidarity be enacted in relation to those who suffer most from global warming or violent natural resource conflicts? And, what does solidarity between anthropologists and activists imply for anthropological practice?

In their theoretical contribution, Anouk de Koning and Edwin de Jong suggest useful starting points for studying the recent resurgence of 'solidarity'. They 'take solidarity to connote a recognition of communality or fellowship, and the willingness or obligation to act upon this recognition' (13). Such a minimal definition is necessary, they argue, for adopting a multidimensional and multiscale approach to solidarity, for the sake of grasping the complex and interconnected processes of solidarity movements and initiatives that emerged as an answer to, and product of, widespread restructuring of markets and governing institutions, climate change, war, and the scarcity of natural resources.

Taking up the question of how solidarity relates to anthropological practice, Elisabet Dueholm Rasch and Saskia van Drunen use the minimal definition of solidarity to explore how engaged ethnography can be an expression of solidarity. They discuss how key elements of solidarity, such as egalitarianism and horizontal relations, are part of doing engaged ethnographic research, as well as the challenges that engaged or activist researchers face within the Dutch 'research landscape'. Engaged research, they argue, can become an act of

solidarity and transform vertical relations often inherent to the research process. However, researchers who do engaged ethnography as solidarity might only slowly transform existing research practices.

The issue's composition further reflects the focus of the recent resurgence of solidarity in anthropological research on the Greek case. Two case studies, by Elena Mamoulaki on Ikaria, and Giorgos Serntedakis on Lesbos, as well as a short reflection by Katerina Rozakou, analyse solidarity initiatives in Greece. Rozakou describes how the 2015 European refugee crisis changed Lesbos into a focal node of reconfigurations of humanitarianism. In the transformation of the contemporary humanitarian world, engaging in social relationships as a way of doing solidarity is, according to Rozakou, an important way for grassroots initiatives of subverting 'the dominant hierarchical schemata of humanitarianism' (100).

In her analysis of the everyday practices of cohabitation binding locals and political exiles on Ikaria during the Greek Civil War (1946-1949), Elena Mamoulaki approaches solidarity in the form of hospitality as part of a widely shared Ikarian ethos of both locals and exiles. Drawing on the memories of exiles and Ikarians, she shows how these two groups asserted a particular way of being together through their interactions in 'forced cohabitation'. She argues that hospitality as solidarity is rooted in histories of repression and injustice in different periods of occupation on the island. Mamoulaki shows how solidarity worked out in practice through, for example, relationships of godparenthood and friendships, but also stresses that soli-

Photo 1. Refugees walking near Idomeni Camp, Greece in Human Flow. Photo courtesy of Amazon Studios.

solidarity can appear in unexpected forms, and that scholars should 'resist the temptation to interpret them through the lens of values of political opportunism, economic maximization and contemporary political interest' (51).

Giorgios Serntedakis' contribution takes us to the Greece of the recent European refugee crisis. Like Mamoulaki, he underlines the importance of a historical perspective to understand the deeper motives behind the movement's acts of selfless giving, and considers the 2015 solidarity initiatives on Lesbos to be rooted in the Greek economic crisis. The analysis of two solidarity initiatives on the island shows that the ways in which solidarians (want to) relate to refugees is best captured by the term 'together'. By way of 'doing solidarity' together with refugees – cooking food, distributing clothes, providing shelter – solidarians engage in different types of social relationships with newcomers. Resonating with Rozakou's point that solidarity is not the same as humanitarianism, solidarians distance themselves discursively and in practice from philanthropic and charity organizations that often reproduce vertical power hierarchies.

Annette Jansen's contribution about the international solidarity movement for East Timor and the global R2P (Responsibility to Protect) coalition, also examines how solidarity activists relate to the people they are in solidarity with. Whereas this relationship in the Lesbos-case is characterized by a desire to be 'together', Jansen shows how a collective imagination of what it means to be 'human' feeds into empathic and compassionate relations between transnational solidarity activists and the people they stand in solidarity with. In tune with Rozakou and Serntedakis, she shows an important difference between East Timorese soli-

solidarity activists and R2P: whereas East Timorese activists represented 'people' in essentially political terms, the populations at risk in the R2P narrative are largely depoliticized. This is also reflected in the different ways in which East Timor solidarity activists and R2P advocates describe their relation with 'suffering others': as one of 'solidarity' or one of 'responsibility'.

The two final contributions explore how religion relates to solidarity, refugees, and (post-)migrants to Western Europe. The conversation with Bosnian-Dutch activist Dino Suhonic takes us to the Netherlands, where Suhonic founded MARUF, an organization that promotes the emancipation of queer Muslims. In this conversation with Pooyan Tamimi Arab, they address solidarity's ever-recurring problem of selective indignation. The final contribution, by Annelise Reid, is a book review of the edited volume *The Refugee Crisis and Religion: Secularism, Security and Hospitality in Question*, which explores the all too often neglected but throughout flight trajectories prominent role of religion in the recent refugee crisis.