The Virus of Capitalism and Why Solidarity Will Not Be Enough

*El virus del capitalismo
y por qué la solidaridad no será suficiente*

Ibalú Alba Dwan

Resumen

Este artículo examina las posibilidades y limitaciones de la solidaridad dentro de los movimientos antiautoritarios en el Norte global, basándose en observaciones en Alemania y Estados Unidos y utilizando como ejemplo la actual pandemia de Covid-19. Aunque las redes antiautoritarias en estas geografías proporcionan importantes líneas de fuga, así como formas concretas de apoyo a un número de personas, siguen siendo incapaces de desafiar las estructuras subyacentes del neoliberalismo de manera importante, ya que todavía están enredadas con un imaginario social que sostiene un individuo masculino hegemónico y formas omnipresentes de intercambio de valor. Por lo tanto, aunque la solidaridad desempeña un papel importante en las luchas actuales por la justicia social, debe complementarse con el cultivo de estructuras de reciprocidad que puedan empezar a socavar las nociones persistentes del individuo, el interés propio y el valor como un juego interminable de equivalencias. Con este objetivo, se ofrece un marco teó-

Abstract

This paper examines the possibilities and limitations of solidarity within anti-authoritarian movements in the global North, based on observations in Germany and the United States, using the current Covid-19 pandemic as an example. Though the anti-authoritarian networks in these geographies provide important lines of flight, as well as concrete forms of support to a number of people, they remain unable to challenge the underlying structures of neoliberalism in important ways, as they are still entangled with a social imaginary that upholds a hegemonic masculine individual and pervasive forms of value-exchange. Hence, though solidarity plays an important role in present struggles towards social justice, it must be complemented with the cultivation of structures of reciprocity that can begin to undermine the persistent notions of the individual, self-interest, and value as an endless play of equivalences. Towards this aim, it offers an initial theoretical framework for reciprocity, as an epistemic reorientation, based on

rico inicial para la reciprocidad, como reorientación epistémica, basado en la teoría de la reciprocidad de Dominique Temple y en las reflexiones de Jean Baudrillard sobre la reversibilidad. En última instancia, pretende contribuir a las prácticas políticas de estos movimientos para construir mejores estructuras sociales de interdependencia y cuidado.

Dominique Temple's theory of reciprocity and Jean Baudrillard's thoughts on reversibility. It ultimately seeks to contribute to these movements' political praxes towards building better social structures of interdependence and care.

Palabras clave: reciprocidad, reversibilidad, solidaridad, movimientos sociales

Key words: reciprocity, reversibility, solidarity, social movements

> Everywhere, in every domain, a single form predominates: reversibility, cyclical reversal and annulment put an end to the linearity of time, language, economic exchange, accumulation and power.
>
> -Baudrillard

Introduction

On March 19, 2020, nineteenth months ago at the time of writing this paper, Covid-19 was declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO)— only three months after first being identified in Wuhan, China, and two months after WHO declared the outbreak as a "Public Health Emergency of International Concern". These events which seemed to unfold, both at warp speed and in slow motion, made immediately visible the many deep faults and painful contradictions of the current system in which we persevere. Despite our effective technologies for communication, advanced understanding of epidemiology and existence of wealth reserves, governments simply failed to act and allowed the virus to continue to spread precisely through the multiple pathways that were readily available to it in our globalized world. To many of us in the left, the completely inadequate and often callously calculated responses from most governments were not surprising, since we know that we cannot expect them to protect our lives the same way they protect capital. More importantly, however, this crisis has also reiterated the left's insufficient ability to offer a real challenge to the social conditions that simultaneously managed and —in many ways— produced this pandemic.

The pandemic as a phenomenon illuminates in high resolution the way capitalism operates: circulation paths, enforcement of borders, resource —including so-called labor— allocation, risk calculation, and, of course, securing increased profit margins. At the same time, the broad range of responses from the left have,

for the most part, remained narrowly circumscribed to the same old frameworks: labor demands —in particular around wage losses and working conditions—, securing welfare provisions from the State, and grassroot forms of localized direct aid and crisis mitigation for those most in need[1]. This last one, in particular, seems to partly constitute the horizon of what is referred to as solidarity within the anti-authoritarian left. Yet what the past several months have made clear, and what must be said, is that this is simply not enough to preserve and affirm all life in the face of such destruction. Since the crises stemming from extreme weather events and increasing levels of precarity will only continue to intensify, it is urgent that we closely examine the ways in which we conceive of and practice solidarity, and the ways it may or may not be contributing to the creation of alternatives rooted in affective logics of care.

In this paper, I examine the possibilities and limitations of solidarity within anti-authoritarian movements in the global North, based on my observations in both Germany and the United States. Though the anti-authoritarian networks in these geographies provide important lines of flight, as well as concrete forms of support to a number of people —especially during times of crises—, they remain unable to challenge the underlying structures of neoliberalism in important ways, as they are still entangled with a social imaginary that upholds a hegemonic masculine individual within a *"structural play of value"* (Baudrillard, 1995; Day, 2005: 210; Deschner, 2021). Therefore, anti-authoritarian movements are largely shaped by forms of value-exchange —something which also responds to a privileged structural position within global capitalism—, that continues to undermine social reproduction. Hence, as I will show in this paper, though solidarity plays an important role in present struggles towards social

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1 For a further inquiry into the various ways in which social movements have mobilized in response to the pandemic Interface Journal's Coronavirus edition covers a wide-range of organizing efforts across various parts of the world, though its coverage is restricted to the earlier months of the pandemic.

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justice, it must be complemented with the cultivation of structures of reciprocity that can begin to undermine the persistent notions of the individual, self-interest, and value as an endless play of equivalences. Towards this aim, I offer an initial theoretical framework for reciprocity, as an epistemic reorientation, that is mainly based on Dominique Temple's theory of reciprocity and Jean Baudrillard's thoughts on reversibility. Ultimately, I hope to contribute to social movements by recuperating and articulating a generative social form that has been at the core of virtually all human societies.

The Limits of Solidarity

The Covid-19 pandemic clearly exposes capitalism as a form of domination, and it also brings to light many of the long-standing limitations in the anti-authoritarian left, which most clearly manifests in an inability to build more inclusive, self-sustaining infrastructures that can support participants long-term (Deschner, 2021; Kadir, 2016). This is in no way a condemnation of the anti-authoritarian left, nor a dismissal of all the important work activists commit themselves to realizing. It is an invitation to dig deeper into the core of our interpersonal relations, organizing dynamics, practices of solidarity, and the organizing logics underlying them. In this section, I will explore what solidarity does and what is its main importance in struggles for social justice, before exploring current limitations by looking at autonomous forms of direct action— specifically in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Finally, I will examine the limits of a solidarity framework, by showing how this frame is often used to refer to changes which necessitate a more profound epistemic transformation, thus inevitably falling short and obscuring the real challenges and stakes. Though my analysis focuses on autonomous forms of direct action within anti-authoritarian movements, as I see these as offering the most fruitful sites for formulating post-capitalist

alternatives, it can also be expanded to how solidarity operates in different contexts as the same logics tend to underpin it as a broader framework. By the end of this section, I hope to make clear the need for a different, complimentary framework to guide our collective action, which is that of reciprocity.

At its most basic, solidarity can be understood as an ethical framework that lies at the heart of leftist politics and is used to guide social action by various subjects (NGOs, activist collectives, individuals) on multiple scales (local, national, international). As a result, it can sometimes be a contentious term with differing and oftentimes opposing meanings depending on the context and who is framing the action (Landy et al., 2014). Within the radical left, however, solidarity is understood more specifically to be a relation forged through shared political struggle which has a transformative potential (Featherstone, 2012). This transformational character differentiates it from charity work and strictly reformist actions, as neither of these seek to challenge current relations of power or conditions of inequality. It is also what makes solidarity a privileged frame within anti-authoritarian movements who seek to create new social forms free from all oppression and build new worlds in the shell of the old. Solidarities are key in territorializing resistance, as they create new connections between different places and struggles, allowing for new relations and alliances to be built. This is where most of its generative potential lies, as it allows for the formation of new political subjects and offers at least the possibility to work through differences across social divides (Featherstone, 2012). Furthermore, solidarity has long been key in creating new geographies of internationalism from below which contest capital exploitation, imperialism, and neoliberal globalization (Featherstone, 2012).

David Featherstone's work (2012) offers examples of the "productive force of solidarities" in re-shaping the political terrain and opening new spaces for collective agency against hegemonic powers (p. 254). One exemplary moment involves working-class organizers in Lancashire, England, and the abolitionist movement

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to end slavery in the United States. Having been deeply affected by Frederick Douglas' appeals, workers in England helped block plans for a military intervention on behalf of the South, which prompted the Union to send back shiploads of aid in return— as British workers went through a bitter "cotton famine" (Featherstone, 2012). Examples today include the international BDS campaign for a free Palestine, Seebrücke's efforts around sea rescue in the Mediterranean, or many of the actions and campaigns supporting prisoner's struggles. These solidarities can oftentimes, not only provide material and immediate life-saving support, but also do the important work of shaping political discourse and opening new spaces for political contestation (Featherstone, 2012). Hence, solidarities are crucial on the macro-political landscape, providing a key basis of support for organized campaigns around important issues[2]. Yet, as per its political definition, solidarity has to do with a struggle against oppression. What takes place outside this shared antagonism? When we delve into the micro-political level— particularly in the global North— is solidarity by itself enough? What are its limits regarding more generative forms of action based on affirmation?

Having completely upended normality, the pandemic was seen as an historic opportunity to build new forms of collective life based precisely on forms of solidarity and mutual aid. Yet though anti-authoritarian movements reiterated the importance of "reconfiguring the infrastructures of care" so that we can depend on one another instead of the market and the State, activists have, in many ways, continued with their own version of business-as-usual (Non Una Di Meno, 2020: 113). During the second lockdown in Germany, an effort was put forward to build a large-scale movement towards the containment of the virus base on a solidarity framework. The Zero Covid campaign (https://ze-

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2 As Gerald Aiken (2013) has noted, Featherstone's book offers a more neatly coherent reading of past moments, whereas more current solidarity movements involve a much more "messy, multiple, and contested character", which is precisely what this paper will address in some ways (p. 3).

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ro-covid.org) began as an online petition in the UK and soon after spread to countries in Europe, calling for a joint strategy to bring infections down to zero. The main demands were for governments to: subsidize a total shutdown by paying workers who could not do home-office; provide support for people in difficult situations (e.g. those exposed to domestic abuse or caring for small children); provide safe accommodations to everyone —including refugees in dangerous collective living situations—; invest in the expansion of the social health infrastructure; secure global access to vaccines; and give financial support to exploited nations. Though perhaps imperfect, this was quite an ambitious proposal. Yet for some reason, Zero Covid did not gain any traction, which has essentially kept the pandemic's management within the capitalist dictates of the State. I think it is important to ask, why did social movements not leverage their organizational structures to demand a stop to the spread of the virus and insist governments pay for the crisis?

Generally, activist organizing simply seemed to adapt to the exigencies of the hygiene regulations and periods of physical distancing, while maintaining their political agenda— along with the pace and type of activities— and leaving their usual organizing logics largely unexamined. In direct response to the crisis, activists mainly focused on acting in solidarity with the "most vulnerable" or "most marginalized", since many people became unable to access many of the essential services they need, which are provided by nonprofits or other government organizations. Prisoners, the elderly, or those with an immunocompromised system were also among those rhetorically included in an effort to "leave no one behind" during these difficult times. Providing immediate assistance in times of crises to those whose lives are often excluded from society (e.g., those with homeless, immigrant or refugee status) is of vital importance, yet it often goes no further than simply acting as a stopgap. More importantly, this limitation cannot be reduced to the effects or specific circumstances of the pandemic. The community kitchens, social fund-raising events, and varie-

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ty of actions organized on an ongoing basis and "in solidarity with" (refugees, homeless, immigrants, etc.), tend to function as the gathering and re-allocation of resources and provision of basic services. In practice, these efforts do little to really transform existing relations based on hierarchies and forms of exclusion.

Cases where activists have difficulties reaching those "most in need" or "at higher risk", as during the pandemic lockdown, further highlight the ways in which a large part of activism takes place in a web of impersonal exchanges, wherein the instrumental goal is the achievement of a certain task (Fiedlschuster & Reichle, 2020). Since activists are oftentimes simply "plugged-in" to predetermined templates for action, this undermines creating spaces for more meaningful forms of encounter that can continue to build on one another (Dwan, 2021). It also demonstrates the inability of activists to establish meaningful connections with the groups they are acting in solidarity with. This makes it so that activists" derive distinct psycho-social benefits from engagement", while those in need receive some sort of material benefit within a quid pro quo logic ultimately based on —perhaps intersecting forms of— self-interest (Temple, 2003; Zeller, 2021: 301). Though activists may get satisfaction from helping others and having the opportunity to act out their moral values, giving and receiving remain distinct and flowing in only one direction— something which I will expand more on later. Finally, as some have noted, these limited forms of solidarity remain tightly bound to local geographies where the emergence of "local rationalities" simply relieve the worst suffering (Cox, 2020; Fielschuster, 2020; Zajak, 2020). This significantly restricts the capacity for international and transnational solidarities with oppressed places where "local rationalities" are already in place and are oftentimes the only recourse people may have against crises like the Covid-19 pandemic (Cox, 2020).

Today's anti-authoritarian movements have created an infrastructural web of self-managed spaces, collectives, projects and events, all of which contribute to a political subculture that offers

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an alternative to capitalist relations and institutions. At the same time, however, these networks mirror neoliberal structures of work and competition, in which activists reproduce "performances of hegemonic masculinity" (Deschner, 2021: 158). This manifests in the expectation to maintain a relentless level of political activity and "unyielding level of commitment and sacrifice" within the movement, which realistically can be undertaken mainly by students or young people with a lot of free time and otherwise few commitments (Brown & Pickerill, 2009: 4). Those who are not able to keep up with the pace, cannot in effect participate in these networks, wherein political activism is conceived as a form of voluntary labor towards a goal that is almost always formulated extraneously to the participants, as activist production aims to transform some large issue in society and often rests on political ideals. Furthermore, the central imaginary of "the activist" is also rooted in patriarchal ideals of strength and ability, which combined with neoliberal structures of self-enterprise and self-making, feed into normative notions of individual autonomy and self-sufficiency. (Deschner, 2021). Finally, individualism, as a bourgeois episteme, remains as the condition of possibility for most relations in ways that significantly hinder more generative forms of collective and interdependent action.

Given the challenges mentioned above, interpersonal relations within anti-authoritarian movements tend to be quite fraught, resulting in fragmentation and transience within movements (Deschner 2021; Lagalisse 2016). Activists themselves recognize the tenuous character of their interpersonal relations as a main challenge facing their movements. This is further evidenced by a recent report published by the Ulex Project— a pan-European training network that has "building social movement capacity" as its goal— which found that "divisions within and between movements", "Lack of clear strategy", "absence of vision/ambition", and "social reproduction" were the main issues as identified by activists themselves. Among the main things they wanted were "More able to work together" along with "Better infrastructure",

which includes things like solidarity, kindness, and sustainable alternatives (Cox & Ulex, 2021). Because each of us experience differing levels of vulnerability in relation to the forms of oppression we face, and activists who are particularly vulnerable still must do the work of asserting their boundaries within movement spaces, interpersonal conflicts are pervasive and difficult to overcome (Deschner, 2021). At the same time, activists remain preoccupied with accruing forms of value —perhaps in an effort to stave off a sense of their own vulnerability—, and with attempts to conform to the normative expectations of high work performance mentioned above.

As Claire Deschner (2021) states: "The problems of overworking, managing of capacities and politics of recognition influence who remains part of [these movements] and who does not", since anyone who is unable or unwilling to perform autonomy in this way will not be recognized as part of the movement (p. 195). This all has very real implications for how solidarities are allowed to emerge between diverse struggles, as well as within collectives themselves. To this point, Erica Lagalisse's (2016) research on transnational solidarity illuminated the ways in which practical forms of solidarity are often hindered in activist spaces by these problematic dynamics, stating:

Rather than ensuring the inclusion of "most affected" participants, the praxis of anti-oppression becomes articulated with the logic of neoliberalism and capital itself to produce a competitive prestige game among activists seeking the honour of "good politics" and ultimately everyone loses. (p. 43)

Though activists do support one another with many of daily life's difficulties within a capitalist reality, these quiet, domestic moments are not acknowledged as being of major significance within their value system (Kadir, 2016: 203). Practical forms of aid which operate outside the "public" political sphere (e.g., meetings, assemblies, and demonstrations), are not conceived of as political per se, but perhaps simply as "helping out a friend"— wherein "friend" and "ally" are valued differently. This is because,

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despite longstanding feminist interventions, the personal and the political remain curiously distinct as separate spheres, making it so that things like gendered violence continue being considered a "private" matter (Lagalisse, 2010). Though it is interesting to note that friends can also be converted into allies at the opportune moment, making one's personal "contacts" a form of capital within a "self-maintained network of possibilities" (Deschner 2021: 155).

In contrast to the above dynamics, those communities who are largely excluded from capital circuits of value-exchange and whom activists hope to stand in solidarity with, such as immigrants without papers, generate all manner of shared values that help them survive their oppressive circumstances. They cultivate what has been defined as "use-values" (e.g., kindness, cooperation, or fairness), as they are embodied in local, collective practices and are consumed— not accrued in the self (Lagalisse, 2016; Skeggs, 2011). Yet, I want to caution that this formulation keeps us within the frame of political economy, wherein value exists as a dangerously abstracted form and therefore always ripe for co-optation into the logic of exchange. It also risks retaining notions of "utility" and "work" as moral imperatives, which tend to leave aside the symbolic aspects of social relations which go beyond these formulations and are highly significant for collective life. In fact, as mentioned above, both "utility" and "work" greatly influence activist engagement already. Yet relations thrive when they are engaged in cultural elaboration based in symbolic meaning and affective connections. In many ways, this is precisely what happens in these marginal communities, which are often also excluded from anti-authoritarian movement spaces. Their values and relations are perhaps often overlooked and undervalued within movements that are rooted in forms of privilege. This is why solidarity with these Others can often be simply a one-way distribution of goods and services, without the acknowledgement that solidarities could in fact go both ways.

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One important issue to consider in all this is that social movements are deeply implicated with "the representational machinery of bourgeois politics", as they have long since accepted "the public sphere" as "their terrain of struggle"— which, despite claims to the contrary, always involves demands for recognition from hegemonic power centers (Thompson, 2010: 159). This makes it so that much of direct action can stay within the realm of representation, and helps explain why so many protest actions, though they may have minimal practical effects, can so often be highly regarded— because of what they are understood to mean. Solidarity tends to work in a similar way, wherein "the public" is composed of other activists in the network. In this way, solidarity has a performative character, in the unfortunate sense that it is meant to demonstrate, and gain approval for, one's "good politics" (Lagalisse, 2016). A.K. Thompson (2010) argues that, in order to move past "the limits of the bourgeois horizon", movements need to start to conceive themselves as "modes of production" instead of "claim making agencies" (p. 168). Though here I would caution against an interpretation of modes of production that, once again, fetishizes objects over human relations —particularly within a frame of self-interest—, instead of centering the processes that constitute the community relations that make this collective production possible, and which carry important symbolic weight.

In the end, though solidarity occupies a central place within activism by territorializing new geographies of resistance capable of connecting various struggles, a lot of its importance in the everyday seems derived from what it signals (i.e., what it says about the person "playing a solidarity card"), much more than what it actually does (Lagalisse, 2016: 305). For this reason, I suggest that anti-authoritarian movements shift their focus more towards their own interpersonal relations and internal processes in order to overcome some of their main challenges and open further possibilities for social transformation. This is where a theory of reciprocity can serve as inspiration towards an epistemic transformation rooted in forms of mutual recognition and

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sense of inclusion. Through these praxes, each participant—in their wholeness as a human being— would be taken as significant to the larger collective process, which is absolutely necessary to make these networks more sustainable and inclusive.

Reciprocity: Logic of Contradiction & Reversibility

So far, I have referred to reciprocity as being key for building post-capitalist alternatives, reserving a closer treatment of it until now in order to fully make my argument. Along with its colloquial meaning of "giving something back in equal measure", reciprocity has been mainly used within the social sciences to refer to all forms of exchange that have taken place prior to the market— such as barter and gift-exchange. This treatment of reciprocity, which has kept it restricted to a liberal-economic conceptualization of human practices, betrays an inability or unwillingness to challenge the underlying assumptions responsible for the reproduction of the current exploitative system. Yet, reciprocity is a much more profound and far-reaching social phenomenon that occurs outside logics of accumulation and notions of an individual self. In this section, I will offer an initial sketch for a theoretical framework of reciprocity as a social relation that is rooted in the principle of contradiction, which allows for a higher affective consciousness to emerge through forms of mutual recognition (Temple, 2003). This phenomenon comes to be expressed in collective forms of cultural elaboration rich in symbolic meaning, which further nurture the web of reciprocal relations and contribute to structures of reciprocity that organize a community or society in egalitarian terms (Martínez Gutiérrez, 2017).

In Temple's theory, which was largely formulated from his observations of Aymara (Bolivia) and Aguaruna-Huambisa (Peru) ways of life in South America, reciprocity is essentially a relation that allows for the contradictory situation of being simultaneously both donor and recipient of what is referred to as the gift.

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This possibility of being both strong and weak in relation to the other, creates an equilibrium between opposing forces (i.e., two consciousnesses), leading to a higher affective state in which a consciousness recognizes itself in the other— a "consciousness of consciousness" (Temple, 2003). This is the point in which care for the other emerges, a revelation which is neither objective nor purely subjective as it can only be apprehended through this embodied experience (Martínez, 2017). Hence, reciprocity cannot really be understood as a form of exchange —though it does also involve the production and circulation of objects—, as it exists outside the economic logic of interest and accumulation that has come to dominate much of our world. The objects that are given and received always carry with them a surplus of symbolic meaning that goes beyond the mere instrumental value of the object (Martínez, 2017). This is because reciprocity's raison d'être is actually the cultivation of the social bond itself, which is renewed through endless gift cycles, weaving interdependencies and building collective forms of wealth (Temple, 2003). From this perspective, it is perhaps not surprising to learn that Temple understood this principle as being fundamental to the constitution of all human societies who come to reproduce this relation wherever possible.

Once reciprocity is allowed to emerge, it becomes organized in increasingly complex social structures, each of which generates specific ethical values, with bilateral reciprocity— or "friendship"— being the simplest. Here a shared feeling of humanity emerges in which the person facing you becomes its whole embodiment (Temple, 2003). From this starting point, and through a multiplicity of gift cycles, social forms that are more open and inclusive begin to appear which are rooted in logics of care. Different social structures give rise to different values as they grow in scale and complexity. For example, the value of "sharing" emerges from one's identification with the group. "Responsibility" and "justice" both come from ternary structures of reciprocity wherein a person receives the gift from one person and gives it to another —justice being formulated with the gift's return to the per-

son who is the intermediary, so to speak—; while in a centralized structure one person is the intermediary for many people, and what emerges is a kind of universal "faith" or trust in the other. It is the political role of the community to articulate these various structures into a wider system so that each person can belong to and participate in all of them (Temple, 2003). This stands in stark contrast to the current capitalist system where value has become automatized and exists only to be individually accumulated, while ethical human values that are necessary for collective life are not fostered in any way (Baudrillard, 1995; Temple, 2003). Moreover, those who cannot accrue value to themselves become excluded from society or even denied personhood (Skeggs, 2011). It is also why many of us come to rely on abstract morals or ideals to guide our political action.

Unlike with the instrumental rationality of relations of exchange, affectivity is at the heart of reciprocal relations. Though it is important to note that this affectivity can be either negative or positive depending on the type of encounter, as there is nothing innate about egalitarian forms of reciprocity— it is something human beings must co-create. Yet when an encounter takes place in conditions of symmetry, the affective consciousness that emerges creates a balanced relation of mutuality in which no form of domination or oppression can take over (Martínez, 2017). As Sara Ahmed's work on the sociality of emotion demonstrates, emotions are indeed world-making (2014). They give us an orientation towards or against certain objects and shape the boundaries of social and bodily space as they move through us. Importantly, Ahmed argues that emotions are always already mediated by cultural context and histories so that our interpretations of them already carry certain meanings and valuations, which could be seen as supporting the argument that a positive affectivity must be worked for within the space of reciprocity (Ahmed, 2014). Although her work mostly addresses the negative aspects of this, particularly the role emotions play in formations such as nationalism, xenophobia, and racism, it could also provide insight

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into how emotions, as cultural practices, can contribute to social structures that embody positive values and provide the basis for more egalitarian and just institutional forms. This perspective could open new ways of thinking and relating within anti-authoritarian movements, towards the creation of more inclusive networks that recognize difference, that can also cultivate more stable communities.

Finally, we get to what I see as one of the most important aspects of reciprocity, since it is precisely what is not made possible in hierarchical relations of power— and that is reversibility. While Marcel Mauss (2011) focused on "the principle whereby the gift received has to be repaid", it is not only the obligation to repay the gift which constitutes its most radical character, but the imperative to accept the gift (p.1). The gift is in the obligation to receive. Since reciprocal relations exist within the flow of giving, receiving and returning, without the reversibility of the gift, there is no possibility of creating a meaningful social bond with the other and establishing a mutual relationship (Baudrillard, 1995). It is precisely the possibility for a counter-gift which is missing in much solidarity work, as activists' efforts sometimes take others as the objects of their solidarity without the possibility of any return from those deemed most vulnerable. Yet the impossibility of returning the gift amounts to a form of violence— perhaps even a symbolic annihilation of the other. Jean Baudrillard emphasizes the importance of this by stating that, "when this reversibility is broken, precisely by the unilateral possibility of giving —which presupposes the possibility of stockpiling value and transferring it in one direction only—, then the properly symbolic relation is dead and power makes an appearance" (p.48). So though returning the gift is, of course, of significant importance so as to not lose face, repayment also plays an important part in economic exchange. Hence, what is really the greatest challenge to relations of exchange is precisely this reversibility of the gift.

Providing a linear stream of direct aid to the "most vulnerable", such as distribution of food or supplies, is not based on the crea-

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tion— and renewal— of a social bond nor does it necessarily contribute to the creation of reciprocal structures of care. As much as activists draw an ideological distinction between solidarity activism and charity, oftentimes they tend to look very similar in practice. Although these types of solidarity actions are also often referred to as fostering mutual-aid, they are rooted in an underlying distinction between those who are —most— vulnerable and those who are —presumably— not, standing in stark contrast to the goal of creating an egalitarian imaginary. Judith Butler (2020) argues against assuming such a divide with such clarity that it is worth quoting at length:

> Of course, the point is to highlight the unequal distribution of vulnerability; but if such a designation implicitly distinguishes between vulnerable and invulnerable groups, and charges the invulnerable with the obligation to protect the vulnerable, then that formulation makes two problematic assumptions: first, it treats groups as if they are already constituted as vulnerable or invulnerable; second, it fortifies a paternalistic form of power at the very moment in which *reciprocal* social *obligations* are most urgently needed. (p.71)

Hence, though anti-authoritarian activists seek to abolish all hierarchical forms, these distinctions reinforce relations of power and do not pose a challenge to the capitalist logic of self-interest, accumulation, and finality.

In many important ways, vulnerability can be understood as the result of politically imposed conditions of precarity that are differentially allocated across populations, which makes it so that certain bodies are more exposed to various forms of violence (Butler, 2015, 2017). Sometimes they are even threatened with extinction— something which may not even register since, under normative frames, some lives are not recognizable as grievable lives; that is, their loss is not "conceptualizable as a loss" (Butler,

2020: 58). "To be grievable", Butler argues, "is to be interpellated in such a way that you know your life matters […] that your body is treated as one that should be able to live and thrive, whose precarity should be minimized" (2020: 59). In this way, solidarity efforts, such as those that provide essential forms of aid to those without shelter or full legal status, do begin to significantly challenge these hegemonic assumptions of who counts as grievable. The question remains, however, on how to move beyond these extremely unequal circumstances and into new configurations based on relations of interdependence, wherein vulnerability is not something that is reserved for Others but recognized as a shared condition in an ontological sense (Butler, 2004). Hence, Deschner (2021) argues that, in order to "extend the possibilities for mutual survival" through robust alternative infrastructures, activists must learn to recognize their own vulnerability as beings with the power to affect others but also to be affected by others (p. 236). This shared vulnerability could importantly provide the basis for solidarity in a more inclusive and deeper way than is now the case (Deschner, 2021).

It is true that without a willingness to embody and perform both strength and weakness with one another, there is virtually no possibility of forming reciprocal relations which can contribute to better post-capitalist alternatives that can care for people's social reproduction across levels of precarity and vulnerability. To this point, a recent publication by the Ulex Project highlights the "glaring" absence of community structures in European countries, capable of sustaining "overwhelmed and burnt out" solidarity activists returning from frontline struggles, particularly from refugee camps (Ulex, 2021: 13). In order to address this, some organizations which include Ulex are developing "a set of tools and resources to strengthen psycho-social resilience in people working within solidarity networks" which will be largely based on peer-to-peer structures (p.14). The publication also mentioned how "dignity eroding" it can feel for people to experience always being on the receiving end of aid efforts —or receive aid

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they feel they can never repay—, and advocated once again for "refugee, undocumented and asylum-seeker-led freedom movements" more generally, though they did not offer a deeper discussion of what this would mean (p.9). I see this as more evidence that the resilience of both activists and "more vulnerable" people is mutually implicated. Yet many of us are also tired of simply surviving and being praised on our resilience. Even having better resilience as our ultimate goal needs to be questioned. What we want is to thrive, and we understand that this necessitates a change in the way we relate to each other on the deepest levels.

As it currently stands, friendships are currently the main site of reciprocity in our lives. Yet, as mentioned earlier, they remain part of the individual's personal property instead of being conceived as a potential terrain of struggle for collective transformation (Montgomery & bergman, 2017: 93). In a similar vein, many aspects of activists' needs and desires are largely satisfied within the private sphere each person is thought to inhabit— which is always implicated with the market and the State, since social reproduction continues to be invisibilized and undervalued within what seems to really count as political. Hence, echoing Nick Montgomery and Carla Bergman, there needs to be a politicization of friendship through an expanded frame that includes "friends, chosen family, and other kin intimately connected in a web of mutual support", and a revaluation of social reproduction as a political project in itself (2017: 93). As Montgomery and Bergman state, "nourishing these kinds of intimacies means putting relationships before abstract political commitments and ideologies" (2017: 105). This would undoubtedly enrich movement spaces and open new possibilities for collective forms of action rooted in the values generated within these contradictory places of shared vulnerability and strength. From here, being in solidarity with the most vulnerable, would be predicated not only on the tacit acknowledgement of all life as precarious and in need of structures to preserve it, but in a knowing that freedom is essentially a relation and a being-in-the-world that is collective.

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Conclusion: Final Thoughts On Giving

At this point in time, there is a tentative and largely uneven return to a "new normal". While regions like Europe and North America have managed to vaccinate a large majority of their population, many places in the world —most notably Africa— have not even reached the double digits. Hence, though solidarity has been all over our current discourses, a devastatingly large majority of the world continues to suffer the worst effects of the crises, and things just go on and on, as they usually do. What can be expected around real international solidarity, when it can simply circulate as yet another Sign? Without reciprocity as an epistemic basis, there is so much acquiescence that continues everywhere. Anti-authoritarian networks in the global North can largely sidestep the pandemic, perhaps only taking notice of it in regard to vulnerable Others to which our solidarity can always be aimed at. Although, one would expect this crisis to make very clear the real ontological vulnerability that implicates all of us, and the necessity of transforming our social reproduction away from a conception of a private sphere, as well as neoliberal structures. Moreover, the unacceptable conditions so many are forced to endure on a daily basis, which become worse during crises, urgently requires local and international solidarities which go way beyond what can even be envisioned at the moment. In order to begin challenging such a stark reality, the struggle for transformation truly needs to begin within our own consciousness, ways of knowing, ways of relating and in the territories we inhabit. These are our own immediate frontlines.

As we have seen, solidarity tends to often be conceived in terms of giving. It can have very positive effects. It can be extremely helpful to those who receive it. And it is certainly experienced as rewarding to those who give. However, it is important to continue to reflect on the limits of giving. Who is in the position to give? Do these positions ever get reversed? When can giving become a form of power or violence instead? Who is being given to, and are

they getting something that can truly benefit them beyond an immediate sense? Perhaps more than material objects, for example, people who are marginalized could benefit from being included in relations of reciprocity with others— particularly those with different levels of privilege and access to resources. A good place social movements can perhaps start is asking; how do we open the obligation to receive and make it an integral part of our political praxes? Could this simply be a criterion that is applied to all organizing projects? Could consciousness-raising around this take place in activist collectives? Could we attempt both and see what changes it brings?

Importantly, I would once again emphasize to not undermine focusing on place-based activity that is deeply rooted in social reproduction in order to create new social forms capable of caring for people and building intergenerational movements that can bring us closer to actually sustainable post-capitalist realities. Though this may seem to keep solidarity inward-looking within local geographies, once relations of reciprocity become firmly established and organized into social structures, they can unfold into wider and more complex forms transforming whole territories and reproducing different kinds of logics. Moreover, by being able to rely on better movement infrastructures, activists in the global North could begin to more effectively challenge neocolonial entities and arrangements that continue to intensify despair and destruction for people in exploited regions across the globe. Taking power away from global capitalism through local organizing, would do much to ensure that people everywhere have a chance to self-determine and live dignified lives, without the necessity to abandon their places of origin and perhaps end up as refugees. Perhaps this may even be seen as the ultimate form of giving. Though, of course, if people need to or want to migrate for whatever reason, what could be a better support than welcoming them into relations of reciprocity that have been cultivated and are already in place?

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In this paper, I examined the positive aspects of political solidarity within anti-authoritarian movements in the global North, as well as its current limitations and ultimate boundaries, using the current Covid-19 pandemic as an example. I have linked the latter two challenges regarding solidarity practices with movements' inability to really transform the neoliberal structures of value-exchange and performativities of autonomy that are rooted in hegemonic masculinity, as they remain pervasive in these networks. Hence, despite the hopeful infrastructures these movements have built over the years, they cannot provide care for activists in a reliable and sustainable ways, which significantly hinders their potential as post-capitalist alternatives. Perhaps more importantly, they also remain highly inaccessible for a large number of people who do not share the same level of structural privilege. In order to help transform these relations, and move beyond the current solidarity framework, I have offered a brief theoretical sketch of reciprocity. Through this frame, in which people find mutual recognition through an affective consciousness, shared values are generated, which form a solid basis for new social forms of collectivity. I hope this will contribute to these movements' praxes, inspiring them to root their politics in a more intimate, local, and intersubjective place towards collective structures of interdependence and care, capable of expanding into larger and more influential scales.

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