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Between Distancing and Interdependence: The Conflict of Solidarities in the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

In a bid to contain the spread of COVID-19, different national states around the world have introduced strict measures to regulate social interaction that have affected the interdependence of modern societies. In this article, we argue that this handling of the pandemic produces a *conflict of solidarities* that can be interpreted by expanding Durkheim's classic formulations (organic and mechanical solidarity) to include the distinction between *fragmentary solidarity* (based on distancing) and *ordinary solidarity* (based on empathy and equal treatment). The conflict is triggered precisely by the introduction of fragmentary solidarity. Through this conceptualization, we identify different paradoxes and problems that the pandemic poses for present-day society and analyze how it attempts to overcome them through a generalization of ordinary solidarity. The paper concludes that the conflict of solidarities that characterizes the pandemic is not a passing phenomenon. Its anchorage in the complexity and interdependence of contemporary technological, social, and natural conditions points to its persistence.

Keywords

COVID-19, division of labor, solidarity, interdependence, social differentiation, fragmentation, globalization, nation-state

Introduction

The outbreak of coronavirus at the beginning of 2020, with its health, political, and social consequences, is one of the most important events for human life in the twenty-first century. The level of interconnectedness of contemporary society, as compared to earlier moments in modern history, means that the social effects of global catastrophes are more far-reaching and have longer-lasting consequences. Today, we are experiencing in real-time and simultaneously the true meaning of the notion of crisis and a radically new moment in history (Friedman 2020; Habermas 2020), which opens up either more optimistic or more pessimistic avenues for the construction of the future (for example, Agamben 2020; Han 2020; Harari 2020; Horton 2020; Žižek 2020a).

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Michel Wieviorka (2020b) has argued that we are discovering what it means to be in history, Hartmut Rosa (2020) has described the current slowdown as a "sociological miracle," Rudolf Stichweh (2020) has referred to it as a moment of "simplification of the social," and Branko Milanovic (2020) calls it the first global event in history.

Beyond these emphases, this is an exceptional moment characterized by the global synchronization of the crisis experience that affects the interdependence of modern society, understood by Émile Durkheim (2013) in terms of the classic concepts of "organic solidarity" and "mechanical solidarity." The former, which is typical of the modern social division of labor, stresses interdependence between different individuals according to their diverse capabilities as the basis of social cohesion, while mechanical solidarity, or solidarity based on similarities, anchors the social bond in the cultural background of human groups.

In this article, we interpret the historical situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic using these Durkheimian concepts and, at the same time, introduce two new notions of solidarity. We argue that the conditions of social confinement imposed around the world by national states in a bid to control the spread of the virus reveal the emergence of a different type of solidarity that we refer to as *fragmentary solidarity* or *solidarity based on distancing*. The different mechanisms to regulate interaction, introduced by a majority of national states (social distancing, reclusion, limits on public meetings, restrictions on mobility, and the closing of borders), interrupt the complex interdependence that characterizes the division of labor in modern society and, thus, destabilize its organic solidarity. Social interaction is suddenly and heavily restricted mainly to local or, ultimately, community and family spaces. This calls for solidarity in a double sense: On one hand, one must show solidarity with others by isolating oneself and respecting barriers to interaction and, on the other hand, show solidarity with society in general insofar as one can, within the limits of these barriers, by contributing to the functional interdependence of society from a position of confinement. In other words, fragmentary solidarity calls for distancing (or the fragmentation of interaction) to maintain the cohesion of society in general.[1]

This fragmentation has significant consequences economically (a severe limitation of production, unemployment), politically (the suspension of freedoms, an increase in inequality), and in daily life (the overburdening of intimacy, discrimination). To deal with such consequences, society has incipiently deployed a set of cooperative behaviors at the local, state, and international levels (exchange of resources, knowledge, and objects), which we describe using the concept of *ordinary solidarity* or *solidarity based on empathy and equal treatment*. These cooperative behaviors seek to redress the inequalities caused and aggravated by fragmentary solidarity and to restore the interdependencies and social cohesion that are threatened by the massive restriction of interaction at the global level.

As seen, we propose a conceptual model of analysis in which four notions of solidarity (organic, mechanical, fragmentary, and ordinary) are brought together and interact. Within this framework, one of them, fragmentary solidarity, has a special place: The conflicts are a result of its radicalization in the pandemic situation. With the help of this model, we describe and structure a diagnosis: The sociohistorical novelty of the COVID-19 pandemic is that it produces a *conflict of solidarities* whose dynamics we seek to decipher in this article.

To develop this argument, in the first section, we construct the pandemic as a sociological object, and then, we lay the foundations of the analytical scheme through which we interpret the pandemic crisis as *a conflict of solidarities*. Next, we address the conflict of solidarities by following the consequences of the interplay between fragmentary, ordinary, mechanical, and organic solidarity. Finally, we draw the conclusions from our analysis.

The Pandemic as a Sociological Object

The COVID-19 pandemic is not just a biological event or a health problem. On the contrary, it changes the meaning of both the type of society we have built as well as the citizen and

institutional responses developed to address situations like this. Its consequences, the number of people infected, the number of deaths, and the alteration of daily social behavior also reflect variables related to geographic, racial, gender, and social inequality. The pandemic is, in other words, a sociological object in its full sense and close to a "total social fact" as understood by Marcel Mauss (1985), for several social and vital aspects are subject to a logic of decomposition and recomposition with the spread of the virus.

This sociological face of a pandemic was also seen in the Spanish flu outbreak of the early twentieth century, which spread across the continents, thanks to the modernization of transport systems and the densification of cities (Kolata 2011). Its sociological structure was not entirely different from that of the present pandemic: The measures taken in the name of community solidarity prompted talk of a *sanitary dictatorship*, national borders were reinforced, the discourse was suffused with contradictory information, and the real effectiveness of public prophylaxis measures was also doubted (Davis 2013). This trend is even more marked in the current pandemic, due to not only the acceleration of transport but also the new technological conditions of global communication (Bolz 2010; Depoux et al. 2020; Walsh 2020). Interaction between the biological time of the virus (Shinghal 2020) and the political and social time of the emergency is complex (Hartog 2020): On the one hand, scientific communication about measures to confront the disease and the search for a vaccine have accelerated, while, on the other, the absence of a vaccine means that political and social communication seeks to slow the spread of the virus by establishing mechanisms to regulate interaction that promote confinement from the level of the interactions through to the transnational level.

The decisions that these mechanisms have fostered—from physical distancing to the closure of borders—are based on different ways of *seeing like a state* (Scott 1999) and, in turn, reflect a mimetic impulse (Tarde 1903; DiMaggio and Powell 1983), with states observing each other and behaving similarly. This has resulted in the restriction of fundamental rights under states of exception (Agamben 2020) and favored a biopolitical mode of government (Foucault 2010) that relies on the management of large numbers to govern and administer reality (Desrosières 2002) and is forced to update its ways of capturing the present in a radically new scenario (Peckham 2020).

However, the success of these measures does not depend solely on how effectively they are imposed in the present, but also on the conduct and modes of a social and political organization configured in the past. The same applies to the profound economic consequences of lockdowns since they call for protection, investment, and reactivation plans to manage the time of the economy (Stiglitz 2020) that are mainly determined by the institutional framework each region has developed over time. Thus, policy decisions in the field of health care that were based on a neoliberal paradigm (cuts in the budgets of public health systems and welfare safety nets) have repercussions now for the scale of the crisis, the availability of critical care beds and ventilators, and the number of people who are infected and die (Horton 2020). By comparison, countries with policies that reinforced investment in science and public health and resisted the weakening of their welfare states can now claim better results (Blackburn and Ruyle 2020). Similarly, countries with an authoritarian tradition in which public freedoms are subordinated to collective goals have been able to react more efficiently to the pandemic, albeit at the cost of individual rights (Han 2020; Harari 2020).

The sociological dimensions of this phenomenon show that there is not a single pandemic, nor even a single path with different phases. It is a multivector, multitemporal, and highly interdependent phenomenon.

The Analytical Model of Solidarities

The interdependence revealed by the pandemic as a sociological object can be partially captured through the Durkheimian concept of solidarity. The internal difference of this concept, between *mechanical solidarity* (based on similarities) and *organic solidarity* (based on differences)

(Durkheim 2013), explains the interdependencies of modern society, including both those related to the division of labor and those that occur at the level of what Durkheim calls collective consciousness. The concept of "mechanical solidarity" refers to rather simple forms of division of labor in segmentary societies with a relatively low volume of population, little interdependence among each other, and a collective consciousness characterized by a high intensity of common beliefs and sentiments. As a way of sociologically observing this shared consciousness, Durkheim resorts to law. Penal sanctions preserve mechanical solidarity by punishing deviations of the common way of life. On the other hand, "organic solidarity" represents the organization of modern societies with a highly interdependent and functionally specialized division of labor and a collective consciousness in which individuality plays a key role. Collective consciousness is therefore secular, individually oriented, and based on individual rights. Consequently, in a world of organic solidarity, civil, restitutive law predominates (Durkheim 2013; see also Lukes 1992:137ss). By distinguishing between these types of solidarity, Durkheim sought to conceptualize the social bond that holds society together and gives consistency to life in common. They are concepts that refer to forms of social cohesion.

Only within the framework of a highly interrelated society, such as that described using the concept of "organic solidarity," can both the virus's great power of territorial expansion and the speed of its spread be explained. In the absence of a vaccine, the response to its spread has been to interrupt the complex interdependence that characterizes the division of labor through mechanisms to regulate interaction. These mechanisms affect the social foundations of the division of labor, namely, the interaction among participants mostly articulated in modern societies within the limits of organizations (Freidson 1976). Reclusion into the private sphere forces to the adoption of traits typical of mechanical solidarity such as in-home educational and productive tasks, which in the modern world had been outsourced to specialized institutions (Lewnard and Lo 2020).

However, this cannot be understood merely as a return to the community because individuals are still expected to fulfill different roles. This takes place in a functional and socially differentiated way: in some cases, without physical interaction or its reduction to the minimum possible through the use of electronic platforms while, in others, people are more exposed because their functions and livelihood depend on some type of in-person work. Whichever the case, the pandemic produces *fragmentary solidarity* (based on distancing) that partially interrupts the division of labor to protect individuals from contagion while still demanding fulfillment of their roles, and legally introduces a series of prohibitions on the level of public interaction. This paradoxical form of solidarity replaces thus physical presence with interaction at a distance, but it keeps individuals functionally united demanding different outputs from them.

Several analogies and historical comparisons can be taken into consideration to illustrate the form of fragmentary solidarity. For example, the structural modularity and financial decoupling proposed to confront future financial crises combines interdependence with distancing (Krugman 2010). A similar design presents the compartmentalized underground political work that Vladimir Lenin (1979) imagined protecting the party community from arrest and repression. The challenges in urbanization processes have prompted innovation in the use of urban space to deal with the tension between densification and social distancing as well (Becker 2020), often with recourse to tradition such as China's *shikumen* architecture, with its small interior courtyards (Sennett 2020). In historical terms, as previously said, the precedent for the policies now being implemented is the Spanish flu pandemic (Davis 2013). However, the differences in global interdependence, synchronicity, and technological sophistication between both historical moments make it difficult to consider the generalization of fragmentary solidarity a hundred years ago. Something similar could be said about the Asian flu pandemic of 1957/1958 and the still ongoing AIDS epidemic. While different acts of ordinary solidarity could have been developed during those events, in neither case did massive lockdowns or a socially generalized substitution of physical interaction by interaction at a distance that characterizes fragmentary solidarity take place,

despite mortality rates and the correlation with economic development (United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS [UNAIDS] 2020; Viboud et al. 2016). Indeed, for the social generalization of fragmentary solidarity, society requires a new technological infrastructure that can both support interaction at a distance and interdependence at the global scale.

Beyond these analogies and historical comparisons, we argue that the conditions for social fragmentation have been incubated and socially generalized by the Internet over the past three decades; the COVID-19 pandemic has radicalized this situation. The rise of the Internet generated infrastructural and technological conditions for both fragmentation and interdependence at many levels: (1) fragmentation of state power and state law at the hands of transnational organizations and networks with their own legal regimes; (2) fragmentation of traditional media-based public sphere vis-à-vis social media-based epistemic communities; (3) fragmentation of the industrial division of labor into different knowledge-based market production and services; and (4) even fragmentation of value commitments into diverging epistemic communities around the globe (Castells 2000; Watts 2004). Yet, the Internet also facilitates decontextualized and disembedded global interdependencies mainly through expert systems (Giddens 1990) and more recently through social media and networked communication (González-Bailón 2017; Moldoveanu and Baum 2014; Schwartz 2010; Segre 2004). Interaction at a distance is a trademark of Internet times, thereby fostering what we call fragmentary solidarity. We must not forget that the Internet was originally designed for military purposes in the 1960s as a backup for the flow of communications when physical interaction was not possible, maintaining fragmentary and decentralized coordination among parts (Ryan 2010). These are precisely the conditions that exist today as a result of the pandemic, and, for this reason, social interdependence has naturally shifted online, providing a remarkable confirmation of the assumption of fragmentary solidarity on which the Internet was initially based.

Fragmentary solidarity represents thus a postindustrial and even postnational form of division of labor. It is characterized by the networked yet disembedded interaction at a distance through electronic communication systems within transnationally organized social fields, such as commerce, finance, digital communication, and science, among others. In this case, solidarity comes from the interdependence between fragments, but also from a commitment to the *rules of the game*, namely, to the so-called *soft law* regulations developed in each field (Abbot and Snidal 2000). These regulations combine a technical dimension specific to the field (knowledge-based rules) with a normative concern connected to both efficacy in decision-making and general principles of law, such as party autonomy, *bona fide* or *pacta sunt servanda* (Teubner 2012; Westerman et al. 2018). Law seems to adopt the form of private transnational law yet fragmented into different regimes (Schmidtchen and Schmidt-Trenz 1990; Teubner 2000), so that collective consciousness becomes a combination of autonomy and self-limitation: individuals pursuing their own professional goals within the customarily developed norms of the field. Sanctions aim to preserve functional integrity, thereby excluding the "offenders" (e.g., Assange) or qualifying the performance of actors (e.g., reliable and nonreliable sellers in e-commerce).

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the measures enforced by states to control contagion bring about a sudden radicalization of this fragmentary solidarity by closing or reducing to a minimum both local and global physical interaction. Fragmentary solidarity becomes thus, for the first time, a socially generalized global condition. Fields mostly based on physical interaction such as education, transportation, tourism, arts, service workers, and traditional commerce either have to suspend their functioning or are forced to shift online mostly from home. This affects the regular functioning of organic solidarity and overburdens spaces of mechanical solidarity with functional requirements. Major critical situations are produced as a result of the interruption of flows of global interdependence, the sharp reduction in economic activity, and the unequal way in which these problems affect different regions of the world according to countries' capacity to respond to the virus (Horton 2020; Žižek 2020b). As a reaction to these critical situations,

cooperative forms of behavior that we refer to as *ordinary solidarity*, or solidarity based on empathy and equal treatment, appear at both the interaction and the institutional level, either in domestic or transnational contexts. At the end of Book III, Durkheim (2013:302) anticipated the need for a "greater equity into our social relationships" regarding the problems of organic solidarity that he called *anomie*. Ordinary solidarity reacts therefore to observed inequities derived from anomic or forced forms of the current division of labor, such as the suffering of fellow citizens (empathy) or the unequal economic consequences emerging from the limitation of functional fields during the pandemic (equal treatment). Ordinary solidarity aims to repair different failures in social and systemic integration and deal with the corresponding disappointments (Brunkhorst 2005). It builds cohesion from conflict (Rawls 2003).

Ordinary solidarity represents thus an overarching supervision of the downsides deriving from different forms of division of labor. In the present situation, it is particularly aimed at correcting the effects of the global interruption of interdependencies. As such, the corrective drive of ordinary solidarity can take place in the domestic realm (e.g., in gender roles), in the community (e.g., attending the elderly, in the form of material support for local stores or symbolic support for health workers), or in ad hoc state measures for affected social sectors and in international collaborations with regions less able to manage the pandemic (Dowling and Kenney 2020; United Nations 2020). At the level of interaction, solidarity comes from a fellow feeling of being affected by others' suffering (Fleischacker 2019). At the structural level, solidarity comes in these cases from the increasing ubiquity and inclusionary structure of a discourse of rights in modern society (Thornhill 2016), which is based on an expanded scope of international law as supranational human rights law (Fine 2012). To that extent, the collective consciousness emerging from ordinary solidarity expresses the understanding that whatever the form of division of labor in contemporary society, there are some general principles are acting as supervisory structures over purely bureaucratic and managerial regulations (Archer 2016; Brunkhorst 2014). In that sense, to put it in Durkheimian words, ordinary solidarity aims at controlling the consequences of the "abnormal forms" of the division of labor, that is, the lack of coordination of the anomic form, the lack of spontaneity of the forced form, and the lack of continuity and sequentiality of functions (Durkheim 2013:277ss).

We refer to all this ambivalent and complex situation in terms of a *conflict of solidarities*. Schematically, this can be seen in Figure 1

The conflict is caused by the radicalization and generalization of fragmentary solidarity in the current pandemic times. While some traditional conflicts persist (e.g., between mechanical and organic solidarity), fragmentary solidarity has intersectional effects on the other forms and presents contradictory outcomes: The domestic space of mechanical solidarity is overburdened with labor and educational functions; the functional space faces demands that create tension regarding the instrumental aspects of systems' rationality; fragmentary solidarity cannot confine everyone since it is necessary to designate *essential workers* to fulfill minimal functions, and, in turn, ordinary solidarity warns against the inequities and risks in a functional world dominated by the impersonal standards of organic and fragmentary solidarity.

The Conflict of Solidarities

In this section, we unfold the conceptual relationships presented in Figure 1. Methodologically, we adopt fragmentary solidarity as a focal point because—we argue—its radicalization due to the COVID-19 pandemic triggers the conflict of solidarities. We make use of theoretical literature and interventions of public intellectuals for constructing the cases. We mostly observe the level of interactions and institutions, thereby reflecting the classical sociological difference between agency and structure, and also make use of the analytical distinction between local, state, and transnational levels for illustration purposes.

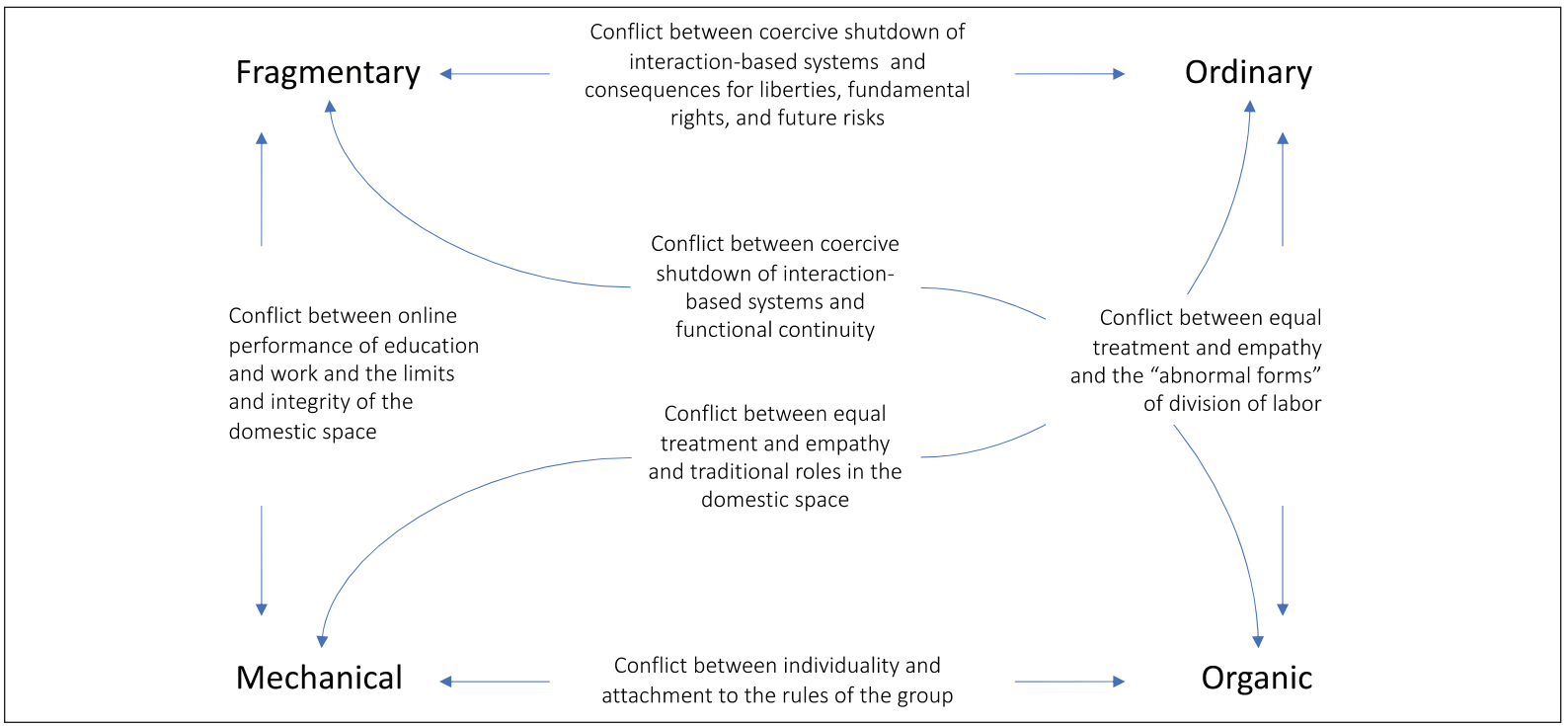

Figure 1. The conflict of solidarities in the pandemic situation.

Fragmentary Solidarity and Interdependence

One of the most surprising outcomes of the COVID-19 pandemic has been the synchronized way in which individuals and particularly states have reacted to the need to regulate physical contact and preserve life through moral and legal mechanisms for regulating interaction. In our view, the synchronic emergence of these mechanisms has radicalized the expression of what we call fragmentary solidarity, thereby releasing the conflict of solidarities.

Considering this, we first corroborate the most striking paradox of the pandemic times: While we are conscious of our interdependence and sense of human community, we risk this interdependence through mechanisms that distance us from each other and fragment social relations. To affirm interdependence while, at the same time, impeding its base of interaction in the context of the pandemic is at the root of fragmentary solidarity. Slavoj Žižek (2020b) calls this a historical irony. However, the paradox can also be understood as a new form of solidarity based on distancing that is expressed in the maxim that, by distancing ourselves from others, we take care of each other and keep open the possibility of functional exchange. The mechanisms of regulation of interaction are, therefore, fundamental elements in the implementation of this new solidarity. Through them, individuals become aware of being part of generalized social and natural circuits (Hinkelammert 2010) which, to use the words of Michel Foucault (1997), refer to a form of self-care (*le souci de soi*) that involves others: a relationship with the polity and an ethical relationship with politics. Limiting interdependence to preserve it is, then, the only effective way to square the circle. To slow down the spread of the virus without completely paralyzing global society is the main outcome of fragmentary solidarity.

Interdependence between roles in the division of labor and between regions of world society are well-known experiences in modern society that the COVID-19 pandemic makes evident (Albrow 2020). The pandemic is, in this sense, a moment of truth. It presents us with a symbolically smaller planet where what happens on the other side of the world affects us in human, health, and economic terms (global consciousness of ordinary solidarity). However, at the same time, it demands that we protect ourselves by restricting the interactional foundations of this interdependence without abandoning functional roles (consciousness of efficacy of fragmentary solidarity).

Interdependence has been regarded as space-time chains that produce unintended consequences of aggregate actions (Giddens 2013); as a form of "ecology of action" (Morin 2020b) that today makes us aware of the meaning of our "community of destiny" (Morin 2020a); and it has been represented through metaphors such as *spaceship Earth* (Buckminster 2008) or *traveling in the same boat* (Žižek 2020a). However, interdependence also has a dark side. Henry Farrell and Newman Newman (2020a, 2020b) have emphasized the condition of a "new source of vulnerability" that derives from the idea of "chained globalization" from which it is not possible to escape: The great fragility of globalized markets lies in the impossibility of their decoupling. Along the same lines, Daniel Innerarity (2020) argues that, rather than facing contagion, we are in a "contagious society" in which there is no longer anything that is wholly isolated nor borders capable of completely destroying these ties. There is, in fact, a certain consensus that it is necessary to prepare now for the next virus (Diamond and Wolfe 2020). According to this vision, the current experience is a foretaste of what, together with climate change, awaits all humanity, unless the global political and economic structure is radically transformed (Dardot and Laval 2020; Latour 2017; Streeck 2016).

Fragmentary and Organic Solidarity

While historically—as argued—fragmentary solidarity developed over the Internet in fields such as knowledge-based work, e-commerce, finance, and social media, thereby reproducing the paradox of interdependence by distancing, the pandemic situation forced the whole modern division

of labor to adopt this model. The emergence of mechanisms to regulate interaction associated with fragmentary solidarity produces a shutdown of classical interaction-based systems such as education, transportation, tourism, arts, and traditional commerce, which constitute the basis of the division of labor in organic solidarity (Durkheim 2013). These systems either have to suspend their functioning or are forced to shift online.

Social distancing, reclusion, limits on public meetings, restrictions on mobility, and the closure of borders are among the measures with the greatest impact on organic solidarity. For interaction-based systems, this works as a weak form of forced division of labor. Forced division of labor arises as a consequence of external causes that dissociate social functions from "the distribution of natural abilities" (Durkheim 2013:294). School teachers, students, parents, service workers, and actors of traditional commerce were required almost overnight to develop the skills for the new situation. In these cases, fragmentary division of labor becomes a nonspontaneous action, which may only produce solidarity in the middle and long run.

The measures to regulate interaction have been implemented even by liberal governments that normally abjure policies that restrict individual freedoms for the sake of collective goals. The main conflictive framework at this level has been the contradiction between, on one hand, the interruption of production processes and the chain of supply of goods and services to protect people's health and, on the other hand, the maintenance of these activities for the sake of the health of the economy, based on the argument that the socioeconomic consequences of confinement would be even more severe than the health consequences it is designed to avoid (Butler 2020). In any case, the decision not to establish barriers to the social division of labor, seen for a time in Sweden, has increasingly become a target of social criticism (Karlsson 2020).

On the other hand, different governments have closed their country's borders to the movement of people, opting for a radical reduction of productive activities in the international division of labor, with a severe impact on international trade (Mazzucato 2020). Governments seem to follow a mimetic impulse (DiMaggio and Powell 1983), thereby abandoning multilateralism and global coordination supported by the global consciousness of ordinary solidarity. The key figure here has been Donald Trump, who had long been boycotting this type of multilateral coordination (Allison 2020; Drezner, Krebs, and Schweller 2020). The concept for this attitude has been that of political xenophobia or state xenophobia (Fassin 2020a, 2020b).

Fragmentary and Mechanical Solidarity

Fragmentary solidarity has also significant consequences for traditional and modern forms of mechanical solidarity. By forcing education, traditional commerce, and service work online, the domestic space becomes overburdened with functional requirements, which affects its limits and integrity. Authorities and citizens hail confinement as an opportunity for a family reunion as if it were an opportunity to value a lost past—a "retrotopia" in the words of Zygmut Bauman (2017). This idealizes traditional forms of mechanical solidarity—that in contemporary society can only be one among others—and leads to an increase in internal conflicts that are expressed in events of rupture, domestic violence, or the factual neglect of the elderly (Guérin 2020; Killeen 1998). In this context, many conflicts, which had been contained by a lack of contact and time for interaction between family members, engulf the daily life of a home that is overcrowded in terms of both time and space.

The permanent copresence of previously avoided neighbors has also given rise to conflicts. These conflicts tend to increase when there is less distance between houses and, therefore, fewer possibilities of avoiding neighbors, a situation directly related to the housing conditions of more disadvantaged sectors (Rollston and Galea 2020). Confinement is unequal. The Internet and social networks have been people's best allies in the context of confinement (Etzioni 2020). However, access to these networks is not equally distributed among the population, hence the

need to review the digital divide. Because it affects people's ability to manage the problems and loneliness of confinement, it means that this is also experienced unequally (Basto-Aguirre, Cerutti, and Nieto-Parra 2020; Morange 2020).

The lower a person is in a society's pyramid of the stratification, the more inequality debases the experience of solidarity in that person's sphere of intimacy (overburdening with responsibilities, overcrowding, domestic violence). This creates a new *social question* in the context of the pandemic. For the lower strata, strict compliance with the restrictions imposed is more difficult. The mostly physical and in-person nature of their work leads them to expose themselves not only to legal and social sanctions for non-compliance with restrictions but also to an increased risk of contagion in the course of their regular interactions (Méda 2020; Wieviorka 2020a, 2020b). In other words, the interactional demands of organic solidarity continue to apply to the lower strata because, for them, the distancing that fragmentary solidarity offers as a mechanism of protection is not feasible. Precisely for this reason, it is in these groups, which are disadvantaged due to racial and class factors related to traditional contents of mechanical solidarity, that cases of the virus and deaths are the highest (Golestaneh et al. 2020). Like health workers, these groups experience a two-fold social distancing: the normal one that applies to everyone and that one associated with the prejudice against certain groups (Bogardus 1925).

Ordinary Solidarity as a Response

In our analytical model of solidarities, we have defined ordinary solidarity as an overarching supervision of the downsides deriving from different forms of division of labor. Ordinary solidarity stems from empathy with suffering and from an expanded culture of human rights that exceeds the boundaries of the Durkheimian civil law which expresses the social bond in organic solidarity. The legal form of ordinary solidarity is transnational public law (Kastner 2015; Neves 2013; Thornhill 2016). Neither fragmentary nor ordinary solidarity were born in this pandemic, yet faced with fragmentary solidarity's negative consequences in terms of conflicts and overburdening, different signs have emerged of *ordinary solidarity* aimed at rebuilding social ties. In this final section, we address these consequences following the main problems ("abnormal forms") of the modern division of labor identified by Durkheim, namely, the lack of coordination (anomic form), the lack of spontaneity (forced form), and the lack of continuity and sequentiality of functions.

The most evident fact of the pandemic situation is the interruption of the functioning of the division of labor and, consequently, the interruption of social interdependencies and coordination, while less evident are the lack of spontaneity and continuity in social functions and the role of ordinary solidarity in this regard.

At the microlevel of local interactions, for example, ordinary solidarity fosters the continuity of functions of the intimate sphere through support services, collective actions at a distance, and social networks aimed to alleviate its burdens and manage its tensions (Wieviorka 2020b). Through a mixture of fragmentary and ordinary solidarity, help has also been provided for the continuity of local retail businesses, with people preferring to satisfy necessities in neighborhood shops, rather than supermarkets (Rahmanan 2020).

Ordinary solidarity has also warned against some relatively forced forms of functions in the pandemic situation and the vulnerabilities actors must confront when dealing with them. Health workers, garbage collectors, police force, suppliers, and delivery workers, the so-called *essential workers*, are more vulnerable to the risks of contagion than others (Méda 2020). Individuals performing these roles inhabit and do not inhabit the time of confinement (Hartog 2015). Insofar as they fulfill a collective responsibility (Wieviorka 2020a), they are a kind of sacrificial victim of the maintenance of the minimum operating conditions of organic solidarity. Essential workers are therefore a condition of possibility of confinement as such, an excluded third party that permits the survival of society while the majority of the population takes refuge in reclusion. In this

sense, essential workers act as a human bridge between the ongoing minimum functioning of organic solidarity and the possibility of fragmentary solidarity through which others collaborate by distancing themselves. For this reason, the semantics of the hero has often been used to describe these essential workers (Dowling and Kenney 2020). They have received public acknowledgment without the need for social struggles in the sense of struggles for recognition (Honneth 2010). It is a form of symbolic compensation for their relatively forced (at least involuntary) position in the labor architecture of the pandemic situation.

Yet, the most relevant problems of the division of labor in the pandemic situation are related to the lack of coordination among functions (anomie) to efficiently address the dramatic social consequences society has to cope with. At the mesolevel of the state, for example, there has never been a more evident need for institutionalized solidarity in the form of a welfare state as a robust and democratic structure for the protection of the most disadvantaged. Division of labor and interdependence cannot be interrupted without generating an economic cataclysm, destroying jobs, and creating poverty (Farrell and Newman 2020a). This problem is only aggravated by the historical contraction of the state in neoliberal contexts, as reflected in budget and tax cuts and public spending adjustments (Stedman Jones 2014; Streeck 2014). These realities—and the consequent delegitimization of authorities and political institutions (Walby 2015)—are the expression of a lack of coordination (anomie) claiming for institutionalized solidarity in the ordinary sense. Therefore, fragmentary solidarity intensifies preexisting conflicts and vulnerabilities and reinforces a quest for ordinary institutionalized solidarity.

The legitimate resource distribution in society takes place not only through the division of labor but also through social rights and redistributive policies (Honneth 2010). Both dimensions constitute a coordinated system of social solidarity (Dubet 2014). However, the growing influence of neoliberal policies means that this legitimate distribution is largely subordinated only to what individuals can obtain through their work, which undermines cohesion. This trend is nonetheless questioned today on two grounds: for leaving people institutionally unprotected in the face of the pandemic, especially as regards public health systems (Chomsky 2020; Davies 2020; Wieviorka 2020b), and for the limited relevance of its recipes in a context that calls for state intervention with a sense of institutionalized solidarity. For Durkheim, the state has a major responsibility in this matter: "It is sufficient to recall, wherever it is necessary, 'the spirit of the whole and the sentiment of common solidarity,' and this action is one that the government alone is qualified to carry out" (Durkheim 2013:282). The rediscovery of the virtues of state intervention, even to support companies to preserve jobs and guarantee the functioning of the financial system (Dardot and Laval 2020), implies recognizing the importance of the institutionalization of ordinary solidarity in the form of a welfare state, especially at times of crisis. Poverty, unemployment, and shortages can cause a significant increase in anomic consequences such as crime, spontaneous disturbances, and social unrest on an unsuspected scale, thereby contributing to the delegitimization of the democratic political system (Wilkinson 2009). The institutionalization of ordinary solidarity is aimed at containing these spillover effects.

Coordination and continuity of functions are also required at the transnational level. The interruption of global interdependencies, on one hand, and the institutional decentralization of the transnational realm, on the other hand, call for particular attention from ordinary solidarity. Despite the protectionist tendencies seen in countries like the United States, as well as in other parts of the world (Dardot and Laval 2020; Ordine 2020), which were relatively predictable in conditions of fragmentary solidarity, there is also a trend toward the generalization of ordinary solidarity in various transnational spheres. The rescue package approved by the European Union in July 2020 counts as an example of institutionalized ordinary solidarity that corrects the anomic effects of fragmentary solidarity (Neuman 2020). Something similar can be said about the aid offered to poor countries as regards public health and economic issues (Dufrenot and Jawadi 2020). This trend is also seen in other areas of transnational activity such as the reinforcement of

principles of responsibility and sustainability in tourism activity facing the continuity of its function (United Nations World Tourism Organization [UNWTO] 2020), the redirection of production or donations in the fashion industry (Rodríguez 2020), the renewal of stakeholder guidelines for public-private cooperation (World Economic Forum 2020), and the reinforcement of the general sense of a solidary economy (RIPESS—Intercontinental Network for the Promotion of Social Solidarity Economy 2020) and, certainly, in donations to the World Health Organization (WHO) to coordinate efforts to understand the spread of the virus, provide information and supplies to patients and front-line health workers, and accelerate research and treatment for all who require it (COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund for WHO 2020).

At different levels, it can be seen that ordinary solidarity offers a way to observe and control the negative consequences of this pandemic and future ones. By contrast, individualist and protectionist strategies seem to lead to an increase in medium-term problems in a world that must now reconcile fragmentation with solidarity in a different way.

Conclusion

Several conclusions can be drawn from the analytical and interpretive proposal developed here. First, the crisis caused by COVID-19 is not confined to biological or health issues but also affects forms of social interaction at the global level and the very functioning of modern society. In this sense, the pandemic is a sociological problem and sociology is, therefore, relevant for understanding the complexity of the phenomenon and its consequences. Several of the sociological reflections that have been formulated since the beginning of the pandemic revolve around the topic of solidarity and its presence or absence. To organize these reflections, this paper uses Durkheim's technical concepts of solidarity (organic and mechanical solidarity) and expands his analytical scope through two new formulas: the complex and paradoxical notion of fragmentary solidarity, or solidarity based on distancing, and the concept of ordinary solidarity, or solidarity based on empathy and equal treatment, as a response to the critical consequences of the division of labor in pandemic times.

Second, while fragmentary solidarity has been incubated and socially generalized by the Internet over the past three decades, its radicalization and generalization in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic have triggered deep sociological processes, which can be referred to as a conflict of solidarities. This consists of an interruption of the organic interdependence of modern society by the mechanisms used by most states around the world to regulate interaction (such as social distancing, reclusion, limits on public meetings, restrictions on mobility, and the closure of borders). These mechanisms have led to functional dedifferentiation whose paradoxical consequences affect the private sphere, partially reproducing a form of community life (mechanical solidarity). However, these same restrictions that reduce the risk of contagion between individuals to protect their health and life are also a form of social bond that we have called fragmentary solidarity, whose negative consequences are addressed through forms of ordinary solidarity. Since fragmentary solidarity relies on the electronic infrastructure of the Internet to enable individuals to fulfill their roles from a distance, total disconnection—as in global network failures because of digital viruses—is fragmentary solidarity's worst nightmare: It interrupts not only functional interdependence but also the paradoxical form of solidarity emerging from distancing ourselves from others. A *double virality* (biological and digital) is thus a probable scenario for the near future. Hence, the discourse of solidarity in the sociological analysis of the pandemic cannot be reduced to simple forms of conflict and collaboration. The conflict of solidarities is much more complex and paradoxical than that, as it regards both the structure of modern society and the outlook for its immediate future.

A third conclusion is that the mechanisms of regulation of interaction that interrupt organic solidarity and open the way to fragmentary solidarity overburden the private sphere, and this is

experienced unequally in different social strata. Although there has been a generalized overflow of the private and family sphere with remote work and education, producing a kind of new "colonization of the world of life" in a Habermasian sense, the *factum* of inequality debases the experience of intimacy the lower a person is in a society's stratification (overburdening with responsibilities, overcrowding, and intrafamily and interfamily violence). Moreover, for the lower strata, rigorous compliance with the restrictions imposed is more difficult, and the physical and in-person nature of their work implies exposure to both legal and social sanctions for failure to adhere to the norms and an increased risk of catching the virus during their regular interactions. This new *social question* is crucial in the context of the pandemic. It can be addressed through mechanisms of ordinary solidarity, that is, through forms of institutionalized solidarity within the state (redistribution strategies and state intervention) and between countries (strategies of exchange and international cooperation). In other words, the role of the state in the context of a pandemic involves not only the practice of solidarity within its borders but also global cooperation in terms of the exchange of resources, knowledge, and practices through which inequalities can be addressed.

A fourth conclusion deals with the general problem of the "abnormal forms"—to use Durkheim's expression—of the division of labor, that is, the lack of coordination of the anomic form, the lack of spontaneity of the forced form, and the lack of continuity and sequentiality of functions. The radicalization and generalization of fragmentary solidarity under the COVID-19 pandemic bring about problems in these three dimensions: (1) the interruption of the functioning of several systems through state measures produces a lack of coordination in the division of labor (anomie) at the domestic and global levels, which has to be dealt with through forms of fragmentary solidarity and corrected by ordinary solidarity in terms of empathy and equal treatment; (2) workers of interaction-based systems (education, traditional services, and commerce) are forced to move online without the required skills to do so, while others (the essential workers) are forced to remain on their positions with a high risk for their health and life; in this respect, ordinary solidarity becomes a relevant tool to recognize and mobilize resources to address the resulting inequalities; and (3) since at the global level there is no central authority to coordinate efforts to cope with the pandemic, the continuity and sequentiality of information and resource networks becomes a crucial asset (e.g., regarding the distribution of the vaccine); ordinary solidarity plays also a relevant role in this respect protecting the integrity and coordination of those efforts through international (e.g., WHO) and transnational (e.g., networks, foundations, nongovernmental organizations [NGO]) institutions.

A fifth conclusion is related to the political dimension of the pandemic. At the beginning of the crisis, a key concern was how mechanisms to regulate interaction implied a restriction for the fundamental rights of citizens in countries governed by the rule of law. These mechanisms have been put into operation but have also been gradually deactivated as health indicators decrease over time. Borders have been closed but, albeit with restrictions, have also begun to be reopened for economic (production) and social (unemployment) reasons. Similarly, after the initial contraction as a means of protection from contagion, different states, and international organizations have turned their attention to the regional and global inequalities made evident by the pandemic and have taken some measures to address them. In other words, although fragmentary solidarity received a strong boost from the restriction of fundamental rights at the state level, it does not dominate all the political scene because ordinary solidarity also creates pressure—at both the national and international levels—for the expansion of the values of freedom and equality, adherence to democratic procedures, and care for the most disadvantaged as an ethical undertaking of political action. This does not imply that the restrictions cannot be maintained in the future or that they cannot be reintroduced in the event of similar or other crises, and it does not mean that surveillance may not expand or biopolitical control may not be strengthened using new technology. However, even if all this occurs, the principle of ordinary solidarity has shown that it can endure as a criterion for the orientation of modern political action.

A sixth conclusion is that the conflict of solidarities that characterizes the pandemic is not a passing phenomenon. Its anchorage in the complexity and interdependence of contemporary social, technological, and natural conditions points to its persistence. In today's profoundly unequal world, socio-natural disasters, such as the COVID-19 crisis, resonate and are experienced differently in different regions of the world, thereby aggravating vulnerability and inequality and making them dramatically visible. These regional inequalities are manifested not only in poverty and exposure to contagion but also in access to the technological and monetary means to address the crisis. Ordinary solidarity is undoubtedly necessary to promote and implement certain solutions. However, paradoxically, the possibility of ordinary solidarity at the local or international level requires that, in different national contexts, the outcomes of the organic solidarity that remains (unconfined individuals who fulfill their role as essential workers) be complemented by the outcomes of fragmentary solidarity (confined individuals fulfilling systemic roles), often at the cost of functional interference in spaces where mechanical solidarity predominates (intimate relationships, the family, the home, neighborhood networks). In other words, as long as the threat of this or other viruses remains, the conflict of solidarities will continue its consolidation as a central dilemma of the society of the twenty-first century. Society is entering what can be called a *viral condition*.

A seventh and final conclusion is that the generalized crisis unleashed by the pandemic has—like all great social crises—a denaturalizing effect on reality. Due to their disruptive nature, major social crises make apparent in individual experience the fragile, unnecessary, and contingent foundations of social reality. The world is as it is, but it could have been otherwise and could also be different in the future. This realization fosters critical reflection about the material conditions of life and also increases normative imagination about postviral social scenarios. The topics may range from the need for a change in the forms of globalization to the continuity of the ecological movement, from the universality of rights in a new regime of public life to criticism of nationalism and economic protectionism, from the democratic challenges imposed by the pandemic to the challenges of international and transnational collaboration between states and global actors such as the WHO. However, whatever the topics imagined, a notable outcome of the current crisis is that—at least for the moment—the undeniable inertia of systemic dynamics, the historical dead ends of international politics, and the weight of tradition in both organizational behaviors and the interaction between people can be questioned and subjected to critical reflection for their transformation. In other words, the pandemic has introduced a conflict of solidarities from which alternatives emerge for the reorganization of national and global solidarity in the world we begin to inhabit.

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Note

1. The concept of fragmentary solidarity has been used marginally in the social analysis as a term without theoretical density and far from the Durkheimian conceptual framework (see e.g., Bobic and Santic 2020; Muscat 2019). As a term, it was originally introduced in a footnote by Isabelle Nabokov (2000:199) to address the difference between solidarity provided by god and goddesses and the "fragmentary solidarity" provided by human spirits. Interestingly, however, in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, also in a footnote, Émile Durkheim (1995:102) introduced the term "fragmentary totems" to reflect on the link between the subdivision of totemic groups and the need "to provide names for the many divisions." Subdivided groups are thus named and in turn, become symbolically united as a part of the whole. While this bridge between religious experience and fragmentary solidarity goes beyond the limits of the present article, it is a relevant line for further research.

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