Social Inclusion
2025 • Volume 13 • Article 9073
https://doi.org/10.17645/si.9073

cogitatio

ARTICLE

Open Access Journal

Collective Identity and Care Ethics: Insights From Chilean Migrant Solidarity Initiatives

Tamara Hernández Araya

Cultural Anthropology, Utrecht University, The Netherlands

Correspondence: Tamara Hernández Araya (t.a.hernandezaraya@uu.nl)

Submitted: 29 July 2024 **Accepted:** 2 December 2024 **Published:** 6 February 2025

Issue: This article is part of the issue "Solidarity in Diversity: Overcoming Marginalisation in Society" edited by Matthew Mabefam (University of Melbourne), Kennedy Mbeva (University of Cambridge), and Franka Vaughan (University of Melbourne), fully open access at https://doi.org/10.17645/si.i417

Abstract

Based on ten months of ethnographic fieldwork conducted with more than twelve migrant organizations in Chile, this article examines how mutual support groups establish and maintain networks of care that their members view as moral imperatives. These organizations develop sophisticated citizenship narratives while emphasizing the importance of nurturing both their collective ethos and solidarity initiatives. Through analyzing how members interpret their collaborative care and solidarity efforts, this article reveals how care practices generate a distinctive form of sociability that departs from traditional Chilean solidarity frameworks. This emergent sociability manifests as an ethical project that challenges prevailing paradigms and expands our understanding of citizenship dynamics within migrant communities. The research contributes to anthropological perspectives by illuminating the intricate relationships between care practices, collective identity formation, and human interaction within migrant support networks.

Keywords

care; Chile; citizenship; migration; solidarity

1. Introduction

In an era marked by increasing global migration, understanding how migrant communities navigate social and cultural integration has become a critical area of study. Mutual support groups within these communities often function as vital spaces where immediate needs are addressed, but also where practices of care, solidarity, and belonging are negotiated. Consistently, much of the existing research on migration organizations and networks focuses on policy frameworks (Cullen, 2009), social and economic integration (Garkisch et al., 2017; Portes et al., 2007), entrepreneurship, and innovation (Rath et al., 2020), yet the intimate dynamics of how care and

solidarity shape and sustain collective identities remain rather unknown. Exploring these processes sheds light on the ways migrant groups challenge dominant narratives of citizenship and redefine what it means to belong, offering deeper insights into the transformative potential of solidarity in contexts marked by diversity.

This article examines the concept of solidarity through the lens of citizenship activism within immigrant organizations in Chile. I begin by exploring how these organizations conceptualize and practice solidarity, highlighting their distinctive approach. The first section situates immigrant organizations within Chile's broader social movement landscape, reflecting on the country's transition to becoming a destination for immigration over the past decade. Then I move to review the historical role of solidarity in Chile, connecting it to migrant activism, noting participants' resistance to framing their efforts solely as acts of solidarity. The second section provides a conceptual framework, drawing on key contributions from social sciences and anthropology to understand solidarity. It examines the interplay between solidarity (as practice) and a particular morality (principles and values), emphasizing how these dynamics shape one another among participants. This section also binds these practices to the notion of acts of care, introducing insights from the anthropology of care (Fassin, 2014). The final section revisits the discussion that links migrant collaboration and participation to political commitment, framing solidarity as acts of care performed with others as equals, rather than *for* others. This political solidarity fosters a unique sociability, diverging from conventional understandings of solidarity in Chile. Concluding remarks underscore how this sociability emerges as an ethical project, challenging existing paradigms and deepening our understanding of citizenship dynamics in migrant communities.

Calle Catedral beats with the vibrant essence of Santiago's central district. The facades of the three-story buildings that flank the street wear the distinctive patina of urban life, marked by traces of traffic soot—a testament to the ceaseless movement below. Yet, climbing up the stairs of Catedral Street number 99, the headquarters nestled within leads you into a realm of tranquillity. Here, elevated ceilings infuse the rooms with an expansive and serene aura. For several months Sede Catedral stood as a pivotal hub for my fieldwork activities. Its three rooms serve as dynamic spaces of collaboration and coordination, hosting bustling meetings, lively dance sessions, and relaxed conversations over tea. Within its walls, migrant organizations, including Plataforma (a platform of migration and refugee organizations promoting and defending the human rights of immigrants in Chile) converge to share time, resources, and ideas. My fieldnotes vividly depict the crisp scent of freshly waxed floors, the sensation of neatness, and the lingering fragrance of lemon and *palo santo* in the air. The meticulous maintenance of the premises was paramount in achieving the harmonious cohabitation of diverse entities.

To schedule activities in this social centre, one had to meet with Dani, who allocated time slots based on activity details. Dani, a young Peruvian, started volunteering with Plataforma during a mass regularization process that proved particularly intricate and which helped several migrants. "I came here just as a volunteer during the second *Bachelet's* regularization. It never occurred to me that I would end up holding the keys!" Dani laughs and shakes the heart-shaped keyholder. She really is the *key master* of the location, coordinating with clarity and kindness to keep the many groups using the rooms in harmony. Upon approval, participants received confirmation, and their activity was added to the schedule board with one of Dani's colourful markers. After each activity, the group must ensure they leave the location as clean as they found it. This is especially important after the lively "Open Breakfast Saturdays" that tend to end with children's games and scattered cookie crumbs and pieces of fruit all over the floor. "I know it's not the most attractive building, but it's our

space," remarked Paola, one of my contacts and the head of Plataforma during those days. Paola, a young activist from Venezuela, became involved with migrant advocacy after the 2018 feminist uprising in several Chilean universities. She transitioned from leadership roles within the feminist student movement to become a spokesperson and leader of Plataforma Nacional de Inmigrantes, the biggest migrant organization in the country. As part of her tasks, Paola, Dani, Marcos, and several other activists work together to produce Open Breakfasts, an initiative that started during the first Covid lockdowns in Chile, in March 2020. The initial recommendation and definitive demand to "stay inside" and never go out on the streets hit particularly hard on all those families employed in commerce (formal and informal). Open Breakfasts functioned primarily as a food bank—at its peak, they managed to offer three meals during the week—but it soon became a space for support and assistance. Sometimes it operated as a daycare for children and teenagers, a place to go and connect with others, an (online) job bank, a place to get help when applying for one of the bonuses (direct money transfers) issued by the government during the Covid emergency, or a place for information regarding vaccination permits, circulation in the cities, and delivery of health kits.

The experiences of citizenship activists across Latin America make it clear that contemporary citizenship must be theorized in the context of societies marked by structured inequalities (Álvarez et al., 2018). Although liberal democratic definitions depict citizenship as a universal category that can be claimed by any legitimate member of the nation-state, it is important to recognize that such categories are enacted in politically structured contexts. In the late 1980s, as dictatorships gave way to more democratic societies across Latin America (the so-called third democratic wave; see Huntington, 1991), citizens had more opportunities to exercise their political rights. Over the years, civil society actors have increasingly taken advantage of this "openness" by demanding particular social and economic rights from which they had been excluded, such as housing, clean water, and education (Dagnino, 2003; Jelin, 1998). In this regard, Chile has seen a surge in social movements and citizen activism, including the student movement of 2011, the feminist wave of 2018, and the October 2019 uprising. These reflect a society disillusioned with political institutions, marked by low electoral participation—which has since led to the decision to establish voting as mandatory by law—and unrest fuelled by visible inequalities. Within this setting, migrant organizations emerged as actors of both contestation and collaboration, navigating internal debates over whether to prioritize political advocacy or cultural expression in response to societal hostility. Some focus on solidarity and mutual aid, others on protest and mobilization, while many engage in artistic and celebratory activities. This article examines these organizations' unique approach to solidarity, emphasizing how joint care and assistance foster new forms of sociability distinct from traditional notions in Chile.

Historically, Chile was not considered a destination for immigrants (Stefoni & Stang, 2017). However, rising and diversifying immigration has shifted this situation, the increase in immigration flows has been accompanied by both a reinforcement of a nationalist rhetoric and the growth of migrant and pro-migrant organizations grounded in collective action. Drawing on ethnographic research with 12 migrant organizations between July 2021 and June 2022 across cities like Santiago, Valparaíso, Casablanca, Rancagua, and Limache, this article explores their social bonds and acts of care. Over 80 interviews, informal conversations, and participant observation reveal how these groups challenge traditional narratives of belonging by building social worlds rooted in care, both among members and in their broader contexts. In Table 1, I specify the main organizations I worked with, their core focus, a description of their membership base, and the categories I used to identify their main field of action.

Table 1. Migrant organizations who enact solidarity included in this research.

	Name	Core focus	Membership and connections	Categorization (a)
1	Plataforma de Migrantes	Advocates for universal legal rights regardless of immigration status. Works to strengthen and unite migrant organizations across the country.	Diverse membership including long-term resident (20+ years) and newly arrived activists. Extensive nationwide network.	Political; festive; solidarity
2	Fuerza Migrante en Acción (FMA)	Champions migrant rights through policy advocacy, legislative reform, and implementation monitoring. Promotes human rights-based approaches to migration, emphasizing interculturality and inclusion.	Predominantly social science professionals with strong ties to academia, media, and arts communities. Active in Senate-level policy discussions.	Human rights; political; solidarity
3	Red Fronteras Libres	Community-based initiative focusing on intercultural integration and family support. Provides comprehensive legal guidance and social services while celebrating cultural diversity through events like the Carnival for Migrant Dignity.	Primarily composed of La Chimba neighborhood residents and local activists. Strong connections with municipal services and educational institutions.	Festive; political; human rights; solidarity
4	Tejidos de Resistencia	Raises awareness about Colombian conflict issues among Chilean society. Works closely with Plataforma while maintaining distinct advocacy positions.	Predominantly Colombian migrants and refugees. Strong partnerships with human rights organizations across Latin America.	Solidarity; political
5	Afrocéntricxs	They describe themselves as a social laboratory for Black and Afro-descendant women's collective action. Focuses on identity strengthening and decolonial practices through performance and cultural activities.	Young women and LGBTQ+ members with extensive international networks across Latin America and globally.	Solidarity; political; festive
6	Geopoéticos	Literary collective focusing on migrant narratives and cultural expression through poetry. Actively participates in cultural events and festivals.	Network of 50+ migrant writers nationwide, originated from Plataforma Migrante workshop. Predominantly male members over 30 with international literary connections.	Festive; solidarity
7	Revista Austral	Online publication platform promoting migrant community development since the 1990s. Provides visibility for migrant organizations and hosts literary competitions.	Close collaboration with Plataforma and FAM. Founded by Peruvian writers with extensive community connections.	Political; solidarity

Table 1. (Cont.) Migrant organizations who enact solidarity included in this research.

	Name	Core focus	Membership and connections	Categorization (a)
8	Casa Colores	Community cultural center in La Chimba offering educational and artistic programs. Successfully transformed abandoned property into vital community space.	Serves local migrant population while maintaining inclusive policy for all community organizations.	Solidarity; festive
9	Sak Pasé	Support network for Haitian women immigrants, evolved from a university outreach program. Provides practical assistance with healthcare access, language training, and cultural integration.	Led by Haitian and Dominican women. Operates with university funding support.	Solidarity; political
10	FEM Migrantes	Feminist migrant coalition coordinating with larger 8M movement. Focuses on connecting feminist activist initiatives within migrant communities.	Student-based organization integrated with broader feminist networks.	Political; solidarity; festive

Note: (a) During my fieldwork, I observed significant variations among these groups and networks, leading me to develop a three-category framework for their analysis: political organizations, solidarity organizations, and festive organizations. This framework, informed by both analytical and ethnographic considerations, emerged organically as participants often identified their groups as either "cultural" or "political" organizations. I refined these labels into three core clusters to reflect the primary focus of each organization. However, it is important to emphasize that most associations extend beyond their primary categorization, often engaging in activities beyond being solely "festive" or offering "assistance."

I should make the point that migrant organizations have been read as (political) activism, as well as a space for sociability and refuge. Dreadfully there have been different incidents of xenophobic and racist attacks towards migrants in the public space. Most famously, the Iquique attacks, when a mob decided to end a protest against migration setting on fire all the belongings of more than 40 families who were squatting for several weeks at the side of a beach near a residential area in the northern city of Iquique. In a conversation with Marcos, a Uruguayan migrant, one of the founders of Fuerza Migrante en Acción (FMA), he was letting me know of the rapid response they received after these attacks. A broad cross-section of society was appalled by the images of the piles of the burning tents and toddlers' cars that hit the media. He reacted with a grin after I inquired about the success of the improvised solidarity campaign towards the affected families (something that was also widely reported by the press). Marcos questioned this self-proclaimed notion of the "giving Chilean" (*el chileno solidario*), a trope commonly used to draw the Chilean national character:

> Chileans can spark solidarity in a second, *like that!* [he snaps his fingers] if and when they want to. With the Iquique attacks I saw it, the very next day we had foster homes for several families, and different local businesses offered their *galpones* [warehouses] to be temporarily used to host the families. That, on top of all the food supplies, clothing, and children's toys and books that we received. As horrific as the attacks were, [this] response was overwhelmingly beautiful….Now, I am fully certain that none of those who donated and were touched by the attacks are available to fight for a sustained system that helps migrants, or [anyone] who needs it for that matter, or would vote for candidates who are a bit more prone towards a human rights approach to face migration, etc. They can be *solidarios*, yes, but

> that one time, with this gesture, but they don't see how solidarity can or should be a more sustained part of their lives. (Interview, March 2022)

Marcos's point is that solidarity in Chile is mobilized by specific events and not a sustained form of interaction—a way of living—as I will propose in what follows.

A critical focus in my analysis is the rejection of the term "solidarity." Marcos is not the only one grinning when they hear the term; I repeatedly noticed how people reacted with at least some level of discomfort. Rooted in Chile's civil society history, "solidarity" is perceived as "aid among strangers," which does not align well with the deep interpersonal connections cultivated in migrant organizations. For them, care and mutual support transcend traditional solidarity, becoming a moral imperative and central to constructing their collective identity and narratives of citizenship. While focussing on the social bonds formed among these groups, my argument is that through acts of care—both among members and within the spaces they inhabit—these organizations are crafting their own social worlds, challenging traditional narratives of belonging and solidarity. In what follows I examine the genealogy of the term "solidarity" in Chilean civil society's recent history, my aim is to understand why my participants reject this term to describe their work. Simply put, they believe that "solidarity" in Chile is used to describe actions taken among strangers, which doesn't reflect their reality.

It is fair to point out that in the case of Chile, these solidarity actions (understood as spontaneous mutual support actions developed by civil society) occupy the role that in other contexts is coordinated by state institutions. The lack of a system of social protection creates the pressing need for mutual help and generosity among citizens who know that, at times of need, they can only rely on each other. Furthermore, due to Chile's focalization welfare paradigm (Román et al., 2014), the few programs supporting families and their livelihoods in Chile are reserved for the very poor, hence, receiving "state-funded solidarity" carries some stigma. As it has been documented, a direct consequence of the neoliberal model, Chileans have come to understand achievement and individual well-being as a matter of personal responsibility (Heine, 2002). Interestingly, my participants avoided labelling their work as solidarity. Instead, they preferred phrases like "building a community," "giving a hand to their extended family," and "creating a world worth living in." I have reached here a relevant first distinction between solidarity among equals and solidarity with others, which in a way mirrors the notions of solidarity per se and solidarity as charity, as will be unraveled in what follows.

In the Chilean context, the concept of solidarity has multiple meanings and historical associations. After the 1973 coup that abruptly put an end to the short-lived *Chilean way* to socialism, the ensuing state terrorism led to an international solidarity campaign supporting Chile (Christiaens, 2018). For older generations, "solidarity" evokes memories of international human rights and political organizations, particularly those on the left. This type of solidarity, which I term "political solidarity" (Scholz, 2008), is characterized by a desire for social change and an emotional commitment to politics (Goodwin et al., 2001). Unlike other forms, political solidarity is typically aimed at explicitly challenging oppression (Featherstone, 2012).

Solidarity as charity has a strong standing mark in the country. Influenced by the Catholic Church and other benevolent institutions (Klesner, 2007), especially during the economic crisis of the 1980s, a common notion of solidarity in Chile connects the term with charity. The dictatorship's austerity measures during this period led to a nearly 30% rate of unemployment (Klein, 2010; Reigadas, 2007), prompting the rise of "soup kitchens"

and communal pots in urban peripheries, often funded by the church (Thörn, 2009, p. 421). The notion of solidarity as synonymous with charity that this period generated persists and it is the most widely shared one: solidarity as spontaneous actions performed for others in response to specific events, such as family illnesses, fires, accidents, or natural disasters. During the Pinochet regime, solidarity encompassed both activism against human rights violations and charity campaigns by the church and NGOs. After the return to democracy in 1990, solidarity lost its direct political connotation and became associated with aiding the poor. This new narrative posits that solidarity is not solely the state's responsibility but is also shared with the private sector. A notable example of this is *Teletón*, a yearly televised campaign carried out since 1978 that raises funds for children suffering from physical impairments, reflecting a broader Chilean practice of organizing fundraisers for those in need. Although its meaning might have varied over time, solidarity is a central element of the Chilean national imaginary, valued as a moral principle and part of national identity (Reigadas, 2007; Román et al., 2014): solidarity as "helping those in need," especially among the middle and lower classes—spurred also by the uncertainty that one may find oneself in that position in the future.

Oriana, a Colombian member of Afrocéntricas, shares with me her reasons for giving time and effort to the organization she participates in:

> It's about giving back and showing that one can be safe here, I am here to help build this space, every day, piece by piece. I wouldn't feel as a whole [*completa*] if I didn't lend a hand to those who need it. Not just this once [but] all of the time, in the future, to my *compañeras* [my friends], to myself, this helps me too, you know? It makes me who I am. (Interview, March 2022)

In Chile, solidarity is often seen as individual acts of generosity. However, activities like Open Breakfasts, Noche Afro, the Haitian Bazaar, and poetry workshops are not just about helping others but also building a better life for everyone—*a vida digna*. Rose, a Haitian young mother and volunteer from Sak Pasé claims:

> I am here because I was part of Sak Pasé's first edition, four years ago, I am a graduate from this love and care, I am giving back, yes, I had nothing, now I have them, this helps me push where I want to go, be the woman I would like to be. (Interview, March 2022)

Solidarity as acts of care sometimes is performed as a moral imperative that motivates migrants to engage in political actions aimed at improving current and future living conditions. This commitment fosters meaningful relationships and collective/mutual care, emphasizing integration and personal fulfilment.

2. Solidarity—The Avenue From Social Cohesion to Interdependence and Ethical Living

Solidarity is a complex term, famously explored by Emile Durkheim. Durkheim (1893/2001) argued that solidarity explains how society holds together and what ties individuals to it. For Durkheim, solidarity is essential for producing meaning in people's lives and anchoring social ideals and values. Defined as our attachment to others, it is the source of human morality (Jones, 2001, p. 97; Miller, 1996). Durkheim distinguished two types of solidarity: (a) mechanical solidarity, which is found in what he referred to as "primitive societies" and based on collective conscience, and (b) organic solidarity, which is typical of modern societies and based on interdependence between individuals. At the interactional level, solidarity is usually linked to a wide range of concepts, ranging from "community" (Mason, 2000) to "associativity" (Reigadas,

2007), "collaboration" (Arnold-Cathalifaud et al., 2007) to "networks" (Breiger & Roberts, 1998) and "social capital" (Klesner, 2007). Solidarity has also been tied to a notion of "social responsibility" when linked to the distinction between the public and private sector (Schuyt, 1998). From a sociological perspective, solidarity has been analysed as a systemic response to social exclusion, functioning as a promoter of social inclusion (Mascareño, 2007). These approaches often view solidarity as purposeful actions or connections designed to bridge differences or address inequalities temporarily and externally. However, my participants reject this systemic and impersonal perspective. Instead, their actions align more closely with a notion of solidarity rooted in agency, framing it as a political project aimed at counteracting atomization and social disintegration (Papataxiarchis, 2016). In this context, the work of Martín-Baró (1991) is particularly relevant, as he conceptualizes solidarity as a pro-social action that fosters social justice and collective responsibility. Following this trend, we can also find what Hunt-Hendrix and Taylor (2024, p. xix) mean by transformative solidarity: a search to expand the circle of inclusion while also altering society's very character. I particularly value these authors' emphasis on transformative solidarity being both a means and an end, i.e., both the process of "struggling together" and a way of describing a kind of society that is more just and mutualistic.

In this article, I follow the Durkheimian tradition that connects solidarity with morality while at the same time highlighting its connection with agency. This might appear odd since Durkheimian approaches tend to be inclined to work systemically and in a rather top-down approach. Contemporary readers of Durkheim (Jones, 2001; Miller, 2002; Tiryakian, 2016) have thought of mechanical and organic solidarity not as different stages of society but as qualities of different social configurations that can (and do) coexist. Agency here is in the will of these organizations to foster interdependence and work counter-current in the context of a strong self-achievement narrative. Morality is present when the latter relates to the way my participants give meaning to their actions and their political involvement. The role solidarity has a clear moral component when social ties of solidarity *give meaning* to the lives of social actors, renovating and providing a place for social ideals and values to thrive in. In sum, the attachment individuals create to one another is the source of morality (Jones, 2001, p. 97; Miller, 2002, p. 150) and in the sociological tradition, this attachment can be labelled as solidarity. Similarly, the opposite could be argued, i.e., that it is through political commitment and solidarity that such morality is shaped.

Practices labelled as solidarity carried out by migrant organizations can also be understood as works of care. Care relationships are pivotal for human connection, moral engagement, and new forms of personhood (Buch, 2018; Mol, 2008). Following Tronto (1993, pp. 105–108), I focus not only on the care-receiver or the care-giver, but also on the process of care from its very start, that is, the detection of the need for care (to care about), the decision-making and organizing of care (to take care of), the actual providing and receiving of care, and the overall relationship developed in that exchange. Rooted in reciprocity, care practices involve emotional aspects and temporal considerations (Thelen, 2015). Anthropology of care explores diverse relational dynamics involved in the acts of care (Constable, 2009; Gutierrez Garza, 2019; Zelizer, 2010), emphasizing the political impact of care on belonging and citizenship notions (Coe, 2019; see also Brown, 2011). Community-based care initiatives, like the ones I analyse in this article, foster a particular kind of solidarity and challenge traditional care and community norms (Bakke, 2005; Brown, 2011; Scherz, 2014). These initiatives prompt reflection on inclusivity and solidarity, emphasizing committed participation as essential for stimulating care and community cohesion. My focus is on adding depth to solidarity actions by theorizing them as acts of care, all the while examining the ethical dimensions at play. When migrant activists say they "participate and get involved in these organizations in the pursue of a good life,"

I wondered what it means for them to "live a good life," as it appears, for them, that a good life involves being there for others and building reciprocal connections, which seems particularly vital for migrants.

Migrant activism in Chile unmistakably has a side sustained by solidarity and mutual assistance networks. In what follows I trace their activities along these lines and explore how their acts of mutual support and solidarity contribute to the establishment of a sense of political belonging and how their actions can be read as political commitment. I follow the notions of care and solidarity among migrant activism in its various usages (emic notions) and revise relevant scholarly accounts of such terms. I further reflect on the organization's moral commitment behind their participation and works of care with one another. Through activities such as Open Breakfasts, I see an act of becoming "a we," a work of building a collective ethos, all of which is central to the citizenship narratives under constructions here.

In an interview with Marcos, a member of FMA and Plataforma, in Santiago de Chile, he noted:

> People use solidarity to talk of specific actions, specific help, in a specific time. That's not what we do here, that's why we don't use that word, we don't do solidarity, charity, we just are here for each other, all the time, and we help one another as part of our lives. (Interview, January 2021)

Marco's point is that he observed that "solidarity" is what is mobilized by specific events and not a sustained form of interaction, or a "way of living," as he says. I consider this distinction particularly significant based on what I see represented by "solidarity actions" by the organizations I got to work with. Whereas it was Open Breakfasts, poetry workshops, civic education and language courses, chess clubs, or knitting circles, the participation I observed in these groups was not sporadic or signalled by an event or a particular circumstance. They derived from a willingness to find each other (*encontrarse*) and spend time together—here I speak both about those organizing and those attending. Also, what makes it "a way of living" in Marco's words, is that these activities permeate their day-to-day lives. Dani must collect the grocery cart the day before every Open Breakfast: On her way to work, she passes by the municipality's bank food with her cart filled with grocery donations to see what she will use and discuss the possibilities for the menu for each Saturday; she also meets several people going in and out of Sede Catedral every day and sometimes accompanies them to a first job interview or a doctor appointment. Over the months I attended Sede Catedral and other community centres used by these organizations, I noticed the intimacy among them: They knew each other's children's names and their graduation dates, whose kids were about to fail math—and hence needed a spot on the reinforcement courses—just to list a few examples. The intricate network of mutual help also included favours and connections (*datos*) that went beyond the organizations themselves. This privileged information was passed around from one member to another as secret key makers; I would often hear conversations that ended with: "Oh, what you need to do is to call *this number*, call and ask for [X], tell [X] it's from me, he will help you with this."

3. Political Commitment and Solidarity

Political commitment can be defined as "the willingness of individuals to expend time, energy, and resources in pursuit of collective political goals, often driven by ideological beliefs or group affiliations" (Tilly, 2005, p. 12). As such, it encompasses various forms of engagement, including participation in social movements, voting behaviour, and activism, and is influenced by factors like social networks, political opportunities, and

cultural context. Now, from an anthropological perspective, political commitment extends beyond formal political structures to also involve "the active engagement of individuals in shaping the social and political landscape of their communities through culturally mediated practices and collective action" (Fassin, 2009, p. 24). This definition emphasizes the role of cultural norms, power dynamics, and local contexts in shaping individuals' participation in political processes and social change efforts. As social beings, we are constituted through relations with others; this process starts with the mother–infant bond, but is mediated by what society objectifies as the identities people are given, names, statutes, roles and the positions they occupy, values or ideas they come to identify with. When discussing political commitment, I emphasize the second part of the process. How and why do people keep their commitments? Why do migrants commit to their organizations, especially in such cases (which are the overwhelming majority) when they are "well-off," or at least have reached a stable position in terms of employment, housing, and other integration matters? Why are they involved and devoted to spending most of their weekends and virtually all of their leisure time in these organizations and networks?

Political commitment involves individuals' dedication to collective political goals driven by ideological beliefs or group affiliations, encompassing various forms of engagement like social movements and activism. From an anthropological viewpoint, political commitment extends beyond formal structures to include shaping social and political landscapes through collective action and culturally mediated practices. Trust, social capital, and self-reflection play key roles in maintaining commitments and balancing obligations in daily life.

Issues of trust and social capital are fundamental in understanding how people preserve commitments they make, or to what degree those commitments make sense for them. The link I try to draw towards ethics is sustained in the idea that commitments are also very relevant to the self: How do I initiate and keep commitments? How do I balance my various obligations in daily life? How do I maintain some consistency between giving to others (time, efforts, resources) and being, myself, open to receive and do what is right, be a good person, live a good life? I witnessed this sort of thought process among the organized migrant activists I worked with. When asked why they participate, activists tend to agree that participation comes smoothly, it is not a huge sacrifice (although sometimes it involves waking up at 6 a.m. after a 60 60-hour working week). Here is where morality comes in; they connect their participation and involvement with the notion of *compromiso*. Commitment is linked with the idea they have about how to "be good," how to "live a good live," or how to "make the world a better place." Migrant activists, as noted by Jones (2001), aid others not just out of altruism but to build a support network for themselves and their community, countering a dominant individualism and affirming the significance of collective solidarity. Paola, a member of Afrocéntricas and spokesperson of Platform, connects her activism with "being a sound person" (*ser una persona completa*):

> I guess it has to do with my upbringing, yes, but it is also something I have learned here, among my *compañeros* and *compañeras*: You need to be for one another, even when it's hard and when you are tired, we all work long hours, most of us don't get paid enough, yet the appreciation we get is just priceless. I feel safe, I know that if something were to happen, they will lend me a hand, or help my kid, or if she gets into trouble, they will let me know, or they will help her, without a doubt. If I did not have this, I [would] feel incomplete, as if something was missing, not only in the sense that I couldn't do it on my own, because I probably could. But it would be meaningless. (Interview, March 2022)

Paola has been living in Chile since the mid-90s, but she has only recently joined Plataforma following her involvement with Afrocéntricas. At the organization Paola collaborates as a therapist; she studied psychology in Chile in night school. Laughing, she remembers being particularly distrustful of all collective action at the beginning:

> I used to say, what are these meetings for? Nothing is going to change! Those who are already in a good place help each other to keep all for themselves! Yes, that is what I used to say. And in part I still believe that. But what I did not know, for being too young or too disappointed from my previous political experience…is that there is no necessity to gain something concrete. Being here is already my prize. Let me tell you, the way I saw it before, organizations were here to demand from you, right? From members, but then, it was not reciprocal because I thought they offered you nothing. With Afrocéntricas everything changed, I just felt a part, I saw a clear retribution…and not that you should benefit from everything you do, but it is good to feel that balance! (Interview, April 2022)

Paola's point was made several times when I pondered on their reasons for participating. Organizations seemed devised to help others as well as to help oneself, wellbeing spaces. So, combined with a sense of interdependence, these morally motivated actions are ordinary acts (that are performed day to day) that are expected to involve (help) the organizer as much as those who are at the receiving end of the solidarity action (reaffirming the processual approach towards care). This is also why I embrace the notion of care, instead of maintaining solely the notion of solidarity.

4. Final Remarks

In this article, I explore four key topics. First, I discuss solidarity from sociological and anthropological perspectives, drawing on Emile Durkheim's work on social differentiation and interdependence to interpret solidarity as political belonging and acts of care. Second, I examine the concept of solidarity in the Chilean context, highlighting its varied usages from isolated charitable acts to political actions against a common oppressor. Third, I connect solidarity to the anthropology of care, showing that the solidarity actions I observed can be seen as acts of care, adding new dimensions to the notion of solidarity. The fourth topic introduces political commitment (*compromise*), which bridges solidarity and care on a horizon of social change.

Anthropology's focus on ethics is crucial. As Taylor (1989, p. 15) describes, moral thinking involves respect for others, understanding what makes a full life, and notions of dignity. Migrant activists' commitment (*compromise*) is driven by a sense of moral obligation, integral to their identity and societal relations. Embracing interdependency in a context dominated by self-achievement narratives, their collaboration in local organizations challenges the view of solidarity as a momentary effort limited to the *real* deserving. By interrogating the intersections of solidarity, political participation, and everyday life, I aim to uncover how care becomes a site of struggle, resistance, and ultimately, the pursuit of a more just and dignified existence. The politicization of care tasks expands the discourse beyond traditional notions of politics, while care is often associated with intimate, domestic gestures, it can also reflect struggles for dignity, autonomy, and social justice. When recognizing the political dimension of care, we acknowledge that everyday acts of nurturing and support are imbued with social significance, contributing to broader struggles for equality and human rights. Valuing these more invisible forms of resistance I recognize the creativity and strengths of marginalized communities in the face of adversity. This perspective challenges traditional notions of heroism

and instead highlights the transformative potential of collective action, both within the home and in broader social movements.

Acknowledgments

This article is drawn from a chapter of my doctoral dissertation in cultural anthropology at Utrecht University. All names have been pseudonymized to protect participants' confidentiality. The organizations' names have been altered for the same reason.

Funding

This research was supported by a 2020 International Doctoral Fellowship from ANID (Chilean National Agency for Research and Development).

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

Data Availability

The research data underlying this article can be shared upon reasonable request to the corresponding author, subject to institutional ethics and confidentiality protocols.

References

Álvarez, S. E., Dagnino, E., & Escobar, A. (2018). Introduction: The cultural and the political in Latin American social movements. In S. E. Alvarez, E. Dagnino, & A. Escobar (Eds.), *Cultures of politics/politics of cultures* (pp. 1–30). Routledge.

Arnold-Cathalifaud, M., Thumala, D., & Urquiza, A. (2007). Collaboration, culture and development: Between individualism and organized solidarity. *Revista Mad—Revista de Magister en Análisis Sistémico Aplicado a la Sociedad*, *2007*(2), 15–34.

Bakke, O. M. (2005). *When children became people: The birth of childhood in early Christianity*. Fortress.

Breiger, R., & Roberts, J. (1998). Solidarity and social networks. In P. Doreian & T. Fararo (Eds.), *The problem of solidarity: Theories and models* (pp. 239–262). Gordon and Breach.

Brown, T. (2011). *Raising Brooklyn: Nannies, childcare, and Caribbeans creating community*. New York University Press.

Buch, E. (2018). *Inequalities of aging: Paradoxes of independence in American home care*. New York University Press.

Christiaens, K. (2018). European reconfigurations of transnational activism: Solidarity and human rights campaigns on behalf of Chile during the 1970s and 1980s. *International Review of Social History*, *63*(3), 413–448.

Coe, C. (2019). *The new American servitude: political belonging among African immigrant home care workers*. New York University Press.

Constable, N. (2009). The commodification of intimacy: Marriage, sex, and reproductive labor. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, *38*(1), 49–64.

Cullen, P. P. (2009). Irish pro-migrant nongovernmental organizations and the politics of immigration. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, *20*, 99–128.

Dagnino, E. (2003). Citizenship in Latin America: An introduction. *Latin American Perspectives*, *30*(2), 211–225.

Durkheim, E. (2001). *La división del trabajo social*. Ediciones Akal. (Original work published 1893)

Fassin, D. (2009). Another politics of life is possible. *Theory, Culture & Society*, *26*(5), 44–60. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276409106349

Fassin, D. (2014). The ethical turn in anthropology: Promises and uncertainties. *Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, 4(1), 429–435.

Featherstone, D. (2012). *Solidarity: Hidden histories and geographies of internationalism*. Zed.

Garkisch, M., Heidingsfelder, J., & Beckmann, M. (2017). Third sector organizations and migration: A systematic literature review on the contribution of third sector organizations in view of flight, migration and refugee crises. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, *28*, 1839–1880.

Goodwin, J., Jasper, J. M., & Polletta, F. (Eds.). (2001). *Passionate politics: Emotions and social movements*. University of Chicago Press.

Gutierrez Garza, A. P. (2019). *Care for sale: An ethnography of Latin American domestic and sex workers in London*. Oxford University Press.

Heine, J. (2002). *Informe sobre desarrollo humano en Chile 2002: Nosotros los chilenos: Un desafío cultural*. PNUD.

Hunt-Hendrix, L., & Taylor, A. (2024). *Solidarity: The past, present, and future of a world-changing idea*. Phanteon.

Huntington, S. P. (1991). *The third wave* (Vol. 199). University of Oklahoma Press.

Jelin, E. (1998). Cities, culture and globalization. In UNESCO (Eds.), *Informe mundial sobre la cultura: Cultura, creatividad y mercados* (pp. 105–124). UNESCO.

Jones, S. S. (2001). *Durkheim reconsidered*. Balckwell.

Klein, N. (2010). *La doctrina del shock: El auge del capitalismo del desastre* (Vol. 1). Paidós.

Klesner, J. L. (2007). Social capital and political participation in Latin America: Evidence from Argentina, Chile, Mexico, and Peru. *Latin American Research Review*, *42*(2), 1–32.

Martín-Baró, I. (1991). Métodos en psicología política. In M. Montero (Ed.), *Acción y discurso problemas de psicología política en América Latina* (pp. 39–58). Eduven.

Mascareño, A. (2007). Sociología de la solidaridad. La diferenciación de un sistema global de cooperación. *Revista Mad—Revista del Magíster en Análisis Sistémico Aplicado a la Sociedad*, *2007*(2), 35–67.

Mason, A. (2000). *Community, solidarity and belonging: Levels of community and their normative significance*. Cambridge University Press.

Miller, W. W. (2002). *Durkheim, morals and modernity*. Routledge.

Mol, A. (2008). *The logic of care: Health and the problem of patient choice*. Routledge.

Papataxiarchis, E. (2016). Unwrapping solidarity? Society reborn in austerity. *Social Anthropology/Anthropologie sociale*, *24*(2), 205–210.

Portes, A., Escobar, C., & Radford, A. W. (2007). Immigrant transnational organizations and development: A comparative study 1. *International Migration Review*, *41*(1), 242–281.

Rath, J., Solano, G., & Schutjens, V. (2020). Migrant entrepreneurship and transnational links. In C. Inglis, B. Khadria, & L. Wei (Eds.), *Sage handbook of international migration* (pp. 450–465). Sage.

Reigadas, C. (2007). Asociaciones voluntarias y participación democrática en la Argentina. *Revista Mad—Revista del Magíster en Análisis Sistémico Aplicado a la Sociedad*, *2007*(2), 69–92.

Román, J. A., Ibarra, S., & Energici, A. (2014). Caracterización de la solidaridad en Chile: Opiniones y percepciones de los habitantes de Santiago de Chile. *Latin American Research Review*, *49*(2), 197–220.

Scherz, C. (2014). *Having people, having heart: Charity, sustainable development, and problems of dependence in Central Uganda*. University Press.

Scholz, S. J. (2008). *Political solidarity*. Penn State Press.

Schuyt, K. (1998). The sharing of risks and the risks of sharing: Solidarity and social justice in the welfare state. *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, *1*(3), 297–311.

Stefoni, C., & Stang, F. (2017). La construcción del campo de estudio de las migraciones en Chile: Notas de un ejercicio reflexivo y autocrítico. *Íconos—Revista de Ciencias Sociales*, *2017*(58), 109–129.

Taylor, C. (1989). *Sources of the self: The making of the modern identity*. Cambridge University Press.

Thelen, T. (2015). Care as social organization: Creating, maintaining and dissolving significant relations. *Anthropological Theory*, *15*(4), 497–515.

Thörn, H. (2009). The meaning (s) of solidarity: Narratives of anti-apartheid activism. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, *35*(2), 417–436.

Tilly, C. (2005). *Trust and rule*. Cambridge University Press.

Tiryakian, E. A. (2016). *For Durkheim: Essays in historical and cultural sociology*. Routledge.

Tronto, J. (1993). *Moral boundaries: A political argument for an ethic of care*. Routledge.

Zelizer, V. (2010). Caring everywhere. In R. Parreñas & E. Boris (Eds.), *Intimate labors: Cultures, technologies, and the politics of care* (pp. 267–279). Standford University Press.

About the Author

Tamara Hernández Araya is a cultural anthropologist pursuing her doctorate at Utrecht University, focusing on migration and democratization in Chile. She holds a master's in migration and social cohesion from the University of Amsterdam (cum laude) and has extensive research experience in human rights, political participation, and social movements. Currently teaching at Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, her work combines academic research with community engagement, particularly in immigrant organizations and social inclusion initiatives.