Playlist

Solidarity

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We are living through a moment of dramatic political change. A series of recent events—among them, the killing of George Floyd, the discovery of mass graves in Canada, the bombing of Gaza—appears to have awakened a fierce political consciousness strongly reminiscent of the 1960s civil rights era. We are arguably moving away from a centrist culture of moral complacency and political passivity toward a heightened awareness of social injustice and collective responsibility. This cultural shift has been accelerated by two major crises: the rapid breakdown of our environment and a global zoonotic pandemic. What climate change and the coronavirus have made so blisteringly clear is just how interconnected we all really are. Our local and immediate actions, we now realize, have profound ripple effects across time, geography, culture, race, and class. As the novelist Kim Stanley Robinson (2020) has eloquently argued, living through a global crisis has forced us to reimagine our place in the world and our relationship to each other. This shared experience has undermined the liberal myth of the sovereign individual, the fantasy that each of us is but an island. We are more like fish in the sea. We swim in the same waters, subject to the same dangers. Crisis has a sobering way of making this explicit. As *New York Times* columnist Farhad Manjoo (2020) put it, "We are all socialists in a pandemic." If only it didn't take a deadly virus to remind us of our mutual interdependency.

This shift in our political culture has been exemplified by a number of powerful movements for social change: Black Lives Matter (BLM), the Every Child Matters campaign, the struggle for Palestinian liberation, the Youth Strike for Climate, the #MeToo movement, the Landless Workers Movement in Brazil, and the global Indigenous-led resistance to oil pipelines and deforestation. These are not particularist causes seeking merely to advance an idiosyncratic set of local interests. Rather, the moral starting point for each of these movements is our basic and universal humanity. The belief in our universal humanity is what binds these movements together. The fight for liberation, equality, and justice unites the wretched of the earth. The oppressed see themselves in each other's experience

of oppression. This is why BLM stands with the Palestinians and why the Palestinians in turn stand with BLM. The belief in a shared humanity also inspires many people of privilege, those with no practical stake in the game, to throw their full support behind social movements for liberation, equality, and justice. These outsiders feel an empathetic sense of injustice for the marginalized, the forgotten, the oppressed. Some risk arrest. Others risk their lives. This ethic of solidarity, the duty towards the stranger, was the moral premise behind Bernie Sanders' historic political campaign, whose driving sentiment at campaign rally after campaign rally was best captured in the slogan, "Solidarity Forever."

But what exactly is solidarity? Despite a sizeable literature about it, solidarity is not easy to theorize. There are numerous studies about solidarity. These are, for the most part, histories of political movements.[1] They present powerful stories of courage and unity. They seldom, however, offer an actual theory.[2] In this respect, the idea of solidarity is akin to that of truth, justice, and beauty—ideas that are difficult to pin down with any degree of analytical precision, yet which remain indispensable to social and political practice. It is common for us to invoke concepts we cannot always put into words. Solidarity appears to be one of them. Perhaps empirical case studies are more useful for making sense of solidarity than abstract theorizing. What, then, might a discipline like communication studies teach us about solidarity?

The archive of the *Canadian Journal of Communication* contains a wealth of studies that touch upon the theme of solidarity. This should not be surprising, given the critical orientation of communication studies in Canada. The following playlist features five articles that explore solidarity as a socially and technologically mediated phenomenon. These five articles were selected to cover a diversity of perspectives on the general theme of solidarity: Indigenous resistance, public policy, the struggle of precarious workers, student activism, and the arts as a medium of solidarity. Two of these articles have solidarity as their primary and explicit focus. The remaining three explore solidarity implicitly. All of them, however, help to illuminate the complexity, the stakes, and the challenges in the ethics, politics, and media of solidarity.

Playlist

Article 1

Conradi, Alexa. (2009). Uprising at Oka: A place of non-identification. *Canadian Journal of Communication, 34*(4), 547–566. doi: 10.22230/cjc .2009v34n4a2133

The "Oka Crisis," otherwise known as the Kanesatake Resistance, was a critical historical moment in Indigenous-settler relations in Canada. Much has been written about it from different scholarly angles. Drawing from the work of rhetori-

cal theorist Robert Hariman, Alexa Conradi presents a fascinating analysis of the political style of the Mohawk resistance to the colonial state. Although many Mohawk elders took part in the Oka stand-off at Kanesatake, the resistance was nonetheless leaderless, a testament to remarkable organization and discipline. How, then, did the Mohawk maintain such a strong and united front? How did they keep each other in line? Conradi explores the techniques of the Mohawks' radical political style by which a leaderless resistance maintained "a high level of solidarity" (560).

Article 2

Raboy, Marc. (2006). Creating the conditions for communication in the public good. *Canadian Journal of Communication, 31*(2), 289–306. doi: 10.22230/cjc.2006v31n2a1733

The public good is a foundational political concept with a long and venerable history. It has been theorized in various forms by thinkers as diverse as Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Rousseau, and Marx. Democracy is scarcely imaginable without it. The public good is the focal point for democratic solidarity. How might we think about communication for the public good? Originally written as "The 2005 Graham Spry Memorial Lecture Making Media: Creating the Conditions for Communication in the Public Good," this article by Marc Raboy addresses the challenge of creating the institutional conditions for media technologies to serve the people. Raboy notes that "communication is a double-edged sword" (292). It can either serve or undermine democracy. We therefore require thoughtful communication policies that strengthen public service broadcasting, balance freedom of expression with respect for diversity, and create spaces for alternative media.

Article 3

Bodnar, Chris. (2006). Taking it to the streets: French cultural worker resistance and the creation of a precariat movement. *Canadian Journal of Communication, 31*(3), 675–694. doi:10.22230/cjc.2006v31n3a1768

In 2003, a large group of workers from the film, television, theatre, and music industries in France went on strike. They took over live television shows and news broadcasts to voice their strong opposition to a long series of changes to the nation's unemployment fund for entertainment industry workers, an important lifeline for actors, writers, directors, producers, musicians, technicians, and engineers during periods of volatility in the entertainment industry. Their concern focused on their status as precarious workers. How, then, did they organize, mobilize, and articulate their objections to the systematic erosion of entertainment workers' protections by industry executives and right-wing politicians? In this article, Chris Bodnar argues that this historic workers' protest movement invoked the concepts of *precarity* and *immaterial labour* to frame their resistance and opposition. These

new concepts were not only necessary to create an opening for a new labour movement in France, they were also the basis for solidarity among an underclass of French workers.

Article 4

Tewksbury, Doug. (2018). Digital solidarity, analog mobilization: An ethnography of the technology-embedded protest networks of the Québec student strike. *Canadian Journal of Communication, 43*(4), 601–617. doi:10.22230/cjc.2018v43n4a3352

In the spring of 2011, the cabinet of Québec Premier Jean Charest proposed a massive hike in university tuition fees over a five-year period. In response, hundreds of thousands of students poured into the streets to protest the proposed tuition hike. For the next year, the Québec student protest movement, famously dubbed the Maple Spring, held a series of highly coordinated, overwhelmingly peaceful, and politically quite powerful public demonstrations at numerous strategic locations across Québec. The Maple Spring was unified by, among other things, the symbol of a red square. How did the student movement organize, mobilize, and deploy on the streets so effectively? What role did digital technology play? In this invaluable ethnographic study, Doug Tewksbury presents the results of an ethnographic study of the Maple Spring protest movement. Tewksbury interviewed dozens of protestors, student union leaders, community organizers, media producers, and activists to gain insights into their organizational prowess and dexterity. His conclusion? That digital media were invaluable for building community and solidarity, for sharing information, and for organizing direct actions.

Article 5

Fernandez, Sharon. (2006). More than an arts festival: Communities, resistance, and the story of Desh Pardesh. *Canadian Journal of Communication, 31*(1), 17–34. doi:10.22230/cjc.2006v31n1a1778

Desh Pardesh was a queer South Asian arts festival held annually in Toronto from 1988 to 2001. Originally called Salaam Toronto, Desh Pardesh ("home away from home") was the event of choice for some of the most marginalized people in Toronto: the South Asian LGBTQ community. How does a minority within a minority find meaning, purpose, and belonging? How do they recognize common struggles, dreams, hopes, and fears? How do they build community and achieve a sense of solidarity? In this study, Sharon Fernandez draws from postcolonial theory to analyze the power of cultural production as a medium of civic engagement and its capacity to create a home away from home for Toronto's queer community. Desh Pardesh eventually collapsed due in large part to Ontario Premier Mike Harris's unconscionable cuts to the arts. This study, written a few years after, considers the power of the arts to leave a lasting sense of solidarity long after the festival's tragic demise.

Notes

1. See, for example, Touraine, Gęsicka, & Denby, 1983; Müller, 2014; Stjernø, 2009; Fantasia, 1989; Fletcher & Fernando, 2008; Mason, 1989.
2. For two notable exceptions, see Scholz, 2008; Dean, 2019.

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