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Comparing Deservingness: A Reflexive Approach to Solidarity and Cruelty

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As pointed out in the Introduction and other chapters in this volume, deservingness is a central mechanism in contemporary European politics. It is at the core of various forms of redistribution: whether of money, after the 2007/2008 global financial crisis; of migrants coming from Africa and the Middle East; and, more recently, of healthcare and other forms of support related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Deservingness draws our attention to the morality and relationality of these very different crises involving people, finance and health.

In this chapter, I would like to follow up on the approach to deservingness taken by Streinzer and Tošić in the Introduction by focusing particularly on the complex relationship between ethnography and comparative approaches. By putting deservingness at the centre of ethnography, the contributors to this volume have successfully upended presumed categories that are typically – often unreflexively – used for comparing distributional regimes in contemporary Europe. How does deservingness shed light on people's experiences, languages and moralities as contingent upon social and political circumstances in contemporary Europe, especially regarding distribution? How can such a contextual and reflexive approach to deservingness be the foundation for a comparative approach that enables ethnographers to explain differences? Answering these questions requires a historical understanding of how Western categories for comparison are part of global power relations (Fox and Gingrich 2002). This chapter takes a deeper look at how deservingness contributes to an ethnographic approach that is both reflexive and comparative.

An ethnographic approach to deservingness is important in that it focuses on what takes place ‘behind the model’. It is particularly capable of revealing the tensions between how things should be and how they actually work out and are experienced in everyday life. It examines how states, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and companies formulate redistribution in policies, laws and regulations as well as in managerial protocols and procedures. Such models and procedures stipulate entitlements and forms of inclusion in discourses that are often neutral and technical. The ethical dimensions of such an impersonal approach to redistribution become much clearer when ethnographically studying how laws, policies and solutions work out in everyday life. Ethnography provides insight into how people undergo classifications and bureaucratic procedures that are inherently part of distributional policies and institutions. An ethnographic approach to deservingness reveals these experiences most clearly by focusing on people who are situated on the border of inclusion and exclusion; people who can, to some extent, claim to be included but simultaneously experience being undeserving. Of particular interest are situations where society sees ‘these’ people as simultaneously deserving and undeserving. Such situations reveal the ambiguous social processes that underlie deservingness, which revolve around the boundaries of empathy towards people who can be seen as insiders just as easily as outsiders, and around the mobilization of moralities that are contingent upon social and political circumstances.

An ethnographic approach to deservingness offers an empirical and conceptual space for the diversity of experiences and practices; it shows how ethics and morality are imbued in policies, laws and languages that are presented as technical and practical solutions. It also offers insights into the tensions and conflicts that are part of redistribution policies, and shows when and how such tensions are mobilized into specific forms of protest.

However, ethnographic research also has its shortcomings in that it contributes less to *explaining* phenomena. The ethnographic approach to interpretation, experience, language and translating lived worlds into others occurs at the expense of the ability to explain differences. Thus, taking a more reflexive approach has been very helpful in deconstructing comparative categories by showing that they are not as universal or neutral as has often been assumed. Reflexivity has revealed that many comparisons used to formulate explanations can be ideological and Eurocentric. Nevertheless, reflexivity has also made comparisons and explaining differences increasingly marginal.

Deservingness, as a new conceptual framework, offers a way out of this dilemma by enabling an ethnographic approach that is both

reflexive and comparative. It offers a conceptual space to reflect on the positionality of the researcher and to incorporate research contexts into the analysis – contexts that always destabilize universal claims, while simultaneously enabling new forms of comparison that significantly diverge from more established categories such as ‘the state’.

Here I will explore deservingness as a reflexive and comparative category in two ways. First, I look at how reflexivity caused explanatory approaches, which hinged on comparative approaches, to become less common in anthropology from the 1970s onwards, a methodological and epistemological shift that was connected to the process of decolonization. Second, I explore more recent debates that steer anthropology and ethnography in a direction that is both reflexive and comparative. The development of this new epistemology again seems to be related to a shifting balance of global power, specifically the end of the Cold War, which had a major impact on Europe and anthropological scholarship. I suggest that deservingness meets the epistemological ‘requirements’ set within this debate, especially because it places a reflexive relational perspective on social realities that departs from the more established categories often used for comparisons within Europe. To further explore deservingness as an analytical category, I turn towards the reflexive epistemology developed by Rorty (1995) that explores how one can simultaneously be aware of the fact that concepts and languages are historically contingent, and at the same time formulate a politically viable agenda for justice and solidarity.

I use Rorty’s reflexive epistemology as the starting point of a comparative approach to deservingness. Particularly valuable is how Rorty sees solidarity as inherently cruel. A reflexive approach to solidarity reveals these cruelties, which I argue are also a central feature in deservingness. With the help of this epistemology, I explore how deservingness is a reflexive and comparative concept that allows us to analyse the more painful and cruel social developments in contemporary Europe.

Explaining Deservingness through Serendipitous Comparison

When objectivist epistemology left ethnography, so did comparison. This becomes particularly poignant in Geertz’s ‘Deep Play’ (1973), a seminal contribution to this cultural shift in anthropology. Geertz argued that money is not characteristic of utilitarian calculations,

but rather establishes relations between people and the groups they belong to. For example, bets men placed at cockfights had to be interpreted symbolically, given that money played an important role in the articulation of masculinity and the creation of hierarchies between men and the groups to which they belong.¹

Geertz famously developed 'thick description' as the key characteristic of an interpretative approach to ethnography. He argued that knowledge is produced within specific networks of interactions in which the ethnographer participates. In this study, Geertz carefully reflected on his role as a researcher and the position he had vis-à-vis the people he engaged with during fieldwork and the situations that undergirded interpretations. Instead of comparing 'his' society with 'their' society, Geertz argued that people construct meaning together. Instead of presenting himself and his society as superior, he described how he was seen as a funny guest that became part of a web of interpretations: he was a visitor interpreting what the Balinese interpreted.

Equally important, but not addressed quite as explicitly as reflexivity, is the ability of the researcher to be in control of the research process. One of the characteristics of ethnographic research is that the anthropologist has little control over the research situation, the language used, the social encounters and the conversations with people. This lack of control makes ethnography a method that allows unexpected and serendipitous encounters, conversations and ideas to emerge.

Geertz starts his study by demonstrating that he is not in control of the research process. He describes how he tries, without much success, to establish relationships with the Balinese. He feels he and his wife are ignored: 'For them, and to a degree for ourselves, we were nonpersons, specters, invisible men' (Geertz 1973: 56). The serendipitous character of his ethnographic research becomes poignant when he describes how his relationship with and, therefore, his understanding of the Balinese change drastically after the police raided a cockfight, forcing him and his wife to flee along with the other Balinese spectators. The Balinese interpreted this as an act of solidarity and henceforth the couple were no longer treated as invisible outsiders. When Geertz interprets the cockfight, it is not his intention to show it as a representative case that characterized Balinese society. Instead, he illustrates how the cockfight, especially the betting between the men, offered important insights into the sociality of money and the establishment of social hierarchies and boundaries.

Geertz later explains how his contribution to a reflexive epistemology was part of a global shift in power relations:

The end of colonialism altered radically the nature of the social relationship between those who ask and those who are asked and looked at. The decline of faith in brute fact, set procedures, and unsituated knowledge in the human sciences, and indeed in scholarship generally, altered no less radically the askers' and lookers' conception of what it was they were trying to do. Imperialism in its classical form, metropolises and possession, and Scientism in its, [*sic*] impulsions and billiard balls, fell at more or less the same time. (Geertz 1988: 131–32)

This 'double fall of scientism and imperialism' (Conquergood 1991: 179) impacted ethnographic comparison, which had been embedded in an objectivist epistemology. As Kuper writes: 'The new cultural anthropology did not aspire to compare and explain' (1994: 541). The cultural turn instead examined positionality, reflexivity and the power and politics of representation in ethnographic writing.² Interpretative epistemology made comparison more problematic because it challenged the understanding that cultures, societies and meanings could be clearly distinguished from one another and placed in a hierarchical relationship (Fox and Gingrich 2002).³ While controlled comparison suggested controlling the research process and the relationship between what is studied and society at large, it was also carried out within the politics of colonialism intended to control the people ethnographers were studying.⁴

Fox and Gingrich formulated a new orientation towards comparison in anthropology: 'The monopolistic, universalist and objectivist claims made in the name of comparison in anthropology today are not necessary' (2002: 5–6). The relatively new debate on ethnographic comparison also takes place against a backdrop of political change. European politics particularly influenced the comparative approach in ethnography, leading anthropologists to try and establish a new vocabulary that allows for new ways of comparing societies, events and experiences.

During the Cold War, ethnographers usually met nationally or in the United States at international conferences. However, the end of the Cold War in 1989 changed this and had major consequences for the networks and debates among ethnographers, which has shaped what ethnography is or should be. The European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA) was established in 1989. Two years later, the Africa-Europe Group for Interdisciplinary Studies

(AEGIS), where many anthropologists also meet, was established. The foundation of the Central European University in Budapest (Hungary) in 1991 with an international department of anthropology and sociology, and the establishment of the prestigious Max-Planck-Institut für Ethnologische Forschung in 1999 in Halle (in the former East Germany) were also important developments.

These new European associations and institutions strengthened anthropology networks in Europe and encouraged anthropologists to reflect on how national traditions influenced ethnography. This brought about an increased awareness of anthropology's diversity in Europe as well as in the Global South (Bošković and Erikson 2008). New European associations and research institutes, as well as publications such as the one by Bošković and Erikson (*ibid.*), meant that national differences in doing anthropology were discussed reflexively, thus avoiding the creation of hierarchies between North versus South, East versus West, and French/Anglo-American versus the rest. Ethnographic comparison began by comparing diverse national ethnographic traditions (see also Fox and Gingrich 2002).

Another reason for the return of comparison to ethnography was the advancement of a European research agenda intended to strengthen scientific developments and stimulate cooperation across national and disciplinary boundaries. The European Research Council (ERC), founded in 2007, typically requires researchers to set up and lead a research team in order to receive funding. Unlike individual research projects, teams have to work collaboratively, and the added value of such collaboration has to be specified. What is the added value of conducting a project that involves, for example, four ethnographies as opposed to conducting four individually funded smaller ethnographic projects? This inevitably raises the question of comparing ethnographic findings.⁵

The comparative question also became more prominent as a result of the selection process for large research grants. Proposals are typically reviewed and selected by interdisciplinary panels (see Lazar 2012; van der Veer 2014: 11; Meyer 2017). The scholars conducting these processes are not always familiar with the epistemology on which ethnography had been based since the 1970s, or are sometimes even hostile towards an epistemology that is not rooted in an objectivist tradition. In order to successfully acquire funding and ensure that ethnography remains a legitimate method, anthropologists have had to respond to questions like: how do you compare ethnographic evidence? It is a challenge to reintroduce the comparative approach

that explains difference without returning to an unreflexive, and sometimes naïve, objectivist epistemology.

Lazar (2012) looks at how to compare fieldwork on trade unions in Bolivia and Argentina. She proposes distinguishing two kinds of comparison: representative and disjunctive. She points out that both types have value, but produce different insights that need to be evaluated using different criteria. Representative comparison is defined as the more traditional way of comparing representative cases, people and events, which means that findings can be analysed side by side. Disjunctive comparison is reflexive about the role of the researcher who does the comparative work, and thus acknowledges that understanding is inevitably a human process. The criterion for disjunctive comparison is not primarily whether cases or research participants are representative of society at large; instead, the focus is more on the opportunity to encounter unexpected differences that urge us to ask new kinds of questions and establish a new vocabulary for analysing these differences. Lazar shows how disjunctive comparison opens up new avenues for theoretically exploring the construction of political selfhood (ibid.: 361).

Candea (2016) also places the ethnographer as the starting point for making comparisons. He distinguishes between what he calls frontal and lateral comparisons: frontal being comparisons between ‘us’ and ‘them’, and lateral between ‘them’ and ‘them’. Both types of comparison are understood as playing important roles and as able to reinforce one another and strengthen ethnographic theory. Both can also be reflexive, Candea argues, but the reflexivity differs, since the researcher is positioned differently in each one: ‘In frontal comparison we put ourselves to the test. In lateral comparison we put each other to the test. The two moves are mutually constitutive’ (ibid.: 218).

Contributions to the special issue of *Social Analysis* entitled ‘Cutting and Connecting: “Afrinesian” Perspectives on Networks, Relationality and Exchange’ examine how Melanesian ethnography and African anthropology influenced one another (Myrhe 2013). Englund and Yarrow (2013) propose a comparative ethnography that recounts what they define as ‘relational knowledge production’. This means that ethnographers have to reflect on how their theories and concepts are established within specific contexts, which implies including themselves in the comparison. Ethnographic comparisons, they argue, are valuable because ‘they destabilize and complicate the terms [used for comparison] themselves, which in turn provides the basis for a descriptive language more finely attuned to the specificities

of particular contexts' (ibid.: 144). This kind of comparison primarily serves to deconstruct categories.

Van der Veer's book *The Value of Comparison* (2016) criticizes the predominant epistemology found in most social sciences (economics, sociology and political science). He argues against the universal claims often made by social scientists, and states that they are based on specific Western models of cognition, structure and rationality that are believed to be universal. Thus, they ignore global differences and assume that Western societies and people are representative of the entire world. He points out that 'one of the greatest flaws in the development of a comparative perspective seems to be the almost universal comparison of any existing society with an ideal-typical and totally self-sufficient Euro-American modernity' (ibid.: 28). This does not mean that concepts developed in the West cannot be used in a comparative method, and van der Veer himself engages critically with Weberian and Maussian concepts. However, this does mean that these ideas and models need to be treated reflexively by recognizing that they are produced within a specific context. Comparison can only work when one realizes that a universal claim is problematic and always involves a historical understanding of how Western ideas and models are part of a globalization process, which are hence charged with global power relations.

Van der Veer's book presents a detailed agenda for reflexive comparison by formulating four advantages of an anthropological approach to comparison: a thorough understanding of the problem of cultural translations of difference; an ability to study a fragment that is not a model of, but sheds light on, a larger whole; a generalism that acknowledges how nations and civilizations are historically integrated; and an understanding of the body and its disciplining that goes beyond a limited cognitive notion (van der Veer 2016: 10). He argues that ethnography can make specific contributions because it is well suited to examining and understanding the dynamic relationship between the fragment and the whole. The fragment, the everyday, or 'micro' in ethnography is not studied because it is believed to represent the whole. But while it may not represent the whole, the fact that the fragment can only be understood in relation to global historical changes is precisely what makes the fragment important for understand the whole. The opposite is also true, where large-scale historical change can only be understood through detailed ethnographic evidence of particular situations (ibid.: 25).⁶ At the same time, van der Veer focuses less exclusively on reflexivity during ethnographic fieldwork, stating that a comparative approach is not as

concerned with the positionality of the ethnographer as it is with the positionality of the ideas and concepts that academics develop.

It is by no means a coincidence that these epistemological questions are discussed in contemporary Europe. Just like the decolonization process unsettled a hierarchical comparison between countries and set the scene for Geertz's interpretative approach, so have political developments in post-Cold War Europe confronted anthropologists with 'new' kinds of differences that call for reflexive and comparative analyses. They have contributed to a serendipitous comparison that reflects on the positionality of the researcher.

Comparisons can be and often are made by using 'old' established categories – for example, welfare programmes in European nation-states, or EU legislation and policies regarding migration in different countries. A serendipitous comparison requires new concepts, and I understand deservingness as a new, unsettling category that enables a reflexive comparison. Certainly, the theoretical challenges that the study of deservingness in this volume brings to the fore are rooted within a specific European context. But deservingness is an important heuristic concept that defines crises in new ways that make it possible to explore redistributive regimes from a relational point of view around the world. Thus, a focus on deservingness allows for a reflexive and comparative approach that leads to new explanations for how redistributive regimes take shape and become part of people's lived world.

In the Introduction to this volume, Streinzer and Tošić argue that the conceptual value of deservingness lies in its moral evaluation of relations. Drawing on the work of Fassin and Ticktin, among others, regarding suffering and humanitarianism, they propose deservingness as a theoretical and methodological lens for examining how the recognition of suffering is based on whether suffering is seen as legitimate. Deservingness, as a new concept for comparing the morality of distribution processes, thus takes the (mis)recognition of a fellow human being as the starting point for analysis. As an analytical category, it begins by questioning how the legitimacy of human suffering is inherently tied to political developments in Europe; how these developments relate to people living outside of Europe; and how markets and states make up forms of redistribution that stipulate whether certain people are in or out. This reflexive treatment of deservingness, based on the recognition of fellow human beings in Europe, raises fascinating opportunities for comparing distributive regimes.

Reflexivity, Comparison and Cruelty

Deservingness draws our attention to the cruelty of redistributive regimes and the solidarity on which they are based. It draws our attention to people who are excluded because they are seen as undeserving, and to situations where people feel it is not necessary to empathize with others because of what they supposedly personify – for example, ‘their’ behaviour is regarded as detrimental to the common good. This volume shows how a critical analysis of deservingness sheds light on the less benevolent, even cruel dimensions of redistribution in Europe.

Rorty’s ironic approach to solidarity is helpful for unpacking deservingness as both a reflexive and comparative concept. Rorty is concerned with epistemological questions regarding objectivity and morality. He argues that the distinction between objectivity and morality is temporal and contingent, and he rejects the claim that morality is universal and extraneous to people, their languages and their ways of understanding the world. He writes: ‘The fundamental premise of the book is that a belief can still regulate action, can still be thought worth dying for, among people who are quite aware that this belief is caused by nothing deeper than contingent historical circumstance’ (Rorty 1995: 189).

In addition to recognizing morality as contingent, Rorty also contends that we should not resort to a kind of relativism that makes morality meaningless and impossible to uphold or express. The irony that morality is contingent and yet crucial to our understanding of the world leads Rorty to explore the private–public divide. Publicly, one needs to uphold a certain morality that is expressed through ever-expanding forms of solidarity. Privately, one needs to be aware of the contingency of morality, and that the vocabulary used to conceptualize the world is never final and needs to be open to change. This requires a degree of reflexivity about one’s own role in shaping morality and understanding. In other words, in order for moralities to be important in public life, one must be reflexive in private. In this way, Rorty acknowledges that moralities are shaped by specific communities and societies, and recognizes the contingency of those important to us. He outlines a liberal utopia where people have debates guided by deep-seated moralities and convictions, while still being aware of the contingency of the language that shapes these debates and the thoughts, metaphors and ideas they produce. Reflexivity here means that when people debate their moralities and

state their convictions, they are aware that they do so as members of a particular community with contingent convictions (see also Bähre 2020).

Rorty identifies three key mechanisms that shape solidarity, which can be summarized as: the boundaries of solidarity, the hierarchies within it and the moralities that support it (Rorty 1995; see also Bähre (2020) on solidarity and financialization in South Africa). These three mechanisms lead to three sets of questions that help develop deservingness as both a reflexive and comparative concept, similar to what Streinzer and Tošić did in the Introduction:

1. How can we compare the boundaries of solidarity and to whom solidarity is extended? Why are people excluded and what is the role of deservingness in this process of exclusion from solidarity?
2. Why do particular hierarchies emerge *within* solidarity? Does deservingness challenge or reflect hierarchies among those who are included? How can we explain these inequalities in terms of degrees of deservingness or notions of being responsible for the wellbeing of others?
3. When and how are notions of deservingness mobilized in order to achieve the ideological conformity on which solidarity is built?

All three sets of questions draw attention to the idea that solidarity is *also* a manifestation of cruelty (Rorty 1995). It becomes clear when people are excluded, when hierarchies emerge within solidarity and when solidarity requires people to comply with certain moralities. Deservingness offers an important perspective on the complexity of solidarity, specifically that it can be both supportive and oppressive, and that while it extends humanity to others, it can also be dehumanizing. Deservingness is a helpful methodological perspective for achieving a thorough understanding of the connections between the benevolent and cruel dimensions of solidarity.

Rorty's ironic approach to solidarity might not seem to be the most likely starting point for this contribution, given that it is part of his analysis of the epistemology of knowledge. Moreover, although Rorty acknowledges that solidarity can be cruel, he presents it as a way to counter the success of universalizing totalitarian political ideologies, which is quite different from what I aim to do here. Nevertheless, there are several reasons why I find his approach to solidarity useful for developing a methodology of deservingness.

I find Rorty's way of connecting private and public realms, and of using literature as an avenue where these realms can relate to one another disharmoniously, particularly useful to ethnography. Ethnographic approaches to deservingness and solidarity explore and elucidate incongruences, helping us make sense of why people say one thing but do something else, or say one thing at one moment and say something contradictory later on. Rorty's ironic approach is valuable in perceiving how people strive towards individualism, autonomy and freedom, while simultaneously acting as social beings that have a fundamental need to belong. But such belonging is not without its complications. Studying deservingness places our focus on the cruelty of how solidarity is extended, and thus helps us understand the ambivalent processes on which solidarities are based.

Boundaries, Hierarchies and Conformity

Rorty's focus on language leads him to emphasize the role of literature. In the final part of *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, he uses literature to understand solidarity and cruelty as not necessarily opposed to each other, but rather that solidarity is a form of cruelty. He is particularly interested in fictional literature:

That is about the ways in which particular sorts of people are cruel to other particular sorts of people. Sometimes works on psychology serve this function, but the most useful books of this sort are works of fiction which exhibit the blindness of a certain kind of person to the pain of another kind of person ... They are the books which dramatize the conflict between duties to self and duties to others. (Rorty 1995: 141)

According to Rorty, this conflict is inherent to solidarity and is where deservingness plays a central role. Solidarity always means that distinctions are made between 'us' and 'them', and discourses about deservingness mark these duties to self and to others, as well as the distinctions that legitimize or challenge these duties. Rorty believes literature is important because it offers a new vocabulary, which in turn presents a new way of seeing the world and of identifying with people. Therefore, books that confront us with what is *not* familiar are of particular interest. The vocabulary in these books relates to the following question: 'what sorts of things about what sorts of people do I need to notice?' These are books that stimulate doubt and confront us with the temptations of cruelty. Rorty discusses writings by Vladimir Nabokov and George Orwell to show how both authors

use cruelty as a central trope in their work. For Nabokov, these were everyday cruelties produced by private pursuits, especially the cruelty of not noticing the suffering of others (Rorty 1995: 157). For Orwell, these cruelties were perpetrated by particular groups and were justified by the rhetoric of equality. Orwell also points out that the perpetrators fail to see their cruelty (*ibid.*: 171–73).⁷

Authors like Nabokov and Orwell are not the only ones who produce new vocabularies and new ways of seeing the world. People who are confronted with such cruelties in their everyday lives do so too, and it is the task of ethnography to examine these vocabularies and explore how they are contingent upon people's experiences. By formulating this examination as 'the task of ethnography' and not 'merely' as a possible contribution of ethnographic research or an option, it becomes more explicit that methodologies are not only scientific 'tools' for gathering knowledge; they are also moralizing devices that call for empathy and the recognition of fellow human beings. The questions then become: what kinds of languages do people use to express their ideas about deservingness? What do stories, autobiographical accounts, art, poetry, pop music, Instagram and WhatsApp messages say about the Nabokovian cruelty of not noticing the suffering of others and the Orwellian cruelty that is justified by a rhetoric of equality? A methodological approach to deservingness examines these cruelties by carefully investigating the languages – to which I might add imageries – that express them.

However, ethnography is not only about languages and images, but also about what people do, how they engage with one another and how they are involved in actions. Languages are contingent upon events and histories, and in order to understand this, it is important to show how solidarity is shaped, how people are involved in it and how it might produce cruelty. Focusing on solidarity allows us to closely examine the material or economic dynamics of deservingness.

The cruelty of solidarity manifests itself in three distinct social processes that contribute to the suppression of individual liberties by forcing people to conform to the 'we'.

The first social process of this 'we' formation is the cruelty of exclusion. Because solidarity is based on the identification of a 'we', it automatically requires a 'them'. How is the line between 'we' and 'them' defined and legitimized? When some people are more entitled than others, when some deserve while others do not, to what extent is this related to the image that people have of others? In order to understand how these boundaries change over time, it is important to ascertain which identities play a role in shaping them, and if these

boundaries are more rigid in some situations than in others, it is crucial to look at both sides of the relationship. In other words, what I mean is that in order to understand how deservingness shapes solidarity, the 'we' and the 'they' perspectives must be included.

This regards not only what people say, but also what they do. In terms of deservingness, actions often revolve around technicalities and procedures that are part of entitlements, none of which are morally neutral. They depend on classifications and categories, and thus on morally charged contingent languages. Furthermore, 'them' is not a unit of study. Being excluded does not necessarily bring people together into another 'we', although at times some might believe or experience this differently when confronted with deservingness.

When exploring boundaries, it is methodologically most fruitful to examine situations in which there are simultaneously grounds for inclusion and exclusion, since this is where the boundaries of solidarity are affirmed, shaped or negotiated.

The second social process that produces cruelty takes place *within* solidarity. An appeal to solidarity can be a manifestation of inequality, even cruelty. When solidarity is highlighted and when people or institutions put forward claims that are the outcome of solidarity, one should ask the following questions: with whom is one expected to show solidarity, and does solidarity go both ways? Are there inequalities within solidarity that result in, to paraphrase Orwell, some being more equal than others?

Shifting attention away from the boundaries of solidarity that define insiders and outsiders, and focusing on what takes place within solidarity offers insight into other kinds of cruelty. While still connected to deservingness, these new cruelties revolve around two other issues. The first concerns who is called upon to help the deserving. Unequal demands to help can be placed on people within solidarity groups or institutions built on solidarity (e.g. welfare programmes). Such unequal demands can alleviate or exacerbate certain inequalities – for example, progressive taxation that requires wealthier citizens to contribute more, or flat tax rates that require relatively high contributions from poorer citizens. Inequalities within solidarity can be highly gendered, for example, when unpaid work performed by women is less valued and less visible. Inequality can also be a result of free-riders, or, in other words, apparently deserving people who do not have to contribute when others are in need. Unless one believes that resources are made out of nothing, research into deservingness should always also show who is expected to contribute and help those who are defined as deserving. By doing

so, deservingness provides a lens that can identify inequalities within solidarity; it shows that appeals to deservingness not only means that some people are entitled to receive something, but also that it puts claims on specific groups or social categories to help the deserving.

The second issue of cruelty within solidarity is that deservingness can be a mechanism that promotes inequality. Solidarity can be used to camouflage personal interests as collective interests and thus actually reinforce inequalities. When personal interests are hidden behind a rhetoric of solidarity, solidarity becomes oppressive and illiberal. Some might not have the opportunity, power or legitimacy to put forward their own personal interests or define solidarity in a different way. Similarly, when someone says that 'we' are entitled to solidarity or that 'we' are deserving, one must question on which authority, and if such authority possibly denies the diversity of needs or desires within solidarity.

The third social process in which deservingness plays a crucial role in solidarity is possibly the cruellest mechanism. It concerns how deservingness requires ideological conformity. What do people have to do or say in order to become or remain deserving of solidarity? How and when are particular ideologies mobilized in ways that affect deservingness? Rorty points out that such ideologies are important for understanding when people sense a moral duty to extend solidarity towards other human beings. People can be identified as one of 'us' as well as one of 'them', and certain differences can be irrelevant, while others can draw sharp, dehumanizing boundaries. As an example, he points to antisemitism, where identities that connect people become relevant, where Christian ideologies of caring for fellow human beings offer insufficient solace and where being a Jew is the line that separates 'us' from 'them'. He expresses his liberal utopia in his plea for an ever-expanding 'we' where 'traditional differences' no longer matter. Yet he does not argue for progressively including more people or for differences to become increasingly irrelevant; instead, he calls for a reflexive approach to the ideologies that create boundaries between 'us' and 'them'. This is possible when we cast doubt on our own ways of seeing the world, of realizing that one's own moralities and ideologies are not superior and are historically contingent. Thus, self-doubt is what makes it possible to identify with others. In short, Rorty argues that identification with other people is based on a deep-seated distrust of ethnocentrism. Focusing on the contingency of these ideologies and moralities, including one's own, is crucial to understanding the ideological dimension that underpins deservingness, which resonates closely with ethnographic approaches

to morality. When and how do certain historically contingent ideologies emerge, creating divisions between ‘us’ and ‘them’? What are the ideological grounds for some defining others as undeserving? And when and how are these ideologies contested and then replaced with other ideologies that can be either more divisive or more empathetic? Methodologically, this would lead to an analysis of how ethnocentrism and doubting one’s own ideologies and moralities play a role in defining people as deserving or not. Rorty writes:

The self-doubt seems to me the characteristic mark of the first epoch in human history in which large numbers of people have become able to separate the question ‘Do you believe and desire what we believe and desire?’ from the question ‘Are you suffering?’ In my jargon, this is the ability to distinguish the question of whether you and I share the same final vocabulary from the question of whether you are in pain. (1995: 198)

Deservingness as a Reflexive and Comparative Concept

Unlike the ‘old categories’ of comparison often used in Europe to compare units and models (e.g. government or population groups), deservingness is a perspective that uses relationships as the analytical starting point. It is a concept that offers an assessment of the European crisis that begins with the relations between insiders and outsiders.

In this manner, deservingness allows for new kinds of comparison. This becomes particularly clear in Rorty’s reflexive epistemology, where he calls for increased social justice and solidarity. He sees increased solidarity not as an ever-widening circle that includes more and more people, but as based on empathy and the recognition of fellow human beings. This means that the ‘litmus test’ of solidarity is not measured against the amount of people being included, but by the ability to see people as fellow human beings. This, I find, is what deservingness is about. And, just like solidarity has cruel dimensions, so does deservingness have its less benevolent dynamics. Just like solidarity produces specific types of harshness, so does deservingness have its dark side that needs investigating and explaining. Light must be shed on these negative aspects of deservingness that revolve around those who are excluded from, for example, redistributive regimes; the hierarchies produced among people who are included; and the suppression of people’s freedoms when requiring some level of ideological conformity. These questions offer fertile ground for reflexive and comparative analysis.

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Notes

1. See Ortner (1984) on how this symbolic approach differs from that of Turner. Generally, Geertz is regarded as the founding father of reflexivity in ethnography, but the issue of the positionality of the researcher has also been developed by Gluckman (1940) and the Manchester school that Turner was part (see Fox and Gingrich 2002).
2. On the cultural turn, see, among others, and Ortner (1984); and Clifford and Marcus (1986).
3. See also Fox and Gingrich (2002: 4) on the holocultural approach to comparison that in the 1950s was presented as a “truly scientific” methodology’ in anthropology. See also Holy (1987); Kuper (1994); and Herzfeld (2001).
4. Said (1978), Spivak (1988) and Bhabha (1990) have shown how crucial it is to critically examine knowledge production within colonial power relations. See also Fox and Gingrich (2002) on their influence on comparison.
5. At the same time, it would be too deterministic to suggest that European or national political changes were the only reason why more attention was given to comparative ethnography. Individual interests, contributions, as well as research traditions and networks also mattered a great deal.
6. See also Kapferer (2015) on studying events. Kapferer critically engages with the work of Gluckman, and Deleuze and Guattari to examine how ethnography can help us understand rupture, conflict and fragmentation

in everyday life, which are therefore sources of social change that transcend that specific event.

7. Although Rorty acknowledges that solidarity is cruel, he is optimistic about solidarity as a political project.

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