

Assessing the Impact of Collective Identity Processes on Transnational Trade Union Solidarity: a South-South Comparative Analysis

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INTRODUCTION¹

While many scholars argue that collective identities are at the heart of trade unionism (Offe and Wiesenthal 1980) and its renewal strategies (Dufour and Hege 2011; Hyman 1994), the analysis of the impact of collective identity processes on transnational union solidarity has been neglected in studies in comparative industrial relations (Greer and Hauptmeier 2012; Locke and Thelen 1995). Although some scholars have considered the impact of a common transnational identity on the smooth functioning of *European Works Councils* (Whittall, Knudsen, and Huijen 2009), the field nevertheless suffers from a lack of conceptualisation of the active role played by actors in constructing identities aimed at supporting labour transnationalism (Greer and Hauptmeier 2012) and trade union renewal strategies (Frege and Kelly 2004; Ganz 2000; Melucci 1991). Most scholars currently rely on the power resources approach in seeking to understand labour transnationalism (for example, Lévesque and Murray 2010). This paper aims to analyse transnational union solidarity through collective identities processes².

Consistent with Segrestin's (1980) framework pertaining to *relevant communities of collective action*, this paper draws on the conceptual tool of *referential unionism* (Murray et al. 2010), understanding collective identity processes *as the raw material of collective representation*. Given that trade unions frame their identity in response to the challenges they face, and that their collective identity is a dynamic construction which evolves over time and space, *this paper contends that identity processes intervene prior to the emergence of new modes and levels of actions pursued by unions, such as transnational networking*. Collective identities are thus conceived as an essential requirement for overcoming collective action problems, reframing differences of opinion, and creating shared perceptions of common interests, goals, norms and strategies. The variety of identities also defines the type of union renewal and provides an orientation for innovations to be deployed transnationally.

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² For Snow and McAdam (2000 cited in Greer and Hauptmeier 2012, p. 281), the notion of *identity work* refers to *the processes through which a collective identity is created, sustained and modified*. Similarly, for social movement literature, identities are based on conceptualizations of common norms, shared interests, and collective goal: these motivate collective action and cope with collective action problems (Poletta and Jasper 2001). These identity processes are labelled identity markers by Ganz (2000) and Melucci (1991).

To assess the impact of identity processes on transnational solidarity, this paper considers a South-South comparative analysis of two local unions, one in Ghana and the other in Chile. While some Southern unions appear to have no other choices but to retreat locally, others go global and act beyond contextual constraints. Anchoring our analysis in this perspective, this paper challenges strategic models, which contend that the very existence of global issues is sufficient to explain the choice of rational actors to behave as risk-taking organisations and seize the strategic relevance of *going global*. Our main argument is that collective action (in this case, transnational unionism) depends on the local actors' sense of group belonging, whether local, national or transnational. In other words, in the absence of such a collective consciousness, an actor will tend not to see the relevance of committing to and endorsing a collective project of any kind. Identities thus constitute the backdrop of any kind of collective action or mobilisation, regardless of where it is undertaken.

This paper is organised in four sections. The first section argues that collective identity is at the heart of transnational union solidarity. The second section describes the research method. The third section presents the results in the form of a narrative of actions undertaken by each of the unions in order to have an impact on transnational solidarity, and the development of these actions over two specific periods of time (*Phase 1* and *Phase 2*). The last section compares the results, by examining the similarities and contrasts between Ghana and Chile before discussing the logics involved. We conclude with some remarks on the importance of collective identity processes for transnational unionism.

COLLECTIVE IDENTITY AT THE HEART OF TRANSNATIONAL UNION SOLIDARITY

Recent work on international trade union alliances (Dufour-Poirier 2011; Greer and Hauptmeier 2012) and social movements (Dufour and Goyer 2011; Poletta and Jasper 2001) underscores the importance of collective identities in the process of transnationalising collective action. For instance, Kay (2011) sees labour transnationalism *not only as an outcome, but also as a process of creating a transnational union culture based on cooperative and complementary identities defined as shared recognitions of mutual interests coupled with a commitment to joint action* (p. 27). Similarly, collective identities are considered as a sort of *strategic compass* (Dufour and Hege 2011), guiding the way actors frame the problems with which they are confronted, interpret the situation in which they find themselves, and give meaning to the relations they establish with others. These studies see collective identities as a fundamental dimension in terms of understanding a union's decision to seize opportunities for action at the international level and, ultimately, renew its repertoires of action. A growing body of theoretical work (Hyman 1994; Locke and Thelen 1995) and empirical studies (Greer and Hauptmeier 2012; Whittall, Knudsen, and Huijen 2009) further support this claim.

Nevertheless, field-based studies have shown that a local actor can be wary of going global and be restrained from acting at the transnational level for multiple contextual reasons. First, severe constraints from the industrial sector can either prevent local actors from networking internationally, or have a structuring effect on their propensity to seek new avenues for representation and action at the international level (Anner et al. 2006; Martínez Lucio 2010). For instance, in the *buyer driven* textile industry, the lack of union resources (notably financial), the fluidity of industrial capacities, the outflow of jobs to the South, the closure of newly-unionised production sites, the ever-changing nature of employers, and the power of attraction of trademarks in the consumer market have made it difficult for unions trying to coordinate manoeuvres of transnational solidarity in recent years. These failures contradict Gereffi's (2001) assumptions to the effect that *buyer driven* industrial sectors, generally characterised by the repetitive use of coercive comparison and offshoring, offer fertile ground for labour transnationalism, and prompt unions to *go global*. Similarly, Bernaciak (2010) and Fetzer (2008) have helped explain why some unions, depending on the specificities of the corporate context in which they are situated, can sometimes be less inclined to internationalise their action, especially if they have access to options for acting locally and nationally. Second, the instability of the corporate context and of the inner structure of multinational companies appears to severely erode union actors' capacity to develop collaborative ties on a transnational basis, and to make these endeavours efficient and sustainable over time (Dufour-Poirier and Hennebert forthcoming). Third, the specificities of traditions of collective representation, the quality of networks of contacts, and the presence of a strong regional identity can also arouse suspicions, and lead trade unions to focus on solving their problems locally, rather than transnationally (Lillie and Martínez Lucio 2004). Fourth, the limited effectiveness and hostility of institutional channels, in particular in Southern countries where union representatives can expect day-to-day reprisals for their militancy, can also undermine the feasibility of transnational union action and the ideals of transnational solidarity that it entails (Anner 2011).

However, despite all these constraining conditions, some Southern trade unions nevertheless manage to maintain relations abroad and seek external allies in their efforts to renew the way they frame their action and put it forward. Indeed, the recent multiplication of transnational union networks attests to the capacity of some Southern actors to resist these constraints (Bronfenbrenner 2007; Fairbrother et al. 2013). Accordingly, this paper seeks to understand *why* and *how* these trade unions seek transnational support and resources, notwithstanding the differences existing among them and the contextual constraints they face. In line with Greer and Hauptmeier (2012), we argue that collective identities (labelled *common interests* by Tattersall 2010) have the potential to shed light on some of the blurred areas related to the *why* and *how* behind the transnationalisation of union action.

Our argument draws on Touraine (1966) and Hyman (1994) and underlines three aspects of trade union identities: the *We*, the *Them* and the *Issues*. First, the *We* refers to a common understanding, based on the simultaneous commonalities and conflicts experienced by a union's membership. This aspect raises the question of inclusion and highlights the need to identify whether the *We* is grounded in occupation, job status, gender, age, ethnic or community origins, ideological beliefs, the whole workplace or part thereof, or some combination of these and other sources of collective identities (Murray et al. 2010, p. 315). The *We* can also be enlarged to include a more or less wide array of potential partners (Ion 2001), all of whom are aware of their mutual dependency and have a common understanding of the group of which they are part. In short, the *We* shapes the *relevant community of collective action* (Segrestin 1980). This aspect of identity measures the scope covered by the group of interests with which workers feel solidarity.

Second, the *Them* relates to opponents, whether they be corporate (the company with which the union is dealing) or related to some larger whole. This group of opponents which is by definition excluded from the workers' locations and references can be found at the workplace, and can include not only those with whom the workers do not feel solidarity, but also competitors, with whom the workers do not feel they share interests. In fact, transnational interactions between trade unions are not necessarily cooperative, and can indeed be competitive (Silver and Arrighi 2001). By providing the rationale of *why* a group of workers excludes certain others, the *Them* aspect of collective identity processes helps to clarify the meaning that the *We* attributes to transnational solidarity, and why the workers think the excluded ones should not be part of their group.

Third, the *Issues* relate to the agenda that unions wish to develop and put forward. It "*denotes the inventory of modes and levels of collective action pursued by a union, whether through negotiation, strikes, community or transnational solidarity, etc.*" (Murray et al. 2010, p. 315). This aspect captures the way unions frame and legitimise the transnationalisation of their repertoires of action with respect to the *We* and against the *Them*. Exploring this aspect consists in discovering whether the repertoires of action are enabling or constraining for transnational solidarity.

Overall, this paper postulates that the affirmation of a *We*, in opposition to one or many opponents (the *Them*), is what initially spurs transnational union action, marks out its objectives and its limits, and reveals its agenda (the *Issues*). While not denying the impact of contextual constraints, our approach recognizes the capacity of unions to seize opportunities of renewal based on their *identity markers*³ (Ganz 2000; Greer and Hauptmeier 2012; Melucci 1991). The three aspects of union identity discussed above will allow us to assess the scope covered by the *We*, the meaning attributed to transnational solidarity through the exclusion of the *Them*, and the way repertoires of action are framed (the *Issues*) and geared towards the development of transnational unionism.

RESEARCH METHOD

Our study examined cross-border actions taken by workplace trade unions in Chile and Ghana. In line with the tradition of qualitative case study design and analysis (Miles and Huberman 1994), the interview data were supplemented by an analysis of various types of documentation (labour, corporate, public and other) and on-site observation in order to ensure consistency and trustworthiness (Patton 2002). This combination of methods increases our confidence in the results and our ability to understand the dynamics of union involvement in transnational union action.

³ For these authors, identities lay down the way actors frame the issues at stake and the constraints specific to the context of collective action.

In both countries, open semi-structured interviews were used to collect the data. In Chile, the data were gathered between 2004 and 2009. In total, 20 interviews were conducted with various actors: workplace representatives operating in a copper refinery (n=9), and trade union leaders from two national confederations (n=8) and two *Global Union Federations* (n=3). Ethical constraints forbid us from revealing the identity of the company, the local union or the representatives consulted (Dufour-Poirier 2011). In Ghana, the data were gathered in 2007 from a total of 22 interviews with various actors: national executives and regional officers from one national trade union confederation (n= 5), local leaders and workers' representatives from a mine (n=10), social activists (n=7) such as NGOs and the *Chamber of Mines*, and representatives from a local mining community (Adanhounme 2010).

Using a narrative format, the interviews covered a wide range of issues relating to the evolution of trade union identities and the framing of transnational solidarity. The issues discussed included: the union's history, structure and internal dynamics; institutional arrangements; trends in the political economy; their perspective on transnational unionism: the place of transnational solidarity in their strategic programs; the conception of solidarity and worker interests; and the nature and intensity of the networks developed.

GHANA: AN INSTRUMENTAL AND CAPACITY-BUILDING LOGIC

As a typical sub-Saharan African country, Ghana is characterized by a factor-driven economy. As far as labour market efficiency is concerned, its restricted labour regulations and inadequately educated workforce are the most problematic factors when it comes to doing business (The *Global Competitiveness Report* 2012-2013, pp. 178-179). However, cooperation in labour-employer relations (4.2 on a 1-to-7 scale) has not been very problematic. Following Ghana's attainment of political sovereignty from Great Britain in 1957, the future of industrial relations was very promising, as illustrated by the *Industrial Act* of 1958 which sought to promote a strong social partnership among employers, unions and the government (Adu-Amankwah 1990). However, the so-called "*monopoly of the Trade Union Congress*" did not last, as the government was forced to ensure that new labour laws conformed to the free market system in order to attract foreign investment (Essuman-Jonhson 2007). After a period of political and economic instability starting in the mid-1970s, the country undertook a series of economic reforms through neo-liberal structural adjustment programmes starting in 1983 (Hilson 2004).

In the mining sector, the *Ghana Miners Workers Union* (GMWU) responded to these neo-liberal reforms by embarking on a process of modernisation aimed at shaping the union's membership crisis (recruiting from the informal sector), leadership (increasing collaboration with management), and strategic orientation (adopting a strategy of *political neutrality*) (Konings 2006). These renewal processes led to some tensions with regard to the union's collective identity – which had, until then, been quite homogeneous – and opened the local union-management partnership to wider arrangements with fellow workers nationwide. The GMWU basically comes under the African branch of the *International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mines and General Workers Union* (ICEM) to which it has been affiliated since 1995 and in which its representatives play an important leadership role, voicing workers' needs and grievances through information sharing and networking. This instrumental approach to transnational unionism has also helped shape the workers' identity.

At the time of data collection in 2007, a change in both management and union leadership at the plant located in the Western province had reshaped the workers' identity. Since 2000, the total workforce amounted to 330 workers, including 56 seniors and 284 juniors. Only five seniors and sixty juniors were from the *Assembly District*, a conglomerate of villages of which the local community surrounding the plant was part, while the remaining workers were from other regions, mostly the Northern provinces. Seventy temporary and casual workers, all of whom were from the *Assembly District* had been hired under corporate social responsibility programmes known as the *Community Development Effort* (CDE). Senior management, composed of three expatriates, was assisted by a team of Ghanaian special advisors and managers in leadership positions at the head of the production, maintenance and service departments. Since the senior staff had become unionised following the GMWU strategic orientation by 2004, they felt solidarity with the juniors they supervised and had become less loyal to management. Job status (permanent versus contractual) and category (seniors versus juniors) as well as origin (foreign Northerners versus local) were paramount to the workers' identity.

Following the implementation of the corporate policies related to job reorganisation under the CDE scheme, a shift occurred in the workers' identity from that of a collaborative management-trade union strategic alliance (*Phase 1*) to an oppositional relationship (*Phase 2*). Having a new union executive who symbolised this change between these two periods of time, the workers felt they were no longer in the same boat with the company. As one executive put it, previously, "*management had respect for the union, but now, the director does not take advice from anybody, even his special advisors.*" Workers, who continued to "*work and live as brothers,*" complained that they were not listened to. As one worker explained, "*before my voice could be heard, but at the moment, my voice is not heard.*" Another worker, deploring the lack of discussion with his supervisor, said: "*if they want to make a change in my office, the boss decides and does not consult me.*" Although the union executives still believed that "*the union [was] to help the management to grow,*" the top management expressed the view that "*the union delegates are ignorants who could not understand, because they don't have the capacity to think issues*". In fact, this change in the quality of the partnership was due to the failure of what one former union executive identified as a *polishing policy*, which the union used to sweeten the hard corporate message to be transmitted to the workers:

If the management says one thing, which is not good, it is you, the union chairman, who have to polish it. If you don't polish what the management tells you and you bring the same message to the workers, you know that it will bring problems.

The framing of the working class *We* was shaped by two strategic arrangements, the first led by management during the *polishing policy* period, and the second by the national union during a time when many complaints were filed. In the previous context characterized by partnership and social dialogue with the employer (*Phase 1*), the workers' identity was structured around a common interest in the plant activity, and their socio-economic rights (wages and benefits) and civil-political rights (negotiation, representation) were more or less respected. During this period, the workers formed a homogeneous group, as they basically came from the same Northern ethnic groups. Their alliance through the local union with the expatriate senior management was backed by the GMWU, which took charge of their collective bargaining. Opposed to the workers (the *Them*) were, on the one hand, the senior staff who enjoyed greater privileges and whom the workers envied and, on the other hand, the *poor* community members who envied the workers. This alliance weakened following the job reorganisation that opened *Phase 2*. As one union leader explained:

Since the management was no longer welcoming the "open door of partnership," the union executive has to rely exclusively on the national union. Now, when we face a problem, we just inform the national union and they should advise.

Among the problems they faced, "*the big issue [was] that the company [was] giving most of the jobs to contractors*" one of whom was the chief of the local community. The jobs given away included several clearance and construction tasks. Junior workers responded to the GMWU strategic orientations by becoming closer to workers from other plants and senior staff from their own plant. Information sharing enlarged their community of interests:

When we have problems or want some issues especially on our conditions of services, and we think we need information, we go to the closest mine and look at their question, and we can have information and compare with what we have.

They anticipated a good relationship with the senior workers because:

If they are unionised, it will help the junior staff; we will be under the same national union that negotiates for both of us. So some hidden conditions for the seniors will be revealed to the national and we shall know the information.

Local union leaders claimed they did not have any relationship with some non-governmental organisations with which the senior management had framed the CDE mostly in favour of the local community against the workers:

The interests are not the same. When this management is going to take a position on the community, the union is not informed, and doesn't play any role.

According to one union leader, the aim of the actions (the *Issues*) undertaken by the union was “*capacity building through workers’ empowerment.*” During the partnership (*Phase 1*), issues were locally solved. A former executive gave an example of how they negotiated the double shift:

As the workers were not trying to understand the change, so what we did is that myself, a senior officer, and the secretary, we were moving from house to house, talking to them, that if we don’t move to double shift and produce more, the company can collapse.

With the new management (*Phase 2*), workers no longer understood the changes taking place. The *Issues* were now debated in mass meetings:

When we get a problem, we discuss it in a mass meeting to get more information: everybody talks and you hear things that worry you.

They also resorted to the national union: “*for the negotiation, we come together with the national union and have [a] serious debate before we sign the contract.*” Besides chairing collective bargaining sessions, the national union provided training sessions for the local union in accordance with the logic of professionalism whereby they endeavoured to “*teach them how to meet the management.*” The local union also planned to “*meet the board of director[s] and tell them that they could not work with the managing director anymore.*” In a situation where legal strikes were hardly legal, a slowdown tactic helped them to advance their rights: “*if you go on strike, they can sack you, but there is no law on slow down*”:

The drivers will be pushing on the accelerator but not moving; a mechanic will do like going and coming, and sitting one lock for about the whole day.

To conclude, collective identity in this Ghanaian plant was shaped by an **instrumental clan** logic that subordinated the working class, either to the **ethnic** configuration during the partnership period (*Phase 1*) or to the **nation** during the time of opposition to management (*Phase 2*). In both phases, clan groupings were paramount to the understanding workers had of their belonging: this instrumental logic was the key that opened (or closed) the door to transnational trade union solidarity. During *Phase 1*, the workers framed a community of interests with fellow workers, whether they were seniors from their own plant or juniors from other plants at the national level. During *Phase 2*, transnational trade union solidarity was made possible through the GMWU’s involvement in the ICEM, mostly at the African regional level, only when the partnership with the local management failed to meet the union’s needs.

CHILE: A TRANSFORMATIVE AND COALITION-BUILDING LOGIC

With an average Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of US \$249 billion in 2011, Chile is characterized by an efficiency-driven economy. It is considered to be Latin America’s most stable and prosperous nation, leading the continent in terms of labour market efficiency and cooperation in labour-employer relations (both 4.7 on a 1-to-7 scale) and income per capita. In 2012-13, the *Global Competitiveness Report* (pp. 136-137) ranked Chile as the 33rd most competitive country in the world, and the first in Latin America, above Brazil (48th) and Mexico (53rd). However, for critics such as Winn (2004), these impressive macro-economic statistics do not reveal the shallow social depth of economic well-being in Chile: in 2005, the poorest 10% of Chileans earned only 1.2% of GDP, while the richest 10% earned 47%.

In fact, the Chilean miracle boom came at a high social price: the quality of employment appears to have steadily declined during Pinochet’s dictatorship (1973-1989) (Sehnbruch 2006). This regime’s economic programme and its treatment of labour destroyed unions and limited labour relations in ways that created favourable investing, increased employer flexibility, decreased job security and reduced labour costs. Chilean law generally restricts the scope of collective bargaining to a single local employer and its unions, and allows the presence of numerous unions in the same workplace. Yet, unions are only allowed to represent those employees who are members. Labour statutes also prohibit negotiations on a multi-union confederation basis, and only allow unions to negotiate on wages, precluding discussions on union security clauses, work organisation, working time, training, and related issues. The *Labour Code* also establishes a 45-day period for bargaining, imposes severe limitations on the right to strike, and permits the use of replacement workers. Finally, only some union representatives are protected from termination during their terms of office and for six months thereafter (see Baker and McKenzie 2008 for details). Union militancy usually involves a

high personal cost. In this context, labour transnationalism appears out of reach, if not utopian.

The local Chilean union involved in this study was located in the corporate setting of *EuroMin*, a transnational mining company specialising in ore extraction and metal refinery. At the time of data collection in 2008, *EuroMin* employed roughly 60 000 workers, and reported a gross annual revenue of US \$28 billion, placing it among the top 10 mining companies in the world (Drexler 2008).

EuroMin owned several production sites in Chile. More specifically, the union studied operated in *Chil*, a plant that became the 4th largest copper refinery of the world in 2008, after a final expansion project. In spite of this apparently favourable corporate scenario, many factors complicated trade union activities in *Chil*. First, job stability had remained very shaky over the years: the limited ore supplies and *Chil*'s unsteady profitability had always threatened the plant's survival, and justified the increasing use of outsourcing. In 2007, 700 temporary (non-unionised) workers were employed, while only 464 workers were hired on a permanent basis (only 279 of whom were unionised). Second, the intensive use of benchmarking strategies had continuously spread fear among workers, who already feared reprisals following any participation in union activities, including simply attending an ordinary union meeting. Last but not least, the heterogeneous nature of working conditions and very tense labour-employer relations had undermined the union's capacity to mobilise its members and to assert its authority in the workplace and gain credibility in the region over the years. However, the union benefited from continuing education and transnational networking, notably a North-South coalition in which it had been intensively involved from the late 1990s until roughly 2008 (Dufour-Poirier 2011), through its affiliation with a well-known industrial confederation. Notwithstanding these relations, the union remained isolated locally and nationally. It was also weakened by the absence of influential allies in its industrial sector due to political and ideological rivalries.

This threatening situation prompted the Chilean union leaders to engage in the transnational arena. Transnational networking and cross-border actions undertaken by the Chilean union were clearly meant to achieve two objectives (the *Issues*): first, to enhance its bargaining leverage with respect to its members, the local employer and other unions in the region; and second, to make up for the lack of credibility and efficiency in all domains of union action that questioned its very existence at the local and national levels. Thus, by making connections worldwide, its representatives intended to bypass their local employers but address their local concerns regarding union action and collective representation with the help of external counterparts that enjoyed greater resources, in the same corporate setting. To put it bluntly, *going global* represented an opportunity for them to change their local *playground*, and to better confront the local employer.

As a result, the *We* was understood during *Phase 1* as transnational, and solely encompassed workers in the corporate chain. The *We* was not defined on the basis of occupation, job status, gender, age, ethnic or community origins, and transcended the local and national spheres. It emerged out of the sense of sharing the same grievances, against a common employer. Although no international framework agreement, transnational strike or other similar action was undertaken at that time, the Chilean representatives nevertheless felt that “*all workers were in the same boat, roughly sharing the same grievances*”. This *community of fate* truly inspired the local representatives to *go global*:

We have to prove our credibility to our members on a daily basis. (...) The company has always tried to undermine our credibility by conducting unspeakable action against us every day! (...) This is why we believe that acting at the international level is a challenge for us, but mostly an opportunity to find the resources and support that will strengthen us, as a union.

The union leaders interviewed frequently referred to the urgent need to move beyond divergent interests and set common goals on a transnational basis, using a proletarian rhetoric:

I hope that one day we'll build up a strategy so that we can stand before the company united, on a global scale! To show them that we know they try to pit every single one of us against each other! We can only achieve this if we are united! My greatest hope is that we will be able to negotiate internationally, not locally anymore!

However, later on (*Phase 2*), the *We* progressively became less inclusive, essentially gathering only workers from the South. The *We* was progressively restricted to a *Latin South*, where the unions appeared to have much more in common, notably in terms of language, culture and the traditions of collective representation:

I think that what the Canadian unions want is for us to attack EuroMin. I'm not saying that the company is behaving properly. But the way I see it is that the Canadians aren't really concerned about the workers, but more about their own future, to make sure that EuroMin doesn't leave their country. (...) If it was a real strategic alliance among workers, we would all set aside our interests and negotiate a unique collective agreement! (...)

The corporate figure was thus still perceived mainly as the opponent during both phases, further highlighting the pressing importance of *going global*. However, the excluded group (the *Them*) was progressively enlarged to include unions from the North, leading the Chilean leaders to nurture a more targeted view of transnational action and its ideals:

The obstacles stand out as being more than a mere language barrier. We are talking here about a barrier of mentalities! (...) Certainly, EuroMin puts obstacles in our path (transnational solidarity). But the fault also lies with us. (...). Last time we met, a Canadian unionist said in front of us: why should I worry about Southern workers when we already have our own concerns to worry about?! We should solve our own problems before trying to solve other people's problems!

To conclude, we consider that the collective identity of the Chilean union was **transformative** since it aimed at building repertoires of action that were better adapted to globalised contingencies whose consequences were endured locally. During *Phase 1*, the Chilean union attempted to experiment with new forms of action and sought external allies, especially in the North: this period corresponded to a **cosmopolitan** identity through which all workers were considered to be part of the *global working class*. During *Phase 2*, this orientation transformed into a **continental** view of transnational action, mainly restricted to Latin America, where agreements seemed to be more easily reached.

DISCUSSION

In both the Ghanaian and Chilean cases, contingent and opportunistic representations of collective identity processes shaped the processes of transnational solidarity. The actions (the *Issues*) carried out were meant to strengthen the workers' identity and repertoires of action in each context: through **local capacity building** in Ghana and a **coalition of external allies** in Chile. In the Chilean case, where the repertoires of action were geared towards reinforcing the links with fellow workers in the corporate setting of *EuroMin*, including the Canadians with whom they had established a North-South coalition, their collective identity was framed in terms of cosmopolitan and continental perspectives. The **transformative** nature of the actions undertaken was aimed at opening the door to transnational unionism. In contrast, the Ghanaian union was only concerned about the welfare of its rural workers, and did not show this global tendency: its repertoire of action was oriented towards local empowerment. This **localist** perspective remained instrumental insofar as it depended on a circumstantial partnership with the local management.

The scope of solidarity was defined by the understanding that each trade union had of the *We* and the inclusive actions undertaken to build a community of collective action. In Ghana, this sense of common belonging was consistent with a working class that was subordinated to an ethnic and clan identity. In Chile, on the other hand, the *We* was defined on the basis of the representation of workers in the corporate chain. Similarly, once the *polishing policy* had failed in Ghana, the *Them* came to encompass the management team and the local community with whom the workers did not share common interests. In Chile, the excluded groups (the *Them*) were identified as being the corporate managers, to which were subsequently added the Northern unions, thus reducing the cosmopolitan scope of their transnational solidarity to a continental basis, notably the *Latin South*.

Each trade union had developed practices, which were consistent with their self-understanding of solidarity. While their differences can be explained by the political economy from which the contents (the *Issues*) of solidarity were developed, their similarities (in terms of interest in transnational action and activism) were shaped by the structures available to them. In other words, *the union's collective identity in both cases was shaped by a sense of group belonging, whether it was local and national as in the Ghanaian case, or continental as in the Chilean case*. These findings are thus consistent with our hypothesis according to which representations of the collective consciousness are at the heart of transnational union

solidarity. These identity markers are determined by logics of interests whereby workers feel solidarity with those they believe share their values, whether fellow unionists, as in Chile, or, paradoxically, even corporate managers as in Ghana.

In line with Ganz (2000), Greer and Hauptmeier (2012), Hyman (1994) and Dufour and Hege (2011), our results thus confirm the structuring effect of collective identity processes and their evolution on transnational union solidarity and union renewal, more globally. First, as seen in *Phase 1* in both cases, the scope of collective identity amounted to the ideal representation of community expressed in terms of the “*same boat*.” In Ghana, the homogeneous clan-based group of workers was in partnership with management, while in Chile, it was open to all workers in the corporate chain. Second, the dynamic construction of identity processes flows from the divergence both unions observed during *Phase 2*, when they discovered that the local interests of workers and managers in Ghana and the global interests of Canadian workers were no longer the same as their own. Both unions then reconstructed their identities, by excluding those from whom they differed (corporate managers in Ghana; Northern unions in Chile) and by integrating groups with whom they felt solidarity (senior workers from the plant and juniors from other plants in Ghana; Latin American workers in Chile). Identity processes, therefore, were neither static nor disconnected from the workers’ own experiences. Indeed, their evolution impacted the understanding the workers had of their community of interests and the practicability of union solidarity.

However, there were differences in the ways in which collective identities shaped transnational union solidarity in the two cases. These differences were largely mediated by the relationship each union had with the corporate figure as the global entity, which either compelled them to search or prevented them from searching for global solidarity. The political economy, notably the available opportunities of action, also shaped the orientation of union solidarity, whether local or global. The subsequent reconfigurations of identity processes and their adaptation to the opportunities offered by new institutional arrangements ultimately explained the differences in their impact on the way transnational action was framed and envisioned by the unions.

In Ghana, in response to the problematic factors inherent in doing business, the government had to conform to a free market economy with conditions that were rather favourable to foreign capital. Following the neo-liberal economic reforms through which the country welcomed foreign investment, especially in the mining sector, the national union adopted a strategic orientation of political neutrality with the state and a more collaborative partnership with foreign corporations. These policies, intended to strengthen local capacities, were implemented locally under the framework of the *polishing policy*, which melded the working class identity with that of the corporate manager. Workers then felt solidarity with the management and believed their interests were the same (*Phase 1*). This openness to the concerns of other workers nationwide, and eventually in other African nations, was motivated by the search for new allies following a job reorganisation at their site. In this context (*Phase 2*), the workers realised that there was a need to *go outside the local plant*. Their interest in regional African unionism through participation in the ICEM stemmed from their quest for the training and education they needed to face a management they now saw as being opposed to them. Motivated by the need for **capacity building**, the collective consciousness of transnational union solidarity was premised on the failure of the partnership with the local management.

In Chile, the reverse shift occurred, from the global to the continental level. At the beginning, the Chilean union was aware of the need to act transnationally in order to counter global capital. The dream of building up a strategy “*to negotiate internationally and not locally anymore*” was motivated by a collective consciousness against the global corporation. The **transformative** logic of identity they introduced and which was built on political mobilisation and information sharing aimed at finding the strength to fight the global corporation by drawing on the body of workers worldwide, beginning with the Canadian workers (*Phase 1*). The factors that prompted the Chilean representatives to engage in transnational action included corporate benchmarking strategies, the heterogeneous nature of working conditions, and tensions in labour-employer relations, all of which contributed to the union’s isolation. As they sought to enhance their bargaining leverage, *going global* represented an opportunity to see “*all workers as being in the same boat*” in a community of fate against a global company that undermined their credibility. The global scope of their identity in *Phase 1*, and its reduction to a continental *Latin South* identity in *Phase 2*, led them to engage in transformative actions geared at **building coalitions**. Contrary to the Ghanaian case, the corporation was the excluded figure against which they framed their collective identity, with the global scale being the level at which issues were pursued.

Lastly, in both cases, intrusive elements fostered transformations in identity processes following the changes observed from *Phase 1* to *Phase 2*. The shift in local institutional arrangements at the plant level (from the corporation to national unionism in Ghana; from global to continental unionism in Chile) also followed the changes in the national political economy. Besides the impact of these structural changes on collective identity processes, opening the Ghanaian union to a wider national perspective and reducing the Chilean union to a lesser global perspective, agency also played a key role. The consciousness of *going global* or *remaining local* was shaped by the knowledge each union had (the setting was a rural mining community in Ghana and an urban refinery in Chile). The actors strategically defined their respective *instrumental* and *transformative logics* in response to local needs and the corresponding repertoires of action undertaken to meet these needs. Transnational union solidarity and activism were needed insofar as they responded to these specific needs and the understanding actors had of their community of interests. Workers' collective identity was not always open to the global working class as advocated by the rhetoric of transnational union solidarity against global capital. Rather, it was shaped by the local context as well as by the relevance of the solutions offered to meet the challenges associated with global capital.

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