From Shared Fate to Shared Fates: An Approach for Civic Education

Abstract: In order to facilitate cooperation to solve problems within a nation-state, a new approach which conceptualizes citizenship in terms of shared fate has been promoted to potentially ameliorate the tensions identified between civic liberty and solidarity. Proponents of an emphasis on shared fate frame it not in terms of a particular shared national identity, but in terms of participation in the shared project(s) of the nation-state. The approach of singular shared fate rightly emphasizes the urgency of finding a common ground for people to cultivate obligations to others and achieve sincere cooperation in a society. Unfortunately, in some cases it leaves room for some people to undermine the common ground and its good intention, however, as the promotion of a view of singular shared fate risks producing a hegemonic singular nation building project and predesigning an agreement before a truly inclusive and just dialogue among relevant stakeholders proceeds. To make the good intentions of the notion of shared fate realizable, a modification is explored, in recasting the concept of singular "shared fate" to plural "shared fates". Given the situation that people in societies have the plural shared fates *de facto*, the view of plural shared fates recognizes that people will reject any singular substantial nation building project that has a predesigned direction. In current, divided societies, acknowledging multiple fates at the beginning, rather than predesigning a singular fate, can better provide a platform for all stakeholders (including citizens, would-be citizens, newcomers, and immigrants) to discuss their obligations to others toward sincere cooperation through equal co-construction of what is shared and what is not shared. To enhance civic education in a multicultural society, we suggest that complementing the concept of singular "shared fate" with a recognition of the value of plural "shared fates" can provide a context for all people to work together towards a more inclusive and just future.

Keywords: shared fate; share fates; diversity; citizenship; dialogue; civic education

Societies today face challenges in bringing diverse people together in an inclusive and tolerant way, to resolve community problems that some if not all members of society observe and face. In order to facilitate cooperation to solve problems within a nation-state, a new approach which conceptualizes citizenship in terms of shared fate has been promoted to potentially ameliorate the tensions identified between civic liberty and solidarity. Proponents of an emphasis on shared fate frame it as an effective reformulation of traditional understandings of citizenship, which focus on national identity. Thinking through a sense of shared fate, citizenship can be understood not in terms of a particular shared national identity, but in terms of participation in the shared project of the nation-state (Ben-Porath 2012, 2011; Williams 2004, 2010; Zembylas 2012). This framework aims to contribute to and expand in a way the traditional understanding of citizenship by recognizing how each person's fate is connected with that of others in a society, to enable people to discuss issues related to diversity in the public sphere while realizing their respective particular linkages and obligations to others. Then the question is distinguishing the best way to realize this potential contribution.

This paper explores two limitations of the theory of shared fate: First, the term *shared fate* conceptualizes the shared project as a singular project, but it should be more inclusive and multiple, in order to truly respect fundamentally different ends that people hope to attend to, and work towards sincere cooperation without coercion. Second, the idea of citizenship as singular shared fate predesigns an agreement before dialogue among stakeholders proceeds, which risks impeding a truly inclusive and just dialogue. In relation to these limitations, this paper argues that recasting the concept from singular "shared fate" to plural "shared fates" could be a complementary approach toward the realization of the contributions of the shared

fate concept. The term *plural shared fates* which we elaborate in this paper could be summarized as adding two insights in relation to the limitations of shared fate framework. The first is recognition that people will reject any singular substantial nation building project that has a predesigned direction, such that multiple shared nation building projects without any predesigned direction are more likely to cultivate a sense of responsibility to diverse others in society without coercion. Second, instead of predesigning an agreement on a substantial nation building project from the viewpoint of mainstream people, the notion of shared fates emphasises sincere cooperation by welcoming all relevant stakeholders (including citizens, would-be citizens, newcomers, and immigrants) to more equally co-construct and revise different shared nation building projects at different levels. In this way, what is shared and what is not shared can be truly open to discussion and criticism (Schoorman and Bogotch 2010).

To elaborate our arguments, the next two sections will analyze two areas where the notion of shared fate bears implications for civic education in a diverse society: citizenship education and education for dialogue. Citizenship education is valuable for people inside a nation-state to realize their obligations to others. Additionally, the legitimacy of a sense of singular shared fate relies on the inclusiveness and equity of deliberative dialogue among all people in the nation-state, so that the shared fate can be reconsidered and re-constructed by all stakeholders. Yet the notion of shared fate will be problematic if the process of deliberative dialogue is not inclusive and just. We contrast perspectives based on a *shared-fate* view to those of our *shared-fates* view in the course.

Civic Education with Shared Fate versus Shared Fates

Proponents of shared fate frame the sense of shared fate they would promote in civic education in terms of national boundaries. Recognising that people ordinarily as citizens find themselves "in webs of relationship with other human beings that profoundly shape our lives, whether or not we consciously choose or voluntarily assent to be enmeshed in these webs", they try to

> offer an alternative way of understanding the boundaries of membership, one that [they] hope will be reconcilable with traditional understandings of citizenship as focused on the nation-state, but flexible and expansive enough to make sense of the new sites and demands of citizenship in the global era. (Williams 2004, p. 229)

In this way, "fellow nationals differentiate the in-group from the out-group in formal terms, but they also evaluate each other's commitments and contributions" (Ben-Porath 2011, p. 314).

Despite the intention of binding together diverse national citizens in this way, we worry about the adverse impacts of applying the concept of shared national fate in deliberation over nation building issues, both in theory and in practice. Our first concern is that the notion of shared fate could be used as an impetus for cultivating fear and hatred toward people who disagree with a presumed nation building project, who may therefore be cast as not genuine citizens or patriots.

Shared national projects include those needed for a society to run smoothly, such as paying tax, supporting local products, job creation, developing infrastructure, promoting a shared language, access to public institutions, commitment to some basic symbols of a national group, and a representative government (Ben-Porath 2011, 2012). These are projects people can be expected to agree upon in general. They are not the focus of shared national projects that the idea of shared fate focuses upon, as these linkages are fairly thin and fleeting. In contrast, an idea of shared fate requires a thicker and tighter linkage among national members towards substantial cooperation. Shared national projects related to shared fate refer mostly to those with a "significant shared dimension" (Ben-Porath 2012, p. 381),

meaning the ones that contain more extensive and substantial requirements, involving people's fundamental values, concrete preferences, and specific criteria for inclusion and exclusion. They involve nation building issues, such as commitment to the sense of a joint social contract, institutions and organizations related to the governance structure, laws and documents, historical understandings of the nation, languages and forms of expression, cultural identity, understandings of national ethos, symbols, myths and values, and even views about typical national traits and aspirations (Ben-Porath 2011, 2012).

Compared with the former smaller-scale national projects, attaining agreement on these more substantive such projects can be fairly difficult, as any substantial nation building project will inevitably generate exclusion by identifying human differences and social boundaries. This difficulty has been acknowledged by proponents of shared fate. Ben-Porath concedes that the good intentions of shard fate "would be affected by social circumstances, and it is possible that they will tend to become less tolerant or less critical in the presence of national threats" (2011, p. 322). Williams also acknowledges that although she has "tried to distance the idea of citizenship as shared fate from the idea of citizenship as identity, there clearly is some connection between the former and identity broadly understood" (2004, p. 232-233). A more promising approach from the perspective of diverse identities requires more effort to ensure an inclusive and equal process of achieving a deep kind of agreement, given that experiences of national threat and of interrelated identity politics are normally found in many societies around the world today.

This groundwork of developing an inclusive process for developing agreement is not emphasised in the theory of shared fate, however. In contrast, in times of national political strife and divisiveness, it is a common situation that a nation-state has already built up a sense of its national directions and nation building project. Government leaders in such cases hold assumptions that these directions and projects are universally or normally held in the society, and are self-evident and valuable to all (e.g. they are reflective of high moral standing, and of commitment to noble values) (Keller, 2005). However, many such national directions and national projects as perceived and defined by official institutions (e.g., government) express the views of powerful people in the society as good and normal. Other directions and projects, and people who support them, are seen in such contexts, particularly in times of national strife, as deviant, abnormal, and threatening to progress (Apple 2009). Proponents of shared fate believe that a shared nation building project is what free, responsible, and equal persons would agree upon. But the "dark side of the claim that we have good reason to trust fellow citizens who affirm their [civic and national] commitment … is the implication that we have good reason to distrust individuals who refuse to affirm this commitment" (Williams 2004, p. 219). In the worst cases, this view risks regarding "everything short of such loyalty as an act of unforgivable treason" (Bauman 2001, p. 4). As Davies noted,

> [t]he linked problem with discussions of the 'national group' or even of 'shared fate' are that the majority of the wars and the greatest number of deaths in the world today are civil wars. Even more than with conflicts against other countries, 'nation' can be invoked as justification for hostilities or even atrocities against groups seen as historically not part of the nation, who refuse to be assimilated or subjugated, who are not seen as 'loyal'. (2011, p. 328)

Shared nation building projects that have a substantive content or flavor also can entail the exclusion of some members of the contemporary nation-state, due to relative newcomer status. The histories of those whose ancestors come from outside national borders or who are on the "losing" side in cases of controversial events, for example, will find their voices misrecognised or misinterpreted in such projects. Some proponents of shared nation building projects today may favor in this context a constitutional or contractual view, wherein all are included through a social contract view of the nation-state. However, such a view can

also function to preserve insider/outsider status in the case of potential new members of society. Relatedly, such projects can assume that what future generations want is sufficiently reflected in the choices of their elders, given that young people in society do not have an equal say to older members due to voting rights and related political rights and opportunities (such as the right to run for public office). The assumption that generations' views can be equated to each other should be questioned, in relation to recent democratic election outcomes, such as the Brexit vote in the United Kingdom and the presidential election of Donald Trump in the United States, where younger and older voters were at odds. In relation, cultivating a singular shared fate can serve as a basis for exclusionary practices also in connection with the participation of would-be citizens, newcomers, immigrants in society, and produce an aggressive and exclusive project, enabling a divided world without any true sense of shared fate (Brighouse 2003; Canovan 2000; Sen 2006).

Second, discussions which employ the lens of shared fate tend to provide a sense of a predesigned singular shared future, which neglects inseparable particular ties of human beings across and within national and other borders. Ben-Porath explains that "a main component of the shared understanding of what the national group is about, its main mores, characteristics, past events, and future hopes, is constituted through the public endorsement of commonly held beliefs about the nation's history" (2007, p. 68). We agree that helping students realize political ties and the aspects of a shared future among them is important. However, of critical importance in civic education in a multicultural society is also respecting each student's distinct ties (e.g. historical ties) across different subgroups, and helping students understand that there are multiple shared futures among them.

A singular notion of shared fate with substantial preferences regarding the future of the nation-state in a multicultural society has a latent discrimination risk, as it entails students waiving in the shared sphere their bonds with subgroups, especially when their cultural roots and subgroups are (or are seen by others as) incompatible with the singular national future. Therefore, minority students face a dilemma. As most resources as well as means for democratic dialogue are controlled by dominant groups, and can only be accessed by those who appear fully willing to contribute to the sense of a singular national future, minority students have to look beyond or appear to give up their past roots of identity (including cultures, religions, families, and subgroups) in order to participate fully in the singular national future and access broad social opportunities (Lamphere 2007). In addition, if minority students show any substantial ties with a past which is defined as incompatible with the singular national future, they will be seen as not well-prepared for contributing to the shared national future and thus may face discrimination, prejudice and other obstacles. These obstacles may not fade away, even if minority students accept the shared national future and waive their past as some indications, such as accent, are difficult if not impossible to modify.

Under this circumstance, even if the singular national future, at best, merely prioritizes a shared civic vision (e.g., if you want to live here, we ask that you share our project or knowledge or language etc. with us), it still enables exclusion and discrimination at two points: 1) any such criteria for being included as a citizen or in a 'shared civic vision' is not really shared by all citizens, as it is not actually co-constructed by all citizens; and 2) even if such criteria does reflect a basic agreement among citizens, it still is problematic as it is not co-constructed by all people in the society, which would also include would-be citizens, newcomers, and new immigrants. An inclusive society should be dynamic and welcome challenges regarding its future rather than just hold its 'traditions', 'social norms' and 'basic values' tightly, which has been seen by many scholars to enable discriminative and exclusive norms and practices (Banks 2017; Banks et al. 2016; Blum 2014; Kymlicka 2001; Ladson-Billings 2004; Taylor & Gutmann 1994).

Thus, the lens of share fate risks oversimplifying the requirements of a singular nation building project, and the fundamental struggles it can invoke in relation to people's identity and sense of belonging. For the notion of shared fate to be operationalizable in a diverse nation-state requires not only that citizens be willing to do what is seen as necessary for the good of society (e.g., paying taxes or obeying laws). It also demands that they compromise or even put aside that which links closely to personal identity and personal well-being (e.g., ultimate ends of life and political visions) when they contrast with the shared nation building project. As Williams acknowledges, the compromise that a singular shared fate view requires involves that which can "profoundly shape our live, whether or not we consciously choose or voluntarily assent to be enmeshed" (2004, p. 229). In reality, people may compromise or waive on substantial things to them because they do not have other options, even if these things mean a lot to them. The notion of shared fate does not necessarily invite awareness that when people's understanding of substantial things is framed as in conflict with a singular nation building project, this brings fundamental struggles to people in everyday life. It at the same time can have a negative influence on their sense of belonging to the nation. In this sense, the singular shared fate risks bringing more struggles and suffering people who are already at the margins of the society. Recognizing this reality makes us hesitate to appreciate the value of encouraging a shared fate view in a diverse society.

Dialogue with Shared Fate versus Shared Fates

Proponents of shared fate state that shared fate is not a fixed idea, and that it should be shaped, debated, revised by negotiation and deliberative dialogue of different groups in different times. One of the central aims of civic education in a multicultural society is to teach young people to respect diversity and forward justice, which requires realizing the existence of deep differences in people and multiple possible particular futures. In relation, expecting different people to agree on a singular shared direction of national project is impractical, as people value different things and have different interpretations of the same things. For example, some value equality more than freedom, and some might want to live in a society with unlimited freedom, while some would value security more than liberty. Others may hate autonomy or deny shared fate. Even for those people who admit a shared dimension of life, they may still have different interpretations of which is shared among people in a nation-state. Different people conceive different futures (e.g., future directions of national projects); diversity does not only entail diverse histories and diverse presents, but also diverse future hopes. A singular shared fate, however, will inescapably lead to idealizing a singular sense of a shared future, because it frames people's differences as comparable and commensurable.

Contemporary societies consist of incommensurable values and incommensurable interpretations of values people have (Rawls 1993; Berlin 1969). A sense of multiple shared futures could be a reasonable alternative to cultivate obligations to others and toward sincere cooperation, as it does not ignore deep differences among people, or risk implying that a simplistic framework can effectively include all people. The singular shared fate, as mentioned before, treats every discordant view as if it is deviating from a universal idea. One possible unspoken subtext of an assumption of singular shared fate is that any person who denies the singular shared fate is selfish and does not deserve tolerance. This oversimplifies differences between people, by supposing that a singular shared fate can be agreed upon by different people to help them take collective action towards a singular shared future. The future cannot be predefined before it happens, however; a dialogue about future fate(s) is a dynamic process of negotiation and equilibrium about the multiple shared futures people have. Therefore, the relational connections that people have are more convoluted than the lens of share fate suggests. Rather, the goal should be to make sure that people with multiple

futures realize the shared parts of their futures, and are willing to and have channels to dialogue with others about what is and is not shared.

In the shared fate approach, majority people and dominant groups predesign a singular direction of shared fate. Put differently, a singular shared fate risks being used as a *finished* approach rather than a *continuous, developmental* approach. This feature means it can preclude some groups and potential equitable and mutually beneficial alliances with them. Reasonable shared fates should be used in the continuous tense, as continuously constructed and expanded, and maximally inclusive to ensure equal rights. Understanding each group's history, social norms, and interpretations of values is crucial for effective dialogue. As some scholars (Banks 2017; Jackson 2014) note, current history textbooks usually do not fully recognize the shared past of all citizens, which can send a message to some groups that they are not valued in a society. In this case, minorities are less likely to trust in a view of a so-called shared future. Furthermore, merely acknowledging a shared past is not enough. Young people should understand others' histories, social norms, and interpretations of values, to attain effective dialogue based on mutual respect and mutual understanding. Therefore, communication and equal status are distinctive features of dialogue, to which the notion of singular shared fate makes less contribution to.

> Regarding the matter of agreement as an aim of dialogue. Ben-Porath notes that, [s]ome dimensions of shared fate are accepted by most citizens while others may be grounds for ongoing negotiations. In the latter case, shared fate is expressed through acceptance of the topic as a contested matter for the public to debate and work toward an agreement on, and the mutual acceptance, sometimes through negotiation, of the processes that such agreement would entail. (2012, p. 382)

A notion of singular shared fate needs to assume an agreement among all interlocutors in order to justify that the fate is shared by all. As its proponents show, a sense of shared fate requires its substantial content to "be owned and accepted by all sides, in order for them to be order to be able to participate in a common future" (Ben-Porath 2006, p. 100). Yet no elements in dialogue guarantee attaining agreement among all participants. One can only aim for dialogue to help develop tolerance and mutual respect. As Burbules and Rice (1991) point out, the potential outcomes of dialogue could be so diverse that agreement or consensus are always not the case. Any type of dialogue which aims to achieve an agreement or predesign an agreement, such as a dialogue implying shared fate, can risk bringing bias, oppression, and exclusiveness into dialogue, and thus may tarnish the genuine good faith of the dialogue. Thus, a dialogue that implies shared fate reflects a paradox. As such a dialogue fails to recognise deep, substantial (or fundamental) diversity among participants which is incommensurable and cannot be reconciled, a dialogue toward agreement is not genuine (Burbules 1993, 2006). Furthermore, such disingenuous dialogue is less likely to enable tolerance, let alone agreement or mutual respect.

Dialogue is perceived by many people as their primary means of challenging an existing unjust reality (Callan 1997; Jackson, 2008; Parekh 2006). It is dangerous, however, to have blind faith in dialogue. Limitations of dialogue have been observed. For example, the primary purpose of some forms of dialogue is convincing or influencing others, rather than listening and understanding others (Kazepides 2010; Oakeshott 1962). By adopting dominant language which already predesigned its values and conceptions of social justice and equality in dialogue process, dialogue reproduces unequal status of interlocutors, maintains social hierarchy, and becomes merely a cover for majoritarianism (Robinson 2007; Tully 1995; Burbules 2006; Halstead 2004). Manipulativeness, privilege, and authority threaten the effectiveness of dialogue (Burbules 1993; Saffari 2012). Dialogue might become a mirror of existing structural inequity, and merely aim to show the kindness of dominant groups (Boler 2004; Mayo 2004; Jones 2004).

To avoid falling into the traps of dialogue while making the good intentions of shared fate come true, the view of shared fates argues for a critical, equal, and constructive dialogue (this is not an exhaustive list). *Critical* dialogue requires interlocutors to question their own assumptions, and try to think through how to make the world better for all from others' views (Freire 1972; Glass 2004; Gatimu 2009). With criticality, dialogue "will prepare students to get to root causes of social injustice through creative problem solving, not alleviating symptoms of problems but changing existing structures" (Jackson 2014, p. 1071). In a diverse society, it is important to empower citizens to think critically about their societies, national projects; nation building issues, criteria of inclusion and exclusion, value orientations and etc.

Equality also should be counted. In the shared fate approach, majority people and dominant groups predesign a singular direction of dialogue and aim to attain agreement on this direction. This risks violating equality, as those who do not agree with the direction of dialogue are not allowed to participate at the ground level, or to change the direction of dialogue even if they can speak out their voices. An effective dialogue towards cultivating obligations to others and sincere cooperation requires equal status and inclusiveness of all relevant stakeholders (Habermas 1998; Jackson 2008; Minnich 1990) so that,

> (i) nobody who could make a relevant contribution may be excluded; (ii) that all participants are granted and equal opportunity to make contributions; (iii) that the participants must mean that they say; and (iv) that communication must be freed from external and internal coercion so that the 'yes' or 'no' stances that participants adopt on criticizable validity claims are motivated solely by the rational force of the better reasons. (Habermas 1998, p. 44)

Constructivism refers here to open-mindedness and incompleteness. Open-mindedness means the shared fates should welcome all voices initially and willing to consider different interpretations or opinions even if these are different from its own (Levinson 2012). At the same time, the shared fates' understanding of an effective dialogue is an action that will never be completed as there is no any group, individual, or interpretation holds the complete truth. Adopting this attitude can be helpful to see each member of a nation as holding a fragment of truth, and to stimulate members to work together to solve issues all are facing, rather than eliminate some voices from consideration (Hess, 2011). As mentioned above, a singular shared fate risks pursuing a *completed* dialogue wherein the direction of dialogue is predefined by the majority. In this sense, it can preclude some voices and potential equitable and mutually beneficial alliances with them. By sticking to the creed of open-mindedness and incompleteness, the shared fates approach aims to overcome this limitation of singular shared fate.

One major concern regarding our approach for civic education in multicultural society might be why adding more fates could help achieve substantial agreement if there is a lack of agreement regarding the substantial content of fate. Our reply is that the plural shared fates is not just a belief; it is an observation of society *de facto*. In current, divided societies, people need a platform to discuss their obligations to others and toward sincere cooperation to solve the problems that all people are facing through debating what is shared and what is not shared. Acknowledging multiple fates at the beginning, rather than predesigning a singular fate, could better provide such a platform for genuine dialogue. Certainly, adding more fates does not guarantee achieving an agreement on substantial content. It just provides more possibilities for achieving an agreement on better option(s) for all. Even if in the end it still is unable to achieve an agreement among substantial content of fates, people can be more inclusively bound together during this co-constructed process through welcoming all stakeholders' contribution and a genuine dialogue.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed the view of shared fate for its promises and challenges in relation to civic education in a diverse society. The approach of singular shared fate rightly emphasizes the urgency of finding a common ground for people to cultivate obligations to others and achieve sincere cooperation in a society. In a country where civic education is lacking and under the risk of balkanization, a sense of single shared fate may be better than others, as it could satisfy the society's need for a stronger sense of a shared foundation. Unfortunately, in many cases it leaves room for some people to undermine the common ground and its good intention, however, as the promotion of a view of singular shared fate risks producing a hegemonic singular nation building project and predesigning an agreement before a truly inclusive and just dialogue among relevant stakeholders proceeds. This worry is rooted in awareness of the serious social conflicts and massacres that have occurred unnecessarily in the name of shared fate, in the United States, China, India, Germany and elsewhere (Sen 2006). To make the good intentions of the notion of shared fate realizable and improve its effectiveness, both in theory and in reality, two insights from a view emphasizing plural shared fates in civic education have been elaborated. Plural shared fates more aptly describes a society *de facto*, where people are pursuing different things and holding different interpretations of the same thing. The view of plural shared fates recognizes that people will reject any singular substantial nation building project that has a predesigned direction. Acknowledging multiple shared nation building projects without any predesigned direction can more effectively cultivate a sense of responsibility to others without coercion. In current, divided societies, acknowledging multiple fates at the beginning, rather than predesigning a singular fate, could better provide a platform for relevant stakeholders (including citizens, would-be citizens, newcomers, and immigrants) to discuss their obligations to others and develop sincere cooperation through equally co-construction of what is shared and what is not shared.

This paper does not argue that we should abandon a singular shared fate national building project in all cases, and wholly replace it with plural shared fates projects. These two concepts are not seen here as mutually exclusive, but as complementary to each other. Singular shared fate is a very useful concept as it can help people realize that they are in the same "boat" in some respects, as communities (from local and national, to international, or universal); yet it may face difficulties in reality, as people will have different opinions and interpretations regarding which government, nation-state, or earth is needed. Considering the divided world of today, establishing true respect for people's differences (e.g. different shared histories, different shared presents, and different shared futures) by recognizing different shared fates can help young people to better find their place and bring people together in a more inclusive formation. To make possible what often seems impossible, and continue to fight against oppression, ignorance, injustice and discrimination, plural shared fates can provide a context for all people to work together to cultivate diverse directions of shared national projects, genuine dialogue, overlapping multiple futures, and more inclusive decision making.

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