



Place, diversity and solidarity

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BOOK REVIEWS

Place, diversity and solidarity, edited by S. Oosterlynck, N. Schuermans, and M. Loopmans, London, Routledge Studies in Human Geography, 2017, 184 pp., hardback: 9781138654976, e-book: 9781315622866

In the post-multicultural era in which we currently are, we seek for renovated approaches to help us manage diversity. This edited book provides us with an innovative way of focusing the link of two of the main key-words shaping our historical period: diversity and solidarity, offering us a place-based and historicizing methodological approach. The concept of solidarity has recently been incorporated into the migration research agenda through two distinct avenues: First, in the refugee research agenda, solidarity is acting as the epicenter of the humanitarian counter-argument against the State-based narrative on security. welcoming-cities, NGO's and collective social entities working with refugees, as well as individuals willing to receive forced migrants share the view of solidarity practice, as it can be expressed in the international global justice scenario. Second, in diversity studies, solidarity has been connected to what some scholars label as the *corroding effect* of the multicultural project. Namely, the fact that multicultural policies have had unintended effects including lack of trust, solidarity and social capital.

In both views, solidarity has taken for granted national-community, group loyalty, as well as commitment and recognition. It is through this stimulating way that this common counter-narrative core volume establishes its contribution. The book offers much strength that we cannot develop within the limited length of this review. It perfectly bridges the conceptual and theoretical debates, with the necessary empirical views, aware from the beginning that we are dealing with a concept with strong normative expansive wave. The result is a useful evidence-based argumentation showing that it is in concrete places where solidarity expands its meaning.

This contextual approach is highly welcomed, it invites us to deal with a multifaceted concept that constructs the meaning of solidarity as a practice rather than defining it in terms of principles and values or even, as it is fashionable today, in terms of indicators. It is this analysis of solidarity from a spatio-temporary contingency view, which invites researchers to analyse different situations and micro-contexts. As a result, the reader can navigate through eight chapters touching on different sites, spaces and relations through which solidarities are shaped: everyday urban life, schools, friendship and personal coalitions, housing, migrant entrepreneurship, neighbouring, sports such as football, and festivals. The broad contributions provide tools for theorizing the politics of solidarity in diversity settings.

The book continuous on to express a multidimensional view of solidarity, following four parameters: interdependence, shared norms and values, struggle and encounter. This conceptual galaxy of solidarity is highly valuable and it strengthens the background epistemology: a pluralistic view of solidarity invites us to always speak in a -ies form (*solidarities*), beyond any temptation to encapsulate the category in a extemporal and decontextualized place. The concept is also used as a factor that influences and modifies power relations. In fact, it is also this view of solidarity as a driver of social and political changes that connects the current application of the concept to its origin, respecting its conceptual biography, well introduced from the very beginning. The book also shows how two parameters of diversity can

remain meaningful under the angle of the solidarity notion: social class and race\ethnicity. As the editors summarize at the end of their introduction: ‘solidarities that develop around very specific issues in particular places are able to question and to challenge state policies relating to social benefits, the educational system or the labour market and the structural mechanisms of exclusion embedded in them’ (p. 14).


It is this all-encompassing view of solidarity as a research category that attracts us right from the first introductory pages. The rightly appropriate focus on citizenship completes this framework of analysis, providing accurate meaning to the concept. What also becomes clear from the reading is that solidarity is considered a concept process, generating through practices, new forms of identities within diversity. Solidarity is well placed also within the inclusion and exclusion theoretical framework, rather than the usually misplaced, to my view, majority and minority framework when theorizing diversity.


Theoretically speaking, this book also rightly expresses the limits of Putnam’s conceptualization of the social capital concept as a category of analysis to be applied to diversity studies. I agree with its substantial critique that social capital is mono-dimensional, too communitarian-based which does not help to understand that there can be different ways to share common grounds and keep people together beyond the national-based view. In this sense the book could also be entitled ‘beyond the chauvinist view of solidarity’. It shows how traditional concepts are also victim of the national methodology, an iron jacked dependence from which the book also tries to free itself. Beyond this community approach, authors rightly underline that solidarity does not presuppose integration into a predefined community and nation. In this sense the book contributes to the local turn announced in migration studies, or the need to go from a state-centric to a much more local-centered view of diversity management. The volume also highlights aspects of place-making so often under-researched in migration and diversity studies. Encounters never take place in a space free from history, power, or material conditions.

To summarize, for me this book belongs to a wider programme of revisiting traditional political and social concepts, given the new patterns provoked by diversity dynamics. This is why I celebrate the focus of the book centred both on the sources of solidarity (the forms of solidarity) and on what solidarity practices can produce (the benefits of solidarity). Most of the time we feel that Editors are following, without mentioning it, a Walzerian lens of dealing with solidarity, the ‘here and now’ of solidarity remember the theory of local and complex justice (if I may suggest, other book titles could be ‘local solidarity’ and even ‘complex solidarity’). The book also illustrates how important it is to work with evidence-based concepts. It demonstrates how practices of contact create forms of sharing material and non-material resources among cultural and increasingly ethnic diverse populations, and the role of institutions play in affecting interactions. The bridge between macro and meso levels (church, trade unions for instance), and micro levels are also a strength of the different contributions.

Maybe one critique, as a researcher trying to theorize interculturalism, is that Editors devote so much energy to the concept of solidarity that no room is left for other key-concepts such as ‘place’ and even ‘diversity’, which seems to adhere to the much debated and multi-faceted concept of super-diversity. Solidarity involves contact, encounters, and then, when placed in diversity settings, interculturalism. A shame that in spite of using the notion, this link is absent. Proximity as a condition of solidarity, here I would like to remind you of my view of interculturalism as proximity policy. It insists in the encounter of those of different class, race, culture or ethnicity, as the authors seem to understand the application of solidarity. It is likely that the intersectorial application of solidarity would require further theorization in the next steps of this stimulating book.

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Becoming landowners: entanglements of custom and modernity in Papua New Guinea and Timor-Leste, by Victoria C. Stead, Series: Topics in the Contemporary Pacific, Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2017, 216 pp., ISBN 9780824856663

Becoming Landowners is an unique comparative study of land tenure and nation-building. The book makes a number of important contributions, and its comparative approach is intriguing. Tracking back and forth between multiple field sites – urban, peri-urban and rural communities in Papua New Guinea and Timor-Leste – the author uncovers how different local actors deploy notions of custom and modernity in contests over land ownership. Hovering over their activities are powerful interests: national governments seeking foreign investment and the extension of state power; extractive and manufacturing industries looking for cheap resources and cheaper labour; and international institutions pushing specific tenure arrangements. In the face of these overwhelming forces, the indigenous Melanesian peoples of both countries make claims to precedence and ownership that draw on radically ontologically different – perhaps mutually incompatible – conceptions of land, property, and personhood.

Stead's guiding metaphor in the book is *entanglement*. The relationship, she argues, between the customary and the modern is not one of opposition, nor one of temporal succession. The two are mutually constitutive and mutually disruptive. However, as the book ultimately shows, the modernist understanding of land (and the powerful interests pushing it) is much, much more likely to prevail – in part because of the power of capitalist abstraction, and how the bureaucratic and judicial work it takes to become landowners wears down customary social relations, heightens ambivalence, and leads people to devalue their own culture.

Timor-Leste and Papua New Guinea share many historical and cultural features that make for a compelling comparison. Both became independent in 1975; the indigenous populations are culturally Melanesian with similarly mutable and complex traditional relations to land; both nations are on divided islands at the nexus of Indonesian, Australian, and Chinese spheres of influence. Yet the two countries' experiences since 1975 have been radically different. Timor-Leste's contemporary land issues are shaped by the aftermath of occupation and civil war, with current struggles to formalise land title complicated by histories of forced relocation and destruction of government records. Papua New Guinea has the inalienability of land enshrined in its constitution. The national ideology celebrates a kind of universal, inextinguishable landownership, and even the poorest peasant or squatter can still claim to be a *papa graun* (customary landowner). While international financial institutions and development agencies once pushed privatisation and individual title, since 2008 a 'middle way' approach has encouraged the registration of landowner groups to facilitate long-term leases to extractive, agricultural, and manufacturing industries.

Public claims to landownership by indigenous people in both countries, Stead argues, entangle modernist legal and political technologies with traditional ones. In rural Timor-