

Book Review: Solidarity Without Borders: Gramscian Perspectives on Migration and Civil Society Alliances edited by Óscar García Agustín and Martin Bak Jørgensen

[blogs.lse.ac.uk/lseviewofbooks/2016/06/23/book-review-solidarity-without-borders-gramscian-perspectives-on-migration-and-civil](https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lseviewofbooks/2016/06/23/book-review-solidarity-without-borders-gramscian-perspectives-on-migration-and-civil-society-alliances/)

Solidarity Without Borders: Gramscian Perspectives on Migration and Civil Society Alliances, a contribution to the 'Reading Gramsci' series, draws upon Gramscian theories to help understand processes of solidarity-building between civil society and various migrant groups across Europe. **Rana Sukarieh** welcomes this book, edited by **Óscar García Agustín** and **Martin Bak Jørgensen**, for demonstrating the continued relevance of Gramsci's theories for considering coalitions and alliances that could help to build more inclusive societies.

Solidarity Without Borders: Gramscian Perspectives on Migration and Civil Society Alliances. Óscar García Agustín and Martin Bak Jørgensen (eds). Pluto Press. 2016.

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Solidarity Without Borders: Gramscian Perspectives on Migration and Civil Society Alliances, edited by Óscar García Agustín and Martin Bak Jørgensen, demonstrates the relevance of Gramscian theories in contemporary politics. Specifically, this edited book focuses on solidarity-building between civil society and various migrant groups in Europe within the context of increasingly non-inclusive immigration policies. Rich in both theory and data, this book contributes to the 'Reading Gramsci' series by Pluto Press, and fills a gap in the field of solidarity-building, which seldom examines alliances between migrants and civil society. The authors aim to provide academics and activists with inspiring practices to 'transform the social and political order towards more solidary and inclusive societies' (x).

In 1926 Antonio Gramsci wrote 'Some Aspects of the Southern Question', in which he explained the differences between the proletariat in Northern industrial Italy and the peasants in the South. Despite these distinctions, both were exploited by the bourgeoisie, who benefitted from their division. Gramsci called for an alliance between the Northern proletariat and the Southern peasants to form a new historic bloc and challenge the hegemonic order. Building on the core themes discussed in Gramsci's work, the main contribution of *Solidarity Without Borders* is demonstrating that civil society alliances with migrant subjects can potentially form an alternative hegemonic system. Although they recognise that solidarity-building among disparate and marginalised groups is rife with contradictions and material challenges, the chapters nonetheless demonstrate that coalitions and alliances are being forged across various European spaces. The chapters also confirm the relevance of Gramsci's theory across place and time.

The book is divided into four parts, each of which affords us a new perspective on the relationship between civil society and migrants, including those that take place within and beyond bounded nation-states. These four parts are the heterogeneity of political actors; solidarity alliances; misplaced alliances; and spaces of resistance.

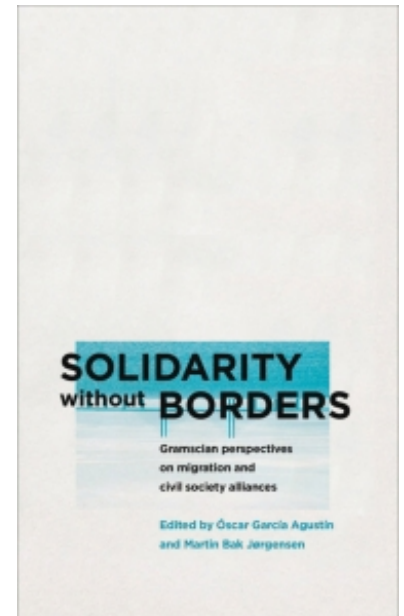




Image Credit: Lampedusa in Hamburg Poster, 2013 (Marotte CC 3.0)

Part One focuses on the heterogeneity of political actors, working through Gramsci's assertion that one class cannot defeat the hegemonic order. Consequently, an alliance between multiple actors is needed to overcome particularism. This includes actors such as the unemployed, workers, refugees, immigrants and undocumented individuals. The plurality of identities is reflected in Nazli Şenses and Kivanç Özcan's chapter. They challenge the dominant belief that the middle class were the main activists in the Gezi Park protests in Turkey. Instead, they argue that the marginalisation and stigmatisation of internal migrants, such as Kurds and Alevis, alongside government gentrification policies, mobilised the urban migrant population against the government. Hence, Gezi Park served as the grounds on which an encounter between the middle class and relatively isolated urban migrants took place.

Part Two of the book demonstrates that engaging in a solidarity movement means transcending particularities and identities, and focusing on transformative solidary relations that connect struggles. Alliances among the multiple actors indicate an understanding of inequality experienced by all precarious groups caused by the hegemonic order. Grassroots solidarity movements that have emerged in recent years provide good examples of how subaltern interests can converge. In this vein, Ronaldo Munck and Mary Hyland analyse how trade unions in Ireland have developed new models of unionism since the mid-1990s to include the emergent migrant population. The involvement of migrants in unions created an obstacle for xenophobic tendencies in the country. Derek Boothman offers a historical analysis of migration into Britain, and provides a pragmatic appraisal of the obstacles in the process and outcome of future alliances, such as the multi-identities of migrant social groups. He argues that the challenge of the Left is to overcome the 'vertical differentiation' (91) among various ethnic groups.

Part Three examines how the bourgeoisie uses propaganda to create a rift between subaltern groups, which consequently results in misplaced alliances. Put differently, the ruling class tends to impose essentialist cultural representation on groups of subalterns, ignoring the roots of economic inequalities. The consequences are divisions between workers and immigrants. The representation of Greeks in the recent financial crisis as non-productive workers illustrates this argument. In this section, Peter Mayo warns against representing migrants across the Mediterranean as 'enemies' who take jobs and resources. The risk is a misplaced alliance, and the attraction and gravitation of the national precariat towards the Right. To redirect this misplacement of interest, Mayo proposes the need for anti-racist education that takes seriously (neo-)colonial legacies to pave the way for inter-ethnic solidarities.

The final section of the book discusses questions of space and resistance. Gramsci believed that space is interdependent on the social relations that are (re-)produced within it. Susi Meret and Elisabetta Della Corte employ Gramsci's concepts of hegemony, subalternity and misplaced alliances to analyse the African migrant collective resistance movement, [Lampedusa in Hamburg](#), in the face of the denial of their basic rights in Hamburg, Germany. On the boundaries of the streets and transit systems, African migrants become 'architects of new political subjectivities and collective identities' (219). It is in these spaces of resistance that migrants fighting for their rights form alliances with civil society in historically politicised Hamburg.

Solidarity Without Borders serves to bridge the gap in the literature examining alliances between civil society and migrants. It also reinforces the relevance of Gramsci's work to contemporary society. While the book rarely engages with transnational alliances, it offers a substantive theoretical foundation for linking national struggles to transnational and international ones. However, its focus on the European context does not address the impact of colonial legacies on relations between non-European immigrants and European civil society. In this context, building alliances become more complicated and can result in misplaced alliances. The authors place stress on the importance and complexity of building alliances to overthrow the dominant order, but rarely engage with the risks of unintentionally reproducing systems of injustice, such as racism. Among solidary actors, some are more privileged than others. Genuine transformative solidarity therefore requires ongoing self-reflection from all involved.

Rana Sukarieh is a PhD candidate in the department of sociology at York University, Toronto. Rana's research interests are in the areas of transnational solidarity movements, social movements in the Middle East and post-colonialism. Her dissertation focuses on the theory of solidarity among transnational activists, with focus on the Palestinian Boycott Divestment and Sanctions movement. She holds a B.A in economics from the American University of Beirut, Hon. B.A in sociology and an M.A in Sociology from York University. She can be reached at rana12@yorku.ca.

Note: This review gives the views of the author, and not the position of the LSE Review of Books blog, or of the London School of Economics.

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