cogitatio

EDITORIAL

Open Access Journal 🔓

Solidarity in Diversity: Overcoming Marginalisation in Society

Matthew Mabefam [1] ⓘ, **Kennedy Mbeva** [2] ⓘ, **and Franka Vaughan** [1] ⓘ

[1] University of Melbourne, Australia
[2] University of Cambridge, UK

Correspondence: Matthew Mabefam (matthewgmalifo.mabefam@unimelb.edu.au)

Abstract

This introduction situates the thematic issue within the discourse on solidarity, exploring its transformative role in addressing marginalisation and fostering social cohesion. The 13 articles in this issue are organised into four themes: (a) solidarity's response to exclusion, (b) its dynamic nature in contested contexts, (c) innovative frameworks, and (d) its role in tackling economic inequalities. Through case studies of migrant communities, Roma graduates, neurodivergent artists, and trans women, the contributions highlight solidarity's potential to counter exclusion, navigate tensions, and inspire collective action. Bridging theory and practice, this thematic issue advances understanding and informs policies to address systemic inequality, diversity, and injustice.

Keywords

diversity; marginalisation; polorisation; solidarity

1. Introduction

In this thematic issue, we bring together interdisciplinary scholarship to examine solidarity as a critical mechanism to address societal marginalisation. In an era of growing social divisions and complex challenges, we aim to create a space for scholars and policymakers to engage in meaningful dialogue. Building on Bauböck and Scholten's 2016 special issue on solidarity in diverse societies (Bauböck & Scholten, 2016) and Robert Mordacci's 2024 special issue on the challenges of solidarity in a critical age (Mordacci, 2024), we respond to the shifting social landscape from 2016 to 2024. While earlier work offered valuable insights, the unprecedented complexity of recent challenges requires fresh analysis to examine dimensions of solidarity previously overlooked. Our objective is to deepen scholarly understanding, raise critical awareness, and inform policy interventions.

We found it necessary to revisit the topic of solidarity, given the proliferation of divisive issues in recent years. Although the earlier focus on immigration in Western societies was foundational, contemporary developments—spanning global inequality, migration, populism, and intersectional oppression—demand broader engagement. In this thematic issue, we address emerging concerns and fill gaps left by prior studies, broadening the analytical framework for understanding solidarity and its role in fostering social cohesion. By advancing knowledge and raising awareness of these pressing issues, we aim to generate actionable insights that shape inclusive policies and practices.

This thematic issue features articles that collectively map the contours of solidarity and diversity. In the next section, we provide an overview of these concepts, establishing the foundation for the broader discussion. Subsequent sections summarise the contributing authors' key arguments, offering theoretical and empirical insights into fostering solidarity which are geographically and thematically diverse. These articles capture unique narratives, engage with diverse theories, and address a salient topic of public and scholarly interest. Through this collection, we aim to demonstrate solidarity's transformative potential, its challenges, and its role in advancing a more inclusive society.

2. Solidarity as an Antidote to Overcoming Marginalisation in Society

Solidarity, broadly conceived as a unifying bond based on mutual support or shared interests, has long been a subject of scholarly inquiry (Jones, 2013; Miller, 2002). As Tiryakian (2005, p. 307) describes, it represents "a rich network of social ties" voluntarily entered into, providing both fulfillment and obligations. Despite decades of exploration, solidarity remains vital to addressing the ongoing marginalisation, oppression, and exclusion of vulnerable groups. Yet, the complexities surrounding who or what to support in solidarity persist, revealing inherent tensions in its application. These debates often revolve around distinctions of belonging, as illustrated by Kymlicka (2015, 2020), who critiques the contradictions between national solidarity and the support for multiculturalism. Such dilemmas reduce solidarity to an "us versus them" binary, complicating its transformative potential.

Diversity, an inherent feature of all societies, further underscores the importance of solidarity. While diversity brings numerous societal benefits (Banks et al., 2001; Smith & Schonfeld, 2000), it can also become a source of tension if poorly managed (Smelser & Alexander, 1999). Recent trends, such as the banning of books on race, gender, and sexuality in the United States (Tylenda, 2024) and the divisive discourse surrounding Australia's "Voice" referendum (Birrell & Betts, 2023; Ch'ng et al., 2024; Windschuttle, 2023), exemplify efforts to suppress diverse perspectives under the guise of unity. These actions highlight the challenges posed by attempts to silence marginalised voices, reinforcing the need for solidarity to counter such exclusionary practices.

Solidarity plays a critical role in amplifying the perspectives of marginalised individuals and groups, fostering awareness, and driving structural change. When grounded in moral conviction, solidarity transcends differences, uniting individuals and groups in their efforts to challenge marginalisation and inequality. Its contested nature, however, reflects broader societal divisions, with growing inequality and nationalist populism undermining its effectiveness. Despite this, solidarity has historically demonstrated its power in mobilising support to address critical issues such as the abolition of slavery, decolonisation, and the fight against apartheid. More recently, global protests following George Floyd's murder exemplified solidarity's

potential to unite people across the world while simultaneously exposing persistent racism and its varied manifestations.

The Covid-19 pandemic further tested solidarity by exacerbating existing inequalities and exposing the vulnerabilities of marginalised groups. Social contracts between governments and citizens fractured, and the pandemic revealed a profound lack of structural support for those most in need. This crisis underscores the urgent need to reimagine solidarity as a mechanism for addressing societal challenges, fostering inclusivity, and reducing marginalisation.

In academia and public discourse, solidarity has also become a focal point, particularly in debates over decolonising knowledge production and amplifying minority voices. While these efforts have brought attention to systemic inequities, their tangible impact remains uncertain. These ongoing dialectical debates highlight the evolving nature of solidarity and its potential to shape inclusive societies. By integrating solidarity with an appreciation of diversity, we can better address the systemic injustices that continue to define contemporary societies.

3. Emergent Themes From the Contributing Articles

This thematic issue examines the multi-faceted dimensions of solidarity, exploring its transformative potential across diverse contexts and challenges. The articles are organized around four key themes. The first focuses on solidarity as a response to systemic marginalization, highlighting how collective efforts address exclusion and foster inclusivity. The second theme investigates the complexities of solidarity within multicultural and politically charged environments, unpacking how it evolves and adapts in contested spaces. The third explores innovative theoretical frameworks that expand our understanding of solidarity, proposing new ways of conceptualizing and operationalizing it. Finally, the fourth theme delves into economic marginalization, demonstrating how solidarity-driven policies and practices can address entrenched inequalities and create pathways for empowerment. Together, these articles provide a comprehensive exploration of solidarity's role in fostering social justice and collective transformation, while offering insights into its theoretical, practical, and policy implications.

Several articles emphasize solidarity's transformative role in addressing systemic marginalization. Tebeje Molla explores the potential of engaged scholarship to drive societal transformation by fostering inclusive narratives and practices. While highlighting its potential, Molla identifies key challenges, such as ethical dilemmas, scholar burnout, and polarized knowledge systems, that hinder these efforts. Building supportive ecosystems for scholars and prioritizing the co-creation of knowledge is critical to overcoming these barriers and sustaining engaged scholarship. Similarly, Tamara Hernández Araya examines how migrant organizations in Chile redefine solidarity as an ethical project grounded in care. By constructing alternative citizenship narratives, these organizations foster collective identity, illustrating how solidarity can challenge exclusionary practices and create inclusive communities. In the Chinese context, Qian Xue and Bo Chen reveal how ableist recruitment practices within government agencies perpetuate the exclusion of disabled individuals. Their analysis demonstrates that judicial efforts to enforce diversity face systemic barriers, highlighting the need to eliminate political obstacles to workplace diversity and equity.

The complexities of solidarity in multicultural and politically charged contexts are another focus. Violetta Zentai and Margit Feischmidt investigate how civic actors in Hungary navigate solidarity dilemmas under an

authoritarian regime. These actors move beyond humanitarianism, adopting anti-discriminatory and interdependent approaches to support displaced Ukrainians. The study illustrates how solidarity can evolve in restrictive political environments to challenge systemic injustices. Judit Durst, Margit Feischmidt, and Zsanna Nyírő focus on the supportive networks enabling Roma social mobility in Hungary. Their work highlights how solidarity fosters upward mobility and empowers marginalized individuals to become agents of social change. Franka Vaughan examines the experiences of Liberian diaspora communities negotiating dual citizenship. By seeking legal recognition in both host and home countries, these communities address dual marginalization and highlight the complex intersections of identity, belonging, and citizenship.

Expanding the conceptual boundaries of solidarity, several authors propose innovative theoretical frameworks. Óscar García Agustín and Martin Bak Jørgensen introduce "commoning cosmopolitanism," a sociospatial framework that links solidarity with class struggle, spatial inclusion, and diverse communities. This framework challenges exclusionary practices by promoting solidarity as a universal principle grounded in local action. Anna Püschel focuses on neurodivergent individuals in the art world, redefining stimming behaviors as radical acts of self-care and inclusion. Her work advocates for structural changes that accommodate neurodivergent needs, demonstrating how solidarity can challenge traditional norms and create more inclusive spaces. Jolita Vveinhardt and Mykolas Deikus explore bystander behavior in workplace bullying through the lens of synderesis, examining three response types: constructive active support for victims, destructive active support for perpetrators, and destructive passive non-intervention. Their analysis draws on consequentialist, utilitarian, and synderetic ethical frameworks to understand these behavioral choices. Matthew Mabefam, Kennedy Mbeva, and Issah Wumbla examine the potential of solidarity to address global challenges amidst resistance and dissent. They argue that solidarity, despite its challenges, remains a viable concept for addressing today's most pressing issues.

Economic marginalization is explored through various lenses. Siyanda Buyile Shabalala and Megan Campbell examine the structural exclusions faced by trans women in South Africa, exposing how binary gender norms perpetuate economic inequities. They call for intersectional policies that explicitly address trans positions within labor systems, underscoring the need for solidarity-driven reform. Charles Gyan and Jacob Kwakye explore how Ghanaian women leverage solidarity and familial networks to overcome economic barriers. Their study emphasizes the role of community-level support systems in fostering resilience and enabling economic empowerment. Neeltje Spit, Evelien Tonkens, and Margo Trappenburg highlight the emotional labor of volunteers supporting refugee integration in the Netherlands. Their research demonstrates how solidarity is deeply shaped by emotional struggles and triumphs, urging policymakers to consider these dynamics in creating inclusive systems.

Collectively, these contributions deepen our understanding of solidarity across diverse contexts, addressing marginalization, contested political spaces, theoretical innovation, and economic justice. Each article demonstrates solidarity's dual role as a tool for empowerment and a response to systemic injustices, offering valuable insights for future research and practical interventions.

4. Conclusion

This thematic issue underscores the transformative potential of solidarity in addressing marginalisation, navigating contested spaces, and fostering inclusion. The contributions highlight solidarity's capacity to

inspire societal change, from supporting marginalised groups like Roma graduates, trans women, and disabled individuals to reimagining citizenship and community through care ethics and sociospatial frameworks. They also reveal its complexities, such as navigating dilemmas within authoritarian regimes, addressing cultural hybridity, and countering economic and systemic inequalities.

Future research could expand and deepen the exploration of solidarity's dual nature—its ability to unite and its potential to exacerbate divisions—while examining how it functions in digitally mediated, transnational, and intersectional contexts. Investigating aspects like engaged scholarship, neurodivergent inclusion, and cosmopolitan commoning could provide new pathways for understanding and operationalising solidarity. Finally, research could focus on how solidarity-driven policies can tackle entrenched economic disparities and systemic marginalisation, offering practical strategies for fostering more equitable and inclusive societies.

Conflict of Interests
The authors declare no conflict of interests.

References
Banks, J. A., Cookson, P., Gay, G., Hawley, W. D., Irvine, J. J., Nieto, S., Schofield, J. W., & Stephan, W. G. (2001). Diversity within unity: Essential principles for teaching and learning in a multicultural society. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *83*(3), 196–203. https://doi.org/10.1177/003172170108300309

Bauböck, R., & Scholten, P. (2016). Introduction to the thematic issue: "Solidarity in diverse societies: Beyond neoliberal multiculturalism and welfare chauvinism": Coping with 'the progressive's dilemma'; nationhood, immigration and the welfare state. *Comparative Migration Studies*, *4*(1), Article 4. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-016-0025-z

Birrell, B., & Betts, K. (2023). *Why the Voice referendum is failing*. Australian Population Research Institute. https://policycommons.net/artifacts/4786083/apo-nid324110/5622553

Ch'ng, H. Y., Smith, B. A., & Nguyen, H. (2024). Hearing the voice: Coverage of the Indigenous voice to parliament referendum in Australia's multi-ethnic public sphere. *Australian Journalism Review*, *46*(1), 113–128. https://doi.org/10.3316/informit.T2024061400006190768233027

Jones, S. S. (2013). *Durkheim reconsidered*. John Wiley & Sons.

Kymlicka, W. (2015). Solidarity in diverse societies: Beyond neoliberal multiculturalism and welfare chauvinism. *Comparative Migration Studies*, *3*(1), Article 17. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-015-0017-4

Kymlicka, W. (2020). Solidarity in diverse societies: Beyond neoliberal multiculturalism and welfare Chauvinism. In V. Kaul & A. Vajpeyi (Eds.), *Minorities and populism—Critical perspectives from South Asia and Europe* (pp. 41–62). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-34098-8_4

Miller, W. W. (2002). *Durkheim, morals and modernity* (1st ed.). Routledge.

Mordacci, R. (2024). The challenges of solidarity in a critical age. *Critical Horizons*, *25*(1), 1–1. https://doi.org/10.1080/14409917.2024.2313432

Smelser, N. J., & Alexander, J. C. (1999). *Diversity and its discontents: Cultural conflict and common ground in contemporary American society*. Princeton University Press.

Smith, D. G., & Schonfeld, N. B. (2000). The benefits of diversity what the research tells us. *About Campus*, *5*(5), 16–23. https://doi.org/10.1177/108648220000500505

Tiryakian, E. A. (2005). Durkheim, solidarity, and September 11. In J. C. Alexander & P. Smith (Eds.), *The Cambridge companion to Durkheim* (pp. 305–321). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL9780521806725.012

Tylenda, M. (2024). Banned books & banned identities: Maintaining secularism and the ability to read in public education for the well-being of America's youth. *Indiana Journal of Law and Social Equality*, *12*(1). https://www.repository.law.indiana.edu/ijlse/vol12/iss1/5

Windschuttle, K. (2023). Why the voice lost the vote. *Quadrant*, *67*(11), 4–6. https://doi.org/10.3316/informit.438962816118117

About the Authors

Matthew Mabefam (PhD) is a lecturer in development studies and a Melbourne Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the School of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Melbourne. His research contributes to decolonising development epistemes, knowledge bases, and practices, with a focus on Africa and the African Diaspora.

Kennedy Mbeva (PhD) is a research associate at the Centre for the Study of Existential Risk and a research fellow at Hughes Hall, University of Cambridge. His research focuses on the governance of global catastrophic risk. A Kenyan national, he holds a PhD in international relations (distinction) from the University of Melbourne and has studied and worked across Africa, Asia, Australia, and Europe.

Franka Vaughan (PhD) is a research associate and a teaching specialist for the Development Studies program at the School of Social and Political Sciences, University of Melbourne. She is also a research fellow for a multi-university antiracism project in community sport. Her research focuses on race and settler colonialism, migration and diasporas, and antiracism praxis in research and curriculum.