

Oscar Garcia Agustin and Martin Bak Jorgensen, 2019.

SOLIDARITY AND THE 'REFUGEE CRISIS' IN EUROPE

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The European Union (EU) proclaims some values which were stated within its founding treaties, and they are at the base of EU integration. Human rights, democracy and freedom of speech are some of these values. Solidarity is also one of these values. It was mentioned in the treaties of the EU. The concept has been discussed many times in the recent crises. It was first mentioned with the economic crisis then with the migration crisis and now it is being discussed within the ongoing Covid-19 crisis. It may have been discussed many more times as long as the EU falls short of responding to the crises as a union and sustaining functioning solidarity among its member states. For that reason, *Solidarity and the 'Refugee Crisis' in Europe* is chosen to be reviewed to evaluate how Agustin and Jorgensen analyzed solidarity within the refugee crisis.

In the book, Agustin and Jorgensen focus on the concept of solidarity within a specific period to assess the international community response to the refugee crisis and determine the common features of emerging solidarities. The authors claim that states and the EU could not find appropriate solutions for the crisis. First, they argue about which concept defines the situation in Europe and they note some of them such as 'migrant crisis', 'refugee crisis', 'humanitarian crisis', 'crisis of the asylum system', 'crisis of the European border'. They define crisis as a time of "rethinking and reinventing what solidarities can do" (p. 14). They support this perspective with examples from the cases throughout the book.

Overall, the authors criticize the EU's refugee crisis approach, as seen throughout the book. For example, in defining the reality in the Mediterranean, they use Achille Mbembe's concept "necropolitics" and state that "The concept implies more than a right to kill, as it also involves the right to expose other people to death" (p. 7). They also remark on the failure of Dublin procedure and criticize the discourse of Europe's refugee crisis by noting the numbers of Syrians in Europe, Turkey, and Lebanon. They explain the so-called refugee crisis in depth and present the EU's failure in sustaining solidarity and collaboration clearly. At this point, they mention the term "crisis of solidarity" and they try to find out what kind of solidarities emerge in such times. They introduce autonomous, civic and institutional solidarity. In general, it can be noted that solidarity has a constructivist mission in finding a way out of the crisis in this book.

The book discusses autonomous, civic, and institutional solidarity with cases. First, autonomous solidarity is explained as noting that it "implies relations and

practices that are produced in self-organized (mainly urban) spaces”, (p. 40) adding that it has “horizontal participation” (p. 40). It is analyzed with the ‘Hotel City Plaza’ case. Then civic solidarity, which is defined as ways of organizing “civil society initiatives to include refugees” (p. 41) is evaluated with the ‘Venligboerne’ (friendly neighbors) case. Thirdly, institutional solidarity is expressed as a solidarity “produced from the institutions” (p. 123) and it is exemplified in the ‘Barcelona as Refuge City’ case. Even though Agustin and Jorgensen introduce these three types of solidarity, they also note that these are not fixed, as solidarity is dynamic and open to changes and other types of solidarity are also possible.

Before focusing on specific definitions within the cases, solidarity is explained from different perspectives such as the right-wing’s, the EU’s, and the authors’ point of view. Especially, the authors define solidarity many times, and they focus on two characteristics: relational and spatial. In terms of relational characteristics, they ask what kind of collective identities and political subjectives emerge within relations and in terms of spatial characteristics, they ask where solidarity emerges in institutions or in everyday spaces (p. 26). Besides, adjectives such as contentious and generative are also used to explain the concept of solidarity. So, they first give the general framework and ask questions which help them to explain their point of view.

Furthermore, every type of solidarity is detailed in a series of case studies. The first one is *autonomous solidarity*, and it is defined with the ‘Hotel City Plaza’ case in Athens. In this case, squatting the hotel and using it for the needs of refugees for a long time is the focus. It is noted that this is not just an action springing from social need but is a political act which targets “borders and repressive anti-immigration policies” (p. 53). The authors explain the economic situation of Greece, the plight of the refugees there, political acts presented as a solution for the crisis, historical and current examples of Athens related to the refugees, and the act of squatting vacant buildings as a means of solidarity for the refugees. Even though ‘Hotel City Plaza’ was not the only squatted building in Athens, it is defined as the most visible, most debated and the one which exemplifies how autonomous solidarity emerges as a “new imaginary and practical alternative” when official management fails (p. 61).

Civic solidarity is explained in the second case study, the Danish network ‘Venligboerne’ (‘friendly neighbors’). Firstly, the political context is detailed by explaining how the policies, precautions and restrictions related to asylum seekers changed in Denmark. Here, previous solidarity networks are mentioned to link them with the refugee crisis. Solidarity is defined as banding with people from diverse backgrounds including migrants and non-migrants to pursue shared goals, common principles and construct collective and inclusive identity. All these are connected to civic solidarity which becomes concrete with Venligboerne initiative. Here, the importance of including people to a community rather than excluding them is emphasized using direct quotations from the migrants. This case demonstrates that inclusiveness plays an important role in civic solidarity.

Thirdly, *institutional solidarity* is explained through the ‘Barcelona as Refugee City’ case. In this case, Barcelona City Council acts in favour of refugees independent of the government because of “the lack of reception of refugees by the government, despite the agreements with the EU” (p. 104). Departing from Barcelona municipality, the position of municipalities is stated to “experience the tension of autonomous and civic solidarities, on the one hand, and of the formalized solidarity of the state, on the other” (p. 98). Institutional solidarity emerges out of this tension and the institutional realm of state, civic society and activists all facilitate the emergence of this solidarity. Agustin and Jorgensen draw attention to tension by noting “the disparity positions between the national government and the local council and civil society” (p. 128).

In the last chapter, the authors discuss the perception that solidarity in the refugee crisis may be considered a crime, noting that solidarity cannot be evaluated as a crime. Here, different types of solidarity sharing the basic aim of helping people are revealed, even as some of them are perceived as a crime, such as squatting buildings or a threat to the policies of governments and the EU, such as helping people to cross the borders. The book focuses on alternative relations, imaginaries, and institutions as the existing way of solidarity is noted to fall short of answering the refugee crisis. The explanations given throughout the book are summarized and shown in a table in this last chapter. So, the authors point out how they evaluate the refugee crisis and its outcomes in terms of solidarity in specific cases such as ‘City Plaza Hotel’, ‘Venligboerne’ and ‘Barcelona as Refugee City’.

In a nutshell, *Solidarity and the ‘Refugee Crisis’ in Europe* focuses on the conceptual framework in the first chapters and then offers a better understanding of each typology (autonomous solidarity, civic solidarity and institutional solidarity) through case studies. Thus, the alternative ways of responding to refugee crises and starting a grassroots initiative/action as a common feature are given in the book. This can be evaluated as a bottom-up process while the criticized EU solidarity can be seen as a top-down process which does not focus on the reality of the crisis. The book can be used as a reference for a better share of burden and migration policy of the EU as migration related problems will not end and continue to be on the agenda of the Europe and the Balkans.

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