

Intersectional Challenges to Cohesion? On Marginalization in an Inclusive Society

*Yudit Namer, Anne Stöcker, Amani Ashour, Janine Dieckmann,
Philipp Schmidt, Carmen Zurbriggen*

Abstract

Despite the acknowledged importance of diversity and intersectionality in fostering inclusion and equity, challenges persist as diversity is sometimes juxtaposed against social cohesion. Meanwhile, societal polarization and inequality exacerbate marginalization, hindering social inclusion and perpetuating discrimination. Various dimensions of marginalization contribute to unequal access to resources and opportunities, further exacerbated during crises. Discrimination and marginalization threaten social cohesion, fostering exclusion within ostensibly inclusive societies. This edited volume underscores the need for inclusive theories of social cohesion that incorporate diverse perspectives and experiences of marginalization, aiming to strengthen collaborations for a more inclusive society.

Keywords: diversity; social cohesion; marginalization; intersectionality; inclusion

Embracing diversity is a foundational element of social cohesion in an inclusive society guided by a human rights framework. Rather than regarding (super-)diversity as a societal asset and intersectionality as a crucial concept for promoting inclusion and equity, however, diversity is sometimes pitted against social cohesion. At the same time, social cohesion is increasingly challenged by polarization and social inequality. These developments, in turn, reproduce and reinforce discrimination and social marginalization and reduce social inclusion. While contemporary societies claim to be inclusive, they generate and preserve many forms of marginalization.

This is evident in the inequality of access to resources and opportunities (e.g., health and education), but also with respect to the inequality of aspects of representation and participation that characterize the current moment. Marginalization can result from the stigmatization of a singular characteristic, but is also driven by interwoven and mutually reinforcing processes that involve multiple dimensions of stigmatization. This can be expressed in the aforementioned terms of super-diversity (Vertovec 2007, 2023) or intersectionality (Crenshaw 1989, 1994, 2017). Life situations arise from manifold circumstances over the life course, which may result in a person being ascribed certain characteristics or labels and regarded as belonging in social sub-groups or categories that are associated with different stigmatized characteristics. Age, geographic origin, nationality, culture, religion, gender identities, sexual orientations, disabilities, precarity due to (mental) health status, living conditions, and socioeconomic status are some of the many determining factors. In general, various forms of discrimination that are intertwined with these social categorizations result in different levels of access to and provisioning of resources—a process exacerbated by crises.

Inequalities and (negative) consequences can accumulate. Many of the aforementioned characteristics intersect and culminate in layers of discrimination. Discrimination intertwined with marginalization can be linked to various ideologies of essential inequality, such as sexism, racism, and ableism. Discrimination and marginalization pose an inherent threat to social cohesion. Inevitably, their consequences are forms of exclusion within a supposedly inclusive and equal society.

Nevertheless, more often than not it is precisely in these experiences of marginalization that new possibilities of utopian societies are imagined and different approaches for social transformation are mapped out. Here as well, questions and debates about social solidarity and cohesion are at the center of discussions about the question of how we (whoever we are) as (an international) society want to live and who we want to be. Possibilities, challenges, and pitfalls of allyship and solidarity across various differences, sensitivities, and communities

are crucial to consider along the path towards a more just world for all. Reflecting on experiences with both positive and negative potentials for practice and theory enrich debates not only for practitioners and activists, but also for researchers and academics.

Why this book? As researchers from diverse backgrounds who started working together within the Research Institute Social Cohesion (Forschungsinstitut Gesellschaftlicher Zusammenhalt), we identified a need to reflect on the theory of social cohesion, while taking different experiences of marginalization into account. Rather than offering discussions of democratic questions grounded solely in political science and sociology, we opted to offer a broad disciplinary consideration of social cohesion and marginalization, ranging from social psychology to linguistics. While edited volumes and monographs on similar topics exist, some are situated in a single national context and/or target specific social fields like migration or economics. This volume attends to many intersecting markers of diversity in various areas of society and life. Furthermore, this interdisciplinary volume covers diverse processes of marginalization.

This book features marginalized perspectives on social cohesion and its challenges. It aims to advance an inclusive theory of social cohesion by synthesizing conceptual work, practical experiences, and reflexive positionalities. It also seeks to contribute to debates about how super-diverse/intersectional collaborations for an inclusive society can be strengthened, encouraged, and built to last. Analyzing the stumbling blocks of previous collaborative attempts at building inclusive societies allows us to learn from past experiences. Our innovative approach here is to focus specifically on the neglected relationship of social cohesion and diversity. In so doing, the volume incorporates lived experiences of marginalization, is diverse in theoretical and epistemic viewpoints, and allows for engagement by different audiences.

How did we achieve these aims? We invited theoretical as well as empirical approaches, general and specific discussions. Relatedly, we did not follow uniform definitions, and welcomed a multitude of definitions of intersectionality and social cohesion. One of our goals with this book is to facilitate the transfer of knowledge from communities into academia, and vice-versa. Therefore, we encouraged contributions from practice partners and groups involved in collective action against marginalization to contribute their perspectives and to increase academic understandings of lived experience. By explicitly incorporating the perspective of marginalized groups, the book not only ensures the transfer and anchoring of research questions in the lived realities of those affected; it also ensures that the affective component of cohesion is taken into account. Contributions are written for a broad audience of academics, professionals from various disciplines, policymakers, activists, and marginalized groups themselves. Con-

tributions are therefore both short and long, and the volume features one conversation between colleagues. Our hope is that academics and students will use this book in the classroom. Many of the chapters are suitable as introductory and advanced course readings. Moreover, some could be used by collectives in their advocacy and collective action.

The chapters are organized into several sections. The first section gives a theoretical introduction to central concepts of the book (social cohesion, marginalization, intersectionality) in relation to each other. In the first chapter, Aydın Bayad, Elif Sandal-Önal, Meral Gezici Yalçın and Ekrem Düzen provide a refreshing account of the conceptual choices surrounding social cohesion in the existing literature, situated between scientific empiricism and political idealism. Focusing on European societies, the authors adopt the minority perspective and argue against the assumption that diversity is inherently incompatible with social cohesion, emphasizing the importance of considering the *social dimension* that encompasses diverse perspectives in society. They critique current operational definitions for neglecting this aspect and discuss potential pitfalls in understanding social cohesion in relation to individuals, communities, and society. Next, Amani Ashour and Janet-Lynn Holz introduce a novel theoretical take on intersectionality, building on Hark's concept of cohabitation as a potential foundation for social cohesion through democracy and universal care. They introduce the concept of *intersectional proximities* to explore cohabitation, solidarity, and allyship. The chosen examples from Human Animal Studies and of Israeli solidarity with Palestinians demonstrate how the proximity between groups differently positioned in structures of discrimination influences their mutual experiences of and responses to discrimination. This section is enhanced by empirical inquiry into discrimination as experienced intersectionally. In the following chapter, Sophia Aalders, Steffen Beigang, Miriam Zineb Meksem, Lara Kronenbitter and Janne Schleifer examine the frequency of discrimination in everyday situations based on various sociodemographic characteristics and investigate how these experiences change when multiple marginalization factors intersect. They also explore the strategies individuals employ to avoid discrimination and assess the impact of discrimination on social cohesion, particularly when discrimination is rooted in multiple forms of marginalization. On the basis of two population surveys in Saxony and the rest of Germany, the authors conclude that discrimination and coping strategies impede social participation, posing a potential threat to social cohesion.

Case studies form the next section. These focus on specific aspects of the discourse (e.g., different forms and areas of marginalization). In this section, specific contexts of marginalization such as welfare eligibility, disability, or migration illustrate the diversity of marginalizing processes and intersecting

of marginalization experiences (such as deafness and migration). This section demonstrates how diverse life situations impact social cohesion. Philipp Schmidt highlights the often overlooked association between mental disorders and various forms of marginalization, including social, economic, and political exclusions, both at an individual and societal level. Emphasizing the underreported role of mental disorders in the dynamics of marginalization, multiple disadvantages, and intersectionality, Schmidt's contribution underscores the importance of consistently considering mental health in research focused on these interconnected areas. Jennifer Eckhardt then explores the German concept of *Bedürftigkeit*¹, investigating its multifaceted nature as both a socio-statistical category, a societal classification, and a fundamental aspect of human existence. Drawing on a study focused on the non-request of social benefits, Eckhardt discusses the transformation brought about by activation policies, which have shifted the perception of citizens from passive recipients of social assistance to active individuals capable of overcoming *Bedürftigkeit* through personal efforts—if they possess sufficient motivation. This analysis highlights the evolving role of *Bedürftigkeit* within the context of changing welfare paradigms, emphasizing the transition under activation policies from the figure of the welfare state citizen to the figure of the empowered and self-reliant active citizen.

Moving on to communication-based marginalization, Anne Stöcker and Yudit Namer engage in conversation about the consequences for social cohesion of marginalization through everyday communication. They discuss marginalizing mechanisms and include for ideal, inclusive communication situations, illustrating possible and realistic ways to substantially reduce or eliminate marginalization through communication in order to enable a socially cohesive society. Considering communication from a different perspective, Julia Gspandl delves into the intersectionality of identities in Deaf migrants, discussing their roles as minority language users, migrants, and individuals perceived as disabled. Focusing on the integration of Deaf migrants who can sign and have engaged with the Austrian Deaf community, the study, conducted through semi-structured interviews by a Deaf signer of Austrian Sign Language, explores the past and present social experiences of Deaf migrants in Graz, Austria. The findings reveal instances of discrimination by hearing individuals, but also highlight a strong sense of cohesion among Deaf peers, suggesting that many participants may identify more strongly with their shared deafhood than with their country of origin. Focusing on the context of medical education, Hans Vogt and Felicia Boma Lazaridou's chapter explores social cohesion and racism in German medical education and practice,

1 Broadly defined as being *in need of* and formally *eligible to* welfare. Please see the chapter for the detailed discussion.

revealing how institutional racism at various levels influences exclusionary practices and semantics. Their analysis emphasizes the interplay of racialized patient treatment, the silence with respect to racism in medical education, and the everyday experiences of students and physicians, concluding that addressing these issues requires a holistic understanding of social cohesion in the context of racist social relations and the pursuit of transformative social change.

The final section is dedicated to collective action, both as topic and practice of research. Taking an intersectional approach, it traces the lived experiences of civil society and activist groups engaged in collective action, such as for climate justice or for just research. The section further discusses ideas for knowledge transfer and considers how research may learn from and co-generate diverse knowledges. Shirin Choudhary investigates the impact of climate change on the socio-economic position of women in Delhi, India, focusing on the intersection of gender with various forms of marginalization, such as caste, class, religion, informal work, and spatial marginalization in the city. This contribution reveals that women from marginalized backgrounds experience a lack of social cohesion, marked by diminished trust, sense of belonging, and participation in public life, and shows how such marginalization becomes exacerbated by institutional and systemic inequalities during climate-related crises. The chapter concludes by advocating for the inclusion of gender perspectives and women's voices in local climate action as a means to foster a more sustainable, climate-resilient, and socially cohesive Delhi.

Migration is the recurring theme in Ines Grau's contribution, which explores the impact of global migration and refugee movements on social diversity, emphasizing the potential for new forms of exclusion and social conflict. Focusing on German municipalities post-2015, the chapter discusses qualitative field research in Jena and Konstanz to analyze and critically reflect on local networks of refugee assistance. Considering the perspectives of refugees, Grau assesses the long-term dynamics of these networks and their potential for creating spaces of collective action and solidarity coalitions and highlights the precarious structural integrity of voluntary networks as practical expressions of solidarity within an unequal world. Finally, Tanja Gangarova considers research itself as a site of action. This chapter discusses Community-based Participatory Research (CBPR) as a research approach aimed at democratizing knowledge creation by increasing the involvement of historically marginalized communities, while acknowledging its susceptibility to perpetuating inequalities on the basis of existing power structures. Drawing from decolonization and participatory literature, the author reflects on CBPR's democratizing potential based on insights from research with communities affected by racial injustice in Germany. Gangarova suggests that a critical application of CBPR can address epistemic injustices within academic in-

stitutions and traditional research processes and advocates for the incorporation of decolonial learning into research methodology and practice to confront such issues.

Rounding off this anthology on intersectional challenges to social cohesion, Vivian Buchholz discusses how the research fields of intersectionality and social cohesion can mutually specify each other's terms and concepts. This chapter offers a conceptual lens for differentiating intersectional approaches by asking what it is that intersects. It further provides an overview of controversies in the current state of intersectionality research. After calling for greater awareness of the difference between identity and subjectivity, and community and society, the chapter argues that considering the intersectionality of ideologies might advance social cohesion research.

In conclusion, we hope this book will allow for nuanced discussions within different audiences about their own social positions and the social cohesiveness of their societies, and about how inclusivity is experienced by those with marginalized positions.

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