

SALLY J. SCHOLZ

# Solidarity across Generations: Transgenerational Political Solidarity for Global Justice

**Abstract:** By exploring the potential for transgenerational political solidarity, this article highlights the importance of acknowledging histories of collective movements for social change within current practices of solidarity, practices that, I suggest, disclose future possibilities as well. I offer some modest suggestions for thinking about transgenerational solidarity alongside accounts of intergenerational justice. Transgenerational political solidarity displays a commitment (1) to bear witness to past injustices and struggles against injustice, especially while navigating through disagreement in a manner that affirms commitment to the collective cause, (2) to find support in and echo the cause of past movements for social change even while owning or being self-consciously critical of past failures, and (3) to foreground the possibilities of future movements by situating collective action or action-in-concert in relation to social justice understood in its temporal as well as its sociocultural context.

**Keywords:** *Transgenerational solidarity; historical injustice; structural injustice; systemic injustice; intergenerational solidarity*

## Introduction

Political and religious leaders, activists, academics, and advocates similarly appeal to the importance of learning from history so as not to repeat the mistakes of the past. Many also acknowledge the need for collective action toward a hoped-for future free from injustice. This article explores the combination to these two: the collective action of political solidarity that accounts for the temporal contexts out of which it operates and toward which it contributes. What is the value of history to political solidarity? Does collective action against injustice need to acknowledge past efforts to challenge injustice and oppression alongside recognizing the effect of historical, structural, or systemic injustices? If there is no shared vision of a future, is collective action for social change doomed to fail? At the risk of spoiling the ending, my short answers are ‘a lot, yes, and not necessarily.’

By exploring the potential for transgenerational political solidarity, this article highlights the importance of acknowledging histories of collective movements for social change within current practices of solidarity, practices that, I suggest, disclose future possibilities as well. I offer some modest suggestions for thinking about transgenerational solidarity alongside accounts of intergenerational justice. The elements I suggest as part of transgenerational political solidarity resonate within local and national solidary movements that have a global reach, especially movements that seek to remedy the injustice of egregious historical wrongs like slavery, land theft during colonization, structural racism, and systemic sexual abuse or violence.

The first section offers a brief sketch of intergenerational social solidarity and intergenerational justice. Numerous theorists discuss the import of social solidarity for maintaining institutions of justice across generations. More recent discussions of intergenerational justice build on these to address obligations of reparations for historical injustices and obligations of responsibility for ensuring continuance of public goods for nonoverlapping future generations. Social solidarity addresses community cohesion and consistency across time, offering valuable insight for maintaining and revising institutions of justice. This discussion of intergenerational justice and social solidarity sets the stage for my primary concern: what might be learned from considerations of transgenerational political solidarity? I turn, in the second section, to political solidarity as a form of collective response to ameliorate historical injustice, structural injustice, and systemic violence. Although political solidarity appears in numerous contexts outside these forms of injustice, I highlight these because they help to illustrate the importance of history for understanding contemporary contexts of oppression. Stories of injustice - how narratives are framed and by whom - impact experiences of current social and political situations, especially contemporary situations characterized by injustice, oppression, or violence. Moreover, the histories of political solidarities that sought to transform unjust social arrangements also impact contemporary efforts to do the same. These histories, too, ought to be part of political theorizing. In short, I hold that injustice that spans generations suggests the need to think about the political solidarity movements across generations that seek social transformation. The third section draws from these discussions to offer modest proposals for elements of a transgenerational political solidarity for global justice. Drawing insight from movements to address the historical injustice of colonial land theft, multigenerational systemic sexual abuse, and historical and structural racism — movements that have grappled with how to deal with the successes and failures of past generations of activists engaged in political solidarity while also

realizing their own limitations to accomplishing the goal they collectively seek — I suggest that theories and practices of global justice benefit from attending to transgenerational political solidarity broadly understood. Transgenerational political solidarity — understanding some collective movements for social change across past, present, and future as acting in concert—is not about maintaining a stable narrative of solidarity. Rather, it is a commitment (1) to bear witness to past injustices and struggles against injustice, especially while navigating through disagreement in a manner that affirms commitment to the collective cause, (2) to find support in and echo the cause of past movements for social change even while owning or being self-consciously critical of past failures, and (3) to foreground the possibilities of future movements by situating collective action or action-in-concert in relation to social justice understood in its temporal as well as its sociocultural context.

Analysis of historical, structural, or systemic injustice recognizes the need to frame past injustice within contemporary accounts of injustice; so too, past social justice efforts offer important framing for contemporary struggles that engage in forward-looking collective efforts to transform situations of injustice. Addressing issues of transgenerational political solidarity, a solidarity that seemingly transverses generations, offers a way of thinking about social justice movements as contributing elements for global social justice even while they disrupt or challenge that which they take to be unjust.

### **Intergenerational Justice and Social Solidarity**

Political philosophy has recently embraced discussions of intergenerational *justice* with special emphasis on the obligations to or burden sharing with future generations. Global crises like climate change, long-term conflict, and global pandemics add urgency to these discussions. In articulating an account of transgenerational solidarity, it is helpful to distinguish it from intergenerational justice. Intergenerational justice is succinctly described by Kassner as ‘moral obligations presently existing moral agents owe to remote (temporally nonoverlapping) past and future generations’ (Kassner, 2011: 540; see also Santos Campos, 2018 for a survey of the intergenerational justice debates). Implicit in accounts of intergenerational justice is an acknowledgement that institutions and obligations of justice must consider others who no longer exist or who have yet to exist. The focus is on what is owed, how redistributive theories of justice deal with future possible peoples, and whether what is done today affects relations of justice to future generations. But there are good reasons to identify the limitations of even these temporally expansive distributive accounts of justice.

Although some accounts of intergenerational justice appeal to the obligations of the current generation to ameliorate past injustices (e.g., Kassner, 2011; Ingram, 2012; Neiman, 2020), the primary emphasis in the literature of intergenerational justice pertains to what is owed to future generations and what intergenerational obligations inform actions of current moral agents. The point is, at least in part, to assess the costs of current distributive policies while recognizing that there is a moral obligation to future generations. In both deontological and utilitarian accounts, failing to account for the obligations to remote generations creates a gap or blind spot in considerations of justice for who will bear the costs of actions of the current generation.

Historical injustice, and discussions of who owes what to whom based on what ancestors did or did not do, that is, questions of accountability and reparations for past injustice, are relatively rarer in the recent literature but arguably central to the question of intergenerational injustice (Neiman, 2020; Thompson, 2002; Truccone-Borgogno, 2022; Waldron, 2004). Given the current climate change crisis and the crisis in institutions of democracy, it might be understandable that so much emphasis in the literature on intergenerational justice is on obligations of the current generation not to harm future possible people by overestimating the claims of current generation's rights. Similarly, the obligation to respect the sacrifices of previous generations in creating institutions of democracy and to ameliorate the claims of current peoples based on historical injustices to their ancestors provide compelling reasons that the demands of justice require intergenerational considerations. The temporally nonoverlapping aspect of intergenerational justice poses an obvious challenge for theories of justice. People are situated differently in relation to liability for past and current harm and that difference can widen as temporal situatedness is factored into liability calculations.

While intergenerational justice focuses on distribution of burdens of our common living and the impact of distributive policies on future generations, intergenerational social solidarity focuses on what binds a people across generations and what obstacles appear to block connection among diverse people. Social solidarity across generations indicates the lived connections between peoples that ground the institutions of justice but also exist beyond or outside institutions of justice: what is it that accounts for the constitution of an aggregate of individuals into a people across time? Or more commonly, what makes a people a people.

Given the need to identify the rights claimant and the duty bearer in intergenerational justice, and given the focus on creating stable just institutions,

intergenerational social solidarity appears to be implied in the institution building of intergenerational justice, or, alternatively, social solidarity refers more narrowly to one aspect of intergenerational justice: the redistributive relations of currently existing peoples.<sup>1</sup> The former is the approach in at least some discussions of bounded civic solidarities concerned with solidarity within nation-states maintaining just institutions for overlapping generations (see, e.g., Banting and Kymlicka, 2017). Keith Banting and Will Kymlicka speculate that the ties that bind societies through policies that support the poor and vulnerable, which they call ‘redistributive solidarity,’ ‘change slowly, perhaps even only intergenerationally’; that the gradual loss of support for social programs is itself a matter of intergenerational justice (Banting and Kymlicka, 2017: 11). Banting and Kymlicka argue that solidarity is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition of a just society, ‘to protect the vulnerable, to ensure equal opportunities, and to mitigate undeserved inequalities particularly if they are at risk of being passed on intergenerationally’ (Banting and Kymlicka, 2017: 7). They focus on intergenerational justice lived through redistributive solidarity practices.

Summarizing the findings of two empirical studies, Banting and Kymlicka highlight the role of intergenerational solidarity in constructing and maintaining the norms of justice within nations:

‘The normative content of nationhood—what it means to be an American, Canadian, French—does not fall fully formed from the sky, but is constructed over time by elite discourse and the operations of institutions and passed on from one generation to the next by families and other reference groups’ (Banting and Kymlicka, 2017: 37-38).

Their focus is, of course, on bounded solidarities which, they propose, need ‘to be built continuously, and there are civil society organizations in all Western nations are [*sic*] dedicated to this process’ (Banting and Kymlicka, 2017: 27). The normative content of a people is constructed over time and passed down

---

1 Other fields have employed ‘Intergenerational solidarity’ for decades to analyze and measure the relationship cohesion between old and young, both within families and within societies (Bengston and Roberts, 1991; Roberts et al., 1991). The dominant account of ‘intergenerational solidarity’ was developed by Roberts and Bengston (1991) to offer a ‘theory of solidarity among parents and children during the adult family life course’ (Roberts and Bengston, 1991: 856). Bengston is widely credited with devising an account of solidarity for sociological research on the family that dissects aspects of the relation along six dimensions: affectual, associational, functional, consensual, normative, and structural (Bengston and Roberts 1991; Bengston and Oyama, 2007; Roberts et al., 1991). Bengston later expanded this theory to address not only the ‘microgens’ of the family but also the ‘macrogens’ of society and groups (Bengston and Oyama, 2007). Bengston’s work set the agenda for family studies focusing on cohesion rather than conflict and influenced research in other fields, including business (e.g., discussion of the family firm), migration studies (e.g., transnational families), and gerontology (e.g., obligations to aging relatives).

from one generation to the next and underpins the institutions of justice that are secured and sustained by a people.

The alternative, that intergenerational solidarity just means social solidarity across currently existing generations, is present in some discussions of social security, the welfare state, and similar institutionalized mechanisms of support. Intergenerational solidarity also appears in legal contexts as a way to frame discussions of economic concerns related to pension systems for aging populations, especially in nations where population growth has stalled. Fewer workers paying into the pension system impacts the longterm sustainability of those systems (Kasagi, 2020). The focus of intergenerational family transfers has gradually overshadowed this social justice approach to redistributive intergenerational solidarity (Budowski and Nollert, 2021: 6; McDaniel, 1997).

The emphasis in political philosophy, then, tends to be on building stable institutions of justice, which rely on moral relationships across generations, affirm connection, validate the social whole, and at times raise challenges to push the institutions of justice to be ever more expansive. Social solidarity among the people provides a basis for communal regulations and the rule of law (Bayertz, 1998). One of the very few accounts of ‘transgenerational solidarity’ in political theory is found in Rainer Bauböck’s essay on ‘Citizenship and Collective Identities as Political Sources of Solidarity in the European Union.’ Bauböck, too, is concerned with social solidarity, or the cohesiveness of a people across time. Transgenerational solidarity, he suggests, might be conceptualized as identity or birthright, defining citizenship in a political community across generations. Bauböck argues that such a conceptualization fails to account for the diversity of people within a political community (Bauböck, 2017: 91-95), but it illustrates some of what is at stake in discussions of transgenerational solidarity.

What connects people across (transgenerational) generations must account for the diversity of participant-members, the varied contexts they inhabit over time, and the shifting conditions of justice due both to internal changes (like population fluctuations) and external changes (like migration and climate change). Peter Hall argues that narratives, together with symbols and myths, are part of the collective imaginary. National identities emerge from collective imaginaries which are themselves constantly recreated. Transgenerational social solidarity contributes to the narrative of why a ‘people’ is a ‘people’ while also, and critically, revising that narrative in light of new conditions and diverse participation. ‘Such imaginaries,’ Hall argues,

‘are a feature of the public sphere in all societies. At their heart are sets of narratives linking a nation’s past to its present and specifying its aspirations

for the future. Collective imaginaries define the boundaries of membership in the community and offer conceptions of what its members can legitimately demand of others and expect in return' (Hall, 2017: 214).

Similarly focusing on the future, Bauböck argues that 'relations of solidarity in a political community [are]...territorially, temporally, and in many cases also federally structured' thereby providing a thin notion of social solidarity that may be activated for civic and democratic solidarity (2017: 102-3) built on forward looking narratives. Bauböck concludes, saying 'coherent collective identity narratives can be developed for each level of political community without relying on shared national identity' (2017: 103). Transgenerational social solidarity involves people across multiple generations creating and recreating narratives, enacting a responsibility to fellow solidaristic actors. Bauböck addresses the question of transgenerational social or civic solidarity for political entities, specifically the European Union, suggesting that every theory of global justice presupposes some account of solidarity or social cooperation, and global justice needs a social imaginary capable of sustaining social solidarity (Bauböck, 2017: 102). Political community is a result of dynamic narratives of collective togetherness, not as a source of them (Bauböck, 2017: 103; Hall, 2017). Empirical evidence, too, points to forward-looking narratives, narratives about collective futures, as more important for solidarity than backward-looking narratives about shared historical pasts (Bauböck, 2017; Hall, 2017). Narratives are fluid and responsive, they shape the people even as individual people shape them. 'Collective identities among citizens should not be understood as rooted in what makes them similar to each other, but as narratives about their shared interests in membership or, in Rogers Smith's apt phrase, as stories of peoplehood' (Bauböck, 2017:100, citing Smith, 2003). Using a hoped-for future to narrate the present may be a distinguishing characteristic of 'transgenerational,' as opposed to 'intergenerational,' solidarities.

Social and civic solidarity - intergenerationally and transgenerationally - are valuable for 'motivating compliance with the demands of justice' (Banting and Kymlicka, 2017: 7). Scholars who study the sources of social and civic solidarity also affirm the importance of *political solidarity* for creating, sustaining, and reforming institutions of justice (e.g., Hall, 2017; Bauböck, 2017; Banting and Kymlicka, 2017). As Hall articulates, the so-called stable social solidarity of political communities is 'vulnerable to the vicissitudes of history' and, it should be added, subject to the critique of contemporary expectations of social justice. It is up to social leaders acting in solidarity 'to argue for inclusive visions of social justice' (Hall, 2017: 217). In other words, by challenging institutions of justice and disrupting accepted narratives of a people, political solidarity brings

to light what is forgotten or obscured, who is dominated or excluded, and how relations of justice are not always as they seem.

Justice or institutions of justice are not timeless entities. They need to be reimagined as conditions change, challenged when they fail to secure justice for all social groups, and disrupted when they are infected by structural injustice. Political solidarity, collective action forged to bring about social change, provides a source for forward-looking commitment that seeks to ensure justice through social criticism and direct challenge. It also entails personal transformation and transformed relations to others, two elements that might be important in thinking about the vicissitudes of social relations across generations.

### **Why Transgenerational Political Solidarity Matters: Historical Injustice, Structural Injustice, and Systemic Violence**

What if so-called stable institutions of justice are part of the problem in society though? Descriptions of ‘the people’ often exclude marginalized groups or newcomers, past institutions of justice sometimes build upon or maintain egregious instances of social evil, current accounts of value or relations of exchange are affected by structural injustices, systemic practices reliant on long histories of injustice or abuse of power silence some currently existing people from bearing witness to acts of violence. In short, the experiences of injustice today might challenge, reflect, or amplify instances of injustice in the past, even within relations and institutions designed to be just. The acknowledgement of historical, structural, or systemic injustice impels a look at efforts to disrupt so-called cohesive accounts of a people and stable institutions of justice precisely because they demonstrate a failure to achieve justice for some denizens of a political community. In addition, given that historical injustice, structural injustice, and, at times, systemic injustice span multiple generations and inform current social and political relations, there is good reason to think that the various efforts to remediate or ameliorate injustice ought also to be understood with some attention to their impact across generations or their need to persist and adapt across multiple generations. Those collective efforts have some transformative effect on people and circumstances, as well as on the recollection of the past and the impact of that recollection on contemporary actors. In short, participants in political solidarity responding to historical, structural, and systemic injustice may find they are also inheritors of past solidarity movements for social change. I am not claiming a cohesive or inherited identity, nor even an extension of group consciousness through time; rather, transgenerational political solidarity directs attention to how current movements carry the weight and act on the transformations of past actions while opening space for future

likelihoods of solidary action against injustice.

Political solidarity is solidarity that connects variously situated individual actors committed to a cause to end oppression, injustice, or tyranny. Adding an additional modifier: ‘intergenerational political solidarity’ signifies solidaristic participants across current overlapping generations who act together in what might be called an intergenerational movement; and ‘transgenerational political solidarity’ signifies those who act acknowledging solidary actors who will come after and in recognition of those who have come before in nonoverlapping generations or transgenerational struggle, regardless of a cohesive connection between generational solidary movements. Rather than the questions from intergenerational justice—who owes what to whom and why—transgenerational political solidarity asks what is the current experience of injustice, how is it rooted in the past, how does history and memory of injustice impact the experience of injustice, and how do past collective struggles against injustice impact the current relationships within the struggle? In addition, because political solidarity looks toward a hopeful future free from the oppression and injustice, it asks how will we be remembered by future generations of activists and what practices might we model to ensure open transformative potential?

Although social solidarity, as we have seen, contributes to maintaining institutions of justice, political solidarity is collective effort among diverse peoples challenging injustice. Broadly speaking, in the case of structural and systemic injustice, political solidarity – the solidarity of movements seeking social change – mobilizes to critique the structures or systems and to draw attention to their impact on some members of the community or social whole; it may also suggest methods of revising structures or otherwise assess the applications of justice within society (e.g., Donahue-Ochoa, 2019; McKean, 2020; Young, 2011). Collective memories of injustices also highlight the complex and contested history of interaction among those who struggle to bring about positive social change in political solidarity. Current actors are not viewed solely as individual persons participating in struggle, but as inheritors of the good and bad of past actors who similarly engaged; they need to be aware of previous actions in struggles, especially those actions between privileged persons acting together with those who suffer injustice (Land, 2015: 52 and 50). Current political solidarity movements, too, will be remembered both for their successes and their failures, their inclusions and exclusions.

In the rest of this section, I focus on understanding the value of historical framing for contemporary conceptions and experiences of injustice and attempts to ameliorate that injustice. I offer brief definitions of historical, structural, and

systemic injustice. Recalling the collective efforts in political solidarity against injustice to bring about transformative social change impacts contemporary relations of solidarity and foregrounds future possible movements, I argue alongside other scholars and activists for the value of memory and history in political solidarity movements. Although not all forms of oppression or injustice that become the target of political solidarity result from historical, structural, or systemic injustice, understanding the nature of injustices that span generations provides additional impetus for thinking about the solidaristic social movements that seek to bring about transformative social change. I then turn, in the next section, to articulating some modest proposals for intentionally engaging in transgenerational political solidarity.

Historical injustice is understood as an event or historical practice in the past that ‘made the world worse’ (Neiman, 2020: 211). Examples of historical injustice include colonialism, race-based slavery, and the Holocaust. Although the particular injustice at issue might have ceased, the effects of the injustice continue for generations: who and how the history is told is shaped by the particular relationship the narrator has to the historical injustice; present-day instances of exclusion, discrimination, or bias might be framed within the backdrop of the historical injustice and thereby carry the weight of that history; even present-day practices that might otherwise appear to be neutral might be tinged with the past practice in such a way that makes them unjust.

The past isn’t finished yet; as Iris Young reminds us,

‘It is a mad and dangerous wish [...] to break with the past entirely, to aim to make the past irrelevant. If we do not face the facts of historic injustice, we may be haunted by victims’ ghosts and destined to repeat the perpetrators’ wrongs’ (Young, 2011: 172).

Histories of injustice affect the current framing of issues and impact the current situation of oppression or experiences of injustice. Colonial land theft is a good example to illustrate the effects. Contemporary governmental policies toward indigenous people are tinged by the histories of displacement and removal. The global practice of colonial land theft impacts relations between nations today, especially former colonies and former colonizers, as well. Further, well-meaning ancestors of former colonizers who seek to work with indigenous peoples are heirs to perpetrators of a grave historical injustice; their actions will be interpreted through that history.

Thinking about how the stories of past injustice are told and allowing different generations to contribute and innovate to the telling as well as to the vocabulary used to name the injustice, creating space where the values and cultural

meanings of past injustices can inform current struggles and set agendas for future hopes, discloses the value of intergenerational and transgenerational thinking for political solidarity. Young, for instance, states,

‘We are responsible in the present for how we narrate the past. How individuals and groups in the society decide to tell the story of past injustice and its connection to or break with the present says much about how members of the society relate to one another now and whether and how they can fashion a more just future’ (Young, 2011: 182).

The point is not merely to tell a story or add a story to an otherwise sterile articulation of an issue; the point is to understand that in naming the injustice, each generation identifies the unique, contextualized, and embodied wounds of the injustice. However, the continuity of the people identified as victims of historical injustice need not rest on a direct identity or inheritance. Collective memory can stand in as the link and allows diverse peoples to both recognize the wrong and participate in solidarity to address its contemporary ramifications (Neiman, 2020; Truccone-Borgogno, 2022).

Whereas historical injustice usually indicates a particularly harmful past action or event, the effects of which continue to reverberate in collective memory, structural injustice occurs when oppression in any of its forms becomes embedded in the structures of society, repeating or reinforcing harm through economic, political, social, or cultural structures (Donahue-Ochoa, 2019, 96; Owen, 2021; Young, 2011). Following discussions in social science literatures, social structures are neither attributable to individual actors nor independent of them. Structures result from past actions which may or may not be intentional; as ‘structural’ they are part of the situation or context confronting contemporary actors. Daniel Finn explains,

‘Social structures emerge from the actions of individuals and require the participation of individuals for their continued existence. But structures have an independent existence and independent causal effects in the lives of those individuals, often at odds with the intentions of those who consciously initiated the creation of the structures in the first place’ (Finn, 2016: 151).

Finn’s account leans on the aggregation of individual decisions that create collective or social structures; other accounts of social structures rely less on aggregating individual actions and more on the collective relation in order to highlight the sometimes-unintentional creation of social structures through collective action or inaction (Shelby, 2016).

Structural injustice results from individual or collective action that is either

intentional or unintentional. Injustice might hide—as ‘natural’ or ‘essential’—aspects of a social system that have adverse or harmful impact on some groups of people. The key is that injustice is embedded in the structures (normative, political, material, or cultural) that shape contemporary social relations and future possibilities for individuals and groups. Moreover, structures that are created through the past actions or inactions and that affect present and future possibilities take on a life of their own. In this sense, it might be argued that they become ontologically real, functioning independently of the intentions of individuals who may not be aware of how their actions contribute to upholding them (Finn, 2016).

Structural injustice has been a useful concept in theorizing what is wrong with enduring relations rooted in racism, as well as other global issues. Structural injustice acknowledges the impact of social structures on groups and demonstrates that power sometimes operates beyond the isolatable actions of liable individuals. Even well-meaning attempts to remedy current situations of injustice may go awry if they fail to account for the structural elements of injustice that develop over time. Collective past action and inaction in quotidian existence, without the intent to cause harm, sustains or fosters structural injustice, making it particularly difficult to identify and eliminate. Although some unjust structures have clear initiation points and identifiable blameworthy perpetrators, global structural injustice develops over generations, often without malicious intent, and creates unforeseen negative consequences on the lives and freedoms of some groups of people. Sometimes structural injustice results from historical injustice. Structural racism in the United States, for instance, is tied to slavery and Jim Crow era discrimination (Shelby, 2016: 45). At other times, it is a negative effect of other policies or procedures, as when social structures exclude people on the basis of race, gender, sexuality, or disability.

Although many accounts of injustice refer to structural and systemic injustice interchangeably, a distinct understanding of systemic injustice is worth considering. Accordingly, systemic injustice may be understood as injustice that is systematically supported or enforced; although individual actors within the system may not be aware of the systemic nature of the injustice, or may feel powerless to change it, the systemic nature of the injustice is, like structural injustice, sustained through the actions of individuals who may or may not be consciously aware of their role in the system. Unlike structural injustice, though, systemic injustice involves intentionality on the part of individual actors, even if they do not consider their unjust acts as part of a system of unjust acts. Patterns of sexual abuse of children and the efforts to conceal or coverup the abuse within institutions are two prominent and interconnected examples

of systemic injustices that appear also mutually to support each other. Systemic injustice violates the duty to establish and maintain just social arrangements in a system of social cooperation (Shelby, 2016: 222). For our purposes, it is also important to note that systemic injustice can span generations and has a multigenerational effect. Housing value assessments in the United States, for instance, demonstrate the systemic nature of racism insofar as houses owned by Black people are frequently undervalued by appraisers. The effects of this systemic injustice, however, continues for generations as family wealth accumulation is negatively impacted by the unjust assessment. Addressing the systemic nature of the unjust appraisals deals with only one part of the multigenerational injustice.

These three forms of injustice, albeit conceptually distinct, share much in common and frequently overlap in substantive ways. For the current purposes, historical injustice, structural injustice, and systemic injustice demonstrate the potential longevity and embeddedness of injustice that demands transgenerational struggle to bring about substantive social transformation.

History, structures, and systems of injustice affect perceptions of contemporary situations for solidary social movements and impact contemporary decisions in at least three ways. First, the past may implicate current solidary actors responding to contemporary experiences of injustice, whether experienced by themselves or others. Wealthy white landowners, privileged by intergenerational wealth transfer, for instance, are implicated in the systemic injustice of discriminatory property ownership practices and policies directed against people of color in the US. That necessarily affects the relations between advocates for antiracism. Contemporary Germans advocating for migration reform might find the historical injustice of the Holocaust impacts how some proposals for housing migrants during the current crisis are perceived. And efforts by some clergy to hold fellow clergy of the Catholic church accountable for systemic sexual abuse might be hindered by the systemic nature of the injustice that imparts suspicion on any Church-leadership-based reform. Second, and the flip side of the previous, historical injustice may affect one's own decision-making. One may be reticent to act in particular ways because the actions risk echoing unjust actions of ancestors, even if the action itself is an important contribution to seeking justice. Ancestors of colonizers may be reluctant to join in solidarity with indigenous peoples for land rights out of fear that their actions will be perceived as new forms of colonizing (Land, 2015). Third, the race, sex, class position of actors in the current moment may give reason for suspicion among others who have suffered under historical, structural, or systemic injustice. In other words, beyond being identified with the community of oppressors, the

intersectional identities of race, sex, class, and others may accord some solidary actors a privileged or powerful position that makes mutuality or trusting relations difficult within political solidarity movements. These facets of the current situation and how solidary actors respond to them may also form part of what options are open to future generations of actors in political solidarity for a cause.

One of the few articulations of an intergenerational political solidarity is found in the most recent social encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*. Pope Francis voiced a deep concern about how the loss of historical consciousness is affecting our collective engagement in the world (Francis, 2020: §13). His concern is that the world cannot afford to lose the lessons of history, even when or especially when that history provides evidence of humanity's failures. Speaking of the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Pope says 'We cannot allow present and future generations to lose the memory of what happened. It is a memory that ensures and encourages the building of a more fair and fraternal future' (Francis, 2020: §248). The Pope invokes a notion of intergenerational solidarity that suggests the outline for obligations to the past and the future. He articulates the need to bear witness to future generations of the memories of the past so that lessons learned from past mistakes may animate a collective consciousness that inspires action to combat similar human failures in the future. Quoting his message for the World Day of Peace on January 1, 2020, the Pope says, 'We need to "keep alive the flame of collective conscience, bearing witness to succeeding generations to the horror of what happened", because that witness "awakens and preserves the memory of the victims, so that the conscience of humanity may rise up in the face of every desire for dominance and destruction"' (Francis, 2020: §249).

In the process of social change, solidary actors would do well to attend to the persistent need to revisit approaches aimed at alleviating injustice felt in the present moment with one eye toward to past so as not to reinscribe structures or systems of injustice or echo the harms of history, and one eye toward to the future so as to create space for critical reflection on current practices and beliefs, realizing that movements are fallible even in the commitment to a hopeful future free from the injustice.

Accounts of intergenerational justice have highlighted the value of understanding history for thinking of what is owed to heirs of historical injustice or for identifying and ameliorating structural and systemic injustice. Incorporating transgenerational awareness of solidary efforts also proves valuable to current movements of political solidarity. As suggested, histories of

injustice contribute to the experience of present-day situations and how those situations are experienced by heirs of past injustice. Indigenous peoples in Australia, as Clare Land (2015) explains, experience current efforts to promote distributive justice differently than white descendants of British colonizers because of the collective memory of historical injustice. That history needs to be folded into generalized conceptions of the requirements of justice. Situations that in other contexts might be perceived as just arrangements might be revealed to be contributing to structural or systemic injustice in the light of history. So too, acknowledging the histories, structures, and systems of different forms of injustice demonstrates both how deep and how entrenched or networked some forms of injustice can be. Efforts to ameliorate injustice must be vigilant and open to identifying the impact of injustice and avoiding recreating it through similar habits of domination or oppression.

Acknowledging interpretations of historical, structural, and systemic injustice relies on properly understanding the multigenerational impact of injustice. Given this historical rootedness, identifying responsibility for injustice and holding people to account becomes complicated, as theorists of intergenerational justice have argued. But one does not need to be a member of the same community that ‘bequeathed those public evils to us.’ Truccone-Burgogno offers continuous collective memory: ‘This responsibility is not based on being members of the same community who committed past injustices. Rather, the responsibility for redressing these injustices is grounded on the collective inheritance received by our predecessors’ (Truccone-Burgogno, 2022: 14; see also Land, 2015: 103). While political theorists continue to grapple with necessary collective responsibility for intergenerational injustice, it is also worth considering how collective efforts through political solidarity against injustice are shaped by acknowledgment of past efforts and how critical conceptions of contemporary solidary movements are temporally contextualized as well.

### **Toward Transgenerational Political Solidarity**

Speaking about Germany owning up to its crimes after the Holocaust, Susan Neiman remarks that ‘It took decades of struggle, often intergenerational struggle, to force changes in notions of citizenship, governmental policies, educational systems and physical iconography’ (Neiman, 2020: 214). Neiman’s insight may be read as indicating both the struggle between overlapping or concurrent generations as they grapple with what it means to be a people responsible for immense historical injustice and as the ongoing transgenerational struggle to reconcile and ameliorate injustice for heinous crimes that continue to reverberate in contemporary lived experience.

Just as the histories of injustice affect experiences of oppression, domination, and injustice today, so too do the examples of successful collective action, failed or recreated dominance in the solidary movements that sought to challenge historical, structural, and systemic injustice, and the substantive successes through transformative solidary relations contribute to present-day movements to create social change. Histories of past collective efforts against injustice affect how solidary actors conceive of themselves and are perceived by others. Relationships of solidarity today are impacted by the actions of past generations of actors in political solidarity. At times, those histories of struggle create a backdrop of support: present-day actors recognize that they are not alone in struggle and bear witness to the brave people who struggled previously. At other times, those histories of struggle offer fodder for critique and corrective measures: present-day actors acknowledge the mistakes of the past and strive to avoid them.

By recognizing that current movements are perceived as inheriting strategies and agendas of previous collective efforts against injustice, current movements might be better positioned to articulate their own aims, making distinctions to distinguish (or distance) themselves from past actors and acknowledging the inheritance of historically successful efforts. Current movements bear witness to past efforts and carry forward a commitment to act collectively against injustice. In bearing witness, they acknowledge what has been transformed and how that transformation impacts current relations in solidary as well as current conceptualizations of what needs to be done. They do not necessarily carry forward the same aims and goals of past actors in political solidarity but acknowledging how current actors may be associated with the past provides moral and epistemic tools for moving forward. Land's discussion of nonindigenous solidarity with indigenous peoples in Australia further highlights the value of history to solidary movements. The current political landscape has been shaped by the history of political involvement. Land explains that present day actors need to be aware of what has gone on before, others likely associate them with or understand their actions within the context of past solidary relations even though they themselves might have no ties to previous solidarity movements (Land, 2015: 50).

In the case of historical injustice, political solidarity in the present moment may be mobilized to support the claim rights of some participants and expand the opportunities for making amends for historical atrocity (e.g., Land, 2015; Shelby, 2005). Moreover, present-day actors in political solidarity will make mistakes and be surpassed by new actors responding to the experiences of injustice (perhaps transformed by past and current struggles) but situated in

new contexts that affect how the history is understood and the future envisioned. Land notes that the decolonial movement among Aboriginal people has ‘roots in the struggle of previous generations’ (2015: 38) and that the politics accrued meaning as it spanned generations (2015: 42). At times, the political scaffold of the past is an acknowledgement of the lack of substantive change and at other times it is a resource for creative strategies (2015: 38 and 42). In short, histories of political solidarities, contested histories of interaction, are part of collective memory and impact present day efforts in solidarity (Land, 2015: 52).

Histories of political solidarities contribute to collective understanding of appropriate actions within the struggle against injustice, oppression, or violence, and the possibilities of imagining new relationships in the future. Social movements of political solidarity that learn from past and think toward the future, then, may be considered transgenerational. But not all social movements intentionally engage transgenerational thinking in this way. Adding the additional modifier highlights a temporal awareness that actors in political solidarity are aware of histories of collective action and acknowledge their own fallibility in the light of history. Present actors in political solidarity inherited a constructed set of interests, political structure, a narrative framing, and a set of tools to combat injustice; in addition to the collective responsibility for historical injustice on the basis of shared memory offered by Truccone-Borgogno (2022) and Land (2015), the collective memories and contested histories of political solidarities impact possibilities for action and relationships for social change.

Political solidarity intervenes in global justice efforts at appropriate moments to critique and challenge so that more inclusive relations and institutions of justice are fostered. The examples used throughout this article – colonial land theft, racism, and systemic sexual abuse – are global injustices as well as local. Global historical and structural injustices, and global systemic violence, challenge actors in political solidarity to take up the collective responsibility to create change and, given the entrenched nature of all three, a compelling argument for transgenerational political solidarity presents itself. Transgenerational political solidarity responding to global injustice is challenged to think about how crossing borders – temporal as well as spatial – contributes to not only the understanding of what is at stake in struggles against injustice but also how to advance an open future aware that present day actors may be faulted or may unintentionally contribute to new systems or structures of injustice.

In the rest of this section, I offer three modest proposals for current generations of solidary actors. These proposals do not constitute a normative framework for transgenerational solidarity. They are not meant to. Rather they suggest that

thinking about current political solidarity transgenerationally, acknowledging the histories of collective action against injustice while recognizing the fallibility of the current movement and opening avenues for future collective actions, is another form of critical lens through which to gauge the prospects and promise for social change. The proposals are meant to take seriously the impact of collective memory as integral to acting in the present, and to acknowledge that the present political solidarity will be the fodder for future collective possibilities in political solidarity.

As should be evident, claiming the value of transgenerational political solidarity is not claiming that solidary actors identify with one another across generational divides; on the contrary, political solidarity brings people together on the basis of a shared commitment to a cause. Although solidary actors across and through generations do not act with each other, they do act in concert for a relevantly similar cause (that itself is transformed and re-understood in different generational temporal contexts). They may not acknowledge a connection between fellow actors across generations, but others may perceive such transgenerational actors as solidary insofar as they share the commitment to the cause.<sup>2</sup> A public memory of collective action against injustice accompanies the public memory of historical or long-standing structural injustice; current solidary actors may be heirs of both those who perpetrated injustice and those who fought against it. Acknowledging that inheritance, especially the failures, contributes significant information for contemporary practices of solidarity and may be a component of trust among solidary actors (Land, 2015; Neiman, 2020).

Transgenerational political solidarity is a political solidarity of committed participants acting in concert with nonoverlapping generations. It is forged around a common cause and recreated with successive generations in light of contemporary conditions and contexts but inheriting from past actors who similarly committed to this cause. Claiming this as a relation of political solidarity implies that participants have a moral relation to fellow participants and to the goal. As we saw in the previous section, that cause or goal, as well as the circumstances or situation in which injustice is perceived and understood,

---

<sup>2</sup> Shelby discusses the problem of generational divide within accounts of solidarity built on shared ethnocultural identity. He notes, in particular, the 'intense intergenerational disagreement over the value and positive or negative influence of hip-hop culture' (Shelby, 2005: 227). Shelby offers his conception of 'thinly black' as a remedy, not to the intergenerational disagreement over hip-hop, but to the possibilities of connection across cultural differences. As he says, 'all blacks have a vested interest in racial equality, regardless of cultural identification, class position, gender, or age....And given their common classification as thinly black, blacks can identify with each other across these differences, for they share the susceptibility of antiblack racism that this classification makes possible' (Shelby, 2005: 228).

transforms over time. Who experiences oppression, and how responsibility for oppression and injustice is understood, changes as generations, systems, and structures transform—for the better or for the worse.

Given both the nature of political solidarity and the impact of history on social movements as well as the experience of injustice, political solidarity that extends through nonoverlapping generations must consider the various relations to disparate others committed to a cause across time (Scholz, 2008). At least three elements of a transgenerational political solidarity begin to come into focus: (I) to navigate through disagreement in a manner that affirms commitment to the collective cause in a way that bears witness to past struggles against injustice, (II) to accept the inheritance of the failures of past movements, knowing that present-day actors in solidarity are often perceived through the lens of those failures, and (III) to foreground the possibilities of future movements by situating collective action or action-in-concert in relation to social justice understood in temporal as well as sociocultural context, or, in other words, to critically reflect on how present-day solidary efforts will be viewed by future actors.

Navigating through disagreement in a way that bears witness to past struggles against injustice affirms commitment and serves as a positive acknowledgement of those who struggled in the past. Transgenerational political solidarity seeks to contribute a new social imaginary that understands and interprets histories of injustice, identifies contemporary structural injustice and its rootedness in history, and then learns from the efforts amassed to struggle against injustice in its systemic or structural forms. In so doing, actors in solidarity will encounter disagreements over the nature of injustice and the methods used to understand and combat it. Navigating through disagreement is one way that solidary actors foreground connection. Countless movements for social change navigate through disagreement about new and old methods, reframe issues, and otherwise adapt to new conditions on the ground while profiting from the wisdom and experience of history. Among contemporaneous solidary actors, this often takes the form of active communication aimed at renegotiating aims, methods, and ends. Transgenerationally, the histories of struggle provide motive, impetus, inspiration, and heritage to present-day struggle. Present-day actors operate in a transformed space because of the sacrifices of past generations of solidary actors. Those who struggle against the systemic oppression of sexual violence, for instance, have inherited structures of accountability and public awareness that contribute to contemporary struggle. Bearing witness to that acknowledges the responsibility to maintain, sustain, build upon, and critically evaluate those inherited tools. They also may be strengthened by the knowledge of generations

of fellow solidary actors struggling against injustice.

Of course, different generations are also challenged to confront their biases and overcome their myopia in understanding issues as histories are interpreted and futures forecasted. Across generations, navigating disagreement means honestly confronting the mistakes of history while acknowledging some sense of inheritance. Accepting that contemporary action and understanding may itself be limited or mistaken and that future generations may need to correct contemporary errors (even remediate structural injustice emerging from well-meaning attempts to correct contemporary instances of injustice) and otherwise laying the groundwork for future generations of solidary actors also acknowledges the potential for transgenerational political solidarity.

Movements of political solidarity sometimes get things wrong, tend to be incomplete, and frequently cease functioning as situations change requiring new practices of solidarity and new commitments to the cause. That insight informs the second element: to acknowledge the inheritance of past failures and realize how that history impacts public perceptions of current actions. As histories of things like colonial land theft, systemic sexual abuse, and structural racism reveal, generations will fail to ameliorate all that has been impacted by historical injustice, systemic injustice, and structural injustice. Solidarities that transverse temporal or generational boundaries promise to contribute to social imaginaries that avoid recreating dangerous framings of social relations and seek to live the very relations of justice they advocate through solidarity.

In acknowledging a relation to those who resisted and fought against past injustice, transgenerational political solidarity is not centered on carrying the same project forward, but, rather, determining how and how much present-day actors relate to those past solidaristic actors, to offer criticism of social justice efforts that (however unintentionally) contributed to structural injustice and learn from those actions, to understand how cultural context and values have been reshaped with ever new ones, to rearticulate issues with contemporary terms, to innovate in how issues are articulated and connections made.

The third element is forward-looking: to set agendas for a just future knowing that those agendas will be surpassed and transformed, as will the articulations of the current injustice. Actors in political solidarity need not share a fully formed vision of the future. They share a hope that the future will be different, more just and less oppressive, than the past. Rather than commonality of vision or unity in identity, transgenerational political solidarity engages a forward-looking narrative that affirms collective commitment to a cause to challenge injustice while remaining open to revision and challenge. Political solidarity offers hope

that individual solidary actors find resources in their collective responsibility for a cause. Transgenerational resources include the acknowledgement that understanding and interpretation of current experiences of injustice rest on long histories of value that include the histories of collective efforts at social transformation.

In thinking about the future, the focus is less on an envisioned, stable, achievable end, and more on a future of hope for solidary actors who will come after us, who will help to expand or challenge conceptualizations of justice issues, who will reframe issues in their own language, and who will offer creative new approaches to build relations and challenge dominant frameworks in the work for social justice.<sup>3</sup> As Tommie Shelby explains, a movement to end injustice itself works to lessen the burden for each successive generation, hoping that each generation will succeed. Shelby notes that loyalty and trustworthiness in movements that resist racism may be displayed by working ‘to help ensure that the next generation of blacks has a lighter burden of racial oppression than the present one’ (Shelby, 2002: 259). This is what I refer to as a future of hope; the temporally disparate actors in transgenerational political solidarity strive to understand the temporal context of injustice and the struggles against it; although heirs to past action, contemporary actors may be buoyed by the knowledge of past actors in struggle against injustice and the hope that, like them, future generations will experience less burden in their struggle.

Transgenerational political solidarity, then, is a modification that recognizes the length of some movements for social change. It crosses temporal boundaries, uniting histories of activism and social change along axis for common cause, albeit within different historical contexts and involving different generations of actors. Transformed at each generational moment, histories of injustice and histories of struggle intertwine to inform current experiences of injustice and future possibilities of hope. Participating in the collective movement signals a hoped-for alternative possible future, acknowledging that the current context will also shape the narrative of social change.

## **Conclusion**

---

3 This model contrasts with the suggestion by Davies that the current generation ought to consider leaving some debts for future generations to shoulder. Davies argues that intergenerational solidarity shares equitably with future generations and in doing so, can defer some costs or refrain from solving some problems for the future generations to address: ‘intergenerational solidarity suggests that the short term treatment, the sticking plaster, may at times be more equitable than the more profound cure’ (Davies, 2022). The short-term solution may be worth pursuing but not because contemporary actors wish to distribute the burden of remedying injustice to future generations.

In opening this paper, I asked, ‘What is the value of history to political solidarity? Does collective action against injustice need to acknowledge past efforts to challenge injustice and oppression? If there is no shared vision of a future, is collective action for social change doomed to fail?’ I hope that the foregoing discussion provides the basis for some sound answers.

The value of history may be summarized as multiple. First, the history of injustice contributes to how some people experience and understand current situations of injustice. Second, even seemingly just social or economic relations might, in the light of history, be revealed to be part of structural injustice. Third, the histories of injustice demonstrate how deeply entrenched injustice becomes and hence how efforts to ameliorate injustice must be vigilant about not echoing similar habits of domination or oppression. Fourth, histories of political solidarities reveal what efforts have gone before and impact how solidary actors conceive of themselves and how others conceive of them in current solidarity relations and relations to others. Fifth, such histories of political solidarities ought to contribute to collective understanding of appropriate actions struggling against injustice, oppression, or violence on one’s own behalf and on behalf of another while opening hope for lessened burden on future generations.

Transgenerational political solidarity offers a means of critically reshaping conceptions of global justice in order to understand the impact of day-to-day actions on people both spatially and temporally. Progress is not a linear process. Even the best attempts to secure global justice in particular temporal contexts may end up contributing to structural injustice. Transgenerational political solidarity indicates moral relations that entail both social criticism and reflexive criticism of the solidary movement itself (Scholz, 2008). The hope is to avoid repeating not only the perpetrators’ wrongs but also the wrongs of solidarity as well. In addition, past solidary efforts to create social change demonstrate the potential for expanding current efforts and the prospects for connecting new causes and peoples in the future. Social movements intervene in policy and politics at critical moments to offer a challenge or transformative vision. The ‘collective imaginaries’ of global justice are also subject to this transformative potential of social movements. Lending critical argument and vocabulary, social movements challenge the institutions of global justice to reconceive social boundaries and redefine rights and obligations (Hall, 2017: 217).

Transgenerational solidarity of any sort does not replace necessary institutional solutions to injustice, but the prosocial activities of solidary actors who acknowledge a connection to previous generations of actors and humbly accept that their actions will be critiqued by future generations of actors demonstrate

the potential of ongoing social criticism capable of adapting previous analysis to contemporary (and future) issues. As situations transform and contexts change, so too the relations of political solidarity must be reimagined. Contemporary participants act not because ‘this is how we have always done things’ but because ‘this is what needs to be done in this moment.’ They inherit a history from the generations that have gone before; and they stand as witness to a different possible future not only for future solidary actors but for the global social whole.

---

*Sally J. Scholz*  
*Professor*  
*Villanova University*  
*Email: [sally.scholz@villanova.edu](mailto:sally.scholz@villanova.edu)*



### **References**

Banting K and Kymlicka W (2017) *The Strains of Commitment*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bauböck R (2017) Citizenship and Collective Identities as Political Sources of Solidarity in the European Union. In: Banting K and Kymlicka W (eds) *The Strains of Commitment*. Oxford: Oxford University Press: 80-106

Bayertz K (1999) Four uses of 'Solidarity'. In: Bayertz K (ed) *Solidarity*. Dordrecht: Kluwer: 3-28.

Davies G (2022) What Can The Future Do For Us? Available at: [verfassungsblog.de/solidarity-across-time/](https://www.verfassungsblog.de/solidarity-across-time/) (Last accessed on: August 10 2022).

Donahue-Ochoa T (2019) *Unfreedom for All: How the World's Injustices Harm You*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Finn D (2016) What is a Sinful Social Structure? *Theological Studies* 77/1: 136-164.

Francis (2020) Fratelli Tutti. The Holy See, 3 Oct. 2020, Available at: [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20201003\\_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html) (Last accessed on: 28 September 2023)

Hall P (2017) Political Sources of Social Solidarity. In: Banting K and Kymlicka W (eds) *The Strains of Commitment*. Oxford: Oxford University Press: 201-232.

Ingram D (2012) The Structural Injustice of Forced Migration and the Failings of Normative Theory. *Perspectives on Global Development and Technology* 11:50-71.

Kassner J (2011) Intergenerational Justice. In Chatterjee D (ed) *Encyclopedia of Global Ethics*. Springer: 540-542.

Land C (2015) *Decolonizing Solidarity*. London: Zed books.

McKean B (2020) *Disorienting Neoliberalism*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Neiman S (2020) Justice and History. *Philosophy: The Journal of the Royal Institute of Philosophy* 95/2: 211-225.

Owen D (2021) Solidarity and the Politics of Redress: Structural Injustice, History and Counter-finalities. *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*. Epub ahead of print 10 December 2021: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10677-021-10246-9>

Santos Campos A (2018) Intergenerational Justice Today. *Philosophy Compass*

13/3: Epub e1-e12.

Scholz S (2008) *Political Solidarity*. State College: Penn State University Press.

Shelby T (2002) Foundations of Black Solidarity: Collective Identity or Common Oppression. *Ethics* 112: 231-266.

Shelby T (2005) *We Who Are Dark: The Philosophical Foundations of Black Solidarity*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap.

Shelby T (2016) *Dark Ghettos: Injustice, Dissent, and Reform*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap.

Thompson J (2002) *Taking Responsibility for the Past: Reparation and Historical Justice*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Truccone-Borgogno S (2022) Responding to historical injustices: Collective inheritances and the moral irrelevance of group identity. *European Journal of Political Theory*. Epub ahead of print: <https://doi.org/10.1177/14748851221100094>

Waldron J (2004) Redressing Historic Injustice. In: Meyer L (ed) *Justice in Time: Responding to Historical Injustice*. Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft: 55-77

Young I (2011) *Responsibility for Justice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.