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## BOOK REVIEW

Yerkes, M. A. & Bal, M. (Eds.) (2022). *Solidarity and Social Justice in Contemporary Societies: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Understanding Inequalities*. Springer

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‘Alone, we can do so little; together, we can do so much.’

Helen Keller

*Solidarity and Social Justice in Contemporary Societies* features a collection of finely crafted chapters authored by scholars and researchers with knowledge and expertise in the subject of social justice. The volume has a special focus on social inequalities with balanced perspectives and empirical evidence. The edited volume is intended for social justice-minded readers, practitioners, academics and a general audience. It informs readers of far-reaching impacts brought by gender, age, socio-economic status and ethnic background in our increasingly diverse and dynamic societies marked by digitalisation, climate (in)justice, and the global pandemic. With an overarching aim to provide theoretical insights into the interlocking issues related to inequalities, the line of inquiry extends beyond enduring, growing or changing faces of solidarity in public discourses that serve as a unifying or dividing force for differences in social and cultural values.

The pioneering volume revolves around three main concepts: social inequality, solidarity and social justice. These concepts remain complex and contested in many ways. The editors conceptualise social inequality as the ‘uneven allocation of burdens and valued resources across members of a society based on their group membership, in combination with the undervaluation of these members of society based on this same group membership’, marked by ‘unfair disadvantage’ (Yerkes & Bal, 2022, p. 4).

Likewise, the conception of solidarity evolves and embodies a mutual attachment that transcends group boundaries. It is often expressed through the co-shaping of a shared identity and the willingness to share resources. In allocating resources, two questions are central to social justice: (1) who deserves what and (2) how it should be achieved. Distributive justice (Adams, 1965) deals with the what, whereas procedural justice deals with the how (Lind & Tyler, 1988). The former concerns the burdens and benefits across members of a certain society, while the latter the standardised procedures leading up to the actual attainment and the intended subject (the ‘whom’) in a particular group of members in a given society (Fraser, 1998).

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The book adopts a five-section structure. It starts with an overview of central concepts and issues relating to social equality, solidarity and social justice. Section I contextualises the volume by explicating self-transcending motives, such as solidarity and common identity building, in societal behaviours.

Section II provides five theoretical discussions: (1) Social Identity Theory, represented by the use of 'I' (personal identities) in 'we' (social identities) (Chapter 2); (2) inter-group and intra-group solidarity on individual and societal levels, marked by socio-psychological triggers and barriers (Chapter 3); (3) distributive, procedural justice, interactional justice and justice as recognition, explained by just-world theory and system-justification theory (Chapter 4); (4) capability-based welfare state and self-transcending motive for social justice (Chapter 5); and (5) deservingness and differentiating criteria for resource allocation (Chapter 6).

Building on theoretical bases, Section III provides empirical analyses of social inequality cases, marked by stereotyping based on gender (Chapters 7 and 8), age (Chapters 9 and 10), socio-economic position (Chapters 11 and 12), ethnicity (Chapters 12 and 13), sexual orientation (Chapters 15 and 16), and household constellations (singles, lone parents and multi-parent families). Comparative analyses were conducted cross-country in Europe, Australia, and North America. Key findings include: (1) restricting gender norms and perceptions of people's choices between work and life; (2) benefits of counter-ageism and intergenerational solidarity in elderly and childcare; and (3) social marginalisation and well-being policies of LGBTQA+ groups.

From theories and empirical data to global challenges, Section IV investigates (1) climate change (Chapter 17), (2) digitalisation (Chapter 18), and (3) the global pandemic (Chapter 19), accelerate social inequalities and undermine solidarity in contemporary societies. The main takeaways encompass (1) the impossibility of an equal behavioural change for all social groups in transition to sustainability; (2) the role of digital services as a gap-closer in access to public health services; and (3) pandemic-accelerated bias against the self-employed, flexible workers and citizens with an Asian appearance living in societies outside Asia.

Section V summarises findings and leaves us with several questions: (1) how do our perceptions of stereotypes and perceptions of deservingness influence our understanding of solidarity and social justice in a given society, (2) how do visible fault lines contribute to social inequalities and (3) what we should do in response to these inequalities by fostering solidarity and social justice among different social groups in a certain society.

Evaluating social inequalities seldom follows a linear or singular path, as equalities are experienced differently by different social groups in various societal sectors with varying impacts. Access to care, health, work, and other public services and social resources requires a rethinking of the deservingness of citizens' social rights (income protection, housing, education, and healthcare) and civil rights (due process under the law). Mere stereotyping will neither benefit constructive discussions about under-served social groups nor drive policy changes in the state support system.

The comprehensive volume enriches our understanding of solidarity and social justice in the latest public discourses of contemporary welfare states. By examining patterns of inequality related to visible fault lines (gender, age, sexual identity, and socio-economic status) in the broader global contexts (climate justice, digitalisation and the pandemic), the

contributors to this volume advocate de-stigmatising structural inequalities through solidarity and social justice in several Central and Eastern European countries. This volume provides a panoramic view of social inequalities with practical and actionable insights towards building solidarity.

One sure strength of this edited volume is its interdisciplinary approach to revealing many faces of a complex issue in our contemporary society. The book intends to be multidisciplinary and integrative. It draws on many theory bases from neighbouring disciplines, such as sociology, psychology, and political philosophy in European societies. Another merit is its state-of-art use of empirical evidence to the sense-making process of a complicated and often contended topic. For example, many contributors shed light on the role of governments in the welfare states in response to a cluster of mounting issues, such as employment equality and inclusive growth. By doing so, they challenge readers to reflect critically on patterns of social (in)equality by comparing, contrasting, and making inferences from welfare state responses to these issues and diverging public opinions surrounding inequality.

In Human Rights Studies, there has been a few existing studies on the protection of the right to a fair representation for migrants and minorities in their host society (Yi, 2023). As a reviewer, I resonate with many ideas presented in this volume, in particular with the topic of social justice and inequalities. However, as responsible members of a certain family, community and society, we need to acknowledge the implications of structural inequalities for different groups in various societies. In an equitable society, everyone deserves a fair chance. It is particularly so when accessing public goods and societal resources. Our choice between short-term self-interests and longer-term societal interests holds the key to resolving social dilemmas. Like the prisoner's dilemma, individuals thrive when they do not act cooperatively, but the collective thrives when everyone chooses to cooperate. The very choice defines the destiny of our future generations. Do we want our kids to be worse off than our generation or previous generations?

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