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THE TRANSGENERATIONAL ACTION OF GROWING OLD TOGETHER. AGEISM AND GENERATIONISM IN AGEING SOCIETIES

abstract

This paper explores ageism and generationism in ageing societies through the lens of transgenerative social ontology and critical phenomenology. It argues that the everyday Lifeworld encompasses multi-age groups coexisting in the same contemporaneousness, which sets up for the constitution of personal attitudes and social interactions, both conflictual and cooperative, between people of different ages and generations. Firstly, I draw on Schützian social phenomenology, focusing on the taxonomy of consociates, contemporaries, predecessors, and successors to analyze the shared experience of growing old together and the overlapping of different generations in shaping societal structures and social tensions. Introducing the concept of Future-Maker Generations (FMGs), I identify a transgenerational social unity aimed at challenging systemic injustices and discriminatory acts rooted in stereotypical beliefs about age and generation. Following some insights from Applewhite's manifesto against ageism, the paper addresses collective intentionality and shared values of FMGs, providing a provisional phenomenological inquiry into the enactment of transgenerational social actions.

keywords

ageing, ageism, generationism, Future-Maker-Generations, transgenerationality

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Every age has its own originality (Arendt, 1930-1954, p. 35)

1. Introduction: A Critical Phenomenology of Ageism and Generationism

In contemporary ageing societies, issues of aging (Dyring & Blonk, 2024) and generational narratives (Strauss & Howe, 1991) have increasingly become sites of interpersonal conflicts and social tensions. The social contexts in which we daily live are multi-age (Harper, 2019), multi-generational (Nichols & Freedman, 2024; Williams, 2024), and this reality lurks the spectre of *ageism* and *generationism*.

But what do ageism and generationism have to do with the phenomenon of ageing? In this contribution, I aim to show the connection between the ageing of the global population and the emergence and increase of discriminatory attitudes and acts toward people based on their age (ageism) or their generational belonging (generationism, or generationalism). Following some insights from Applewhite's book, *This Chair Rocks. A Manifesto Against Ageism* (2016), we may say that the problem of ageing population risks framing "aging and growing old as shameful" or "inevitably pitting younger and older generations against each other" (Applewhite, 2016, p. 14). Applewhite offers a very interesting analysis of the role that age, and consequently ageism, have on the quality of life of people of all ages (e.g. identity, body, work, sexuality). She proposes many elements to explain ageism, arguing that ageing is a phenomenon that is anything but limited to the end of life, diseases, or being not worthwhile, because "aging is life itself" (p. 202). So ageism inevitably affects our social relationships because we live in multigenerational families and societies (Applewhite, 2016, p. 31). Basically, ageism may affect everyone because everyone ages. The neurologist Friedland, indeed, claims that "aging is not a concern only to 'aged people', it is a subject of concern to everyone" (2022). I borrow this statement in my argumentation, because thinking that aging does not affect all people is one of the conditions under which ageism and generationism emerge.

Up to this point, what does ageism mean and how it is connected to generationism? Applewhite was mentored by Dr. Robert Butler, who has coined the term ageism in 1969. The term 'ageism' indicates "a process by which stereotyping and discriminating against individuals of groups occurred because of their age" (Islam, 2014, p. 95) and it impacts on person's confidence, job, financial situation, and quality of life. The term 'generationism,' on the other side, occurred for the first time in the work of Swedish philosophers Bard and Söderqvist (2002). It is the belief that a specific generation has inherent traits that make it inferior or superior to another generation, and it is close to ageism because "the term has also been used to describe prejudice and discrimination against adolescents and children, including ignoring their ideas

because they are too young, or assuming that they should behave in certain ways because of their age" (Islam, 2014, p. 96). Nowadays, we all are familiar with expressions like 'older people are outdated, stuck in the past, and closeminded,' 'new generations are hopeless,' 'the older generations have failed, now it is your turn,' 'younger people do not want to work,' 'elders upheld higher values,' 'you look too much *something* for your age,' and so on. All these common expressions and beliefs are grounded in predefined stereotypical typifications (Taipale, 2016, p. 144) and social categorizations[1] that need further considerations and analyses.

I will clarify shortly how the demographic shifts in many parts of the world, marked by declining birth rates and rising life expectancy, have brought intergenerational relations to the forefront of public discourse. I do also argue that state of crisis in the accelerated, globalised world (Rosa, 2013) in which we live (i.e. climate change, recognition of human rights, migrations, struggles in health systems, economy, education, democracy, and so on) are also connected to the emergence of ageism and generationism, as these stereotypical attitudes become charged with social tensions and mutual accusations of moral and social responsibility. This often leads people to transform their social categorizations based on age and generation into prejudices, hostile speech, and discriminatory acts that assign blame and condemnation without considering that an individual may be more or less aware of and responsible for the global crisis, regardless of their age or generation. In other words, the typifications we attribute to a person (for example, assuming that an older individual is uninterested in climate change and human rights or is responsible for current social inequalities, or that a younger person is naïve, extremist, lazy, or inherently more aware than older generations) are not necessarily valid. As a result, they turn into ageist and generationist stereotypes and discriminatory acts.

In the following paragraphs, I explore these issues through the framework of a *transgenerative social ontology* embedded in a *critical phenomenology* of ageism and generationism. Critical phenomenology is a recently emerging methodological approach to describe the constitution of personal identity, groups, social norms, meaning-structures, societal structures, and power dynamics, and all other elements that characterize our personal and social life within the intersectional constitution of subjectivities and intersubjectivities (Weiss *et al*., 2020, p. 7). In recent years, critical phenomenology (Guenther, 2013, 2021; Salamon, 2018; Weiss *et al*., 2020) aims to describe and explain how discriminatory, exclusionary, violent, and oppressive beliefs, actions, speeches, and behaviours are "normalized," "embodied," and even "institutionalized" in our societies (Butler, 2022, p. 72). A critical phenomenology of society includes qualitative analyses where the focus on intersectionality[2] serves as a method (Lutz, 2015) to integrate

1 Social categorization is the process by which people categorize themselves (self-identification) and others into differentiated groups, based upon personal and social information about others: "the big three" are sex/gender, race, and age: but numerous other dimensions are categorized as well, such as languages, social status (roles), occupation, bodily condition, and even other categories such as sexual orientation, religion, and political opinion. Some recent publications and studies focused on social categorization and group identity are dealing with the perspective of intersectionality within psychological research and social cognition theories, examining how social identity is to be understood in its intersectionality and within the complexity of multiply categorizable targets [Moffitt *et al*., 2023]. Individuals categorize themselves and others in diverse social categories, and these categorization generate social cohesion and conflicts. While not recent, Tajfel's *Human Groups and Social Categories* (1981) continues to influence contemporary discussions about social identity theory, social categorization, and their implications for understanding group dynamics and discriminations.

2 The concept of 'intersectionality' has been initially introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991), a prominent black feminist scholar in legal studies. She utilized this term to illustrate how a complex interplay of factors such as race, gender, class, and other power structures collaboratively oppress and impact those who are most marginalized in society, while concurrently affording privilege in other spheres. Intersectionality serves as a valuable tool for illustrating how various facets and elements intersect to shape and delineate individuals' experiences and personal identities. This amalgamation not only elucidates the disadvantages and vulnerabilities of specific groups but also

classical phenomenological approaches to personhood and sociality. In my perspective, critical phenomenology is fundamentally a *transgenerative social ontology*. I call 'transgenerativity' the interconnectedness of different 'personal generativity,' that is, the unique possibility of an individual to do, 'generate,' something new and different compared to what they thought and did in the past or to what people who belong to their same 'social categorization' (in this case, age-groups and generations) usually think and do. As a result, transgenerative social ontology aims at critically describing and analysing the constitution of societies by avoiding the risk to lose the qualitative individuality of each person, that we should not reduce to their age or generational belonging, or other intersectional characteristics.

By adopting the perspective of a transgenerative social ontology, this paper builds on Schützian phenomenology and integrates some insights from Arendt and Applewhite, to critically unpack the structures and dynamics of ageist and generationist attitude. While much research and work continue to analyse sex, gender, race/ethnicity, and increasingly the topics of bodies and disabilities, recent account has also begun to shift towards age and aging, generation and intergenerational conflicts. All '-isms' are social constructed ideas, the assumption that all members of a group are the same and that there is something wrong about their characteristics (ageism, racism, sexism, etc.). As for other personal traits like the colour of the skin, the place where we were born, gender, social roles, and so on, I want to focus on age and generation as socially meaningful properties of individual identity, which may also become (stereo)typical "social markers" (Haslanger, 2000, p. 40), "social categories" (Ásta, 2018), and typifications included in our taken-for-granted common knowledge already at hand (Schütz, 1973, pp. 229-241).

The core statement is that age and generational cohort are not that relevant to comprehensively understanding personal identity and the role of an individual in the constitution of our society, since they are often easy ways of diving up and grouping people according to just two of many other features that contribute to shape personal identity and role in everyday life (Duffy, 2021, pp. 9-10; Haslanger, 2005, p. 22). To make the case, people should be cautious about treating common knowledge and prejudices about age and generational belonging as purely natural and 'normalized' demarcations that occur systematically for every individual. The categorization of age-group and generations is socially, historically, and politically significant as well as the concept of sex/gender and race/ethnicity. I argue that our contemporary aging societies are strongly marked by a highly meaningful use and abuse of 'generational classifications,' and simultaneously an exaggeration of general assumptions that can be made about people based on their age. Ageing is a shared ontological condition that touches all people, whatever their intersectional situation, generational cohort, or social context. I borrow Arendt's words, "every age has its own originality" (1930-1954, p. 35), and Applewhite's perspective that suggest understanding the phenomenon of ageing as something that involves everyone. Otherwise, that tendency to deny that ageing concerns all age groups only reinforces the widespread belief that growing older inevitably means losing something: "We see old age through the lens of loss. The losses are real and wrenching. But from the inside, the experience is different" (2016, p. 220). Of course, embodying an anti-ageist (and anti-generationist) perspective does not mean to avoid speaking about social injustices in our aging societies. Social injustices and inequalities do not affect 'elders' and 'youngers' in the same way, indeed. However, ageing is

enumerates the infinite combinations that distinguish an individual as a unique entity, possibly divergent even from others within the same group, united only by shared characteristics. In other words, an old white person or a young black person do not irreducibly belong to the types of 'whiteness', or to the 'black community.' For instance, the white person could be an old woman who feels to be close to 'Black Lives Matter' movement, while the young black person may be a young boy who embodied the discriminatory propaganda of a conservative far right-wing party.

not always equal to healthy ageing, but it could be if certain welfare conditions are guaranteed, and being younger does not necessarily imply hope for access to more opportunities than older people. The problems of our ageing societies are related to a much more complex scenario that is not only connected to the ontological 'phenomenon of ageing.' If there is any tendency to consider 'growing old' as the last pejorative stage of life, it is because this ontological phenomenon is socially, historically, and politically structured. We all age and, sooner or later, each social person may suffer from the same problems that cyclically affect the various ages of life: "living and aging cannot be separated. Aging is not a disease [...] Aging cannot be 'cured.' Aging means living" (Applewhite, 2016, pp. 91-92). That's why the research of better political systems to handle the transgenerational claims for social justice must deal with the fact that "growing old isn't new" (Applewhite, 2016, p. 21). What's new is how we are facing the fact that many people now routinely try to change their perspective, that ageing is not necessary a disease, and that "health care costs are not rising in proportion to the average of the population" (p. 98), because spending money on older people is often portrayed as a cost for the present and not as an investment for the future. To overcome the exacerbation of ageism and generationism, then, we need to unmask ageist and generationist traps in the fight against the systemic injustices and inequalities, the lack of material conditions and economic opportunities, that oppress, sooner or later, people of all ages in our societies. Eventually, social injustice and the crisis of our social systems (economy, education, health care, democracy, work, human rights, and so on) do not discriminate only a specific age-group, but they will prospectively affect people of all ages.

Expanding on Schützian analysis of the transgenerational constitution of the lifeworld and the role of typifications in social tensions (Embree, 2000), I will focus on the simultaneous overlapping of different age groups and generations in our societies, by focusing on the processes of social categorization that may foster stereotypes (what we think), prejudices (how we feel), and discriminations (how we act)[3], grounded on assumptions and misconceptions about age and generation. In the end, I will also present the perspective of Future-Maker-Generations (FMGs) as an alternative way to counterbalance mainstream generational classifications (Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, Gen X, Millennials, Zoomers, Gen Alpha, Gen Beta) and widespread ageist attitudes in the young-elder divide. FMGs indicate a togetherness of people who, despite being born in different generational cohorts or belonging to different age groups, share a same future-focused axiological perspective towards wellness and social equality for people of all ages.

2. The Transgenerational Stratifications of the Everyday Lifeworld: A Schützian Approach to Social Encounters Between Different Age Groups and Generations

Ageing societies represent a crucial context for understanding how ageism and generationism emerge in our contemporary globalized world[4]. Following this framework, I focus now on the transgenerational structure of our contemporary society, emphasizing its layered temporality and the coexistence of multiple generations and age-groups in a shared contemporaneousness. In Schützian analysis we can find very fruitful elements in outlining a transgenerative social ontology. This section critically engages with Schütz's taxonomy of transtemporal social

3 For an insight on the relationship between stereotypes, prejudices, and discrimination, see Voss *et al.* (2018).

4 To better understand how pervasive studies on generational classifications are in our society, particularly in certain contexts such as the labour market, it is worth examining the profiles and projects of some international companies that base their market analyses and employee training programs on generational classifications. These companies operate on the assumption that individuals belonging to a specific generation (currently, according to these studies, five generations make up our society) share certain personal, cognitive, behavioural, and axiological profiles, as well as specific challenges in the workplace and in their personal and professional development. This approach is taken for granted the validity of statistics that assign to every member of a given generation a specific 'package' of cognitive, social, professional, and value-based traits. For an example, see: https://genhq.com/the-generations-hub/generational-faqs/.

relations – consociates, contemporaries, predecessors, and successors – and argues that these provinces of reality reveal an inherently transgenerational constitution of the everyday social world. The constitution of the lifeworld, as argued by Husserl (1938) and later expanded by Schütz (1962, 1964, 1966, 1973), provides a fundamental theoretical framework for understanding the transgenerational layering of social experiences. It is within the lifeworld that individuals experience the phenomenon of 'growing old together,' a process that is inherently relational and structured by transgenerational interactions[5].

In Schützian terms, the lifeworld is the everyday world where each 'social person' (Schütz, 1966, p. 73) is situated, spatially, all around the world (synchronicity) and, temporally, in the chain of generations (diachronicity). Ricoeur once used the notion of 'transgenerational tie' (*la lien transgénérationnel*) while engaging Schützian social phenomenology and the Arendtian concept of natality in analysing the phenomenon of 'growing old together' in a world where plurality is the hallmark of our contemporaneousness (2000, pp. 129-131). In the everyday lifeworld we experience the simultaneous overlapping of different people, age groups, and generations in the same "vivid present" (Schütz, 1962, pp. 216-219), namely the shared horizon of a transgenerational *continuum*[6], where we should be careful not to reduce personal identity and uniqueness[7] merely to a certain age or generational cohort, assuming we can anticipate who a person is based solely on these factors.

The Schützian scheme of social encounters in the everyday lifeworld encompasses the uniqueness of each *face-to-face situation* (Schütz, 1973, p. 65). The lifeworld, in its *taken-for-grantedness*, is the world of common sense, the world of daily life, in which we find ourselves,

5 For the sake of clarity, the term 'transgenerationality' has recently appeared in Andina (2022), instead of the term 'intergenerationality,' to better emphasize the obligations between present generations and future and past generations. In my perspective, it is problematic not only the relationship between present generations and, in the backward-looking, past generations (who are no longer here) and, in the forward-looking, future generations (who are not yet here), but also the present relationship between different generations and multi-age groups in the same contemporaneousness. The expression 'present generations' is in itself another 'umbrella term' that indistinctively groups and categorizes in the same simplified box a complex variety of people who have different ages and who belong to different generations, thus we should avoid the risk of thinking that 'present generations' think and act as a homogenous 'social group' or 'community.'

6 Schütz listed four different temporal stratification of the lifeworld, revealing its transtemporal constitution and structure. The first immediate province of our daily reality is the world of those who live in the same spatial and temporal proximity, the world of 'associated individuals,' or consociates (*Umwelt*), for example our family, our friends, and all the Others we immediately known in our familiar routine. Then, we find the world of 'contemporaries' (*Mitwelt*), those who share a community of time, but not of space, that is, all the people characterized by different degrees of anonymity and typification; the world of 'predecessors' (*Vorwelt*) and the world of 'successors' (*Folgewelt*), respectively the world of those who have lived and are gone now, and the world of those who have yet to exist (1932, pp. 142-144). In these last two cases, we have different types of socialization: invariability characterizes the world of predecessors, because we cannot influence them, they only influence us and there is nothing undecided, uncertain, or awaiting fulfilment (pp. 207-208) because the past is "no longer graspable by typifications having full content" (Schütz, 1973, p. 90). "If the world of predecessors is completely fixed and determined," the world of successors is indeterminate and indeterminable, because we can anticipate infinite kind of possible ideal types, but they remain absolutely free from our control and the possible fulfilment based on the experience of predecessors, consociates, and contemporaries (p. 214).

7 The 'uniqueness of the person' is a Schützian theme, and there are several argumentations in *The Structure of the Lifeworld* (1973) and in some essays included in *Collected Papers II* where this very relevant idea occurs. For example, see: "Our analysis has shown that the synthesis of the interpretations by which I know my contemporaries as ideal types does not apprehend the unique Self of a human being in his vivid present. It is an act of thought that holds invariant some typical attribute of fellow-human beings and disregards the modifications and variations of that attribute 'in real life,' i.e. when embedded in the ongoing experiences of a concrete and unique individual" (Schütz, 1964, p. 44); or "Typifying consists in passing by what makes the individual unique and irreplaceable" (1964, p. 234). In the same volume, see also (1964, pp. 110-111, 168, 237, 253).

at every moment of our life, and risk neglecting Others' biographical situations[8]. "My social partner appears to me in spatially, temporally, and socio-biographically differentiated perspectives of apprehension" (p. 65), so that I may fill up any degree of anonymity (or lack of knowledge) about their life with a various set of *functionary types* (pp. 82-83). Indeed, the 'world of everyday life,' or 'reality,' does not quite fit into my actual stock of knowledge (Schütz, 1962, p. 328). It means that my *functionary types* (i.e., 'old people,' 'young people,' 'people of this age', 'people belonging to that generation,' and so on) may not correspond to the knowledge I think I have about them. Schützian typifications proceed from the closest levels of anonymity (provinces that are at my hand, for example, the people I meet on public transports, on the streets, in hospitals, in workplaces, in the city where I live, etc.) up to the highest degrees (parliaments, nations, the enemies of my group, the economy, the social classes, the generations, the other cultures, and so on). We can say that expressions like 'young people,' 'old people,' 'new generations,' 'older generations,' may represent sort of typifications and social categorizations that may foster ageist and generationist attitudes. In the simultaneous coexistence of different age groups and generations, there is a daily possibility to experience the rising of stereotypes (what we think), prejudices (how we feel), and discriminations (how we act), based on the concept of age and generation, when one may refer a certain type of behaviour (i.e. 'being different,' 'think otherwise about this and that than I,' etc.) to a stereotyped profile (i.e. 'old person,' 'younger generations,' 'that age,' 'this generation,' etc.).

To counterbalance this dominant perspective, I suggest focusing on a possible development of Schütz framework. Every individual exists simultaneously in multiple transtemporal dimensions – as a successor to predecessors (or, as a younger person to elders), as a predecessor to future generations (or, as an older person to youngers). Transgenerationality, therefore, is not merely a future-oriented concept (as, for instance, in discussions of intergenerational justice) but is an intrinsic feature of everyday social reality. In this case, we may highlight a phenomenon that I termed 'contemporary transgenerationality,' that is, the simultaneity or "quasi-simultaneity" of many age groups and different generational cohorts in the same "contemporaneousness," namely the shared historical horizon of our globalized world (Ricoeur, 2000, p. 132). As Schütz argued, "the dividing line between the world of my contemporaries and that of my predecessors is not sharp" (1973, p. 88), but we may say the same about the dividing line between contemporaneity and the world of successors. On one side, the term 'predecessors' may refer to those who no longer exist and who belong to a past accessible only through memory, historiographical knowledge, and archives. However, predecessor may also denote people living in the same contemporary

8 This note became necessary following a comment received during the review process, in which it was argued that this point was not clearly a Schützian notion. I would thus like to emphasize that the entire development of Schützian work (1973), along with several essays in his *Collected Papers*, substantiate this interpretation. Schütz argues that each individual has their own socio-biographical situation in their lifeworld, at any moment of their life, at any moment of their daily projecting actions (1973, p. 76). Social actions are properly those actions that the individual performs in the everyday lifeworld of common-sense. Moreover, the possibility of deeper understanding of the Others, the "tuning-in situation," discussed in *Making Music Together* (1964, p. 178), specifically refers to the fact that, in everyday life, 'I' and 'Thou' encounter one another as unique holders of socio-biographical situations that are not immediately accessible if one relies solely on the mere perception of the Other. To sum up, at the very beginning of the first chapter of *The Structures of the Life-World*, Schütz clarifies that the "everyday life-world is to be understood" as the province of reality simply taken for granted "in the attitude of common sense" (1973, p. 3). The constitution of the "social biographical situation" of each individual in the Life-World is explained starting from section B, paragraph 4c, ii., of the second chapter (pp. 56-59). Regarding the description of the Lifeworld as the world of common sense, for the sake of brevity, I will simply recommend consulting the second volume of *Collected Papers*, which contains extensive references to the theme of Lifeworld as the world of common sense and its implications in Schützian theoretical framework (1964, p. 21, p. 92, p. 142, pp. 152-158).

horizon who were born before us but are still alive (the elders, the older generations). On the other, the term 'successors' may refer to those who have yet to exist, those who we can call 'future generations'[9]. However, according to the Arendtian concept of natality, which is not simply biological birth but encompasses the broader notion of the birth of ideas, initiatives, and new ways of being in the world, each generation was a 'future generation' for the previous ones, and each generation becomes 'older generations' for the following ones. In Arendtian words, each member of any generation is a newcomer, a beginner of something new in the world (1961, p. 196), and "feeling the future" is what essentially empowers us to live, to feel part of history (Zambrano, 1958, p. 27, 50). I call 'futurity' this potential future-focused attitude embedded in each person of any generation. And consequently, Future-Maker Generations (FMGs) are those people who, for example, fights for the resolution of problems affecting their life, their well-being and their societies, no matter their ages, their generational cohorts, or their social contexts. They break the taken-for-grantedness of generational conflict by which the tragic nature of history unfolds (Zambrano, 1958, p. 55), and they interpret that different age groups and generations living in the same contemporary world may cooperate and act together around the world, by not socially reproducing ageist and generationist dynamics.

3. Ageism and Generationism: Social Tensions and Discriminatory Attitudes Based on Age and Generational Classifications

As we have already pointed out, while ageism refers to discriminatory practices and attitudes toward individuals based on their age, generationism refers to prejudices and stereotypes about generational cohorts, often reducing individuals to fixed generational classifications. This dual discriminatory perspective is structurally embedded in societal structures, and may affect access to employment, the quality of healthcare, social wellness, economic opportunities, and political representation. Ageism and generationism may also reinforce the same oppressive structures and power dynamics already enacted by sexism, ableism, racism (Rennes, 2020), and other kinds of contemporary '-phobias' and '-isms'[10].

When people express personal opinions about the challenges of ageing societies in today's world, or about who others are and how they think and act, their discourse is often shaped by typifications, stereotypes, and commonplaces based on limited knowledge of others or the contexts in which they live. This reliance on superficial assumptions can lead to the social reproduction of stereotypes, reinforcing oversimplified narratives that obscure the complexity of individual experiences. In turn, it risks distorting the faculty of judgment[11], potentially fuelling social tensions and contributing to discriminatory attitudes that harm both individuals and society at large. Just as many personal characteristics – such as body shape, sex, gender, race/ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, language, social status, economic condition, and disability – may become markers of social division, age and generational belonging are also frequently used to categorize individuals. The danger lies in the tendency to treat these characteristics as fixed social markers, reinforcing reductive assumptions about

9 For an investigation on the ontological constitution of 'future generations,' see Andina (2022, pp. 77-103).

10 The University of Iowa's Institute for Public Health Practice provides an accessible guide that lists and explains some of the most common 'isms' (ageism, ableism, sexism, racism, classism, elitism, tokenism) and 'phobias' (xenophobia, homophobia, transphobia, islamophobia, atheophobia, fatphobia). Their purpose is to offer definitions and examples of these discriminations, showing how they manifest in everyday interactions and in each societal structure. In 2016, the Collins Dictionary has recently added a new word suggestion for the fear or hatred on religion, religious faith, religious people or religious organisations, that is, 'religiophobia.'

11 Here, I refer to the faculty of judgment, following the Arendtian interpretation of Kant (Arendt, 1961, pp. 220-222), as one of the most political of human activities. When people make a personal judgment, they express the very opposite of a 'private feeling' because judging means to take a decision towards us and the world, in that intersubjective tension between what 'I' think about something (or someone) in the world and what 'the others' think about the same topic or person. Judging is taking a position about problems and situations in society.

who people are, what they value, or how they engage with the world. However, as Applewhite points out, age should not be seen as a fixed characteristic but rather as a relational observation – a way of situating oneself relative to others (2016, pp. 47-48).

In a rapidly changing world marked by globalization and increasing generational diversity, tensions arise between older generations struggling to keep pace with change and younger generations striving to assert their voices and agency. Structural imbalances contribute to these tensions: while older populations often benefit from stronger political representation and greater access to resources, younger generations face with challenges in securing effective representation and equitable opportunities – particularly in employment and political representation. This dynamic can fuel intergenerational conflicts (Bonatti & Lorenzetti, 2023; McCormik, 2009) and reinforce ageist and generationist attitudes. For clarity, ageism and generationism are not new phenomena; throughout history, each generation has criticized its predecessors for being too conservative while simultaneously accusing younger generations of abandoning tradition (Heller, 2015, pp. 5-11). At the same time, every generation has recognized the necessity of engaging with the past while striving to shape a different future – often enduring tensions and struggles between age groups and generations in the process (Zambrano, 1958, p. 55). And, throughout history, various cultural and philosophical traditions have shaped our understanding of different life stages. Bodei describes an inverse symmetry between youth and old age: the young, with little past and much future ahead, are associated with hope, while the elderly, with much past and little future, are often left with only memories (2014, p. 5). This binary distinction raises an important question: at what stage of life is an individual fully realized as a social being?

Ultimately, the conventional division between youth and old age is becoming increasingly blurred. To counter this, we must resist the taken-for-granted attitude that leads us to categorize people prematurely based on their age, generation, or other identity markers. When we rely on preconceived typifications, and commonplaces, we risk erasing the rich uniqueness of personal biographies and reducing individuals to stereotypes, assuming we already understand their perspectives, experiences, and motivations. I address the issue of ageing societies in our contemporary world because it offers a crucial opportunity to bridge the phenomenological first-person plural perspective – the fact that 'we grow old together' – with interdisciplinary discussions in philosophy, psychology, and sociology that seek to unpack ageist and generationist attitudes and narratives. While concerns about ageing societies are widespread, the phenomenon of ageing itself is not new in human history. This raises critical questions: Why is growing old perceived as an urgent present concern? How do ageism and intergenerational conflict relate to the realities of ageing global population and multi-generational societies? Recent studies on ageism (Giasson *et al.*, 2017) reveal that age group classifications (e.g., young age, early midlife, late midlife, young old, oldest old) reflect far more complex social identities and personal experiences than simplistic generational labels suggest.

Today, global ageing trends are unprecedented, due to declining mortality and fertility rates: according to WHO (2022), by 2030, one in six people will be over 60 years old, reaching 1.4 billion individuals; by 2050, this figure will nearly double to 2.1 billion. Simultaneously, the UNFPA (2022) highlights a paradox: while the world's population has more than doubled in the past 50 years, fears of an underpopulation crisis persist due to declining birth rates, particularly in Europe[12]. The challenges posed by ageing societies are often exploited to fuel intergenerational divisions. For instance, younger activists argue that older generations ignore

12 For more details see https://www.unfpa.org/swp2023/too-few.

climate change, gender equity, unemployment crisis, and human rights issues. Conversely, critics claim that youth-led movements lack pragmatism and alienate potential older allies with ageist rhetoric[13]. Both perspectives can perpetuate age-based discrimination and obscure the structural factors responsible for inequality. Applewhite (2016) identifies other common ageist myths, including:

- The superiority of postwar generations over younger cohorts (p. 45).
- A youth-centric culture that equates ageing with decline, expressed in remarks like, "You surprisingly look great for your age" (pp. 7-11).
- The assumption that older individuals should step aside for the next generation.

As Applewhite argues, ageism functions similarly to other forms of bias – like racism or sexism – by fostering deeply ingrained prejudices that start early in life: "nobody's born ageist, but it starts young" (p. 41). These attitudes are so pervasive that everyone exhibits some form of age bias (p. 226), reinforcing discriminatory policies and cultural norms. If we are to navigate the challenges of ageing societies effectively and justly, we must move beyond the false dichotomy of intergenerational conflict and instead foster transgenerational cooperation. Recognizing ageing as a shared human experience, rather than a divisive issue, allows us to cultivate more inclusive social perspectives.

4. Towards An Ameliorative Perspective: The Transgenerational Action of FMGs

Ageing is both a personal and collective experience. From birth individuals navigate a shared ageing process, just as humanity does across generations. However, social perceptions of ageing are shaped by power structures, cultural narratives, and economic conditions that differ across societies. While cultural contexts shape how age-related biases manifest, research suggests that ageism and sexism – two pervasive forms of discrimination – share cross-cultural patterns (Fiske, 2017). Understanding the commonalities and differences in how these prejudices emerge across societies, as well as their historical and structural origins, is essential for unmasking and dismantling the stereotypes that sustain them. Recognizing that these biases are socially constructed, rather than inevitable, allows us to move beyond age-based and generational divisions and toward more inclusive and transgenerational forms of solidarity and cooperation.

Looking at contemporary society, especially in the extensive proliferation of social media pages, podcasts, international networks of activism, and profiles on SNs[14], we find that people of different ages and generations increasingly engage in shared struggles against systemic injustices, advocating for social and political change. New digital platforms and social networks facilitate interpersonal communication and activism across generations, enabling FMGs to emerge through both physical mobilization and virtual solidarity. Examples include:

- Global climate action movements (e.g., Climate Action Network, Fridays for Future)
- Feminist and human rights movements (e.g., Ni Una Menos, World Prides)
- Multigenerational political advocacy communities.

Ageist narratives are insidious, but they can be dismantled when individuals across all ages (and other intersectional differences) actively support justice in togetherness – whether for younger or older people, for better representation, or for improved welfare. This transgenerational (and transgenerative) cooperation challenges the assumption that social issues should be framed as generational conflicts – where older generations are seen as

13 For this point of view, see the article of Anne Karpf (2020), author of *How to Age. The School of Life* (2014). https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jan/18/ageism-climate-movement-generation-stereotypes.

14 Examples of FMGs can be found daily on SNs: //www.theguardian.com/technology/2022/may/18/older-people-using-tiktok-to-defy-ageist-stereotypes-research-finds.

dependent on the young, and younger generations as burdened by the old. Mainstream narratives often emphasize intergenerational conflict, portraying younger generations as oppressed by older ones, while older individuals face pressure to relinquish power and privileges. Islam describes this perception as a generational divide, where young people are seen as uninterested in older generations, while the elderly experience loneliness and isolation due to age discrimination (2014, p. 104). However, rather than an inevitable clash between age groups, this scenario reveals a deeply rooted social malaise – one that can be challenged through transgenerational cooperation. Instead, fostering intergenerational solidarity can help to reshape our societies towards greater inclusivity. As our societies become more multi-age, multi-ethnic, multi-generational, and diverse in gender identities and social structures, the challenges of ageing societies cannot be viewed in isolation. Ageing societies are deeply intertwined with broader intersectional issues, such as:

– Global migration patterns, where imbalances between population-rich but economically disadvantaged regions and other wealthier, ageing regions fuel demographic shifts.
– Social movements that reveal new forms of collective intentionality and trust across generations in the fight for human rights (Bodei, 2014, pp. 93-94).

Examining the formation of 'transgenerational community' – not merely motivated by empathy, but by a shared experience of systemic inequality – is essential to understanding how injustices affect people across all life stages. By promoting FMGs as a model of collective agency, based on shared values, we can challenge ageist and generationist attitudes, build more equitable social actions, and lead transgenerational actions where people of all ages actively shape the future together. In an era of unprecedented demographic shifts, fostering transgenerational solidarity is not just an ethical imperative – it is a necessary step toward a more just, inclusive, and sustainable world.

Ortega y Gasset (1923), as recalled by Bodei (2014), observed the acceleration of generational overlap in modern times, where biological generations span approximately three to four per century, yet cultural and social generational shifts occur in as little as fifteen years (pp. 47-48). This rapid generational turnover amplifies tensions but also presents opportunities for transgenerational dialogue. A phenomenological social theory on transgenerationality can help us to critically reassess how ageing is experienced and perceived, moving beyond age-based and generational classifications (e.g., Silent Generation, Boomers, Gen X, Millennials, Gen Z, Gen Alpha, Gen Beta). These generational labels risk pitting younger and older groups against each other, rather than fostering cooperative intergenerational engagement. In this framework, FMGs emerge as social groups that challenge ageism and generationism by addressing broader systemic injustices. While economic and political strategies in various parts of the world attempt to rebalance generational inequalities – sometimes favouring younger over older generations (Bodei, 2014, pp. 94-95) – these approaches are often insufficient. The complexity of today's multi-age, globalized world demands alternative models of citizenship, collective agency, and social empowerment that transcend generational divides. FMGs refer to a transgenerational social unity characterized by shared values, collective intentionality, and a commitment to challenging these systemic injustices. Unlike traditional generational cohorts, FMGs are not defined by age or historical birth periods but by their commitment to transformative social action. FMGs can be understood as a social entity bound by a shared sense of purpose rather than by age and generation. The agency of FMGs is defined by:

– Shared values (e.g., social justice, environmental sustainability, economic equity and social welfare across life stages).
– Transgenerational solidarity, overcoming narratives of generational conflict.
– Collective action aimed at structural change, rather than age-based identity politics.

As Duffy (2021) and Foster (2013) argue, intergenerational cooperation is essential in addressing contemporary crises, from climate change to economic inequality. FMGs embody this collaborative ethos, demonstrating that social action need not be limited by generational categories. Within the perspective of FMGs, the traditional concept of 'generation' is not that useful anymore (Costanza *et al.*, 2023). Back to Mannheim's *The Problem of Generations* (1928), we commonly use the concept of 'generation' as a way of encapsulating the unique experiences and corresponding perspectives or worldviews of people born in the same generational cohort, assuming that they share certain modes of thinking, behave, feel, and act. But this is the erroneous tendency to conflate "generation with cohort" (McDaniel, 2001, p. 197) and to categorize 'age groups' and 'generations' as social groups or communities.

Following Mannheim's thesis (1952, pp. 255-286), I argue that age and generational belonging are not deterministic elements for the constitution of social groups. As Aristotle might put it, they are accidental characteristics, meaning that categories such as 'young people' or 'older generations' are Schützian typifications – social constructs rather than essential identities. Bodei reinforces this point, emphasizing that same-aged individuals may have vastly different socio-economic conditions, cultural experiences, and personal identities (2014, pp. 49-50). By contrast, FMGs can be conceived as genuine community because their members, despite age differences, engage in transgenerational action, reshaping the meaning of growing old together in the contemporary world. Within transgenerational communities, ageist and generationist mindsets may be unmasked. The impact of FMGs extends beyond activism – their influence on political structures and systemic injustices could be stronger than traditional age-related interests. By filling the lack of political representation for various age groups, FMGs may reconceptualize intergenerational conflict as a misguided dichotomy that should be replaced with a framework of shared interests and transgenerational empowerment.

5. Conclusions: Unmasking Age Bias, Challenging Generationism, and Paving the Way Forward

This paper has argued that ageism and generationism are socially and historically embedded discriminatory attitudes that still shape contemporary ageing societies. By analysing the transtemporal stratifications of the lifeworld, it has demonstrated that social reality is inherently transgenerational, with individuals existing across multiple temporal dimensions. The introduction of FMGs provides a new framework for rethinking collective agency beyond generational divides, advocating for a critical phenomenology of sociality that prioritizes transgenerational solidarity over intergenerational conflict. Rather than viewing ageing as a site of division and competition, this perspective affirms the shared experience of growing old together, fostering cooperation rather than antagonism in an increasingly interdependent world.

In my view, an alternative model of social cohesion emerges in the perspective of FMGs, namely people who experience shared social-biographical situations, where typical ageist and generationist social interactions of ageing societies and global crises change into meaningful transgenerational connections. This 'transgenerational attunement' allows diverse individuals to overcome age-based barriers and interests, by engaging in collective struggles for social justice that transcend intergenerational conflicts. Regardless of how we define community – whether in terms of family, national identity, or cultural belonging – FMGs position themselves within an alternative transgenerational flow. In a world where 'growing old together' is an inevitable reality, FMGs redefine ageing societies as a shared horizon, where people of all ages and generations may jointly navigate global crises and structural injustices together.

As Bodei observes, increased life expectancy has led to a redefinition of age-related roles – young people are expected to "stay young longer" before assuming adult responsibilities, while older individuals are granted new possibilities in later life (2014,

pp. 18-19). Moreover, the assumption that youth is inherently hopeful is becoming a tragic irony (2014, p. 25). How we age ultimately depends on how we live, and fostering a positive ageing culture requires a fundamental shift in public narratives and social policies. Friedland highlights the importance of personal agency in shaping the ageing process, arguing that well-being in later life is influenced by multiple factors – cognitive, physical, psychological, and social (2022, pp. 292-297). Rather than viewing ageing as a phase of decline, research increasingly emphasizes its potential for growth, renewal, and active participation.

Anne Lamott's words, chosen by Applewhite as an epigraph, encapsulate this perspective: "We contain all the ages we have ever been." Overcoming ageism and generationism is not just about securing rights for older or younger people – it is about demanding systemic change to ensure that all ages are valued and supported. In transgenerational communities, people can act together despite age-related divisions, forging alliances based on shared struggles rather than generational differences. As Applewhite argues: "If we make the world a better place to grow old in, we make it a better place in which to be from somewhere else, to have a disability, or be queer, non-white, or non-rich" (2016, p. 12). Unmasking ageism means inspiring individuals of all ages to embrace ageing as a universal and shared process (Gendron, 2022). This requires educating ourselves on internalized biases, fostering age-friendly communities, and challenging stereotypes that divide rather than unite us (Applewhite, 2016, p. 180). There are many strategies for combating ageism, from personal awareness to counter-speech in public discourse (pp. 232-235). Applewhite highlights that chronological age is an increasingly unreliable benchmark for understanding a person (2016, p. 46). Human variability and personal experiences do not conform to biological predictions or ageist cultural expectations. She insists that there is "no such thing as age-appropriate" (p. 47). A key challenge is avoiding the social tendency to suppress discussions about ageing and mortality. Applewhite argues that we must "bring death and dying out of the closet" (2016, p. 220), as this avoidance has significant social consequences. The pursuit of an idealized 'best age' and the attempt to eliminate uncertainty from the ageing process – including resisting conversations about ageing at younger ages – ultimately limits our ability to develop new perspectives on ageing societies and reinforces ageist and generationist divisions. Age and generation should be recognized as criteria of diversity, not a tool for exclusion (Applewhite, 2016, p. 10). Applewhite particularly advocates for a shift in language, proposing that instead of using terms laden with negative connotations, we adopt neutral, value-free terms:

> Since the only unobjectionable term used to describe older people is 'older people,' I've shortened the term to 'olders' and use it, along with 'youngers,' as a noun. It's clear and value-neutral, and it emphasizes that age is a continuum. There is no old/young divide. We're always older than some people and younger than others. Since no one on the planet is getting any younger, let's stop using 'aging' as a pejorative (Applewhite, 2016, p. 10).

The perspective developed in this paper – centred on the necessity of outlining a critical phenomenology of ageism and generationism – aligns closely with Applewhite's reflections on the urgency of dismantling age-based biases and generational divides. At the same time, the transgenerative social ontology of FMGs offers a framework for rethinking collective agency, moving beyond generational categorizations and towards a model of transgenerational solidarity. In this light, resisting ageism and generationism is not merely an isolated effort but part of a broader cultural revolution (Applewhite, 2019, p. 236) – one that calls for empowering transgenerational communities and rejecting ageism and generationism with the same commitment with which we challenge other forms of discrimination. Applewhite's

call to action encapsulates this vision: "People of all ages, unite! We have nothing to lose but our prejudices." (2016, p. 242). By fostering a transgenerational perspective, we do not merely seek to address ageism and intergenerational conflicts – we strive to transform them into opportunities for global renewal. In doing so, we offer valuable insights for shaping a more inclusive, just, and socially cohesive world, where ageing is not seen as a process of division but as a shared experience that may unite people across ages and generations.

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