Chapter 18

Introduction: Framing Civic Exclusion

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18.1 Introduction

The topic of old-age social exclusion has received increased attention as studies that measure the prevalence of this multidimensional phenomenon have shown its spread across countries; see Ogg (2005) who focuses on Europe, Hraet et al. (2013) who considers Central and Eastern Europe, and Macleod et al. (2019) who measure exclusion in the UK. The three chapters that belong to this section pay specific attention to two of the domains which Walsh et al. (2017) refer to as civic participation and socio-cultural aspects in their framework on exclusion in later life. In this book, we refer to them as civic exclusion [see Walsh et al. this volume]. It is worth noting that this domain has received the least scholarly attention so far within the literature (Van Regenmortel et al. 2016; Walsh et al. 2017), even though there is clear evidence that civic engagement and socio-cultural aspects of exclusion can have an impact on self-rated health (Poortinga 2006). Thus, the purpose of the chapter is to offer an abridged introduction to the topic of civic exclusion in later life in order to offer context to the three chapters in this section.

18.2 Civic Exclusion and the Life Course

First, to the part of this domain that deals with exclusion from civic participation. In the old-age exclusion conceptual framework formulated by Walsh et al. (2017), the domain of civic exclusion is about what the lack of participation in generic civic activities, volunteering and community involvement, voting and the political sphere can mean for older people's ability to exercise their citizenship rights to the fullest.

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Grenier and Guberman (2009) call this domain “socio-political exclusion”. They define this type of exclusion as being about “barriers to civic and political participation resulting from a lack of involvement in decision-making, collective power, and limited clout of agency” (ibid: 118). Macleod et al. (2019) – who rely on another framework for the study of exclusion in later life – call this domain civic participation but define the scope of it in a much broader sense than Walsh et al. (2017) do. Macleod et al. (2019) propose namely that this domain “encompasses cultural, educational, and political engagement, factors that enable a person to connect with and contribute to their society, and be involved in its decision making” (ibid: 82).

Serrat et al. (2020) have recently published a scoping review of 50-years of research into older people’s civic participation that shows that most of this research focuses on either social (particularly volunteering), or political participation. This means that citizenship and generic civic activities are the dimensions of civic exclusion that remain relatively unexplored. In their review, they identify the critical gaps that need to be addressed as well, and the ways in which these gaps affect not only the conceptualisation of old-age civic exclusion, but also the ways in which contextual aspects are addressed. Relatively little research has taken a life-course approach to the study of civic exclusion, and the ways in which diverse and potentially marginalised groups of older people experience civic exclusion remains a topic in dire need of scholarly attention. With regard to the latter, Torres and Serrat (2019) have argued that the lacuna of research on older migrants’ civic participation means that the role that migratory life-courses play in civic participation in older-age remains unexplored. In the latest measurement of the prevalence of civic exclusion amongst older people in the UK, Macleod et al. (2019) have shown that those who are “non-white were more excluded /.../ and that those born outside of the UK score higher” (ibid: 97), which is why a diversity-informed agenda for the study of civic exclusion in later life is needed.

We turn our focus now to the second part of this domain, socio-cultural aspects of exclusion. According to Walsh et al. (2017), the socio-cultural domain brings attention to the symbolic and discursive sphere (and the ways in which public discourses and imagery promote the exclusion of older people from wider society), ageism and age discrimination (which is about how these discourses get translated into exclusionary practices), and identity exclusion (which they define as a “reduction to one-dimensional identities”) (Walsh et al. 2017, p. 90). Canadian scholars have, as already mentioned, their own framework, but they have two domains rather than just one to refer to the socio-cultural aspects alluded to here. They differentiate namely between the domain they call symbolic (which is about the negative representations mentioned earlier), and the one they call identity (which they define as “dismissal or diminishment of the distinctive and multiple identities of the person or group through reduction to one identity such as age”, (Grenier and Guberman 2009, p. 118). In the framework used by Macleod et al. (2019), the socio-cultural domain is called “discrimination” instead, which they define as the domain that “includes symbolic exclusion: negative representation or prejudicial treatment for a particular characteristic or group membership, and identity exclusion: disregard of one’s whole identity by only recognising a single characteristic/ identity” (Macleod et al.

2019, p. 82). Irrespective of which framework one relies on, the socio-cultural aspect of exclusion is about the ways in which societal discourses lead not only to the exclusion of older people, but also to neglecting the complex identities they have, and the variety of circumstances, experiences and needs with which these are associated. Studies focusing on these forms of exclusion not only consider the positionality of ageing within societal values systems and structures, but also often its intersection with the construction of other social locations, such as gender, ethnicity and migration status, disability and health conditions.

18.3 Outline of This Section

Like other contributions to this book, these chapters were written before the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020. However, the relevance and importance of the themes, and the forms of exclusion, documented within this section is only heightened by the barriers and discourses that emerged to impact civic engagement and socio-cultural aspects of ageing during the virus outbreak.

The chapter by Serrat et al. in this section exposes the angles of investigation that deserve scholarly attention if exclusion from civic engagement in later life is to be studied in a useful manner. This chapter also maps out what a future agenda for this research field could look like while arguing for the need to take into account that civic exclusion plays an important part of what old-age social exclusion entails. They propose that there are four areas that future research should address: the multidimensionality of civic engagement; the diversity of the older population; the dynamics and experiences of engagement across the life course; and the culturally-embedded processes that characterise civic engagement. In arguing that these are the areas that deserve scholarly attention at this point in time, Serrat and colleagues offer us a roadmap for future research on this topic.

The chapter by Gallistl brings attention to exclusion from cultural activities in later life and exposes how consumption patterns relating to cultural activities change as we grow older, and how we sometimes position these activities in relation to cultural identities stratified by socio-economic status. Gallistl's contribution gives us insight into how socio-economic determinants, as well as changes over the life course, affect someone's engagement in cultural activities, and why policies to advance cultural participation need to more actively consider ageing and later life. In doing so, this chapter offers ample empirical evidence for some of the arguments that Walsh et al. (2017) have made. They have namely argued that "old-age exclusion /.../ (varies) in form and degree across the older adult life course", and that "its complexity, impact and prevalence are amplified by old-age vulnerabilities, accumulated disadvantage for some groups, and constrained opportunities to ameliorate exclusion" (ibid: 93). Thus, through its use of quantitative data on older Austrians' cultural consumption patterns, this chapter shows the intrinsic interconnectedness of the domains of social exclusion since both material and financial resources, as

well as access to services, amenities and mobility affect older people's participation in cultural activities.

The last chapter in this section (by Gallassi and Harrysson) is also a contribution that exposes the interconnectedness of domains, but does so from the perspective of identity. The chapter by Gallassi and Harrysson is a prime example of how the horizons that have informed policy formulation (which is influenced by, and can formulate, societal discourses) can inadvertently lead to the neglect of older people's multiple identities. In their chapter, they discuss older migrants' truncated labour participation, and the effects this has on their retirement. They argue that it is Swedish policies lack of mobility know-how that complicates these older people's pension access. Thus, by showing how policy formulation can reduce the needs of older people to just one dimension, this chapter makes a contribution to our understanding of socio-cultural exclusion that is concerned with identity, which Walsh et al. (2017) have argued is also about the "mechanisms in relation to social security individualization, globalization, social stratification" (ibid: 90–91). With its focus on older migrants this chapter clearly shows also why I have for years argued that the peculiarities of the migratory life-course are not always taken into account when non-migrant life-courses are regarded as the norm (Warnes et al. 2004; Torres 2012).

This introductory chapter has contextualised what the contributions of the following three chapters are. This has been done by alluding to the fact that the scholarly debate on civic exclusion (incorporating both civic participation and socio-cultural aspects of exclusion) is in its infancy but the contributions made in this section advance the ways in which we make sense of how mechanisms associated with this type of exclusion operate. The call by Serrat and colleagues for more research on civic exclusion, that uses the agenda for future research they delineate in their chapter, urges scholars of ageing to pay more attention to civic participation in older-age, and the ways in which a lack of civic participation affects the social exclusion that older people can experience later in life. The contributions by Gallistl on cultural exclusion, and by Gallassi and Harrysson on older migrants' retirement, offer policy makers suggestions for areas that require further attention. Taken together, these contributions expand our imagination on old-age social exclusion by bringing attention to how civic forms of exclusion are constructed, why attention to this domain is necessary, and how social exclusion, in relation to civic participation and socio-cultural aspects, works in later life.

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