

The process of social exclusion:  
the dynamics of an evolving concept

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## **Abstract**

Most theorists maintain that social exclusion is a process, not only the condition reflecting the outcome of that process. Yet few, if any, people ever reach the ultimate end of the imagined trajectory. There are no formal 'exclusion thresholds' to cross, as exist for poverty. Rather, at any one time, people are situated on a multidimensional continuum and may be moving towards inclusion in one or another sense, or towards a state of comprehensive, cumulative social rupture. This process has been labelled social 'disaffiliation' or 'disqualification', among other terms, and encompasses humiliation as well as social isolation. Longitudinal and panel studies reviewed here document some of the mechanisms of individuals' downward spiral, with the accumulation of dimensions of exclusion. At a more macro-level, groups, communities, and societies also may undergo a process of social exclusion from larger collectives in which progressive isolation and a decline of solidarity give rise to new social boundaries – exclusion lines, so to speak – between insiders and outsiders. The process of residential segregation is a notable example. Despite the EU's designation of common exclusion indicators, national differences in the meaning of social exclusion, in contrast to poverty, may impede comparative study. The concept and its measures are still evolving.

**Keywords:** social exclusion, poverty, welfare dynamics, European social policy

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## 1. The concepts of social exclusion and inclusion

Social exclusion is usually defined as a dynamic process of progressive multidimensional rupturing of the 'social bond' at the individual and collective levels. By social bond, I mean the social relations, institutions, and imagined identities of belonging constituting social cohesion, integration, or solidarity.<sup>1</sup> Social exclusion precludes full participation in the normatively prescribed activities of a given society and denies access to information, resources, sociability, recognition, and identity, eroding self-respect and reducing capabilities to achieve personal goals.

As a process, it is inherently *dynamic*, taking temporal matters into account. At any one time, people may be situated on a multidimensional continuum, moving towards inclusion in one or another aspect, or towards a state of comprehensive, cumulative social rupture. The latter process has been labelled social 'disaffiliation' (Bahr 1973; Castel 1995) or 'disqualification' (Paugam 1991) among other terms. Yet few if any people ever reach the ultimate end of the imagined trajectory of absolute social disengagement. Despite some methodological attempts at measuring cumulative aspects of disadvantage, no country or scholar has identified a formal 'exclusion thresholds', like the poverty line. This is because few if any human beings can exist entirely outside of society (Balibar 1992). To be sure, at any one moment, analysts can identify individuals or groups that are more or less in an excluded condition or state, reflecting the outcome of a process. As with the poor, the point-in-time excluded are most likely to be those in the middle of a long spell of social exclusion and thus, to have cumulative difficulties, unlike the more numerous people who are touched by short periods of multiple disadvantages and soon rejoin the 'mainstream'.

Another way to think about the relationship of exclusion and inclusion is in the classic case of 'sociological ambivalence', the stranger. As Simmel (1950) notes, strangers are at once within and outside society. For this reason, social exclusion overlaps with the notion of 'adverse incorporation' or 'differential inclusion'. In a Simmelian 'social distance' perspective, excluded groups are marginal, not socially isolated. This gives rise to peculiar relations between mainstream and marginals, such as sharing confidences in the belief that outsiders are 'objective' and that permanent strangers have no consequences for the insiders' social world. Similarly, the poor as social assistance recipients are excluded as a means of reinforcing work ethics among the majority. Thus, the terms of inclusion are adverse, disadvantageous and occasionally, insurmountable, but there is some social interaction between groups, so that social exclusion is not absolute.

Although they may be in a zero-sum relationship, social *exclusion and inclusion* are not perfect antonyms. Individuals may be excluded in some respects while being included in others. Demonstrating Simmel's principle of sociological ambivalence of the stranger and the poor, the same individual may be included and excluded as once. Modern individualism – autonomy, liberty, and social separation – rose hand-in-hand with citizenship and integration in nation-states. In the process, group identities fell by the wayside, excluded from state recognition and function, only to reassert themselves now during globalisation. Similarly, societal inclusion itself may itself be exclusionary (Woodward and Kohli 2001). As Durkheim points out, exclusion, ostracism, and punishment of deviant groups reinforces internal normative solidarity. Thus, inclusion of some groups may reinforce the exclusion of others. As nation-states form, for example, inclusive citizenship excludes migrants and foreigners. An expanding European Union can easily become 'fortress Europe'. Yet different societies

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<sup>1</sup> The rupture of the social bond can take many forms: elimination, abandonment, segregation, assistance, marginalization, and discrimination (Ravaud and Stiker 2001). However, the conception of social inclusion – integration, cohesion, solidarity, etc. – varies across ideological paradigms (see Silver 1994). The 'social bond' need not imply a neo-Durkheimian (Levitas 2005), normative, or functionalist view of society, insofar as 'solidarity' may also be based upon a redistributive social contract between classes.

have different dominant, if contested, ideal notions of what social inclusion means, e.g., moral integration, pluralist interdependence, or class concentration. Social mechanisms of inclusion may vary from deliberate integration programmes and liberalising membership rules to encouraging assimilation, inter-marriage, or multiculturalism. Clearly a society may make little effort to include newcomers without necessarily deporting or excluding them. From the perspective of agency, the process of exclusion – in the sense of discrimination, rejection, eviction, expulsion, or ineligibility – is a deliberate act of social domination with different motives than the impulse behind the intentional inclusion of outsiders. But a society that makes strong demands for inclusion may be more exclusive.

Exclusion is *multidimensional*. However, which dimensions are relevant and how they are related vary across time and space. Most frequently, as discussed below, the dimensions include both economic and social aspects of disadvantage. But the economic dimensions need not refer only to monetary poverty or insufficient income; scholars have also considered exclusion from land, credit, and other assets, food and other consumption goods, and of course, the labour market. The perspective easily incorporates regional, gender, and ethnic/cultural variation, and usually takes notice of the spatial setting.

Although exclusion is multidimensional, the *causal* relations among dimensions of disadvantage may run in many directions, reinforcing or cushioning the impact of one another. Excluded from welfare state protection and family support, enduring unemployment can give rise to income poverty; in turn, income poverty can interrupt social relations. Some of the literature discussed below examines the dynamics of social assistance receipt or unemployment. These may give rise to, or be caused by poverty, ill health, minority group status, or residence in an isolated area. Some use phrases like downward spirals, vicious cycles, and chain reactions to describe the inter-relations among dimensions. In brief, the exact causal sequences among multiple dimensions are often non-recursive, complex, and *a priori* indeterminate. The study of exclusion dynamics is in its infancy.

Moreover, social exclusion and inclusion are polysemic terms whose definitions and connotations are *context-dependent*. Social and cultural cleavages obviously vary across countries. Not only do dominant cultures and institutions give rise to socially enforced boundaries that distinguish amongst insider and outsider groups and individuals, but they also impart different meanings to isolation and belonging. For example, living alone may be construed as a disadvantage in societies where family solidarity is socially, culturally, and economically important, but an indicator of independence, self-sufficiency, and privilege in individualistic societies.

Social exclusion is a structural process of social isolation, of stripping away multiple dimensions of social involvement. Were such disaffiliation voluntary, however, it would be hard to call it 'exclusion' (see Barry 2002). Rather, it entails an *active relationship* between excluders and the excluded. Excluders are *agents* who use specific *mechanisms* to push others out and deny access to resources and relations. Even if it looks like the excluded want to withdraw from society, they may be doing so in reaction to poor treatment. Exclusion entails the loss of status, lack of recognition, and often, humiliation. The shame of the socially excluded is prominent in the accounts of the downwardly mobile. The 'fall from grace' and withdrawal from social life by the unemployed have long been noted in the sociological literature since the Depression-era classic, *Marienthal* (Jahoda, Lazarsfeld and Zeisel 1971). Those working with the 'Fourth World' in developed countries (e.g., ATD-Quart Monde) emphasize how important it is to treat the poor with dignity. Narayan et al. (1999) note how those in Central and Eastern European transition countries who fell into poverty after the end of socialism suffer shame and humiliation when they compare their present to the past status, suffering from the relative deprivation in their own lifetimes. Social characteristics that reflect the distribution of honour, respect, and social distance, not just the distribution of material and non-material resources, are central to the social exclusion approach. It easily accommodates analyses of gender, race, ethnicity, caste, citizenship, disability, and other socially constructed cleavages.

Conversely, one might ask, 'inclusion on whose terms?' Forced inclusion – conversions, for example, or requirements to register with authorities – gives a very different meaning to integration. Thus, the flip side of active exclusion is the important stress on active *participation* in one's own inclusion. Policies to fight social exclusion emphasize the need to give a voice to the poor and empower excluded groups.

Why now? Why has social exclusion emerged as a meaningful concept at the end of the twentieth century? Since the 1980s, there has been much talk of the 'new poverty' or an 'underclass' immune to the benefits of economic growth (Silver 1993). There is no doubt that the last few decades of economic restructuring, heightened migration, and global capital mobility have made a predictable collectively-shared life course less sustainable, eliminated earlier expected career ladders, and made some labour and regions economically expendable. Global integration is accompanied by local exclusions. Regions having trouble adapting to rapid social change lack the necessary networks and social relations to participate actively in larger markets.

### 1.1 Social exclusion and chronic poverty

There are a number of commonalities between the exclusion and 'chronic poverty' approaches. First, both social exclusion and chronic poverty emphasize *dynamics*, although the latter concentrates on duration and the scarring effects of prior poverty spells. Just as exclusion theories focus on processes, scholars of chronic poverty identify both the 'chutes' into destitution and the 'ladders' out of it. As defined by Green and Hulme (2005: 874), the chronic poor are 'people who remain poor for much of their life course, who may "pass on" their poverty to their children, and who may die of easily preventable deaths because of the poverty they experience'. Hulme and Shepard (2003) note that those who are poor for at least five years or more are very unlikely to escape this situation. Exclusion dynamics are not as precise as this, but numerous studies of people who are unemployed for a year or more document the increasing difficulty they experience in ever finding a job again.

Chronic poverty, like social exclusion, is embedded in the *social relations* that generate and maintain it. Exclusion by necessity implicates excluders, including exclusionary institutions and policies. For this reason, the capabilities approach of Amartya Sen (2000), for example, is compatible with both conceptions. Social relations that restrict access to rights give rise to the lack of freedom underlying poverty. Both chronic poverty and exclusion devote attention not only to economic resources, but also to political entitlements, rights, and access that make full social participation possible. The chronic poverty approach moves beyond participatory poverty assessments or livelihood frameworks to consider 'the fundamental sociological question of what kinds of social relations produce what kinds of poverty effects' (Green and Hulme 2005: 868).

Chronic poverty shares with social exclusion a *multidimensional* notion of disadvantage. As Hulme and Shepard (2003: 403) write, the causes of chronic poverty are 'multifarious'. Categorising people into groups, for example, or living in large families, may hinder inclusion and prolong poverty. Even in countries with high economic growth, 'significant minorities of their people remained highly deprived' (Green and Hulme 2005: 873). The attention that both chronic poverty and social exclusion perspectives devote to the multiple disadvantages associated with social categorisation is an obvious similarity.

Both chronic poverty and social exclusion approaches are **context-dependent** and take institutional and cultural variation into account. 'What constitutes "poverty,"' write Green and Hulme 2005: 869, 'is neither obvious nor universal'. Poverty is a consequence of lacking a social or institutional safety net during adverse events or periods of increasing needs over the life course. Different legal systems may grant or deprive certain social categories (e.g., widows, linguistic or other minorities) access to various assets or activities necessary to avoid material poverty. Similarly, changing valuations of social categories can throw groups into poverty (e.g., un/deserving poor). 'The question becomes not why some people are poor in society, but why some societies tolerate poverty as an outcome and, for whom, and how

this toleration becomes embedded within institutional norms and systems' (Ibid: 872). Chronic poverty theory transcends Sen's emphasis on universal human rights and its 'placeless and a historical account of how poverty is caused in particular contexts...to specify the institutional mechanisms through which effective rights regimes could be established' (Ibid: 873). It shares Townsend's (1979) emphasis on poverty as 'relative deprivation', depending upon the society in question.

Social exclusion arises from a relationship between active excluders and the excluded who may resist such treatment. Examples of chronic poverty among the Roma in Europe, the Kihn in Vietnam, or historical expulsion of lepers and witches also illustrate the process of humiliation that accompanies social exclusion. One might suppose that countering this calls for participation of the excluded, an orientation found in poverty reduction strategies, such as Narayan's (1999) call to include the 'voices' of the poor. However, inclusion in political institutions alone is not the solution to poverty, since other spheres of life may also inhibit integration.

The chronic poverty approach does suffer from a longstanding tendency of social researchers to sort the poor into categories. Green and Hulme (2005: 873) propose that 'analysts could begin to disaggregate between different categories of poor people', such as the chronic poor, transitory poor, and non-poor. This approach focuses on characteristics of the poor rather than their social relations and the mechanisms that keep them poor. It also contains the danger – well-known from the 'underclass' debate – of diverting attention to the least well-off minority of the poor, absolving the majority from helping the transitory poor. For example, in 2002, the Bush Administration called for eliminating 'chronic homelessness' in ten years, while slashing the affordable and public housing budgets. The 'chronically' homeless referred to the minority who were homeless over long periods of time and generally have multiple problems, such as mental disability or substance abuse. Distinctions among the poor may give rise to evaluations of more or less deserving of assistance, tolerance, or even punishment.

## **1.2 Exclusion versus poverty**

Despite these commonalities, the concept of social exclusion is usually contrasted to that of poverty. In some respects, exclusion encompasses but transcends poverty. It is multidimensional in that it marries the material and non-material, economic and social dimensions of disadvantage. In the evolution of the concept in the European Union, the study of social exclusion grew out of the third Poverty Programme, which was phased out after Brussels adopted the idea.

However, it is useful to identify the ways in which the ideas diverge. People may be poor without being socially excluded, and one can easily think of rich members of socially excluded groups who nonetheless suffer various forms of indignity and social rejection because of their identities. Social exclusion is conventionally concerned with social relations, including those that govern access to resources. It is about the excluders as well as the excluded. Poverty studies may be helpful in understanding the latter, but rarely focus on the former. To the extent that they do, they often point to large, impersonal, structural forces – capitalism, welfare states, governance.

Exclusion emphasizes 'horizontal' ties of belonging, while poverty is concerned with 'vertical' distribution. As Touraine (1991) puts it, exclusion is a matter of being 'in' or 'out', not 'up or 'down'. Inequality and exclusion follow different 'logics'. Inequality belongs to industrial society in which opposing classes are 'integrated' because they confront each other face to face in collective bargaining. In contrast, he argues, exclusion is a symptom of economic growth and social change in which the social actors contesting the dominant 'historicity' are divorced from the economic and political system. In the emerging post-industrial society, the social problem is no longer inequality, but justice and the rules of the game.

One outcome of poverty is 'exclusion' from social participation. Indeed, Peter Townsend (1979: 31) defines poverty as 'relative deprivation', referring to resources 'so seriously below those commanded by the average individual or family that they are, in effect, excluded from ordinary living patterns, customs and activities'. Both poverty and exclusion are considered to be social 'problems', but their points of reference differ. Social exclusion is often contrasted to an inclusive society, one with an intact social bond, whereas poverty is usually opposed to a more equal society. However, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation notes that 'poverty and social exclusion cannot be solved in isolation: people in poverty find it hard to participate in society because they lack resources to do so. Conversely, lack of participation exacerbates poverty, both directly (exclusion from paid work) and indirectly (exclusion from social networks enabling people to improve their lives'. Although a relatively small group cannot afford material basics, larger numbers cannot afford to participate in activities that the majority think everyone should (Hirsch 2006). There are clear political implications of defining both concepts narrowly instead of more broadly.

### **1.3 Indicators of social exclusion: a still-evolving concept**

Nonetheless, one can overstate the differences between social exclusion and poverty, especially chronic poverty. In fact, both are evolving concepts. Social exclusion research can contribute to poverty studies, which are increasingly taking non-monetary dimensions and social considerations into account. At the same time, social exclusion research still makes use of poverty measures. Indeed, with a term so contingently defined as 'social exclusion', measurement has proved challenging. Not surprisingly, researchers found it easier to rely upon what was already learned about the measurement of poverty. The debates over 'basic needs' versus 'deprivation', 'absolute' versus 'relative' poverty, and 'current' versus 'lifetime' poverty have all been enlisted in clarifying exclusion indicators.

In social research, data availability has largely driven the selection of which dimensions of exclusion to measure. Thus, they vary across studies. For example, Barnes's (2005) indicators cover seven dimensions of social exclusion: financial situation, ownership of durable goods, the quality of housing, neighbourhood perception, personal social relationships (operationalised as social support), physical health and psychological well-being. In earlier work, Barnes et al. (2002) measure exclusion as multidimensional disadvantage in the areas of housing, health, education, social relations, and participation. Some of these sound like old-fashioned deprivation measures. Using the British Household Panel Survey, Burchardt, Le Grand and Piachaud (2002) work with four interrelated sets of indicators of 'participation in 'normal' activities of society': (i) consumption (less than half the mean net household income) and savings; (ii) production (those still economically active who are not engaged in socially valued activity); (iii) political engagement (those who do not vote or belong to political organisations); and most important for our purposes, (iv) social interaction (lacking someone who will offer support (listen, comfort, or help in a crisis) or having someone to relax with or who really appreciates you).

Unlike secondary data analyses, the Rowntree Foundation sponsored a group of researchers in Bristol (Gordon et al. 2000) to conduct a new Poverty and Social Exclusion survey that examined four 'themes' of social exclusion: (i) income poverty and material deprivation; (ii) exclusion from the labour market; (iii) exclusion from public services; and (iv) exclusion from social relations. Four aspects of the latter received attention. First, on indicators of participation in 'common social activities', respondents indicated whether they considered an activity essential, whether they actually engaged in them, and if not, what prevented them. For some essential social activities, sizable minorities did not enjoy an evening out once a fortnight, a meal out once a month, a week's holiday away from home, a hobby or leisure activity, and having friends round for a meal, snack or drink. Second, indicators of 'social isolation' and living alone included marital status and household composition. Third, isolation and non-participation implied the lack of emotional and material 'social support'. Fourth, 'civic disengagement' tapped more than just 'thick' formal citizenship but also active involvement in public affairs. An important Bristol innovation was that, rather than define inclusion arbitrarily,



the researchers did something similar to those constructing 'subjective' poverty measures: they asked a representative sample of Britons what they considered 'normal' social activities. The Poverty and Social Exclusion survey also examined constraints on individual choice. Respondents indicated whether their unwanted exclusion was due to lack of affordability or to non-financial obstacles, such as poor transport, fear of crime, child care needs, time stress, physical barriers, or cultural inappropriateness. Perhaps more comprehensively than any other study to date, the Bristol group examined the specifically *social* aspects of exclusion.

German studies use yet other dimensions of exclusion. For example, Kronauer lists labour market, economic, cultural, spatial, social and institutional exclusions (cited in Littlewood and Herkommer 1999). Petra Böhnke (2006) uses the Eurobarometer surveys to measure social exclusion in subjective terms, creating an index of belonging that was in turn related to social support and family ties as well as trust in others and social institutions.<sup>2</sup> She also uses the 1998 German Welfare Survey to find a relationship between distributional/material exclusion and relational or participatory exclusion (Böhnke 2006).<sup>3</sup> In sum, researchers have drawn upon a diverse set of social exclusion dimensions, which they then examined for inter-correlation. However, these studies are largely based upon cross-sectional microdata.

In December 2000 at Nice, the EU Council decided that the fight against social exclusion would be pursued as soft law, and applied the open method of coordination to the social dimension of EU strategy. Every two years beginning in June 2001, nation-states were to produce 'national action plans' on social inclusion, laying out their progress towards agreed-upon goals on a variety of social indicators. Thus, there arose a need to develop exclusion indicators that would make sense both within and across national boundaries and could be tracked over time.

Between 2001 and 2003, A. B. Atkinson and other experts in the Indicators Sub-Group of the Social Protection Committee worked on developing common measures to operationalise a 'shorthand' or working definition of social exclusion drawing upon available data. Measurement priority was given to the distribution of income, access to the labour market (measured in terms of employment rates, unemployment and joblessness as a characteristic of households), the performance of the educational system (measured in terms of early school leaving) and the distribution of health (as measured by life expectancy) (Atkinson et al. 2005). There were also attempts to develop housing and homelessness indicators, but they have yet to be finalised. Since May 2003, the fight against social exclusion has become just one strand in a larger 'streamlined' open method of coordination of social protection. The Commission's attempt to strengthen the 'social dimension' of the Lisbon strategy for growth and employment joined social inclusion efforts to reforms, first, of pensions, and subsequently, of health care. Streamlining also included a reduction in strategic reports to a single report every three years from 2006 on.

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<sup>2</sup> The extent of agreement with four statements were used: 'I don't feel the value of what I do is recognised by the people I meet'; 'I feel left out of society'; 'I don't feel that I have the chance to play a useful part in society'; and 'some people look down on me because of my income or job situation.' By this measure, social exclusion is greater among the unemployed and the poor and among those without family back-up and social support. The latter is based upon the availability of social support outside the household in cases of depression and financial need; satisfaction with family life; and marital status.

<sup>3</sup> Relational dimensions of social exclusion were measured by no close friends and limited possibilities to contact others; pessimism about and no interest in politics; feeling lonely and that life is too complicated; and depression or frightening thoughts.

**Table 1: EU common indicators of poverty and social exclusion**

<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Primary Indicators</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">(Broken down by age and gender)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• At risk of poverty (household size- and composition-adjusted disposable income relative to 60 percent of nationally equivalent median income with OECD equivalence scales, before and after social transfers) by economic activity; household type; housing tenure;</li><li>• Income inequality (top 20-percent-to-bottom-20-percent quintile share ratio);</li><li>• Persistent at-risk-of poverty (share of the population below the poverty line for current year and at least two of three preceding years);</li><li>• Relative median poverty risk gap (ratio of median income of those at risk of poverty and the at risk of poverty threshold);</li><li>• Regional cohesion (coefficient of variation of employment rates among territorial regions);</li><li>• Long-term unemployment rate (share of 15-64 year olds in active population who were unemployed by ILO definition for 12 months or more);</li><li>• Share of children and working age adults living in jobless households;</li><li>• Early school leavers not in education or training (proportion of 18-24 year olds with only lower secondary education and not in education or training in the prior four weeks);</li><li>• Life expectancy at birth;</li><li>• Self-defined health status (as bad or very bad) by bottom and top of income distribution.</li></ul>
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Source: European Commission, Joint Report on Social Inclusion. Brussels, July 2003, Appendix.

The indicators presented in Table 1, used in the first two Joint Exclusion Reports of 2001 and 2003, covered material and labour market deprivation better than they did social, political, or cultural dimensions. Poverty is central.<sup>4</sup> The EU indicators have little to do with the academic social scientists' measures of social exclusion (discussed above) that are more oriented to the rupture of social relations. However, it is worth noting that two of the EU indicators attempt to capture *dynamics* of both persistent poverty and long-term unemployment.

Although this official list stresses consumption and production, work is underway to measure more social and political dimensions of exclusion. The 2005 Joint Report underlines 'the need to better capture the multidimensional nature of social exclusion' and 'adapting to the diversity of challenges in the Member States'. European researchers are examining less tangible aspects like non-participation in civic life, poor future prospects, financial precariousness, inability to participate in customary family and community activities, living in multiply-deprived areas in depressed regions and large cities, education, literacy/numeracy, access to the internet, housing, and homelessness. They also consider life events that increase the risk of exclusion, such as prior delinquency or a prison record. Some studies

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<sup>4</sup> Indeed, as time goes on, child poverty has made its way from Britain to the EU as a focus of the social dimension.

examine exclusion from public and private services, from social relations and sociable activities, from social support and even from leisure and culture. Insofar as social exclusion is a relational concept associated with social isolation or civic participation, indicators of 'social capital' such as associational membership, social network involvement, and democratic inclusion or voting rights may also qualify. The list can go on and on, as NGOs and the 'social partners' participate in the statistical process, giving a voice to the excluded in devising benchmarks that hold governments accountable for social inclusion.

The EU has also issued a number of directives against discrimination. To determine whether there are group disparities, new measures are needed. The effort has begun to measure the social inclusion of non-naturalised immigrants, composing over 13 million people, or 3.5 percent of the population living in the fifteen older member states of the European Union. Immigrant unemployment is double or more that of the native born in most European countries.

Recognising that social cohesion rests upon the peaceful incorporation of newcomers through a process of mutual acceptance and tolerance, the British Council of Brussels, Foreign Policy Centre and Migration Policy Group initiated the development of a 'European Civic Citizenship and Inclusion Index'. It gauges the extent to which immigrants have rights and obligations comparable to EU citizens. The index is based upon almost one hundred indicators, grouped into five policy areas ordered by immigrants' progressive stages towards full citizenship. Thus, it incorporates a dynamic logic. The index assumes the immigrant inclusion process requires: (i) labour Market inclusion, (ii) family reunion, (iii) long-term residence, (iv) naturalisation, and (vi) anti-discrimination measures. The first annual report provides the initial 2003 benchmarks for each country. It reveals that, as expected from the context-dependence of exclusion, countries implement their common commitment to inclusion very differently, although they tend to rank consistently across the five areas. So far, member states have not systematically enforced EU Directives and national laws forbidding discrimination against immigrants. The report states that:

Inclusion requires more than just access to the labour market. Work is not enough – for immigrants to be included successfully into society, they need to feel secure, and to feel that their contribution over time is valued.

The index looks at inclusion from the perspective of the labour market and civic citizenship, but it neglects cultural integration and political participation. Furthermore, the index measures a 'thin' definition of citizenship (legal formalities like the existence of laws and policies) more than a 'thick' or substantive conception, assessing whether those policies are effective in prodding communities to include and accept immigrants in social life. In sum, work on European racial and ethnic inclusion indicators has just begun. Reviewing the existing indicators and confronting the challenges of measurement suggest that no single 'exclusion line' is likely in the near future.

## **2. What have we learned? A review of the exclusion literature**

A dynamic approach to social exclusion should situate the analysis of longitudinal micro-data in the institutional and local context within which individual life courses progress (Room 2006). Social exclusion dynamics should also be conceptualised at the meso- and macro-levels.

### **2.1 Micro studies of social ex/inclusion**

The increasing availability of *longitudinal and panel data* has furthered empirical research on social exclusion. Such data sets were first assembled in the United States where studies of poverty dynamics using the National Longitudinal Surveys, Panel Study of Income Dynamics, and Survey of Income and Program Participation (e.g., Bane and Ellwood 1994; Duncan 1984) strongly encouraged European countries to launch their own data collection efforts.

Some of the first European-wide studies of social exclusion dynamics were based upon national panel surveys in the UK and Germany. It was only a matter of time before the European Union instituted the European Community Household Panel (ECHP) Survey. Unfortunately, the ECHP has ended, and the EU-Survey of Income and Living Conditions (SILC) does not appear to include the longitudinal aspect so necessary for studying exclusion dynamics. In the meantime, panel studies from a few developing countries are becoming available. The longitudinal Ethiopian Rural Household Survey, Vietnam National Household Panel survey, and the Indonesian Family Life Survey are all potentially useful for studying exclusion dynamics.

#### *Exclusion and the individual life course*

At an individual level, exclusion may express itself as 'persistent' or 'chronic' social dislocation, both poverty and other non-material handicaps. A person may be in the process of moving in opposite directions on different dimensions towards more or less social integration. As a result, chronic poverty does not necessarily imply social exclusion in other spheres of social life.

The life course perspective may be profitably applied to social exclusion (DeWilde 2003). Seebohm Rowntree is usually considered the founder of the perspective. He finds that poverty was due to interruption of earning power or large families. The welfare state insured workers against either eventuality. Like social exclusion, the life course is multidimensional. There are life stages with more/less earnings and larger/smaller family. Both labour market and household social relations are thus implicated in life course analysis.

Life course theory has three central ideas: trajectories, transitions, and turning points (Elder and Shanahan 2006). Life courses, social pathways and the accumulation of experience are comprised of dynamic trajectories of considerable duration. A transition is a change in state(s), an entry and exit to a role. A turning point is a substantial change in the course of a behaviour trajectory. The life source approach has traditionally considered how individuals adapt to events, socially defined transitions between positions in a given life domain, and life stage passages from one combination of transitions to another in different life domains. These individual adjustments are examined especially in the context of the family's interdependent life courses and its strategies to balance needs and the use and distribution of resources. Life source events like transitions in/out of paid work, in/out of welfare, family/household transitions, and health/illness are among the most important topics of research. Unexpected life events or historic changes -- contracting AIDS, drought, or war cause some to spiral into exclusion, passing through stages of social detachments (death or dislocation of family and villagers) and exclusion from assets (land) needed for a livelihood -- can alter the institutionalised life course. The traditional American life source perspective (Elder 1974) has been successfully applied to the study of poverty dynamics in Britain (Rigg and Sefton 2004) and suggests new avenues for exclusion research.

Welfare states helped to institutionalise a common life course among citizens of the same country, regimenting school, work, family formation, retirement, and other social activities into a common normative sequence. This process also led to social exclusion of those whose lives did not conform to expectation. Single mothers and early retirees appear to be 'out of sync'. However, as new social risks arise, the life course may change too. It is increasingly unconvincing to assume that Europeans have a single trajectory in family life, as individuals move through many families and household formations or live alone over time. As generations replace one another, period or cohort effects on life courses are evident. Today workers may change careers in mid-life, more frequently moving across firms and occupations. As households and work change, welfare states come under pressure to adapt more flexibly to disparate individual life courses, using citizenship rather than employment as a basis for social rights.

Karl Ulrich Mayer's (2001; Mayer and Schoepflin 1989) work on 'life course regimes' shows that societies develop different life course patterns due to different institutional configurations

shaping what social roles are deemed appropriate and when. Empirically, Mayer has found that, under globalisation pressures, there are commonalities among industrial countries in who is excluded: young adults without training, qualifications, or from migrant backgrounds, single mothers, and large families. However, there are also systematic divergences in how social exclusion manifests itself. In liberal market states, the working poor appear trapped, giving rise to 'underclass' outcomes among marginalised groups. In continental conservative welfare states, exclusion takes the form of labour market exclusion, of young adults but especially of older long-term unemployed workers. In southern European welfare states, exclusion is manifested primarily among unemployed young adults, but the Scandinavian social democratic welfare states prevent permanent social exclusion because redistributive programmes are universal and consensual and there is a stress on activation.

Comparing poverty dynamics in four advanced industrial countries (Canada, unified Germany, Great Britain, and the United States) for overlapping six-year periods in the 1990s, Valletta (2004) finds that the persistence of poverty is higher in North America than in Europe. Differences in social policy helped account for the observed differences in poverty incidence and persistence between the continents. Despite a high incidence of poverty in Great Britain, it was relatively transitory. What is important about this study is that poverty transitions and the prevalence of chronic poverty were associated with employment instability and family dissolution in all four countries. Thus, it associates poverty dynamics with multidimensional social exclusion dynamics.

#### *National studies of welfare dynamics*

As longitudinal micro-data sets appropriate to the dynamic conception of social exclusion are coming on line in Europe, some national longitudinal surveys were available to assess exclusion dynamics. Beyond the study of income poverty dynamics alone, welfare dynamics or social assistance 'careers' – the entry and exit into social assistance – also received intense analysis (Saraceno 2002; Leisering and Leibfried 1999), as much for political as scholarly reasons. Long-term social assistance receipt was labelled 'dependency'. Neoliberals advocated activation policies or 'workfare' based upon the finding that the longer workers are unemployed, the more their skills atrophy, and the less likely they are to find a new job. But just like poverty, the length of unemployment also partly reflects eligibility and other social insurance rules.

Utilising the concept of a 'poverty career', Leisering and Leibfried (1999: 245) find that 'the spectrum of poverty ranges from temporary interruption of social integration (or social inclusion) to permanent exclusion'. By exclusion, they mean something more than deprivation or low income. It means being 'outside' – for example, a foreigner legally banned from working. Exclusion reduces social relationships and participation in social institutions to an extent that restricts wide areas of a person's life.

But analysis of the Bremen Longitudinal Study of Social Assistance revealed that very few people are ever socially excluded in this extreme sense.<sup>5</sup>

A similar longitudinal study of unemployed persons in Croatia compared those (over half) who remained unemployed after one year and those who returned to work. The long-term unemployed, who tended to be older, poor, with low education and poor health, suffered a decline in their financial resources and an increase in social isolation. In contrast, those who were employed improved their material situation and experience less social isolation (Sverko, Galic, and Sersic 2006).

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<sup>5</sup> Leisering and Leibfried (1999) use social assistance as a proxy for poverty. The Bremen Longitudinal Study took a 10 percent sample of social assistance claimants in Bremen in 1989 and followed up in 1994, together with a parallel 'East' German study in Halle from 1991 to 1995. Only a small percentage of the German population (3 percent) went on social assistance in those days, and take up was only around 50 percent of those eligible, limiting the sample to a relatively deprived group, both economically and socially.

The reverse of welfare to work is the process of moving from work to welfare or losing a job. For example, Alcock et al. (2003) note that, despite policy emphasis on youth unemployment, more and more prime-age and especially over 50-year old men are becoming detached from the British labour force, especially in the industrial regions of the UK. Many of these men are not officially unemployed and retire early, but are really the hidden unemployed. Others are on disability and involve themselves with domestic responsibilities. The life-events that lead to their unemployment are not simply layoffs. However long they are jobless, they want a job and tend to look, but face obstacles in regaining a job. Although more actively looking for work and applying for jobs does increase the chances of finding one, supply-side activation measures may simply move individuals around the hiring queue without addressing the problem of insufficient demand in these regions.

There are a few studies from developing countries that combine poverty and exclusion dynamics. For example, Verner and Alda (2004) use survey data on poor excluded youth from three poor urban neighbourhoods in Fortaleza in the northeast. Poverty was conceived multidimensionally, with indicators of hunger, early pregnancy and fatherhood, violence, crime, drug use, low levels of social capital, and low educational attainment. The main findings show that poor youth are at considerable risk of growing up without their father. The intergenerational transmission of low education attainment does exist, but it is diminishing. The risk of early pregnancy and early fatherhood is large among poor and excluded youth; there is a small risk of sexual abuse, and violence within the household exists. Social capital levels are low, and the risk of growing up in a violent neighbourhood is high. Indeed, 80 percent of the youth feel unsafe in their neighbourhood, and 50 percent feel unsafe at home. This attention to social relations and spatial context is typical of social exclusion studies.

#### *The European community household panel studies*

The ECHP survey provided one of the first opportunities for many Europeans to study social exclusion as a dynamic, multidimensional, relational process in an institutional context. For example, it became possible to examine how long-term unemployment set other disadvantages in motion in some countries rather than others. This process is at the heart of Serge Paugam's notion of social disqualification:

When the social status of individuals depends primarily on their participation in the systems of economic production and exchange of their society, there is a high probability that unemployment will lead to a loss of status and a feeling of failure, especially if it extends for any length of time. It involves more a process of what might be termed 'social disqualification' than a static state. It brings about a sharp drop in living standards, a weakening of social life, and marginalization with respect to those in work – effects which can become cumulative and lead to a situation of intense poverty and, at the extreme, of social rupture' (Gallie and Paugam 2000).

Labour market conditions at first entry to work influenced later risks of unemployment, implying a scarring effect of unemployed people who face a higher risk of unemployment in the future. At the same time, the process of 'defamilialisation' leads people to live on their own, but is differentially advanced across countries. Together, the joint influence of these processes formed the basis for models or systems of social regulation of unemployment. Gallie and Paugam (2000) examine individual life courses across a set of eight European countries for hypothesized employment welfare regimes and social regulation of the family. They find that long-term unemployment led to social isolation in 'employment centred regimes' with strong insider-outsider boundaries like France, but it did not lead to social exclusion because of stronger family normative obligations in 'sub-protective' Southern European regimes and Ireland.

Muffels and Fouarge (2001) examine whether welfare regimes explain social exclusion. They define social exclusion as living in both persistent income poverty and persistent multidimensional resources deprivation over three years. Using ECHP data, they correlate poverty and deprivation, built from 21 items in four resource areas (health, financial stress,

housing conditions, possession of durables that people want but cannot afford), measured relative to national standards. By their measure of social exclusion, about 6 percent of the EU population was excluded, but persistent poverty was only moderately correlated (0.40) with persistent deprivation, suggesting that they are separate dimensions. The association was higher in southern Europe and lower in social democratic countries. The association between long-term income and long-term deprivation was stronger than between short-term income and resources deprivation. Muffles and Fouarge then predict social exclusion with class, education, and work insecurity, which are related in all regimes, especially in the southern one. Those excluded longer from the labour market are more likely to be deprived in Liberal than corporatist regimes, and least of all in social democratic ones. One especially good insight of this study is its awareness that welfare regimes are also changing, just as individuals do over time. It also suggests that in determining well-being, health, employment housing, and other social policies are as implicated as income transfers.

Tsakoglou and Papadopoulos (2002) employ the first three years of the European Community Household Panel survey to measure the risk of social exclusion dynamically. High risk referred to chronic disadvantage – being excluded on at least two of four criteria – income, 22 living conditions, whether certain basic necessities could be afforded, and ‘social relations’ – for at least two out of the last three years. Social relations (‘nonmaterial deprivation’) were a function of talking to neighbours only once or twice a month or less; meeting friends once or twice a month or less; and not being a member of a club, political party, or group.

Similarly, a group of scholars use the ECHP to compare *The Dynamics of Social Exclusion in Europe* with detailed analyses of Austria, Germany, Greece, Portugal and the UK (Apospori and Millar 2003). These researchers focus on four life course transitions of groups expected to be at risk of exclusion: young adults; lone parents; the sick and disabled; and retirees. They follow individuals within the four risk groups for one year to see if they move into or out of poverty and states of non-monetary deprivation. The analysis also considers three indicators of social relations: membership in clubs or organisations; rarely talking to neighbours; and rarely meeting friends and relatives.

#### *Cumulative disadvantage?*

As these studies make clear, some scholars consider social exclusion to be a process of accruing multiple types of disadvantage. Mechanisms of exclusion include ‘cumulative continuity’, which results from individual and family values inducing people to live in compatible environments, reinforcing dispositions. In contrast, ‘cumulative disadvantage’ results when problem youth associate with others like them in inner-city neighbourhoods, where they also lack family support (Furstenberg et al. 1999). Similarly, many studies find that the longer one is unemployed, the worse one’s health (Bartley and Plewis 2002). The precise sequencing of cumulative disadvantage is not yet known.

Some studies define social exclusion as a downward spiral of cumulative disadvantage. For example, Gallie and Paugam (2000: 370) write:

Social exclusion refers to a situation where people suffer from the cumulative disadvantages of labour market marginalization, poverty, and social isolation. The different aspects of deprivation become mutually reinforcing over time, leading to a downward spiral in which the individual comes to have neither the economic nor the social resources needed to participate in their society or to retain a sense of social worth.

Indeed, Paugam (1999) finds that the unemployed and irregularly employed have a greater probability of marital separation or living alone, of rarely speaking to neighbours, meeting friends and relatives, or receiving financial support from relatives or friends, and not belonging to clubs or organisations only in some, mainly northern European, countries.

Yet one of the more consistent findings of exclusion studies is that some dimensions of social rupture are not associated with others. This implies that processes of cumulative disadvantage – vicious cycles, downward spirals, etc. – are more rare than many suppose. For one thing, social exclusion is distinct from chronic poverty. Most studies find that the rupture of social relations varies only imperfectly with forms of material and economic deprivation. Barnes et al. (2002: 42) and Gallie and Paugam (2000) finds that sociability/social isolation has its own dynamics distinct from persistent poverty and for this reason, warn against assuming there is a cleavage between a multiply-deprived minority and a comfortable majority.

Whelan, Layte, and Maitre (2002) use the ECHP to examine the association between persistent poverty over three years (1993-95) and other dimensions of deprivation (basic lifestyle, secondary lifestyle, housing, and environment). Across countries, between a third and a half of those below the 60 percent median income line in 1993 remained poor in all three years. They find that only a small proportion of the persistently poor were exposed to multiple deprivations, even though poverty increased the risk of multiple deprivations, especially basic lifestyle deprivation. More people are poor or deprived in one way than are deprived in multiple ways.

Other dimensions are imperfectly inter-related. Associations among the consumption, production, political, and social dimensions in the British Household Panel were also moderate to weak. Very few British people were excluded on all these dimensions, especially over a five-year period (Burchardt, Le Grand and Piachaud 2002).

The imperfect associations among dimensions of social exclusion illustrate the fact that many people are on trajectories into and out of social life at different paces. There are more people who are 'vulnerable' and 'at risk' of exclusion than those who are multiply disadvantaged all at the same time. The consistent finding of weak correlations among dimensions of social life belies the earlier notion of an 'underclass', a set of 'hard core', permanently disadvantaged people. At most, this would characterise a very small percentage of the population in western industrial countries.

#### *Contextual impacts on dynamic exclusion processes*

As noted, the process of individual exclusion is embedded in and structured by local, national, and international contexts. Welfare regimes determine the coincidence of unemployment, poverty, family life, and social relations. Spatial contexts, such as the concentration of poverty in one's neighbourhood (Wilson 1996), also influence life chances. The life course, we have seen, is institutionally patterned. For example, Room (2006, 2000) argues that the dynamics of social exclusion – the feedback loops and cumulative change – are mediated by the interactions of institutional (school) and household strategies. But in addition, institutions can be undermined by 'runaway feedback loops' and dynamic interdependencies among individuals they serve. This perspective calls for multi-level analysis that takes the 'meso-level' into account. Individuals make decisions based upon what their neighbours, peers, and role models do.

Migration is a process that easily can be cast as transgressing a boundary, becoming excluded, and slowly integrating anew. Rules governing residence, naturalisation, and work in a given territory have profound effects on the chances of migrant incorporation. However, more informal cultural rules – from expectations about learning a language to adopting local customs – vary considerably across space. Context matters, as there is much national variation between the poles of assimilation and multiculturalism.

Exclusion also encompasses the dynamics of homelessness. Many have noted the loss of social fixity and the progressive isolation of those without a home (Snow and Anderson 2003). For example, one study of the life courses of homeless individuals in Berlin and Los Angeles identifies how policy over time exacerbated social exclusion. Displaced, criminalised, and relocated to inhospitable areas of the city, they 'become increasingly socially and spatially excluded over time and with increasing durations of homelessness'.



Furthermore, the enforced proximity to other people with severe social problems exacerbates 'substance abuse, defeatist attitudes, and shame. Negative experiences in low-level commercial and communal shelters have adverse consequences for the ability of homeless people to maintain their social networks, self-esteem, and life chances' (Von Mahs 2005: 941-3; see also Conley 1996) Unable to stay in a neighbourhood where they do have social relations, homeless people's social networks to housed people evaporate. Shelter practices also reinforce shame and foster deliberate self-isolation. Exclusion processes thus explain how single homeless people become trapped as their many disadvantages accumulate over time. The case of the homeless illustrates a more general condition in which social support is institutionally and spatially mediated.

### *Exclusion traps*

One important topic in the study of poverty dynamics is the notion of poverty (or unemployment) 'traps' (see Bowles, Durlauf and Hoff 2006). Generally speaking, these 'traps' result when individuals are confronted with constrained choices (bounded rationality) that cause their problems to persist. These constraints might include the obligation to help needy family whenever resources allow, spatially constricted opportunities, and institutions like social policies that make it difficult to save, build assets, and thus, earn one's way out of poverty.

There are three broad explanations for the persistence of poverty, all of which entail individual decisions dependent upon others: critical thresholds; dysfunctional institutions; and neighbourhood effects. In the first, productivity and income cannot increase without reaching a given critical mass. In the second, high levels of inequality or political corruption make it impossible for the economy to work efficiently. Or a preference for one's in-group that improved well-being in low levels of development hinders impersonal market forces at a higher one. Social exclusion from one's group is too costly a price for defection. The third explanation is in fact more general than the simple effect of neighbourhood; any fixed characteristic or group membership of an individual may distort his/her decisions and in turn, the decisions of others. Everyone adjusts to non-optimal behaviour, such as peer group conformity to underachievement in school, resulting in collective inefficiencies.

Similar processes may trap people in conditions of social exclusion. One example comes from the author's research among local initiatives to help the long-term unemployed in France and Germany. Locked out of the primary labour market, the long-term unemployed find short-term work opportunities in new nonprofit, socially beneficial enterprises like recycling companies, home help services, and playground maintenance. However, instead of providing the job skills that would signal to employers that these workers are motivated and ready to work, these 'secondary' or 'transitional' labour market jobs signal that the worker is 'second-class'. Since these secondary jobs are temporary, the workers return to unemployment, no better off than before. These results are confirmed by the European Commission's targeted socio-economic research programme's INPART (Inclusion through Participation) study. It finds that temporary employment schemes can provide 'economic independence, income improvement, social contacts, status and respect, useful activities, self-confidence and a more positive outlook', but can also exacerbate social exclusion, trapping participants in an 'activation recycling process' from one scheme after another (Van Berkel 2000: 13).

A recent study of post-apartheid South Africa similarly reports a long-lasting legacy of that society's exclusionary practices. Limited social relationships that do not reach non-poor households or mainstream institutions can block mobility and trap people in poverty. Linkages beyond the poor are needed for growth opportunities. Although active participation and social relationships among the poor stabilise livelihoods at low levels, they do not promote upward mobility, access to markets, or the accumulation of assets (Adato, Carter, and May 2006).

## 2.2 Meso-level exclusion

So far, this paper has discussed individual trajectories in and out of social exclusion. But it is also appropriate to speak of social exclusion with respect to groups. The concentration of chronic poverty among sub-populations or identifiable groups is a form of multidimensional disadvantage, and there are some clear processes that give rise to it or break it down.

### *Social boundaries*

One way in which groups are excluded from society is through the drawing of distinctions or social boundaries. Social scientific interest in the subject of social boundaries has burgeoned of late, perhaps in response to rising migration, capital mobility, and gender mainstreaming. Some boundaries are more porous, formal, salient, complex, and specialised than others. For example, citizenship may be easier to attain in some countries (e.g., with 'thin' political-legal notions of citizenship) than others (say, with 'thick' ethno-national ideas of membership).

Group formation entails boundary processes. As Edmond Goblots puts it, 'every barrier is also a level'. When groups delineate what makes them special and what the members share, they draw a line that makes outsiders inferior (if not necessarily poorer). The cohesion of insiders is reinforced through the creation of cultural 'dualisms', viewing the outsiders as having attributes opposite to one's own group (Barth 1969; Douglas 1966; Alexander 2001; Elias and Scotson 1994). Outsiders are profane; insiders are sacred. In-groups are clean; out-groups are dirty. Newcomers are disorderly; the established follow the rules. As Norbert Elias observes, there are clear configurations of the relations of newcomers and oldtimers. The latter's greater cohesion, familiarity, information and organisation give them the power to stigmatise and exclude newcomers. Yet dominant groups cannot easily continue without social contact outside the group, at least for some purposes. Thus, particularism and universalism co-exist in uneasy tension. Outsiders are really marginals, strangers.

Wimmer and Lamont (2006) examine the genesis and change of social boundaries through the mechanisms of actors engaged in 'boundary work'. There are struggles over the definition or drawing of boundaries. Cultural, symbolic, and moral arguments have real implications for social interaction and access to group resources. In situations such as rising inter-group contact, boundary work can take several forms. A boundary may be activated, giving rise to social closure and opportunity hoarding by insiders and 'dual closure' by the outsiders. Frank Parkin (1979) argues that excluded groups may themselves engage in a reactive form of social closure that he calls 'usurpation', valorising their own group and excluding the majority. In this 'dual closure' process, boundaries harden. However, it may also provide the excluded group with the solidarity, organisation, and resources necessary to demand inclusion. Alternatively, boundaries may become more or less open, allowing outsiders to cross with few transaction costs. 'Passing' is a method of an individual changing identity while leaving the boundary unchanged. Insiders and outsiders may also engage in re-defining or re-interpreting their identities. Stigmatised groups and insiders may also de-emphasize their identity in ways that allow newcomers to join.

Research at the border is thus a useful site for examining exclusion processes, as it takes work to delineate where the lines are drawn between in and out. However, some boundaries are narrow in scope, so exclusion in one respect may be compensated for by inclusion in a different one. Boundaries also vary over time, being activated in some circumstances and receding in importance in others.

Much theorising about boundaries seeks to identify universal structuralist mechanisms in which content and context do not matter. Charles Tilly (2004) defines a social boundary as any contiguous zone of contrasting density, rapid transition, or separation between internally connected clusters of population activity. Social boundaries separate 'us' from 'them,' encouraging mutual aid and sociability within the boundary and exploitation and denigration across it. Depending upon transactions across the boundary, categories can produce 'durable' inequality. Categorical inequalities or asymmetrical group relations become

institutionalised because they solve organisational problems, setting up 'systems of social closure, exclusion and control' (Tilly 1998: 8). They work through several mechanisms. Exploitation (increased returns on resources by excluding outsiders from the full value that they add by their efforts) and opportunity hoarding (unequal or monopolistic access to a valuable resource) produce durable inequality as agents incorporate paired and unequal categories at crucial organisational boundaries. The categorical distinction is reinforced through emulation (transfer from one social setting to another) and adaptation of activities to the unequal categories. Tilly also identifies the causal mechanisms that precipitate boundary change: encounter, imposition, borrowing, conversation, and incentive shifts. He distinguishes these causal mechanisms from mechanisms that constitute boundary change itself – inscription/erasure; de/activation; site transfer; relocation – and from the consequences of boundary change: coordinated attack, coordinated defence, or mutual aid.

### *Participation*

Many working in the social exclusion framework argue that social inclusion requires direct participation in decision-making and active citizenship. Thus, the formation of local groups of disadvantaged citizens makes it possible to challenge existing exclusionary practices. This is more likely to be successful when real resources and power are involved. Just expressing one's point of view or 'voice' (Narayan et al. 1999) is rarely sufficient for meaningful participation. Empowerment, influence, and agency entail more than being invited to the table.

For example, Thorp, Stewart, and Heyer (2005) maintain that group formation has great potential to empower and raise the incomes of poor people. However, since the chronically poor are socially isolated, lack political rights, or are materially disadvantaged in group formation, this handicap in organising simply adds to the vicious circle that maintains their chronic poverty. Even when some groups are formed among the poor, such as rotating credit associations, they often exclude the even poorer. Thus, using participation and group organisation to overcome social isolation of the poor can ironically encourage exclusion of the weakest.

Consequently, some thought must be given to capacity building of organisations of excluded groups. Obstacles such as remoteness, poor access, cultural/linguistic differences must be tackled. For example, two European Commission funded comparative empirical studies – SEDEC (Social Exclusion and the Development of European Citizenship) and INPART (Inclusion through Participation) – show that full social participation requires taking into account the inclusionary potential of forms of work other than mainstream paid employment. Having considered the partial extent to which paid employment is a source of social integration, this research identifies the significance of citizen participation as an essential element in reducing exclusion. 'A lack of participation or social isolation is not necessarily only a problem of financial hardship, and financial hardship is not necessarily a problem of a lack of participation, as the situation of the working poor and the active unemployed illustrate' (Van Berkel 2000: 10). Voluntary, unpaid participation in 'third system organisations' in local neighbourhoods was considered valuable, but 'unpaid work by itself cannot achieve inclusion'. Also, policies should support and not work at cross-purposes to the self-help efforts of the poor. For example, in Brazil and Berlin, local citizens are given some decision-making power over the budget, allowing them to launch projects that can fight social exclusion.

Too often, the study of social exclusion focuses on its victims, their characteristics or life events.<sup>6</sup> This tends to conceal the relationships involved in exclusion, the role played by excluders as well as the excluded. Individual micro-data cannot capture discrimination and

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<sup>6</sup> The Social Exclusion Unit, established in 1997 in the Prime Minister's Office, conducted studies on a wide range of 'problem' groups, like 'rough sleepers', 'school leavers', or 'lone mothers', targeted for policy intervention.

other exclusionary relations between insiders and outsiders. While the study of poverty dynamics often takes context as given (or assumes it is fixed), scholars of social exclusion should take group relations and collective processes seriously. For example, religious, ethnic, racial, and gender exclusion may be codified in impersonal laws impeding social participation. Extreme examples are the Nuremberg laws and South African apartheid. More widespread laws governing the rights of non-citizens create similar obstacles to full participation in society. A taken-for-granted institutional obstacle to social inclusion is the social organisation of time, which can disadvantage parents, for example. The process of spatial segregation is another exclusionary mechanism. Poor neighbourhoods and housing estates are excluded from access to resources and opportunities, despite urban regeneration policies, because institutions (e.g., housing programmes, transportation, poor schools, plant closures, no cultural facilities) in fact maintain the social isolation of such places, impeding individual efforts to integrate.

### **2.3 Macro-level processes**

The meaning of social exclusion varies across national and sub-cultural contexts (Silver 1994). For example, in France, Republican and Durkheimian thought treats social exclusion as a progressive rupturing of the social bond that socialises and integrates individuals. However, republicanism identifies groups in the law only reluctantly, which makes it difficult to target excluded identity groups. In Britain, the opposite is true. Social exclusion refers to catastrophic ruptures in living standards that characterise 'problem groups' composed of deviant individuals with cumulative disadvantages. British work on social exclusion emphasizes poverty, particularly child poverty, and disfavoured residence. On the continent, a lack of social integration refers foremost to joblessness, not poverty *per se*, but it often includes cultural deprivation, such as inability to speak the native language, or unfamiliarity or non-conformity with dominant norms.

Different national understandings of what it means to belong have thus far defied analysis. The EU may have designated common exclusion indicators for monitoring purposes, but national differences in the meaning of social exclusion, in contrast to poverty, still impede comparative study. Instead, the institutions in which these ideas are embedded, especially welfare regimes, have acted as proxies. This problem arises not least because welfare states supposedly express social solidarity. However, there has been a decline in redistributive solidarity in many welfare states, so that over time, more and more people are excluded from its protection. Those who do fall in the social safety net are expected to carry out their responsibilities, namely, work, but are stigmatised in return. The welfare state itself is ironically contributing to social exclusion.

Can inclusion policies serve as anti-poverty policies? Many welfare states distinguished between social insurance for workers financed by contributions of the social partners and social assistance, financed by general taxation and distributed to the needy who cannot work. This distinction has blurred in recent years with the increasing stress on activation and inclusion through paid work. Escaping poverty increasingly means inclusion in the labour market. But if inclusion is to have the meaning of social membership and full participation, minimum wages, taxes, and transfers to workers should be high enough to prevent poverty and protection adequate to avoid exploitation. As Joan Robinson once said, 'the only thing worse than being exploited is not being exploited', that is, being socially excluded.

With European and global market integration, national bases of social solidarity have been eroding. This is not to say that national institutions are converging, but rather that the norms upon which they were founded are changing. Moreover, incorporation into larger markets and transnational institutions may disadvantage some countries. Thus, if it is undesirable to be excluded or isolated from world trade flows, it is not much better to be 'adversely incorporated' into them (Hickey and du Toit, 2006).

With globalisation also comes labour mobility and increasing social and cultural heterogeneity. Social integration cannot be assumed. Societies are working harder and more

self-consciously at actualising their values, exercising tolerance of difference, and learning from newcomers. Institutional changes may be necessary to address the problems of new, potentially excluded groups. For example, European societies will need to address the question of how to represent Islam institutionally in light of their earlier agreements about church-state relations. Similarly, what kinds of rights shall be extended to refugees and asylum seekers, to the family members of immigrants? Shall they be permitted to vote or participate in politics as a way of encouraging social inclusion? Shall language classes be offered to all newcomers so as to permit an inclusive and meaningful civic conversation about what membership in a pluralistic society shall mean?

These are new policy questions about social exclusion. However, there are already laws on the books to eliminate discrimination on the basis of gender, race, ethnicity, religion, disability, and sexual orientation. The question is whether there is the will to enforce them. The EU Directives were neglected for years until the European Court of Justice threatened sanctions. Legal and policy remedies are often insufficient to prevent discrimination when exclusion is multidimensional and embedded in social relationships. One solution is 'associative redistribution' (Durlauf 2001), making group memberships more accessible, or affirmative or 'positive action' to include members of excluded groups. Another way to insure the execution of anti-discrimination laws is to create representative institutions in which group members participate in safeguarding their rights. The full range of civil, political, and social rights should be extended to the excluded so they can participate in their own inclusion.

### **3. Conclusion**

While drawing many insights from the literature on poverty dynamics, the study of social exclusion aims to transcend poverty's narrow focus on monetary or material resource distribution. Exclusion as a process of progressive social rupture is a more comprehensive and complex conceptualisation of social disadvantage. Material and non-material dimensions are implicated; so too are individual and group dynamics. National and local contexts – from the law to cultural understandings – shape the meaning of exclusion. Exclusion emphasizes horizontal ties of belonging, although these may give rise to vertical distribution. Relations prevail over resources in the process of social exclusion. Exclusion can take place at the individual, community, national, and even international level.

Although this paper enumerated some commonalities between the exclusion perspective and that of chronic poverty, it is possible to add some critical observations about the chronic poverty approach. First, that perspective seems to continue the historical tendency for elites and policymakers to sort and make distinctions among the poor. Second, there is a danger in emphasizing the worst-off few with cumulative disadvantages – the chronically poor – rather than the larger number of precarious and vulnerable people. Third, solutions that emphasize participation by the excluded or organising excluded groups in order to overcome isolation can ironically encourage exclusion of even weaker and more isolated people. Fourth, chronic poverty, especially measured in money metrics, allows for greater comparability across countries and periods, but at the expense of detail about the specific contexts in which chronic poverty emerges and the mechanisms that reproduce it.

These criticisms are not intended to deny that social exclusion analyses may suffer from related weaknesses. The term is vague, ambiguous, and contested in meaning, allowing for its malleable, flexible application in many contexts at the cost of conceptual precision. The difficulty in defining social exclusion makes it hard to measure. The fact that exclusion researchers have fallen back on poverty indicators gives credence to the claims that exclusion is just a new label on old wine bottles.

Some critics of the term maintain that talk of social exclusion is distracting attention from larger processes of social class conflict, rising income inequality, and welfare state reforms that stress 'activation' and inclusion through paid work (e.g., Castel 1995; Levitas 2005). At its best, social exclusion theory acknowledges the structural sources of the process rather

than the characteristics of the excluded. However, there is a danger that larger forces will disappear in analyses following the life source trajectories of excluded individuals as they accumulate deprivations and social ruptures. Rather than resurrecting debates about the 'underclass' or 'Unterschicht',<sup>7</sup> the study of social exclusion dynamics should emphasize the large number of people today who have spent some portion in their lives in a period of multiple disadvantages due to transformations beyond their individual control. Conversely, social inclusion highlights the importance of social relations and societal support in re-knitting the social bond.

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<sup>7</sup> A 2006 report claimed that 8 percent of the German population was in the 'Unterschicht', 4 percent in the former west, 20 percent in the east.

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