



ISSN: 2230-9926

Available online at <http://www.journalijdr.com>

# IJDR

International Journal of Development Research

Vol. 14, Issue, 02, pp. 64788-64794, February, 2024

<https://doi.org/10.37118/ijdr.27750.02.2024>



RESEARCH ARTICLE

OPEN ACCESS

## SENSE OF IDENTITY AND SOCIAL IDENTITY IN AGEING: EXPULSION AND RESILIENCE

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article History:

Received 18<sup>th</sup> January, 2024

Received in revised form

29<sup>th</sup> January, 2024

Accepted 01<sup>st</sup> February, 2024

Published online 26<sup>th</sup> February, 2024

#### Key Words:

Old people; Expulsion; Resilience.

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### ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to investigate the many meanings of the sense of identity, attachment and roots in old people, and attempts to offer a review of different perspectives on the issue, including whether or not these factors stimulate the sense of expulsion or the sense of citizenship and resilience. As we develop further on, we believe that depending on the circumstances, old people person oscillates between two opposite poles: a sense of Home that gives them strength and helps form their identity, roots and attachment and a sense of Orphanhood, which makes them feel vulnerable and socially abandoned. The paper also explores how it is possible to build and maintain the concept and sense of home whilst considering old people age implies loss and mourning, and challenges and opportunities of new ways of living. The concept of life course may help advance our understanding of the relationship between home, self and meaning, which are all embedded in cultural factors which must also be considered, such as the stereotypes of older people as inefficient, weak, and sick.

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Citation: Dr. Alejandro Klein. 2024. "Sense of identity and social identity in Ageing: Expulsion and resilience". International Journal of Development Research, 14, (02), 64788-64794.

## INTRODUCTION

**The traditional place of old people in our society: Expulsion:** The traditional place of old people in our society has been expulsion and rejection. While this model is beginning to change, old age has meant by and large the loss of citizen rights, worse quality of life and withdrawal from social relationships. Therefore, in old age it seems that the citizen and its individual character are substituted for a "cog in the wheel", along the same vein as "replaceable" (Klein, 2015; 2022). We may suppose that attachment and roots are substantial to human beings, within a permanent interaction with the other. At the same time, the sense of 'being themselves' - a 'self-identity' - is fundamental, where the social and individual stories are combined or become indivisible. But this consolidated identity and what is left behind is also situational and includes the environment. In particular, psychological and psychoanalytical studies highlight the need to maintain the integrity of the self in this stage of life (Burkitt, 1992; Wetherall, 1996; Peace, Kellaher and Holland, 2006; Hockey and James, 2003)).

**Orphanhood:** In this way, we designate this situation as "orphanhood" as a failure of the social environment to provide adequate or good enough care to its population of old people. With the term "orphanhood" we are not only referring to situations where old people are institutionalized, but to all situations of sudden or gradual change that makes one lose the thread of continual existence, as the environment becomes a confusing, threatening or persecutory space (Kaufman, 1986).

Homelessness and rootlessness are related to social alienation and exclusion and to losing the sense of one's past (and therefore, arguably, one's future). This argument has been applied both to individuals and to displaced groups, where loss of place may also imply the loss of cultural heritage and community cohesion (Peace, Kellaher and Holland, 2006). Here we include the deterioration of community bonds, the change in neighborhoods, the danger of walking on the streets, the feeling of insecurity in one's own home, the violent crime rate, but also the lack of provision on the streets, in vehicles, public spaces, and government offices for the transit and comfort of old people. All these situations worsen when they happen faster, which impedes the capacity to deal with them adequately (Xie, Tong, Guan, Du, Qiu and Slutsky, 2020). Subjectivity tends to be a disorganized attachment, although it does not necessarily imply physical maltreatment, it does imply psychological maltreatment. Old people person loses the guarantee that they can care for themselves, in other words, by default they become an expert self-caregiver. They become exhausted and do not feel protected, but on the opposite, they face chronic situations of abandonment and destitution (Fonagy, 2000; Probyn, 2003). Together with the "collapse" of the secure world, the process of dialogue is fragile or interrupted by the social and the affected exchanges, symbolic and interactive, with processes of confusion with the public, private and intimate environments (Lyons-Ruth, 2004). The world as a good environment is transformed into precariousness and confusion, so old people person locks themselves in and is afraid of leaving. It is no longer an intermediary between the public and the intimate, but a protective barrier in the face of what the public sees as an imminent threat, within an imminent catastrophic situation that becomes chronic (Klein, 2006;

Lukes, 2001). Negotiated and predictable situations change to non-negotiable and unpredictable. The construction of subjectivity in turn consolidates anxious expectation, insecurity prevails and compounds the difficulty of consolidating a cohesive and self-assured identity. In this way, the psychological device in charge of processes of discrimination and differentiation becomes a pathology (Giddens, 1995, 1995b, 1997). We may value the importance of being able to count on adequate frameworks that sustain a predictable and good enough environment that consolidates the feelings of control and recognition. The sensation of imminent danger resurges psychologically as a feeling of imminent collapse. The theory fits the research to the extent that these old people suffer mini panic attacks, in relation to invasive feelings, chaotic-fragmented selves and anxiety before the lived experiences such as out-growing, consolidating an unbalanced vegetative state of the nervous and psychic systems that can become exhausting (Winnicott (1981; Bleichmar, 1997).

One consequence is the difficulty of maintaining a “cohesive self”, “a representation, and a level of functioning in which the subject feels like a unit, in which the body and the mind are lived as insoluble parts of one’s self in the present, and in addition, with a feeling of temporal continuity (Monahan, Macdonald, Lytle, Apriceno and Levy, 2020). The best empirical evidence of what we are indicating is that all of these factors, to a greater or lesser extent, appeared in the last critical situation of Covid 19 where older adults suffered the effects of isolation, precariousness, and social and psychological vulnerability (Coibion, Gorodnichenko, and Weber, 2020; Golubev and Sidorenko, 2020; Brynjolfsson, Horton, Ozimek, Rock, Sharma, and Ye, 2020). It seems especially important to emphasize that all these factors ultimately destroy essential constructs of the link between older people and society: ending the carrier subject (social adults are no longer socially legitimized), the sustainer (social adults no longer represent the social) and the guardian (social adults are no longer considered capable of caring for or preserving the social) (Kaës, 1993; Klein, 2022).

**Lack of Solidarity and old people:** As Bengtson and Roberts (1991) define solidarity, it has a structural dimension applied to the support received from family and friends who are not co-residents of old people and who contribute to their well-being. Is possible to apply this term related with the situation of orphanhood and precariousness mentioned, indicating that the lack of solidarity is a worrying indication of the impossibility of a social environment to “shelter” and protect its older members, who are exposed to situations of helplessness (Bellingtier and Neupert, 2018). The social environment no longer has space or resources for all its older adults and the transit through different security experiences becomes almost impossible. It is inevitable that under these conditions emotions of trust and reciprocity are replaced by emotions of distrust and paranoia, leading to situations of ageism and prejudice (Aronson, 2020). This societal order needs the integrated and the expelled, producing a non-existent, a “disappeared” from the public and exchange scenarios. A society that needs some of its members to be in a non-place and, perhaps, in a place of scapegoating (Levy et al., 2020; Klein, 2020).

**Vulnerability and social images:** In addition to the fact that this traditional social environment consolidates social and economic conditions that exclude and denigrate ageing, it is necessary to take into account that they are fed by factors linked to the social imaginary, which end up placing old people in a deficient and extremely fragile condition. We propose to call this predominant social image as one of helplessness, through which ageing persons are labelled as “old”, seeking to highlight their vulnerability and decrepitude, characterising them socially as unproductive and useless and generating expenses at the social and State level that end up being a waste of State resources (López, 2010). Based on this image of helplessness, old persons are considered as particularly vulnerable to death, loneliness, and helplessness. It seems to be understood that all subjects go through the same thing, as if there were no different and changing ageing situations. The subject is already on the “verge” of death, not to say existential agony, full of memories, grief and nostalgia, facing a successive series of losses that torment or depress him. The ageing

process inevitably appears as a process of chronic and irreversible deficit (Hakkert and Guzmán, 2004). We suggest in this sense that public policies are not neutral to social images, but respond, in one way or another, to ideological perspectives. In this sense, it is worth noting that by stereotyping the older adult as a vulnerable and deprived person, public policies are basically conceived as strategies to cover this deficit, further confirming what is considered unproductive and decrepit of older adults (Viveros Madariaga, 2001; Huenchuan, 2004). Concomitantly, when discussing whether or not the State or society has obligations towards the subject called old adult, one of these obligations being retirement, support networks, health systems or others, the answer appears confused or ambiguous, seeming more like a gift than a management of social obligations (Rabell and D'Aubeterre, 2009).

**Political situation of old people:** Although the term has already been widely used (Bauman, 1999), we wonder if citizenship, referred to old people, arise “fragile”, as a function of the chronic irregularity of citizenship rights (Pilotti, 2000). These cycles of retraction, with moments of suspension and freezing of social rights, make it difficult to apply the distinction between formal and substantive citizenship (Marshall and Bottomore, 1998) to old people. The citizenship situation becomes elusive for older adults, as on the one hand, the right to claim civil and social rights becomes scarce and elusive or unattainable. Under these conditions it is difficult for older people to feel part of society, community or the State. In this way, the possibility of social integration and reciprocity is nullified (Freijeiro Varela, 2008). As social images fix old people are unproductive and useless, the idea also develops that, consequently, they should be considered as incapable of autonomy, of making decisions and of self-support, generating the consensus that they are condemned to a process of infantilizing regression. Their destiny can only be to be protected, or in a public asylum or in situations of ruin, loneliness and abandonment. So, implicitly or explicitly, public policies will no longer be aimed at sustaining social rights, but on the contrary, are aimed at protecting them and placing them under care and protection (Katz, 1996, 2000). In this context, older adults are seen as excluded from their status as citizens. A paradoxical situation when part of the contemporary political discussion focuses on how to revalue and strengthen citizenship processes as part of a strategy for greater participation and deepening of democracy (Marshall and Bottomore, 1998). In this way, there are aspects of a process of de-citizenisation, which is obviously more acute among the poorest and most disadvantaged social groups, whereby old people lose identity and social integration frames of reference, with extreme difficulty for substitute social referents to emerge (Klein and Carcaño, 2017).

**The concept of “active” ageing: beginning of the resilience:** Nevertheless, researchers indicate that during old age, the sense of independence and staying active is maintained as an essential value. There has been an important recognition of the constant interchange between the individual and their environmental and social circumstances that can lead to continued growth through maintaining expertise and control, and developing new skills that will support morale (Carp and Carp, 1984; Peace, Kellaheer and Holland, 2006). The concept of “active” or “successful” ageing has been slowly but inexorably gaining ground in the field of new paradigms of old age. While retaining the term “ageing”, this new perspective aims to invert the conception of old age in terms of deficit, decline or decrepitude, emphasizing the generative and productive capacity of the older adult, repositioning him or her as a relevant actor in social events. It emphasizes continuity rather than discontinuity; resilience and potential rather than loss and deficit; and the potential and possibilities that ageing might imply, thus suggesting new forms of social insertion, indicating what the older adult is able to contribute to society (Hutchinson et al, 2006). In this way, emphasis is placed on the effort applied to the domains where development potential is maintained, achieving through this effort an optimization of functionality, which is understood to compensate for the normative and non-normative losses caused by social and biological ageing. From another point of analysis, the relevance of maintaining satisfactory interpersonal relationships and productive activities,

which result in the ability to maintain a factor of autonomy and self-care, among others, with which the older adults can face and solve their problems in a satisfactory way, maintaining their insertion in everyday life, is pointed out (Rowe and Kahn, 1997, 1998). It will be noted that these authors discard the need for the older adult to live apart or withdrawn from the family or social world, interned in asylums, institutions or others, clearly emphasizing the possibility of establishing or shaping satisfactory projects that include deep interpersonal relationships, high self-esteem and proactive social insertion. Thus, it could be suggested that the concept of "successful" ageing is being enriched, in the sense that it is no longer understood only as the absence of persistent illness or decrepitude, but as older adults' reformulation of their insertion into social life, decisively reshaping their personal biography in terms of adequate achievements and a fulfilling future (Baltes and Wahl, 1996).

**Quality of life and subjectivity:** In this sense, and due to the different changes in the subjective and cultural spheres, the quality of life we want to insist on is not only that of the healthiest older adults (which ultimately refers to a geriatric paradigm) but that of older adults as a generalized group, embarked on an identity "explosion", which places them in a stage of high subjective experimentation. It should be noted that a specific characteristic of these older adults is that they no longer see "death" in front of them (precisely in terms of quality of life achievements, able to postpone death almost indefinitely), but a second or third chance of life, that is, not only an extension of the years of life, but also the unnecessary need to build their life project around the issue of death (Rosow, 1963; Klein, 2015). Older adults are thus experiencing a time of change and renewal. A fundamental factor is the possibility of consolidating different networks and new forms of bonding, which allows the recognition of a new ageing as a place of solidarity, the updating of imaginaries and essential bonds of fraternity and the consolidation of new forms of self-management and protection in the face of processes of helplessness (Furstenberg and Hughes, 1995). At the same time, old age anticipates the renewal of the promise of new opportunities, new perspectives and new challenges. A subjectivity with new opportunities begins to take shape, in which the figure of the decrepit old person is replaced by that of an agent of empowerment, with an astonishing energy and capacity for change (Cole, 1992). Older adults appropriate a new version of themselves, possessing a future that is transformed into a future that imposes itself in order to improve the quality and style of life. The "older person" has definitely given way to the "older adult", as a configuration of subjectivity capable of assuming the risk and opportunities of new lifestyles but framed in the conviction of the opportunity to possess a future, and to be better than he or she is. At this point, the different negotiated life options that the older adult rethinks: vocational, marital, divorce, understood as opportunities for improvement through a crisis that expresses the feeling of confidence, security and continentality provided by this second or third opportunity to change, improve and deepen the existential options of the older adult (Araujo, 2016).

**The new idea of the "post-adult":** This field of high subjective experimentation thus finds a framework of reasonable expectation of proactivity, well-being and dignified life, revealing a structure of care and protection. The new age thus becomes a possible world of people who wish to live, care for themselves, grow, as well as experience new things (Jopp, 2016). So, the model of old age as something precarious, deficient and exhausted is definitively delegitimized, making it almost offensive to speak of "old an" or "old woman". The idea of the older adult or post-adult is imposed. The variety of names indicates that, deep down, no denomination is entirely precise. There is an excess or a lack of names, but apparently never a totally pertinent name is never reached, giving an account of a state of emerging identities (Araújo, 2018). These situations of high subjective experimentation together with high semantic experimentation seem to indicate that the third age is experiencing as an age group and as a cultural experience, the emergence of new subjectivities, "emergent" subjectivities, which sometimes become "abrupt", as they confront us with cultural, identity and epistemological experiences of extreme novelty (Hutchison, Morrison

and Mikhailovich, 2006). Hypothetically, however, three processes could be proposed that seem to predominate in the achievement of this high subjective experimentation: a) transgenerational confrontation (these older adults refuse to be like the old people or grandparents of yesteryear or those who preceded them); b) reorganization of the age group of adolescents, adults and older adults, into diffuse and interchangeable groupings, where each of the traditional age groups receives characteristics from the others; c) impossibility of maintaining the place of the "old man" as the transmitter of a "sacred" and irreplaceable word. Loss of ancestral memory that ultimately implies that the word of the ancestors has become unnecessary, insofar as it no longer marks models of conduct or codes of ethics to be strictly followed (Klein, 2018; Klein and Carcaño, 2017). In any case, it is necessary to point out that if these older adults express an "abrupt" subjectivity, it is also in the sense of conveying an impressive amount of quantitative and qualitative changes that are neither generationally unprecedented nor fully explained by social structure, generational change, advances in medical technology or cultural climate. All contribute, but probably none of them can reliably explain it (Klein, 2022).

**The meaning of Home:** This new old people or renewed post-adult achieves the complex notion of the world as his Home, and at the same time, with the eradication of the concept of "orphanhood", he sees himself as an adult who lives and cares for himself in his own home. Diverse authors have indicated that the concept of home is fundamental to human life and that this is especially true for old people. It is as if home were a kind of 'anchor' that protects and supports them in the face of the many, often irreversible, changes that they must face in this stage of life (Walter, 2006). To accept that an old person is capable of living, sustaining and organizing oneself, alone or in a couple, in a home without the need to be institutionalized is to accept that they are not decrepit, nor are is that person incapable of making decisions and maintaining their ability to be autonomous and independent (Peace, Kellaher and Holland, 2006). In this space old people maintains their preferred objects, their memories, routines, way of life and preferences and generates the conditions of their own environment while maintaining their quality of life, and also demonstrates the importance of agency that can be seriously eroded when others take over tasks that can still be managed (Cooper, 1995). In this sense, these post-adults, can feel the sense of home as a place of refuge and protection, guaranteeing the dominium of the private and the separation from the public. But, also very relevant, allow the sense of the biography in terms of the continuum of the life span. Autobiographical inclusion that is correlated with social inclusion. It is possible to understand the meaning of home as a physical structure, as a territory, as a locus in space, as self and self-identity, and as a social and cultural unit (Rapoport, 1969; Rowles and Chaudhury, 2005).

We would like to contribute to this by emphasizing that the Home is a privileged space of emotional experience in relation to the preservation and the continuity of the self as an integrated experience of the subject regarding their ability to care for one's self (Rubinstein, 1989; Foucault, 1988). Home may be considered as the continuity, the integration and the synthesis of those paternal-maternal "good enough" affections that avoid the plain appearance of worries and uncertainty, in turn facilitating solid structures: self-truth, the feeling of security, a state of integration and continuity (Winnicott, 1979). At the same time these elements of security allow for the prevalence of a zone in the mind that is associated to the capacity to consider or reflect, that marks the comprehension of one's own behavior and that of the others in terms of mental states. This concurrently increases the quality of life, whilst maintaining a calm and creative relationship with the environment. Lyons-Ruth (2004) indicates how emotional unavailability generates emotional vulnerability. In this way, we think that Home is not only the avoidance of the forced or voluntary institution but is also related with the ability to maintain a good relationship with the environment, guaranteeing conditions of agency and mental health (Fonagy, 1999, 2000). The new model of active old people implies the challenge to understand the need of Home, not only in terms of something real and material. We suggest

that implies a task of symbolization in terms of change how the social structure perceives ageing. So, includes different factors: the synthesis of the biography of the course of life, from the past to the future, the emotional experience of 'Home' as a solid place, where it is possible to return, to be educated, and to find consolation. Finally, it is an extraordinary space because assures the daily sense of security, as part of the "basic trust" (Giddens, 1997). This trust is related to the experience of buffer spaces that they are able to care for and protect. It also includes the social. If old people person learns to trust in their environment, it is because the environment in turn may begin to trust in the executive and operative capacity of old person. It deals with, then, a structure of continuity between the familiar, the social, and the subjective-intimately related among them- for which a brand of trust is established, experiences of trust, and reassurance.

The achievement of "basic trust" explicitly relates this process to the quality and type of care that responds to the individual needs of old people. Care that concomitantly expresses the determined values and cultural and valued codes. Therefore, one condition of basic trust is that it has to have a sense of integration among old people and the social component (Giddens, 1995). The transmission of positive determinate models of the environment, of roots and self-consolidation, reflect firm and solid processes of what it is to be an old person from a society capable of reflecting on their prejudices and stereotypes. At the same time, old people are capable of transmitting "basic trust" to their grandchildren through their role as grandparents (Hutchison et al, 2006; Jopp et al, 2016; Attar-Schwartz et al, 2009; Fergusson et al, 2008). Following on, these social structures that dignify the adult in old people need to be taken into account, in order to make this kind of feeling and education possible. Education transmits through society and old people may identify themselves with it and equally feel dignified by it. Old people person becomes an "expert" self-caregiver, maintaining the capacity and pride of sustaining a Home, with the responsibilities that come with it, guaranteeing the conditions of their survival. This shows that between the home-society and subjectivity there is nothing but integration and creativity (Lawton, 1989). We can take a moment to consider that care techniques that provide the appropriate environment definitely instill the skills that allow us to achieve autonomy, self-confidence, the ability to be alone, that is, psychological traces that allow the insertion of the care process. Citizenship with its rights in interaction – obligations, limits and abilities. At the same time, these emotional realities should also be taken into account in the design of public policies (Bengtson, 2001).

**Citizenship and resilience:** However, it is necessary to highlight another positive aspect that also includes the notion of the environment in relation to the capacity of resilience that these old people demonstrate, which implies joint activities at an economic level, but also the capacity to share knowledge, beliefs, and actions collectively (Taylor et al., 2000). For some older people, the reality is that day-to-day interactions with other people, especially in person, are confined to the immediate neighborhood (if not entirely to their own home in the case of people who are housebound) and for many of them these communities based on neighborhood are essential to their well-being and sense of identity. So, is possible to perceive some level of involvement with local community activities, commitment with communitarian goals, links with social clubs, and others (Uhlenberg and Hammill, 1998; Uhlenberg, 2004). In this way the neighborhood is transformed into an essential point of reference, a "known" and "recognizable" place, which at the same time is important for the maintenance of the social wellbeing and the capacity of oneself to maintain their strength and integrity. We could say that the collective facilitates a feeling structure (Fonagy, 2000), that includes daily interactions but also those shared and thought about. These considerations point out the supposed "vulnerability" and "fragility" of old people in the face of their environment may indicate, not infrequently, the existence of prejudices and stereotypes (Tuan, 1994). We suggest the concept of resilience, in order to understand these community activities that imply a sense of change and of being the protagonist. Resilience is as space where the other is transformed into a significant person, an operator in which one can

make and modify reality. Accepting this significant person within a public experience that opens guidelines of solidarity (Zuckerfeld, 2003). Community strategies are added as a network of support and auto-management processes. It has even been indicated that the social life of the united subject to the capacity of autonomy and security is a fundamental theme of the environment in older adults (Parmelee and Lawton, 1990). In this way, it is also a way to update the imagined and real acts of fraternity, essential for society and exchanges with older adults, which allows consolidating forms of self-management, trust and protection against vulnerability. These are processes that intertwine emotional experiences, autonomy and both individual and collective responses (Czernikowski, 2003).

## CONCLUSIONS

It is possible to understand the resilience as related to the promotion of answers as part of the new model of old people in terms of new transformations, new activities, new opportunities. So, it means the capacity to use creative and unusual processes. We suggest that the transformation of the model of "orphanhood" and vulnerability to the model of active aging, in terms of "home" and resilience, implies the challenge of taking into account multiple factors, such as emotional feelings of self-confidence, expansion of intellectual capacities, recognition of the other from solidarity, promotion of autonomy, good levels of education and income, among others. Also is important to take in account that resilience at a social level is indivisible from changes in the ways of relating with the other. Which is at the same time, indivisible from a change in the way that old people are related with themselves. It also has something to do with the fundamental job of memory, but also with the construction of projects and the sense of hope and social ability. But, on the other hand, it is not possible to deny that the structures that fix old people as decrepit and fragile remain vigorous, as the recent experiences of Covid 19 demonstrated. In these terms, everything seems to indicate that society is currently in a balance on how to perceive and experience older people. So the two cultures are together: one whose expression for old person is "orphan" and "useless", and another whose expression for old person is in terms of rupture and new perspectives of home and resilience.

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