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**Minority associations, networks and public policies:
re-assessing relationships**

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Abstract

Economic and political restructuring in Western societies has wrought a variety of new modes of exclusion, including unequal access to public resources and policy making. These have particularly affected members of immigrant and ethnic minority populations. New forums, types of representation and modes of participation are needed to bring about more democratic developments surrounding a range of public policies (including education, housing, health and social care).

In the first part of this paper a variety of forms of immigrant and ethnic minority representation, consultation and participation in the policy process are reviewed. In the second part, new directions are discussed, particularly by way of calls to recognize institutionally (a) 'the new pluralism' and the inherent multiplicity of identities among all members of the public, (b) new modes of social and political networking, and (c) associationalist political frameworks intended to facilitate more democratic forms of policy formation and delivery.

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[W]e have entered a truly multicultural, interdependent world, that can only be understood, and changed, from a plural perspective that brings together cultural identity, global networking, and multidimensional politics.

(Castells 1996: 28)

Increasingly since the beginning of the 1980s, members of Western societies have found themselves in the situation in which they have little say in, or control over, the content and delivery of public resources and services in a range of policy domains (including education, health and social care, housing, and income benefits). In the decades following the second World War, public policy in many nation-states was largely formulated around universal forms of provision along Marshallian lines with an ideal to promote social equality, common culture and the elimination of life chance inequalities (Hill 1996). Now in many places, a state strategy has emerged in which the desired goal in each policy domain is to move from a welfarist model toward creating a population of individualized consumers, a strategy marked by concepts like the Citizens' Charter and a belief in the market as the primary basis for practically all forms of social provision (see Pijl 1994, Kearns 1995).

Widespread criticism of these developments have pointed to the growing social and economic inequalities to which such a shift contributes. The neo-liberal trend has not only wrought unequal results with regard to accessibility and quality of delivery affecting what comes out of public resources and services; it also has involved a growing democratic deficit with regard to what goes into decision-making processes surrounding public policies, resources and services. One important way of redressing current

inequalities, political theorists like Paul Hirst (1994a: 166) emphasize, is 'to create circumstances in which the consumers of welfare have far more capacity to determine and shape what is provided. Only in that case will they identify fully with the services in question.'

Immigrants and ethnic minorities have suffered a disproportionately large share of the widening inequalities and exclusions from social citizenship which have accompanied economic and political restructurings since the 1980s (see for instance Cross 1993, Jones 1993, Mingione 1995, Schierup 1997). Therefore, it follows that enhancing the capacity of immigrants and ethnic minorities to participate more fully in the policy process is one way of tackling the situation.

In the first part of this paper a variety of forms of immigrant and ethnic minority representation, consultation and participation in the policy process are reviewed. In the second part, new directions are discussed, particularly by way of calls to recognize institutionally (a) 'the new pluralism' and the inherent multiplicity of identities among all members of the public, (b) new modes of social and political networking, and (c) associationalist political frameworks intended to facilitate more democratic forms of policy formation and delivery.

PART I

Immigrants, Ethnic Minorities and Political Participation

With regard to the re-examination of frameworks for political participation relevant to immigrants -- and by extension, ethnic minorities -- Patrick Ireland (1994: 28-9) poses two key questions:

How do outsider groups go about articulating their demands on a democratic political system? Can they make themselves heard and win a response from it, and if so, what type of impact can they effect? Such issues go to the heart of our notions of what a democracy is and who participates. By looking at the politics of immigrants, we can learn a great deal about how effectively and fairly the institutions we associate with liberal democracy in Europe cope with the social needs and political aspirations of even those most marginal to society.

By way of addressing such questions, political issues surrounding the role, social position, forms of exclusion and possibilities for inclusion concerning immigrants and ethnic minorities have recently stimulated much rethinking with regard to the concepts of citizenship and pluralism, as well as basic ideas concerning the nature of civic democratic society. Contributing importantly to new trends in political thinking are the ever more effective and organised expressions of group concerns (often described as modes of ethnic mobilisation, identity or community politics, or the politics of recognition; see for example Gutman 1992, Rex & Drury 1994, Vertovec & Peach 1997).

A renewed interest in the relationship between excluded groups, political pluralism, citizenship and democracy are evident, for instance, in recent statements by Ralf Dahrendorf (1994: 17 -- 'The true test of the strength of citizenship rights is heterogeneity'), H. van Gunsteren (1994: 45 -- 'the task of the republic is to organise plurality'), and Jürgen Habermas (1994: 27 -- 'the political culture must serve as the common denominator for a constitutional patriotism which simultaneously sharpens an

awareness of the multiplicity and integrity of the different forms of life which coexist in a multicultural society’).

Indeed, in the past few years this kind of rethinking has spawned numerous important publications. In these, new concepts of citizenship are proposed as a way of working through the questions posed by contemporary forms of pluralism and the modes of exclusion which have arisen with them. Among these new concepts are ‘transnational citizenship’ (Bauböck 1994a), ‘multicultural citizenship’ (Kymlicka 1995a), ‘differentiated citizenship’ (Young 1989), ‘neo-republican citizenship’ (van Gunsteren 1994), ‘cultural citizenship’ (Turner 1994), and ‘postnational membership’ (Soysal 1994). Most such calls seek to extend T.H Marshall’s (1950) classic notions surrounding ‘social citizenship’ and to explore new meanings of ‘membership’ and, especially, of ‘participation.’ In this sense ‘citizenship’ is coming to refer to a general corpus of rights, duties and activities of individuals and groups relevant to the expression of their interests with regard to public sphere decisions effecting life opportunities, quality of life, and/or representation to others in society.

There is a very substantial set of literature concerning the politics of immigration, citizenship and the rights of minorities in Europe. Important examples include the volumes edited by Brubaker (1989), Layton-Henry (1990), Bauböck (1994b), Kymlicka (1995b), and Martiniello (1995). In line with these publications, in recent years a number of academics, policy institutes and politicians have articulated the need for policy re-assessment and formulation in terms of issues concerning enhanced modes of participation and immigrants/ethnic minorities. Many such calls follow the broad view advocated by Franco Bianchini & Jude Bloomfield (1995: 17), that

In order to address the problems of social polarisation and ethnic minority deprivation, it is necessary to encourage organisations of the immigrant

communities and other disadvantaged social groups to access the policy-making processes and demonstrate the relevance of their ideas, aspirations, resources and skills....

In key areas of current theory, re-defining citizenship means dismantling certain forms of representation in favour of participatory frameworks and mechanisms fostering greater group involvement. 'Participation creates ownership,' Charles Landry and Franco Bianchini (1995: 25) emphasise; hence 'people are more likely to become stakeholders in projects they have participated in. For example, if people are involved in the design and management of their housing estates, this can help in fostering a culture that reduces crime and vandalism.' For specific public projects like the example of improving particular housing estates, extended participation can be on offer to individuals concerned; for broad areas of public policy such as education and health, more collective representation forms of participation usually need to be established.

Across Europe each political context -- national, regional and municipal -- has often produced its own institutional and participatory forms in response to the needs of immigrants and ethnic minorities. Differentiation of institutional and participatory forms between nation-states within Europe is described generally by Yasemin Soysal (1994); within particular countries, variation in such forms between cities is demonstrated by Rex & Samad's (1996) comparison of Birmingham and Bradford in the UK, Blommaert & Martiniello's study of Antwerp and Liège in Belgium, and Ireland's (1994) work concerning La Courneuve and Roubaix in France and Schlieren and La Chaux-de-Fonds in Switzerland. Beyond inter-city differences in approach and structure, there are abundant forms of variation between levels of administration within nation-states as well. For example, Ireland (1994: 112) found that in the French city of La Courneuve, 'what constituted institutional participation and expected and "proper" immigrant behavior differed from that in the nation at large.'

There are calls to harmonise throughout Europe such institutions for immigrant and ethnic minority participation in policy-making. One such call has come from the Standing Conference on Local and Regional Authorities of Europe (CLRAE). This body issued the 1991 Frankfurt Declaration, entitled 'Towards a New Municipal Policy for Multicultural Integration in Europe' (see CLRAE 1992), which contains a section of policy recommendations under the heading 'Effective participation by immigrants in local political life'. This include proposals that:

- immigrants must be involved in public enquiries and consultation;
- consultative councils should be set up within decision -making system of local authorities, and these should be:
 - staffed by persons either elected by immigrants or nominated by immigrants' associations; and
 - organised by neighbourhood in larger cities;
- the right to vote in local elections should be extended to foreigners who have been resident for several years; and that
- procedures for gaining nationality should be facilitated and obstacles for multiple nationality should be removed.

In a similar manner the Council of Europe, too, in its Final Report on 'Community and Ethnic Relations in Europe' (1991) has reviewed a core set of *policy domains* on a variety of political levels across Europe. It provides evidence of best practice in this field and puts forward a variety of recommendations by way of institutional frameworks promoting participation. In the *legal* domain this includes calls to extend rights of residence and formal citizenship -- linked to providing greater access to the electoral process, education, housing, the labour market, health care, social services, access to public support for cultural and religious activities. In the *socio-economic* domain it recommends the establishment of structures and institutions supporting [a] the gaining of 'tools for integration' -- language classes, special advice and employment agencies, vocational courses, and [b] the 'opening up of insufficiently accessible institutions' -- through making accommodations in education, housing provision, monitoring

employment, extending infrastructural provisions through urban renewal programmes.

And in the *cultural* domain, the Council of Europe highlights the need for making special accommodations in public services by way of linguistic provisions and sensitivity to cultural values, recognizing religious practices, providing mother-tongue teaching, and supporting the organisation and activities of voluntary associations.

In many ways quite distinct from such recommendations as to what should be, there remains the question as to what currently exists. A general typology of forms of participation for immigrants and ethnic minorities in Europe has been formulated by Miller (1989). He distinguishes five types of *activity and institutions* through which members of such groups can express their interests to decision-making agents of the state. These are: (1) homeland organisations, (2) consultative bodies (on local or national level) designed to represent collective interests, (3) unions and workplace councils, (4) political parties or religious and civic organisations, and (5) confrontational means (demonstrations, strikes, etc.).

Perhaps the most common institutions are the kinds of *consultative bodies* established to create forms of liaison between local governments and immigrant / ethnic minority groups. Uwe Anderson (1990) describes these as ‘a form of limited but guaranteed access to the political process’ (Ibid.: 113).

They are similar to voting rights in the sense that [immigrants and ethnic minorities] may be able to elect representatives to a formally constituted body which can then press their views on policy-makers. However, they are not part of the normal democratic process, and while they have some legitimacy they have no power -- only influence through argument and the size of their constituent groups. (Ibid.)

Anderson classifies the possible kinds of consultative structures as:

- 1) Contact and co-ordination Groups (inclusion of all majority and minority groups with a broad remit to improve relations),

- 2) Working and Co-ordination Groups (comprised mainly of government departments dealing with immigrants and ethnic minorities, with very few actual members of the latter groups; for the purpose of sharing information and co-ordinating programmes and activities),
- 3) Parliaments of Migrant Workers (made up of representatives of immigrant groups only, in order to articulate their interests and press for the implementation of policies),
- 4) Advisory Councils (perhaps the most common type of institution, including representatives of both immigrant / ethnic minority groups and members of government, with broad scope for sharing information, expressing concerns, distributing resources, and lobbying for interests), and
- 5) Committees on Migrant Affairs (established by government, with variable makeup but sometimes with decision-making powers).

In some urban contexts, only one such consultative institution exists; in others, a combination of these (with overlapping or hierarchical functions) are to be found. While there have been some attempts (as in Germany) to co-ordinate different consultative bodies in order to exert greater public pressure on various levels of government, Anderson (Ibid.: 118) comments in his overview of seven European countries that ‘On the whole, consultative institutions at the local, regional and national levels are not linked closely together.’

With regard to the variety of types and forms of consultative institutions, we must bear in mind that, often, each has been established with a very different *raison d’être*. Local authorities may have set-up such institutions for immigrants and ethnic minorities as an alternative to voting rights, as a channel for immigrant and ethnic minority opinion, as a kind of educational step toward eventual full participation, as a symbolic gesture to encourage racial harmony and combat discrimination, or as a supportive mechanism to avoid alienation and resentment.

Moreover, as Soysal (1994: 79) reminds us, these institutions draw upon and are conditioned by quite differing national regimes -- comprised of interwoven ‘institutional repertoires and resources... predominant models and organizing principles of

membership.’ Soysal characterizes such regimes as marked by ‘corporatist’ policies in Sweden and the Netherlands, an ‘individualist’ liberal approach in Switzerland and Britain, a centralized state in France, and a mixed ‘statist-corporatist’ philosophy in Germany.

Examples of sectors of local government, city level consultative bodies and other institutions broadly concerned with immigrant and ethnic minority participation in the policy process include the following (drawn from Bergman 1986, Stoové 1988, Haagensen 1989, Anderson 1990, Council of Europe 1991, Gürbüz 1991, Soysal 1994, Ireland 1994, Vertovec 1994, 1996a,b, Blommaert & Martiniello 1996, Rex & Samad 1996):

- ◆ Belgium - regional Advisory Councils since the late 1960s, and municipal Migrant Councils or Immigrants Communal Consultative Councils;
- ◆ Germany - mostly local advisory councils for foreigners, municipal Commissioners for Foreigners’ Affairs, municipal social service sectors and offices of semi-public welfare agencies (such as Churches, trade unions);
- ◆ Switzerland - cantonal institutions including the Foreigners Police and Commission for Foreigners’ Affairs, community (*Gemeinde*) level Coordination or Contact Offices for Foreigners’ Affairs and Foreigners Commissions;
- ◆ France - a variety of consultative institutions existing among most prefects and municipalities since 1971; in provinces immigrant issues are dealt with by employment offices and the Regional Commission of the Insertion of Migrants Populations (CRIPI) while in municipalities there are immigrant councils, social service bureaux and local offices of the Association of Social Assistance for Migrants (SSAE);
- ◆ United Kingdom - (where it is important to remember that 75% of ethnic minorities are naturalised with full voting privileges) Race Equality Councils -- which replaced earlier Community Relations Councils -- with close ties to the national Commission for Racial Equality (CRE), Race Relations Units or Committees or Advisory Groups (sometimes incorporating or incorporated by broader Equal Opportunity Boards) of City Councils, city-supported forums and umbrella groups for ethnic associations, municipal social services departments, community centres funded by local government;
- ◆ The Netherlands - (where immigrants and ethnic minorities can vote in local elections) Municipal Bureaux for Ethnic Minority Affairs, Councils for Foreigners, Foreign Workers Assistance Units and municipal employment offices and social services;

◆ Sweden - (where 'although local and regional voting rights have been granted to foreign residents, consultative procedures are still widely used and are seen as a necessary supplement to voting rights, rather than as an alternative form of political participation' [Anderson 1990: 119]) Immigration Boards or Councils and municipal employment offices and social services.

The breadth of participatory modes and institutional types -- along with the problems surrounding each -- provide compelling reasons for comparative study by social scientists and exchange of policy experiences by local authorities and by immigrant and ethnic minority associations. In each sphere, questions surrounding the nature of minority 'representation' will likely come to the fore.

Questions of Representation

Almost regardless of the type of consultative body in any city, it is common for representatives in most institutions and frameworks established to promote immigrant and ethnic minority participation in the policy process to be drawn from the (often contested) 'main' immigrant and ethnic minority associations. While perhaps expedient, such arrangements reinforce the roles of self-selected 'community leaders' serving as 'ethnic brokers' (Werbner 1991).

The question of political representation -- i.e., who is given 'the voice' of a particular segment of the population (often defined by the state in racialist or culturalist terms) -- has remained at the core of issues surrounding participation (see Ålund & Schierup 1991, Vertovec 1996a). Should they be self-selected as presidents of voluntary associations? Elected (from within associations, or within ethnic minority communities -- if the latter, according to what criteria of 'belonging')? Nominated (by local government, or trade unions, or other social welfare organisations)? Co-opted (again, by agents of political power outside or inside the so-called 'community')? Further, should representatives' support by third forces (governments of country of immigrant origin,

international political movements, transnational religious bodies) be encouraged, forbidden, tolerated?

In one case demonstrating problems of this kind, Ralph Grillo (1985) described the profound and centralising control of the French state, along with local 'power elites' (with the Church, major businessmen, senior politicians), in determining the makeup and agendas of consultative bodies concerned with immigrants in Lyon. This determinacy was due to the organisational nature of the consultative bodies themselves, which were either: (1) branches of the state, (2) private associations created by the state, (3) private association financed by the state, or (4) private associations in which the prefecture was included in their governing bodies.

Other problems surrounding city-based consultative institutions are: that these are sometimes used as an excuse of not extending the vote to resident immigrants (Anderson 1990); that they may be pointed to as a reason for keeping immigrant / ethnic minority issues off of the core local authority agendas (Rex & Tomlinson 1979); that such institutions may be allowed to function merely for the benefit of 'paternalistic white councils' (Rex & Samad 1996: 28); that by co-opting ethnic leaders into state-sponsored structures, these leaders are made co-responsible for administering state policies (Björklund 1986); or, based on the feelings of many -- especially young, so-called second generation -- ethnic minority members who often feel frustrated with the often limited influence of such bodies, that such institutions are perhaps not the most appropriate, desirable or effective arenas for gaining more direct forms of political power (Blommaert & Martiniello 1996).

In order to explore this area of inquiry further, it is useful to isolate two senses of 'representation'. The first sense of 'representation' refers to the ways in which immigrant and ethnic minority groups organise themselves politically. With such an orientation in

mind, the recent works of two political scientists --Yasemin Soysal and Patrick Ireland -- have proven instructive. Underscoring the proposition that ‘the rules of membership that define the forms of participation in particular polities also configure the collective patterns of migrant organisation’, Soysal (1994: 84) points out that few studies today -- in any discipline -- actually examine ‘how the host society’s institutions shape the organisational incorporation of migrants’ (Ibid.: 85). She emphasises that researchers must take note of how participatory institutions often pattern the political organisation of groups -- for instance, through the ways in which public resources are provided (or not), through the processes of selection and expression which gain legitimation by the state, and through the kinds of representational categories which are officially recognised. Here Soysal (Ibid.: 86) further suggests that:

Migrant organisations, in turn, define their goals, strategies, functions, and level of operation in relation to the existing policies and resources of the host state. They advance demands and set agendas vis-à-vis state policy and discourses in order to seize institutional opportunities and further their claims. In that sense, the expression and organisation of migrant collective identity are formed by the institutionalised forms of the state’s incorporation regime.

Thus, for instance, by way of the different institutions comprising contrasting incorporation regimes and their impact on emergent patterns of political mobilisation, Soysal observes ‘Turks in Sweden are organised differently than Turks in France or Switzerland, in ways that reproduce the predominant organisational models of the particular host country’ (Ibid.: 85).

Patrick Ireland advocates a very similar approach, demonstrating how ‘immigrants develop participatory forms that reflect the political opportunity structures they face’ (1994: 248). His concern is with ways in which various urban regimes present differential ‘templates for interest organisation [which] mould movements’ political tactics and groups’ collective identities and shape the terms in which they understand and couch their

demands' (Ibid.: 259). Such 'templates' and the localised opportunities they afford or mitigate provide for the variable 'institutional channelling' of immigrant and ethnic minority political engagement. In Ireland's comparative study of four cities of France and Switzerland, he accordingly demonstrates how 'The nature of institutional opportunities, constraints, and support vis-à-vis immigrants has accounted for their adopting homeland-oriented, confrontational, or assimilative political tactics.'

The second sense of 'representation' we might do well to bear in mind refers to the qualitative images and symbols surrounding immigrant and ethnic minority groups which their participatory activities present in the public sphere. Here again the perspective of Soysal (1994: 70) is useful in that she draws our attention to the ways in which 'formal consultative structures contribute to a uniform and institutional understanding at all levels of what policy is, by providing a common language and legitimate categories.' Through the continuous workings of such consultative structures and institutions, she (Ibid.: 98-9) suggests, 'The organisational language of the host states is appropriated and reproduced by migrant leaders, and the aims of state policies are similarly articulated in the agendas of migrant organisations.'

Once more Ralph Grillo's (1985) work on Lyon provides in-depth ethnographic material most germane to this field. Grillo probed the ways in which, via certain state structures, 'the "processing" of the immigrant voice' in public arenas becomes 'encoded in a variety of ideological and institutional registers' (Ibid.: 272). In the course of liaison between immigrants and local government authorities, this process produces a 'transmutation of information' about minority groups as it is passed via a variety of 'messengers' from 'the immigrants' to 'the French'.

Such information is inevitably located within a conceptual and ideological framework, whether it concerns the selection and presentation of 'facts', or

whether it represents an interpretative account of behavior. ...This kind of transmutation is perhaps only important if it is taken into the public arena, and if it affects policy. When it does, that arena becomes the scene of a struggle between alternative versions of immigrant life. Now, entry to that arena is highly structured. Generally it involves French institutions with French representatives, or immigrant spokesmen incorporated within the French system on that system's terms: consultative bodies, trade unions, political parties, residents' associations, and so on. ...

In this process, information about immigrants, obtained only indirectly from immigrants themselves, is transmuted ideologically and carried by institutionalised spokesmen of unequal authority, influence, and power into those places where policies are discussed and formulated. (Ibid.: 277)

Although focused on a period and framework of French local politics now in many ways superseded and restructured, Grillo's work significantly demonstrates the critical relationships existing between, we might say, the 'medium' (local government consultative body) and the 'message' (the image and articulated interests of immigrant and ethnic minority groups) during the course of immigrant and ethnic minority consultations over public policies. More recently, related dynamics of representation have been addressed by Gerd Baumann (1996) in a brilliant ethnography of Southall, where the images and meanings of ethnicity, 'culture,' 'community' and multiculturalism which pervade the 'dominant discourse' of the state have critical impacts upon (yet are not entirely reproduced within) the everyday or 'demotic' discourse of individuals amongst ethnic minorities themselves.

On the whole, most forums, frameworks and institutions which serve in some way as consultative bodies concerned with facilitating the participation of immigrants and ethnic minorities rest on corporatist models of representation. That is, immigrants and ethnic minorities are believed (by many of their own members as well as by members of the majority public) to consist of specific corporate groups (bounded and socially interlinked) and identities (including common symbols, values and moralities) whose interests can be voiced by delegates. Although 'corporatist forums serve to facilitate

consultation (and therefore communication) and coordination (and therefore bargaining) between social interests and public bodies' (Hirst 1990: 15), these forms of representation have several drawbacks which have recently come under much criticism (see for instance Ålund & Schierup 1991, Anthias & Yuval-Davis 1991, Radkte 1994). Most of this criticism centres on claims that corporate representation reinforces essentialist stereotypes. Particularly through the corporate groups identified in many models of state multiculturalism, there emerges 'a picture of society as a "mosaic" of several bounded, nameable, individually homogeneous and unmeltable minority uni-cultures which are pinned on to the backdrop of a similarly characterized majority uni-culture' (Vertovec 1996a: 51).

Yet corporate representation is of course not confined to the sphere of consultative institutions. Significant social movements promulgate such forms of representation as well. These are apparent in the 'post-socialist' conflicts centred on demands for the 'recognition of difference' under the banners of nationality, ethnicity, 'race', gender and sexuality in which group identity and cultural domination are seen to supplant class interest and socio-economic exploitation as the chief mediums of political mobilization and struggle (Fraser 1995; cf. Young 1997).

While social movements advocating the recognition of difference are arguably liberating in many ways, the further entrenchment of corporatist representation may in the end effect a stultification of democratic participation. This is the view of, among others, Paul Hirst (1994a: 53) who writes,

...in a multicultural society of conflicting identities, of communities *as* identities, the public sphere and the freedoms of civil society become nothing more than a medium for different groups to seek to capture the public power for their own purposes. This view supposes that existential communities will predominate and that they will enclose the life of the individual; far from being

voluntary associations, they will become communities of fate. Thus to be black, for example, will become an all-defining identity.

The rather rigid images of group belonging and identity which corporate representation in the public sphere tends to promulgate eventually may see 'society as fragmenting into competing existential communities' (Ibid.; a warning sounded also by Ålund & Schierup 1991 and Radkte 1994).

All of these issues add up to a considerable degree of inadequacy in matters of policy and public participation. Indeed, studies on the relationship between social service providers and ethnic minorities conducted by Ian Law (1996: 144) uncovered

a widespread feeling that the mechanisms for consulting about their needs are inadequate. There is considerable scepticism, and some cynicism, amongst black groups based on past experience of 'consultation'. This was seen as a means by which purchaser and providers pacify black people while doing very little to enhance service provision. There was resentment that the diversity of needs within the black community were not addressed.

More open and effective modes of representation, consultation and participation are needed so as to provide adequate machinery for the voicing of interests in the policy process, to allow for the self-expression of values and identity based on 'ethnic' criteria, yet which will also be framed so as to prevent social fragmentation by rigid boundary formation. The next section explores some possible avenues towards these ends.

PART II

‘The New Pluralism’ and ‘the Multiple Subject’

While a ‘conventional’ notion of pluralism -- based largely on idealized images of vocal, organized citizen interest groups -- long held sway in the study of politics, Gregor McLennan (1995) describes the relatively recent ascendancy of what purports to be ‘the new pluralism.’ Sharing many understandings of a postmodern approach to contemporary phenomena (social, political, cultural and literary), this advocates of the new pluralism are concerned with matters such as methodological diversity, the endorsement of different ways of knowing and being, and a view that political and social identities are chosen rather than inherited.

Paul Hirst (1994a: 9) similarly describes features of the new pluralism, a ‘complex multi-focal politics’ which is developing and challenging traditional modes of politics:

The new political forces are too diverse, too concerned with different issues, to be placed on a single spectrum. There are new types of nationalist and regional autonomist parties, and ethnic and religiously-based campaigns. There are also new forms of politics centred on resistance to racism, gender issues, the environmental question and on lifestyles. New political problems and new social expectations are ill-accommodated by the old party systems in many Western states, and the traditional parties of both left and right command less and less popular support.

Subsequently, Hirst (1994b: 241) also notes, the increasing salience of the new pluralism ‘means that uniform national services are less acceptable to diverse publics.’

The new pluralism, then is characterized by the rise of diverse range of organized interest groups and social movements campaigning for often specific causes. These consist not only of highly mobilized and articulate ethnic and religious groups, but includes women’s groups, associations of the disabled, support groups for those with particular social or medical problems, people concerned with the care and protection of children,

with the welfare of the elderly, with the state of the local and general environment, with crime and the plight of neighbourhoods, and more. Healey *et al.* (1995b: 277) note that a common, defining feature of such groups is that they are ‘arguing for the right to be heard and for an active voice in policy making’, doing so by ‘not only protest[ing] against their previous invisibility and demand[ing] fair consideration. They demand to be heard *as themselves*, not filtered through the politics of representative democracy or the concepts and vocabulary of professional advocacy’ [italics in original].

The stimulus for a renewed interest in pluralism among political scientists of course does not arise only with consideration of the kind of diversity associated with the proliferating interest groups. Jürgen Habermas (1994: 31), for instance, describes an array of conditions contributing to a generalized increase in plurality affecting individuals in society:

In a functionally ever more differentiated society an ever greater number of persons acquire an ever larger number of rights of access to and participation in an ever greater number of subsystems, be these markets, factories and places of work, government offices, courts and standing armies, schools and hospitals, theatres and museums, insurance, public services and goods, political associations and public communities, media, political parties, or parliaments. For each individual the number of memberships in organizations therefore multiplies, and the range of options expands.

In addition to (some will argue, as part of) the fragmentation and multiplication of interest groups and associations, roles and practices facing members of contemporary Western society, the differential impact of contemporary economic restructuring on has produced or deepened a multiplicity of forms of ethnicised/racialised marginalization, exclusion and poverty (Mingione 1995, Healey *et al.* 1995a,b, Schierup 1997). Further, a variety of political restructurings -- including the rise of unaccountable quasi-public bodies, restrictive access to public resources, and the disempowering of collective bargaining agencies such as trades unions -- has brought about a kind of distancing of

citizens from policy decision-making processes. This is evident especially in the privatization of public services, producing a mixed economy of provision, access and delivery which may well actually reduce access to services for the most marginalized members of society (Hill 1996). Sometimes people have passively accepted such modes of change, sometimes they have actively resisted them. Either way, these multifaceted contemporary destructurings, restructurings and renegotiations have brought about new manifestations of social diversity and exclusion.

All this is to say that there arguably now exists forms of group variegation, personal identification and structural differentiation which are producing an ever more complex social morphology. Or as Clifford Geertz (1986: 114) drolly observes, 'diversity is not what it used to be.'

The cumulative effect of such changes is to produce a kind of 'selective overload' among individuals, stimulating a desire to 'reduce the complexity' (Zolo 1992: 6). Indeed, McLennan (1995: 90) points out, the increasing feelings of dislocation wrought by conditions of pluralism and complexity often turn people *toward* essentialist corporatism as a political strategy.

Yet such emergent conditions of complexity can bring about adaptive non-essentialist political strategies, movements and associations as well. Here, it is the city which arguably gains new importance as the site for the manifestation and contestation of such new political forms. In this way James Holsten and Arjun Appadurai (1996: 199-200) observe that 'urban multiplicity can spawn new and more democratic forms of citizenship [and] it also suggests the emergence of an almost medieval body of overlapping, heterogeneous, non-uniform, and increasingly private memberships' (cf. Garcia 1996).

Following the growing awareness of these kinds of social forms, Robin Cohen (1994) points to the increasing salience of the notion of multiple social identities in both sociological and political theory. Axes of gender, age, disability, race, religion, ethnicity, sexuality, nationality, civil status, even musical styles and dress codes, serve as potent motivating sources of organisation and identification among almost any individual at any time. Such competing claims for affiliation and identity, Cohen (*Ibid.*: 205) observes, ‘appear to be upheld simultaneously, successively or separately and with different degrees of force, conviction and enthusiasm.’

A variety of theorists have incorporated such an awareness into their political thinking. Jeremy Waldron (1992: 789), for example, believes that cultural communal (corporatist) strategies have largely failed because they simply have not accounted for the fact that ‘each person has or can have a variety, a multiplicity of different and perhaps disparate communal allegiances.’ Similarly Stuart Hall (1991), in his call for ‘the politics of living identity through difference,’ argues persuasively for:

the politics of recognising that all of us are composed of multiple social identities, not one. That we are all complexly constructed through different categories, of different antagonisms, and these may have the effect of locating us socially in multiple positions of marginality and subordination, but which do not operate on us in exactly the same way. (*Ibid.*: 57)

Indeed, Hall concludes, a politics which is able to address people through multiple identities ‘is the only political game that the locals have left’ (*Ibid.*: 59).

Iris Marion Young (1990) also advocates an approach to the representation of a wide range of excluded groups along these lines. In place of the traditional political structures that aim ultimately to create a homogeneous public, she sees the need for a participatory democracy based on the idea of ‘a heterogeneous public.’

Instead of a fictional contract, we require participatory structures in which actual people, with their geographical, ethnic, gender and occupational

differences, assert their perspectives on social issues within institutions that encourage the representation of their distinct voices. (Ibid.: 116)

Yet Young does not wish for wholly 'group' differentiated or corporate format for representation since 'In a complex, highly differentiated societies like our own, all persons have multiple group identifications' (Ibid.: 48). '[I]ndividual persons,' she emphasizes, 'as constituted partly by their group affinities and relations, cannot be unified, themselves are heterogeneous and not necessarily constant.'

Chantal Mouffe, too, promotes the idea of recognizing multiple identities in politics. Yet this idea, she usefully states, must be 'distinguished from the postmodern conception of the fragmentation of the social, which refuses to grant the fragments any kind of relational identity' (1993: 7). In approaching the ways in which the idea of multiple identities might be politically formulated, Mouffe asks:

How, in effect, can we hope to understand the nature of these new antagonisms if we hold on to an image of the unitary as the ultimate source of intelligibility of its actions? How can we grasp the multiplicity of relations of subordination that can affect an individual if we envisage social agents as homogeneous and unified entities? What characterizes the struggles of these new social movements is precisely the multiplicity of subject positions which constitute a single agent and the possibility that this multiplicity can become the site of an antagonism and thereby politicized. (Ibid.: 12)

Mouffe goes on to paint a picture of the person as a 'decentred, detotalized agent' within whom there is 'always a certain degree of openness and ambiguity in the way the different subject positions are articulated' (Ibid.). The picture is intended to bring something wholly different to representational politics. 'What emerges,' she suggests, 'are entirely new perspectives for political action which neither liberalism, with its idea of the individual who only pursues his or her own interests, nor Marxism, with its reduction of all subject positions to that of class, can sanction, let alone imagine' (Ibid.: 12-13).

These perspectives on political pluralism appear a long way from the ‘citizen interest group’ kind long described in conventional political theory, as well as from the ‘ethnic group competition’ kind which was for many years (particularly in sociology and anthropology) associated with colonial and post-colonial societies. However, as they stand, such calls for recognizing personal as well as socio-cultural and political pluralism through multiple identities remain very problematic. Among such problems are the following:

- Already inherent in any kind of political pluralism is the ‘pressure to accommodate to a babel of often conflicting demands’ (Healey *et al.* 1995b: 277). When such pluralistic demands are focused on the individual this may well produce a ‘confused citizenry with unstable, conflicting social identities’ (Kearns 1995: 169);
- Gregor McLennan (1995: 83) also points to the potential danger that ‘The principle of difference of multiplicity turns into just another ontological or methodological “absolute,” a new all-purpose privileged abstraction’ whereby everything is necessarily assumed to be multiple, separate and differentiated. It becomes impossible to get a ‘fix’ on anything. ‘A descriptive vastness ensues,’ he warns, ‘a bland and thin egalitarianism of concerns, in which myriad micro-situations have a rightful claim to full representation in the sociocultural matrix’ (Ibid.);
- Finally, while calls for politically recognizing multiple identities are interesting, important and laudable, they generally do not provide any kind of sociological or policy-directed detail as to how such multiplicity is manifested or how it can be operationalized in politics (McLennan 1995).

Clearly new political frameworks need to be created in order to tap the ‘multiple subject positions’, and thereby hear the multiple concerns and interests, of local populations in the course of policy formation, implementation and delivery.

Multiplicity, Social Networks and Policy Institutions

One significant way round such pitfalls of confliction/confusion, ‘multiplicity vastness’ and operational vagueness is to recognize that not only do people individually have a variety of identificatory positions, but that (particularly in modern urban conditions) these reflect involvement in a wide range of social relationships varying reach, density and degree of institutionalization (see Rogers & Vertovec 1995). That is, to shift a large degree of political focus from the individual to her or his social networks.

Such an approach is hinted at by Mouffe (1993: 20), who points to the fact that everyone is an inhabitant of a diversity of communities -- ‘as many, really as the social relations in which we participate and the subject positions they define.’ It is an approach which points the way for the grounding of the kind of postmodernist political theory, which notions of multiple identities are often equated, in actual social relations, everyday institutions and interactional practices. Further, such relationships and networks can be directly equated with the increasing differentiation of functional ‘memberships’ and ‘subsystems’ referred to by Habermas in the quotation earlier in this paper.

Here, the ‘new’ anthropology of cultural complexity can make important advances (see Vertovec 1996c). Increasingly, Social Anthropology is becoming interested in new forms of cultural production, reproduction and multiple identity, especially forms marked by diasporic, transnational, and ‘border’ peoples (see for instance Barth 1989, Hannerz 1992, 1996, Clifford 1994, Kearney 1995). This too, indicates in many ways an abstract postmodernist trend in anthropological theory -- but one supported by important, and

solid, new ethnographic work (e.g., Georges 1990, Glick Schiller *et al.* 1992, Baumann 1996). These relatively new fields of interest, research and theory promise to provide fresh insights into makeup and expression of multiple identities through the analysis of situations in which overlapping, cross-cutting social networks find articulation.

A heightened awareness of social networks is also evident in the emergent approach of a set of economic and political geographers, urban planners and regional developers deemed ‘the “new” institutionalists’ (Healey *et al.* 1995a). Here, the focus for the analysis of urban management is on ‘people-in-relations,’ or how individuals, households, organisations and firms are ‘connected to, and embedded in, the webs of relations which form the social milieu of the various participants’ (Ibid.: 18). The “new” institutionalists’ urge planners and policy makers to be cognisant of how, in response or connection to complex forms of political and economic restructuring -- especially by way of the dismantling of the public sector -- people are renegotiating and making new uses of their relational and interest ‘webs’.

In these ways complex new social morphologies and organisational patterns are coming to challenge the hierarchical political structures of the past. As Healey and her colleagues (1995b: 274) observe, the latter are ‘being replaced by horizontal alliances and networks, cutting across divides between the political and the economic, the public and private.’ These alliances are often temporary, project-specific, and less tied to particular locations. They involve not just networking activity, but also the identification of ‘key nodes’ in networks, ‘places where what constitute shared problems and objectives can be identified and discussed’ (Ibid.: 285). Because of the further interest in the ways a shared voicing of concerns arises and gains articulation, ‘This new approach is not just a matter of intellectual interest, to provide a richer and more robust explanation of what is going

on within the urban arena,' Healey and her colleagues (Ibid.: 18) explain. 'It also has considerable implications for the focus and form of policy intervention in urban areas.'

An elucidating account of these issues is provided by H elene Clark (1994) with reference to the struggle of diverse sets of people and their efforts to create new housing co-operatives in New York City. The efforts (and success) of the people concerned underlines the 'primacy of intersubjectivity in daily life over an ethic of individualism' (Ibid.: 938). The intersubjectivity of actors in this case gave rise to networks of mutual interest cross-cutting affiliations of gender, race, class and locale. Clark also points to ways in which different networks assume different group identities, which in turn are built out of specific shared needs and overlapping experiences. Consequently Clark advocates

The development of networks as strong public spheres that determine their own boundaries and provide a place to bring formal issues of concern to local residents yet at the same time challenge existing assumptions about their roles and identities.... (Ibid.: 948)

The general approach being advocated here emphasizes that people's needs in relation to various policy domains are often at least as much collective -- based on any number of criteria -- as they are individual. Hence city governments and urban managers should both (a) encourage and facilitate the building of mutual interest networks, and (b) make links and establish common cause with them to make best use of limited resources.

An urban management which makes a difference needs to develop an appreciation of what are the critical relations, the key links, which need to be fostered in an area. What are the networks aimed to get access to and which existing relational nodes are the best route to this? What practices and ways of behaving, and what manipulation of roles and resources, will help achieve such relation-building work? ...In such conceptions, the task of urban governance moves beyond that of provider of welfare and support services for economic activity, to that of a strategically shaping enabler of the lively coexistence of multiple relations. (Healey *et al.* 1994b: 282)

With specific regard to ethnic minorities, when one appreciates the nature of social networks, one realizes that many people's immediate or primary set of interests rest within their 'ethnic' networks (which are themselves multiple and overlapping with reference to criteria including kinship and household, religious tradition and sect, languages and place of origin). These, like any set of interests about life opportunities and choices, should be allowed articulation in any liberal democratic forum. But the 'ethnic' voice is not the only one most persons have, just as for most their 'ethnic network' is not the only set of 'interrelational webs' in which they are engaged. Persons within ethnic minorities -- we must regularly remind ourselves -- are also everyday participants in other kinds of social networks surrounding which there are specific interests and concerns: as women, parents, co-workers, members of political parties and neighbourhood associations, consumers of public services, customers and business people, sports team supporters, members of local religious institutions, and so on (again I refer the reader to Habermas's examples of functional differentiation, above).

Returning to the field of policy consultation, 'The contemporary problem' conclude Healey *et al.* (1995b: 287), 'is that the representative model does not easily provide voice for the multiple interests generated by the relational webs within urban areas.' Instead they urge that what is needed is 'a form of accountability which allows for the active involvement of various parties in policy development and delivery... while at the same time setting the parameters of *attention to interests* to which governance activity, whether strategic or specific, is required to refer' (Ibid., italics in original). Such a form may come more fully into being through developing associationalist political structures, as proposed by Paul Hirst (1990, 1994a,b).

Associationalism

Given the kinds of limitations surrounding participation and representation in the policy process -- and in governance generally -- Hirst comments that

The ideas of majoritarian democracy and a common ideal of citizenship are ill-suited to a pluralistic society in which social objectives are increasingly divergent. Citizens need a political community that will enable them to be different, and not one that exhorts them to be the same. (1994a: 13-14)

While some form of 'pluralism' is at present catered for in state strategies of 'multiculturalism', he points out that these are nevertheless usually lodged within 'uniform structures of provision that satisfy no community and at worst degenerate into a decultured pap' (Ibid.: 11).

Hirst (1990, 1994a,b) describes an alternative political framework interchangeably as associational democracy, associational socialism, or associationalism (the philosophy as well as the terminology is parallel in most ways to the 'critical associationalism' advocated by Michael Walzer 1992). It is a political idea that has a long history which incorporates, among other political ideas, Guild Socialism.

A 'fundamental contention' of associationalism is that 'modern societies are pluralistic, they are composed of different partial societies with distinct objectives and beliefs, and those diverse ends cannot be accommodated by uniform methods of compulsory provision through the state' (Hirst 1994a: 20). There is a need to build upon, rather than negate, the plurality and diversity of Western society. Associationalism, then, proposes a greater degree of governance of social affairs through voluntary associations which would offer to a considerable degree their own decision, facilities and service provision in a variety of public policy realms. Recognizing that different groups and associations will organize their affairs in very different ways, associationalism is said to offer an enhance pluralism which would allow 'great diversity of organizational forms,

great complexity in the interaction of associations, and the coexistence of very different values and objectives' (Hirst 1990: 78).

Associationalism offers a form of kind of middle-path mode of decentralisation which challenges the long-standing state strategy of collective welfarism without embracing any form of neo-liberal individualism. Hirst proposes that within such a political framework, in order to have the capacity to fully reflect the interests of their members and carry out their services, associations would:

- ◇ obtain funding perhaps by payment of portion of taxes -- by 'institutionaliz[ing] citizens' voluntary initiative by ring-fencing a portion of a citizen's tax payments (say five per cent) and enabling citizens to annually assign that revenue to up to five organizations of their own choice in proportions they deemed fit' (Hirst 1994a: 186-7);
- ◇ compete politically by soliciting the voluntary choices of individuals;
- ◇ share a limited, but common, set of public rules and regulatory institutions;
- ◇ be free to join or link with international organizations and movements (a point of considerable interest to a range of transnational communities).

With a strong foundation through public finance and some degree of common regulation, voluntary associations would be given reign to establish many of their own public services -- in this way bypassing, as it were, the problematics characteristic of current policy consultation by government agencies. In Hirst's model,

...any voluntary organisation -- church, trade union, charitable trust -- may establish as wide or narrow a range of welfare services as its members choose (e.g., a Muslim charitable foundation may wish to establish schools, hospitals, old people's homes, and so on). It is assumed, therefore, that (at least in urban areas) there will be a range of competing services with which citizens may choose to register. (Ibid.: 176)

Matters relevant to the 'multiplicity of subject positions' or multiple identities, *à la* Mouffe and others, are addressed in a manner by Hirst's version of associationalism as well by this idea of 'competing services'. That is, although an association may arise through a specific network ('ethnic,' neighbourhood, special interest, etc.), an individual

would be free to take part in only those facilities or services managed by the association which appeal to her or him. Hirst explains,

...most associations will not be exclusive groups that enclose the whole of their members' social lives. ...The members of most associations will also be members of others too. Furthermore, for many purposes associations or their organisations will need to coordinate and collaborate with others in like spheres of activity -- if only to build conditions of mutual convenience when funds are distributed or common standards set. Associations may thus gradually create a network of formal and informal relations, which enables society to enjoy both diversity in social governance and a substantial measure of coordination. (Ibid.: 69)

Of course such arrangements already exist in many ways, just as Hirst (1990: 79) points out, 'someone may belong to the Catholic Church for purposes of worship but not for most social activities.' Through multiple associational memberships, individuals would have several "votes" on a range of policy issues (Ibid.: 177). In this way multiple interests are served and multiplex networks are reinforced.

Discussion

Following a review and critique of several schools of thought relevant to political pluralism -- in both its 'old' and 'new' senses -- Gregor McLennan praises associationalism as 'a refreshing and concrete recipe for achieving civic responsibility without social uniformity, and mutualism without communalism' (1995: 85). Tenets of Hirstian associationalism certainly hold promise for a more participatory policy process, yet they are not without problems.

There remain, for instance, important questions of legitimacy, accountability and authority among voluntary associations and networks (see Healey *et al.* 1995b, Kearns 1995, Rogers & Vertovec 1997). If the services of voluntary associations are to be extended and underwritten more substantially by public funding, there must be solid

mechanisms set up to ensure that such associations are wholly democratic and internally accountable to members, and that they have an absolutely open and fully supportive relationship to the local elected authority. On the other hand, the transfer of services to voluntary associations should not fall into widespread government strategies undertaken since the 1980s whereby many kinds of social service provision have been privatised or farmed out to a myriad of local bodies in solely in the name of rationalization (Kearns 1995), having consequently often produced highly limited access or generally much poorer quality. Rather, the associationalist approach is intended to be more participatory by way of decision-making and resource allocation, with feedback arising more directly from users themselves.

A further potential problem relates to the issues described earlier in this paper concerning modes of representation. In the past, as we have seen with most forms of policy consultation, it has widely been thought that ‘Classes, ethnic and religious groups are ideological categories that rely upon forms of closure, to convert them into communities’ (Hirst 1994a: 54). Thus there have arisen in most frameworks and forums for participation and consultation too many ‘corporatist schemes to bureaucratize civil society and to compel individuals to be represented through collective agencies’ (Ibid.: 25). This has resulted in a tendency for the world of interest groups to become, as Healey *et al.* (1995b: 277) put it, ‘a collection of niche habitats rather than a world of spatially and socially intersecting relations’

To ensure a departure from overly corporatist (some would say essentialist) conceptualizations, Hirst is insistent that ‘associationalism must be sharply distinguished from any form of communalism’ (Ibid.: 55). Membership of associations within the system should be based on consent and choice, not on ascription or gross categorization; representation should be elective and based on interest networks, not based on the

expediency of employing 'ethnic brokers'. Information sharing, co-operation and collaboration among associations should be encouraged and supported by local government.

The establishment of collaborative activities and policies envisioned in this kind of associationalism bears a direct relation to long-standing forms of alliance and coalition politics. 'After all,' Hélene Clark (1994: 938) notes, 'actions based on norms and values, mutual aid and support, and a more interdependent and collective life-style are not rare in communities with limited resources where the main resources are other people and interlocking relationships.' What is arguably new in the approach advocated by Hirst, as mentioned above, is the way it might dovetail with 'new pluralism' identified with the 'multiple subject position' concept described by Mouffe and with the 'interrelational web' approach to urban management sought by Healey and the 'new institutionalists' (as well as with anthropology's new interests in the practices and identity politics of transnational communities).

With reference to individuals' complex, overlapping networks and related positional self-identities, we must understand and make public provision for the multiple interests which are accordingly voiced. Individuals should have one voice here 'A,' another there 'as B,' yet another over there 'as C,' and so forth. Such a system can not only facilitate multiplicity, but it can move us far beyond the 'A and ever only A' perspective unwittingly shared and articulated through culturalist assumptions among some exponents of multiculturalism, the politics of difference, and the New Right. In these ways, we would do well to be reminded that we all approach our own circumstances through the overlapping of roles, identities and interests. As Alisdair MacIntyre writes,

I am someone's son or daughter, someone else's cousin or uncle; I am a citizen of this or that city, a member of this or that guild or profession; I

belong to this clan, that tribe, this nation. Hence what is good for me has to be the good for one who inhabits these roles. As such, I inherit the past of my family, my city, my tribe, my nation, a variety of debts, inheritances, rightful expectations and obligations. These constitute the given of my life, my moral starting point. This is in part what gives my life its own moral particularity. (in Waldron 1992: 790-1)

Conclusion

The political philosophy which emerges from the parallel lines of thinking outlined in this paper underscores the need to institutionalise simultaneously in the public sphere mechanisms for [a] voicing individuals' multiple interests and expressing their multiple identities, [b] supporting substantially the work voluntary associations in a variety of policy domains (housing, social care, etc.), and [c] establishing effective forums for consensus- and alliance-building and campaigns based around mutual interest networks.

The simultaneous diversification of political frameworks which are demanded by such a philosophy has been urged by a number of theorists. For example, Mouffe (1993: 18) states that we require 'a multiplication of democratic practices, institutionalizing of them into ever more diverse social relations, so that a multiplicity of subject positions can be formed through a democratic matrix.' Hirst (1990: 8) describes the need for 'pluralizing the state' in order to 'multiply representative bodies and to complement them by forms of functional representation of organized social interests.' Tarrow (1989) advocates the creation of a 'repertoire of participation', as Ireland (1994: 265) does 'multiple access points at which influence might be exerted', and Kearns (1995: 171) 'a set of arenas in which citizens can control their own projects and resources.' And Iris Young (1997: 160) argues for 'a coalition politics that recognizes the differing modalities of oppression that people experience and affirms their culturally specific networks and organizations.'

Recognizing multiplicity and the value of political networking in policy decision-making and management not only better reflects social reality and allows for a fuller range of interests to be voiced more effectively, but provides a valuable third strategy for public provision. By recognizing both the individual and the social networks which intersect in the person, this approach challenges the mutualist, universalist strategies of traditional welfarism, as well as the wholly individualist neo-liberal agenda.

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