Social Inclusion and Democratic Citizenship

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For citizenship to matter it must be inclusive and for inclusion to matter it must successfully deal with social exclusion in a society that is fractured along numerous fault lines. The European discourse on social inclusion is too narrowly focussed on poverty and labour market inclusion (Viet-Wilson 1998; Walker and Walker, 1997; Bryne, 1999; Gore, 1995). Howard Duncan is correct in saying that this is not a useful starting point for either understanding the concept or for identifying a policy agenda for creating an inclusive society (Duncan, 2003: 30-31). Similarly Biles and Burstein argue that the narrow conception ignores other important dimensions of inclusion – cultural and political inclusion (Biles and Burstein, 2003: 14-15). This paper suggests that the European conception can not be readily applied in the Canadian context for one other reason – it pays scant attention to the importance of democratic citizenship[1]. Given these criticisms, it is necessary to distinguish between weak and strong versions of the social inclusion discourse. The former focus simply on assimilation and integration of the excluded (via a state commitment to multiculturalism), while the latter take a structural approach that focuses on historical processes that continually reproduce oppression, discrimination and exclusion. Strong approaches to the social inclusion discourse therefore are intimately concerned with rights, citizenship and restructured relations between newcomer and marginalized communities and the institutions of the dominant society. The focus is on valued recognition and valued participation by those excluded from full participation in society and the benefits of society. This requires a broader conception of citizenship with an interlocking set of reciprocal rights and obligations (Bryne, 1999: 2; Gore, 1995: 2).

Duffy notes that social exclusion refers to "the inability to participate effectively in economic social, political and cultural life, and, in some characterizations, alienation and distance from the mainstream society" (Duffy, cited by Barry, 1998: 2). The link between social exclusion and citizenship in part hinges on the degree to which individuals from newcomer and marginalized communities encounter structural and systemic barriers and are denied or restricted from participating in society. In 1990 the *European Observatory on National Policies for Combating Social Exclusion* was established to look at "the basic rights of citizenship to a basic standard of living and to participation in major social and economic opportunities in society" (Room as cited in Gore, 1995: 2). Social inclusion then is fundamentally about citizenship rights and about the rights of citizens. In this sense, social inclusion as a political response to forms of exclusion recasts the debate about citizenship in a number of important ways. First, in a society like Canada that is multicultural, multiracial, multilingual, multiethnic and multi faith, social inclusion it is about creating a level playing field and enhancing equality of opportunity for all members of society. Second it is about changing our way of thinking about citizenship (as that conferred on members of a nation state by virtue of birth or length of residence). And third as Duncan suggests it forces policy makers to think about how citizens and communities can and do increase social capital (Duncan, 2003: 32).

In a society as diverse as Canada, identity formation and social cohesion of racialized communities and immigrant communities is a complex response to many factors. Their respective citizenship claims are intimately linked to making equality claims and to ensuring their rights and freedoms enshrined in the *Charter* are not eroded. In Canada, these citizenship claims are in no small measure, mediated by the histories of immigrants in the sending countries, the state in the host country and its multicultural practices, and they are also mediated by the reality of discrimination and exclusion. Discrimination undermines citizenship and erodes a person's ability to develop their talents and capacities. This dual mediation is reflected in the two phases of multiculturalism in Canada. Through an official policy of multiculturalism, the state in Canada has attempted to deal with racial discrimination and significantly determine the nature of state /minority relations within a liberal tradition that promotes equality and encourages group social cohesion and social inclusion.

In the narrow sense citizenship is exclusionary. It is about who is a citizen of a nation state and what bundle of rights

that citizen can exercise and it is about what that citizen is entitled to as a member of the nation state. In the realm of formal equality the laws, the constitutions, the human rights codes proclaim the equality of all citizens. In this realm, it is just that citizens should be equally entitled to certain rights typically associated with a democracy – the right to vote, to freedom of association, freedom of religion etc.

Social inclusion forces the discourse beyond the realm of formal equality and into the realm of substantive equality which is characterized by challenges to discrimination, exclusion and inequality. It was the Abella report that advanced the notion that equality does not mean sameness and that equality means that we have to treat differences differently (Abella, 1984). This is the necessary minimum precondition for achieving social inclusion. The Supreme Court of Canada has noted that minority rights do not erode democratic citizenship, rather "The accommodation of differences is the essence of true equality" (cited by Kymlicka and Norman 2000: 33). Accommodating differences and eliminating barriers to equality of opportunity are the hallmarks of social inclusion. The latter however ought not to be confused with social cohesion for multiple forms of exclusion can exist in a socially cohesive society. Nonetheless, important questions persist: inclusion around what vision and inclusion to what? Are we talking about assimilation? Is this a new way of managing state minority relation? Is this "Anglo conformity" or even "multiculturalism" in a new guise? As Kymlicka and Norman point out there have been major disputes both about the legitimacy of assimilation as a way of eliminating differences, and about multiculturalism as the official recognition of differences (Kymlicka and Norman 2000: 14-16).

In a society like Canada that is multicultural, multiracial, multilingual, multiethnic and multi faith, social inclusion it is about creating a level playing field and enhancing equality of opportunity for all members of society.

In Canada, the government developed a public policy on multiculturalism that committed it to three primary activities. First, recognizing and promoting the understanding that multiculturalism is a fundamental characteristic of Canadian society. Second, eliminating barriers to full and equitable participation faced by members of minority communities in all spheres of Canadian society. Third, ensuring that all individuals receive equal treatment and equal protection of the law, while respecting and valuing their diversity. Certainly, it is not clear that a policy of protecting and promoting the equality rights of ethnic and racialized minority groups will erode the practices of responsible democratic citizenship. What it will do is simultaneously erode the racialized and exclusionary conception of citizenship embedded in the notion of binationalism and build the case for a democratic pluralist conception of citizenship in Canada. Social inclusion begins from the premise that it is democratic citizenship that is at risk when a society fails to develop the talents and capacities of all its members. The move to social inclusion is eroded when the rights of minorities are not respected and accommodated and minorities feel "Othered".

In the context of accommodating differences and promoting social inclusion there is space for the state to intervene to ensure equal treatment (equality of opportunity). Within a liberal discourse, a societal commitment to equality of opportunity ensures that all members of society are provided with the opportunity to exercise the broadest possible citizenship rights and to secure the valued goods and services free from the multiple forms of exclusion that erode substantive citizenship. The notion that democratic citizenship requires assimilation is not only patently absurd, it is patently unfair. As Phillips suggest, "It should not be necessary for people to make themselves the same as the others in order to qualify for equal respect" (Phillips, 1999: 128-9). For social inclusion there is no contradiction between democratic citizenship and differentiated citizenship (where people can hold dual and even multiple loyalties). Democratic citizenship is about valued participation, valued recognition and belonging. At a minimum, it is characterized by:

- All the political rights associated with formal equality;
- A right to equality and a right to be free from discrimination;
- An intimate relationship between the individual and the community;
- Reciprocal relationship of rights and obligations;
- Barrier free access, a sense of belonging and not being "othered" and marginalized;
- A commitment on the part of the state to ensure that all members of society have equal access to developing their talents and capacities; and
- Providing all members of society with the resources to exercise democratic citizenship.

Conclusion

The vision of a Canadian multiracial multiethnic multi faith polity, is one that "democratizes democracy" and embraces a broad "inclusive" conception of citizenship. Social inclusion and democratic citizenship both involve ensuring that all members of society are provided with the opportunity to develop their talents and capacities and secure the valued goods and services in society. In the urban environment this requires a fundamental movement from tolerating diverse cultures to recognizing and respecting them. Democratic citizenship is fully capable of both recognizing the politics of difference and transcending its narrow confines precisely because it embraces an inclusive vision that suggests common purpose and shared community can be achieved through inter-group solidarity. Canada will be a much stronger country if we embrace democratic citizenship and social inclusion as transformative tools and as normative ideals.

[34] See, for example, Alain Pelletier, "Politics and Ethnicity: Representation of Ethnic and Visible-Minority Groups in the House of Commons," Ethno-cultural Groups and Visible Minorities in Canadian Politics, Kathy Megyery, ed. Volume 7 of the Research Studies for the royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1991) p. 101-160; Simard, "La representation des groupes ethnoculturels dans la région montréalise."

[35] See, for example, Black, "Representation in the Parliament of Canada"; and Political Participation Research Network.

[36] Henry Milner, "Civic Literacy in Comparative Context," Policy Matters 2.2 (2001); also, this magazine.

[37] See www.torontoyouth.com.

[38] See Philip Haid, Elder C. Marques and Jon Brown, "Re-focusing the Lens: Assessing the Challenge of Youth Involvement in Public Policy," (June 1, 1999) www.iog.ca.

[39] See Sylvia Bashevkin, Toeing the Lines: Women and Party Politics in English Canada, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1993).

[40] Sayers and Jetha's interviews with ethnic minority politicians point to "the permeability of Canadian parties."

[41] Daiva Stasiulis, "'Deep Diversity': Race and Ethnicity in Canadian Politics," Canadian Politics in the 1990s, 4th ed., Michael S. Whittington and Glen Williams, eds. (Peterborough: Nelson, 1995) p. 203-204.

[42] Stasiulis, p. 201.

[43] Tossutti, p. 23; See, also, Sayers and Jetha.

[44] See, for example, Anver Saloojee and Myer Siemiatycki, "Formal and Non-Formal Political Participation by Immigrants and Newcomers," Canadian Issues (April 2003) p. 42-44.

[45] Kymlicka, p. 120.

[46] See Erin Tolley, "Supplement, Substitute or Stepping Stone?: Understanding the Electoral and Non-Electoral Participation of Immigrants and Minorities" paper presented at the Sixth National Metropolis Conference, Edmonton, Alberta (March 21-24, 2003).

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[1] Respondents were divided into the following groups: sex (male, female); age (18-34, 35-50, 51 years and over); education (high school or less; some post-secondary or more); and annual household income (less than $40,000; $40,000-69,999; $70,000 or more).

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[1] Kymlicka,. Norman, (2000), in their article "Citizenship in Culturally Diverse Societies: Issues, Contexts Concepts", distinguish between "common citizenship" and democratic citizenship Kymlicka,. Norman, 2000: 10).

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