SOCIAL EXCLUSION: A CONCEPT IN NEED OF DEFINITION?

Robin Peace[1]
Knowledge Management Group
Ministry of Social Policy

Abstract

"Social exclusion" is a contested term. Not only is it used to refer to a wide range of phenomena and processes related to poverty, deprivation and hardship, but it is also used in relation to a wide range of categories of excluded people and places of exclusion. This presentation offers some evidence for the elusive and challenging nature of the concept both in the European Union and in New Zealand.

INTRODUCTION

"Social exclusion" – what do these two words mean? Why have they become popular in policy discourse in parts of the English-speaking world? How and in what ways are they a contested concept? Arguably, they signify a new concept somehow related to notions of poverty, hardship, deprivation and marginalisation, but the contexts in which the concept appears are often ambiguous and contradictory. Despite over 20 years of use in the European Union (especially France) and in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, there is debate about what the concept signifies and how it is best used in rhetorical and policy contexts. Notwithstanding the level of debate, the concept is widely used and seems to be profoundly attractive to the producers of social policy discourse.

Although there is much that could and has been said about social exclusion, this paper focuses on only four things. First, I give a brief reconstruction of the history of the concept – where it came from and my understanding of why it was used in particular ways to particular effect in the European setting. Second, I introduce some of the "things" that social exclusion refers to – kinds of exclusion and categories of excluded people – that make their appearance in the discourse of social exclusion. Third, I lay out

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[1] I have based this paper on two main sources: my own research on social exclusion in the European Union (Peace 1999), and a recent publication from the United Kingdom edited by Janie Percy-Smith (Percy-Smith 2000) from the Policy Research Institute at Leeds Metropolitan University. What I say here is very much my own view of the matter and does not reflect the views of the Research Unit or indeed of the Ministry of Social Policy in any way.

some of the definitions of social exclusion in current circulation and identify the key differences between them. Fourth, and finally, I suggest some of the other implications, the perverse consequences and unanticipated outcomes, that inhere in the "exclusion" discourse.

HISTORY OF THE CONCEPT

Debates over social exclusion as a concept often begin with its history. Who used it first, why was it chosen as a policy term rather than the more familiar concepts of "poverty" or "deprivation" or "hardship", what did it mean in its earliest incarnation? In English-language policy documents produced in Europe, North America and Oceania in the 1970s, researchers would be hard pressed to find texts that included the phrase. However, by the mid-1980s "social exclusion" had not only made its appearance in European Union documents but had also appeared in academic discourse emanating from the so-called "less-industrialised" world (Rodgers et al. 1995). It has been used even more frequently since the 1990s. The concept of "social exclusion" has become a core concept in the European Union and a foundational policy concept in Tony Blair's New Labour Government in the UK. It has surfaced briefly (though not persuasively) in Australia in 1999 as an umbrella concept for a large social policy conference, and most recently has appeared in Aotearoa/New Zealand as part of the project of rethinking the direction of social policy. There is, however, no clear record of how the term came into use in English-language policy contexts. My own version of this history, however, and one that is backed up by a number of scholars, suggests that the concept of social exclusion, as a policy term, made its English-language debut in the European Union Poverty Programmes in the 1980s.

French and English were the mandatory official languages for all European-Union-wide policy initiatives in the 1980s and a recognisably similar term existed in the French in the form of *"exclusion sociale"*. As the European policy makers struggled to find a term for innovative social policy that avoided the stigma of concepts such as "poverty" and "deprivation", *"exclusion sociale"* or "social exclusion" as it neatly translated, offered a fresh alternative. It was mutually recognisable in both languages, it avoided conceptual stigma and it was indeed "shiny and new". In a sense, it was used as a "branding" exercise for the European Union's highly controversial Poverty Programmes. The Poverty Programmes were controversial for two reasons. Firstly, they appeared to compromise the principle of subsidiarity, that the Union, or the Community as it was then, would not generate policies that were more properly the responsibility of individual member states. Secondly, they publicised "poverty" and thus seemed to offend the language of decency. "Exclusion" was a less blatant and

more malleable concept. The "war on poverty" was out and the "fight against social exclusion" was in.

"Social exclusion" was rapidly disseminated in English-language versions of European policies and the shift in meaning entailed in the translation from its old (French) meaning and its new manifestations was barely remarked outside of academic discourse.

The French Policy Milieu

In the French policy milieu, for at least a decade prior to the European Union Poverty Programmes, *exclusion sociale"* had been a term used to refer to a very select set of categories of people who were excluded from the provision of social insurance in France. According to Hilary Silver (1995), an American commentator on European Union exclusion policies, a French social policy analyst, Paul Lenoir, in 1974, identified ten categories or groups who came under the "uninsured" umbrella. These were the physically and mentally handicapped, those who were "suicidal", aged invalids, abused children, substance abusers, delinquents, single parents (notably sole mothers), multi-problem households (where more than one of the factors existed at any one time), "marginals", "asocials" and "social misfits".

Several of these terms – especially the last three – may also be terms that have suffered in the translation from the French, but the picture is nevertheless clear. Successive French Governments produced policies that only offered social insurance to those who were in paid work or who were legally married to someone in paid work. The inevitable outcome of policies that excluded people on the basis of their capacity to engage in paid work was an eclectic range and growing number of people who were left in the hands of church-based and private charity, but for quite different reasons.

The European Union Context

In view of what happened in the European Union in relation to "social exclusion" policy frameworks, this starting place is significant. To understand this requires an understanding of the policy mandate of the European Union. I will not go into this in any great depth. Suffice it to say that the European Union represents a primarily *economic* relationship between the 15 member states and it has proved extremely difficult to rationalise the inclusion of social policy initiatives into the broader mandate of European Union policy. Thus, wherever "anti-poverty" initiatives could be coupled to "employment" initiatives, there was greater acceptance of them by the member

states. Over the 20 years of the Poverty Programmes (the policy initiatives that were the key carriers of the "social exclusion" discourse into member states) a significant "discursive shift" (where "discursive" refers to the ways in which poverty and exclusion were talked about and written about) occurred.

The discursive shift in European Union social policy entailed a shift from a focus on "poverty" to a focus on "social exclusion" and has attracted a great deal of (English-language) commentary, especially since the mid-1990s[2]. The substance of this commentary is that the concept of social exclusion now has an accepted currency in European Union policy discourse. Not only has it taken over the discursive space, the language, of "poverty" in the European Union policy milieu, but also its use has increasingly encouraged a conflation with the idea of "exclusion from employment" and simultaneously encouraged a shift away from the idea of extreme marginalisation.

Thus, for many researchers, analysts and commentators who saw "social exclusion" as a new and shiny term – perhaps even a Trojan horse – that would encourage a rethinking of social issues and problems away from the tired and limited concepts of poverty and deprivation, disappointment was not long in coming. Paradoxically it seemed that the policies deriving from the new discourse of "social exclusion" were capable of ensuring that some groups and individuals were being excluded even from the discourse of exclusion.

The Shift from Verb to Noun

There are a number of possible reasons for the conflations and slippages entailed in the development of European Union policies. They are beyond the scope of this paper. The significant lesson to draw, however, is that it is important to understand what a person or group is excluded from and by whom. In the case of *"exclusion sociale"* the agency was clear. The French Government made *policies* that excluded particular groups from receiving social insurance on the basis of explicit criteria. If you wanted to be included amongst those who had access to social insurance you found a job, or you got married to someone who had a job. This was inclusion and exclusion in a definable sense.

The "Poverty Programmes" provided, in a sense, a "transformative space" – a space, that is, where change in the nature and understanding of poverty took place. In this

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[2] Most notably Silver (1995), but also Andersen et al. (1994), Bhalla and Lapeyre (1997), Burchardt et al. (1999), Conroy (1994), Cousins (1998), Harvey (1990, 1994), Jordan (1996), Gordon and Spicker (1999), Lee and Murie (1999), Levitas (1996, 1998), Madanipour et al. (1998), Peace (1999), Percy-Smith (2000), Rodgers et al. (1995) and Room (1995), as well as detailed reports from the Social Exclusion Unit (1999, 1998).

transformative space, the concept of social exclusion underwent a complex linguistic shift that has affected what policy makers now "do" with the concept. The English language has a "trick" (called, in semantic terms, "nominalisation") whereby strong active verbs can be turned into nouns. This happens whenever, for example, the phrase "to ruminate" that refers to the actions of a cow engaged in digesting its food becomes the subject of our "rumination" or our slow and deliberative thinking on any matter other than cows' digestive processes, or when the school that desires "to integrate" with the state school sector becomes the subject of "integration" policies.

In each case, nominalisation tends to produce two linguistic effects. The first is that agency disappears – whoever or whatever was "doing the thing" becomes either abstract or invisible. The second effect is that reification occurs. The action turns into a thing in its own right. Thus, a commentary that discusses the active act of "excluding" someone or something from somewhere involves an identification of agency: "they were excluded by the group from...", "he excluded her from...". But "exclusion", as a verb that has been turned into a noun (a process also known as "reification"), signifies a "thing" rather than an "action". Thus, "'social exclusion' affects their life chances...". It is in this nominalised and reified state that the concept of social exclusion is most often deployed in the naming and labelling of different and particular groups.

REIFIED CATEGORIES

In my own research into European Union policies relating to social exclusion (Peace 1999) I developed a classification for the subject categories being used in relation to the new subject of social exclusion. In this section I introduce some of these reifications and discuss both positive and negative implications for policy discourse arising from these particular constructions. The method I used in this analysis was a painstaking process of electronically searching over 100 digitised European Union social policy documents for sentences or paragraphs where the phrase "social exclusion" appeared. Once the phrase was found and captured in a software database, I used text analysis software (QSR NUD.IST) to record and cross-tabulate the findings, and derived my categories from the most commonly occurring relationships.

Identifying the Ways Social Exclusion is Deployed in Policy Texts

The European Union policy documents deploy the concept of social exclusion in a bewildering array. In order to make sense of the array, I divided the findings into a six-component matrix. For each element of the matrix I identified an attribute under which the findings could be subsumed. The attributes included:

- labels/names/categories for excluded people;
- names for different kinds of exclusion;
- names for factors identified as accentuating exclusion;
- metaphors for states, conditions or places of exclusion;
- structural causes of exclusion; and
- names/labels for particular psychosocial effects of exclusion.

Although this catalogue of attributes and my assignment of terms to it are arbitrary, it provided a useful framework for reflecting on the slipperiness of the concept of exclusion. These attributes are discussed more fully below, along with lists of examples of each attribute. This material is excerpted from large and complex diagrams that could not be reproduced here. The lists come from the range of EU texts that were referenced in my research, where the individual items may be found with footnotes to the original text (Peace 1999:397-400).

Making Categories for People

Effectively, the search of the policy documents established that there were at least 51 ways that a person could qualify as belonging to a category of the "socially excluded".

I suggest that these are "categories" inasmuch as they pertain to individuals who may be, and often are, grouped and labelled under these terms. Thus, a "landless peasant", is understood to be a person without land and "the homeless" as persons without homes. A closer examination of these labels in context led me to "group the groups" under five headings: those marginalised by "choice"; the socioculturally marginalised; those excluded by age, gender or disability; the socio-economically marginalised; and several "undifferentiated" groups who could include many of the people who can be categorised in other groupings.

Kinds of Exclusion

In addition to these terms that I designated as "categories" of excluded people, I found at least 15 kinds of exclusion that are named in the European social policy texts. These include: social marginalisation, new poverty, democratic legal/political exclusion, non-material disadvantage, exclusion from the "minimal acceptable way of life", cultural exclusion (including race and gender), exclusion from family and the community, exclusion from the welfare state, long-term poverty, exclusion from mainstream political and economic life, poverty, state of deprivation, detachment from work relations, economic exclusion, and exclusion from the labour market (Peace 1999:397).

These names and labels represent "kinds" of exclusion in the sense of there being different "sorts" of exclusion or overlapping "forms" of exclusion. Some of the terms (especially the latter four) primarily identify aspects of economic exclusion whereas the other terms are more generally part of the exclusion rhetoric. In this case, as with the names for categories of people, there is evidence that exclusion is a multifaceted phenomenon.

These "kinds" of exclusion not only encapsulate a wide range of different kinds of exclusionary circumstances but they also identify a range of contemporary expressions and euphemisms for poverty. In talking about kinds of exclusion, the slippage between "exclusion" and "poverty" is quite marked. Percy-Smith (2000:9) has also developed a typology for "kinds" of exclusion and her analysis provides a more orderly framework than my own retrospective reconstruction. She suggests that there are "economic, social, political, neighbourhood, individual, spatial and group" dimensions to social exclusion. Notably absent from her list is "cultural exclusion", which, I would argue, is something resonantly different from the "group exclusion" of "ethnic minorities" that she identifies, and one that is of critical importance in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Accentuating Factors

Perhaps the greatest sense of the mobility and potential ambiguity of the concept of exclusion comes under the heading of what I have called, "accentuating factors". There are at least 41 words or phrases in the European Union policy texts that could be seen as factors that contribute to, or accentuate, the conditions of exclusion in which people live. The factors have been subdivided into those which are based on a lack of access to some critical resource, lack of "fair recognition", and those which might be regarded as "spatial", "personal" or "economic" intensifiers.

Lack of access includes access to factors such as social mobility, means of communication, vital social systems, housing, public amenities, social security, health services, education services and social citizenship (Peace 1999:398). Lack of fair recognition includes: negative image of the poor groups, social discrimination, cultural inequalities, prejudices in the wider society, hostility, stigmatism, segregation, ethnic discrimination and low participation rates of women (ibid.). Personal intensifiers include factors like bad lifestyle, negative family circumstances, low living standards, poor health, indebtedness, drug trafficking, unsatisfactory quality of life, lack of knowledge and information, and low levels of education and qualification (ibid.). Spatial intensifiers include: social isolation, geographical isolation, loneliness from family and community, the sense of being forgotten and the resort to out-migration (ibid.).

This typology tends to confirm my assessment that not only is social exclusion a mobile concept, but it has a wide reach and can capture images from beyond the accustomed spectrum of "poverty" discourse.

Typologies of "categories", "kinds" and "accentuating factors" do begin to provide a rich picture of the ways in which social exclusion is deployed in European Union policy texts, but they do not exhaust the references to exclusion in the document corpus that I studied. The three remaining categories attempt to impose some order on the less tangible aspects of the social exclusion discourse and identify "metaphors", "structural causes" and "psycho-social effects" that are part of the vocabulary of exclusion.

Metaphors of Exclusion

There are a number of distinctive metaphors associated with social exclusion discourse, at least some of which express the (often neglected) spatiality of exclusion. I have classified these particular constructs as metaphors following Lakoff and Johnston's (1980) approach to metaphor interpretation. The terms being used to describe social exclusion in this context entail complex metaphorical associations. On the one hand a number of constructs that are not, of themselves, referring to space and place directly are inflected by language that implies downward movement. Terms describing social exclusion are coupled with terms such as "decline", "least", and "below". On the other hand, other constructs are coupled with terms that invoke a sense of circularity and entrapment. Social exclusion is inflected by association with words such as "trap", "cycles", "web", "cumulative" and "lifecycle", all of which tend to intensify notions of sticky complexity and inevitable negativity.

The list of common metaphors includes: state of continuous decline, being on the margins, least-privileged groups, detachment from work relations, poverty trap, cycles of exclusion, perseverance of poverty through the lifecycle of the poor, web of disadvantages, cumulative handicaps that engender vicious circles, situations of risk, below the poverty line, poor spaces, poor islands, shanty towns, ghettos, clandestine residential zones, and random residential zones (Peace 1999:397).

Structural Causes

References are also made to the structural causes of social exclusion. This is a hard grouping to either assemble or justify in any simple way. The acceptance and rejection of "structural causes" as an explanation for the prevalence and persistence of social exclusion waxes and wanes. Reference to "structural causes" appears more frequently

in many of the Irish debates on social exclusion and has more recently made an appearance in the rhetoric of the United Kingdom's Social Exclusion Unit. Arguably, causes can be identified as "structural" when they describe factors or elements over which individuals have limited control.

These include exclusions relating to employment such as child labourers, unqualified youngsters, the low paid, those employed in precarious and unskilled jobs, unprotected workers, older workers, the long-term and recurrently unemployed. Multiple deprivation includes such things as environmental deprivation, bad housing conditions, derelict land, vandalism and high levels of crime, but also includes insufficient resources, lack of work, lack of basic resources, lack of adequate services, as well as the effects of government policies (Peace 1999:400).

Psycho-Social Effects of Exclusion

This is a small but powerful grouping. The categories of people produced by these "effects" of exclusion are those for whom the discourse of social exclusion is less potent. Psycho-social effects may include: psychological problems, relational problems, loss of identity, loss of cultural affiliations, de-integration from work relations, problems of mental depression, internal de-structuring of the person, loss of purpose, de-integration from family ties, processes of subjective implication, the inner dimension of poverty, and de-integration from social relations (Peace 1999:400).

Most of the excluded bodies that experience "relational problems", "loss of identity", "mental depression" and so on, are also those people that the Poverty Programmes were beginning to target successfully in the 1980s, but which the consequent, employment-oriented policies of the 1990s are leaving behind. These characteristics are often associated with individuals who have a depleted capacity to engage in well-paid work and are frequently engaged in cycling in and out of paid work, with rapid changes in status and increasing vulnerability in the paid work market as they develop a reputation for workplace unreliability.

The inter-relationships between these characteristics and categories of social exclusion are further complicated by the over-riding impact of the economic and political policy-making environment that is in place at any one time in any one place. Within this complex framework, social exclusion has been represented in policy texts in many different ways. This suggests that a definition is in order.

DEFINITIONS OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION

In general terms there is consensus that "social exclusion" is a concept that can be defined and deployed in two ways:

It can be defined narrowly – in which case it is used as a synonym for income poverty and refers specifically to either those people who are not attached to the paid labour market (exclusion from the paid workforce) or to those people in low-wage work. It is often used alongside the concept of "social cohesion" in the sense that a cohesive society is one in which (political, social and economic) stability is maintained and controlled by participation in the paid workforce.

It can be defined broadly – in which case it refers to much more than poverty, income inequality, deprivation or lack of employment. The final reports on the European Union Poverty Programmes (Andersen et al. 1994, Conroy 1994) systematically articulated social exclusion in this complex way. This set of 12 reports identified that exclusion was multidimensional, that it involved a lack of resources and/or denial of social rights and that exclusion was a dynamic process. The processes of exclusion resulted in multiple deprivations, the breaking of family ties and social relationships, and loss of identity and purpose (Silver 1995).

It is in this latter, broad and flexible sense that the concept of social exclusion can be useful for developing a different and more complex understanding of the factors and influences that lead to well-being and relative advantage on the one hand, and disparities, inequalities and relative disadvantage between members of a community on the other hand. In the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland and Scotland have introduced this complexity into definitions in their reference to "processes", "complexity" and "causes", and their references to "individuals", "households", "families" and "communities". Concepts such as "participation" and "social inclusion" are highly visible in their definitions.

In Northern Ireland it has been defined as:

> Social exclusion is a set of *processes*, including within the labour market and the welfare system, by which *individuals, households, communities* or even whole social groups are pushed towards or kept to the margins of society. It encompasses not only material deprivation but also more broadly the denial of opportunities *to participate* fully in social and civil life. (Democratic Dialogue 1995, emphasis added)

The Scottish Office suggests that:

> Social Exclusion is *complex*: its *causes* are connected, and its effects themselves become causes of further exclusion; for example, poverty is both a key cause of social exclusion and a key effect. Action to promote social inclusion therefore needs to be both comprehensive and co-ordinated: it must address the full range of issues facing an *individual, a family or a community.* (Scottish Office 1999: 1-2 online, emphasis added)

The UK Social Exclusion Unit, which has effect in England, in its earliest manifestations tended to focus more on "individuals" and to define exclusion more in terms of conventional "poverty discourse". Thus, the complexity was identified in terms such as "linked problems":

> Social exclusion is a shorthand label for what can happen when *individuals* or areas suffer from a combination of *linked problems* such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown. (Social Exclusion Unit 1999, emphasis added)

A widely cited definition in early European Union commentaries identified that social exclusion has three faces:

- **Economic:** The excluded are … the unemployed, … those deprived of access to assets such as property or credit,
- **Social:** The loss of an individual's links to mainstream society,
- **Political:** Certain categories of the population – such as women, ethnic and religious minorities, or migrants – are deprived of part or all of their political and human rights (Bhalla and Lapeyre quoted in Bessis 1995).

An ILO report (Rodgers et al. 1995) also suggests a multifaceted approach to understanding social exclusion by identifying distinctions between social exclusion as an attribute of individuals or groups, and social exclusion as a property of societies:

> [attribute of individuals] Excluded persons or groups are seen to be in a situation of disadvantage … beyond a narrow definition of poverty as lack of income or material possessions … they are socially isolated in some sense, … they "have", or experience, weak social relatedness … may lack ties to the family, local community, voluntary associations, trade unions or even the

nation ... they may be disadvantaged in terms of the extent of their legal rights. ... [This definition] brings together both consumption-related and work-related aspects of disadvantage ... It focuses on the dynamics of cumulative causation ...

[property of societies] A useful approach is an institutional perspective in which social exclusion is a property of the basic institutional framework and ongoing institutional arrangements within which individuals and groups [live] ... Social exclusion is a property of society if racial, sexual, or other forms of discrimination are present, if the markets through which people earn a livelihood are segmented, or if public goods ... are semi-public.

One of the most recent and, to my mind, most useful definitions is that posited by Burchardt et al. (1999). These writers, speaking about the discourse of social exclusion in the United Kingdom in the 1990s, suggest a restricted, two-point definition. They suggest that:

An individual is socially excluded if (a) he or she is geographically resident in a society and (b) he or she does not participate in the normal activities of citizens in that society.

They go on to address the problematic issue of what constitutes "normal activities" by identifying five dimensions in which participation is arguably important for individual [and group] well-being. These dimensions include:

1. **Consumption activity:** [which] relates to traditional measures of poverty
2. **Savings activities:** [that] includes pensions, savings, home ownership
3. **Production activity:** defined in terms of "engaging in an economically or socially valued activity, such as paid work, education or training, retirement ... or looking after a family"
4. **Political activity:** defined as "engaging in some collective effort to improve or protect the immediate or wider social or physical environment"
5. **Social activity:** defined as "engaging in significant social interaction with family, or friends, and identifying with a cultural group or community". (Burchardt et al. cited in Percy-Smith 2000:8)

The elements of this definition that have particular value are twofold. Firstly, the dimensions specify the multidimensional nature of social exclusion and extend the

reach of the definition beyond factors related to production and/or income. Secondly, they provide a very broad interpretation of the productive, political and social aspects of exclusion.

My criticism of the dimensions as outlined here is also twofold. First, consumption, in item one, is quite narrowly defined in relation to "measures of poverty". I would argue that the politics of consumption in relation to social exclusion is very complex. Capacity for consumption has become a marker not only for poverty but increasingly a marker for identity. Being able to "consume" (particular products, services and knowledge) increasingly sets the visible parameters for social inclusion. This is an area that needs considerably more research. My second criticism relates to the conflation of cultural and social activity. Although it is easy to argue that "the cultural" is necessarily embedded in "the social" it is less easy to identify the extent to which "politics of identity" operate in relation to exclusion if the two concepts are bundled up as one. The area of cultural identity and exclusion also requires more research.

Janie Percy-Smith (2000:8) also contests the dimensions identified by Burchardt et al., but rather than challenging the content of the dimensions she suggests a range of new dimensions and attempts to identify indicators that could be used to measure the exclusions that she sees. What is useful in her typology is that she specifies neighbourhood, individual, spatial and group dimensions in addition to economic, social and political dimensions. Capturing the spatial aspects of social exclusion has not been a significant priority in many of the earlier definitions of exclusion (although, ironically, exclusion is an inherently spatial phenomenon as groups and individuals tend to be "excluded from" spaces of inclusion). Identifying "group" as opposed to "individual" indices of exclusion arguably creates greater capacity for policies and indicators to adapt to a cultural ethos that has a group-based rather than individualistic life rationale.

It would appear, overall, that a great deal of thought and debate have gone into finding the "ideal" definition of social exclusion. It would also appear, even from this brief résumé, that there is as yet no consensus. The decision for New Zealand policy lies not only in deciding whether a broad or a narrow definition of social exclusion would serve our purposes best, but also to decide the extent to which such a complicated and in many ways elusive concept is in fact of use. The final section of this paper suggests some of the unanticipated consequences of using the concept of "exclusion" that have become apparent in places where it is already being used.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Percy-Smith (2000:19) describes what she calls the "moral agenda that seems to underpin many of the policy interventions discussed" in relation to social exclusion. She suggests that the moral agenda resides in the implicit normalisation that a discourse of exclusion entails. This has two aspects.

First, there is a powerful discourse, which circulates in societies that are drawn to "social exclusion" as a policy framework, which places value on "independence". Sovereign and possessive individualism (the notion that each individual being possesses control and authority over their own self) is more than a neat socio-philosophical theory. It is the implicit framework that provides the rationale for the rise of the commercial market sector and "new right" political agendas. It is also a dominant discourse that predisposes discussion of the concept of social exclusion to becoming a discussion of "welfare to work". In the European Union at least, the focus on "economic" exclusion – exclusion from the paid workforce – is evident in the history of the Poverty Programmes. The discussion tends to focus on policies that can move people from a state of "dependence" (on the state) to "independence" in the paid work force. The UK Social Exclusion Unit has also tended to pick up on this direction in much of its discussion about "Opportunities for All" (1998).

The second point is that developing a strong notion of "social inclusion" may also give permission to:

> ...the intolerant attitudes towards and punitive treatment of those who are considered to be deviant or non-conforming ... The normative element to policy raises important questions in relation to those who are deemed to have voluntarily excluded themselves. There is a strand in New Labour thinking which suggests that such voluntary self-exclusion itself constitutes a social problem and as such is the legitimate target for possibly punitive action. A good example ... is policies aimed at "clearing the streets" of rough sleepers and beggars. (Percy-Smith 2000:20)

Both of these implications were evident in my research into European Union policy documents. To illustrate this I return to the earlier discussion of "categories of the excluded" that I first mentioned in the section "Reified Categories" and focus on 19 categories that I have identified as "marginalised by choice". These categories are perhaps the most problematic for social exclusion policy. First, it is important to note that the notion of "choice" is inferred in the context in which the categories were found

rather than in my own interpretation. There is, however, a readily accepted discursive space for the notion that people do "choose" "to live otherwise". Whether or not the categories of people who get "put in that place" are in fact people who do "choose" their disadvantage is more complex.

One of the unanticipated benefits of developing a portion of my matrix devoted to categories was that it enabled me to see a "behind the scenes" pattern emerging in policy discourse that was directly connected to the moral problem of supposedly being the kind of person who was able to "choose" disadvantage.

Identity-Based Politics

At this point in the 21st century in the "western industrialised" nations there is a clear tension between two distinct philosophical approaches to targeted welfare distribution. On the one hand, a "politics of identity/politics of recognition" is informing many claims to rights and policy. Ethnicity, age, gender, sexuality and disability are familiar identity groups that individuals lay claim to in their pursuit of policy recognition: Grey Power, Women's Affairs, The Mongrel Mob, Gays and Lesbians in Education, and CCS are all various Aotearoa/New Zealand manifestations of identity-based politics. On the other hand, a politics of "redistribution" (from the "haves" to the "have nots") has its own genealogy in state- and church-based welfare regimes.

Discussion about identity-based politics as a basis for formulating policies to reduce inequalities can be problematic. The selectively universalist assumptions about intra-group rights and responsibilities in identity-based politics can also be problematic for narrowly defined concepts of social exclusion. The claims of Māori in the context of Aotearoa can be understood in terms of this "politics of recognition". A "politics of recognition" presumes that decisions and debates that relate to a particular category or group can only occur when the identity of that group is clearly visible. Thus, for example, there was little discussion of "women's rights" until such time as "women" became, in a sense, a "category of analysis". A politics of recognition, in relation to social exclusion, is premised on the notion that it is exclusion, in some form, that produces the conditions of possibility for recognition of group identity. Thus, and this is the argument that Janie Percy-Smith expresses persuasively (2000), defining social exclusion in a way that ignores the complexity of political exclusion is not an adequate definition. Normative and dominant (hegemonic) conceptualisations of social inclusion and social cohesion are, in Percy-Smith's interpretation, morally problematic.

Redistributive welfare policies (that are significantly more familiar and well understood in their policy expression in New Zealand than identity-based politics) are also premised on categorisations. In this case, the criteria through which individuals can be assigned to a particular category are more narrowly defined. Each category usually relies on one, or a small set of related characteristics to pigeon-hole its members. Thus, rather than the category of "women" there is the category of "sole mother", rather than the category of "migrant" there is the category of "unemployed migrant". Most of the key targeting relates to taxation and employment-related regimes and is premised on "deficit models". The assumption of a set of normative standards for aspiration and achievement provides the basis from which redistribution can be calculated and assessed.

What was significant in my findings on European Union social exclusion policies was that the tension between these two paradigms was resolved both paradoxically and partially. In the first instance, a number of key policy areas were carved off from the "anti-poverty" agenda. There was a telling shift toward a politics of recognition made visible in the rise of a large number of very specific identity-based policy platforms. Thus, there were, and are, policy platforms for migrants, women, the disabled and the elderly, that are designed to address all people in that category regardless of the extent to which poverty or material deprivation underwrites the condition in which individuals live.

At the other end of the scale, targeted (and essentially redistributive) anti-poverty policies were more narrowly focused on tax and employment-related policies. In the polarisation of policy that occurred as a result of these shifts a strange thing occurred at the European level. There was capacity to talk about European-wide policies for the "disabled", for example, at one end of the spectrum and for the "unemployed" at the other. However, there were groups and individuals who had no clear claim either through a politics of recognition (we do not easily accord "identity" status to homeless addicts, for example) or through their capacity and commitment to employment. The discourse of "social exclusion" and the rewriting of social and economic policy frameworks that were a corollary of its use has, paradoxically, produced a space in which groups and individuals are in danger of becoming "excluded from the discourse of exclusion" (Peace 1999).

The second and related "moral problem" that inheres in a discourse of "social exclusion" is the inevitability of "normalisation". In order to develop policies deriving from a concept of "social exclusion" there must be some sense of what people are being excluded from (not to mention who they are being excluded by). Thus there must be an

implicit understanding of what might constitute the grounds for "inclusion". But how are our notions of "inclusion" derived? Who creates the rules, the parameters and the expectations of what a person must do, achieve, aspire to that would make it possible for them to be "included" in the social matrix? Arguably, it is as important to be clear about the grounds for social "inclusion" as it is to be clear about what is meant by social "exclusion".

CONCLUSION

Social inclusion as a policy framework is also not without risk – the normative tendencies inherent on social exclusion discourse are still present. However, a desire for social inclusion could be interpreted, in a policy context, as an agenda to facilitate, enrich and enhance individual and group capacity for at least three things: opportunity, reciprocity and participation. These three concepts occur alongside the concept of exclusion in much of the international policy debate. Investing in the strengths and resources of people requires multifaceted policy approaches. There need to be policies that provide access to basic advantages in health, education, housing and amenities. There need to be policies that seek to protect people from harm, and/or that help prevent people being exposed to difficult circumstances and unnecessary risk. There also need to be policies that enable people to seek new opportunities and take advantage of available opportunities. Ideally, there need to be policy mechanisms for recognising that investments and opportunities that are valuable and accessible to some people are not relevant or accessible to others.

Any development of social exclusion policy in New Zealand needs to be mindful of the complexity of the concept and its contradictory tendencies. In addition, policy makers would need to be mindful of the ways in which a "turn of phrase" can have significant impact on what is talked about and consequently on what actions can be formulated. Using "social exclusion" as an organising concept for social policy runs the risk of framing social policy negatively. Both concepts of "social exclusion" and "social inclusion" run the risk of establishing normative parameters that further complicate the lives of people who are already "at the edge".

More usefully, perhaps, social exclusion could be imported into New Zealand as one concept among many. It could sit alongside the more familiar concepts of "poverty", "being underprivileged", "experiencing hardship", and seeking to attain a "good quality of life". Thus, rather than providing a new framework that introduces unanticipated consequences, social exclusion becomes another conceptual tool for talking about the *linked and cumulative factors* and processes that confound individual

and group capacity for hope, opportunity, reciprocity and participation. Social exclusion (and social inclusion) become further "ways of naming" the collective processes that work to deprive people of access to opportunities and means, material or otherwise, to achieve well-being and security in the terms that are important to them.

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