

DEBATES ON SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN THE SOUTH: WHAT HAVE THEY CONTRIBUTED TO OUR UNDERSTANDING OF DEPRIVATION?

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RESPONSES

Response from Anna Robinson-Pant

I came to this paper as a relative novice in the poverty debates, but believing that I shared a common understanding of 'social exclusion' or the 'socially excluded'. My own experience as a development practitioner was that the term 'socially excluded' had been coined to refer to a target group that was wider, and in some contexts more defined, than simply referring to 'the poor'. I had never really worried whether 'social exclusion' was a Northern or Southern concept. But I was aware that it was one of those top-down labels given by policy makers (both Southern and Northern) to groups of people who were probably not aware of being excluded from something (see Escobar's (1995) account of how 'labelling' has become part of the development process). Although I have sometimes felt consciously excluded - for example, by being denied access to a certain institution or means of support - I tended to assume that 'social exclusion' was a state of which the victims were probably ignorant. It is rather like the state of 'remoteness'. When I was living in a village in the Far West of Nepal, only accessible by plane or a five day walk to the roadhead, many friends used to sympathise that I must feel very 'cut off' out there. In fact, being submerged in the activities of living and working in that area, surrounded by people, I was only aware of being so busy, rarely having time to myself. It was only when the weekly plane came from Kathmandu, that I stopped to reflect on the life from which I was 'isolated'. 'Social exclusion', like 'remoteness', is perhaps a label given more readily by people other than yourself - unlike hunger or poverty.

Who defines social exclusion?

After reading Arjan's paper, I realise that my own experience of how the concept of 'social exclusion' has been used in development planning needs to be set against the potential of how it could be used. Arjan, in this paper, talks both about how the concept might be used and about how it has been and is currently used. My own experience of 'social exclusion' as a quite static term describing a state or a group of people, rather than a process, could be seen as the more common use. Though Arjan emphasises the very wide meanings and uses of the term "which can create as much confusion as it helps to clarify" , he seems to hold on to the potential of the concept to focus "on the processes and institutions that are responsible for deprivation". Hence his response at the end of his paper to the question about the usefulness of the notion of social exclusion is, "it depends".

Now that I have a wider understanding of the ways in which the concept has been and could be used through Arjan's thorough historical grounding of the concept, I accept that 'social exclusion' can be used in a more creative way

than simply labelling groups of people or forms of discrimination. However, I feel that we need to discuss further why the concept 'social exclusion' has sometimes not been useful, in that it has focused attention on outputs, rather than allowing more dynamic analysis of processes.

Arjan usefully traces how the concept of 'social exclusion' has been shaped by the specific country context, for example, responding to the contrasting political ideologies in France and the UK. I found it useful to see how the concept of social exclusion was both defined and used in different ways to contribute to 'solidarity' (in France) or liberal individualism in the UK. I wondered too how theoretical influences, such as Sen's capability approach or poverty as relative deprivation, have served to change and become integrated in this new definition of 'social exclusion'. Since the concept of 'social exclusion' seems to share so much with other multi-dimensional tools of poverty analysis, such as Sen's capability approach, I question what is added? Arjan suggests that it is the attention to processes and institutions that distinguishes this approach from Sen's more 'individualistic' approach. However, my (mostly second-hand!) reading is that Sen's concept of 'freedoms' adds a dimension of agency which is lacking in the 'social exclusion' debate - the recognition that individuals may have goals other than their personal well-being.

Who wants social inclusion?

I feel in particular that there is an assumption in this paper that 'social integration' ("the opposite to social exclusion", de Haan, *ibid.*) is the desirable norm - rather like the critics of "participation" or "PRA" who suggest that conflict is downplayed in these development approaches because of the promotion of consensus at any cost. Yet, as writers on the 'gendered' notion of social exclusion have pointed out, 'inclusion' for some women in the labour market, might mean greater suffering than when they were supposedly 'excluded' (Porter, 2000). It is very clear that some people don't want to be integrated or included, whether on the macro level, in labour markets, or on a micro level, in NGO income generating groups, and their exclusion is a deliberate act (the "alternative spaces" that Porter refers to). It is the difference between being and doing: 'I exclude myself' versus 'I am excluded'. This relates to Sen's notion of freedom. The example he gives of person A who is starving through lack of resources to buy food and person B who is starving through religious fasting. The state is the same but the reasons and meanings of the actions are totally different (cited in Pant, 2000). It is this idea of 'freedoms' and choice which I have found missing from most accounts of social exclusion.

A Northern imported concept?

So is 'social exclusion' a Northern concept transposed to a Southern context? Arjan suggests that the "South Asian conceptualisations of the notion tend to be strongly influenced by Anglo-Saxon individualist frameworks". I wonder whether this analysis takes account of the changes taking place worldwide - that it is not just the concept of 'social exclusion' that is influenced by the North, but many aspects of South Asian society which increasingly converge with the dominant values in the North. How feasible is it to polarise the North and the South, with the rapid and increasing globalisation that is taking place

all over the world? Can we really generalise about 'South Asian' - or 'Northern' for that matter?

What might be interesting is to begin to analyse how the term 'social exclusion' is being used in, for example, the Indian context - what different meanings and uses might be discovered, similar to the differences identified historically between France and Britain? We need to move away from a static notion of 'social exclusion' being exported to South Asia, to an examination of how discourses are changing in the South and in the North.

Pointing to the broader picture of the political nature of knowledge, Arjan emphasises in this paper the one-way traffic of ideas. However, perhaps we can also point to examples of concepts being re-imported in the North, having been shaped by Southern partners (the concept of PRA might fall into this category...) With regard to social exclusion, I wonder whether the issue isn't around Northern versus Southern concepts, but around how far concepts shaped and developed in relation to specific political, cultural and economic conditions can ever have the same use in completely contrasting contexts? Perhaps this accounts for our concern as to whether 'social exclusion' is a Northern concept, whereas I have not heard this concern around Sen's 'capability approach' or even Chambers' concept of 'vulnerability'. The latter two tended to arise from theoretical debates on the nature of poverty, rather than being coined by politicians for mobilisation around a specific cause: an academic versus a policy discourse.

Quantitative or qualitative research implications?

Arjan's paper draws attention to the kind of statistical poverty research that has taken place, which tends to concentrate on correlations, while ignoring the reasons or the relationship between cause and effect. He suggests that much of the development literature focuses on the description of poverty or deprivation without analysing the causes. The implication is that a certain approach to poverty analysis (such as social exclusion or poverty as basic needs deprivation) belongs to a certain research paradigm. He seems to suggest that the concept of social exclusion leads to one adopting a more complex, qualitative approach to research, analysing causes of deprivation and the whole process of how people become excluded. To return to my first paragraph, I feel that Arjan's assumption is perhaps rather idealistic (i.e. the potential use of 'social exclusion' rather than the actual use). The kind of research I have come across (using the concept of 'social exclusion') equally emphasises statistics of numbers of people excluded (e.g. drop-outs from literacy programmes or schools - see the example from Nepal given here by Arjan of girls not at school), rather than exploring the causes in depth.

Last year, I was involved in analysing the findings of the World Bank's 'Consultations with the Poor' field research. Though most of the analysis categories and concepts emerged directly from the data itself (in the manner of 'grounded theory'), we were advised to include the categories 'social exclusion' and 'socially excluded' as part of the World Bank's agenda. The analysis had been intended to reflect the categories and priorities of the poor groups of people interviewed, but ended up with this one category of 'socially excluded' imposed by policy makers (it was not a concept which any of the

interviewees mentioned directly). In my own experience then, the concept of 'social exclusion' actually pushed us away from analysing processes, towards an attempt to present data in terms of more static policy recommendations around access to institutions.

Where do we go from here?

I think what we need to focus on at Uppingham, given Arjan's excellent overview and introduction to the varied concepts of 'social exclusion', is how to use the concept practically in our roles as policy makers, planners, academics, and development workers. My own concern is how to compare or prioritise the different areas of exclusion to which Arjan's paper refers. For example, a project with which several people coming to Uppingham have been involved is the Community Literacy Project Nepal (CLPN). In the participatory approach to planning this project, many different dimensions of deprivation emerged in relation to individuals' lives (such as physical, resource, educational deprivation). The problem the team has faced is how to prioritise these needs: is it possible for a literacy project to help address issues of physical deprivation or should they be working only with people who have access to physical and material resources, but lack certain educational opportunities? What do the debates on social exclusion offer to the CLPN team, in terms of drawing up aims and deciding how to prioritise their project activities, target groups etc? A major dilemma facing many countries in the South is how to improve state institutions to deliver the services needed by rural communities. What practical solutions can the concept of 'social exclusion' contribute to the reform of such institutions? Many thanks to Arjan for starting the debate - like Arjan, I can be accused of posing more questions than I answer. But let's hope that we begin to map out some solutions or some practical approaches at Uppingham this year.

Anna Robinson-Pant

26/1/01

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Response from Roy Williams

Unpacking the discourse of social exclusion/inclusion

There are different elements to the debate. This includes understanding:

1. The problem - poverty/exclusion - what is happening and what causes what? - understanding the data/evidence available.
2. The solutions - the policies, legislation, programmes.
3. The agents of the discourses: Who is defining the problems, who is defining the solutions, how are the actors (the poor, the State, the IGOs) defined, and

why do they define things the way they do - what do they get out of it?

4. The implications - what happens when the problems/solutions are defined in particular ways?

These four are all important for our understanding of the discourse. We need to explore the problems, the solutions, the agents and the implications.

Arjan's paper has outlined the first two issues very well. The fourth, implications, is touched on usefully in part, and the third, the agents (both of the discourses and poverty), is not really dealt with in any detail.

It is a question of emphasis and method that concerns me first of all, for the Seminar at hand in Uppingham.

The four issues must be addressed together. But I would like to take the excellent exposition of the first two issues as a basis, and move on to focus on the third and fourth. I would like to see the theoretical discussion centre on the implications - what happens when problems and solutions are constructed in particular ways? And even more so on the agents - what people/agencies/institutions are defining issues in particular ways, and why are they doing so? What are their expectations?

Some initial comments on Arjan's paper on Social Exclusion

Jon Lauglo, World Bank

Thank you for the paper on exclusion which I have only had time to scan fast. It looks comprehensive in many ways, and I do not know this literature.

But...but I wonder if the concept has emerged simply as a recent Gaullist contribution, without some philosophical source. Is it as simple as that? Secondly, to me the concept is diffuse.

I would expect there had been a launching publication with some social diagnosis which had dismissed earlier concepts of class, poverty, etc. as inadequate for addressing the types of socially significant inequality which characterise societies in which the majority of people no longer can be described as a deprived - for example, that Marxist class analysis becomes hard to sustain when workers increasingly are the white collar salariate Or that new equity concerns require new labels. But is a single common denominator for such varied concerns possible and useful?

To me, there is to the notion of exclusion and inclusion an implied identification of a deprived minority that is set apart from a notional mainstream whose condition is perceived as relatively unproblematic, compared to this minority. Should not the relationship between the inclusion-exclusion dimension, and other terms which have been used to designate socially problematic inequality, be discussed a bit more, and related to characteristics of those societies to which the 'exclusion' analysis has been applied?

If 'society' is not the point of reference, then the aptness of the term would depend on what else is taken as such a point. The impoverished people in Gambia are not excluded from their own society. They are the great mainstream. But they might increasingly be seen as excluded from a globalized world. At the other end, one can presumably talk about women (about half the population) being excluded from certain encrusted and exclusive male clubs in

London - if those clubs were the point of reference...

The main problem with the term is that it is too diffuse, because it begs the question of what the common denominator is to all those traits according to which a person may or may not be 'excluded'. To refer to detachment from circles of solidarity is no solution, Durkheim notwithstanding, for an extreme individualist position would be to see freedom in such detachment - getting away from parochialism, having more 'agency', the advantage of farflung but 'weak ties' as compared to cloyingly confining dense networks etc, and also because society is a patchwork of groups, some of them small and in their solidarity opposed to (could even be preying upon!) larger groups (e.g. the solidarity of thugs in ancient India). ...So what is the supposed common denominator in the 'desired states of affair' from which a deprived person is excluded? Would deprivation be a more precise term?

Response from Alan Rogers

The Discourse of Social Exclusion/Inclusion

I don't like the discourse of social exclusion/inclusion. I have never liked the discourse of social exclusion/inclusion. I had hoped that Arjan de Haan's paper would have overcome my dislike of the discourse of social exclusion/inclusion, but although he has answered some of my problems and pointed to ways in which some of my doubts and hesitations can be assimilated, I still find the discourse of social exclusion/inclusion objectionable and unacceptable, either as a tool of analysis or as a tool of policy-making and planning. I appreciate that what I shall say is not new; and indeed Arjan has indicated in his references that he has examined the arguments of several of those who have written strongly against the discourse, and that therefore his paper is already premised on the intention to address the issues which I shall raise. But I hope he will forgive me if I raise them again in somewhat stronger terms than he has done.

THE CURRENT USE OF THE DISCOURSE

I have been surprised at the prevalence of the discourse of social exclusion/inclusion. It occurs everywhere. Social Exclusion has become a mantra, a justificatory statement for any action, political or social. Governments have set up units to help others (e.g. local government) to rewrite their policies and programmes in this discourse. And it is spreading throughout society. To describe a programme as socially inclusive is to give it a cloak of respectability, to 'unproblematise' it, to remove it beyond further questioning. Social Exclusion is the great 'purifier'.

Now I appreciate that (as with other great religions) there are many forms of belief, ranging from the popular to the sophisticated. The Hinduism or Catholicism of the masses is very different from that of the intellectual, both in concept and in practice. It may be that my experience of the discourse of social exclusion/inclusion is that of the crude variety rather than the more theorised. Certainly, many of the reports which claim to be based on a doctrine of social inclusion seem to me to be simplistic in their approach. I take it that this is one of the key points of Arjan's paper.

Nevertheless, I find at the heart of the discourse real problems. I start from the assumption that we are dealing here with a discourse - and that a discourse has three main components:

- a) it is a construct of reality, a way of looking at the world in an attempt to make sense of the world, an approximation as close as possible to a 'true' description of what exists;
- b) it creates a discourse community, united by a common purpose, not just to change our understanding or picture of reality but to change reality. I am of course aware that a discourse community is not always united, that it is an arena of contestation. But certain fundamental assumptions, certain shared values underlie and underpin these contested programmes of action;
- c) it has a 'voice' - that is, it has been created consciously or subconsciously in someone's interest.

The construct of social exclusion/inclusion

In the discourse of social exclusion/inclusion, one group in society constructs themselves as the included and they construct the rest of society as the excluded. The discourse dichotomises the world. It creates two categories which are exclusive - 'us' and 'the others'.

The discourse dichotomises society; it tends to create the 'excluded' as 'the other', as 'not us'. It does not call for any 'redescription' of ourselves. I am minded of the words of Richard Rorty which I recently quoted in another publication:

Solidarity is not discovered by reflection but created. It is created by increasing our sensitivity to the particular details of the pain and humiliation of other, unfamiliar sorts of people. Such increased sensitivity makes it more difficult to marginalise people different from ourselves by thinking, 'They do not feel it as we would', or 'there must always be suffering, so why not let them suffer?' This process of coming to see other people as 'one of us' rather than as 'them' is a matter of detailed description of what unfamiliar people are like and of redescription of what we ourselves are like. Rorty R 1989, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press pxvi.

As with Freire, the whole world is divided into pro and con, oppressed and oppressors, the included and the excluded. There is and can be no neutrality, no shades of grey. We are dealing here with categories, not with continua. And these categories tend to be static within themselves; the only movement is from excluded to included (do we ever see signs of movement from included to excluded?).

I think I first became aware of this set of concepts in India in the 1970s. At that time UNESCO, and the educated elites in India who accepted what UNESCO said without qualification, constructed the country into two parts, the literate and the illiterate, at that time 30% and 70% respectively. Among the common statements at that time (and they still persist) were such words as "We must bring the illiterate into society". I must confess it blew my mind to think of 70% of the population being constructed as being excluded from their own society (the picture does not change greatly if we alter the percentages to the nominal 60% and 40% which are today's best estimates for that country). The arrogance of one group so defining the rest of society is unacceptable.

Such a picture of reality - that the world is dichotomised into two categories, the included and the excluded - simply does not fit my own picture. For me, the discourse of social exclusion/inclusion fails the essential test of all constructs: it does not fit. People are not (in my view) like this. They do not fall into two categories, the one privileged and the other excluded. The world is much more diverse.

A few examples [I understand why Arjan concentrates in his discussion of the discourse on poverty: but (as he points out) it is much more widely used than that, especially in terms of education - e.g. girls from schooling].

There are those women of Nellore (India), who must be defined as socially excluded since they were very poor and illiterate, who went on the rampage in their area, closed all the drink (arrack) shops, mounted a campaign throughout their district, encouraging it to spread throughout the state of Andhra Pradesh, forced the government to close a newspaper (which attracted worldwide attention) and who (through the political manipulation of political parties) brought down the government of the state. The language of Social Exclusion does not seem to fit their case.

On a smaller scale, there is the women's group in Bangladesh who, when one of their members was refused admission to hospital (exclusion indeed), got together with other neighbouring women's groups and marched on the hospital and forced the authorities to admit the sick woman; again the analysis of this situation in terms of social exclusion does not fit.

Chizu Sato (who attended last year's Uppingham Seminar) writes of two women's groups in Nepal, both participating in adult literacy classes and both of which would be classified as socially excluded. In one case, the women launched out on their own initiative on a programme of community development, with a health clinic and an income generation programme; in the other case, the women did nothing further and never in fact used their literacy skills for any purpose. How can the discourse of social exclusion/inclusion be used to analyse this situation?

In the UK, there are community groups which take action to address their own issues defined in their own terms. Are they 'excluded'?

Above all, where does the women's movement fit into the discourse of social exclusion/ inclusion? Perhaps Jean Barr can help us here.

Such examples (and I am sure we can find many more for the Seminar) seem to me to defy classification within the discourse of social exclusion/inclusion . These people are neither excluded nor included. They do their own thing, they develop themselves. They are less concerned with the values of the elites than with their own advancement in their own terms. They do not, it seems to me, see the world in terms of core and periphery but of achieving immediate goals.

The value of the discourse of social exclusion/inclusion

Now, I want to recognise that the discourse of social exclusion/inclusion is a clear improvement on what preceded it, on what it replaced, that is the deficit discourse. The deficit discourse constructed some people as lacking that which the 'constructors' possessed. The rich countries constructed other countries as 'the Third World', the educated constructed others as illiterate or uneducated,

the healthy constructed others as unhealthy etc. It was the lack of capital, of education, of healthy practices which caused the 'problem' as seen by the privileged. And the tendency was to blame the victim, or at least to assert that it was the 'needy' who must change.

At least the discourse of social exclusion/inclusion recognises that it is the responsibility of the 'included' to help the excluded to gain access, that the included need to act and perhaps to change, if the excluded are to be brought in. [We must also recognise that the discourse of social exclusion/inclusion has brought about significant and valuable achievements as a result of the new understandings that accompany it, for example in the area of legal awareness. Arjan's suggestion that it is a useful tool for the analysis of processes of exclusion is one example of this].

The dangers of the discourse of social exclusion/inclusion

But in this very fact, I find one of the greater dangers of the discourse of social exclusion/inclusion. For not only does the discourse not fit reality; I believe it is positively dangerous. We have already seen that the discourses dichotomises and ranks reality, that it disfranchises those it calls the excluded and privileges those it describes as the included. It suggests that our view is the right one and any other view is 'wrong'.

Let me draw a parallel here to show what I mean. I have been struck in the last three to four years in travelling in Asia and Africa to see how the term 'European' has changed its meaning in many contexts there. No longer is it seen to comprise all those people who live west of the Urals. Now it is constructed to mean only those within fifteen self-chosen nations in western Europe. The other European peoples have been disfranchised, not by the creation of the European Union but by the language used by this group, the appropriation of the term 'European' to mean the Union alone. Poland is no longer European and won't be until it becomes 'included' (on terms set by the included). The discourse of social exclusion/inclusion does not just construct a dichotomy, it constructs a hierarchy. It shapes reality, leads some people to ascribe to themselves more or less power.

Unproblematizing the categories

The discourse also tends to unify both the included and the excluded. It does not problematise them.

a) The 'core' (I use this term because I cannot think of another term: can anyone help in this please?). Arjan points out that the core is represented/constructed by different people in different ways - e.g. as education or rights etc. But I want to take this a bit further. Because the discourse of social exclusion/inclusion wishes to make the core (however defined) attractive, desirable, it rarely critiques it. It never asks questions such as whether this is the right core into which the excluded need to be included, whether and how the core needs to be changed. For example, do we really want the excluded to have the same kind of schooling that is currently available? Doesn't education (even inclusive education) need to be reformed? Again, in terms of rights, in Pakistan I found the view that Human Rights are part of a plot aimed at Western neo-colonialism, another form of hegemony using UN and other aid agencies. Do we just ignore this view and insist on the

inclusion of Pakistani women into our Human Rights? Where does the recognition and indeed the celebration of indigenous cultures come in the discourse of social exclusion/inclusion? How does social transformation fit into the discourse of social exclusion/inclusion? The discourse does not encourage us to reflect critically on the core into which we wish to include the excluded.

b) The excluded: Again the social exclusion/inclusion discourse also tends to unify the excluded. Arjan has problematised this area more fully, pointing out that it is a complex amalgam of different interest groups, that the term excluded is applied to many different contexts and situations. But this too is a contingent area, depending on who is talking and about what. I am excluded from some things in my life but I am not one of the excluded. The 'excluded' are not those who feel they are excluded but those who are defined by the included as being excluded. And to do this, the discourse tends to construct the excluded as having more in common with each other than they have with the included. The 'poor' are unproblematised in this discourse - all the poor are the same. And this discourse fails to recognise the real power which many of the groups labelled as 'the excluded' actually possess. Like the deficit paradigm, the discourse of social exclusion/inclusion tends to stress the negative elements in the lives of the excluded rather than the positive elements.

One of the problems at the excluded end is that some of those who are constructed as excluded do not feel they are excluded; and (as with Freire again), the included feel it is their task to 'conscientise' these until they do feel that they are excluded and become motivated towards inclusion. In this sense, the discourse of social exclusion/inclusion becomes one part of the disadvantaged paradigm. The included need to help the excluded to be drawn in, to gain access; without that help, the excluded cannot come in. Europe must admit the other countries, they cannot admit themselves. Schools must act to help the excluded to access education; those who enjoy rights must help the excluded to gain their rightful place in the sun.

What the discourse of social exclusion/inclusion does not face is what is the right course of action when the agendas set by the included do not coincide with the agendas of the excluded. When instead of a community learning centre, the participant group request a cinema (as happened in Gujarat); when instead of asking for improving literature to read with their newly acquired literacy skills, the participants ask for fashion and sports magazines, whose agenda will be followed - that of inclusiveness or that of diversity?

And this raises the question of voice. Whose interests are being served by the discourse of social exclusion/inclusion? It seems to me that the purpose of this discourse is to preserve the position of the included, to remove it beyond challenge. To construct the rest of society as 'excluded' from what is desirable, only to be admitted on terms set by the included, is the best defence of the core. We thus see that the discourse of social exclusion/inclusion is a hegemonic tool - on the global scale, to keep the developing countries poor in a form of neo-colonialism, on the national level, cultural hegemony, at the local level the sheer exercise of power. It is in the interest of the included to construct the rest of society as the excluded. The discourse of social exclusion is built on the arrogance of the included.

The elites then construct the others as the excluded, even though the elites are themselves the site of contestation; they are not united either in their constructions or in the programmes of action which spring from their constructions. But I also need to remind myself that some (not all) of those 'others' do in fact construct themselves as the excluded. This too needs to be explored in more detail. Some, I suggest, do this through what may be called the 'echo' effect - either internalising the conceptualisations of the includers, or out of self-interest, using the discourse of social exclusion/inclusion to achieve some of their own goals. I have seen both of these syndromes happening throughout many countries in the search for funding from donor agencies.

On the other hand, some of this ascription seems to me to be genuine. Such persons or groups see certain benefits in which the included participate and wish to partake of these. Is then the discourse of social exclusion/inclusion to be confined only to those who define themselves as the excluded?

An alternative construct.

I construct society in terms of a much more diverse arena than the dichotomy of the discourse of social exclusion/inclusion sees it. The best image I have at the moment is that of a jar full of tadpoles all moving and mixing, some above and below and sideways on to each other - indeed four-dimensional, allowing for time changes as well, in a constant flux of interaction. There are individuals as well as groups, all in constant interface. Each of us (individuals and groups) are in a number of different affiliations at the same time.

Exclusion then is a normal part of reality - and indeed is a 'good' thing. I am in one family and therefore excluded from others; I am British and white and not an American or Indian or black or coloured. I am male and therefore excluded from the female consortium. To create a coherent Seminar, we excluded some people or we should have been even more oversubscribed. To get a compatible tenant, I have excluded some applicants. And so on. We all exclude and are excluded, just as we also include and are included.

Life then is a perpetual process of negotiation involving collaboration and contest. That is what it means to me to be a social being. This is the construct I make, the discourse which I would wish to adopt.

The programme of action which springs from this is the valuing, not the demeaning of the different, what Sampson has been called the 'celebration of the other' - indeed, the increase of diversity, not the reduction of otherness which the social exclusion/inclusion discourse seems to imply. I want to increase awareness of the boundaries, not necessarily reduce them. If we are to talk about exclusion, then I would like us to see the value of exclusion as well as its negative aspects. But I don't find it helpful to describe the kinds of situation I find myself in these terms.

A final example. In November last, I found myself sitting in a field under the hot sun in Ethiopia with a group of women. By any definition of the discourse of social exclusion/inclusion, they would have been the excluded. But we did not talk about that or use this discourse. We talked about what they intended to do - to set up their own shop, to grow vegetables and trees, to keep bees, to run their own village kindergarten etc. The task of the agency which was working with them was to help them to do more effectively what they were

already doing where they are, not to get them to join some kind of society I approve of. While I can see that the discourse of social exclusion might help me to analyse that situation by looking at the processes whereby 'exclusion' might work, it would only be a partial analysis and would tend to emphasise the negative aspects of these women's lives, not the positive. Therein lies the danger of the discourse of social exclusion/inclusion.

A Case Study

Let me look more closely at a quite different example which will I hope make clearer the alternative I wish to foster and its practical implications. The issue I have in mind is dyslexia.

At first, dyslexia was thought of in terms of deficit which could be remedied through inputs. The person had a 'fault', not always in the sense of blame but in the sense that a piece of timber may have a fault. The dyslexic needed to be helped to overcome his/her deficit, mainly through additional training. They could be made to match the rest of society. This is what Paulston calls the 'orthodoxy' model. Normal society can spell; those who cannot have been constructed as 'ab-normal'. They were made to feel inferior. They can only join society after they have changed. The construct of dyslexia as a fault led to the programme of action to meet that situation.

Subsequently dyslexia has come to be regarded as a structural disadvantage. Dyslexics have been excluded from certain institutions and activities because of the rules of society. From this flowed the programme of action which accompanied this paradigm. Institutions are encouraged to alter their regulations and make special provision to help dyslexics to gain access to what others have (the social exclusion/inclusion discourse). Dyslexia is still seen to be a variation from the norm; and dyslexics are made to feel 'different', not normal. They can only join society when society has made special adaptations to meet their special needs (the 'special needs' discourse). Indeed, the special arrangements (as with free school meals for the poor) often draw attention to their difference. This is what Paulston calls the heterodoxy model - dyslexia challenging the structures of society to change so as to accommodate the dyslexics.

Both of these are based on assumptions about norms - and with it some sense of 'shame' in not achieving that norm. But many dyslexics point out that these norms (and the social exclusion/inclusion discourse which stands on norms) lead to them being regarded as a problem, as abnormal. They ask to be recognised as full persons, not simply as disabilities. And in response to that, many of those who work with dyslexics have come to see dyslexia as a social construct, created by these norms. Dyslexia is seen in this paradigm as simply one of many differences rather than as an abnormality. Dyslexics are different in much the same way as everyone else is different. This is what Paulston calls a 'heterogeneity' model. In this, dyslexia can be regarded as being much the same as being (for example) very short or very tall.

The change that this has brought to the way of working with such persons is enormous. Encouraging the dyslexic (like the short person) to identify and understand those specific situations in which the dyslexia (like the shortness) is felt to cause problems and encouraging them to develop their own diverse

strategies to meet each situation as it arises - these are seen to be the key to dealing with dyslexia today. And (as I have seen in experience) the change it has brought about in the way in which these people regard themselves is also enormous. They no longer see themselves as abnormal or even as different except in the same sense as very short persons are different. Instead, they see themselves from the start and not only after interventions as full members of society. They control their own destinies rather than this lying in the hands of educators, social workers or special units. They come to choose the helpers they feel they need. The change of discourse, based on new paradigms, has altered both the analysis and the programme of action.

Tilting at windmills

Now I shall be told that I have really seriously misunderstood the discourse of social exclusion/ inclusion, that I have set up a parody of the discourse so that I can object to it. If that is so, then I apologise for wasting everybody's time. I know that I am prone to see things rather too starkly in black and white, to oversimplify everyone else's points of view (but to overcomplicate my own). But if in the process of doing this, I cause others to engage in debate and to clarify their own statements about what they do mean and what it implies, even this will have been useful.

But I would like others to tell me whether they find the discourse of social exclusion/inclusion useful in discussing (analysing?) the situations in which they work - whether Sheila Aikman can see how it applies to her work with the Arakmbut in Peru, whether Anna Robinson-Pant can use it in Nepal with different women's groups, whether Uta Papen finds it helpful in Namibia or Julia Betts in El Salvador; whether Joanie Cohen Mitchell finds social exclusion an appropriate way to describe the groups she works with in Guatemala, or Cathy Kell in her South African townships. For if they do, then I shall need to draw new visions, devise new constructs, apply new language - and open my mind wider. And if the Seminar does that, then I for one shall be grateful.

Response from Julia Betts

The Discourse on Social Exclusion / Inclusion: Response to Arjan

Along the same lines as Anna and Alan's responses, my experiences in rural El Salvador indicate that the current discourse of social exclusion / inclusion, which suggests divided categories of 'the included' and 'the excluded', is both unhelpful as a construct, and inadequate for reflecting the experiences and situations of people in their daily lives. And where it is taken as a basis for development planning, this current usage can be quite dangerous, as Anna suggests.

1. It does not reflect reality. People include / exclude themselves into / from groups (communities of interests) at any given time. In rural El Salvador, people engage and negotiate at any given moment with either the agents of the State, or those of its ideological opposition, according to their own livelihood strategies and hopes. They creatively pursue their own agendas, co-opting the dominant discourses of power to do so - as Alan says, using the

discourses of inclusion / exclusion to achieve their intentions. For example, a group of coffee-growers visit the local mayor one morning in order to ask for supplies of fertiliser, and to argue their case they consciously include themselves into the dominant discourses of the State - of economic advancement, of 'development', etc. Having failed to convince the mayor, a few days later they write a letter, also requesting fertiliser, to a local aid agency - part of the ideological Left, which uses discourses of oppression, solidarity, co-operation - and couch their letter in exactly these terms. How would the dichotomy of inclusion / exclusion fit these scenarios? where people consciously include themselves into / exclude themselves from powerful groups as part of their own livelihood strategies?

2. The discourse of a dichotomy also doesn't offer space to recognise people's assets and capabilities, as Arjan points out in the context of the multidimensionality of poverty. These assets and capabilities define the ways people negotiate the constraints around them - this is the question of agency. In our village in El Salvador, the water pump broke down for period of four months, and the local mayor initially completely denied responsibility. He refused to meet with groups of people who made repeated visits to his offices about the problem, simply promising that repairs would begin soon. Eventually, with considerable ingenuity, the people began to arrange meetings with him about other matters, and in these meetings they began to talk explicitly to the forthcoming elections next year and linking this to the water supply.... at the third such meeting the mayor eventually took the hint and water supplies were brought up in trucks. So in the face of initial exclusion, people used their assets - the clout of their political support - to achieve a given aim. How does this vision fit a scenario of complete oppression, disenfranchisement, exclusion?

3. The discourse of social exclusion has a tendency towards assumptions of homogenous groups. But as Arjan's paper points out, the reality of human life is much more complex; 'communities' of power dichotomies and identities change from moment to moment, according to situation, agenda, impulse etc. People are simultaneously mothers and daughters, fathers and sons, senior members of local development committees and poor farmers, leaders of women's groups and kept in purdah. They shift in and out of these identities according to the demands of the moment and the nature of the domains in which they are moving; they are excluded in some domains and included in others. The categories of 'excluded' and 'included' are both too simple and as Anna says, static.

4. The discourse assumes a total absence of choice, or option. Exclusion is forced on people, something beyond their control. Yet there are sometimes instances of self-exclusion, which function as part of people's deliberate livelihood strategies. When I first went to El Salvador, I naively categorised most of the people around me as living completely in a state of social exclusion, with lack of voice etc. Yet with experience I came to realise that sometimes people's seeming inability to engage with some of the 'included' was actually a strategic choice; a wish to be excluded from one power arena in order to pursue their livelihood strategies in another. These people made the conscious choice to ally themselves with one particular provider of resources -

in this context usually either an agent of the State or an NGO on the political Left - in doing so deliberately excluding themselves from the other. Where does this fit into the current discourse?

5. Whose categories? - (Whose reality counts?) The categorisations of 'excluded' and 'included' are imposed by outsiders, as Alan and Anna point out. The current discourse does not address the question of how do people see themselves - as included or excluded, when, how, where? Again, people conceive of themselves as included or excluded in different domains - a matriarch and a daughter, the village spokesman and a poor farmer... Thus the discourse runs the risk of informing a simplistic model of 'empowerment', where the included feel that the only way to incorporate the excluded - as categorised by them, and into their framework of 'inclusion' - is through their methods and approaches. This raises the difficulty indicated by Alan - whose agenda will be followed? In El Salvador, people were offered seeds by the local aid agency as long as they were planted collectively, to encourage co-operation, unity and solidarity. But this discourse ran contrary to the wishes and agendas of rural cultivators in the matter of seed-planting at least. To sustain the relationship with the resource-holder, however, they accepted the seeds, agreed wholeheartedly with the discourse of communality while the aid agency staff were present, and once alone, proceeded to divide them up and plant them individually. Such stories suggest a more complex scenario than two externally-imposed categories of inclusion and exclusion.

6. Discourses of 'oppression' or 'exclusion' or 'illiteracy' also run the risk of leading to Alan's 'echo effect', where people, by uses of these discourses by the powerful, find reflected at them a vision of themselves which clearly show them to be part of society's lowest level. Many of us will have had the experience of hearing people describe themselves as 'the illiterates' or 'the lowest ones' or 'the 'unformed' ones' - while actually being very creative and able in their knowledge, skills and negotiation of constraints. This results in self-identification as part of the problematic 'other', alienated from society. So the use of such discourse becomes ironically an act of disempowerment in itself.

7. Concurrently, as Alan points out, the construction of a discourse community - primarily people in the North - takes place, who as the 'included' create for themselves an unproblematised group of 'excluded'. And it is, of course, simpler and more sympathetic to view people as universally oppressed. It is more risky, more challenging, more complex and less comfortable to view individuals and groups as creative and shrewd, as ingenious dealers and at times manipulators of power and resources. But such a vision does at least reflect perhaps more realistically human nature - in situations of daily struggle and contestation, of the striving for survival and better livelihoods, who would not take advantage where they can?

Where to from here?

In terms of both theory and policy, then, it would be helpful to move beyond a simple dichotomisation of 'included / excluded' to an exploration and recognition of people's creativity - what are people's existing assets and capabilities, how do they negotiate the boundaries of 'inclusion' and 'exclusion',

how do they manage and reshape the constraints around them? We need greater and more detailed knowledge of the intricate and complex nature of social contexts - what choices do people have, in what domains are they excluded, and how can we help them maximise their existing practices to negotiate their perceived barriers better? Arjan's suggestion that the discourse of inclusion / exclusion is a helpful mechanism for analysing processes of exclusion may well be a fruitful starting point.

Julia Betts
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