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A comparative approach to social exclusion: Lessons from France and Belgium

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In France, the concept of social exclusion plays a vital role in shaping sociological debate, political discourse and state intervention. Indeed, the meaning taken on by the term "social exclusion" has been influenced by conceptual debates, analyses of pertinent empirical data and the formulation of related government policies. This article attempts to place the French concept of social exclusion within its context and to define it in the light of those three factors: conceptual debate, empirical data and government policies.

The purpose of this exercise is to establish whether a basis exists on which the concept of social exclusion may be used in a comparative perspective. In other words, can the concept as applied to the situation in France, for example, cast light on the situation in Belgium or in other regions, especially Latin America, and vice versa?

The first part of the article presents a synthesis of theoretical discussions on social exclusion in France. Concepts, empirical data and government policies will then be examined as a whole, on the basis of two points of entry which are probably the most characteristic of French policy: employment and employment-based integration policies (second part); and localization and "urban policy" (third part). Differences between the French situation and that of neighbouring Belgium are highlighted. The fourth part addresses the relevance of the concept of social exclusion to Latin America and the possibility of using it as the pivotal concept in a comparative approach.

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Conceptual debates

To quote Joël Roman, "exclusion has become the social issue of the end of the century" (1993a, p. 1) and, in her bibliographical analysis, Maryse Gaudier notes that "social exclusion is considered by many of the authors consulted to be a typical mechanism of poverty in the industrialized countries, especially in the case of the increased numbers of the new poor. The many varieties of exclusion, the fears of social explosions to which it gives rise, the dangers of social disruption; the complexity of the mechanisms that cause it, the extreme difficulty of finding solutions, have made it 'the major social issue of our time'" (1993, pp. 58-59).

Does all the talk of social exclusion make it a pertinent theoretical and methodological concept for scientific research or policy orientation? Rather than answer this question, we shall discuss certain salient points emerging from a survey of the conceptualizations of social exclusion recently published in France and Belgium.

According to Graham Room et al., "the concept in its modern sense has always been a key concept in the French discourse on inequality and poverty" (1992, p. 25). In Belgium, while it remains more typical of the French-speaking areas, it is becoming part of the political vocabulary in Flanders as well. The meanings attributed to the concept can be complementary or competing. Some authors give it theoretical content, either seeing social exclusion as "the breaking of the social tie" or by relating it to social rights. Others define it by comparison with the concepts of inequality or social dualism. The points of view presented here illustrate the diversity of the debate in France (and to a lesser extent in Belgium), but are by no means to be regarded as exhaustive.

Exclusion as the breaking of the social tie

France's General Planning Commission *(Commissariat général du Plan)* has devoted a number of studies to exclusion in general and to social exclusion in particular, such as those produced by Philippe Nasse in 1992 and Martine Xiberras in 1993. Efforts to make exclusion a pertinent concept, despite "the great heterogeneity of the populations and wide diversity of the life trajectories of the excluded" (Nasse, 1992, p. 191), have focused on an approach combining sociological theories,[1] empirical data on vulnerable groups such as the unemployed, and the policies developed to combat exclusion.

Unlike the many, generally short, articles published in collective works, the study by Xiberras (1993) is devoted to purely theoretical questions. Exclusion is seen as the "breaking of the social tie". But what is this social

[1] From classical authors, such as Durkheim, Simmel and Weber, to the sociology of social movements and the theories of post-modernism in contemporary sociology (Chicago School, symbolic interactionism).

tie? There are as many answers as there are authors or sociological theories. Looked at in terms of its opposite, exclusion must have as many facets as the bond tying individuals to society. "From these theories we may thus describe exclusion not as a monolithic phenomenon, but as a diversity of expressions of difference: imposed and individual (anomie) or voluntary and collective (marginality), voluntary and individual (deviance), or imposed and collective (stigmatization)... Exclusion is not a new social issue, but rather another way of describing the difficulties encountered in establishing solidarity" (Nasse, 1992, p. 215).

The unexpected twist to this approach to social exclusion is that one finds, among the excluded, drug addicts or jazz musicians, where one expected to find the unemployed. Thus, definitions which may well be very interesting can give rise to such broad interpretations of exclusion as to discourage decision-makers and practitioners from looking for unambiguous and immediately operational concepts.

While recognizing the complexity of the phenomenon of exclusion, other studies produced by the General Planning Commission (also in Nasse, 1992) have a more limited scope, focusing on work. Employment is identified (defined) as the core of the social tie, social cohesion and social transactions, precisely at a time when society is threatened with the crisis of "the civilization of work" (Gorz, 1993). Beyond the employment crisis, what is being questioned is the significance of work and its integrating capacity:

> The fact remains that we are still far from the objective pursued, which can be summed up as follows: to each his/her place within the social exchange... Our modern societies have privileged economic exchange and thus remunerated work. It is from there that we have to start: provide more jobs, but maybe also other forms of exchange (de Foucauld, 1992b, p. 6).
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> When employment no longer plays its integrating role for a growing segment of the population, the challenge for policies to combat poverty is, above all, that of restoring the social tie and collectively re-mobilizing individuals and families by devising other instruments of socialization outside work relationships, to compensate for the growth of unemployment and the "desacralization" of large institutions (churches, political parties, labour unions, etc.) (Paugam, 1993, p. 215).

Exclusion and social rights

The Observatory on National Policies to Combat Social Exclusion, established in 1990 by the Commission of the European Communities, has published a number of reports intended to identify specific policy issues for European debate. Consolidated reports on France and Belgium (Bouget and Nogues, 1992; Vranken and Geldof, 1992) as well as a Community-wide synthesis (Room et al., 1992) have been published.

The Observatory, being committed to the wider concept of citizenship, decided to define social exclusion in relation to social rights (Room et al., 1992), by reference to the work of T. H. Marshall (1973). According to Jürgen Habermas, "the expression citizenship' is no longer used only to designate nationality, but also to designate the status defined by the rights

and duties of the citizen" (1992, p. 25). Marshall (1973), taking Britain as an example, introduced the notions of rights-liberties, rights-participation and social rights to support the thesis that the status of the citizen in modern societies has been progressively extended and consolidated. From a somewhat more linear point of view, civil liberties were complemented first by democratic rights and, later, by social rights (Habermas, 1992).

The Observatory starts by stating that the concept of social exclusion is vague and ambiguous. It therefore seeks a definition with a precise theoretical content, which distinguishes it from such concepts as poverty, marginalization, etc., makes it identifiable empirically by means of well-defined indicators and provides a point of reference for the design and evaluation of practical interventions to combat it. "Here we define social exclusion first and foremost in relation to the social rights of citizens... Social exclusion can be analysed in terms of the denial – or non-realization – of social rights" (Room et al., 1992, pp. 13-15).

The Observatory is aware that citizenship involves more than mere social rights. In Marshall's view, as indicated earlier, it also includes civil and political rights. But Room et al. mention these:

> only in so far as they are directly linked to our analysis of social exclusion. ... To repeat, we define social exclusion in relation, first of all, to social rights. We investigate what social rights the citizen has to employment, housing, health care, etc.; how effectively national policies enable citizens to secure these rights; and what are the barriers and processes by which people are excluded from these rights.
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> But this is only the first stage. We go on, secondly, to study the evidence that, where citizens are unable to secure their social rights, they will tend to suffer processes of generalized and persisting disadvantage, and their social and occupational participation will be undermined. The Observatory therefore makes use of studies of multiple, persisting and cumulative disadvantage. We refer to patterns and processes of generalized disadvantage in terms of education, training, employment, housing, financial resources, etc.; and we have investigated whether those who suffer such disadvantages have substantially lower chances than the rest of the population of gaining access to the major social institutions. (1992, pp. 16-17).

The issue under consideration here is particularly important as it relates directly to the contemporary challenge to one of the cornerstones of justice or, to be more precise, the system of "social contract" associated with democracies since the Second World War, namely, the equality of opportunity which should be guaranteed by law.

This raises the vexed question of defining the concept of social rights. The Observatory, pragmatic when faced with the difficulty of producing a definition applicable to all countries of the European Union, refers the matter to their national legislations. Indeed, it states that "social rights are not of course the same across the twelve countries of the EC... Within the Irish Constitution, the only explicit social right... is the right to primary education" (Room et al., 1992, p. 15). It will therefore have to be left to the legal machinery – legislation or jurisprudence – to expand, justify and possibly even define social rights.

None the less, if comparative research is extended beyond the confines of Western Europe, this method of defining social rights becomes questionable. It may be acceptable in the case of countries where legal perceptions and realities are similar, but what branch of law are we, in fact, talking about? The obvious answer is positive law, i.e. that which is explicitly provided for in laws and constitutions, or which can, at the very least, be deduced from their provisions. It should be recalled, however, that positive law and justice do not necessarily mean the same thing. There are countries where citizens' legally recognized social rights are subject to fairly quick changes according to policy. If a new constitutional provision no longer recognizes the right to work, for example, would the unemployed automatically stop being excluded?

By contrast, a wider conception of social rights based on considerations of human dignity – as expressed in declarations of (individual and social) human rights – may provide protection against political (or politicking) contingencies. However, at least two questions remain. First, what is the true significance of social rights if the citizen is not in a position to demand that they be upheld or applied? And, second, what is the use of a social right – the right to health, for example – without the necessary material conditions for its application, e.g. when health-care personnel and medicine are not available? Two questions on the enforceability of social rights thus remain open: institutional capabilities for giving effect to them and the dependence of states on their economic and social situation.

Exclusion or inequality

Rather than attempt to give theoretical content to the concept of social exclusion, some authors have compared it with other concepts, primarily with inequality. The crucial issue then becomes the transition from a situation which could be defined in terms of inequality to another, defined in terms of exclusion. Alain Touraine explains:

> The point today is no longer a matter of being "up or down", but of being "in or out": those who are not "in" want to be; otherwise they are in a social void (1991, p. 8).... To consider society mainly as a production unit is to insist on two basic ideas, that of rationality and that of hierarchy, and thus on the idea of inequality through the association of these two themes ... we are moving from a perception of society as a production society to an idea of a society considered as a market (1992, p. 164).... Categories emerge, which are not defined by a class position, by a production function, but by a position on the market (1992, p. 165).

There are two opposing schools of thought: one holds that exclusion must be seen as the worst form of inequality (Castel and Balibar, 1992); the other maintains that inequality and exclusion relate to two separate social rationales (Touraine, 1991).

A pragmatic, middle-of-the-road approach is suggested by Jean-Baptiste de Foucauld:

> Our present society, unlike what it was before 1973, is characterized by the concomitance of two phenomena, namely inequality and exclusion (1992a, p. 1). ... We must find an approach which will integrate inequality and exclusion in a perspective of social cohesion and dynamics. We must not play off exclusion against inequalities. It is tempting to say "exclusion is the central problem, let us deal with exclusion and let inequalities develop", since some widening of wage inequalities is considered helpful in combating unemployment. But we have to work on both issues at the same time (1992a, p. 4).

Exclusion or social dualism

Another concept with which social exclusion is contrasted is that of dualism.

> The theory of the "Fourth World" (Quart-Monde) and of its "social exclusion" ... creates an effect of distance, of estrangement from the rest of society. The "Fourth World" is "them", those who are not "us" (Dechamp, 1992, p. 9).
> Dualism. A notion which seemed until recently to be used only by the observers of the Third World, or to describe such societies as those of Brazil or South Africa. Dualism is the cut, the *de facto* segregation, the "economic apartheid" at work in a society definitively and cruelly moving along at "two speeds". A society where different categories of population live, in effect, on two different planets which are moving ever further apart" (Albert, 1992, p. 24).

Rather than dualism, Robert Castel (1992) distinguishes three zones of organization and social cohesion. The first is the zone of integration; the second is the zone of vulnerability characterized by precariousness of employment and fragility of relational supports. The third zone is that of exclusion, i.e. extreme marginality. The author uses this typology to show that the zone of vulnerability is the strategic region, producing extreme situations at its frontiers. "Vulnerability designates the crumbling of the social tie before it breaks" (ibid., p. 138).

This last statement completes the circle, bringing us back to the first concept mentioned at the beginning of this theoretical survey. Does this mean that we are running round in circles? No, it should be taken as an invitation not to confine ourselves to an exclusively theoretical discussion but also to consider empirical evidence and the policies designed to combat exclusion. We shall examine two vital topics which characterize the French and Belgian debates on social exclusion, namely employment and urban housing.

Employment

Persistent unemployment in Europe has made employment the dominant social policy issue in most countries of the European Union. This raises a crucial question: does work continue to provide a means of social integration, or are we witnessing the break-up of the social tie that it used to represent?

Long-term unemployment and precarious work

What is striking is not only the scale of unemployment, but also the fact that it is constantly affecting new categories of people, giving rise to widespread feelings of vulnerability, especially among young people. A recent poll showed that 55 per cent of the French (69 per cent in the 18-24 age bracket) are afraid of losing their job and finding themselves in a situation of exclusion. These figures indicate that employment is not just a source of income, but is also considered as the main stepping stone to social integration.

Over the past 20 years France has witnessed a massive increase in unemployment. From 300,000 in 1970, the number of jobseekers had gone up to 3 million by 1992, i.e. a tenfold increase. During the same period the number of unemployed in Belgium was multiplied by five (from 71,261 in 1970 to 352,337 in 1991).

A feature common to both countries is the persistence of long-term unemployment; Belgian statistics indicate that, by the end of the 1980s, half of the recipients of full unemployment benefits had been out of work for more than two years, and a quarter of them for over five years. As Bruno Van der Linden (1992) points out, the long-lasting nature of this phenomenon suggests that it has gradually become accepted as normal. Different categories of the active population are variously affected by long-term unemployment: in relative terms, women and persons between the ages of 25 and 45 are the hardest hit; unemployment rates are higher among those with only a primary school education and among unskilled workers.

In France, jobseekers registered at the National Employment Agency (ANPE) for more than one year accounted for 17 per cent of all the unemployed in 1970, 22 per cent in 1980 and 31 per cent in 1990. Women, unskilled workers and persons over the age of 50 make up the majority of the long-term unemployed.

The fact that only a minimal number of long-term unemployed were hired during the 1988-1990 employment recovery has given rise to a new expression: "exclusion unemployment". This phenomenon raises the question of the relation between economic recovery and reduced unemployment, especially long-term unemployment. While 700,000 jobs were created between 1988 and 1991, only 60,000 of them were given to unemployed persons. Young, and especially highly qualified, applicants were the main beneficiaries. By contrast, the number of unemployed adults increased by 5 per cent in 1990.

Bernard Simonin of France's Centre for Employment Studies *(Centre d'études de l'emploi)* maintains that the increased profits made by French firms are directly related to a reduction in labour costs. In recent years, workers have been laid off not only by loss-making firms, but also by firms with increasing profits. Indeed, firms have restructured around their core businesses and outsourced part of their production activities. Workers who

had been employed for a long time in "normal", that is to say non-precarious, conditions were severely affected by their redundancy and its devastating effects on their personal and family lives.[2] The hardest hit were low-skilled workers.

Such trends have been strengthened by the waning influence of trade unions over the social aspects of the restructuring process and redundancies. Indeed, the consequences have been particularly serious for non-unionized, unorganized and marginalized workers, the hardest hit being those with no union to defend their interests.

Redundancies, followed by the recruitment of workers under precarious contracts or of over-qualified personnel, have accelerated the exclusion process. Workers, especially the unskilled, have been forced to accept precarious contracts and jobs (Wuhl, 1992).

According to Robert Salais (1980), the proliferation of unstable forms of employment is central to the growth of long-term unemployment: in the context of a quantitative deterioration in the terms of labour supply and demand, the newly unemployed are constantly moving from one insecure and unskilled job to another. The risk of remaining unemployed increases exponentially with the length of unemployment. This dual trend – precarious employment and recruitment of over-qualified workers – continuously pushes to the back of the queue those among the unemployed who are considered to be the least productive. During the 1980s in France, the overwhelming majority of new jobs were based on precarious employment contracts (Wuhl, 1992): the proportion was two-thirds in 1989; however, a slight reversal of this trend was registered in 1990.

Employment promotion policies

The high proportion of young people among the unemployed has led the public authorities to introduce specific programmes to help them find jobs. In France assistance for unemployed young persons has been provided in three ways:

(a) Re-adaptation of the unemployed to new labour-market demands. This programme, introduced by an ordinance issued in March 1982, was targeted at young people between the ages of 16 and 18 and focused on training as a precondition for access to employment. This could take either of two forms: vocational induction internships and vocational qualification internships. Though maintained after 1986, these have progressively lost their significance; with the introduction of community service programmes and the development of sandwich training courses, these options were then offered only to the least qualified young people;

(b) Promotion of employment outside the labour market. In 1984, the Government organized community service work (TUC) for

[2] This paragraph is based on an interview conducted by the author on 7 January 1993.

unemployed young persons between the ages of 16 and 21, later 16 and 25. The programme was extensive: by 1989, 1.2 million young people had participated. The originality of the TUC schemes, which, for some authors, foreshadowed a new type of linkage between work and employment, stems from two factors. First, they show that work can be dissociated from employment (social integration without occupational integration, but a working activity integrated within a socially organized framework); second, they help to manage "non-employment" (activity without employment status, focusing on occupation rather than on training) (*Centre d'études de l'emploi*, 1993; Legros and Simonin, 1991);

(c) Creation of new job opportunities in firms. A general collective agreement signed in 1983 contained arrangements for the establishment of a sandwich training system with three components: an adaptation contract, an occupational induction internship and a qualification contract.

In Belgium, at the beginning of the 1980s, young people were regarded as the most vulnerable group on the labour market. Employment promotion policy, based on an analysis of unemployment, linked ability to perform a job with the level of training acquired. Accordingly, it focused both on training and on beginning work. To start with, employment induction mechanisms were set up on the basis of three types of sandwich training for young people under the age of 18 and still subject to compulsory schooling. Since 1987 they have also been available to those between 18 and 25. These schemes consist of employment-training contracts, the promotion of on-the-job training and vocational training workshops for "disadvantaged" young persons. Most of these arrangements were supported by the exemption from social security contributions of employers who took on young unemployed workers. In 1988, vocational training and sandwich training schemes were given further support through the reorientation of the Employment Fund, the purpose of which was to promote training and employment. Like the unemployment reduction programme, these measures derived from a policy to lower labour costs, which, according to Andrea Rea (1993), allowed firms to externalize part of their labour costs.

In France, employment promotion schemes for adults were primarily targeted at the long-term unemployed (i.e. those out of work for more than one year). Policy-making in this field was guided by two concerns: lack of skills in the workforce and the reduction of labour redeployment costs made necessary by economic developments. Employment entry and training schemes accounted for all the training courses financed by the National Employment Fund: the modular courses organized by the ANPE since 1985 and the sandwich courses introduced by the Ministry of Labour in 1987; in 1990, 230,000 persons benefited from these programmes. Employers who concluded employment re-entry contracts, specially intended for the long-term unemployed, were exempted from social security contributions and received a subsidy for each person hired; in 1991, 100,000 persons signed

such contracts. "Solidarity-employment" contracts covered the various community service programmes (TUC schemes, local integration programmes for adults and community service programmes for the recipients of the RMI, the minimum income for economic and social integration); 300,000 persons benefited from these measures in 1990.[3]

The minimum income for economic and social integration (RMI)

Within three years of its introduction in 1988, the RMI had benefited over 2 million persons. It is one of the principal measures adopted in France to combat poverty. Its purpose is to guarantee a minimum temporary income and to help recipients to secure a permanent income. It has three components: (i) a differential allowance, i.e. an income supplement that does not place an extra burden on the general social protection system; (ii) a guarantee of social rights in respect of housing and health care; and (iii) a social or occupational "integration contract" (Bouget and Nogues, 1992). A number of studies have highlighted the positive aspects of the RMI (Commission nationale d'évaluation du RMI, 1992; Castel and Lae, 1992; Wuhl, 1991), but it has met with limited success as regards actual occupational integration. Admittedly, this criticism applies not only to the RMI, but to integration schemes in general.

Though entirely different from the RMI in its conception, a Minimum Subsistence Income (MINIMEX) has existed in Belgium since 1974. It works as a safety net for persons who cannot derive a subsistence income from their labour, personal property or entitlement to social benefits. The MINIMEX is paid out by the Public Social Welfare Centres. The number of persons receiving it in 1994 was about seven times greater than in 1976. This increase occurred mainly in the period between 1976 and 1988, the figures having remained fairly stable since then (Vranken and Van Monxel, 1994).

The efforts made by the unemployed and all the actors involved in their re-integration (social workers, public employment service staff, etc.) are generally frustrated at the "enterprise doorstep". According to Jacques Donzelot (1991), social work that offers no employment prospects gets bogged down in "compensatory social action", which perpetuates the cleavage between certain population groups and the world of work. An evaluation of training schemes for the long-term unemployed has confirmed their poor effectiveness, at least in respect of labour market re-entry (Stankiewicz et al., 1985; Stankiewicz, 1994).

Does the growth of unemployment call for a radical reappraisal of the concept of work as the chief means of social integration (*Transversales*,

[3] It should be noted that, after the change of political majority in 1993, a Five-Year Employment Act was passed, the main aims of which were to reduce unskilled labour costs by lowering social security contributions, to encourage part-time work, and to bring about relative deregulation of the labour market.

1993)? Economic growth no longer creates new jobs, but produces social exclusion. Has the time come to dissociate income from work, as suggested by the advocates of a universal allowance and the RMI (Robin, 1993; Van Parijs, 1993)? Does recognition of the value of work not imply measuring it in relation to what is of use to the community, for example by identifying social needs and ensuring that they are met (Laville, 1992; Perret and Roustang, 1993; Gorz, 1993)?

An avenue for qualitative research?

The frequent combination of unemployment and precarious employment raises a number of problems, especially as to its consequences for the shaping of occupational and social identity. Moreover, the fragility and instability of employment relationships and industrial relations have modified the role of the social partners. What effect will the emergence of new population groups excluded from the workforce have on the identity and role of the various actors on the social scene? Addressing these questions certainly requires extensive qualitative research.

Urban housing: A localized approach to exclusion

Housing is surely one of the most vital issues linked to social exclusion, not only because it represents a basic need, but also because having a fixed abode largely conditions access to employment, social welfare, health care, etc. A number of studies have emphasized this question in relation to the conditions of social integration, in both France and Belgium (see Bouget and Nogues, 1992, and Vranken and Geldof, 1992). "Housing security is a condition of occupational or social integration and family life" (IRFRH-ATD Quart Monde, 1991).

The housing issue is being increasingly addressed within the wider context of the neighbourhood, the community or the city, which are where factors of social exclusion emerge, but also where innovative schemes are developed to combat it. Moreover, in France localized policies against exclusion are considered by some as pioneering a new rationale for state intervention (Roman, 1993b).

The following section will seek to describe "traditional" approaches which focus on housing as such; to highlight certain features of the French debate on citizenship and exclusion; to examine what is seen as a specific pattern of social exclusion: spatial segregation, the most vivid expression of which is found in France's "suburban sickness"; and, in conclusion, to provide a critical evaluation of the potential and limitations of localized action programmes.

Housing as a basic need

Housing is recognized as a "socially determinant variable" (Fournier and Questiaux, 1980). In France, housing is the main item of expenditure in the family budget (accounting for an average of 29 per cent), and many families would be unable to find decent housing without help from the State (Moutardier, 1991). For a long time, the main problem was the housing shortage, but in recent years the deterioration of housing conditions has been giving even greater cause for concern.

Despite extensive construction programmes, the problem of housing for the most underprivileged population groups has not been solved (Bouget and Nogues, 1992). According to the so-called Petrequin Report (see *Conseil économique et social*, 1986), between 2 and 3 million families had serious difficulties meeting their housing costs and were living in precarious and uncomfortable conditions.

Policies designed to address the housing problem have shifted over the past few decades from a macroeconomic approach promoting construction to housing subsidies. The reasons for this shift can be traced to a determination to limit public spending and to avoid some of the perverse effects of macroeconomic policies (Bouget and Nogues, 1992). The State has to some extent ceased to finance housing, especially the construction of new projects, with the result that the cost is now chiefly and directly borne by the family budget. Many underprivileged families, which were excluded from low-rent housing for various reasons (selection of tenants, saturation of existing capacity, insolvency), had no alternative but to purchase their own home and were encouraged to do so without restraint by the then easy terms of housing loans. The housing sector thus contributed to the development of the "economy of indebtedness". It should indeed be emphasized that "widespread home ownership through recourse to borrowing could only be to the detriment of low-income families" (Bouget and Nogues, 1992, p. 164).

In Belgium, the quality of housing, considered the prime indicator of housing deprivation, leaves much to be desired. Low-rent housing projects have been cut back as part of the austerity policy pursued by the national and regional governments, and low-income households are finding it increasingly difficult to find somewhere to live (Vranken and Geldof, 1992). The number of homeless has also taken on alarming proportions. An estimated 3,000 persons spend the night in refuges, but the true figure is probably much higher. Moreover, the number of homeless women and young persons is increasing (Vranken and Geldof, 1992, p. 53).

The French debate on citizenship and exclusion

The main points of the conceptual and theoretical debate going on in France on the city, citizenship and exclusion are set out in two publications: *Citoyenneté et urbanité* (Baudrillard et al., 1991) and *Ville, exclusion et citoyenneté* (Roman, 1993b). Theoretical though it may be, this debate has

none the less influenced the measures adopted by the French Government under the generic term of "urban policy".

The gist of the theoretical reflection is described by Roman (1993b) as a tentative answer to the following two questions: how can citizenship be envisaged in a society of exclusion? How can social exclusion be dealt with? In this perspective, French urban policy can be judged by its capacity to contribute to the emergence of a new type of citizenship. In Donzelot's view: "It is not the business of urban policy to reduce unemployment, delinquency, racism, or at least not directly. These issues are dealt with by other policies, using greater resources, though perhaps not always efficiently. The objective of urban policy is rather to make those policies converge on the issue of exclusion, and thus citizenship" (1993, p. 272). Michel Wieviorka (1993) maintains that it is because the themes of dualism and exclusion have come to the fore spontaneously in recent years that the urban question has become crucial. The city provides a visible, spatial embodiment of the cleavages of a dual society. Touraine (1991) sees the city, education and employment as the three areas that most vividly reflect the transition from a vertical society – typified by the existence of social classes, with people at the top and people at the bottom – to a horizontal society, where what matters is whether one is at the centre or on the periphery. The exclusion-participation dichotomy is present in all three areas. The emphasis has thus shifted from internal conflict to problems of integration and exclusion.

According to Didier Lapeyronnie (1993), the fact that this shift of emphasis is not reflected in the dominant political discourse has led to the apathy and violence characteristic of the contemporary urban scene. Donzelot (1993) holds the view that urban policies should be brought to bear on that estrangement from democracy which is expressed through abstentionism and populist voting. As for the different patterns of exclusion, Lapeyronnie (1993) emphasizes that the city is the place where exclusion takes on distinct forms underpinned by different rationales. Be they social, economic (income, work, housing), political or cultural, these forms of exclusion interact while remaining self-contained. Given the frequent accumulation of disadvantages, the removal of, say, the economic disadvantage, will not cause the others simply to disappear; they may even compete with each other. The old model of integration, which closely linked economic participation, access to culture and political citizenship, has broken down. This has led to a profound questioning of our traditional ways of viewing society, of tackling social problems or integration, and of identifying the objectives of the struggle against exclusion and the means of achieving them. For Touraine (1991), it is this dysfunction that distinguishes the French situation from that of the United Kingdom or the United States: in France, the lack of social and economic integration can coexist with cultural assimilation, as illustrated by the conformist tone of the mass protests staged by secondary school students in 1986 and 1990.

Spatial segregation and the "suburban sickness"

The above conceptual considerations are fairly general, but they find a very concrete expression in what is known in France as the suburban sickness. In this context, the term "suburban" refers specifically to the low-rent housing estates built on city outskirts, where scenes of daily violence and social unrest have been common in recent years (the most famous being the Vaulx-en-Velin rioting in 1990). Attempts have been made to improve the living environment in these often ageing and decrepit estates with the aim of averting the breakdown of social cohesion. But such rehabilitation measures have seldom produced the intended social effects (Oberti, 1993).

For Touraine (1991), the deprived outer suburbs have come to embody the zone of great uncertainty and tensions caused by the integration-exclusion dichotomy. In this zone, people do not know whether they will end up on the inside or the outside. More generally, the suburb itself is seen as the expression of social mutations and tensions, at the centre of the problems of citizenship and national solidarity.

Numerous authors have focused their analyses on the situation in the suburbs, on the growing social unrest and underlying racial tensions. They include Patrick Simon (1992), Pierre Mayol (1992), François Dubet and Didier Lapeyronnie (1992), Catherine Wintol and Daoud Zakya (1993).

In fact, the issue raised is that of spatial segregation. I. Aldeghi, G. de la Gorce and N. Tabard (1989) see this segregation as one of the main factors of exclusion, linking it with such processes as ghettoization or the expulsion of population groups from the main centres of economic activity.

As noted by Bruno Vinikas (1993), the situation is very different in Belgium, where it is the middle and upper classes that generally live in the suburbs. Furthermore, certain inner-city neighbourhoods are experiencing social deterioration and unrest, such as the Brussels municipality of Forest did in 1991. The ethnic make-up of these neighbourhoods and their social dynamics differ from those observed in France. Accordingly, the question of spatial segregation has not taken on the same importance in Belgium, though the concept has proved valid, notably in the case of Antwerp (Vranken and Geldof, 1992, 1993).

Localized policies against social exclusion: Potential and limitations

The conceptual and theoretical focus on the city as the setting for the expression of social exclusion has not been without effect on the development of government policies and action. The choice of the city or neighbourhood as the focus of intervention in the struggle against exclusion is regarded as offering at least three major advantages over "conventional" approaches: (1) this framework gives multidisciplinary coherence to approaches that would otherwise remain strictly confined to specific fields of

intervention; (2) appropriate project structure can bridge the gaps between the different levels of government intervention (national, regional, local), and also between the public authorities and other actors such as the private sector or associations; (3) whereas a number of policies individualize – not to say stigmatize – the excluded, localized policies can stimulate or encourage collective initiatives. According to Donzelot, "Bringing autonomy into play, appealing to alliances that transcend corporatisms, reciprocal challenge between the State and local communities, these are the three areas in which urban policy can be seen to contribute to the renewal of citizenship. But this is, of course, only a potentiality . . ." (1993, p. 275).

One of the most original of these localized policies, described by Denis Bouget and Henry Nogues (1992) and by the General Planning Commission (see Commissariat général du Plan, 1992), is known as neighbourhood social development. This is based on three principles: globality of actions, localization of interventions and partnership between institutions and local actors. Neighbourhood social development was first implemented in 1982, though its origins can be traced to some 20 years earlier. Thirty-three neighbourhoods were involved initially, to which 130 more were added in 1984. In 1992 a second contract covered 400 sites. Initiated by the State, this policy is now part of a broader framework, namely "urban social development", which incorporates most of the actions currently targeting urban areas in France and provides the basis for urban policy. Furthermore, neighbourhood social development programmes are often linked to other localized policies, such as the creation of "priority education areas", which proceed from the same principle of desegmentation and global intervention, while addressing school education problems more specifically.

Apart from the originality of the activities it involves, neighbourhood social development is characterized by a particular procedure. In attempting to address the issue of spatial segregation and the shortcomings of other policies to combat exclusion, its objectives and projects are extremely wide-ranging and diverse. The neighbourhood social development approach is no longer based on the individual dimension of social welfare. The implementation of projects – especially the rehabilitation of low-rent housing and related social measures – is conducted under the management of a project coordinator and under the responsibility of the mayor of the municipality concerned. Financing is mostly provided by the State and regional budgets on a contractual basis. The participation of other actors is less formal and depends on local initiatives.

After ten years of experience, neighbourhood social development has produced mixed results. The objective of housing improvement has been attained, as has its incorporation within a broader urban development framework (public amenities, less isolation, better accessibility). However, there remains the risk of "filtering up": as the quality of housing improves, the families with the lowest incomes move to other neighbourhoods, "pushed out" by families that already had better housing in the first place. No solution has so far been found to prevent this. Neighbourhood social

development has also succeeded in improving consultation between institutions and social actors, sometimes through mutual emulation. This policy, however, has not had the desired effect of securing the participation of the local population, and this appears to be its main failing. According to J. M. Delarue (1991), effective participation remains poor, or even nil. The initiative was felt to have been monopolized by "development professionals", hence the observation by Dubet and Lapeyronnie (1992) that "we are still far from having attained our objectives of reintegrating these neighbourhoods within the life of the city and restoring the active citizenship of their inhabitants". Other critics argue that, by focusing on the spatial expressions of exclusion, urban policy addresses its effects rather than its causes.

While this study focuses on government action, it should be pointed out that experiments have been conducted by other agencies as well. Under the Charleroi Pilot Scheme in Belgium, for example, over 60 associations have formed a Regional Mission for Integration and Employment. In France, there have been trade union initiatives, such as that of the French Democratic Confederation of Labour (CFDT), to promote integration through employment, and experiments conducted by non-governmental organizations, such as the Association for the Right to Economic Initiative (ADIE), which has been trying, since 1990, to facilitate access to credit for individuals or groups with income-generating projects but no collateral. Other examples abound.

The world of social exclusion and the struggle to reduce or eliminate exclusion are becoming more complex daily. It would therefore be foolish to try to apprehend the entire situation in purely theoretical and methodological terms. This is why we would advocate a comparative approach.

A comparative perspective

A comparative approach is bound to encounter many pitfalls, as is clear from the foregoing comments on two countries as close to each other as France and Belgium. Substantial differences remain between their institutional frameworks (pre-eminence of the State in France as opposed to the Belgian system of social consultation), their social practices and policies, and the terms of the theoretical debate in the two countries: there is a much closer link between scientific conceptualization and political discourse in France than in Belgium.

Nevertheless, only comparison can bring out these differences. It is not surprising, then, that the European Union has established an Observatory to compare the different approaches and experiences of its member States. While the issue of exclusion tends to be seen as closely related to the Welfare State, there is no reason why it should not be viewed in the context of other industrialized countries as well, such as the United States. In this connection, there seems to be an emerging consensus that Western Europe should not go

the way of the United States, where there is little or no protection against social exclusion.

This comparative perspective calls for a return to the question raised in the introduction, concerning the concepts examined here and in the literature reviewed: are they exportable elsewhere, to Latin America for example? We shall confine ourselves to a few comments.

Since the export of concepts to the Third World is now commonplace (Maesschalck, 1993), it is scarcely surprising that this should apply also to the concept of social exclusion. However, statements such as the following by Touraine and Marshall Wolfe are infrequent:

> We are in the process of drawing nearer to Latin America. The concepts we are using are those that have been used for the past 30 years in Latin America; we are only beginning to discover them on this side of the Atlantic: formal and informal sectors, instead of the simple opposition between work and unemployment. The National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE) has been using these Latin American categories for a number of years, and rightly so. Indeed, while we thought of ourselves as a production society, the Latin Americans have always considered that their society should be thought of in terms of the market, of the world economic system, and therefore have always lived on the opposition of the "in" and the "out" sectors (Touraine, 1992, p. 167).

- The term "social exclusion" represents a relatively recent way of conceptualizing or at least of labelling a range of situations and trends already visible as "problems", or threats to a self-evidently desirable future of "social integration" or "solidarity". It also harks back to debates of the 1960s in Latin America over "marginality" (Wolfe, 1993).

Does this mean that Latin America has advanced where Europe has lagged behind? Certainly, right from the start, the integration of Latin America in the Western world has taken place in conditions of exclusion. Logically, any intellectual effort, any thinking on or in Latin America required the creation of conceptual instruments to apprehend the notion of such exclusion, be it in the disciplines of economics, sociology, anthropology, philosophy or even theology. It is worth noting that this scientific work was undertaken in close connection, sometimes in conflict, with the theories and theorists of the developed West, including France (see Touraine, 1993).

Since external colonialism was present from the start, internal colonialism has dominated economic, social and cultural relations in Latin American countries. This century witnessed the emergence of a modern sector that rapidly asserted its dominance. The indigenous, agrarian or pre-capitalist populations were excluded from this development and modernization. The diagnosis of social scientists was "structural heterogeneity".

In the 1950s and 1960s, industrialization was overwhelmed by urbanization: instead of providing industrial labour reserves, migration from rural areas swelled the ranks of the marginal population. The circle of poverty surrounding the big cities was defined as a world of exclusion, with no work, no schools, no social assistance. But did this imply there was no integration? The life of the poor is much richer and more complex than the

diagrams of social theorists and practitioners suggest: integrated into society through the link of consumption, they create a world of their own. The term "informal sector" has been coined; social movements and survival strategies have been studied. Since the end of the 1970s, other processes have developed. Within the very heart of the modern sector, exclusion has appeared in the form of precarious employment, deregulation and adjustment policies. Over the decades, Latin America has undergone many changes. Do they foreshadow changes to come in Europe?

However, the similarities must not blind us to the differences. In the dictionary, exclusion is defined as the act of excluding people by expelling them from a place where they stood before, or by depriving them of certain rights. Does this have any meaning in relation to a person who has never been socially integrated? Why speak of social exclusion where the Welfare State, pensions and unemployment benefits scarcely exist? Does the term exclusion apply only to the "new poverty" of the West? Does it have anything in common with the "old poverty" prevailing in Latin America?

These doubts may be summed up in the following question: are the realities of Europe and Latin America – or other continents – comparable within a common theoretical framework?

There are reasons for defending the use of the term exclusion and other, cogent reasons for opposing it. Research on the precariousness of employment in Europe and Latin America (Peru) (Yépez, 1993) suggests that, while a comparative approach is of practical use, caution must be exercised with regard to the concepts used. For substantive reasons, it is essential to create new concepts – or redefine existing concepts – to cope with new realities, but also to be as precise as possible while retaining a measure of abstraction to avoid strait-jacketing the concept in specifics. Besides, there are significant common characteristics as between the social processes at work in Europe and Latin America.

Conclusion

The views expressed in the French debate on exclusion are extremely varied and often contradictory. However, it is still possible to identify two underlying principles which are common to all of them and which lie at the very heart of the social policies pursued by the Government during the past decade:

(a) emphasis on employment – and not only on the income that it generates – as a key element of social cohesion;

(b) the importance of the spatial dimension, as the locus of both social differentiation and linkage between different social actors, allowing them to overcome the barriers between different types of action.

At the intersection of these two principles, social exclusion may be considered as a pivotal concept, aimed less at identifying the contours of observable reality than at highlighting relations between processes, between

microsocial and macrosocial mechanisms, between individual and collective dimensions.

Even if, for some observers, the changes that have occurred in Europe have set it on a path towards "Latin Americanization", there are still substantial differences between the two continents, which raise questions as to the validity of common concepts. If the conceptualization of social exclusion is intrinsically related to the notion of the Welfare State as it has developed in Europe, is it meaningful to apply this concept in countries where the Welfare State does not really exist? A tentative conclusion might be that the notion of social exclusion will be more useful if it also becomes a pivotal concept within Latin America, and between Europe and Latin America.

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