

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem
The Paul Baerwald School of Social Work

The Richard M. Titmuss Memorial Lecture

“Social Exclusion, Solidarity and The Challenge of Globalisation”

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The Richard M. Titmuss Memorial Lecture

Richard M. Titmuss was appointed Professor of Social Administration at the London School of Economics in March 1950, a position which he held for the rest of his life until 1973. He was one of the outstanding and original social scientists of his generation and in his research, lectures and personal encounters shaped anew the whole concept of social policy in Britain and abroad. For a period of three decades he exerted immense influence in scholarship, politics and government at home and in many countries throughout the world.

Richard Titmuss was a great friend of Israel. His thought and work very much influenced the study of social policy in Israel, and he left a lasting imprint on the social policies of the country. The lecture series in his memory has been made possible with the kind help of his friends in the United Kingdom and by a generous grant of the National Insurance Institute of Israel.

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A. INTRODUCTION

The 1990s have seen increasing concern about the growth of poverty and social exclusion. That is true of Israel: our colleague Abraham Doron warned in a paper last year of "the widening gaps between the different population groups, the increase of economic and personal insecurity in general and among weak population groups in particular, resulting in considerable harm to integration and cohesiveness" (Doron, 1997). It is no less true of western Europe, associated with fears about the resurgence of high unemployment, and in central and eastern Europe, amidst the stresses of the transition to a market economy.

This growing concern has been evident in debates at the level of the European Union: first within the narrow realm of DGV (the Directorate General for Employment, Industrial Relations and Social Affairs), with its anti-poverty programmes, research studies and efforts at statistical harmonisation (Room et al, 1993); then in DGXII (the Directorate General for Science, Research and Development), which included social exclusion within its Fourth Framework Research Programme; and finally, in the incorporation of social exclusion into the Maastricht and Amsterdam Treaties and the

objectives of the Structural Funds. Alongside these initiatives by the EU institutions, the Council of Europe has also been commissioning studies of social exclusion, focused on the wider range of European countries which make up its membership, and informed by its specific interest in human rights (Duffy, 1995).

During the 1970s and 1980s, the European Commission embraced the language of "poverty" when championing its research studies and action projects concerned with disadvantage, despite the displeasure of some governments, notably the British and German. During the 1990s, in contrast, under the inspiration of Jacques Delors and the French political debate, the European Commission adopted the language of "social exclusion". The Council of Ministers passed a Resolution in 1989 calling for action to combat social exclusion and in 1990, the Commission set up a research network, a so-called "Observatory", to monitor national trends and policies in this field (the author was until the end of 1993 co-ordinator of this Observatory: Room et al, 1992).

Until recently, researchers and policy-makers in Britain tended to regard "social exclusion" as rather unhelpful, combining as it did the imprecision of the French social philosophical debates with the echoes of earlier, discredited right-wing accounts of the "underclass". The election of the new Labour Government in May 1997 changed all that. The Prime Minister has established in Downing Street itself a Policy Unit concerned with Social Exclusion; the ESRC has established at the LSE a high

profile Research Centre on Social Exclusion; and "social exclusion" recurs throughout a wide range of government policy documents, as a central point of reference.

This paper has two aims. First, to clarify the conceptual relationship between poverty and social exclusion: is the difference merely semantic, or does "social exclusion" offer the basis for new insights into disadvantage and new guidance for policy-makers? Second, to analyse social exclusion in relation to the globalisation of our market societies and to highlight the policy dilemmas that this poses.

B. SOCIAL EXCLUSION: FIVE STEPS BEYOND POVERTY

Until recent years it was commonplace in poverty research - in particular, cross-national studies within Europe - to focus on the disposable income (or expenditure) of an individual or household at a moment in time. This was the basis for most of the estimates of the overall poverty rate in the EU that have appeared during the last decade and a half: see, for example, O'Higgins and Jenkins (1987). The reason for this narrow focus was, at least in part, because of the limited data that were available on a cross-nationally comparable basis: Eurostat had secured some consistency of national household budget surveys but other data sources remained disparate.

Recent years have seen growing acknowledgement that this focus is too narrow (cf Room, 1995). In part because of this awareness and in part under the influence of the

proponents of "social exclusion", the research debate has changed significantly during the 1990s. There are five main elements in this reconfiguration of the debate.

1. *From Financial to Multi-Dimensional Disadvantage*

Financial resources are, of course, of enormous importance for the whole range of life chances which a person can enjoy. Nevertheless, financial indicators such as low income are insufficiently reliable as proxies for general hardship: multi-dimensional indicators are needed. It is, moreover, important for policy and for explanatory purposes to disentangle different elements of hardship and to identify their interrelationships.

During the 1990s, the European Commission in its work on disadvantage has shown growing interest in this multi-dimensionality (Whelan, 1995). Eurostat has been developing new statistical tools, centred on the European Community Household Survey, launched in 1995, which collect information on multiple disadvantage from a multi-national panel.

Those who use the language of social exclusion have also been prominent in these efforts. However, they risk overlooking the fact that many of the classic studies of poverty during the 1970s and 1980s were already well aware of this multi-dimensionality: Townsend's various studies, Mack and Lansley's survey of "Breadline Britain" (Mack and Lansley, 1985), Ringen's analysis of direct

(consumption) and indirect (money) measures of deprivation (Ringen, 1988). Many of the cross-national studies and pilot projects sponsored by the European Commission itself had this same multi-dimensional notion of disadvantage (Room, 1993). Only the early, crude cross-national comparisons of poverty rates can be fairly accused of a narrow concern with financial resources alone, and even then the paucity of comparable data provide an excuse. In short, then, the move to an appreciation of the multi-dimensionality of disadvantage hardly suffices to justify the excitement which the new language of social exclusion has been generating.

2. *From a Static to a Dynamic Analysis*

A second feature of recent analyses of disadvantage has been their concern with the dynamics and processes involved. As Robert Walker (1995) has written, "far from time simply being the medium in which poverty occurs, it helps to forge different experiences". It is not enough to count the numbers and describe the characteristics of those who are disadvantaged; it is also necessary to identify the factors which can trigger entry or exit from this situation and to understand how the *duration* of disadvantage helps to shape how it is experienced and what are its consequences. As Walker, again, writes, "there is growing evidence that the events which trigger poverty are widespread but that poverty is a comparatively rare outcome". To explain the circumstances under which particular trigger events do result in poverty is an important research priority.

There is a growing number of national panel surveys which can provide insights into these dynamics. Some focus on those who fall below a particular poverty line (Muffels et al, 1992) or within the lowest section of the income distribution (Goodman, Johnson and Webb, 1997); others on the recipients of minimum benefits (Leibfried, 1995). They find that most poverty is short-term: there is plenty of income mobility, although many of those who escape from poverty remain on its margins and may subsequently descend into it once more. These panel studies can also identify those most at risk of falling into poverty and staying there: people who are poorly educated, are unemployed or disabled, and lone mothers. Factors related to employability are crucial in determining who escapes. These national panel studies will soon be enriched by the findings emerging from the new European Community Household Panel, with annual waves from 1995 onwards.

Many of those who use the language of social exclusion place this dynamic analysis at the centre of their own work and appear to believe that this is the major step forward which the notion of social exclusion involves (Atkinson and Hills, 1998).

Again, however, this risks over-stating the situation. Many of the classic studies of poverty were already well aware of this dynamic or temporal dimension, even if they were not equipped with the technical possibilities that panel studies offer. Studies of disadvantaged local communities – for example, Coates and Silburn's study (1970) of the St Anne's district of Nottingham – explored the dynamics of change over a period of years; and during the 1970s the alleged processes of intergenerational transmission of poverty were at the heart of the ESRC's research programme on Transmitted

Deprivation (Rutter and Madge, 1976). Again, therefore, while the move to an appreciation of the dynamic aspects of disadvantage is important, of itself it hardly suffices to justify the excitement which the new language of social exclusion has been generating.

3. *From the Individual or Household to the Local Neighbourhood*

As I have argued, many of the conventional cross-national comparisons of poverty rates take as their focus the *financial resources* which are held at a *particular moment*: held, that is, by an *individual or household*. This focus on the individual or household has come under attack from two directions. First, from feminist writers who wish to direct attention to the processes of unequal access to resources inside the household unit (Glendinning and Millar, 1992); and second, from writers who point to the resources which are available or lacking within the local community, which affect the extent to which a household or individual is able to manage in times of adversity. It is on the second of these that I focus here.

Deprivation is caused not only by lack of personal resources but also by insufficient or unsatisfactory community facilities, such as dilapidated schools, remotely sited shops, poor public transport networks and so on; such an environment tends to reinforce and perpetuate household poverty. Household surveys and panel studies need to include questions on the availability or non-availability of these local community resources, if we are to understand the differential vulnerability of different individuals and households to social exclusion and disadvantage. No less important

are local traditions of mutual aid, self-help organisations and other elements of development potential; and, more negatively, local sub-cultures which may limit and undermine the capacity of local people to take up opportunities and to take control of their lives.

This is of obvious relevance for policy-makers, who must consider what actions they will take to invest in these local community resources, alongside policies which are targeted on particular individuals and households. In many countries, poverty alleviation measures include pinpointed resource allocation to run-down localities, such as derelict inner urban city centres or areas of industrial decline.

Again, while the recent debates in terms of social exclusion have encouraged attention to this local community dimension, this is not an invention of the 1990s. First, there is a long tradition of studies of disadvantaged local communities and of the interplay between individual and community resources: in the UK, an obvious example is provided by the studies coming out of the Institute of Community Studies in the 1950s and 1960s and out of the Community Development Project in the 1970s (Home Office, 1977). Second, but in a different tradition, governments have used indicators of disadvantage of local areas in their programmes of resource allocation: in the UK, the Department of the Environment has been using its so-called z-scores for many years for this purpose. The most recent updating of these indicators, undertaken by Professor Brian Robson in Liverpool, uses the 1991 census data collected from households but marries these with data pertaining to the local area as a whole

(Robson, 1995). Finally, and in a different vein again, William Julius Wilson in Chicago has investigated the processes of community erosion and isolation which affect the black and Hispanic inner-city areas of the northern United States and compound the experience of disadvantage for individual households in those neighbourhoods (Wilson, 1987). His research, although in one sense admitting the existence of an underclass, aims to explain that underclass by reference to the collapse of employment opportunities, the lack of good quality public services, the exit of the black middle class and the counter-attractions of a delinquent sub-culture of crime and drugs in neighbourhoods where there are no "legitimate" opportunities.

4. *From a Distributional to a Relational Focus*

There is a fourth element in the shift from poverty to social exclusion which is, if anything, more fundamental still. The notion of poverty is primarily focused upon *distributional* issues: the lack of resources at the disposal of an individual or a household. In contrast, notions such as social exclusion focus primarily on *relational* issues: in other words, inadequate social participation, lack of social integration and lack of power.

These two sets of concepts can be related to the different intellectual traditions from which they derive. Research into poverty, in its modern scientific form, is primarily an Anglo-Saxon - more specifically a British - product of the 19th century (Rowntree, 1901; Townsend, 1979). It is closely associated with the liberal vision of society, under which society was seen by the relevant intellectual and political elites as a mass

of atomised individuals engaged in competition within the market place. The goal of social policy is then to ensure to each person sufficient resources to be able to survive in this competitive arena. I acknowledge that Peter Townsend, as the most prominent contemporary heir of this tradition, judges the sufficiency of the resources at the disposal of an individual or households by whether or not the person is able to "participate" in the activities customary in their society. He thus makes an effort to break out of the limitations of the Anglo-Saxon legacy and to include relational elements also. Nevertheless, with his focus on the resources which individuals need to have at their command, it is still distributional issues that are at the heart of his definition (Townsend, 1979).

In contrast, notions of social exclusion are part of a Continental - and perhaps more particularly a French - tradition of social analysis. Society is seen by intellectual and political elites as a status hierarchy or as a number of collectivities, bound together by sets of mutual rights and obligations which are rooted in some broader moral order. Social exclusion is the process of becoming detached from this moral order (Castels, 1995). The task of social policy is to reinsert or reintegrate people into society

At first glance, to operationalise this relational notion of social exclusion for purposes of empirical investigation is not as easy as measuring the financial resources at the disposal of an individual or household. However, there are several recent studies which can be seen as offering such an operationalisation (whether or not this is how they see themselves).

Paugam (1995) uses cross-sectional survey data in France to explore the relationship between a person's detachment from the occupational community and his or her detachment from the extended family. By comparing individuals categorised according to the security or fragility of their employment situation, and examining the proportions of such individuals who lack links with their extended families, Paugam is able to show that the two forms of detachment tend to go together. This is especially the case for men: women, when their occupational integration weakens, seem to be able to maintain their family links to a much greater extent. Paugam then goes on, in a subsequent study, to consider cross-national variations in the strength of these occupational and family relationships (Paugam, 1996). He shows, using national data sets - albeit imperfectly comparable - that the French experience is mirrored in the other large urban industrial societies of northern Europe, the United Kingdom and Germany; however, in Spain and Italy, as separation from the occupational community worsens, the extended family seems to play a stronger role, as our stereotypes of the southern European family might indeed lead us to expect.

A second, although rather different, approach to these relational aspects of social exclusion is provided by Perri 6, the research director of the Demos think-tank, which has been highly influential in shaping the new Labour Government's social policy (6,1997). Perri 6 distinguishes two sorts of social bonds: those that link us to people in the same position as ourselves - our family members, people in the local neighbourhood, our immediate colleagues at work - and those that link us to people in

very different positions from ourselves: especially those people who are in contact with opportunities which they can bring to our attention, but of which we are unlikely to be able to avail ourselves without their help.

Perri 6 proceeds to argue that our social policies typically concentrate disadvantaged people together with people like themselves, instead of helping them to make the second type of link: with people who are in touch with opportunities in the wider society, people who can therefore provide ladders for them to move out of their disadvantaged positions. We concentrate low income families into the same housing estates; we put the young unemployed together onto separate training programmes; we neglect low cost public transport that could enable low income families to maintain and develop contacts and networks in the wider society. An appreciation of the importance of the relational dimension of social exclusion should, Perri 6 argues, prompt policy-makers to re-examine some of these practices.

5. *Continuity or Catastrophe*

There is one final element in moving from poverty to social exclusion. The most common estimates of the proportion of people who are poor, especially for the purpose of cross-national comparison, make use of a fairly arbitrary poverty line defined in financial terms. One of the most commonly used poverty lines is drawn at 50% of the mean or median disposable income (or expenditure) in each of the societies being compared. But recognising that 50% is indeed arbitrary, estimates are then often also produced based on 40% or 60% lines also.

In a famous debate with David Piachaud, Peter Townsend argued that as one moved down the income hierarchy, at a certain point the consequences of income deprivation had a disproportionately great effect on the capacity of a household to join in the activities customary in their society. This discontinuity or "kink" provided an objective indicator of what it was plausible to call the poverty line. Piachaud (1981) disagreed. No evidence of such a discontinuity could be found in Townsend's data: to define poverty, and to distinguish the poor from the non-poor, required an arbitrary value judgement, from which the empirical data could not provide an escape.

Whatever the outcome of this debate in reference to Townsend's own data, I suggest that when we speak of social exclusion, the concept carries with it the connotation of separation and permanence: a catastrophic discontinuity in relationships with the rest of society. This is very evident in Wilson's depiction of the underclass of Chicago. It may or may not be true of other groups of the population suffering disadvantage. To use the notion of social exclusion carries the implication that we are speaking of people who are suffering such a degree of multi-dimensional disadvantage, of such duration, and reinforced by such material and cultural degradation of the neighbourhoods in which they live, that their relational links with the wider society are ruptured to a degree which is in some considerable degree irreversible. We may sometimes choose to use the notion of social exclusion in a more general sense than this: but here is its core. And if it is to be useful to us as an analytical concept and as

a point of reference for policy design, it may be better to use this core notion, rather than to use "social exclusion" as no more than a synonym of "disadvantage".

III. SOLIDARITY AND THE CHALLENGE OF GLOBALISATION

In summary, then, the notion of social exclusion consolidates and integrates five key elements in the definition and study of disadvantage. None of these elements is sufficient by itself to justify the research and political interest that the notion of social exclusion has generated, although together they probably can. None is so novel as to render irrelevant previous research into poverty. Nor does the notion of social exclusion provide some wondrous new approach as far as policy is concerned: we need to learn from past efforts to combat disadvantage, what worked as well as what did not. Not the least role of the academic researcher is to oppose any tendencies to collective amnesia.

While the new notion of social exclusion provides illumination, it also holds certain perils. For example, it may encourage us to conceive of society as a moral community (albeit hierarchical) with networks of mutual support: social casualties lose touch with these networks and the task of social policy is to reintegrate them. This is a form of neo-functionalist social theory. The counter-view is that society is a battleground of different social groups (based on social background, ethnicity, economic interest, gender, age, etc), seeking to maintain and extend their power and

influence, in a zero-sum struggle with other groups, whom they seek to exclude.

"Exclusion" is the result of this struggle, rather than a label we attach to the casualties of some impersonal process of urban-industrial change. Social exclusion is a normal and integral part of the power dynamics of modern society.

This suggests a further agenda of questions for empirical research. First, in what ways are the actions of more advantaged groups shaping the processes of exclusion which were discussed earlier? Second, in what ways are these same groups shaping the policies for inclusion that governments are pursuing? Are these policies – for example, the welfare to work programmes that many governments are now pursuing, in one form or another – providing stepping stones back into mainstream society, or are they condemning disadvantaged people to eking out low skill, low paid jobs on the margins of society? Third, how ready are these same groups to support more vigorous inclusionary policies? Peter Golding (1995) at Loughborough University has used Eurobarometer data to analyse the perceptions of the disadvantaged held by more advantaged groups: he finds little evidence of substantial support for such policies.

A little earlier I mentioned Perri 6's work. He calls for policies which will promote social mixing – in our local communities, in our schools, in our vocational training schemes – in order to create contacts and networks of mutual support between more and less advantaged people in our societies. But this begs the question: one can see what the poor might get out of such contacts, but what will the middle classes get? Will they not always face the temptation to retreat into their fortresses? Perhaps more

seriously still, if the more capable among the disadvantaged are creamed off in the way that Perri 6 proposes, what of those who are left behind, lacking now those most capable of providing leadership for disadvantaged local communities? This is precisely the situation described by Wilson in his account of inner-city Chicago. The prospects of these communities becoming the beneficiaries of more vigorous policies aimed at their inclusion would seem more remote than ever.

In the aftermath of World War II, T H Marshall (1950) offered his famous account of social citizenship, set within the context of universalist welfare services. Titmuss continued the argument, pointing out that with such an infrastructure of universalist services, one could hope that the more prosperous sections of the population would feel sufficiently the mutual obligations of a shared citizenship, that they would – to return to the vocabulary used by Perri 6 – be ready to establish ties with people distant from themselves. However, at least in the United Kingdom, the 1980s saw growing inequality (Hills, 1998) and polarisation, coupled with the curtailment of this infrastructure of common citizenship institutions.

The globalisation of our economies can only make this worse – and not just in the United Kingdom. One of the most obvious expressions of this is the way that in the upper reaches of the income hierarchy, it is the global, rather than the national, market for top managers that shapes the scale of their rewards. Within the UK, the Chief Executive of SmithKline Beecham, the pharmaceuticals company, commands an annual pay package of approximately £70 million sterling, which his chairman

justifies by reference to the global market in managers (*Guardian*, 29.4.98). This is at a time when the mass of the working population receive pay increases which do little more than preserve their real standard of living; while those who depend on social benefits are lucky if they get even this. The consequent elongation of the rewards hierarchy – something which individual national governments are fearful of challenging, lest capital make use of its mobility to exit to other countries – erodes all sense that we live in a single national society, with shared criteria for the distribution of rewards.

This is not all. Once someone is part of this small circle of highly privileged people, it is not at all easy to leave it. Managers of large corporations who fail, instead of receiving their just desserts, often receive golden handshakes on a scale of which most of us can only dream. Nor is it only the financial failures who find that failure is sweet. The unprecedented slaughter of Conservative MPs in May 1997, in the British General Election, did not produce a surge in the ranks of social benefit recipients; it has been more common for them to find themselves appointed to lucrative directorships (*Guardian*, 28th April 1998). They have no lack of the sort of ties of which Perri 6 speaks, acquaintances who are ready and able to find alternative sources of income and standing when existing employment suddenly terminates. This is not a situation of *catastrophe*, in the sense I spoke of it earlier, but one of what we might term *bliss*. (The state of bliss is less researched than that of social exclusion: this may spring from the reluctance of the affluent to give up the privacy surrounding their dealings, at least as far as academic researchers are concerned. However, see Gregg et

al, 1994) Their co-existence in the same society belies the notion that we share a common citizenship. This matters. As Titmuss always insisted, we cannot separate the way that our economy functions from the way in which we organise our common institutions and define our common citizenship.

"Who is my stranger?" asks Titmuss (1973) in his book *The Gift Relationship*, cleverly reworking the New Testament question, "Who is my neighbour?" Titmuss was concerned with the way that we perceive our fellow man and women, within the anonymity of the market society, and the extent to which, encouraged by universalist welfare institutions, we treat every stranger as our neighbour. In a world where the global market overrides the boundaries and identities of local and national communities, this question is particularly poignant. Universalist welfare institutions will be able to transcend the divisions of the market place only if they too have a global dimension: only if they are universalist in a double sense.

The ILO, the WHO and some arms of the United Nations Organisation represent partial and fragmentary steps towards establishing a global framework for welfare. So also does Jubilee 2000 campaign by Aid Charities for the cancellation of the debts of the poorest countries. However, compared with the progress of the World Trade Organisation, their scope is sadly limited. Alongside what they are doing, actions can also be traced within the various regional blocks, notably the European Union, to establish a social framework for economic activities and to ensure that social policy objectives are met on a transnational basis: but even here, progress is pitifully limited.

As we enter the 21st Century, this surely stands alongside and equal to the environmental challenge as the major political choice which our people and politicians face. It must involve efforts to establish a common moral basis for the distribution of rewards; to ensure a basic minimum for all citizens; and to reassert the social responsibility of business, as against the amoral anonymity of the global market place.

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Graham Room: Social Exclusion, Solidarity and the Challenge of Globalisation

ABSTRACT

During the 1990s, the notion of 'social exclusion' has given a new impetus to the debate about poverty and disadvantage, directing attention to the relational - as distinct from the distributional - dimensions of inequality. It thereby highlights the need to consider not only the resources that the poor have at their disposal, but also the networks of support on which they can call within the wider society, including those mediated through the formal organisations of the welfare state.

The globalisation of our market economies is tending, however, to erode the networks of support which more advantaged groups are ready to offer and to force retrenchment of the formal welfare organisations on which the poor can call. In a global economy, moral solidarity with the disadvantaged atrophies, and the national communities within which the post-war welfare states were built no longer serve as the focus for good neighbourliness.

Only if governments establish a World Welfare Organisation – as a complement to the World Trade Organisation – in conjunction with business and other organised transnational interests, will it be feasible to arrest this depleting moral legacy, and the growing risk of impoverishment for substantial sections of our population. The prospects are not good.