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Problems and Developments

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DEMOCRACY AND THE
REPRESENTATION OF DIFFERENCE
AND
THE POLITICS OF PRESENCE:
PROBLEMS AND DEVELOPMENTS

BY
ANNE PHILLIPS

Anne Phillips
Democracy and the Representation of Difference
The Politics of Presence: Problems and Developments

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Preface

GEP – the Research Programme on GENDER EMPOWERMENT AND POLITICS is proud to publish Anne Phillips' paper: *Democracy and the Representation of Difference*. The paper was first presented as a lecture at Aalborg University, September 16, 1999 on the occasion of the University's 25th anniversary. On this day Aalborg University offered Anne Phillips an Honorary Doctorate on behalf of the Social Science Faculty. After the acceptance lecture Anne Phillips discussed *The Politics of Presence: Problems and Developments* in a research seminar organised by FREIA, Feminist Research Centre in Aalborg and DEMOS, Research Group on Democracy at Aalborg University.

Anne Phillips has since 1990 been employed as a professor in Politics at the Department of Politics and Modern History, London Guildhall University, and from October 1, 1999, she became Professor at the Gender Institute at the London School of Economics and Political Science. She has during the 1990s made an important contribution to the development of new theories, paradigms and concepts in the political science, especially in the areas of normative political theory, feminist theory and to the theory of multiculturalism. The titles of the most important books are, *Engendering Democracy* (Polity Press, 1992), *Democracy and Difference* (Polity Press, 1993), and *The Politics of Presence* (Oxford Political Theory, 1995). Her latest book is *Which Equalities Matter* (Polity Press, 1999).

The theory about the importance of the 'politics of presence' gives an original and well-argued contribution to theories of representation and to political attempts to strengthen women's active participation in all aspects of political life. In the Nordic countries there has been a special interest in the theory and implications of women's increased political representation, which was partly inspired by the quotas for women introduced by many political parties in the Nordic countries during the 1990s.

Birte Siim

Democracy and the Representation of Difference¹

Anne Phillips

‘Simple democracy was society governing itself without the aid of secondary means. By ingrafting representation onto democracy, we arrive at a system of government capable of embracing and confederating all the various interests and every extent of industry and population.’”

‘It is on this system that the American government is founded. It is representation ingrafted upon democracy...What Athens was in miniature, America will be in magnitude. The one was the wonder of the ancient world; the other is becoming the admiration, the model of the present. It is the easiest of all forms of government to be understood and the most eligible in practice, and excludes at once the ignorance and insecurity of the hereditary mode, and the inconveniences of the simple democracy.’ (Paine, 1995:232-3)

Writing at the end of the eighteenth century, Thomas Paine captures the high hopes then attached to the development of representative democracy, and the optimism of his analysis strikes a decisively new note. Some decades earlier, Jean-Jacques Rousseau had treated representation as the antithesis of democracy, but progressive thinkers from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century were more likely to see it as what made democracy finally possible. It was partly considerations of equality that inspired admiration for this ‘wonder’ of the modern world, for if voting rights were to be extended beyond the propertied classes (by 1789, most American states had extended their franchise to cover 70-90% of adult white men), it would become logistically impossible - too inconvenient, to use Paine’s term - for all citizens to participate directly in government. More ambiguously, representation was also being perceived as a way of reconciling quantity with quality: a way of having democracy without too much of the demos. In his most cited contribution to *The Federalist Papers*, James Madison defended the large

¹ A version of this essay will be published under the title ‘Representation Renewed’ in a collection edited by Marian Sawer and Gianni Zappala *Representation: Theory and Practice in Australian Politics*.

electorates of a federal republic as likely to throw up more educated and thoughtful representatives. At its simplest, this was because there would be a greater pool of talented men (and he did mean 'men') to choose from. It was also because large voting constituencies would make it harder for 'unworthy' candidates who tried to buy their way through bribery and corruption or for parochial candidates who could not see beyond 'local circumstances and lesser interests'. (Madison et al, 1987: 127) In a representative democracy, the views of the electorate would pass through the filter of elected representatives, and this filtering process would have the effect of enlarging and refining their views. Instead of electing people 'just like themselves' to serve as their political representatives (in Madison's view, a travesty of representative government), voters would be inclined to support those they perceived as wiser, more educated, more knowledgeable than the rest. The people would have their say yet the talented would still be elected. A perfect compromise.

Some critics from the time countered with what (following Hanna Pitkin) we have come to term 'descriptive' or 'mirror' representation. Anti-federalists in America made much of the dangers of remote government, and they took this to include not only the remoteness of federal government from the concerns of constituent states but what they perceived as a growing gap between representatives and the people. Their main objection, of course, was that a strong federal government would overturn the laws and practices of individual states, but they also argued that ordinary citizens would have no chance of election to a federal assembly. '(T)he station will be too elevated for them to aspire to'; 'there will be no part of the people represented, but the rich' (Storing, 1985:125-6): the resulting assembly would be thoroughly unrepresentative.

By the end of the eighteenth century, this counter-position had been pretty soundly defeated and issues of pictorial accuracy had dropped off the agenda. The one exception to this related to the nature of electoral systems, and whether it was desirable to secure a proportional representation of the electorate's preferences in the composition of the legislative assembly. Writing in 1861, John Stuart Mill expressed no interest in the idea that representatives should be drawn from a variety of occupational or social strata - that they should be 'representative' in a social sampling sense. He was, however, deeply concerned that the prevailing electoral system did not promote a fair representation of minority opinions and views. Democracy should secure 'a representation, in proportion to numbers, of every division of the electoral body: not two great parties alone, with perhaps a few sectional minorities in particular places, but every minority in the whole nation, consisting of a sufficiently large number to be, on principles of justice, entitled to a representative.' (Mill, 1975:256) Though the reference to minority representation points forward to my own concerns about the representation of difference, Mill did not anticipate that electors who came from a minority ethnic group, spoke a minority language, or followed a minority religion, would have a proportionate share of representative positions: this was not the kind of 'division' of the electoral body he had in mind.

Mill favoured the electoral reforms proposed by Thomas Hare (some element of which has been incorporated into the voting system currently employed in Denmark). Hare wanted it to be possible for individuals to cast their vote for candidates in any locality, thereby making it possible for geographically dispersed minorities to elect representatives sharing their own point of view. One advantage Mill saw in this was that it would help raise the intellectual calibre of political representatives. In tones that echo Madison's preoccupations, he talks of 'the men of independent thought', 'the superior intellects and characters', those who would have limited appeal to parochially minded local electorates but might win substantial support from discerning individuals nation-wide. Mill's worries about raising intellectual standards are never far from the surface, but he was also making a deeper point about political equity. A representative democracy, he argued, should represent all its citizens, not just the majority. It should be possible for opinions and interests that are outnumbered still to be heard in the legislative assembly, and minorities should have the chance of obtaining 'by weight of character and strength of argument' (Mill, 1975:273) an influence greater than their numbers alone.

The minority Mill had in mind was composed of deep and original thinkers standing out against collective mediocrity, but it is not so difficult to extend his argument to apply to members of minority religions or minority cultures or any group whose values and beliefs are at odds with majority norms. The point to note at this stage is that Mill was talking about the proportionate representation of minority opinion and interest. He had nothing to say about - and given his incipient elitism would almost certainly have opposed - the proportionate representation of people from minority groups. His arguments about proportionality fall into what I have termed a 'politics of ideas', revolving around how best to secure a fair representation in legislative assemblies of the full range of citizens' opinions and preferences and ideas. He does not address those further claims that have arisen within a 'politics of presence': the argument that an assembly cannot be representative of the citizens unless it include members of minority social groups; and that fair representation implies proportionate representation according to characteristics like ethnicity or gender (Phillips, 1995).

As the number of representative democracies multiplied through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the degree of proportionality attached to the electoral system came to be one of the main points of distinction, but with proportionality interpreted almost exclusively in the framework of a politics of ideas. The single member constituency, simple plurality system that is still employed in Britain (though not for the new Scottish Parliament or Welsh Assembly) notoriously generates governments with an overwhelming majority of parliamentary seats on significantly less than half the popular vote; in Denmark, by contrast, the multi-member constituency, party list system, makes that kind of outcome impossible. Some systems are more 'representative' than others in the sense of giving a fairer representation of how the electorate votes - and these are important differences. Outside these differences in electoral systems, however, there has been remarkably little experimentation in modes and patterns of

representation, little serious debate, it seems, over what 'fair representation' means. Right and left have conspired to keep representation off the agenda. The right has not been particularly interested in improving levels of representation, preferring a Schumpeterian pared-down version of democracy as no more than a mechanism for generating political elites. The left, meanwhile, has pursued a Rousseauesque version of direct democracy that made them unwilling to talk about representation at all. Up until the last fifteen years, neither right nor left has seemed particularly interested in representation.

1. From a politics of ideas to a politics of presence

The subsequent renewal of interest has been most marked among those on the political left: people getting to grips with liberal/ representative democracy as probably the only available option, and then asking what can be done within this framework to make the democracy more democratic. Two features stand out in this development. The first is the importance attached to representing people along axes previously discounted: gender most notably, but also race and ethnicity, sexuality, and disability. My recollection from British debates of twenty years ago is that only those actively campaigning around women or race or disability would even have noticed the extraordinary under-representation of women, black people, the disabled in decision-making assemblies, but this began to change in the course of the 1970s and 80s when a number of political groups took up the question of who can legitimately speak for whom. Women insisted on autonomous organisation as women, while black activists looked askance at anti-racist committees still organised predominantly by whites, and this politics eventually spilt over to the composition of legislative assemblies. Arguments for proportionality have not yet been won, but there is now a widely shared conviction that assemblies made up from one group alone are unrepresentative of the citizen body.

The clearest political expression of this comes in what has been a world-wide movement to raise the proportion of women in politics, Denmark being one of the success stories here, with women currently making up 37.4 % of the legislative representatives. There have also been major initiatives, most notably in the USA, to raise the proportion of representatives who come from minority racial or linguistic groups; and smaller scale initiatives to secure the election of individuals with disabilities. Some of those earlier ideas about mirror representation have then returned to the political agenda, though this time as a way of reflecting identity rather than occupational groups. Underpinning these developments is the notion that no one can better express the distinctive perspectives of a group than someone who is a group member, and that no one else is likely to be a better judge of group interests. Embodiment matters. By their presence in the decision-making chamber, members of a previously marginalised group can better

guarantee that their interests and perspectives will be articulated. By their presence, they also make it more likely that members of dominant groups will recognise and speak to their concerns. Some experiences are more detachable than others, and there are, of course, cases where it seems plausible enough to talk of representation by individuals who were not directly exposed to a particular experience. I find it plausible enough to think of a well-informed agricultural expert as representing the interests of farmers, but much less plausible to think of a well-informed (male) expert on gender as representing the perspectives of women. This is partly a matter of logic, for perspectives – by definition – attach to those who are looking from a particular location, and are not open to the same kind of 'objective' investigation we might think of applying to interests. It is also, I believe, a historical point, reflecting what is still a relatively new process of policy formation. Where there has been a long history of subordination, exclusion, or denial, it seems particularly inappropriate to look to individuals without such experience as spokespeople for the group in question: not because individuals outside the group can never be knowledgeable or never be trusted; but because failing the direct involvement of those with the relevant experiences, the policy process will be inherently paternalistic and the policy outcomes almost certainly skewed. The belated recognition of this has generated a new set of questions about representation, focusing attention on ensuring a rough representation of the range of experiences as well as the range of ideas.

The second thing that stands out in the recent renewal of interest in representation is the declining confidence in a politics of mandates. This too has been mainly an issue on the political left, where it used to be commonplace to contrast the accountability of the binding mandate to the wayward elitism of politicians claiming the right to make decisions by themselves. Those on the right rarely took the representative element in representative democracy so seriously. But for those on the left, it has seemed self-evident that accountability to party mandates is more democratic than allowing people to strike out on their own: that representatives elected on behalf of a particular party should regard themselves as bound by the policies of that party; and that they have no right to abandon policies to which they just happen to be personally opposed. When representatives are not bound by the policies or manifestos on which they were elected, there seems little point describing what they do as representation. Either there is some notion of party mandates or there is no representation at all.

In broad outline, this must be so, for if there were no connection between what politicians promise and what they then do, we would rightly regard them as cynical manipulators not bothering to represent us at all. Representation is the lifeline that keeps citizens linked to their political elites; without this lifeline, the democratic system becomes just a Schumpeterian 'method' for selecting the individuals with the power to decide. But while any system of representative democracy needs this lifeline, citizens do not always want it pulled too tightly. Thus, most people will agree that politicians should seek to implement the programmes on which they were elected to office – most of us get edgy when our governments simply abandon their

supposed programmes - but many of us will simultaneously say we expect our representatives to be giving a lead. People do not, on the whole, like government by focus group (a form of government much loved by the current New Labour government in the UK): we do not want politicians deciding between policies on the basis of which will most raise their approval ratings; we do not want them to trail the worst prejudices of the electorate; we would rather see our representatives taking a lead in persuading us to see things in a broader perspective. And while many democrats would react unfavourably to Edmund Burke's famous speech to the electors of Bristol (where he effectively told them he would be a better judge than they of what was in their best interest) the same people may also say they want their representatives to exercise their own powers of judgement, to be prepared to criticise party policy, to deliberate before they decide. One common criticism of the Labour Party in Britain is that party discipline is now so tight that backbench MPs are turned into mere ciphers, deprived of their political independence and expected to toe the party line. Anyone who finds this objectionable is saying she expects her political representatives to retain some independence and autonomy. Some part of her is then agreeing with Burke.

This second development links back to the first, for the more we come to accept - even welcome - a degree of autonomy among our political representatives, the more importance we should attach to whether they are roughly 'like' ourselves. A politics based on mandates can more readily dispense with questions about social composition, for if representatives really are bound in advance to implement pre-agreed programmes, it hardly matters whether they are black or white, female or male, come from the ethnic majority or minority. (It *should* make no difference, if they are there to implement rather than modify policy.) Once we shift from this to the idea that representatives should retain some independence of judgement, then the partialities and bias that creep in with different kinds of experience become more pressing. Judgement depends on knowledge; knowledge is refracted through experience; judgement of political events is going to be powerfully affected by life histories and life experience. If those with the power to decide turn out to come from the same social caste - predominantly male, for example, or overwhelmingly from one of a number of ethnic groups - this skewing of the decision-making body will skew the policy outcomes as well.

The link this suggests between representing social diversity and making democracy more deliberative is borne out in the contemporary literature. Deliberative democrats are dissatisfied with the intermittent democracy of the ballot box; committed to a 'strong' democracy (Barber, 1984) of dialogue and engagement and debate; and convinced that political justice is best arrived at through the mutual engagement of diverse perspectives and voices. In the deliberative conception, the legitimacy of decisions comes to depend less on what representatives said they would argue for at their moment of election (did they keep their promises?) and more on whether the decisions are arrived at out of sufficiently wide-ranging debate (were all relevant perspectives adequately voiced?). So if there were hardly any women involved in the discussion, or if everyone

came from the same ethnic group, or if - to quote again one of the critics of James Madison - 'there is no part of the people represented but the rich', deliberative democrats would have to distrust the results. The two things go together. If the social composition of the assembly matters, it must be because we expect our representatives to draw on life experiences and knowledges (not just party manifestos) in the course of their deliberations. And if we do want our representatives freed up to engage in more deliberative behaviour, it is going to become more important than ever that the social composition of the deliberators reflects the social composition of the citizen body.

2. Two kinds of 'group representation'

In the rest of what I say, I will take it as given that the common understanding of representation as a vehicle for representing constituents' opinions, preferences and ideas is inadequate, and should be supplemented by additional arrangements ensuring the physical presence of members of subordinate groups. Which groups and what arrangements then become central issues, and there are many questions associated with this that I cannot deal with here. I want to focus on a prior question relating to what it means to 'represent' a social group. One criticism levelled at arguments for group representation is that the importance attached to representing 'group' concerns or perspectives can exaggerate the role of ascribed characteristics in the formation of political identities, and that this will encourage a sedimentation of group differences - a kind of essentialism about the nature of group identities - that are better understood as fluid and shifting. Those who say this may agree that there is a problem with those false homogeneities that repress or deny group difference, that present any individual as capable of speaking for and representing any other, or treat it as entirely irrelevant if all representatives turn out to come from the same social group. But if it is important to challenge one kind of false unity, they will say, it is equally important to challenge pressures that force individuals into a straitjacket of 'Irishness' or 'blackness' or 'femaleness', as if all Irish people or women or all black people think and want the same. Many social theorists now talk of identities as hybrid, and see this as making nonsense of simpler notions about 'black identity' or 'Asian identity' or 'female identity'. Even apart from these considerations, it is hard to see why defining oneself exclusively through one's group should be regarded as such a great achievement.

These are important issues. Nancy Fraser (1996) makes the point that much of the politics associated with women or racial minorities has been about putting 'gender' or 'race' out of business - ending the feminisation and racialisation of the economy, eliminating distinctions that place women or black people in the ranks of the over-exploited or under-paid, and making it possible for us to exist as people rather than as categories of gender or race. Yet claims for equality of representation or recognition often seem to aim for the opposite effect. They put more emphasis on what makes each group distinct and different, and are less prepared to subsume

differences under grand abstractions like citizen or humanity or 'man'. Fraser points out that this sets up a tension within egalitarian politics, part of which then looks towards the dissolution of our differences while the other seems to want these differences more fully acknowledged.

In addressing this dilemma, it is important to keep in mind the distinction between including/ representing/ revaluing 'a group' and including/ representing/ revaluing its members. It is the failure to make this distinction clearly enough that has generated much of the subsequent confusion. When subordinate groups can legitimately claim to be under-represented (I leave to one side what counts as a legitimate claim²), there seem to be two possible ways of addressing this. The first approach puts mechanisms in place that will allow for the representation of group interests and concerns, probably by people who are members of that group. The advantage of this is that it makes it possible for group members to establish chains of accountability that will link 'their' representatives back to 'their' group; the disadvantage is that representatives become spokespeople only for the group and cannot claim a wider franchise. A second approach pursues a more equitable distribution of representative positions between members of different social groups: looks to parity, for example, between women and men, or a greater presence for members of minority ethnic groups. This offers a much looser form of 'group representation'. It provides no obvious mechanism to link representatives to the group whose characteristics they supposedly share, and gives us no guarantee that these people will come to see themselves as charged with responsibility for representing that group. It is, however, less likely to lead to a 'Balkanisation' of competing and exclusionary groups, and less likely to confine people to specifically 'group' affairs.

The first approach can be described as a form of corporatist representation. People serve as representatives of their group, they are expected to speak on and for group issues, and they are held accountable in some way to the members of that group. There are a number of ways in which this might be - or already is - achieved. The link between representatives and group might be established by creating a separate electoral roll for group members who then elect 'their' representatives: this is essentially what happens with the Maori seats in New Zealand who are elected for a separate Maori-only electoral roll. More commonly and haphazardly, leading figures from the organisations that campaign on behalf of a group might be co-opted onto some larger body: in these cases, the 'representatives' will be expected to speak for and defend the interests of their group but may only be tenuously accountable. In a more radical scenario (closer to that proposed by Iris Young in many of her writings), a group might be asked to generate its own representatives - through whatever mechanisms it finds most reliable. These individuals would then have a right of representation on the decision-making body.

2. I develop the case more fully in Phillips, 1995.

As far as accountability is concerned, all these options look quite promising, for all of them provide some mechanism through which members of a group can influence or direct the policies their representatives pursue. All of them, that is, allow for some genuine sense of 'group representation', and they throw up people whose job it is to reflect group perspectives and promote group interests and concerns. The disadvantage is that the process will mainly engage those we can call 'core' members of the group (does not, on other words, capture the sense in which everyone has multiple identities); and that it locks group representatives into a narrow reiteration of specifically group interests or concerns. If generalised to all groups - not just those identified as having a history of political exclusion - this would clearly be problematic, for politics would then become little more than a jostling between interest groups. But even assuming some plausible basis for restricting group representation to those currently marginalised or oppressed, do we really want representatives to address exclusively 'group' interests and priorities, or do we want them to address the full range of political and human concerns? If we want a system of representation that ever goes beyond group interests and priorities, we need something other than corporatism.

The second approach is almost the mirror image of the first: no great risk of inward-looking 'groupiness' but not much accountability either. The starting point here is that people marked by certain group characteristics (femaleness, for example) are seriously under-represented in politics (note that it is not so much 'the group' that is under-represented as those bearing certain group characteristics), and that 'fair representation' depends on electing more representatives who share the markers and experiences of these groups. Instead of the dedicated representation (by individuals dedicated to this task alone) of group interests and concerns, this looks to a more equitable distribution of representative positions between members of different social groups. It is this, rather than 'group representation' proper, that is proposed in most of the current initiatives towards raising the proportion of female or minority representatives: not a corporatist system of group representation that requires representatives to refer back to and speak for their group, but a more equitable distribution of representative positions between different social groups that brings a wider range of perspectives into play.

Note that in this scenario, there is no way of guaranteeing that representatives will speak for the needs or concerns of 'their' group. If they are not elected by or linked in any formal way to the group they supposedly come from, there is no obvious way of ensuring that Maoris will speak for the needs or concerns of Maoris, women for the needs or concerns of women, or African Americans for the needs and concerns of African Americans. Whatever connections individuals may happen to feel with their identity group, whatever responsibilities they may choose to assume for raising group priorities and concerns, there is no explicit chain of command that requires them to do so. On the contrary, since most will have been elected as representatives of a particular party, they may feel too constrained by existing party policy to exert much pressure on behalf of what they see as 'their' group. They may want to speak up for different policies, but

feel they have no mandate to do so. They may even actively resist association with what others persist in describing as 'their' group, feeling (as many women politicians have through the last century) that this association will only confirm their marginality. The downside, then, is that people might come to be elected because of certain group characteristics like sex, ethnicity or race without this having much noticeable impact on the kinds of policies they decide to pursue. More individuals from the social group might become representatives and nothing else might change. In such cases, you would have what Hege Skjeie has termed just a 'rhetoric of difference': 'The belief in women's difference could still turn into a mere litany on the importance of difference. Repeated often enough, the statement that "gender matters" may in turn convince the participants that change can in fact be achieved by no other contribution than the mere presence of women'. (Skjeie, 1991:8p258)

This second option is thus looser, less predictable, and less accountable, but it is also less likely to lock representatives into narrowly bounded political identities. It does not treat people as if they are exclusively defined by their group characteristics, and it does not expect individuals to view everything from a narrowly 'group' point of view. The sense in which it is still about group representation is that it continues to recognise the crucial effects of group experience on political identities and aspirations, and insists on the importance of including people with different group experiences at the point where decisions are made. As a case for specific representation of the *group*, this would be vulnerable to criticism for exaggerating the power of ascribed characteristics or intensifying divisions between different groups. Understood as a case for raising the representation of group *members*, it is only vulnerable to criticism from those who think difference should not matter at all.

In my own work I have dwelt mainly on the second option, and this reflects a preference for ways of dealing with under-representation that are not too 'groupy' in nature. The option does, however, leave some difficult questions about accountability and what difference the proposed changes would bring. There was, for Britain, an unprecedented increase in the number of women MPs after the 1997 general election – a doubling of the proportion in parliament from just over 9% to just over 18% - and most of this increase came about as a result of affirmative action by the Labour Party. A significant number of the new Labour MPs had been selected by constituencies that were keen to address women's under-representation in politics; they were selected, then, at least partly on the basis of their gender. All of them, however, were elected as candidates of the Labour Party, with no obvious mandate to speak for anything else. How, then, could they legitimately challenge the Government's decision to end special benefits for single parents - the first major issue on which all those extra women in parliament might have been expected to make some difference? By what right could they set up their own views against those of the Party? Were they there to represent some vaguely defined constituency of women? Or were they there as representatives of Labour?

The dilemma facing these representatives is part of a broader picture that sees us caught between two different models of representation, and this is not a dilemma that can be solved within the framework of representation alone. I have stressed representation because I believe the renewal of democracy depends on addressing the persistent under-representation of marginalised groups and the closure of political alternatives that has for too long been associated with this. There is much we can do to improve our representative institutions, much to be done before we can share Paine's delight in the 'discovery' of representative democracy. But making our democracies more democratic can never be just about representation; it also depends crucially on the forms of organisation and participation in the wider society. We come back, in other words, to what has long been argued in feminist circles: the importance of the relationship between politics 'inside' and politics 'outside' the system. We need better forms of representation, and we need a lot more work on how best to achieve this goal. It would be a serious error, however, to think that the democratisation of our societies can proceed through transforming representation alone.

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The Politics of Presence: Problems and Developments

Anne Phillips

In the arguments I have developed around the 'politics of presence', fair representation means not only the fair representation of the electorate's *political views* (so that if half the electorate supports one political party and half the electorate supports another, the assembly ought to be roughly divided between these two parties); but also a fair representation of *characteristics like gender, ethnicity, race*. In this understanding of representation, there ought to be rough parity between women and men among the representatives. If the electorate contains significant ethnic and racial minorities, this diversity and range should also be roughly reflected in the composition of the representative body.

There are many arguments for this that are not particularly to do with representation *per se*. These include the notion that it is a terrible commentary on the nature of a society if it cannot give all its citizens, regardless of their sex, race etc, the genuinely equal opportunity to serve as political representatives; the idea that a society that allows a minority to monopolise positions of political authority is not an egalitarian society; or that a society that excludes what may turn out to be the numerical majority from positions of political influence is building up dangerous and potentially explosive resentments. But the arguments are also about what counts as fair representation: the idea that failing this 'politics of presence', democracies cannot hope to achieve fair representation of the full range of political concerns. It is this that proved the more difficult point to argue. I focus here on a numbers of problems that are typically (and rightly) raised.

1. The first point I want to deal with falls under the familiar heading of *essentialism*. Is it (a) possible and (b) desirable to categorise citizens for the purposes of political representation according to characteristics like gender, ethnicity, or race? Is this a useful or viable way of thinking about political identities? On the first aspect, there is clearly an issue about whether it makes sense to talk as if women as women, black people as black people, Muslims as Muslims, share enough experiences, perspectives, needs, interests to constitute a definite group. We know how infinitely varied people are. We know that many members of these so-called groups will explicitly reject 'their' group label (and this is not something we can just ignore or dismiss as false consciousness). We know that the members of these so-called groups can disagree very

strongly amongst themselves across a huge range of political issues. We also know that many identities are 'hybrid' – the identities of children born out of mixed-race marriages, of people who are bi-sexual, of people who have migrated from one country to another and have developed out of this process new kinds of cultural identity that do not simply reflect either their country of origin or their country of arrival. What, more generally, of the fact that within each of the categories, we almost always find ourselves compelled to sub-divide yet again, for we cannot isolate gender from identities of race, class, sexuality, age, ethnicity. One might think here of the argument developed by Elizabeth Spelman in *Inessential Woman* (Beacon Press, 1988), to the effect that trying to strip off 'the woman part' that all women supposedly have in common from all the other features that may characterise us does violence to our identities. Attempting to isolate the supposedly common 'female' element sets up one aspect of our identities as if it were more fundamental than the others, gives the misleading impression that there are women (seemingly without any ethnic identity) and then *also* people defined by their ethnic or religious characteristics, and generally creates categories that do not capture the way we are.

Even if we do manage to give the categories some meaning (even, that is, if this categorisation is possible) we also have to ask whether it is a desirable way to make the political divides. Is there not a danger that this will fix identities that are better understood as fluid and changing? Is it not rather backward-looking to lock people into these pre-defined identities, when much of the dynamism of contemporary politics takes the form of people shaking themselves free from these? Is it not more liberating to aim at freeing ourselves from prior definition by gender, or race of sexuality, claiming our right to exist as individuals not expressions of a category?

These are all very serious issues. My basic starting point in response (very similar to Iris M. Young in her article on 'Gender as Seriality' in *Intersecting Voices* (Princeton University Press, 1997) is that if we give up on any categorising of groups, we are forced to fall back on thinking of people only as individuals. In doing so, we lose the capacity to theorise relations of inequality, subordination and power. If you believe, as I do, that there is a systematic subordination and exclusion that operates precisely against and through such categorisations and groupings – that women are positioned as women and thereby suffer particular kinds of disadvantage, that racial minorities are positioned as racial minorities and as such are systematically disadvantaged or harassed or oppressed – then refusing to recognise the collective nature of this disadvantage makes it virtually impossible to address it. As far as political representation goes, refusing to acknowledge the group nature of current exclusions makes it impossible to come up with remedies other than the overly optimistic 'wait and see'.

2. This leads into a second set of problems that is recurrently raised as an objection to the politics of Presence. *Which groups* are we going to deal with? One review of *The Politics of Presence* charged me with doing just what New Labour is currently doing in the UK: taking the political under-representation of women seriously, but refusing to consider parallel measures for ethnicity or race. This responded to an argument I had developed in the book to the effect that it

is harder to extend mechanisms such as numerical quotas to exclusions by ethnicity or race: (a) because of the greater difficulties in identifying who belongs to which group; (b) the potential for endless subdivisions of categories like 'black' into 'Asian' and 'Afro-Caribbean', then of 'Asian' into Indian, Bangladeshi, Pakistani, and (c) the deep worries associated with the past history of racial quotas. In fact my argument was that gender, race and ethnicity should be seen as the three crucial categories, even if they might require different institutional solutions though needing different approaches. But what then of religion, disability, etc? Where should democracies intent on fairer representation of diverse groups draw the line?

My basic answer here relates to my response to the first issue: that the reason for focusing on group characteristics is that there are structures of power that have turned certain characteristics into sources of disadvantage and oppression, and that it is where there are such structures of power that intervention is most urgently required. Consider here the example of Northern Ireland, where the political division between nationalist and unionist coincides with a religious divide between Catholic and Protestant, and where fair representation then has to engage with some degree of proportionality according to religion. In this context, a political settlement that gave majority power to one or other of the two religious groups would not be regarded as fair. But saying this does not imply that all democracies have to ensure proportionality according to religion. In the rest of the United Kingdom, for example, the religious affiliations of politicians are largely unknown, and apart from some key issues like attitudes to abortion, religious affiliation has little predictive power. It would make no sense to say that religion always has to be taken as one of the politically salient divides; but it would also be inappropriate to rule religion out as irrelevant to each and every context.

Having said that, I remain troubled by what seems a certain pragmatism in my position, for part of the thinking behind my prioritisation of gender, ethnicity and race is a desire not to cloud the case by extending it to too many groupings. On sexuality, for example, I have been more concerned that it should be possible for politicians to be open about their existing sexual orientation – not to be forced to disguise or conceal their sexual identities–than with pursuing a case for representatives that roughly approximate to the sexual identities in the population as a whole. Is this because I do not think there are such significant structures of power at issue? Is it that the case is more difficult to establish because of the difficulties in knowing what proportion of the population is homosexual or heterosexual? Or is it more pragmatically that I do not want to cloud my case on women's representation by adding on too many issues?

Questions of class are particularly troubling here, and though I provide some discussion of this in *The Politics of Presence*, I am not convinced that my arguments there are entirely adequate. It is, of course, harder to set up a case for proportional representation according to class, for such an argument would have to tackle more forcibly notions about professionalism in the 'political class' and assumptions about merit and expertise. Maybe we should be tackling these more forcibly – but the politics of presence as currently argued or practised rarely engages on such grounds.

3. *Particularism* is also raised as a further objection. The argument here is that encouraging citizens to conceive of political representation as relating to the particularity of different groups – to *group* experiences, perspectives or interests – could discourage the capacity to forge alliances or address wider themes. The end result then might be a narrow politics of group interest, in which any broader considerations of justice drop out.

I think the best way of resolving this dilemma is through the relationship between a politics of presence and the development of more deliberative democracy. Many feel that we need a more deliberative democracy than we have at present. Usually what people mean by this is that they want a democracy that encourages representatives to deliberate on the issues rather than simply defending in an unthinking way what they see as their constituents' interests; that they want representatives to be able to think through the wider and longer-term implications of each issue; that they want them to be able to think, in the light of later knowledge, about what really is the most just as well as the most efficient way forward; that they want them to be able to reconsider their original positions in the light of what they discover about the needs and concerns of other groups. If we want this kind of democracy, however, it becomes more important than ever that all groups are fairly represented in the deliberative assembly.

Deliberation is at odds with a politics of mandates, for if we want our representatives to deliberate, we cannot also tie their hands by dictating to them in advance the precise policies they are supposed to pursue. This weakens some of the ties that democrats have traditionally favoured as the way to ensure fair representation. This would be entirely unacceptable in assemblies made up only of members from one social caste, for then there would be no guarantee – either through the implementation of manifestos or through shared experiences – that the representatives would be representing anyone but themselves. More fair representation – in the 'politics of presence' sense – is in my view the *sine qua non* of a more deliberative democracy. It is only when representatives contain among themselves a wide range of social experiences that we can more safely encourage them to pursue what they see as the longer-term view.

4. My fourth point relates to issues that Birte Siim has raised a number of contexts (Birte, have you published some version of the argument you developed at Stanford- if so, could you put that in as a reference here?) The politics of presence potentially risks promoting *representation without mobilisation*, for the possibly exaggerated focus on inclusion through official channels

(getting more individuals with the right kinds of characteristics to enter the political elite) could work to the detriment of local activism as an equally (perhaps more important) mechanism of political inclusion. In the process we might find ourselves with even more of a separation of the politics of elected assemblies from the politics of grass roots movements. Indeed the unhealthy emphasis on the first could actively demobilise the second.

I worry about this one, not so much as a conceptual problem (I see no conceptual reasons why one cannot support both forms of inclusion at once) but more as a practical one. There is undoubtedly a risk of complacency, for when people look around and see significant improvements in the number of women (if not yet of people from ethnic minorities) elected to parliament, they may well conceive that the problems are now solved. If the message that gets attached to the politics of presence is that numbers in parliament are all that should concern us, then this is a undoubtedly a problem.

5. The issues raised relate to a fifth question about *elitism*. Pursuing a politics of presence may end up providing political access only to certain members of the groups in question – usually the middle class professional, the ones, that is, who are most similar in status and class position to existing politicians. Where this is the case, it seems to go against the central thesis of a politics of presence, for instead of achieving a full range of citizens' perspectives, interests, and concerns, we may end up with a smallish sub-set, now pluralised along gender lines, but not in other ways more inclusive. This has proved particularly worrying at a time when the gap between 'successful' and unsuccessful' members of the group seems to be opening up. Thus the income gap between professional men and women is closing, women across Europe are now more likely than men to enter higher education, and larger numbers of women are managing to break the so-called 'glass ceiling' and reach high positions in management or the professions - yet all this coincides with continuing impoverishment for women in the lower paid, less skilled jobs. (This phenomenon is part of what generates notions of 'post-feminism.) If the pursuit of 'fairer representation' becomes no more than a means to assist women in their individual political careers, then it threatens to leave behind the larger claims associated with a politics of presence.

On both these two points, I can only say that we should not set up one strategy of inclusion in opposition to the other: that we should not focus exclusively on the composition of national parliaments and in the process ignore the wider mobilisation of women through the different spheres of civil society. But it does seem to be extraordinarily difficult to keep the various levels together – and this is something that has to be addressed with great care in the further development of a politics of presence.

6. The final (also related) point is that focusing on the composition of legislative and other assemblies may be an *overly -political solution* to problems that are still primarily located in the social and economic sphere. If you pursue the point about elitism, for example, you might have to conclude that when initiatives designed to get more women or more people from minority

groups elected as representatives are formulated in exclusively political terms (as when we develop affirmative action policies), then such initiatives can only assist the more middle class professional groups. The 'political fixes' are only going to help certain kinds of women, for it is only when we also tackle deeper structural problems that the opportunities to participate in political decision-making will become more widely available. In the case of women, these structural problems include the way the sexual division of labour continues to allocate to women the main responsibilities for carework, and the obstacles this inevitably places in the part of any woman thinking of putting herself forward as a candidate for political office. In English slang, focusing on political mechanisms to widen women's representation, without *first* addressing the sexual division of labour looks like a sad case of putting the cart before the horse.

Now, it has seemed to me (and I still hold to this position) that we have to challenge such arguments. We have to take issue with what has been an overly 'base-superstructure' model of political change: a model that sees specifically political initiatives almost as beside the point if we do not first achieve major social and economic change. Who, after all, is the 'we' in this? What reason do we have for thinking that the appropriate social and economic reforms will be put in place unless there are people from the group in question actively pressing for such change? Politics does not simply 'follow' economic and social transformation. Indeed if there is one thing that has become clearer in feminist arguments and campaigning over the last years it is that politics matters. The differences between one country and another cannot be read off deeper social and economic structures; in most cases, significant changes come about precisely because of political interventions and acts. So I do not want to fall back on what seems to me an empirically implausible (and fatalistic) base-superstructure analysis.

But I am also very concerned about the way issues of democratic inclusion seem to have pushed aside other issues of social and economic equality – and this is indeed the main theme of my most recent book *Which Equalities Matter?* (Polity Press, 1999). This was written against a background in British politics where we have a Labour Government that is constitutionally radical but economically conservative. On the one hand, the government has promoting reform of the House of Lords, devolving government in Scotland and Wales, and introducing proportional representation for the new Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly (if no longer, it seems, for the House of Commons). At the same time, however, it has been pursuing what I regard as conservative economic policies. For example, while the government seems seriously committed to addressing the problem of poverty (especially the problem of child poverty, which it views as the main source of low achievement and social disorder), it no longer sees equality as an important or desirable goal. This policy shift from issues of economic redistribution to issues of democracy and citizenship is also reflected in the academic literature (including – though to a lesser extent – the feminist literature), which has become more concerned with questions of political than social citizenship and less interested in what is happening to the division of labour. In that context, I would very much want to restore some of the earlier insights about the

relationship between political equality and social/economic conditions. Once again, it has proved extraordinarily difficult to keep different things together: in this case, to challenge the older base-superstructure analysis without thereby falling into a mirror opposite that treats political inclusion in isolation from social and economic conditions. I do not take this as a critique of *The Politics of Presence* – but certainly regard it as a task for future development.

The Dilemma of Quotas

Comment to Anne Phillip's arguments for quotas

Drude Dahlerup, GEP

Despite the fact that many, also many feminists, feel uncomfortable with the idea of quotas for women, this instrument is in fact being increasingly employed in politics. This is done either through constitutional amendments and electoral laws like in Uganda, India, Nepal, Belgium, Tanzania and France, or through decisions within political parties like in the Scandinavian countries (Dahlerup 1998).

In *The Politics of Presence*, (1995), Anne Phillips supports the idea of quotas for women. So do I! Quotas for women or for ethnic minorities, however, highlight some of the dilemmas embodied in the argument for a more fair representation. In her paper, "Representation Renewed", presented at Aalborg University, Anne Phillips develops the arguments and answers her critiques. I will argue that the idea of temporary quotas, rather than permanent, changes the arguments.

Anne Phillip's support for quotas for women and ethnic minorities (but surprisingly not for blacks in the United States) is justified in a radical concept of democracy, which requires the presence in all decisions-making bodies by all historically excluded groups (social representation). Theoretically convincingly, Anne Phillip's dismisses the argument that quotas are "reversed discrimination", and as such unjust. What is in focus here is the development, theoretically and in practice, of measures that can eliminate the *exclusion* of women and other groups from representation.

Even if the theoretical argument of *The Politics of Presence* focuses on exclusion, it also contains various reasons for inclusion. Anne Phillips argue for a possible and even likely connection between being a female representative and being able to represent women's experiences and the interests of women in general or that of specific groups of women. Anne Phillips dismisses the

justice argument (too much linked to individual women's career aspiration), and consequently she prefers arguments of women's different interests and experiences from those of men in general. These two arguments have always been controversial, and even more so in a poststructuralist' era. Anne Phillip's answers her critiques in the following way:

1. "Not women as a group, but as members of the group women"

Anne Phillips argues that there are in fact two kinds of representation

- 1) representing "a group"
- 2) representing/including "the members of a group"

The second approach does not presume the existence of any group identification or common group interests. It is a much looser form for group representation, Anne Phillips states.

By this new concept (point 2), Anne Phillips, however, in my view returns to the argument of justice: Women should be represented equally to men, simply because women constitute half the population - no matter what they will do with this new tool of influence. Within the justice argument, suffrage or equal representation becomes an end in itself, and women are freed from all the expectations of making - or on the contrary not making - a difference in politics.

However, in my view, the justice argument fits very well with the perspective of *exclusion* of women. In this way, quotas for women are seen as a measure to counteract previous exclusions of women. And women do not have to argue about whether they make any difference or not. Other excluded groups like ethnic minorities or immigrants might also prefer this straightforward argument, based on a concept of just representation (the political assemblies should mirror all fundamental groupings in society).

Most feminists are, however, not satisfied with the justice argument. Investigations into the arguments used by various women's organisations during the suffrage campaigns and today's arguments for about better representation for women, clearly reveal a hope, that more women in politics will change society. Consequently, the arguments of women's experience(s) and interest(s) re-enter the discussion. Anne Phillips theory does include arguments of the possibility, yes likelihood, that women will represent experiences and interests of women, and consequently I do not think that the concepts of members of the group women solve the problems.

The hope that women in politics will make a difference, a potential also included in Anne Phillips argument, is in focus in the Scandinavian countries where women now constitute 30-50 % of the parliaments and governments.

2. But women is not a series

Neither do the concept of a series, an incidental collective waiting for the bus (Iris Young/Sartre) help solving our theoretical problems. Women are not a random selection of individuals, who occasional will be activated. "Women" just like "men" an overdetermined concept, which in all known cultures is overloaded with meanings, that structures the life of all individuals.

Modern feminism must find its way(s) exactly between the wish to be freed from this overdetermination of gender on one hand, and on the other hand the desire not to abandon all values and cultural products, which are mostly associated with women and their work.

3. Essentialism

Today, any structural theory of women's oppression or exclusion, any talk about women's experiences or interests runs the risk of being met with criticism of being "essentialist". Since all feminist ideas throughout history have implied some sort of revolt against determinism and against biologism, this criticism seems to miss the point. Rather, this present critique must be seen as a reaction against the new women's movement in the 1970's and 80's, which worked hard to try to constitute women as a group. "Women's Liberation can only come true, if women liberate ourselves", as the popular feminist song had it. The poststructuralist critique is thus a revolt against this previous attempt to constitute women as a group "für sich", which on its part was a reaction against the structures that was said to split women and prevent collective actions by women. That gender is a construct is a common belief in all modern feminism. However, that statement does not solve the much more crucial question: Which of those cultural products, which through history have been developed mainly by women, do we want to keep and develop for all society.

What I label "the dilemma of equality politics" remains a true dilemma (Dahlerup 1998, II, pp. 86-88). When women work for entrance into until now male dominated arenas, from which women have historically been excluded, we risk coming to see the male as the norm, because position and maleness have melted together in our common understanding. Therefore new concepts like "female culture" or "rationality of care" were developed. And we are facing all the well-known dilemmas again. The point of intersection between essentialists and non-essentialists lies in the answer to the question, whether such values should be associated with women only, or shared by men as well.

4. Temporary or permanent quotas?

The introduction of quotas for women has everywhere been met with strong resistance from liberals, who argues that this is a violation of the principle of justice. However, among women and also among feminists, the attitudes are split on this issue. At the same time, quotas for women or gender quotas are been introduced in one country after the other.

If, however, quotas for women are introduced as a *temporary*, not a *permanent* measure, the need to solve all the difficult question of women as a group diminishes. *Temporary quotas are introduced as a measure against the processes of exclusion.* Quotas may be introduced as a temporary measure to overcome the barriers that women or other groups encounter right now. The prospect is, that one time in the future this measure will not be needed any longer.

But quotas as a temporary measure must be followed by strong initiatives to remove the structural barriers that in the first place prevented women from getting a fair representation. Quotas cannot be the only measure. To give an example: The Danish Socialdemocratic party in 1996 abandoned their women quotas introduced in the 1980's. This was pushed by the younger women of the party, who argued, that women did not need quotas any longer. Lack of strong measures to remove the structural barriers, however, gave the result, that in the first election to the European Parliament after the elimination of quotas, 4 middle age men were placed on the top of the Socialdemocratic list at the election. That caused a strong upheaval in the press - and among the voters.

Theoretically, the idea of temporary quotas places the focus on the processes of exclusion, while permanent quotas make it impossible to avoid the whole discussion of women's experiences and interests.

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GEP - THE RESEARCH PROGRAMME GENDER, EMPOWERMENT AND POLITICS

THE RESEARCH PROGRAMME GENDER, EMPOWERMENT AND POLITICS (GEP) deals with the changing political importance of gender in modern societies. During the last 30 years, women have moved from a position of political powerlessness to political presence and influence in the Danish democracy. Women's new role in politics has had deepgoing consequences - not only for women but also for men.

The aim of the programme is to analyse the interplay between gender relations and discourses of gender on the one hand and changes in the European welfare states and models of democracy on the other. The basic hypothesis is that politics is a determining factor for the construction of gender - and conversely that gender relations influence the political discourses and the political institutions. From this double assumption, new questions concerning the interconnection between civil, political, and social citizenship are analysed.

The programme emphasises two factors: First analysing processes and patterns behind the double tendencies toward empowerment and social exclusion of social groups in terms of gender and class. Secondly, the differentiation within the group of women and men analysing the interplay between gender and class. Maintaining the perspective of gender, these differentiations will make visible the differences of generations as well as the differences between the educated/employed and the marginalized groups.

Questions connected with public equality politics, the increasing representation of women, women's participation in the local political communities and the political elite, as well as strategies against marginalization and poverty will be discussed through projects and case studies.

The project is carried out by six scientists from four different institutions.

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