

## Rethinking urban diversity

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### Introduction – diversity and context

As a social and political notion, diversity varies highly among different contexts. Vertovec (2010) uses diversity interchangeably with multiculturalism echoing mainly what happens in the Anglophone world. In fact, diversity mostly makes sense in respect to the melting pot notion in the New Anglophone World and to the tolerated juxtaposition of difference at the core of the post-colonial Commonwealth. It would make much less sense in the assimilationist context of French Republicanism or during the West German *gastarbeiter* period.

Diversity varies also over time. Vertovec proposed 'super-diversity' (2007) as a notion that updates the content of diversity so that it covers the multidimensionality produced by the new dynamics of migration. Super-diversity is proposed as a post-multiculturalist approach of diversity grasping the interaction amongst its various dimensions under conditions of increased migrant mobility, multiple legal statuses, transnational living and the various feelings of belonging they entail. He eventually insists, along with other authors, on the need to reconsider policies elaborated on the understanding of migrant/minority groups as internally homogenous and unchanging communities, an approach that leaves out an increasingly large number of people who do not feel adequately represented by groupings based on their formal national and/or ethnic attributes. More recently, Tasan-Kok et al. (2013) involved in the FP7 project 'Divercities' proposed alternatively the notion of 'hyper-diversity' as a way to go beyond migration-based diversity and embrace also other possible dimensions of diversity and their interaction, following the basic idea of intersectionality (Anthias 2013). Additional dimensions of diversity, according to these authors, comprise class inequalities, age differences, gender, sexual preferences etc.

These are certainly pertinent remarks on the inadequacies and limitations of the multiculturalist approach of diversity; in this paper I would mainly like to take the discussion of diversity a bit further by questioning the ways the content of this notion evolves in parallel with important socioeconomic and political changes.

Capitalist globalization and the dominance of neoliberal policies in the last 30 years have changed considerably the *rapport des forces* between Capital and Labour, and eventually curtailed the part of the social product appropriated by the latter. As the appropriation of the lion's share by Capital becomes increasingly indisputable, it also becomes increasingly invisible, and disappears from the political game. This limits the stakes in the political arena and promotes new criteria for shaping social policies which downplay social redistribution in favour of the 'rational' use of resources that seem to be available. Under these conditions, the diverse profiles of those who sell their labour force often become the main way of gaining advantages or suffering disadvantages in the increasingly antagonistic redistribution of resources amongst workers.

Within this new landscape of social and political *rappports des forces*, and regardless of contextual differences, multiculturalism started taking blows from all sides, either as a breeder of national disintegration and insecurity or as a way to avoid addressing class based inequalities and welfare withdrawal (Vertovek 2010). The political unpopularity of multiculturalism, especially for governing parties throughout the major countries of Europe, is obviously not related to the definitional inadequacies of diversity, but rather to the new social and political stakes that diversity implies. The unanimous declaration, a few years ago, by Merkel, Sarkozy and Cameron about the failure of multicultural policies<sup>1</sup> was an attempt by conservative parties in most European countries by adopting (more or less) nationalist and xenophobic discourses to legitimate austerity policies. This was an attempt to draw political gains from antagonisms over depleted resources within the Labour camp, which legitimated and promoted the extreme Right political agenda and, eventually, boosted the scores of its parties in recent European and national elections and polls. And although multiculturalist measures and policies have not been seriously reduced in several countries –especially those with a strong welfare state tradition– the political conditions for their preservation and development have substantially been undermined.

My main argument is that approaches of diversity that emphasize its increasing complexity and the increasing difficulties of its management, tend to overshadow issues of inequality and discrimination. They focus less on the structures and mechanisms that reproduce inequalities and discrimination and deal more with the ways diversity can be managed to produce positive economic and social effects. Such an approach is characteristic of the European Commission, as I will mention later.

In the following I will be looking at diversity through four different angles, while trying to preserve the focus on inequality and discrimination as a common thread that reveals the actual social and political content of diversity.

### A genealogy of diversity

The first angle is to place diversity in a genealogy of concepts which describe and in fact assess urban societies; by the way each of these concepts describes urban societies, they reveal –implicitly or explicitly– the issues on which they focus and, thus, are putting on the agenda.

Several years ago in a paper about urban governance and social cohesion with Maro Pantelidou (Maloutas, Pantelidou Malouta 2004) we tried to show that social cohesion is a rather vague concept which denotes, however, a significant change in the content of social and political agendas. The more egalitarian goals of bridging social distances and the rather explicit terms that expressed them (reduction of inequalities, narrowing of gaps etc.) were replaced by less encompassing goals of social justice, expressed by new terms like inclusion and social cohesion. These news terms signify holding society together and avoiding

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<sup>1</sup> For Merkel’s declarations about the failure of multiculturalism see Weaver (2010) and Noack (2015); for similar declarations from Cameron and Sarkozy see Cameron (2011) and CBNNews (2011).

the exclusion of groups at its lower socioeconomic echelons from the fiction of a prospering 2/3 mainstream society. This transition from rather explicit egalitarian goals to more vague and limited social goals and terms is concomitant with the transition from a period of welfare state growth to the gradual domination of neoliberal ideas and policies that demoted such goals and subsumed them to economic growth objectives that were henceforth considered of primary societal importance and priority.

Diversity may be considered a further step down this line of concepts and notions that describe (urban) societies by focusing on what are implied as their central issues and, by that, what is required as a policy agenda. Describing a city as unequal implies immediately policies that should bridge the gaps; a city described as socially fragmented, where exclusion appears as an imminent danger, implies the need for policies promoting social cohesion; and a city described as diverse implies the need to manage this diversity without specifying the social and political objectives of this management. The approach adopted by the European Commission on 'societal challenges' prescribed as research missions for Horizon 2020 (<https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/en/h2020-section/societal-challenges>) is characteristic of the reluctance to address inequalities and discriminations as issues per se, unless the scope is limited to managing their extreme forms and their negative impact. 'Societal challenges' comprise issues like ageing and climate change, which seem more susceptible of technocratic solutions, and leave aside issues like tax evasion, avoidance and offshoring whose immediate political management is more complicated and which are left to be dealt with at the national level where no effective solution can be promoted.

This narrative about diversity is, to a large extent, Eurocentric. If we look at the other side of the Atlantic, the genealogy of diversity as a description of urban social milieus would be quite different. It would involve the constant tension between the melting-pot side of the American dream and the resilient urban segregation structures studied since the Chicago School and fought by the Civil Rights Movement; and since segregation in US cities is almost synonymous to ethno-racial segregation, the implied social issue is discrimination and the policy agenda is anti-discrimination, mainly by controlling the negative effects of segregation. Thus, by making diversity a privileged way of approaching European urban societies –and since diversity is mainly related to ethnocultural difference– there seems to be some indirect corroboration in the claim that European cities are moving towards the American model.

Diversity is, therefore, first of all a way of perceiving and describing (urban) societies, which focuses on difference rather than on inequality. We need, therefore, to turn to particular interpretations of what diversity means –that are numerous and often contradictory– in order to give the term a specific social and political content.

### Diversity and inequality

The second angle through which I would like to reconsider diversity is its relation to equality and social justice.

To consider subjects as unequal requires some degree of homogeneity, of sameness, that permits comparison in the first place. Diversity is by definition the negation of homogeneity and, therefore, makes any reference to equality/inequality dependent on the system of difference it pinpoints. For a rather homogeneous population group of economically active white males, differences in class positions may be easily understood in terms of inequality, while if gender and ethnicity are also considered the observed differences become more complex as they involve multiple systems of inequality, hierarchy and discrimination.

François Dubet has published a book (Dubet 2010) where he stresses the difference between the two major forms of social inequality –unequal positions and unequal opportunities– and investigates their relation to social justice. He shows that claiming equal opportunities for social justice is closer to liberal ideological principles, while defending the minimization of distances among social positions is closer to socialist principles. In fact, both forms of equality are essential for social justice, and one-sided attention to either one creates injustices. Focusing exclusively on distances among class positions usually leaves out those who are not securely inserted in the class position system, while by focusing exclusively on opportunities we underestimate the fact that equal opportunities to unequal individuals lead to unequal outcomes in a systematic way. Therefore, even though both forms of equality need one another, equal positions are a priority for a solid egalitarian project, and in fact a prerequisite for opportunities that are effectively equal.

If diversity is considered a crucial social feature of urban societies, and social justice issues are addressed mainly in respect of diversity, then we come closer to equal opportunity principles than to positional equality; differences among individuals and groups appear as the major separating element affecting the just redistribution of resources rather than distance among their positions within some hierarchical system. The transition from inequality to diversity as the main focus of social and political attention follows in fact the economic and political changes of the last four decades leading from Fordist regulation within a variety of capitalist regimes to the more homogenous postmodern condition.

The differences that constitute what we usually understand as diversity have become increasingly prominent during the last decades and overshadowed inequalities.

Capitalist globalization and the domination of neoliberal policies have weakened considerably the position of Labour in the Capital / Labour relation, and eventually curtailed the resources Labour is receiving through redistribution. This weakening process was certainly supported by the diversification of identities in the camp of Labour that make a specific commodity (labour force) to be treated differently and traded unequally following certain characteristics of its holders (like gender or ethnicity) that are usually irrelevant to its quality, but are closely related to entitlements associated to such characteristics. Entitlements may be legally bound (as those related to nationality and citizenship) or related to established practices (e.g. gendered practices in the labour market that form glass ceilings and gender gaps in remuneration for the same jobs). The long-term reproduction of discrimination according to such different characteristics contributes to their

essentialization and hence to reinforcing sexism and racism, and to consolidating their effect on inequality.

Thus, discrimination on the basis of the essentialized characteristics of all individuals takes currently precedence over inequality amongst positions held by some of these individuals within class systems where they are more or less integrated. Diversity may therefore be considered a notion that conveys primarily the incommensurability of individuals; it downplays class positions and the issue of inequality amongst them by bringing to the fore other attributes whose social importance is to a large extent tautological since it derives from the discriminating impact of their essentialized nature. A man and a woman providing the same work are treated differently because of the essentialized differences of their historically constituted social roles. The stereotyped and immanent identities assumed in multiculturalist and interculturalist approaches also essentialize the long and discriminating impact of colonial history and neo-colonial practice. Diversity may therefore be either a descriptive inventory of stereotyped differences that reinforces this essentialization or –when openly addressing and challenging discrimination– may lead to the opposite result and really raise issues of social justice. In this sense, diversity does not have an inherent ideological / political predilection and meaning; it rather follows what the dominant wave assigns as its content. And since neoliberalism is still dominant, diversity is usually interpreted and operates in the first sense.

On the whole, the post-modern condition weakens the foundation of social justice on the equality of positions within inclusive class systems –which it tends to disintegrate– and favours turning to the equality of opportunities, undermining by that the egalitarian social project. To a large extent, it does this through the general increase of mobility; and it is the unequal role and participation of Capital and Labour to this increased mobility that enhances the tension between diversity and equality.

#### Diversity, mobility and visibility/invisibility

This brings us to the third angle under which I want to consider diversity, i.e. its relation to mobility.

Movement and mobility have been related to urban diversity for more than a century. Tönnies, Simmel and later the Chicago School have elaborated on contrasting the ‘immobile’ traditional, small and closed village communities to the open communities of the modern metropolis, which facilitated mobility and bred individualism (Maloutas 2004; Bassand, Kaufmann & Joye 2007; Grefmeyer & Joseph 1984). The increased division of labour created a much higher level of social diversity throughout the fast growing cities, which produced in its turn new waves of intertwined social and spatial mobility. Social and spatial mobility seem to have moved in parallel courses throughout the long years of the old industrial development model and its expression through multiple varieties of capitalism across the globe. These parallel courses are particularly marked by the massive growth of urban populations and of the middle-classes that eventually reduced the very pyramidal social structure and the inequality of income distribution (Piketty 2014) in advanced capitalist countries in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Capitalist globalization and the new economy model brought important changes in the relation between mobility and diversity, mainly by establishing completely asymmetrical mobility situations for Capital and Labour. Capital used to be personalized and locally bounded. Its increased movement in the form of accelerated investment / disinvestment –greatly supported by its financialization– made Capital’s presence much more volatile in terms of both time and space. Volatility, in terms of space, is the ability of capital to choose the locations for its investment and the spatial scale at which to negotiate its interests. Volatility, in terms of time, results from the constantly shorter intervals between consecutive moves. With the leverage of investment promise and the threat of disinvestment, Capital tends to avoid confrontation at the national level, where Labour has historically consolidated its power.

By becoming a kind of external factor at the national level, Capital is transformed to an invisible and uncontrollable force, out of reach for national social and political arenas. The political burden is no longer in equilibrating opposite social interests in the distribution of resources, but in devising local and national strategies to attract investment in a fierce competition amongst local and national entities. Capital has to be lured by the highest bidders. The perception that markets are an intangible force is in fact transforming a social relation to a ‘natural’ force that stands out and above social and political relations. Thus, at the national level –and at the level of supranational coalitions and unions like the EU– Labour has to face government(s) much more than Capital; and governments usually choose to act as if the power of markets is out of reach, explaining this choice as political realism on which is built the dominant political rationalism.

At the same time, the enhanced mobility of capital has modified its role in the process of growth. According to Mazzucato (2013) the liberation of capital from the traditional spatial confines and temporal requirements of its investment, has completely changed its contribution to producing innovation and, therefore, to producing growth. Being practically and politically free to focus on the short term and on the most profitable part of the long process of innovation, Capital increasingly avoids investment in the uncertain phases of research and early stage innovation, while it has become very active in the ways it can maximize gains at the end of the innovation process through the stock market and through the minimization of tax for capital gains. In the new economy, Capital minimizes its part and maximizes its gains from innovation by becoming increasingly parasitic at the expense of both the workers in innovative industries and the taxpayers whose increasing contribution to producing innovation is socializing the risks, while Capital’s focused investments privatize the profits. At the same time, austerity policies and public funding cuts reduce the investment for research and innovation, curtailing thus the prospective impact on growth.

The unleashed mobility of Capital has been concomitant with the growing mobility of people. However, people are moving much more as bearers of purchase power (i.e. as tourists) or as business travellers than as bearers of the commodity they inherently carry (labour power) and that they can possibly sell in different places.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> It is interesting to compare the much greater increase during the 2000s in the mobility of individuals as carriers of solvent demand for tourist services

Labour is much more constrained than capital in its movement, since –unlike Capital– the labour force commodity cannot be equitized or otherwise physically separated from its holders.

Moreover, policy frames promoted under conditions of capitalist globalization treat the mobility of Capital and Labour very unequally, following the assumption that Capital is beyond reach, being also beyond recognition as a social relation. The different policy frames for the mobility of Capital and Labour are materialized in, and reproduced by, the globally dominant pro-growth, pro-competitiveness policies and by the subsidiarity of social policies, which illustrate, on the one hand, the ability of Capital to move across the deregulated scape of locations and spatial scales and the regulated confinement of Labour to national boundaries, on the other.<sup>3</sup> In such a context, the main asset for labour force bearers in motion is the usefulness of the commodity they carry (i.e. skills in demand) which legitimates their mobility and acts like a passport for their movement. At the same time, this legitimates also the impediments for the movement of those with no skills in demand.

Therefore, the mobility of Capital is considered as a plus for growth and is enabled by international treaties and agreements in ways that put it beyond control, especially for countries and regions that either suffer from disinvestment or have to make excessive concessions to attract new investment. On the other hand, the mobility of Labour is strongly regulated at the national level and becomes increasingly eclectic, depending on the quality of the commodity embodied by the bearers of labour power. In this sense, what happens for the Labour part of the Capital-Labour relation is a de-humanizing personalization, i.e. the loss of the right to move related to the human nature of people in motion in favour of skills or other commodified features evaluated as assets or liabilities. Thus, Labour moves under completely unequal conditions –negatively affecting especially the less skilled– and its advantages are far from matching those that Capital draws from its increased mobility.

The main impact on the perception of diversity from the unequal increase in the mobility of Capital and Labour derives from the growing invisibility of Capital as a social relation and the invisibility of people in motion as carriers of the human property. By concealing class relations, the bearers of the labour force commodity become visible mainly through their skills that make them useful or redundant and their other characteristics (nationality, age, gender etc) which are essentialized and evaluated as such.

It is within this radical reshaping of the relation between Capital and Labour that labour force mobility is enhanced nowadays through migration. And labour force mobility –once again unlike Capital mobility– is often forced in its origins, caused by wars, poverty or natural disasters, and constrained at the receiving end through complex legal frames and enforced control, which eventually lead to an amalgam of promoted, tolerated or restricted mobility.

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(consumers) than as carriers of the labour force commodity (migrants) (Recchi 2015).

<sup>3</sup> The EU offers a good example: social policies are subsidiary, while competitiveness constitutes a heavily subsidized central EU policy objective.

The diversity that is produced at the level of migration receiving cities has to face the depletion of resources left for Labour, following the massive tax evasion and avoidance that have led to the growth of austerity regimes. As Capital becomes increasingly invisible as a social relation, social justice appears related to fairness in the distribution of depleted resources amongst the groups that constitute this increased urban diversity. Thus, an arena of competition over the available resources is usually created, where groups that are better positioned in current social and political arrangements and power structures claim their rights on the basis of features related to these arrangements and structures. In doing so, they contribute in essentializing their own features as positive assets (e.g. nationality and citizenship) versus others' features as negative (e.g. absence of legal documents, 'dangerous' religious beliefs). Drawing from a colonial past and from centuries of nationalism, rich in the essentialization of difference, the antagonistic urban settings of globalization's diversity contribute to ethnicize, racialize or otherwise stereotype and discriminate labour force carriers –and hence the whole population– in a process that eventually strips them of their human property as the source of their rights. This type of antagonism over the appropriation of available resources becomes eventually a major component in the workings of local and national political systems that often overshadows class divisions and contributes to making traditional ideological and political divides (Left/Right) seem out-dated.

Under such conditions, it seems increasingly common sense to promote pro-Capital policies that appear as the outcome of rational and, at the same time, unavoidable decisions, while labour's interests appear as a contradictory mess that has to be slowly and painstakingly sorted out. The identities of labour force carriers become increasingly diversified not only because more cultural backgrounds are present, but also because the lived experience and the expectations of people with transnational lives are increasingly oppressed within the confines of nationalism that marginalize them as eternal outsiders. Nina Glick-Schiller (2014) showed this very clearly in a recent paper on the experience and the sense of belonging of young, second generation migrants in different European cities. National(ist) borders remain real and effective in dividing labour force carriers, while capital enjoys a much freer circulation, even if this is achieved at the expense also of multitudes of smaller or weaker capitalists. In these increasingly diversified settings, it is more and more difficult to find common ground for struggle against the asphyxiating domination of neoliberal policies and the only hope, according to Glick-Schiller again, are the shared experiences of the outcast migrants with the increasingly growing margins of local precariats. However, the adoption of variants of an extreme Right agenda by several conservative and social democrat parties – in Europe at least– remains a strong opposite trend, which has enabled the important growth of the influence of extreme Right parties throughout the continent, appeasingly qualified as the growth of populism.

The increased urban socio-cultural diversity produced within capitalist globalization seems thus, ironically, to go together with the restriction of political options and, at the same time, with the total or partial exclusion of large numbers of people who form this diversity from political rights. Diversity seems therefore to develop in parallel with the limitation of democracy.

## Diversity and Democracy

So, the fourth angle through which I would like to consider diversity is its relation to Democracy.

Diversity is the opposite of homogeneity or sameness, and this opposition may be understood in different ways.

In societies largely organized as nation-states, homogeneity is usually considered an important positive asset and understood as the basis of social cohesion in terms of attributes, like language and culture, related to a common national origin. This creates clear 'US's and clear 'THEM's, and otherness has to be dealt with by assimilation, exclusion or domination. Tensions appear between individual social and political rights and collective minority rights, as well as between individual identities and feelings of belonging and minority communities' representation. The same dipole of diversity/homogeneity may alternatively be understood in a different, pluralist way, when diversity is portrayed as a positive asset. The 'US' and 'THEM' continue to be established on the same separating foundation, but otherness is dealt with as the tolerated –or even celebrated in more optimistic visions, like Walzer's (1997)– juxtaposition of equally immanent/stereotyped identities because it is presumed to be leading to a mutually beneficial and synergistic cohabitation.

Within, and cutting across, such homogeneous groups other important differences –mainly class positions– (re)emerge and (re)create different types of US and THEM. These differences are founded on inequality among similar subjects rather than on other forms of dissimilarity; and since we are dealing with unequal and inequality yielding capitalist societies, all forms of diversity become eventually the subject of some kind of social ranking.<sup>4</sup>

This systematic social ranking of diversity is a problem for democracy, unless democracy is understood simply as a set of political procedures and management policies. In that case, diversity is understood as growing complexity that has to be effectively managed; and multidimensional urban diversity –as in super or hyper-diversity– may be easily reduced to a growing complexity that begs for ways to accommodate different social, cultural, generational and otherwise diverse needs and resources in close spatial proximity. This eventually leads to understanding diversity as a complex problem that requires a technocratic approach based on rational analysis and choice.

But, if democratic theory is involved, the tension between democracy and socially ranked diversity becomes even clearer.

Democracy, perceived in a more or less broad way, is a watchword for a variety of notions and aspirations that go far beyond the issues raised by liberal democracy and the mere possession of political rights. Diversity, on the other hand –as a hierarchy of particularities that negates universality– raises problems even for the most narrow notion of democracy. At the level of attribution of rights, democracy and especially contemporary theories of participatory democracy, presuppose a perception and management of diversity that leads not only to equality in the

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<sup>4</sup> See Savage (215, 232) on the exceptional power of the British to create hierarchy out of diversity.

possession of rights, but also to the possibility of their equal exercise. Questions of social equality and non-discrimination reemerge thus, since they are intrinsically linked to effectively implementing democracy and promoting the democratic project. Indeed democracy is a theory of society (Mackpherson 1973) and thus an ongoing project, which refers to a critical concept (Arblaster 1991), by which reality is measured and always found lacking. It is a process and a way of life (Barber 1998, Benhabib 1996), and not a positive state. According to Pierre Bourdieu, it is a “historical process of active negation (...) a never-ending effort to make social relations less arbitrary, institutions less unjust, distributions of resources and options less imbalanced” (Wacquant 2005, 21). In conditions where all inequalities, including those covered under “diversity” are not a central target for “less inequality” policies, democracy in negated.

The internal contradictions of liberal democracy being indeed what they are, make it impossible for democracy to deliver what it promises (Hall 2002) because it tries to produce equal political subjects out of unequal social subjects. The co-existence of political equality and social inequality is the basic weakness of democracy, commonly leading to a “mockery of the ideals and values that democracy is held to embody” (Pateman 1989, 223, referring to gender inequality). The key issue is universal citizenship. According to I.M. Young (1990), universal citizenship is defined as general –as opposed to particular– in the sense of what citizens have in common, i.e. their human nature, and not in what they differ. At the same time, universal citizenship is also defined as same treatment by laws and rules that should be blind to individual and group differences. Inequality and essentialised or otherwise socially ranked diversity are therefore curtailing universality and make it incompatible with democracy. Democracy requires the possession of political rights as well as the conditions that make these rights effectively exercised by all.

This means that democracy requires not only political but effective social rights as well. Free and equal citizens are a prerequisite for democracy to function. Since they do not really exist, democracy has to create them. In this sense, diversity in a general period climate of welfare provisions, optimism and belief in a better future for all, can co-exist with democracy as expected plurality, and can even be seen as the reason for which democracy is needed. On the contrary, in conditions of neo-liberal ideological hegemony, the promotion of fixed identities that are excluding each other, the idea of boundaries that are insurmountable and fixed once and for all, are by definition contradictory with democracy. It is clear furthermore, that the way in which a notion, like diversity, is conceptualized, is actually significant for social reality, since it determines the framing of policies that affect it.

It is a fact that although democracy presupposes the rejection of strictly defined and opposed identities, so that it may function for all with no exclusions, at the same time, aiming at the maximization of the participation by all and their effective social inclusion, it is necessary to promote the assertion of specific identities for the institutionalization of measures for equality (Nash 1998). This contradiction forms an additional difficulty for the substantial democratic transformation of political and social relations, while the way it is handled determines the kind of social coexistence promoted. This contradiction, furthermore, makes it obvious that on a certain level (especially in policy formation) it seems unfeasible for the time being not to view the subjects of democracy as agents of pre-existing and given unequal

identities and interests, which obviously is the common perception on the matter.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, this constitutes the sole stance consistent in the long term with the constitutive principles of democracy.

As a way out of this impossibility of democracy in unequal societies, diversity may be given a content that promotes the democratic project if it is conceived as the (accepted) possibility of alternatives. Following Mouffe's (2013) conceptualization of agonistic politics, diversity can be related to the possibility of political space, which is strangled when the sociopolitically dominant 'WE' translates its hegemony to rationality and evicts alternative choice from political decisions. Neoliberal policies are clearly associated with the eviction of choice that makes democracy redundant and impossible, and Thatcher's 'There Is No Alternative' could not express this eviction of choice any better. Diversity related to agonistic politics would therefore recognize adverse sociopolitical projects and the continuously reformed 'WE's and 'THEM's related to these projects that struggle for hegemony in the democratic arena, rather than try to translate their transient hegemony to overarching rationalities that hollow-out the democratic process by producing a rationalist 'WE' that leaves no space for the redundant 'THEM'.

## Conclusion

As a concluding remark, I will argue that democracy is certainly not a problem, i.e. in the way it is treated by neoliberal policies that try to hollow it out as much as possible. However, it is not a magic solution either for the egalitarian project, since notions of diversity and inequality are enmeshed in intricate ways in politico-ideological beliefs and discourses. In a recent paper with Maro Pantelidou (2012) we pinpoint the complex and contradictory relation between supporting egalitarian ideas and accepting diversity as the foundation of particularistic rights. We used data from the European Social Survey (especially from the module on welfare attitudes that was part of the survey in Round 4 [2008]). In short, what we found out was that the largely majoritarian support for social equality (founded on the positive answers by almost 75% of respondents to the questions: 'Governments should reduce differences in income levels?' and 'For a fair society, differences in standards of living should be small') is seriously undermined in two ways:

- The first is the parallel support for traditional liberal or neoliberal interpretations of social justice. A considerable part of respondents who are within the large majority expressing egalitarian views in terms of income differences, at the same time, consider large differences in standards of living acceptable if they are rewards of talent and effort; or consider social benefits too big a strain on the economy and business; or believe that social benefits breed laziness and unwillingness to take responsibility; or consider that social order is more effectively maintained through a punitive rather than a welfare state.
- The second way (and most important here) that support for egalitarian views and policies is undermined is related to the mode and degree of accepting diversity as a parameter defining those who should and those who shouldn't

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<sup>5</sup> See Mouffe (1993, 86) criticizing Young (1987 and 1990) for perceiving groups "with their interests and identities already given".

benefit from egalitarian policies. The profile of those entitled to equality is restricted and the participation, for example, of immigrants or women becomes conditional. For a very substantial percentage of respondents, immigrants receive more than they contribute, make the host country a worse place to live and should acquire social rights under very strict conditions, if they ever do. A smaller, but still considerable proportion of respondents within the majority of those expressing egalitarian views, perceives differently the rights of men and women, making egalitarian claims conditional for the latter (e.g. limited right to employment when 'there are not enough jobs for men') on grounds of their stereotypic and subordinate social roles.

Diversity is interesting, therefore, not only for the intricate ways this notion is effectively integrated in the social and economic structures and practices of urban societies, but also for the ambivalent ways its constitutive features are perceived. These constitutive features are perceived in ways that either do not affect the human nature of their holders as the source of equal social and political rights, or become essentialized and classify their holders in different categories of access to such rights. The considerable extent to which diversity is essentialized even for supporters of egalitarian social conditions (and academic acknowledgement and positive discrimination policies have unintendedly contributed to this) provides the basis of its political manipulation to further divide the camp of Labour.

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