Authorisation and Authenticity: Does Democracy Really Need Political Parties?

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The specialist literature makes it clear that political parties clearly face challenges – and challengers. In this open-ended and exploratory paper I try to get under the skin of selected key features of democracy in theory and practice, in order to tease out some underlying aspects of the challenge to parties. I begin with the idea of democracy as a system in which citizens are the authors of their destinies. I then ask what political systems have no need for partisan groupings like parties, and infer from this the features of systems which do need them – or something very like them. By exploring briefly historical shifts and internal tensions between two variants of authorship – authorisation and authenticity – I argue that a demand for (perceived) authenticity lies close to the heart of the troubled lives of contemporary parties across various countries. An extended account of nonelectoral representative claims, and how it is fruitful to view representation as an economy of claim-making, underpins this view. I conclude with an account of how the need for parties to simulate and to sell authenticity in a crowded and dynamic political marketplace forms the core of the contemporary challenge to parties.

Authorship and Democracy

There is nearly endless scope for debating exactly what are the basic principles of democracy. There is plenty of it around and it is far from clear that more would be helpful (see for example Dahl 1989; Beetham 1999; Saward 1998). Democrats call on and seek to enact within institutions and procedures an open-ended set of principles – which ones, and how they are understood and put into effect, depends upon cultural and historical context (I discuss this in detail in Saward 2003). However, a regularly invoked principle is that of self-determination: the capacity and the desirability of citizens being the authors of their own destiny despite, and in part due to, their membership of a bounded, larger political community. Self-determination thus evokes an idea of self-authorship – the importance of writing one’s own story, making one’s own choices, and not being unduly (arbitrarily, etc.) subject to the will of another. This is not to imply that each citizen will have a destiny, or know what it is if they do, or will make choices that may realise it.

The idea of self-authorship can be unpacked in different ways. In particular, there is a tension between two key sides of the notion, namely those of authorisation and authenticity. Authorisation involves a principal empowering an agent to act on their behalf. Authenticity involves the principal acting ‘as themselves’, in such a way that it expresses or embodies their genuine wish or (perceived) interest. Political parties are agents of authorisation – among the many other things that they are (I am picking out one
key aspect of their nature, not trying to subsume their wide range of characteristics and functions to one). My interest lies in the extent to which this characteristic of parties detracts from or glosses over their capacities to capture the authentic views and wishes of citizens. Certainly, in one way or another, they continue to claim this capacity. But I will go on to suggest that it is the inevitable and multiple tensions between authorisation and authenticity which pose significant challenges to the role of parties in democracy.

**Politics without Parties**

Let us take one step back now. Democracy, however it is understood exactly, is a distinctive mode of organising the conduct of politics, the demand for which arises in particular circumstances that are closely linked to the demand for authorisation and authenticity. Consider what political circumstances do not give rise for this need. Plato’s ideal republic is the primary example. Philosopher-kings would operate in a context of certainty about what the right and true course for a political community must be (even if they must strive long and hard to perceive the products of their deeper wisdom which provide that certainty) – ‘we can rightly call his state of mind one of knowledge; and that of the other man, who holds opinions only, opinion’ (Plato, 1955 edn, 270). Through the special capacities and inclinations of the philosopher we reach, on Plato’s account, a question that can only be answered one way: ‘If philosophers have the capacity to grasp the eternal and immutable, while those who have no such capacity are not philosophers and are lost in multiplicity and change, which of the two should be in charge of a state?’ (p.276).

Robert Nozick’s utopia in *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (1974) is a quite different example which tends to the same end. It is extraordinary that one of the most influential books on political philosophy of the second half of the twentieth century nowhere uses the word ‘democracy’ (quite literally). In essence, this is because in Nozick’s libertarian utopia there is no significant ground for dispute about what states (or political authority more generally) are for. They have a job to do, it is clear what that job is, and that’s the end of the story: ‘treat us with respect by respecting our rights, [the state] allows us, individually or with whom we choose, to choose our life and to realize our ends and our conception of ourselves, insofar as we can, aided by the voluntary co-operation of other individuals possessing the same dignity. How dare any state or group of individuals do more. Or less.’ (Nozick 1974: 334). Separated as they are by over two millennia (and countless other arguments to similar effect), these views amount to an argument that what ideal or properly constituted states do is (or will be) authentically in the interests of citizens, and therefore that formal or procedural authorisation of the state and its agents is entirely unnecessary, since no one outside political authority has the wisdom or the right to will the state to do anything other than what it (knows it) must (already) do. In both cases there is a kind and a source of certain knowledge of what is right and proper for the state to do. Authenticity is assumed and need not be demonstrated. Authorisation of state by the citizenry is unnecessary, beside the very point of the systems concerned.

The *Republic/Utopia* vision contains certain key, general characteristics. It has no use for scepticism; it is unified; it does not require political mediation (since the interests of all are one, no negotiation via mediators is required). The interests of the whole are everything, and any interests felt by parts or factions are illegitimate or illusory and may therefore be discounted. That is a world of Certainty (a world of the imagination, as all worlds are, though attempted to be put into practice many times over several centuries).
There is no point of political parties in such an order, unless it is one party which crystallises all interests into one, since political parties stand for parts not wholes, embody righteous certainty in themselves perhaps but more broadly accept their sharing of a political community with other organised and institutionalised factions/interests/parties.

But of course we all, in Plato’s terms, are ‘lost in multiplicity and change’. We can infer from the counter-example of the Republic/Utopia that the conception of democracy which does appear to have a distinctive role for parties will be: a sceptical, pluralistic, institutionalised, territorially-bounded and mediated system. It is a world of uncertainty, contestation, openness, partiality and factionalism. Where what is right and good can and must change, where it cannot reliably be known because we cannot accept that there are perpetually reliable ‘knowers’. In this imperfect world the demand for both authorisation and authenticity arises prominently. Who can speak for us, for me? There is no given, automatic answer; we have to choose, and there must be choices. We must authorise mediators. And those mediators must try to capture something about us which can substantiate their claim to speak for groups of citizens; they must tap into a rhetoric of authenticity. Neither authorisation nor a claim to authenticity can be perpetual, but themselves will always be partial, contestable and contested, and subject to change and renewal.

This play of, and tension between, the competing claims and demands of authorisation and authenticity characterises key threads running through the weave of modern democracy. From the decades around and subsequent to the American and French revolutions, however, the sense of authorship at the heart of self-determination came to be framed primarily in terms of authorisation. The historically successive notions that representation was (at first) not incompatible liberal government (Locke), that it was core to republican government (Madison), that it was not incompatible with modern democracy (J.S. Mill), and finally the notion that it was the key and indispensable mechanism of modern democracy (arguably the apogee of the argument was Schumpeter), cemented in place authorisation’s role as the key effective interpretation of self-determination or self-authorship in democracy. The key vehicle for this consolidation and highlighting of authorisation came to be the free and fair election, where parties compete for the popular vote.

In this broad historical process, authenticity came to be downgraded, and (electoral, party, parliamentary) representation came to be democracy in all mainstream thinking. Authenticity became a version of self-authorship operating at the margins at best, occasionally evoked to enervate dissenting voices. The dominance of authorisation (of party candidates via elections) meant that representation was not an unattainable state of affairs but rather a fact, an achievement, an outcome that followed uncontroversially from the free and fair conduct of elections. Perhaps the seemingly systematic incapacity of democratic theory and the study of democracy practice to speak to each other in recent decades stems in part from these developments. Even the best among students of democracy struggled to close the gap. Witness the degree, style and selective character of the dilution of his basic principles of democracy – which tap implicitly into self-determination as authentic expressions of people’s wishes - when Dahl (1989) translates those principles into the key features of ‘polyarchies’ (Saward 2001). Authenticity comes to be subsumed by – or, slightly differently, assumed to operate straightforwardly within – a selective regime of authorisation. And parties are the vehicles for enacting
authorisation through elections. It is in this context, with democracy redefined within (a selective view of) discourses of authorisation, that Schattsneider’s over-quoted comment about democracy being unthinkable without political parties makes sense.

This mediation role is an active, not a passive one. Parties and candidates in an important sense create, portray and sustain the constituencies that they claim to represent. The making of claims to be representative involves this double-sided process of creating and ‘speaking for’ constituencies. Curiously, authorisation gives rise to the often underestimated need for parties and leaders to ‘author’ that aspect (or presumed aspect) of constituency identity which, for their own purposes, they wish to speak for or stand for. Representation in this electoral-political context gives rise to parties and leaders ‘representing’ in a more aesthetic sense (portraying, depicting) selected or presumed characteristics of constituencies. Constituencies don’t just exist; they are actively constituted, meanings are read into them rather than read off them (Saward 2005). And what has to be read in can readily be contested. And, I would suggest, it is most often contested on the basis of counter-claims to authenticity – ‘who are you to speak for me, to know me and my needs, you’ve got me wrong, I’ll represent myself without you misrepresenting who and what I think I am’.

Here, I encroach on the substance of the following section. It will explore the desirability of viewing representation as an economy of claims, and against that background will explore a set of claims and criteria which arise in nonelectoral arenas today, challenging the role of parties as they challenge the subsumption of authenticity under (a restricted view and institutionalisation of) authorisation. Parties face stiff competition as claimants to be representatives in this conception of representation, not least because of a range of pressing new claims draw on authenticity rather than seek authorisation. Non-party actors and claims abound. The ‘engineered democracy’ of parties is challenged by the ‘engaged democracy’ of other actors (Blaug 2002). The importance and limits of elections to democracy is a vital sub-theme here, since the key mediating role of political parties rests on electoral foundations.

So, the following discussion involves an effort to identify and clarify a range of representative claims that do not have an elective basis. I will set out possible criteria which those claims evoke, and which, alongside other factors, might render them to be democratically convincing. I will make observations about underlying, in some cases surprising shifts in salience for different sorts of representative claims and the criteria of justification that they evoke. It is in this context that I return towards the end of the paper explicitly to the interplay of authorisation and authenticity through rises and falls in political salience of certain of the criteria.

**Representation as claim-making**

The broader frame of my thinking on representation (Saward 2005) is sympathetic to Jane Mansbridge’s recent advocacy of a shift in perspective from ‘singular, aggregatively-oriented, and district-based’ criteria for representation, to what she calls ‘plural, deliberatively-oriented, and systemic criteria’ (2003). In other words, within this frame representation is a feature and a quality of democratic politics in more, and more complex, styles, and spaces than it is commonly assumed. We can better assess the challenges facing political parties if we look at representation in this new light.
That larger framework includes four closely linked arguments in particular, which link representation’s processual, claim-based, elective and nonelective and constitutive character:

(1) in the words of Dennis Thompson, ‘… we must understand representation not as a relationship between constituents and representatives at particular moments, but as a process in which the relationship between citizens and representatives continues over time’ (1988: 136; see also Mansbridge 2003);

(2) representation as a process centres not on a ‘fact’ of representation, an achieved state of affairs, but rather upon the practice of making claims to be representative, and varied efforts to substantiate and to contest those claims. A representative claim is a claim to represent, or to know what represents, the interests of someone or something.; and

(3) ‘constituents’ and ‘representatives’ need not, in principle, be members of electoral districts and elected parliamentarians or councillors respectively; a range of differently-situated actors can and do make representative claims (the potential democratic credentials of such claims being a focus of this paper)

(4) by making representative claims, claimants ‘make representations’: they construct and offer portraits or images of constituents. In so doing, in important ways they ‘construct’ their constituencies.

Non-elective representative claims

I present a range of types and examples of representative claims by the unelected. The discussion will lead to reflections on contemporary tensions between the claims of authorisation and authenticity that lie at democracy’s heart, and in particular on the rise in salience of claims to representation on the basis of authenticity. The emphasis in this section will be placed on the basis for justification of the claim - the X in ‘I represent these people’s interests because of X’. The list is selective and indicative rather than

1 Modern democratic constitutions place at centre-stage electoral representation. Scholars of comparative politics and democratic theory generally take ‘representative’ to mean ‘elected’. Electoral representation is taken to be the paradigmatic mode of political representation. However, this focus is the product of a 200 year institutional congealing around a ‘code’, an interpretive frame which helps us to make sense of a system and to assign relative roles and importance’s to devices and practices within the system. The power of democracy-as-elections derives from how deeply and widely it permeates western (and other) political understandings. The oft-presumed superiority of electoral against other representative claims rests upon the tenacity of the mainstream democratic code on our political imaginations. But this coding is not inevitable, natural or unshakeable.

Consider the preferred definition of representation offered by the most influential contemporary writer on the subject, Hanna Pitkin. Pitkin defines representation as a ‘substantive acting for others’. She distinguishes it from other definitions which often require formal authorisation in the form of voting (the ‘authorisation’ and ‘accountability’ theories, in her words). Her preferred understanding does not require elections, but rather a substantive link with interests.

2 So for example, Picasso’s claim to represent the horrors of ordinary people’s suffering in war in his painting Guernica, the Pope’s claim to represent a higher system of morality than the merely earthly, Tony Blair’s claim to represent the interests of the British people, even a father’s claim to represent the interests of all his family, are all political claims, and can usefully and rightly be treated as sharing generic roots.
definitive, and in this section of the paper I present them without making explicit evaluative comments (I keep that for the following section). My modest goal is to indicate the range of representative claims that are ‘out there’3. The claims listed vary in a number of ways. For example some are claims about the self – ‘I represent …’. Others are claims about others – ‘She represents …’ or ‘It represents …’. Some are explicit, others implicit. Some involve a tangible presence of support for the claim from its supposed ‘constituency’ or ‘audience’, while others do not (necessarily). For the moment I simply present the different types of claim-basis.

The claims are grouped as follows:

1. “Deeper roots” representative claims
2. “Expertise and special credentials” claims
3. “Wider interests and new voices” claims

“Deeper roots” representative claims

1. Higher morality. Representative claim may be based on more universal or enduring principles than mere political systems can embody. One might cite Antigone’s claim that the bonds of kinship and decency transcend the rule of state authority, and that she stood for these values. Many religious representative claims would take this form4.

2. Meta-agreement. A representative claim might be based on what people would hypothetically have agreed to in (for example) a state of nature, or an original position. One might read John Rawls’s *A Theory of Justice* (1971), for example, as claiming that our deeper rational selves would all sign up to a certain, specifiable distribution of ‘primary goods’ such as rights and duties.

3. Context or embeddedness. A representative claim may be made by or for members of institutions which are not themselves elective but which are part of larger systems which are. For example, members of the House of Lords in the United Kingdom, an institution which is currently undergoing a sluggish and uncertain process of reform, often claim that the House contributes to the democratic character of the overall political system in which it is embedded precisely because its members gain their positions by inheritance or appointment (now almost entirely by appointment).

4. The ties of tradition. A representative claim may be based on the fact that someone embodies for stands for factors arising from a deeply-entrenched moral system. A key contemporary example here may be the legitimacy among Tibetans of the rule of the Dalai Lama. His authority, based on long traditions, owes nothing to election and everything to divinely ordained powers. Monarchs, of course, make representative claims based on tradition5.

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4 One could claim to represent oneself only, or to represent some inherent element of human nature or goodness. The core of the claim’s basis may be that constituted earthly authority is always bound into a particular context and necessarily partial and compromised, whereas higher codes of morality sometimes require separate (though not necessarily opposed) representation or advocacy.

5 One might consider, for example, monarchs within broadly constitutional monarchic systems. The contemporary kings of Morocco, for example, base their claims to legitimate political power within
“Expertise and special credentials” representative claims

5. Specialist expertise. A claim may be based on the possession of authoritative knowledge arising from specialist expertise. One might cite here the Union of Concerned Scientists. Such claims occupy a difficult area between political and expertise ‘roles’ (Hudson 2001: 332). Their substantiation will depend in part on the existence of the appropriate ‘interpretative community’ (March and Olsen 1995: 176), i.e. in this case a body of recognised experts.

6. Addressing systematic corruption. A representative claim may be based on the idea that electoral politics is temporarily corrupted to an extent and in a way that systematically works against the interests of certain specified groups. The would-be representative claims to speak for the interests (a) of that group, and perhaps (b) of the entire ethos of the system as a whole insofar as he or she defends a deeper version of that ethos against its current surface manifestation. One might cite for example Martin Luther King, the unelected but widely respected and venerated American civil rights leader of the 1960s.

7. Addressing systematic policy failure. A representative claim may be made by an unelected official who is appointed to take full charge of a policy area that has proved too difficult for the conventional structures of the political system to address effectively. For example, recent UK governments have been fond of appointing ‘tsars’ to consider radical options in areas of dramatic policy failure. In the past two years alone, the UK has seen a ‘drugs tsar’, a ‘privacy tsar’, ‘cycling tsar’, ‘rough sleepers tsar’, and a ‘mental health tsar’! All too often the irony has resided in the powerlessness of the tsars who find themselves outmanoeuvred by seasoned politicians and officials.

“Wider interests and new voices” representative claims

8. Wider interests. A representative claim may be based on the idea that larger human interests and needs that are vital and need to be represented or voiced, but are too dispersed or disparate to receive sufficient voice in a national political system need to be given such voice. One might consider for example the rock stars Bob Geldof and Bono and their advocacy of third world debt relief, famine relief and poverty alleviation. Such figures not only claim to represent non-national interests on the basis of common humanity, but also to represent the better interests of those in their ‘home’ country whose actions are linked in non-obvious ways to the plight of many in the ‘south’.

9. Media bias, partial exclusion and surrogacy. Closely related to ‘wider interests’, a representative claim may be based on the fact that an important perspective within a debate is not being heard or even voiced. For example a representative claim might be based on the idea that one is a surrogate spokesperson for a group that because of its cultural nature of geographical dispersion has no elected representative. Mansbridge (2003) cites the example.

the Moroccan constitutional monarchy upon the deeply symbolic connections between rituals of royalty and the meaningful practices of the everyday life of Moroccans (Combs-Schilling 1989).
10. The word from the street. A claim may be based on massive and tangible
demonstration of popular support in the context of freedom of expression. For example,
two million people marching in a London demonstration against Britain going to war
against Iraq is a basis for representative claims for those leading or addressing such
demonstrations to be representative of a significant swathe of public opinion (Beetham
2004). Another example might be a claim to be representative of a group by virtue of a
sizeable petition calling for specified political action.

11. Mirroring. A claim that is based on descriptive similarity between the claimant and
the audience or constituency he or she claims to speak or stand for. For example, a
deliberative poll (Fishkin and Luskin 2000) or a citizens’ jury might actually be
incorporated into the policy-making process and gain legitimacy from the random basis
of its selection. In many cases these groups are claimed to maximise social or descriptive
representation. In a quite different sense, a ‘mirroring’ representative claim may arise
along the lines of the case of Subcommante Marcos of the Zapatista army in Chiapas,
Mexico. Marcos argues that his army does not ‘speak for’ the people of Chiapas. Rather,
it ‘listens’ or ‘echoes’, the voices of the people. ‘An echo that reproduces its own sound,
yet opens itself to the sound of the other’; ‘An echo that takes its place and speaks its own
voice, yet speaks with the voice of the other’ (quoted in Tormey 2003).

12. Stakeholding. A representative claim might be based on the notion that one stands for
or speaks for a group that has a material or other ‘stake’ in a process or a decision, and
therefore has a right to have its interests included in the process. Procedures which
incorporate ‘stakeholders’ in deliberative and decisional forums can be quite formal, as
was the case at the Johannesburg World Summit on Environment and Development in
2002. In Johannesburg several businesses and business representative groups and NGOs
were regarded formally as stakeholders and took part in deliberations. Potential
stakeholders might be new or potential constituencies. A radical vision of such a new
constituency might be non-human animals and their interests, for example. Claims to
represent or speak for human communities-of-fate which cross national boundaries may
be another example (see Dobson 1996; Eckersley 2000). These examples, to be sure,
invoke a radical deconstruction of our received ideas of what a ‘constituency’ is.
‘Constituencies’, arguably, can be short-lived, non-territorial, spontaneously-formed, and
still form the basis of completing demands for political representation.

13. Extraterritorial rules and laws. An extraterritorial body or entity, e.g. an international
court or an agency of the UN, may establish laws or formal procedures with respect to
which its agents can make representative claims which bear on internal matters within a
state. Part of that rethinking, at least, will involve fabricating and deploying sequences of
devices to address the needs of different, potential constituencies, regardless of their
location within traditionally understood political boundaries. Between them, the works of
Held (1995) and Dryzek (2000) represent influential and contrasting approaches to
cosmopolitan or transnational democratisation.

14. Self-representation. I need to represent myself, my own interests (or I choose to). No-
one can know the fuller range of my interests or how I would prefer them to be
articulated. As a well-known mobile phone advertisement says: ‘define yourself’. Make
your own representations, be your own representative. The notion of ‘individualised
collective action’ is evocative here (Micheletti 2003).
Evaluating non-elective representative claims: some possible criteria

Those are some common enough examples of non-elective representative claims. So much for making claims. What might make some such claims convincing? I will sketch here very briefly possible evaluative criteria.

The following evaluative criteria are indications of the types of argument or discourse we might expect in cases where non-electoral representation is being offered or defended. I do not want to claim anything grander for them. In practice there will be multiple and overlapping criteria, which much room for deliberation over their democratic credentials. So the set of criteria I offer here is not a comprehensive set, but rather indicative. They are not the criteria people must use, but rather criteria we might expect to see used and find are used. There is no simple match between criteria and the examples of claims, but I will suggest some important connections in a moment.

The nature of the criteria vary. Some refer to the verifiability of a claim with respect to an invoked constituency. Others for example refer to the position of the claimant within larger sets of institutions or processes.

What I offer here is a tentative sketch of the field, a basis for further work.

The criteria come under four headings:

1. “Confirming” criteria, which focus on constituencies of varied kinds accepting claims;
2. “Connecting” criteria, which focus on appropriate formal positioning of claimants;
3. “Untainted” criteria, which focus on claims located deliberately outside governmental institutions; and
4. “New bases” criteria, which focus on non-electoral modes of participation.

My objective is to locate and sketch an assessment of the types of claims traced above, in the context of tensions between authenticity and authorisation. Authenticity and authorisation are closely linked to certain of the criteria I now go on to discuss. As we shall see, there is an argument for seeing certain of the criteria, and cases linked to them, as increasing in salience, and a key part of that rise in salience is a rise in demand for political authenticity which poses a distinctive challenge to contemporary political parties. But that is to look further ahead – the task now is to spell out the criteria a little more.

“Confirming” criteria

A. Can the representative claim be tested in principle? Does it suggest the existence of a specifiable constituency to which the claim refers, and which might therefore be able to attest in some way to the claim’s veracity or reasonableness?
B. Is the claim accepted, or provisionally acceptable? A representative claim might immediately be acclaimed by public action on the part of large numbers of the would-be constituency of the claim-maker. Or, it may not be opposed when repeatedly, publicly expressed, in which case one might charitably apply a notion
of ‘provisional’ acceptability (Gutmann and Thompson (1999) - the claim can be respected as long as it receives (or is denied) validation by the relevant proto-constituency at some reasonable future date.

“Connecting” criteria

C. Does the claimant occupy an appropriate position in the line of democratic delegation? Principal-agent models see parliamentarism as ‘a chain of delegation from voters to the ultimate policy makers. Thus, those authorised to make political decisions (agents of voters, but in this context principals) conditionally designate others (agents) to make such decisions in their name and place’ (Bergman, Muller and Strom 2000, 257)

D. Does the claimant have an appropriate connection to a link in the chain of democratic delegation? A representative claimant may not be in a chain of delegation, but may be attached to or communicate with a link in such a chain in a way that provides the basis of a justification for the claim’s reasonableness.

E. Is the claim acceptable because it is embedded in a larger democratic system? Eckstein (1960) once argued that it did not matter if pressure groups were not internally democratic themselves so long as they were operating within a broadly democratic system and context. Thus for example a defence of the House of Lords in the UK has been mounted on the basis that it remains subordinated to the elected House of Commons in terms of the passage of legislation.

F. Locked in to networks. A representative claim might be based on the actor being ‘locked into’ a tight or dense network of organisational or other like ties, such that alternative forms of accountability become exercised. One might for example think in terms of the thickness of the ‘cobweb of connections in the ecology of communities’ (March and Olsen 1995: 177). There are various non-elective mechanisms for achieving accountability of organisations. Dense networks lend legitimacy arguably in part because they constrain actors in ways that are analogous to electoral constraints.

“Untainted” criteria

G. Is a claim acceptable precisely because it is untainted by formal election processes? If Carl Schmitt was right that parliamentary democracy involved the embodiment of a certain ‘principled unprincipledness’, then perhaps there is always a ‘space’ for such claims? Does ‘disinterestedness’, in the older sense of the word (where it does not mean ‘uninterested’ but rather something like

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6 On a standard interpretation we might specify five positions in an ideal-typical line of delegation: (1) from voters to legislators, (2) within legislatures, (3) from legislators to executives, (4) within executives, and (5) from executives to bureaucracies (Andeweg and Thomassen 2003). We might ask if a non-elective representative claim might seek justification by asserting its position within such a chain of formal democratic delegation.

7 For example, Giandomenico Majone writes: ‘What is required to reconcile independence and accountability are richer and more flexible forms of control than the traditional methods of political and administrative oversight. Statutory objectives, procedural requirements, judicial review, budgetary discipline, professionalism, expertise, monitoring by interest groups, even inter-agency rivalry can all be elements of a pervasive system of control which only needs to be activated. When the system works properly no one controls an independent agency, yet the agency is “under control”’ (Majone 1995: 118).
‘unbiased’) sometimes require independence of electoral pressures? Electoral pressures, it is sometimes argued, press those subject to them to look to short-term and parochial interests. They also force one to address – rhetorically at least – a wide array of concerns. ‘Bundling’ of issues may do disservice to specific issues or concerns.

H. Is the claim acceptable precisely because it is untainted by formal membership of a state apparatus? A distinctive version of this criterion is Dryzek’s ‘contest of discourses’ approach. In my words rather than his, we could say that electoral processes are linked to the state, and that the state is tied into structural imperatives that prevent it from acting systematically in the interests of its citizens. Dryzek’s argues that ‘… we can step back and ask whether democracy does indeed require counting heads. I would argue that a logically complete alternative exists based on a conceptualisation of intersubjective communication in the public sphere as a matter of the contestation of discourses’ (Dryzek 2000b, 84). I do not want to go that far. But perhaps dominant representations of discourses in such a ‘contest of discourses’ could form the basis of non-elective representative claims?

“New bases” criteria

I. Is a claim justified because it taps into non-electoral modes of active political participation, such as (a) deliberation, (b) through voluntary associations, or (c) dissenting activism? Advocates of deliberative democracy often claimed that there was a full-blown ‘deliberative model of democracy’ which downgraded the democratic value of electoral participation (Saward 2000 and 2003). That may be going too far, but deliberative forums, whether of randomly chosen or part-selected or within or between voluntary associations, can give rise to compelling claims to represent considered popular opinion. Similarly, people can ‘do it for themselves’ (Bang and Dyrberg 2000), pursuing ‘individualised collective action’ in new and innovative ways (Micheletti 2003). Dissenting activism can be conceived in terms of major social movements that seek to force a system to live up to its own ideals. A key argument here is that democracy is not just about deliberation within established forums. Those forums can become sclerotic and moribund if they are not subject to pressure and renewal through outsider activism and dissent.

Cases: some on the rise?

There is no God’s eye point of view from which to build a comprehensive list of types of representative claim. My list of 14 is not airtight. But it does cover a very wide variety of claims.

I would argue that some types of these claims are increasing in salience and frequency – they are made more often, in more ways, with more prominence, today than twenty years ago. Likewise, other types of claims are declining in frequency and salience. The cases that are increasing in salience are primarily the “wider interests and new voices” claims: ones which concern bringing in new and affected voices – ‘new constituencies’, in some cases new ‘communities of fate’ - to bear on democratic politics: wider interests,
disenfranchised interests, extra-territorial interests, individual perspectives and interests, and so on.

The types of claim that appear to be less common or salient are those based on tradition or ‘deeper values’ which often do not involve actual involvement or expression by citizens themselves with regard to their own interests. It is harder today to invoke non-procedural invocation of citizens’ ‘better interests’, though recently religion-based moral claims show an increased prominence and grip in varied religious contexts: Hindu, Christian and Islamic.

Criteria: some on the rise?

What about criteria? Which ones are invoked more today? And is there a link with which types of claim tend to be more common or salient?

In particular, certain criteria of formal connectedness appear to have reached a limit in terms of how much legitimacy their invocation can garner. Occupying or being connected to a position in a formal hierarchy or chain of delegation appears increasingly insufficient as the basis of a convincing representative claim. This observation goes to the heart of authorisation’s hold on dominance conceptions of representation and democracy, and therefore to the heart of the ways in which contemporary political parties make representative claims. Formal connectedness still matters – it is important to most of us that politicians and other decision-makers and managers are formally accountable, and that there is a direct or indirect electoral component to that accountability. But the political-cultural resonance of the claim seems to be accompanied by greater scepticism, or cynicism, concerning disengagement and unresponsiveness of formal governmental institutions. Declining voting rates, declining party membership and partisan alignment, and more sceptical attitudes to parties are well documented in this context.

So, although formal accountability still matters, other criteria seem to be on the rise. In particular, criteria which stress the role of claimants being locked into wider governance networks – and which appeal to underlying values of accountability and control, but which tap into different constructions or interpretations of ‘accountability’ and ‘control’. Here, connectedness as a criterion is still invoked, but it is less formal, less clearly linked to elections, more to do with the operation of networks than the presence of hierarchies.

And, surprisingly perhaps, there has been a seeming increase in the salience of criteria of ‘untaintedness’ – that is, a rise in the perceived value of precisely disconnection from formal hierarchies or lines of delegation centring on traditional governmental and elected actors. Criteria of untaintedness enact – or at least advocates would like to enact - values of authenticity; indeed, arguably they are the primary vehicle for the re-emergence of claims based around authenticity, and for the challenge to the authorisation-based claims of political parties.

Cases, criteria, principles: virtuous circles?

As my comments have already suggested, mixed in with the evaluative criteria are democratic values or principles. The links between cases, criteria and principles are dynamic, shifting, and themselves highly political. Alternative interpretations of
democratic principles come hand-in-hand with shifting criteria of evaluation of non-elective representative claims. Cases, criteria and principles are closely linked. But they exist in a contextual and circular relationship, not a foundational or deductive one.

To make some connections, then, between cases, criteria and principles, I would offer the following observations.

- Many ‘wider interests and new voices’ cases invoke untaintedness (criteria) which in turn evokes/enacts versions of the principles of authenticity, accountability, inclusion. Untaintedness is provocative – it houses the claim that political credibility can arise precisely from not being elected! Untaintedness is particularly linked to the renascent principle of authenticity.

- The ‘deeper roots’ cases (e.g. higher values and tradition) are losing salience and resonance in secular and postmodern times. This decline can be seen as running parallel to a decline in certain types of argument for the justification of democracy. In particular, justifications of democracy tend to have more hold and resonance today if they are primarily procedural and consequential in character, as opposed to being based on would-be substantive, ‘independent’ principles.

- Specialised expert and stakeholder cases of representative claims depend for their strength on “connecting” criteria – the experts or stakeholders are not just a law unto themselves with no restraint or effective oversight. But the preferred style of connectedness seems to be shifting. Such claims, it seems, receive a better reception today if they are ‘connected’ by being ‘locked into networks’, rather than if connected via a link to a formal or hierarchical chain of delegation (criteria). In terms of principles, principles of informal role/control have risen in importance in comparison to formal accountability (principles).

- And finally for the moment, self representation and mirroring (cases) tap in part into new bases of political participation (criteria) which in turn evoke principles of authenticity, inclusion and participation.

So, there is evidence of the evolution of new styles of enacting, and therefore recasting, democratic principles of accountability, inclusion and participation, along with the emergence of authenticity as a crucial democratic principle. And again, authenticity is the key basis for the challenge to the ‘representative’ role of political parties.

**Can elections deliver more though?**

That is approaching non-elective representative claims from the angle that they are new sorts of claim, offering something different from elections as a basis of representation. These are ‘new thing’ claims. But non-elective claims can enact principles which also figure heavily with regard to elections. Briefly and just indicatively, I here look at what may make elections valuable and show how these principles can be enacted in non-elective representative contexts too. These are ‘same thing’ claims, too.

In this context, we can say that elections enact principles of:

1. choice/chosenness
2. all-affectedness (giving voice to the affected)
3. control
4. accountability
5. consent

… all in a context of authorisation. Authorisation is the mechanism through which this set of principled outcomes can be achieved through electoral processes.

But non-elective representative processes can, I would argue, enact these principles too:

- choice/chosenness enacted in terms of more fine-grained, multiple, issue-specific choices?
- giving voice to the affected by opening up new lines and styles of representation, which can be more sensitive to intensity of preference and lived experiences of affectedness?
- more varied and perhaps effective means of control via governance networks
- accountability, via deliberative and other devices rather than elections?
- retroactive consent upon reception and consideration of claims?

More choices which are more directly made, additional voices expressing wishes and interests, more direct modes of accountability – authenticity lies at the core of the potentially more extensive realisation of these principled outcomes arising from certain non-elective contexts and claims. In short, the realisation of certain principled outcomes may well be coded into electoral processes featuring party competition. But elections are not necessarily the only way the principles can democratically be enacted.

Elections are vital to democracy and representation. They are crucial to enacting democratic principles. The principle that elections distinctively offer is (arguably) authorisation. Non-elective modes of representation are important too (a topic opened up when we regard representation as an economy of claim-making). They too are perfectly capable of enacting core principles. Arguably, the principle they distinctively offer is authenticity. The tension between authorisation and authenticity runs deep and at the same time is mutually constitutive; it is a tension that creates and enlivens democracy, a tensions for which we can hold neither hope for nor expect final resolution.

**Elections and democracy**

I conclude the discussion with speculative remarks which are designed to open out the topic further, rather than to close it down.

First, a hypothesis that may arise from the discussion is this: for democracy to achieve minimum threshold standards, it requires more or less free and fair elections. But above that minimum level – if we are looking to continuum standards which can help us to answer the question ‘how democratic is this practice or system?’ – we might expect that multiple and dynamic forms of non-elective representation could play a key role. Could it be that the formal achievement for authorisation (of political parties through electoral processes) gives rise to the push for authenticity (extra-electoral and extra-party) representative claims, and that we are in a historical period where these tensions and shifts are particularly prominent and salient?
Second, the democratic credentials of non-elective representative claims set out in the paper mirrors the ‘founding paradox’ of democracy. Democratic polities, like others, require undemocratic foundings – Derrida’s ‘founding violence’. We might add to this an ‘enervating paradox’ – electoral politics requires non-electoral action to shake up and re-set its agenda on a regular basis. Similarly, perhaps electoral representation requires the persistent challenge of alternative, non-electoral representative claims to ‘keep it on its toes’?

And third, there are broader, ‘hardware’ shifts, which impact upon the conditions of possibility of sites and styles of representative claim-making and their embodiment: institutional shifts on a broad scale from hierarchy to networks. I have concentrated mostly at the more micro level, discursive ‘software’ about the enactment of claims and principles. The complexity and the disaggregated character of the contemporary executive means that governance is a multi-sided, multi-level task which is mostly performed by the unelected. The rise of social movements and (on some accounts) the decline of political parties as a focus for political participation and principled action, arguably puts leadership into the hands of the unelected. But these unelected actors are not necessarily ‘unrepresentative’ just by virtue of that fact. Indeed, the example of some NGOs might lead us to hypothesise that unelected groups can at times gain a more intensive and vocal substantiation of their representative claims precisely because they are not elected politicians.

Conclusion

Do we need a radical rethink of the status of elections and voting with regard to democratic representation? Perhaps elections amount to a contribution to the quality of public deliberation, rather than the ‘core medium of democracy’ or the ‘main guarantor of genuine representation’? Constituencies are no longer singular, territorial, fixed, and possessed of transparent interests. Rather, ‘constituency’ is fluid, functional and cultural, permanent or temporary, within or across borders, evoked as well as given. And if we recognise this fact, we will begin to recognise the inevitability, even the democratic necessity, of a wide array of other, non-elected representative claims in complex contemporary democratic politics. Elections could be seen as one factor in a chain of factors that provides us with a context in which representative claims and be made and evaluated. And parties could be seen as one vehicle among others, and not always the most important one, not least since they struggle to make authenticity claims ‘stick’ alongside the basic legitimisation of their democratic role through authorisation.

Parties as would-be representatives and mediators are under challenge; they have to adapt the way they make claims to be representative. Among other things, there is evidence that they have to develop new capacities, make their claims more explicit, forge new constituencies, make new sorts of promises, open up new channels for making representative claims. Does democracy really need political parties? It does need mediators, as it is inevitably the setting for a complex economy of representation as claim-making. And given the established position of parties it is difficult to see their wholesale displacement as the key electoral mediators for the foreseeable future. But ‘party’ could be a signifier of a transformed and transforming set of mediating organisations. The future of democracy will doubtless feature political parties, but not necessarily parties as we know them. Following the central thread of my argument around the constitutive tensions between authenticity and authorisation at the heart of
representative democracy, we could argue that the central challenge for contemporary political parties is successfully to simulate authenticity, and to sell that simulation to existing and new constituencies (and indeed to create new constituencies). Arguably, recent efforts by the governing Labour Party in the UK tend in this direction – Tony Blair meeting voters for face-to-face discussions, the party conducting a ‘Big Conversation’ with voters in an (apparently, simulated?) open-ended discussion of future policy priorities. Successful simulation is as far as authenticity can go; throughout this discussion I have avoided scare quotes around the word authenticity, but nothing I have said implies that there is a single, authentic conception of a group’s or individual’s interests. Perhaps ‘open parties’ (Hilder 2005), with open policy agendas and features such as open primaries, could simulate authenticity. But such changes would pose major challenges to parties as vehicles democratic authorisation. Straddling competing demands of the two underlying principles of self-determination will ensure that party strategists in many countries will have their work cut out.

References
Plato (1955 edn.), The Republic (translated by D. Lee) (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books)