Restructuring the Public Sphere:
Contemporary Ideologies between Theory and Politics

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Have new ideologies emerged in advanced industrial democracies? Can we define neoliberalism of the 1980s or the Third Way of the late 1990s as new ideologies? What about the new radical right parties, which are said to appear only in the most advanced postindustrial democracies? All these parties have complex relations with their ancestors, from which they partly wanted to dissociate themselves, partly sought to re-present hem in a different way. If old parties with shifting conceptual patterns might suggest transformed rather than ‘new’ worldviews, how about new parties, with no clear forbears? Consider the Greens. While in the 1980s they qualified as a ‘new party’, that is ‘standing for elections for the first time’, on the ideological side there have been plenty of competing theses. Some authors argued they profess a new, ecological ideology; the roots of environmental politics, however, were traced back at least to the mid-nineteen century. Others argued that the Greens are an integral part of the left, or a left-liberatian party, with socialist pedigree. Still others maintained that the new social movements are their predecessors and the Greens’ are therefore New Politics or a framework party, with strong emphasis on decentralized, participatory democracy. All of these ideological roots suggest that there is no political vacuum. Collective actors always come from somewhere, with particular ideological heritage.

However, political ideologies do change, react and interact due to different external and internal circumstances. Third Way ideologues famously put the ‘blame’ for the need to ‘modernize’, as they like to call it, on external forces, most notably globalization. Yet many of these forces – globalizing markets, wars or international environmental agreements – result from ideas and policies of leaders, governments, parties and the reaction of the public. Indeed, the political agenda, as reflected in the media, public opinion and private minds has a crucial role to play in transferring and transforming ideas. In turn, the different ideological families respond to such changes in varied ways.
The contention of this paper is that within advanced industrial democracies both structural and substantive changes have taken place, changes which are reflected in the transformation of political ideologies and in the wider public discourse. On the structural level, a major reshuffling occurred in the apprehension of the public arena. Liberal-democracies have by and large endorsed the separation between the public and the private spheres. Going back to classical liberalism in the 17th and 18th centuries, the public arena was identified with political institutions, whereas the private sphere with individual interest and the economic realm. This basic demarcation was strengthened during the 19th century, with the advent of nation-state and the development of representative democracies. It was crystallized in the structuring of the ideological spectrum around the relations between state and the individual: pro-interventionists to the left, anti-interventionists to the right. In the course of two world wars and the emergence of the welfare-state, the cohesiveness of the political, economic and social realms substantially grew. The neoliberal rebellion sought to bring back a clearer separation between the private and the public, by rolling back the state and making the free market the main mechanism for social interactions.

However, in post-industrial societies this picture has radically changed. Civil society has become a part of how we perceive society today, a pillar of contemporary theoretical and social discourse. Civil society – the third realm between politics and economics – facilitated the rehabilitation of social activity beyond the established political system, provided voluntary organizations with a societal arena independent of political parties and interest groups, and especially signified the rejuvenation of the democratic discourse in the post-material age. In this capacity, ‘civil society’ was identified with the potential of democratizing post-Soviet and authoritarian regimes in the ‘end of history’ era. Complementarily, it symbolized the new democratic theory – providing the public sphere for communicative action; enhancing the multicultural space for materializing the politics of identity; facilitating social change; and providing the alternative realm for participatory democracy. Indeed, the restructuring of the public sphere has to do with the reorganization of the relationships between politics, economics and society. Civil society has become a key concept in understanding the value system of contemporary discourse, reflecting these changes in advanced democracies.

The new patterns of understanding the public sphere, inextricably linked with processes of globalizing markets, waves of immigration, growing levels of higher education and mounting concerns about environmental problems and indigenous cultures, also enabled a shift in the substantive make up of the ideological arena. Crucially, this shift was generated on the fringes of the established political system, in an interesting interaction between the radical left and the far
right, from where it moved onto the centre stage of the public arena. The hegemony of neoliberalism, which was instated during the 1970s and 1980s, generated a fundamental reaction – against materialism, imperialism, economic globalism and consumerism – which brought to the fore alternative set of concepts. Community, sustainability, diversity, grassroots democracy, deliberation and multiculturalism emanated from a critique of the dominant ideology but acquired a life of their own in theory, ideology and public discourse.

The Structure of the Argument: Comparing ‘Civil Society’ and ‘Multiculturalism’ in the Theory and Politics of four Ideological Families

This paper analyzes the incarnation of the structural and substantive changes in contemporary ideologies. It examines the role civil society as a manifestation of the relationship between politics, economics and society. It explores the concept of multiculturalism as an embodiment of the cluster of identity politics and participatory democracy in contemporary European political ideologies. The discussion exposes the different responses of the four ideologies to the relations between the three spheres. All adopt a tertiary division; the social outcomes in each are fundamentally different. Their interpretation of this division, in turn, is closely linked with the way they conceptualize issues of identity, culture, community and their model of democracy.

Yet another fundamental dimension of the argument has to do with the relationship between party ideology, political theory and the public discourse. Whereas a clear transformation can be seen within each of the ideological families – the conservative, social-democrat, Green and far right parties – it is the contention of this paper that the political discourse is broader than its concrete manifestations in party ideology. Indeed, the parties themselves react to political theorists in ways that suit them, incorporating some ideas into the internal configuration of their values system and rejecting others. However, these public intellectuals and social theories influence not only the institutional actors, but the public debate at large. There is a level of public discourse that transcends ideological parties and interacts directly with the wider public. This public discourse, composed of the media, communication system, opinion polls, internet chat groups and enlightened citizens - is much more fluid then the relatively coherent and consistent ideologies of the parties. It is through this medium that opposition parties and social movements can influence the established parties. However, this public discourse and social theory is much more illusive. In order to demonstrate the gaps in the public discourse, in each of the four ideological families the discussion separates the theory from the politics, the theoreticians from the politicians. This allows first to reify the two levels – theory and politics – in each ideological family. Left and Right do matter. Second, it accounts for the tension between the more ‘pure’
theory and more compromising interpretation in each case. Nevertheless, by this analysis theoreticians become prone to ideological analysis. It commends their responsibility to their ideas beyond the library. The concluding discussion will suggest that the public debate, beyond the party level, can demonstrate both the way ideas are transmuted in contemporary society, and the dangers of a possible cooperation between the radical left and the extreme right in the public sphere, facilitated by the amorphous discourse.

For each of the four cases, the ‘ideal type’ exemplar in Europe has been chosen. The analysis starts with the neoliberal school, which symbolizes the new dominant paradigm of advanced industrial democracies. However, the separation between state and markets, politics and economics, is not even fully endorsed by the conservative parties. As the example of the Thatcher’s government shows, the obligation to the British people necessitates a different conception of the relations between state, economy and society. After setting the hegemonic force, three reactions are explored. The new left is analyzed looking at the advent of communitarian, multicultural and deliberative theory on the one hand, and examining the ideology of Bündnis90/die Grünen on the other. Two very different reactions of the far right to the discourse of multiculturalism and civil society is studied next: Alain de Benoist’s complete adoption of the communitarian discourse, and Le Pen’s rejection of culture as a way to challenge the multicultural society. The final part compares Gidden’s the third way with Blair’s New Labour.

**The New Right: Markets against the State and the National Question**

Neoliberalism emerged in the cold-war context, emanating from a critique of the welfare state in the wake of the economic miracle – given recession, inflation and structural unemployment – despite Keynesian policies. It equated economic liberty with political liberty, demanded the rejuvenation of the economy by market forces and advocated ‘rolling the state back’. Building on the cold-war animosity towards collectivist regimes, neoliberalism soon became the new dominant ideology. Still, the gap between economy theorists and conservative politicians meant the new understanding of the public sphere was distinctly different.

**Neoliberalism: Civil Society as Liberating State-occupied Territories**

The prime purpose of Hayek and the neoliberal school was to reinstates the opposition between state and economy, central planning and free market. Milton Friedman introduces *Capitalism and Freedom* thus: “Its major theme is the role of competitive capitalism – the organization of the bulk of economic activity through private enterprise operating in a free market – as a system of
economic freedom and a necessary condition for political freedom. Its minor theme is the role that government should play in a society dedicated to freedom and relying primarily on the market to organize economic activity.” This seems to leave little room for any other public sphere. Yet, a closer analysis exposes a more complex relationship between politics, economics and civil society, the latter playing a major role in ‘liberating’ citizens from the grip of a state-induced conformity by returning the strongholds of the welfare state – education, health, employment – into the invisible hand of the market. In this process, the notion of citizenship is being radically transformed.

Take the educational system as a case of dismantling welfare state power in neoliberal thinking. Friedman advocates that the “role of government would be limited to ensuring that the schools met certain minimum standards.” This is achieved by operating on a school-voucher system, in which “Parents would then be free to spend this sum and any additional sum they themselves provided on purchasing educational services from an “approved” institution of their own choice. The educational services could be rendered by private enterprises operated for profit or by non-profit institutions.” Privatizing schools, undermining the welfare state by introducing principles of demand – and supply – are radical measures of neoliberalism. It redraws the balance between state and economy. The role of the government is changing from the main provider of social goods to one of setting the requirements – in this case, minimum schooling and a common curriculum. The market then steps in, catering for the demand, enabling parental choice.

Is it, then, the interplay between state and economy only? Note that in his account, educational services can be provided by profit and non-profit organizations. The market is instrumental in opening up the competition – not in determining the actors or outcomes. Moreover, the goods go beyond economic goods: they are definitely social goods. Different schools may hold different values, methods, structures and agenda. All would have to survive the educational market place. The implicit roles of civil society come to the fore. One crucial function of civil society is to liberate the ‘state-occupied’ territories and facilitate the penetration of open competition, market-like mechanisms and forces of demand and supply to the state-held realm. The traditional roles of the welfare state are re-appropriated by private capital. Civil society mediates this transfer of powers from the collective to the private via free enterprise. Consequently, there are three layers of public realms: the state which sets the framework in terms of laws, security and standards; the market which provides the means, the mechanism and the infrastructure; and civil society in which social goods are provided, and a greater good – operating on invisible hand principles – could emerge. Redrawing the boundaries within the
public sphere has significant implications for another crucial aspect, namely, the concept of citizenship. For in what way is it civil society? Friedman argues:

> What the market does is to reduce greatly the range of issues that must be decided through political means, and thereby to minimize the extent to which government needs to participate directly in the game... It is, in political terms, a system of proportional representation. Each man can vote, as it were, for the color of tie he wants and get it; he does not have to see what color the majority wants and then, if he is in the minority, submit.¹¹

Crucially, neoliberalism replaces the concept of the citizen as a political actor with the image of the citizen as a consumer by appropriating the terminology associated with the democratic system – freedom of choice, voting, and proportional representation. The market thus provides the illusion of politicalness by going beyond the main argument of the book, that a system of economic freedom is a necessary condition for political freedom,¹² and actually equating economic choices with political ones. The choices materialize in civil society rather than in the political realm. Thus, civil society also provides an alternative public – yet non-political – sphere where one’s citizenship materializes as consumer of social and economic goods rather then as political actor.

The Conservative Party: In the Name of National Interest

Whereas for the neoliberal school relegating as much power from the state back to the market was the first principle which defined the role of civic society and left for the free market – rather than politics or social views – to determine the waves of migration, foreign workers and out-sourcing which are entailed in enhancing the economic logic, the picture is more complicated even for the direct political offspring of their ideas – the conservatives in Britain, the Republicans in the US and the Christian Democrats in the continent. The Thatcher government came closer to fully endorse neoliberalism.¹³ As early as 1976 Thatcher explains why it is crucial to roll back the state and to fight the mix-economy: “The mixed economy has become a nonsense phrase. It has been used to justify the extension of Government into almost every aspect of business.”¹⁴ Instead, she redefines the concept by using the central logic of neoliberalism:

> The true characteristic of ‘the mixed-economy’ is the recognition that Government has a considerable but limited role: and the larger private sector should flourish and expand in the response to the choice of the consumer within the framework of private law. On the Government side this involved setting the priorities.”¹⁵
Indeed, the radical revolution carried out by Thatcher was to combat the trade unions, reduce public expenditure, privatize monopolies, give more and more people “the chance to buy their own homes, to build up capital, to acquire shares in their companies.” Just as theoreticians of neoliberalism did, Thatcher compares the welfare system to charity, claiming that while Labour places their exclusive confidence in the state to relieve suffering, the Conservatives see charity as a personal quality, as advocated by St Paul: ‘Heavy taxation had lowered fiscal morality’ she concludes. True, Thatcher was as much a Tory as she was a free-marketeer. She declared in 1977: “The conservative party is an integral part of the British tradition... we are essentially a British Party. We try to the best of our ability to understand Britain’s problems and do what is good for Britain... different national traditions, experience and religious values must affect the social, political and economic solutions.”

The mission of her ideological project was therefore to portray the neoliberal revolution from within the values of the Conservative, national party. She fulfilled it commendably, by postulating the difference between ‘we’ – the national party and ‘they’ – Labour in the process:

Our religion teaches us that every human being is unique and must play his part in working out his own salvation. So whereas Socialists begin with society, and how people can be fitted in, we start with Man, whose social and economic relationships are just part of his wider existence. Because we see man as a spiritual being, we utterly reject the Marxist view, which gives pride of place to economics.

Thus, she simultaneously legitimizes her neoliberal vision by deducing it from the individualist emphasis of the Christian faith; argues she does not, in contrast to socialists, put economy first; and repudiates her ideological opponents as collectivists. Against etatistic positions, she argues that the only way for social improvement is by “the only true driving force of society – the desire of the individual to do better for himself and his family.” It is the family which connects the individual with his natural ties, community and nation. Crucially, she reconciles the individualist stance with the national ethos by masterfully playing the dual meaning of the concept ‘people’. After counting the achievements of her first government, she states: “These things were achieved by strong government – strong to do what only Governments can do. But a strong government knows where to draw the line. It has confidence to trust the people. And a free people knows that the power of Government must be limited.” Individual people make the free people – the nation. By bettering one’s life, the individual contributes to his country.
It is now possible to reconstruct the public sphere in Thatcher’s worldview. Her major revolution, radicalizing her own party traditions, was the endorsement on neoliberal market ideology. Her own unique contribution was the portrayal of this individualistic, competitive, economic ideational system in national, religious and British terms. While breaking down social ties with the trade unions, local communities, workplace and neighborhood, and making every man a loner consumer in the marketplace, she managed to retain a moralistic, spiritual bond by rhetorically using the British traditions, religion and nationalism to create a protecting greenhouse above middle England. Thus, while Thatcher reinstated the dichotomy between a small, strong government and a prosperous, diverse economic sphere, she changed the framework of the social entity from the State to the nation, from the bureaucracy to the UK. It was civil society inasmuch as it was held by civil laws and civility – British manners. Tory policies towards immigration indeed state: “racial discrimination is an injustice and can have no place in a tolerant and civilized society.” However, they go out of their way to emphasize how successful the Conservative government is in reducing immigration levels, tightening controls and requiring visas for tourists from the Indian sub-continent and Africa in order to ‘guard against bogus visitors seeking to settle here illigally’. In the sole comment on minority cultures, at the end of the above ‘immigration and race relations’ section, the manifesto notoriously declares:

Immigrant communities have already shown that it is possible to play an active and influential role in the mainstream of British life without losing one’s distinctive cultural traditions. We also want to see all ethnic minorities participating fully in British culture. They will suffer permanent disadvantage if they remain in linguistic and cultural ghettos.

While praising the strong control over immigration they paternally commend the possibility of immigrant communities participating in British life, but warn them against cultural enclaves, which will make them suffer.

The New Left: The Politics of Identity – from the Personal to the Communal
Neoliberalism thus enhanced the legitimacy of civil society as an autonomous social realm and prescribed a highly ideological role to it in privatizing the state. The age of consumerism, emphasizing individual interests and material wellbeing was a major factor in the emergence of the counterculture in advanced industrial democracies. The new middle classes - which later provided the engine for the information society – were growing up under conditions of relative security and economic prosperity and were characterized by higher education, and post-materialist values. They were interested in self-expression, cultural enrichment and
environmental issues and were electorally volatile and politically critical of the established system. They developed alternative ways of life and new forms of societal organizations all composing the emerging civil society. These developments had tremendous effect on political theory. The development of new left theory and civic society’s new collective actors is very much a co-evolution. Theory was embedded in political practice and *vice versa*. Yet, the move from ‘the personal is the political’ to constituting civil society as a public realm based on social groups proved tremendously dangerous to the wider public discourse as the discussion of the far right will later show. In the meantime, the new left has recruited civic society into the project of renewing democratic theory.

Whereas in other sections of the paper a certain thinker or text was taken to represent the theory, the new left is different. For one, the politicians and ideologues of the radical left, emerging from the alternative scene of the late 1960s, were themselves very articulated and theoretically productive. Moreover, there was no ‘house intellectual’ but rather constant interactions between the changing theoretical discourse and the activists of the Greens. The transformation from the communitarian to the multicultural to the theory of deliberation, is analyzed through the concepts of civil society, politics of identity and participatory democracy which arise in the process.

The New Democratic Theory: Civil Society & Multiculturalism – Beyond the Individual?
The bedrock of contemporary political theory is John Rawls’ *Theory of Justice*, which paved the way for the debate between individualism and communitarism. While Rawls’ theory was interested in generating a just polity based on rethinking the relationship between economic distribution and political institutions, civil society acquires an explicit role with the emergence of the communitarian critique of his theory. Communitarians made two overarching claims: first, that Rawls uses methodological individualism, which wrongly supposes that, at least in the original position, a person is devoid of any prior knowledge about her social positioning, community and culture. Communitarians would argue it is ‘methodological’ individualism precisely since it is ontologically and epistemologically not the case: a person is always a part of a community, a culture, a group, which shapes the way she views society. Her values thus constitute her position. Second, communitarians would argue that the idea that the community is constitutive of one’s identity is not only a given fact, but also a good thing, providing the notion of belonging against an atomistic perception of society. And for the notion of belonging. Sandel maintains that the Rawlsian
notion of independence carries consequences for the kind of community of which we are capable. Understood as unencumbered selves, we are of course free to join in voluntary associations with others… What is denied to the unencumbered self is the possibility of membership in any community bound by moral ties antecedent to choice; he cannot belong to any community where the self itself could be at stake.26

Sandel thus challenges not only liberalism’s preoccupation with justice, but also its notion of civil society. Civil society should not be seen as a thin concept of voluntary associations catering for individual choices, but a constitutive realm into which the individual is born and which thereby poses certain moral obligations, which are prior to choice and concern her very sense of identity. Such loyalties and convictions are “inseparable from understanding ourselves as the particular person we are – as members of this family or community or nation or people, as bearers of that history, as citizens of this republic.”27 What emerges from the communitarian account of society is the constitutive role of moral communities that co-exist within the public domain as an independent realm. Within civil society groups and communities lead a normative existence, which informs the state and projects values into the political order.28 Thus, the ethical community returns to the centre stage, however, in contradistinction to early liberalism’s stress on the community of equal citizens, communitarianism is highly informed by religious communities, ethnic and cultural groups, and national minorities. The main goal of liberalism – achieving one political community of equals – is transcended by the fragmentation of moral communities and the return of notions of belonging, primordial ties and collective identity to play a formative role in the public sphere.

With the coming of age of the individual-communitarian debate, it merged into another emerging theoretical discourse, that of multiculturalism, based on what Kelly called “the communitarian ‘social thesis’ – namely, that individual identity is shaped by and provided through membership of groups, of which cultural groups are perhaps the most important”.29 Whereas some communitarians would advocate an alternative sense of a unitary community – a nation or people or state – where the normative is prior to the procedural and good overrides the right, the standpoint of multiculturalism is from the beginning one of pluralism of communities within the state.

Clearly, the discourse of multiculturalism accepts the plurality of communities as its point of departure. Once this is recognized, the issue becomes one of minority groups within the state seeking collective rights. One trend of thought perceives these rights as emanating from the classical individual rights. Kymlika argues that “respecting minority rights can enlarge the freedom of the individual, because freedom is intimately linked with and dependent on culture”.30
In Kymlika’s account, therefore, the realization of individual rights is almost conditioned upon cultural rights, insofar as culture “provides its members with meaningful ways of life across the full range of human activities, including social, educational, religious, recreational, and economic life, encompassing both public and private spheres”. Kymlika’s liberalism thus brings back culture and difference as conditions for the self-materialization of individual rights. The realm where these minority rights are practiced is neither the political nor the economic: it is civil society.

However, the more radical demand of multicultural theory, with the move from individual to collective rights, and from economic to cultural goods, is that of the politics of recognition. This claim clashes with the traditional liberal framework, which addressed the issue of difference and identity politics by assigning rights. Fraser explains the contradiction: “Recognition claims often take the form of calling attention to, if not performatively creating, the putative specificity of some group, and then of affirming the value of that specificity. Thus, they tend to promote group differentiation. Redistribution claims, in contrast, often call for abolishing economic arrangements that underpin group specificity.” Multiculturalism questions the very discourse of rights designed to bring about equality. Difference, rather than equality, should be recognized and practiced. Crucially, the difference is across groups, so that sameness within groups is assumed and equality of a second order – equality to be different as a group – is advocated. The discourse of rights is not superior to that of identity. It is just different. The cultural difference is itself perceived as a value, and cultural diversity should hence be recognized, valued and preserved in its difference. In multiculturalism, the role of groups – cultures, traditions, religions, and communities – is tantamount to that of individuals in liberalism. The cultural difference – its recognition, its practice – rejects the unitary political realm. It is within civil society, autonomous from the political sphere (which reduced the Left/Right spectrum to questions of redistribution) that cultural diversity becomes pivotal in achieving social change.

If the politics of recognition demanded the autonomy of each community of values, deliberative democracy provided a normative framework that assigned this very plurality of associations and cultures a positive role, as an indicator of qualitatively better democracy. Thus, the new democratic theory had to find the fine line between advocating a new, unitary meta-narrative, and succumbing to cultural relativism. It found the balance by underlying an alternative framework rather than a close set of values, stressing procedures instead of positive beliefs.

Against representative democracy, emphasizing universal participation as embodied in elections between parties and reducing citizenship to the right to vote, deliberative theorists
advocate, side by side with universal suffrage, concrete forms of active participation. Benhabib explicates: “the procedural specifications of this model privilege a *plurality of modes of association* in which all affected can have the right to articulate their point of view.”34 With the change from the established political realm to an extended social arena comes the centrality of civil society as the prime locus of interaction manifested in deliberation. Benhabib continues: “It is through the interlocking of these multiple forms of associations, networks, and organizations that an anonymous “public conversation” results.”35 Not only civil society gains primacy as the realm of the public sphere where most of the networks and organizations operate, but the unique feature of this realm is public discourse, argumentation and communication. An alternative model of democracy emerges. Legitimacy, rationality and associations become quintessential to the normative power of deliberative democracy. Communication becomes an act of participation, a manifestation of active citizenship, extended to civil society and measured not by voting, legislating or policy-making, but by engaging in the debate on the nature of society on different levels, through diverse networks, by plurality of collective actors. Yet, just as with communitarism and multiculturalism, the collective actors become the prime unit in this political analysis.

**The Greens: Building a Postnational Minorities Party**

Theories of deliberative democracy were highly influenced by the emergence of the collective actors – NSMs, NGOs, protest groups and Green parties – in civil society. Political theorists sought to maintain side by side the political realm - representative democracy, and civil society - characterized by deliberating communities. The Greens from the beginning had a more radical project in mind. Even if the new collective actors and the plethora of New politics issues may seem to lie within a separate social sphere, in civil society, an essential feature of it is the very challenge to the borders and meaning of the ‘political’. They developed a distinct notion of the role of civil society in the repoliticization of advanced democracies.

The main concern of the Greens, this paper argues, is with those disperse disadvantaged groups – on political, economic, social, cultural or environmental grounds; the Greens attempt to incorporate them into an alternative vision of a participatory democracy. This, in turn, allows issues of ecology, the underclass, ethnic minorities, Third-worldism or women inequality to find their place within the broader conceptual structure of their modular ideology. Indeed, the cement between these different disadvantaged groups is the principle of inclusion. This, together with respect for others, tolerance, social justice, participatory politics and grassroots democracy has
been at the heart of their ideology. The idea of inclusion stands in close antagonistic relations to that of exclusion, which is fundamental to the conception of the extreme right.

The German Greens were never ‘an ecology party’; diversity and pluralism were always their trademark. However, ecology symbolized ‘unity in diversity’. First, ecology provided an alternative discourse, against the dominant political one, which centered around self-interest, economic pursuit, competitiveness and individualism. Ecological principles of interrelatedness, interdependence, systemic approach, sustainability and biodiversity granted the emphasis on pluralism, cooperation, solidarity and holistic thinking. Second, ecological politics rejected economic growth shared by the ruling parties - Left and Right alike. The ecological crisis and the limits to growth challenged the foundations of traditional politics and united the protest movements under the slogan ‘we are neither left nor right we are ahead’. Finally, ecology provided fertile ground for challenging the dominant political culture which concentrated on national interests. Instead, ecological problems figured on the individual, communal, local, regional and global levels. The Greens, which proud themselves on endorsing ‘the wide rainbow from Dutschke to Gruhl’, stretching from the radical left to the value conservatives, perceived themselves as party of inclusion. The enhancement of diversity was the opening statement of their basic-programme which read: “We are the alternative to the traditional parties. We grew out of a coalition of alternative groups and parties. We feel solidarity with all those who have become active in the new democratic movement... We consider ourselves a part of the Green movement that is rising up throughout the world.

It is in that context that the idea of multicultural democracy as a vision for the new Germany should be analyzed. Multicultural democracy was a core idea of the Greens already in their basic-programme of 1980: “the steadfast support for the concerns of minorities in our society is one of the guiding principles of Die Grünen... We support the right of national minorities to develop their own unique identity and to maintain their cultural and religious characteristics by means of self-government.” The rights of self-determination, self-administration and self-realization, which the Greens promote, transcend individual rights and advocate collective rights of national, ethnic, cultural, religious and sexual minorities. Cultural preservation of foreign-workers, immigrants and Gypsies is also endorsed, more than a decade before they become central in the public discussion. This politics of identity – politics of appreciating and respecting difference – is advanced through decentralized direct democracy of autonomous local and regional spheres.

Crucially, this multicultural approach is political rather than merely social: exploitation and injustice are extended beyond the traditional Marxist analysis of social classes to include
other kinds of disadvantaged groups. Issues of collective identity, culture and community should be recognized as the responsibility of the state, and minorities should acquire recognition and collective rights. On their own part, the Greens portrayed themselves a minorities’ party, voicing the concern of the exploited, weak groups in society – the underclass, immigrants, homeless, poor, but also homosexuals, ethnic and religious minorities. The greater vision was one of empowerment: minority groups should participate in the political discourse and express their own views and needs: "It is only through the self-determination of those directly affected that the ecological, social and economic crises can be counteracted". But the party was to make sure such groups would always have a political home. Thus, the Greens tried to establish a multicultural democracy within their own party – among the different ideological currents and in their relations with the movements; they endorsed the cause of representing the claims and rights of disadvantaged groups in Germany; they struggled against the extreme right movements, and they envisioned the greater Gremany eventually as a multicultural democracy. From the perspective of the Greens, it was essential, within the German political culture, that there would always be a political niche for disadvantaged groups. The internal structure of the party was the reflection of the multicultural democracy the Greens sought for Germany.

The German unification project, in the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall, signalled a major setback for the Greens idea of post-national, multicultural society. They resent the naked Machtpolitik reality expressed in the “empty, chauvinistic phrase 'one people and one fatherland'”. By 1990, the struggle was against the attempt to re-nationalize Germany. One of the main issues was the rise of extreme-right sentiment. The Greens feared the renewed national impetus would threaten immigrant communities. For them, it was inextricably linked to democracy:

Immigrants and refugees, Rumanians and Gypsies, Jews and Muslims, gays and lesbians, disabled and homeless are the victims of Right-wing violence. As the party of citizens' rights alliance90/Greens wants to send, through a comprehensive politics of equality, a clear signal against right-wing reactionaries and segregation. Promoting equal citizens' rights for all the long-standing minorities here is for Alliance90/Greens a central question of democracy.

But the most crucial battle for the mature Green party of the late 1990s, was the issue of citizenship. The 1998 coalition between the SPD and the Greens tackled, for the first time, the German law which was still based on blood rather than on citizenship rights. Immigrants who were born on Germany soil and lived there for most of their life could not become citizens. While both coalition partners sought to change the law, their positions differ. The Greens wanted to
uphold dual-citizenship; the SPD demanded that naturalized people will choose one citizenship – either German or their country of origin. The SPD has won but the Greens’ stance reflect the way they hoped Germany to be: a multicultural democracy which respects the rights of its minorities without restricting their benefits from the German welfare state in return. The Greens thus sought a post-national multicultural democracy in which cultural, national and ethnic communities are endorsed and collective identities – other than national ones – are cherished.

Thus, civil society is used to revitalize the established political system and endow a different kind of polity, with grassroots democracy based on active participation in local, national, regional, international and global politics. It was embedded in a new kind of politics: "we want with our electoral program to create passion for politics". Politics is a life-long process, politics is a way of life: "We should not decide for our future only in the ballot box, but everywhere and every day". The Greens "want to make politics with people, not only with their votes". Civil society challenged the established party-system and the very understanding of what is the ‘political’. The politicization of society was the role ascribed to civil society in the new left.

It took five more years for the Greens to realize the problem with pursuing politics of collective identity to the full. Without giving up their vision of a multicultural democracy, their 2003 new fundamental manifesto, replacing the basic-programme of 1980, opens: “At the centre of our politics stands the person, with his dignity and freedom. The prohibition to interfere with one's dignity is our starting point.” For the first time in an ideological document, the individual is placed at the centre of the worldview, and the relations to nature, community, state and the world are deduced from one's inalienable rights to dignity and freedom. The return to individual rights as the basis of culture, community and participatory democracy may have been too late as the relegitimation of collective identity and primordial communities already stroke an ancient chord with their principal opponent, the far right.

**Politics of (National) Identity: Two Reactions to the Cultural Discourse**

For the new left, the extreme right represented a phenomenon greater than the new radical right parties which emerged in post-industrial societies. They symbolized the long shadow of the all too nationalistic and fascist European past; they reified the social danger of neglecting to guard the growing ethnic minorities in advanced democracies; and they constituted the alternative pole against which the political vision of a future post-national, participatory multicultural democracy was erected. For the project of the new democratic theory, the far right symbolize the possible demise of the whole idea of civil society as the realm of new democratization. For the extreme right, however, the close attention given to it by the new left was instrumental in magnifying its
effect. For example, the fact that, determined to combat the extremists, the new left generated counter-demonstrations in many of the far right gatherings, meant that such events were often attended by the police and the media. Ironically, the new left thus helped to establish the far right as a rising force to be reckoned with.

However, the interrelationships between the far right and the new left transcend instrumental or strategic levels. The extreme right has reacted directly to the challenge of multiculturalism and identity politics which the new left re legitimized, and brought back into the public discourse. Crucially, the evidence of direct struggle on the interpretation of political concepts such as identity, community, culture and participatory democracy suggest that the relationship between the new left and the far right, as well as their influence on the public discourse, are more substantial than usually perceived. The charge that the far right can adopt – with only marginal changes – the communitarian discourse of the new left raises grave questions for the latter.

The same conceptual building blocks characterize the discourse of the far right – theoreticians and politicians alike: identity, the notion of an all-encompassing crisis, the rejection of globalism and individualism, emphasizing organic communities - the family and the nation. Moreover, the same policy outcomes – rejection of immigration, denunciation of globalism and interest-oriented market economy, the critique of the elites and endorsing referendum as a vehicle for direct democracy – are professed by both collective actors of the far right. However, their respective reactions to communitarianism and the politics of difference are fundamentally different.

Thinking the French New Right: Politics of Difference against Immigration

The affinity of the new left and right can be traced to the date of their inception. The ideologues of the far right describe their project thus: “The French New Right was born in 1968. It is not a political movement, but a think-tank and school of thought. Indeed, the philosophical reaction to the challenge of multiculturalism and politics of identity is one of wholesale endorsement:

The New Right proposes, then, a communitarian model which would spare individuals from being cut off from their cultural roots and which would permit them to keep alive the structures of their collective cultural lives.49

The dichotomy which the intellectual new right adopts as the framework of ‘us and them’ is that between liberal individualism, which cuts off the cultural roots and atomize individuals, and a communitarian model, which embraces collective identity, embedded in culture. The new right begins its analysis with the all-encompassing crisis of modernity. Modernity is characterized by
five converging processes: individualization, massification, desacriialization, rationalization and universalization. It is clear from the title of the third section who is the target of the New Right - ‘Liberalism: The Main Enemy’: “Liberalism embodies the dominant ideology of modernity. It was the first to appear and will be the last to disappear... it turned commercial value into the essence of all communal life.” The one-dimensional man and the ideology of human rights are deplored by the new right’s ideologues, just as they are by the new left. Interestingly, in contradistinction to the new left, de Benoist closely associates civil society with the faults of liberalism - ‘atomized civil society and the managerial state’ – against which he argues that ‘man is rooted by nature in his culture’. It therefore follows that a Society is a Body of Communities: “Human existence is inseparable from the communities and social groups in which it reveals itself. The idea of a primitive "state of nature" in which autonomous individuals might have coexisted is pure fiction.”

The organic metaphors woven into the manifesto – body of communities, organic collectives, natural equilibrium, harmony, spontaneity, family – are set against the rationalist, contractual, interest-oriented liberalism and remind us the discourse of the 1930s. The detestatation of individualism rejects the premises of liberal democracy and the individual as the center of its philosophy. Just like the new left, the FNR repudiates the alienated individual, the impulse of economic interests, embraces the cultural, communal, emotional, spontaneous and natural, echoing the communitarian discourse of the 1980s, and the Greens’ manifestos. If so, what about diversity and multiculturalism? Curiously, the new right has no reservations:

Diversity is inherent in the very movement of life, which flourishes as it becomes more complex. The plurality and variety of races, ethnic groups, languages, customs, even religions has characterized the development of humanity since the very beginning... The French New Right is profoundly opposed to the suppression of differences... The true wealth of the world is first and foremost the diversity of its cultures and peoples.

Thus, the philosophical position adopted by the new right embraces diversity – particularly ‘the diversity of its cultures and peoples’. The ideological boundaries are now clear: against the atomistic, mechanical, rational, culturally-blind, ‘homogenizing universalism’ of civil society which liberalism offers, the new right endorses diversity, community and culture as alternative, organic building blocks which constitute collective identity. But if the manifesto not only acknowledges, but advocates the politics of difference, the French new right might not be extremist after all. It might indeed share the ‘neither Left nor Right’ position of the new left.

Yet, from the recognition of difference the new right deduces the following position: “By reason of its rapid growth and its massive proportions, immigration such as one sees today in
Europe constitutes an undeniably negative phenomenon." The objection to immigration is dual: first, the causes for immigration are the “consumer-oriented way of life. The responsibility for current immigration lies primarily, not with the immigrants, but with the industrialized nations which have reduced man to the level of merchandise that can be relocated anywhere.” But, crucially, also “Immigration is not desirable for the immigrants, who are forced to abandon their native country for another where they are received as back-ups for economic needs.” The multicultural stance of the new right is consistent with its first principles: in order for cultures to stay intact, immigrants must remain within their indigenous cultures and not play the global market economy game which uproots them from their organic communities. “Thus the New Right favors policies restrictive of immigration, coupled with increased cooperation with Third World countries where organic interdependence and traditional ways of life still survive, in order to overcome imbalances resulting from globalization.”

Politics of difference means guarding cultural diversity against globalization. But should immigrants be sent to their country of origin? On the face of it, this cannot be the case:

Citizenship implies belonging, allegiance and participation in public life at different levels. Thus, one can be, at one and the same time, a citizen of one's neighborhood, city, region, nation, and of Europe... By contrast, one cannot be a citizen of the world, for the "world" is not a political category.

In a surprising move, the concept of citizenship endorsed by the FNR repudiates the intimate relationship between nationality and citizenship: citizenship is a tag of membership possible on many different levels simultaneously, apart from world citizenship. Politics of difference seems to generate a multicultural society. The manifesto does not refute it. In fact, it argues that “communitarian politics could, in the long run, lead to a dissociation of citizenship from nationality.”

However, a clue as to somewhat different outcomes is provided on a closer reading of the idea of democracy which the FRN upholds. It criticizes representative democracy in a very similar manner to both the FN and the new left: “there is the growing impotence of political parties, unions, governments, classical forms of conquest and the exercise of political power.” The political establishment is accused of being managerial and oriented towards sectorial interest rather than the common good. Just like the new left, the FNR proposes that the principle of subsidiarity will rule at all levels, declaring that “renewing the democratic spirit implies not settling for mere representative democracy, but seeking to also put into effect, at every level, a true participatory democracy.” However, in stark contrast to deliberative ideas of democracy, which go hand in hand with participatory politics in the new left, the FNR claims that
“(d)emocracy is not endless discussion and debate, but rather a popular decision in favor of the common good.” Democracy, we learn, is related to the sovereignty of a people, and the “French New Right upholds the cause of peoples,” on which the principle of democratic equality is based: “all citizens are politically equal, because they all belong to the same political body. It is, thus, a substantial equality, based upon belonging or membership.” It is in the document ‘Democracy revisited: The Ancients and the Modern’ which we find the sought linkage. De Benoist concludes:

Direct democracy… is primarily associated with the notion of a relatively homogeneous people that is conscious of what makes it a people… Therefore, to return to a Greek concept of democracy … means reappropriating, as well as adapting to the modern world, the concept of the people and community – concepts that have been eclipsed by two thousand years of egalitarianism, rationalism, and the exaltation of the rootless individual.

The multi-layered concept of citizenship, together with the intimate relationship which de Benoist perceives between participatory democracy and a sovereign people, a political body, taking into account the option of dissociating citizenship from nationality, means that there is possibility of saving one form of citizenship – political citizenship – to the national community. Other levels of associations may enjoy different aspects of citizenship, since citizenship is simply membership. The principle of diversity is upheld, but in the end, political citizenship is inherently connected to the national level. Thus, by adopting the principle of difference, the French new right did not necessarily adopt the political vision of a multicultural democracy. For the FNR, participatory democracy is not a deliberative process but one of decision making directed to the common good of the people. It is only the nation, the political body, which can share a true democracy – a government of a people. The political citizenship might, in the end, prove the exclusive right of the sovereign nation. Other kinds of citizenships will accommodate the diverse communities.

The National Front: Identity against Culture
The National Front placed the struggle against the multicultural society at the heart of its contemporary ideology. In order to combat multiculturalism, it dismissed ‘culture’ altogether. This enabled the FN to make the classic move of the extreme-right: designating the enemy from within (ethnic cultures and social disintegration) and the enemy from without (cosmopolitan, imperial, American-led mass-culture and the European Union). The organic ties embedded within history, tradition and collective values constitute the French civilisation, bonded by French citizenship. Universaism is endorsed by generalizing the natural feeling of national solidarity and
portraying it as a universal -part of human nature- emotion. The FN is therefore not racist, for it recognizes the universal impulse of nationhood. France is for the French, this is its modest claim; other people can have their own countries. In the words of Le Pen: “We have one vocation: to serve France so it will remain French.” The climax of the programme of the National Front reads:

The rejection of the multicultural society in the name of the identity of France is the fundamental struggle of the National Front. Identity is to the nation what personality is to the individual. They are the conditions for its life and liberty.

This statement encapsulates the central role combating multiculturalism has within the self-understanding of the extreme right in the beginning of the third millennium. Politics is perceived as a fundamental struggle between us and them, friends and foes, we and the others. ‘We’ are identified by the essentialist notion of identity, of natural belonging to the national unit. The ‘others’ are those who threaten the identity of France by attempting to penetrate and transform the notion of the nation, and those who embrace the invaders and support a multicultural society. The life and liberty of France itself are at stake, as the first paragraph of the programme contends:

The entire history of all the people of the world attests: a civilization cannot endure without referring to a spiritual order beyond the individuals, order which must be preserved, despite human vicissitudes, by the political and social institutions. It is they that give legitimacy to the authority, and at the same time, limit its powers. These institutions also codify the relations at the heart of society: civilization and citizenship have the same etymology.

The two camps profess conflicting rationales. The national camp relies on the embedded history of peoples constituted around a spiritual order manifested in political – (that is national) and social (that is family, local communities and professional) institutions. These institutions are the source of legitimacy of the authority, which make the social fabric into a civilisation. The linkage between the social units and the national is the membership within this civilisation, namely citizenship. Just as citizenship and civilisation come from the same natural linguistic family, sharing the same etymological roots, so do the building blocks that constitute civilisation: they are natural elements of the spiritual order: “Heir to the traditions of French civilisation, our movement restores man to his natural ties, his family, local attachments, profession and nation.” Against the natural order, encapsulated in the notion of civilisation and substantiated by the history of all nations, stands the mechanistic, individualistic, one-dimensional order. All other
ideologies share a material dimension, failing to recognize the moral, spiritual dimension which is crucial for the continuity of identity.\textsuperscript{70}

Indeed, identity is the central pillar of the National Front’s programme. It is the first part of the manifesto, following the introduction about France. The family, the basic unit of society, is facing an economic and social crisis. The prevailing notion is one of disintegration of the basic unit of identity. The crisis of the French family is inextricably linked with the hedonistic and egotistic ‘1968 culture’,\textsuperscript{71} which legitimized abortions, children out of wedlock, and ultimately led to the expansion of divorce. The French family – taken to be the natural building block of a national society – is also a microcosm of its disintegration. The prime source of “dissociété” – the break down of the natural ties – is immigration.

The presence and development, year after year, of colonies of people, supported by a very auspicious social and legal system and delirious propaganda of favoring strangers, christened as ‘the fight against racism’, is for our national identity a death threat: it modifies profoundly the very nature of the French people. The formation of closed communities, based on ethnicity, evidently contradicts the entire history of the French society.\textsuperscript{72}

The passage encapsulates three thematic layers: the idea that immigration entails ‘the death threat to the French identity’ generating existential crisis; the collective values of the French society; and the positioning of the national front vis-à-vis the ruling elites. The problem of immigration is portrayed in essentialist terms. National identity is a universal principle of natural sentiment and solidarity, just as is the case within one’s family.\textsuperscript{73} It is impermeable. The nation is based on shared values, language, history and traditions; the very possibility of integration is by definition unattainable. National identity cannot be altered: “Assimilation is impossible, conflicts emerge, sooner or later. Thus, the massive immigration to which we are subjected, impair our identity and consequently threatens the very existence of France.”\textsuperscript{74} Assimilation is impossible, not least because of ‘the formation of closed communities’. While the FN tolerates religious and cultural traditions, the prime problem of France is the threat of Islamization, which is incompatible with the French civilisation. Islam is a theocracy – it is simultaneously a religion and a system of government – and therefore pose a threat to the French society.\textsuperscript{75} This is why the particular immigration France is facing ‘poses a death threat to civil peace… The immigration is indeed a major source of insecurity’.\textsuperscript{76} Since there is a threat to the natural national unit, as the whole social and legal system hide behind the policies which favour immigrants – over compatriots – and the closed communities on ethnic basis keep growing in France – there is a
‘death threat’ to the collective identity of the French, an existential crisis which threatens the civil peace. Civil peace is in turn connected to the notion of citizenship.

Against the multicultural society, and in order to rescue the French identity, the FN calls for reversing the current of immigration flood, ban all future immigration and return immigrants to the country of origin. It justifies it by demanding the reaffirmation of the basic code for nationality and citizenship – being French-born to both French mother and father. Only French citizens will be accorded the right to vote. France should adopt national preference. In contradistinction to the FNR, the identification of nationality and citizenship is at the heart of the FN philosophical project. The inseparability of nationality from citizenship embodies the logic of preserving the natural unit and banning immigration. No automatic citizenship but only a process of naturalization can be considered. It involved acquiring the spiritual values, the customs, the language and practices that form the French civilisation.

The etymological family of the main political concepts associated with national identity by the FN – citizenship, civil peace, polity, civilisation – are based on shared collective values which comprise the second layer of discourse within the programme. Since the struggle against the multicultural society is at the core of the FN ideology, the programme takes the extra-step of condemning culture per se. It does this by juxtaposing it to civilisation, under the final part of the programme, ‘liberty’. Interestingly, a section titled ‘civilisation’ or ‘culture’? contrasts the French civilisation with the global mass culture. Civilisation is the source of order, which produces the beautiful, the good and the truth; conversely, ‘culture’ is driven by economic interests, which reject any idea of the beautiful, any hierarchy. For the politically-correct mass culture Mozart and rap music are just the same. It thus reduces everyone to a ‘consumer of culture’, a means to making money. This reductionism is totalitarian by nature. Indeed, the French civilisation, whose vocation is to preserve the national memory and national identity, is being threatened by ‘the cultural cosmopolitan imperialism’ and ‘the Americanisation of our society’.

Thus, the juxtaposition between civilisation and culture allows the FN to arrive at a complete philosophical framework: the French civilisation, the true national identity which is the natural unit constituted around shared spiritual, moral and social values, is threatened by the internal enemy – the closed ethnic communities and their theocratic culture, as well as by an external enemy – the imperialist, cosmopolitan, money-driven mass culture. The former endangers civil peace and social integration by changing the rules of citizenship, the latter imperils the cultural and national sovereignty of France, by forces of economic globalisation, Europeanisation and cultural imperialism.
The idea of popular democracy – bringing sovereignty back to the people via referendum – sits well with the kind of street politics advocated by the FN. Political rights are strictly connected to citizenship rights of those belonging to the natural, national unit. Civil society should, again, be coextensive with the French people for whom French welfare is designed.

The Third Way: Civil Society - between the Market and the State

The third way, to a large extent, ignored the extreme right, seeking a third way between neoliberalism and the new left. However, it voiced conspicuously similar concerns: “The fostering of an active civil society is a basic part of the politics of the third way… Civic decline is real and visible in many sectors of contemporary societies... It is seen in the weakening sense of solidarity in some local communities and urban neighborhoods, high levels of crime, and the break-up of marriages and families.” In contrast to the other ideological families, in which the role of civil society had to be reconstructed and its implicit meaning retrieved, the concept has a prescribed role in the renewal of social democracy; Giddens explains:

But how does Giddens see the role of civil society in responding to civic decline? His agenda comes conspicuously close to that of the neoliberal view, as far as the dismantling of the welfare state is concerned. It can be demonstrated in the cases of the breakdown of the family and crime prevention. Giddens argues: “Reform of the welfare state has already been mentioned… To take just one example, with changes in the nature of the family, single parents, particularly single mothers, have become much more numerous. Effective policies must be designed to cope with this change.”

What is a possible alternative policy, instead of having the burden of care on the welfare system? “Contractual commitment to a child could thus be separated from the marriage, and made by each parent as a binding matter of law, with unmarried and married fathers having the same rights and responsibilities.” The care should be removed from the shoulders of the state and put on those of the individuals – and the voluntary associations of civil society. The same goes for care in old age: “Children should have responsibilities to their parents, not just the other way round.”

In the case of crime, the Third Way suggests emphasizing the notion of crime prevention by putting the burden on the local communities themselves: “partnership between government agencies, the criminal justice system, local associations and community organizations have to be inclusive – all economic and ethnic groups must be involved.” Ultimately, perceiving the role of the government strictly as a coordinating entity, which shifts the burden to local associations, amounts to dismantling one crucial responsibility of the government to its citizens, and would inevitably create new inequalities between communities wealthy enough to invest in local policing and those who would have to rely on decreasing help
from the state. Thus, as far as renewing the welfare state is concerned, the third way program, just like the neoliberal agenda, is emphasizing shifting responsibility from the state to the civil society, the only difference being the rhetoric of solidarity and partnership.

Yet, with the discourse of community, solidarity and partnership comes the additional role of civil society for the third way. It has to do with the notion of citizenship that is advocated. If the neoliberal thinking pointed to the transfer of citizenship from the political sphere to the consumer arena of civil society and the market, in third way thinking civil society is fundamental in generating a new kind of solidarity with the nation state. It is so precisely because the cohesion forces of social democracy so far were the welfare provisions that connected the citizens to the polity. With the agenda of dismantling the responsibility to the social network, alternative sources of solidarity must be sought, especially vis-à-vis the forces of globalization and localization: “Government can act in partnership with agencies in civil society to foster community renewal and development... Third way politics is one-nation politics.”

This role of civil society is derived from Giddens’ analysis of the crisis of democracy. Devolving power to local organizations, communities and associations – actors of civil society - must have the capability to reinforce solidarity without homogenizing the society. This is connected to the ‘theorem that responsibilities go along with rights’ which “should be seen as a general principle of citizenship, by no means confined to the welfare area.” Thus, in return for a greater role within the economy, social associations within civil society have a responsibility to generate solidarity beyond their individual missions towards the one nation state. “The cosmopolitan nation is an active nation... Today, national identities must be sustained in a collaborative milieu, where they won’t have the level of inclusiveness they once did, and where other loyalties exist alongside them.”

This role is, for Giddens, a third way between conservative nationalism and radical multiculturalism. Asking whether the idea of the nation can be compatible with ethnic and cultural pluralism, he argues that for conservatives “‘one nation’ is inherent from the past and must be protected from cultural contamination”, whereas radical multiculturalists embrace “cultural pluralism at whatever cost to wider solidarity. In this view, national identity has no priority over other cultural claims.” Instead, a third way is offered, based on the recognition that every collective identity is a social construction, by which ‘a more open and reflexive construction of national identity – which marks out what is distinctive about the nation and its aspirations, but is less taken-for-granted way than before’ is advocated. Indeed, Giddens proposes a cosmopolitan democracy operating on globalizing scale, as the future direction for advanced industrial democracies.
Thus, the role of civil society in third way thinking is borrowing elements both from the new right and the new left, while ignoring the agenda – and social analysis – of the extreme right altogether. It relies on civil society to relieve the welfare state of the burden of social justice by ascribing a growing role to local communities and voluntary associations. In return for their greater role, the state expects these associations to play a part in forging a new solidarity towards the nation state, by allowing different levels of loyalties to be part and parcel of the cosmopolitan state, hence contributing to a growing democratization of society. Citizenship remains a political concept, which derives its strength from an active civil society. This, in turn, generates a new source of national solidarity, based on a cosmopolitan democracy.

**New Labour: Community for a One-Nation Britain**

In all previous ideological families, the ties between the theoreticians and politicians were loose ones: Thatcher preferred to draw on religious traditions and national writers and poets; if the need for social theory arose, she chose Adam Smith and Edmund Burke, not contemporary thinkers. The Greens, for whom Marcuse and the Frankfurt school were cultural heroes, were much more attentive to the theoretical discourse, but they were as much producers of social ideas as consumers. The extreme right parties, with their instinctive detestation for the intelligentsia, were less prone to participate in the dialogue albeit being much in tune with the changing public discourse and the yearning to belonging, community and identity. However, for New Labour, the relationship with the Third Way theory were much more symbiotic. Whereas Giddens offered a social analysis from which he drew his political theory, Blair differed in two major respects: he had actual political battle on his hands, and he came into politics with a deep moral conviction, which in his understanding intersected with political theory: “the basic premises of our faith – solidarity; justice; peace and the dignity of the human person – are what we need in the age of globalization. Traditionally, these were religious values. But now we know, through several quite different disciplines, that they are universal values. Economists call them “social capital”… Political theorists call them communitarism or civil society”.

Thus, Blair knowingly identifies himself with the two central concepts of our analysis – civil society and communitarism. His take on both, however, is very distinct.

For Giddens, the Third Way is between conservatism and socialism, but also between nationalism and multiculturalism. In the end of the day, he opts for a cosmopolitan democracy in a global civil society. A prime minister can hardly afford to hold an idea of ‘reflexive’ nation-state as a tangible ideational currency. For Tony Blair, then, the third way is much more concrete
and his notions of community and civil society fits the bill of he who believes in ‘one nation, one Britain’. Thus, for him the “third way (is) not old left or new right but a new centre and centre left governing philosophy for the future.” The political task is to distance himself from Old Labour and Thatcherism without alienating the major bulks, which compose both camps. In economics terms, Blair believes “(t)here is no right or left politics in economic management today. There is good and bad.” Indeed, meritocracy will become his big, undivisive ideal. In terms of the welfare state, “the role of Government becomes less about regulation than about equipping people for economic change… This is the third way: not laissez-faire nor state control and rigidity; but an active Government role linked to improving the employability of the workforce.” Blair follows here Giddens’ footsteps in transforming the role of the state from owner and regulator to a guiding partner: ‘the purpose of economic intervention is not that Government can run industry, but that it should work with it so that industry is better able to run itself.” It is this notion of working together, of enabling and facilitating that the government acquires.

Crucially, this understanding of economics generates a vacuum in social cohesion. The welfare state, with Marshall’s perception of social rights, held society together through the social net which the state provided. The market economy relinquished this trust in the system and created a vacuum: ‘the Conservatives have systematically divided our nation and eroded the social fabric that holds us together… For far from creating a classless society, the gap between classes has become a gulf.” The individualism of the marketplace, which Blair does not offset, generates a vacuum of solidarity and trust; the alternative would be the sense of community: “At the heart of my beliefs is the idea of community... I mean that our fulfillment as individuals lies in a decent society of others. My argument to you today is that the renewal of community is the answer to the challenge of a changing world.” But what kind of community does he have in mind? This is where the ascribed role of civil society comes into play: “We understand the benefits of open markets… But we believe also in an active civic society, founded on the basis of solidarity that provides a helping hand for people to realize their potential.” At the heart of Blair’s politics are the concepts of community, solidarity, partnership and civic society. However, in contrast to neoliberal consumer-oriented civic society, and fragmented ethnic cultures advocated by the new left, for Blair civic society is the prime tool for creating solidarity for ‘one Britain’:
The Third Way needs a concept of a modern civic society that is founded on opportunity and responsibility, rights and duties go together. Society has a duty to its citizens and its citizens have a duty for society... But – and here is the deal that is at the heart of a good, decent, modern civic society – in return for that opportunity we are entitled to demand a law-abiding behaviour… We believe, therefore, in this concept of strong, modern civic society and we can be equally fierce in our defense of racial and religious tolerance as in our attack on crime and social disintegration. What people are looking for today is a country free from prejudice but not free from rules. They want a strong society bound by strong rules. That society should be fair and it should give equality of opportunity that people need but it should also demand that responsibility back from them as citizens of that society.¹⁰³

The make up of civic society is individuals, bearing rights and responsibilities. It is civic society, as its components are equal citizens, bounded by civic laws and entitled to civic liberties. It is where racial and religious tolerance is being practiced, and also where social disintegration is being tackled. Civic society – the community of British citizens, is central for his polity. He seeks “to create a one-nation Britain where all share in our country’s prosperity, not only a privileged few.”¹⁰⁴

But if it is back to classic liberalism of individual citizens within a political community, what does New Labour think about ethnic, religious, and cultural minorities? “Labour believes that Britain can be a model of multicultural, multi-racial society… Now it is time to build the inclusive society in tune with British values. Our commitment to protection of every citizen is expressed in the 1998 Human Rights Act.”¹⁰⁵ The ideal of a multicultural society is rooted in protecting individuals. Their social communities have a role to play in cementing the new national solidarity: “Voluntary and community organizations are key to Labour’s vision for Britain. From large national charities to local community groups and faith-based institutions, these sectors are vital and diverse part of national life… Labour will build on its Compact with the voluntary sector, as we develop more far-reaching partnerships for the delivery of services and the renewal of our communities.”¹⁰⁶ Thus, we came a full circle: civic society is, like with neoliberalism, to relieve the welfare state from its social burdens by using the voluntary, religious and local communities. In return for this role, they are to generate national solidarity. It is much more national than Giddens’ cosmopolitan democracy, and much more committed to reducing the gap between rich and poor. It is based on political moralism, in which meritocracy is a way to overcome class difference, but also racial and cultural gaps, by creating a ‘world-class’ lifelong learning society. This is why education is so central to New Labour’s project.
Concluding Discussion

Advanced industrial democracies have experienced a fundamental restructuring of the perceptions of the public sphere from a private/public divide into three autonomic realms of politics, economics and civic society. These changes were absorbed into the four dominant ideological families in Europe today, facilitating, in each case, their own internal renewal. For scholars of ideology, that means there are ‘guiding concepts’ through which a fundamental, cross-ideological change can be explored. However, in each ideology the role of civic society, as manifested in its relation to the other two spheres, was distinctly different. Neoliberalism constructed civil society as a vehicle to liberate state-occupied public goods, thereby hoping to generate a greater societal good by freeing the creative forces of society from the centralized grip. The idea of citizenship transformed a political notion into an economic one and was placed in the economic realm of citizens as consumers. The new left sought to challenge the relationship between the political and the social by devising a grassroots democracy of communicating communities. The politicization of civil society, based on collective identities, entailed an opportunity which the extreme right seized. They sought ‘civic peace’ in an organic society in which economic chauvinism, national identity and social integration are co-extensive. For the third way, civil society was crucial in transferring responsibility from the welfare state to the communities, based on a moral ideal of regenerating a shared solidarity through the voluntary, religious and local organizations of civil society thus cementing anew the national community.

The restructuring of the public sphere had also implications for the substance of these ideological families. The main argument here was that in setting the political agenda there is a crucial role to the fringe, opposition and radical movements. While the main left and right parties focus on the median voter, seeking to capture the centre of the ideological spectrum, it is oftentimes the radical parties which have the capacity to place new political issues on the public agenda. Thus, the discourse of multiculturalism, politics of identity and communitarianism arose from the reaction against the neoliberal hegemony of both ruling parties. For neoliberalism methodological individualism is crucial: each person is a pursuer of interests, whether he is an immigrant, a foreign worker, an employer or an unemployed. There is no room for cultural communities besides the civic space operating on market demand. The neoconservatists came thus to hold the contradictive position, in which their economic agenda encouraged waves of immigration, while their traditional nationalism dictated prohibitions on the naturalization of these immigrants, thus generating an underclass. The reaction of the new left was a full endorsement of the new disadvantaged groups. Both economically exploited – foreign workers, homeless, immigrants; and culturally disadvantaged – ethnic, religious, national and sexual
minorities. The new sense of community enabled the transcendence beyond national identity – to local and global ones. However, the new left thus jeopardized the universal commitment to the individual as the basic unit of the political vision. The centrality of groups, and collective identity, was abused by the far right. Far from being indifferent to the new discourse of identity and culture brought by the new left, the extremists built on the relegitimation of collective communities, to return to politics of (national) identity. Whereas their agenda is an exclusionist one, seeing national preference as a natural policy outcome, the third way was as nationalistic, but of an inclusionist type. The cultural and religious communities were to become part of the national project of a renewed solidarity based on citizenship.

The final point has to do with the public discourse. The gap between the theorists of the ideological families, and their politicians and parties, served to demonstrate that the political discourse is broader than the ideological spectrum as embedded in the party-system. First, while theorists can think they operate in an ideal world, politicians have to respond to concrete political pressures. Second, the dialogue is by no means only a vertical one, between the theorists and their ideological disciples. Rather, there are horizontal levels of communication mediated via the media, the internet, books, newspapers and public opinion. Third, since political theorists do contribute to the social discourse, they have a public role. As much as they hope they will be read by the right (or left) people, theorists in the public sphere become ideologues. Their ideas are being used by politicians and activists alike. The example of the way the extreme right parties manipulate the discourse of communitarism and politics of identity, demonstrated the crucial responsibility intellectuals have for their ideas. The pen is, in-deed, a mighty sword.

5 Civil society literature has by now reached voluminous size. For good overviews see Simon Chambers and Will Kymlika (eds.) Alternative Conceptions of Civil Society (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); Sudipta Kaviraj & Sunil Khilnani (eds.) Civil Society:


8 Ibid. p. 89.

9 Ibid. ibid.

10 Ibid. p. 91.

11 Ibid. p. 15.

12 Ibid. p. 4.


15 Ibid. p.2.

16 Ibid. p. 195.

17 Ibid. p. 50-1.

18 Ibid. p. 52.


20 Thatcher, Margaret The Revival of Britain, ibid. p. 167.


22 Ibid. ibid.


27 Ibid. p. 23.


31 Ibid. p. 76.

This, of course, raises the issue of illiberal minorities; See Gutmann, Multiculturalism, ibid, p. 5.


42 Ibid. p. 38.

43 Ibid.


46 Bündnis90/die Grünen, Wahlprogram 1994 (Berlin).


48 Ibid.

49 Ibid. p. 15.

50 Ibid. p. 2.

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid. p. 8.

53 Ibid. p. 6.

54 Ibid. p. 11.

55 Ibid. p. 15.

56 Ibid., ibid.

57 Ibid. ibid.

58 Ibid. p. 13

59 Ibid. p. 16.

60 Ibid. p. 1.

61 Ibid. p. 8.

62 Ibid. p. 17.

63 Ibid. P. 13.

64 Ibid. p. 16.


66 Ibid. p. 3.


68 Ibid. p. 3.

69 Ibid. p. 180.

70 Ibid. ibid.

71 Ibid. p. 11.

72 Ibid. p. 22.


This stands in dialectic relations to the debate in Germany, in the turn of the century, between Kultur und Zivilisation, in which culture was perceived as part of the Gemeinschaft, the superior values, whereas civilization was identified with the French mechanistic state apparatus.


Giddens, 2001, p. 11.

Giddens, 1998 p. 95.

Ibid. p. 97.

Ibid, ibid.

Ibid. p. 69.

Ibid. p. 71.


Ibid. p. 132.

Ibid. p. 134.

Ibid. p. 136.


Ibid. p. 34.