Social Cohesion and the Struggle for Power in Diverse Societies[1]

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ABSTRACT

This article critically examines Nils Holtug's contribution to the debate on social cohesion within liberal democratic societies, particularly in response to the challenges posed by increasing immigration-driven diversity. More specifically, it focuses on his utilization of the social capital framework to solve the "progressive's dilemma". As a solution to this dilemma, Holtug proposes the promotion of an overarching identity grounded in shared liberal values, which he argues can concomitantly support diverse societies and robust welfare systems. However, the analysis presented here challenges Holtug's framework on the grounds that it potentially overlooks power dynamics and existing social hierarchies, which can skew social cohesion processes and outcomes in favor of dominant groups. This paper contends that while Holtug's model aims to enhance inclusivity and bridge social divides through social capital, it may inadvertently enable the perpetuation of inequalities by failing to critically address the underlying power structures that shape social cohesion. By focusing on the problems of *invisible contributions* and *asymmetric relations*, this paper advocates for a more nuanced understanding of social cohesion that incorporates a critical examination of power relations and democratizes the process of shaping shared values and norms in diverse societies.

Keywords: social cohesion, progressive's dilemma, immigration, social capital, power dynamics, liberal democratic societies.

1. INTRODUCTION

In both political and academic domains, social cohesion has become a recurrent and multifaceted lens for addressing the challenges presented by diversity within liberal democratic societies. Loosely defined as the "tie that binds us together" and used to rethink the collective under conditions of diversity, social cohesion has, through the history of Western political philosophy, been theorized under different conceptions of social unity. According to these different conceptions, the most fundamental links between individuals and a collective have been defended as being based on identity, connection to institutions/constitution, or agreement on the principles of justice, or as anchored in interdependence and joint social and political activities (see Sevinç 2022 for an overview of these). In the political domain, which includes a large range of public, partisan and policy discourses, social cohesion is behind a wide array of policies that aim to rehabilitate fragmented societies and restore a sense of collective solidarity among citizens (see e.g. TFEU 2008, Art. 173-8; Kołodziejski 2023; Høyres redaksjon 2023).

Common to these approaches in both domains, political and academic, is that they often grapple with the complexity of embracing diverse populations while maintaining strong links of social solidarity: a challenge that within liberal democratic thought has been referred to as the *progressive's dilemma*. Basically, the progressive's dilemma centers on the conflict between commitments to freedom and equality within the pursuit of social justice. In a more precise version of this dilemma, the challenge lies in reconciling the push for broad support for redistributive policies with the growing diversity that may undermine a conception of social unity that is deemed essential for garnering backing for such policies (for a recent description of this dilemma, see Goodyear-Grant *et al.* 2019; Kymlicka and Banting 2006). Addressing this dilemma within the scholarly debate on ethics and politics of immigration, we find liberal nationalists using the framework of social cohesion to justify restrictive and more assimilatory immigration policies (see e.g. Miller 2016). Others resolve this dilemma in favor of inclusive policies that aim at increasing the immigrant's freedom of mobility across borders and their wellbeing in the host countries (see e.g. Baycan-Herzog 2021; Mendoza 2015; Wilcox 2004). While liberal nationalists defend national identity as the strongest form of linkage among individuals, i.e. the one that is capable of providing the most solid ground for inclusive redistributive obligations (see Miller 1995, 1993), others contend that national identity is a too exclusive form of linkage (see e.g. Føllesdal 2020; Mason 1999).

Nils Holtug offers an alternative to these approaches that promises to solve the progressive's dilemma in an ingenious way. He combines a conception of social unity defined in terms of identity with agreement on principles of justice, and offers a solution that is anchored in empirical findings and informed by political realities. Bluntly, his proposal consists in the promotion of an overarching identity transcending national identities that is based on shared liberal values and advanced by the social capital approach to social cohesion. His aim is to offer a solution to the progressive's dilemma that offers greater inclusivity than liberal nationalist approaches and stronger social links than previous approaches not based on identity, and also enables advancements towards cohesion to be actively pursued and monitored in terms of social capital.

More specifically, Holtug's book focuses on a version of the progressive's dilemma in which the liberal egalitarian values that endorse greater diversity through immigration effectively conflict with the possible negative impacts of such policies on welfare systems. In presenting his solution to the progressive's dilemma, Holtug points out the lack of conclusive empirical support for a core premise of this dilemma that stipulates a necessary conflictual relation between diversity and collective solidarity, and argues, from a moral standpoint, for a global striving for equality. The book's main thesis is then twofold: the progressive's dilemma can be solved and there are empirical and normative reasons to do so. He argues that a conception of social cohesion based on an overarching identity that transcends national differences and is grounded in a strong commitment to core liberal values can, as a matter of fact, provide an ideological foundation that is sufficiently stable to sustain support for immigration-driven diversity *and* welfare systems. Consistently with this, he further defends the promotion of these shared values in forming such an overarching identity as a way of uniting the native population and marginalized immigrants (272).

Central to Holtug's alternative is his reliance on the social capital approach for addressing the progressive's dilemma. As social capital concerns networks of relationships among people who live and work in a particular society and enable that society to function effectively, the social capital approach to social cohesion becomes practically relevant because it is action-oriented. This means that, since the introduction of new members into a society can either enhance or strain the existing social capital in that society—i.e. due to the malleability of social capital—the progressive's dilemma can, for Holtug, be proactively solved through the development of policies and practices that enhance social capital among marginalized immigrants and the native population. This would facilitate

integration and foster trust and solidarity between them, which are crucial for maintaining social cohesion in a society that is experiencing immigration.

While, however, Holtug's solution to the progressive's dilemma concludes with a clear recommendation for less exclusionary and assimilatory migration policies, this response raises concerns about the potential power struggles that could arise in shaping the boundaries of social cohesion in his terms, i.e. so that it is formed by an overarching identity based on shared values. In this article, I will argue that in relying on the social capital approach to social cohesion, Holtug risks overlooking the influence of existing social hierarchies and power imbalances in affecting how social cohesion is shaped and maintained. First, I argue that this shortcoming of Holtug's framework brings a general problem because the mere promotion of social capital can lead to situations where the norms and values of a society continue being skewed in favor of dominant groups, with problematic consequences for marginalized immigrants. Social cohesion can then come at the expense of their perspectives. Second, I maintain that this is a problem for Holtug's theory in itself, because if marginalized immigrants, despite visible improvements to their condition, remain systematically and disproportionally influential and disadvantaged in relation to the dominant groups in the process of shaping and maintaining social cohesion, then this undermines Holtug's goal of promoting social justice through social cohesion.

It may be worth mentioning that another recent account of the politics of social cohesion, by Jan Dobbernack (2014), has flagged the unifying attempts of social cohesion approaches in policy as highly questionable. Like Dobbernack, Holtug (43) highlights the different ways in which social cohesion has been framed and implemented in contemporary liberal democracies to realize distinct nation-building policies (e.g. French republicanism, Canadian and British liberalism and multiculturalism, and Danish liberalism and nationalism). Dobbernack sees these differences as unleashing a pattern in the politics of social cohesion that reveals how behaviors that promote social unity are often defined in contrast to the actions of certain groups, which are preemptively labeled as "problematic populations". According to him, problematic populations are, within a certain social imaginary ruled by a particular moral order, the ones considered to be a source of unwanted diversity and responsible for the disruption of social integration. Dobbernack's (2014: 181) conclusion is that a politics of social cohesion that strives for social unity through a sense of sharedness will only impoverish the social imaginary, i.e. reduce the diversity of societal beliefs and values, and serve to obscure how relational

effects occur within a moral order that systematically privileges some while disadvantaging others. But unlike Dobbernack, Holtug does not regard social cohesion as an approach oriented towards the so-called problematic populations, and so he does not abandon the search for social unity through a sense of sharedness. Holtug instead sets out to rehabilitate social cohesion from dystopian politics, thereby promoting its healing and restorative capacities in diverse societies. The problem is that, in being overly optimistic about the general benefits of his unifying attempt at promoting and maintaining social cohesion, Holtug is less able to guarantee that marginalized immigrants are not regarded as the "problematic populations" in Dobbernack's sense.

To unpack my claim, I will show that Holtug's narrow approach to social cohesion in terms of social capital and his consequent overlooking of power struggles in affecting the formation and maintenance of social cohesion crumbles into two issues when seeking social justice. For the sake of clarity, I label these two issues here as the problems of *invisible contributions* and of *asymmetric relations*. These problems can be briefly formulated as follows:

> *Invisible contributions*: The promotion of social capital can be overall beneficial to everyone in terms of creating/sustaining social cohesion but still perpetuate systemic disadvantages between the native population and marginalized immigrants. This happens when existing social hierarchies and power imbalances make people's investments in and benefits from a cohesive society not equally visible, valuable or transferable by social capital. This means that an approach to social cohesion that is confined to promoting social capital in terms of resources and opportunities, like Holtug's approach, risks marginalized immigrants contributing more to achieving common benefits, because their contributions might not be fully recognized or accounted for in a framework that conceives sharedness as external to their own premises.

> *Asymmetric relations*: Liberal values are indeed inclusive. But these inclusive liberal values have a context and a history connected to the West. Putting these values at the center of our theorizing when aiming to unify the native population and marginalized immigrants, and insisting on their top-down sharedness of identity and values, risks further marginalizing immigrants despite their accommodation in Western societies. This happens not necessarily because marginalized

immigrants might not share these values, but because, historically and contextually, these are values that they second and do not author. This means that in a liberal approach to social cohesion, like Holtug's approach, marginalized immigrants risk being permanently locked into a position of being apprentices of these values.

Section 2 starts by providing a brief overview of the two primary traditions in the study of social capital, with a focus on their perspectives of power. After situating Holtug's work more firmly within one of these traditions, I then transpose the shortcomings of the tradition to his theory in order to outline my critique of his reliance on a confined approach to social capital that neglects a systemic understanding of power relations. The problems of *invisible contributions* and of *asymmetric relations* will emerge from the lack of a critical view of power relations. Promoting social capital that creates and sustains cohesive societies is not enough, or not always the best way to achieve social justice. Section 3 will take care of the former problem, and section 4 the latter. While the problem of *invisible contributions* focuses more on an issue related to the form of Holtug's solution to the progressive's dilemma (i.e. on the intention to promote social cohesion through the sharedness of identity and values), the problem of asymmetric relations focuses more on the content (i.e. the history and content of the value set defended by Holtug). The implications of this critique for Holtug's theory, which is basically a critique of his preferred framework, suggest a need for a more nuanced problematization of social cohesion that incorporates a critical examination of power relations and democratizes the process of shaping shared values and norms in diverse societies.

To be clear, I do not deny in this critique that Holtug could be right in his proposal, and that the best way to achieve social justice for native populations and marginalized immigrants is to unite them around a kind of overarching identity that transcends their national differences and is grounded in shared values. The empirical support that Holtug's mobilizes in his book makes this proposal attractive. But for securing social justice, which is his goal, Holtug's proposal still has to survive a critical scrutiny of the role that power plays in even conceiving something like an overarching identity: What differences are transcended? By whom? Why? Should the transcended differences be transcended? By design, it would have to enable shared values that are genuinely shared. It is possible that empirical studies that focus on the perspective of marginalized immigrants living in diverse and well-functioning Western societies reveal that, despite a society having accommodated for them, and despite having achieved more

equality of resources and opportunities in relation to the native population, they still lack a sense of belonging because the society is structured around premises that keep alienating them in other ways (see e.g. Rathe 2023). Since I am not engaging with the empirical part of Holtug's book, I will not exploit this empirical literature on belonging, but rather focus on the two problems mentioned above. Section 5 concludes with a short evaluation of the book's merits and deficits in my reading.

2. THE INSTRUMENTAL VS THE CRITICAL APPROACH TO SOCIAL CAPITAL AND THE ROLE OF POWER

Following Putnam (2000), Holtug belongs to a Tocquevillian tradition revived by Hanifan (1916) and cultivated by Coleman (1988), Bourdieu (1986), and Burt (1997), among others. This line of thinking redefined the market view of capital, which is based purely on assets and wealth, by appealing to its broader social and individual functionalities. Generally put, its central commitments emphasize the importance of networks, shared norms, and civic engagement in enabling the collective, and this approach relies on measurements of social capital to provide insights into how communities can actively work towards revitalizing and strengthening social bonds that are conducive to well-functioning societies.

Within this broad and influential tradition, two different approaches to social capital have received attention—one instrumental and the other critical. The instrumental approach focuses on the common benefits of social capital, while the critical approach looks at how individuals and groups have historically and politically accumulated these benefits in unequal ways. In the former, social capital is a desirable achievement; in the latter, it amounts to a category for the analysis of power struggles that renders the attainment of social cohesion sometimes undesirable. In instrumental terms, social cohesion is more usually sought through a certain kind of unity in a society that largely benefits everyone; and in critical terms, it comes about through contestation and the valuing of differences within this society, since common benefits have historically and contextually required different degrees of compromise acceptance among groups. Thinkers such as Hanifan (1916), Coleman (1988), and Putnam (2000) all belong to the instrumental tradition in virtue of having emphasized the common benefits of social capital to all participants of a given societal structure that includes the most vulnerable. However, Bourdieu (1986), Burt (1997) and, more recently, Arneil (2006) belong to the critical tradition in virtue of having paid greater attention to the risks of social capital being used as an instrument to preserve privilege, despite

incremental improvements for the most vulnerable.

To give a quick example of what such incremental improvements can amount to, we can think of a situation where a prestigious university gives scholarships to economically disadvantaged students. While these scholarships will help these students to gain access to the institution, the overall structure of the institution might still benefit those who are already privileged, simply because the cultural capital value of the institution mirrors the upbringing of the privileged. Applied to the case of marginalized immigrants, a typical example is the case of policy-driven programs securing language and job training to integrate them into the job market. While these programs provide vital skills for entering the job market, the overall structure of the local economy and society might still inherently favor the native population. This favoritism occurs when social norms, communication patterns, and professional networks remain shaped by and for the native population, thus ignoring structural inequalities in the struggle for social justice. This issue, known as "network externalities", has been recently problematized by Goodin (2023: 122-4), who shows how inclusion in networks serves to perpetuate disadvantages, even when they are generally beneficial to all their members.

Instrumental and critical approaches to social capital do not necessarily conflict with each other. This is because they might be complementary. But they are still rivals in the sense that the critical approach intends to show that social cohesion cannot be applied to all cases without promoting injustices. The point is that, even if social cohesion benefits everyone, in some situations it requires greater compromises for some and in ways that are not accounted for. Within the critical approach to social capital, Bourdieu (1986) points out that beneficial social capital (i.e. good aims and outcomes in instrumental terms) can reproduce inequalities when privileged people make use of the social capital in their networks to their own advantage. In this sense, a lack of economic and other forms of connected capital, such as cultural capital, can create additional barriers to members of disadvantaged social groups. Barriers prevent these individuals from both acquiring social capital as an aggregated resource and benefiting more proportionately from it. By focusing on the critical perspective, Bourdieu (1986) draws attention to a dimension of social capital that has the potential to be more substantially transformative, as opposed to merely reformative. When exploring how social capital has historically been construed and used, and by whom, he asks for a deeper inquiry into power relations and social hierarchies in a society.

The point here is that while the instrumental approach to social capital, focusing on promoting beneficial social capital with good aims and good

outcomes, can promote social gains in general and even improve the situation of the worst-off members of society, these improvements risk remaining merely incremental absent consideration of the central role of power relations and social hierarchies in the formation and maintenance of social cohesion. Indeed, on the instrumental approach, the worst-off risk bearing the majority of the unaccounted costs involved in attaining overall social gains.

Now, on to Holtug's social capital approach to social cohesion. Holtug's approach is complex and, in a way, marked by the two traditions. Like Bourdieu, he is concerned with equalizing advantages to accessing social capital within a broad scope that includes culture and religion (ch. 4). However, his focus is limited to cultural and religious resources and opportunities, and the neglect of power-driven relations (81) leads him to overlook possible inequitable outcomes in the distribution of benefits of social capital to everyone outside this restricted scope. Including culture and religion in terms of opportunities is not enough to sufficiently expand the scope of inquiry to Bourdieu's standard and capture the relevant dimensions of the cultural and religious differences between marginalized immigrants and the native population. This is because accommodating cultural and religious differences to equalize access to resources and opportunities is not the same as promoting the sharing of cultural capital, since the value attributed to the different cultures and religions might still differ greatly. While Holtug acknowledges this value gap, as transpires from his discussion on the currency for equality, this is where the conversation stops. He says:

> Indeed people's religion and culture impact the (welfare-)value of the specific choice-sets that are available to them and so a given set of opportunities in a society may generate unequal welfare if that set—or the laws, rules, and practices that contribute to shaping it—tend to favor specific religious and cultural groups. (96)

After that, he turns to examining resources as the currency for equality in its capacity to incorporate culture and religion.

To make this point clear, we can return to the example of students from disadvantaged backgrounds getting scholarships at prestigious universities. A scholarship may help these students financially in obtaining access to the university. Quotas may help them to obtain more equal chances to access the university. Being able to see their symbols on campus or not to show up to some classes may help them to preserve their culture or practice their religion. But none of these problematizes the differential

ranking of their statuses. These students might still be required to perform exceptionally well in order to be freed from the lower status that is attributed by the dominant group to their respective group. As a result of such lack of problematization of these power relations in preserving the cultural capital of the dominant group, it is unclear whether, on Holtug's approach, some groups are required (or allowed) to invest more than others to obtain the benefits available to everyone. It is also unclear how these cross-group benefits can be made proportionate to investments that are less tangible but equally important to social justice.

More saliently inspired by Putnam's account of social capital, Holtug defines social cohesion as the "social networks and the customs, bonds, and values that keep [individuals] together" (46; following the definition of social capital in Putnam 2000: 19). In this sense, social cohesion is broadly conceived as a complex function of the manifold features that make up the social, economic, and cultural networks of a society, and refined as a collective resource that connects people together while sustaining links of trust between individuals and making them willing to forgo their own resources to the benefit of others. Conceived as a connection among individuals that facilitates cooperation in societies, and which can provide support for democracy, welfare, and collective action, social cohesion is, on Holtug's approach, positive and instrumentally "required for the implementation of social justice" (47).

It is important to note that while Holtug aligns more strongly with the instrumental tradition of social capital scholarship, given his focus on the positive healing and restorative potential of social cohesion in diverse societies, his perspective is not unilaterally optimistic. Like Putnam (2000: 22, 136), he highlights instances where social cohesion fails to yield positive aims and outcomes despite its strong network dynamics—as seen in the examples of the Ku Klux Klan and criminal organizations. These cases exemplify how high levels of social cohesion can be devoid of societal benefits (48). For Holtug, the value of social cohesion is attached to the goodness of its aims and outcomes in promoting social justice. While this qualification renders social cohesion morally neutral from the outset (leaving it open for criticism), the good and the bad types of social cohesion are differentiated as wheat and tares. The badness of social cohesion is then limited to what reflects undesirable aims and outcomes.

The problem is that this approach obscures concerns associated with positive social cohesion, especially when viewed from a privileged standpoint from which overall societal improvements appear evident. The rendering of positive social cohesion in overarching unitarian terms, with good aims and good outcomes for society in general, might still overburden

members of historically disadvantaged groups and treat their contestations as a social illness that needs to be healed. For instance, Arneil (2006: 14) departs from a Bourdieusian perspective on social capital to question the appropriateness of this approach when it comes to creating diverse communities "that seek to be not only connected, but just". She argues that diverse societies are better off not when relations are solidified around a shared set of values, but when they are conceptualized in agonistic terms that involve a constant (re)negotiation of norms and values. According to Arneil, negotiations that might appear divisive in the short term could still better serve social justice in the long term. This is because the contestation of social norms and values has the potential to decentralize a hegemonic power. For her, social contestation does not directly oppose social cohesion if diverse societies are conceptualized in agonistic (rather than in overarching unitarian) terms. In addition, unity, for her, is not always the best way to promote social justice (Arneil 2006: 215-16). But by relying more substantially on an instrumental approach to social capital as the asset capable of not only forming the public good but also sustaining it, Holtug does not seem to make social cohesion any less vulnerable to construction in accordance with the desires of the dominant group, owing to the malleability of social capital. In other words, Holtug's narrow approach to social cohesion risks overlooking the fact that the differences that are supposedly transcended with an expanded "we" might actually already shape not only the possibilities for constituting this very "we", but also the possibilities for socially benefiting from a cohesive "we" in ways that are proportionate. Disadvantaged students who gain access to prestigious universities may be included in the body of students like everyone else, but because the nature of their relation is not problematized, these students might still lack the status to be a constitutive part (rather than a derivative part) of the student's body, and to be able to increase their own cultural capital.

To be fair to the complexity of his account, Holtug does take the nature of relations into account. Inspired by Putnam, he builds on the distinction between *bonding* and *bridging* social capital. Bridging concerns connections across heterogeneous groups through the creation of "overarching identities that transcend internal differences"; bonding concerns the connections within "homogeneous groups reinforcing identities" (49). Although the boundaries between these forms of social capital are not always clear, Holtug focuses primarily on bridging social capital. Its value is attached to the aims and outcomes that it produces in terms of social justice on a global scale, and is tangibly measured by access to resources and opportunities that include religious and cultural opportunities. Bridging social capital does admit power differences as a

source of unfair disadvantages—and Holtug, to an extent, accounts for this when aiming at redistributing power. But power, in this framework, is treated as a resource like other forms of social capital, and not as a nondyadic and dynamic relation that has a context and a history (Allen 2009). The point is that this latter understanding of power makes the whole social capital approach to social cohesion inappropriate for dealing with specific relations whereby certain social groups have historically benefited only incrementally and remain trapped in social hierarchies that persistently disadvantage them. The issue here is that Holtug's approach conceptualizes power like any other variation that feeds diversity into society, which lacks centrality and a systemic view.

Even social capital theorists (e.g. Woolcock 2001) have recognized the shortcomings of the instrumental approach to social capital in not giving more centrality to power inequalities; they have proposed an additional form of social capital to refine the properties of bridging and engage more directly with hierarchical power relations. In the social capital literature, the term "linking social capital" is used to describe patterns of hierarchical relationships marked by power differences (Cote and Healy 2001: 42). It has been argued, for example, that linking social capital can lead to the empowerment of marginalized groups (Woolcock 2001). If this is the case, then I would expect a more explicit account of linking social capital when Holtug explains how bridging social capital would be proportionately (and not just incrementally) beneficial to members of marginalized groups. At the same time, I would also expect a more explicit defense of the social capital approach in the face of the critique that despite including vertical power relations, linking social capital still implicitly accepts existing power structures (Fine 2004).

In sum, Holtug argues that the shared liberal values grounding an overarching identity are supposed to be thin enough to allow for diversity and thick enough to foster unity. Nevertheless, the challenges of constructing an all-encompassing identity while accommodating contestation and diversity and the challenges of operating with a determined set of values that has a context and history warrant closer scrutiny.[2] What does it mean to forge an overarching identity that is all-inclusive in the light of contestation? What remains concealed in this process? Whose compromises are most pronounced in the pursuit of the greater unity? Where do these values come from? Who has enacted them? The answers to these questions can be unpacked only through an account that locates the intricate nature of power relations at its center. What the

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2   See Miklosi's critique in this volume, which challenges the possibility of dismantling this dilemma in the liberal-democratic framework through a thick or thin appeal to liberal values.

problem of *invisible contributions* and of *asymmetric relations* clarifies, in such a context, is that this scrutiny of power struggles is not sufficiently accounted for in Holtug's inquiry, given his choice of framework, and this results in a rational skepticism towards his proposed solution to the progressive's dilemma.

3. THE PROBLEM OF INVISIBLE CONTRIBUTIONS

As a reminder, the *problem of invisible contributions* consists in exposing how a unifying approach to social cohesion, while comprehensive in its consideration of shared values and identities, may not fully account for the nuanced dynamics of participation and representation in shaping these shared constructs, particularly for marginalized groups. I will start by unpacking what is meant here by "invisible" in this problem. It is uncontroversial today to say that women have played an important social role in binding families and communities together through housekeeping, child raising, participation in school or church associations, and so on. Their work has certainly increased the social capital that benefited society as a whole. They have historically borne a great portion of the costs of the common good—costs that previously went unaccounted for as their contributions were largely invisible or ignored, but which are today largely recognized. Before we plot this into the case of marginalized immigrants, I should note that Holtug's solution to gender inequality seems to be to formally and informally establish equality of opportunity across gender groups and extend to women equitable access to arenas where their contributions can be accounted for (95-6). In this sense, he takes a horizontal (peer-level interactions) and even a vertical (top-down interactions) approach to understanding power when accounting for leadership positions. However, he omits any systemic approach that challenges the structures that lead some part of the population to take greater responsibility for contributing in ways that go unrecognized in the first place. This shows that the social capital approach that accounts merely for resources and opportunities is highly dependent on what can more tangibly be redistributed and is unable to capture external sources of benefit inequality that are linked to power differences among existing social hierarchies.

Although gender, nationality, ethnicity, and religion are not supposed to be of any significance in determining who makes contributions in Holtug's framework, the persistence of unrecognized efforts and their hierarchical order remain unchallenged. This means that people across these categories can have equal opportunities (or an equitable chance of

contributing both in recognized and unrecognized ways), but the efforts themselves are still located at different points in the hierarchical order, because they are performed by people in different social positions. For instance, it is consistent to say that in Holtug's egalitarian framework, the breadwinner vs. caregivers' model is replaced by everyone having a share of paid employment and domestic work. However, despite this apparent equality in resources and opportunities, women, unlike men, are still often viewed as merely fulfilling their duties when they do domestic work, or as being neglectful of their families when they are working (Chesley 2017). The hierarchical order then goes unchallenged in an approach that fails to center structural power struggles, because the definitions, nature, value, and authority of the contributions in themselves are not questioned (Young 1990: 23). Historically, too, some population groups (e.g. women and guest workers) have consistently earned lower returns on their social investments, and these injustices are only partially captured by Holtug's egalitarian framework.

If we now use this reasoning to think of the case of marginalized immigrants, then with the help of some relational humility, we might be able to infer that is possible that we are failing to account for their contributions to the common good simply because the lens we deploy is not aligned with their own premises. Just as we did not know that women's domestic work was a valuable contribution to the functioning of societies, so too we might not be grasping the contributions that marginalized immigrants make to these societies. It seems to me that one way of finding this out would entail securing the participation of marginalized immigrants in defining what is supposed to unify them with the native populations. A top-down appeal to the establishment of an overarching identity grounded in shared values that are settled in advance by the host societies, like Holtug's, would not secure this by procedure.

This means that, without solving the progressive's dilemma with an approach that is also sensitive to power differences, it is difficult to imagine that the tendency of members of marginalized social groups to take on a greater portion of unrecognized activity will change. This is because equalizing opportunities and resources does not automatically and alone equalize the outcomes of social investment in the greater good if members of marginalized groups are still investing in ways that are unaccounted for and thus continue to be more prone to devaluation. This means that, in Holtug's account, while we can say that social hierarchies are superficially displaced and power is materially dispersed, the possibilities of constituting an inclusive "we" through an overarching identity based on shared values risk remaining more limited or disproportional for members of

marginalized groups. As the case of women given above shows, this means that one's social position already alters the way in which one is integrated into a cohesive "we" (e.g. as coadjuvants or full-fledged members) and also the way one benefits from being part of this cohesive "we", depending on the proportionality between investments in the common good and particular turnouts.

Given that relations between immigrants and citizens are paradigmatic examples of hierarchical relationships—since they are especially marked by power differences—the absence of a critical account of bridging social capital centered on power relations is a serious shortcoming that affects the success of the book's normative thesis. For example, when Holtug accepts large limitations of his normative claims based on regulatory concerns emerging from backlashes from the majority's perspective, the strength of the normative claims has very little significance for immigrants. He says: "At the basic level, justice may well require something close to open borders, although as a regulative policy for the present, this would be counterproductive, for example, because it would most likely lead to a major backlash" (190). In fact, backlash from the majority seems to have an overly strong impact on moderating the extent to which less restrictive and less assimilatory immigration policies can be implemented, without any previous reeducation making the majority more receptive towards immigrants. Still, the challenges of implementation do not seem to be of primary concern. Immigrants have rights of their own. According to Holtug, some of these restrictive and assimilatory immigration policies wrong immigrants when it comes to a basic level of justice. But wrongdoings risk becoming banal compared with regulative considerations that still prevent societies from being more open, if power struggles are not more substantially part of the solution to the progressive's dilemma.

The room between what justice requires at the basic level (purely normative claims) and what it can deliver at the regulatory level (sensitive to empirical claims) is underdefined. Therefore there is a clear risk that the outcomes of these standards and regulations will tend to fall on the side of the majority. The boundaries between different categories of social capital can indeed be diluted, as Holtug observes, and linking social capital can be interpreted as a less tangible dimension of bridging social capital. But by declining to explicitly account for power relations, Holtug's attempt to entangle the transcendence of internal differences into an overarching identity is less capable of reworking the power balance that favors the majority.[3]

3   See Lenard's critique in this volume, which defends an approach to social cohesion through political inclusion as a way to decenter the power of majorities.

4. THE PROBLEM OF ASYMMETRIC RELATIONS

If the problem of invisible contributions had to do with the form of Holtug's solution to the progressive's dilemma (overarching identity based on shared values), then the problem of asymmetric relations is more concrete and relates to the content of these values and to what they historically and contextually represent. The set of values defended by Holtug as able to support both redistributive policies and immigration are not any set of solidary values, but a determined set of values. He says: "I have argued that a shared commitment to liberty and equality has positive institutional, distributive, and value effects on trust and solidarity. Thus not only are these values basic to our obligations of justice, they also form a social basis for implementing just institutions" (273). The problem is that immigrants, especially those who are more likely to be identified as posing a threat to social cohesion, are typically perceived by host societies as not owning or sharing precisely these values in the same way or with the same authority that their hosts do. From this perspective, the hosts are those who are identified by default as the "founders" of these values and the determinants of the "we", and non-Western immigrants are, at best, "apprentices" of these values by virtue of their non-Western immigrant status. Regardless of whether non-Western immigrants actually hold these values, nothing prevents them from being perceived as never subscribing to these values in the same way or with the same properties as the native population. If the possession of liberal values becomes the new basis for exclusion, replacing nationality, ethnicity and religion, then Holtug's balancing of the progressive's dilemma by diffusing commitment to these values in order to secure diversity appears to be insufficient for reaching the very core of the problem of exclusion. At the core of the problem is the absence of collaborative negotiation over differences between social players on an equal footing, whereby norms and values are collectively redefined. This issue cannot be addressed without a more extensive account of power relations that is aimed at dismantling social hierarchies rather than taking their abolition as a given.

The roles of the majority as both decision-makers and norm setters do not seem to be sufficiently distinguished in Holtug's account. After all, it seems inevitable that the majority would carry some advantages in democratic decision-making and that social justice for all depends on getting this majority to support redistributive policies. The book provides the majority with strong empirical and normative reasons to do just that. But as norm setters, the majority gets more than mere electoral advantages in making decisions; they get also to determine the norms and values to which others should aspire. Certainly, this process of determining norms

and values is, according to Holtug, not unconstrained for the majorities. But by adopting a more critical approach to social cohesion, it also becomes relevant to ask who gets to decide on such common norms and values. It is still important that norm setting is constrained by moral reasons, but if Dobbernack is right, then a moral framework can already privilege some while disadvantaging others. While preventing the perpetuation of unfair disadvantages, it is also important that the determination of these common norms and values is mediated by minorities' perspectives. Otherwise, we get very little to prevent their degradation into "problematic populations", as Dobbernack fears.

Despite recognizing the responsibility of dominant groups for accommodating the cultural and religious diversity that results from immigration, Holtug's analysis pays insufficient attention to the question of who gets to decide about shared norms and values. In liberal democracies, the willingness of majorities to embrace immigration often hinges on their commitment to values that have already been established within their society, primarily rooted in Western liberal democratic states. Consequently, Holtug appears to overlook the potential risk that the aspiration to transcend internal differences into an overarching identity, grounded precisely in shared liberal values, may result in an abstraction of these differences, disproportionally affecting the least powerful immigrants.

Holtug's treatment of gender equality illustrates the issue at hand. First, he posits that a shared commitment to liberal values can be flexibly inclusive, allowing for various interpretations of the good. These values provide the basis for social cohesion in form, while being open to variation in content. They are supposed to be thin enough to allow for a series of cultural and religious accommodations that do not conflict with liberal aims, but thick enough to "allow some informal pressure to value, for example, gender equality" (225). Regardless of how this informal pressure is supposed to take shape and what its effects might be (e.g. nudging, pedagogical initiatives), the problem is that both the form and the content of gender equality appear to be predefined within a framework and are presumed to be valid for everyone. This presumes that there is one way of getting gender equality right. The content of gender equality is, however, still determined by liberal aims as a community conception, i.e. as the set of liberal values and norms that, when adequately shared and expressed, can best foster social cohesion. While it is clear that cases of violence against women and gender minorities breach gender equality norms in general, it is much less clear how much room for content variation is allowed within the conception of gender equality that Holtug has in mind.

When liberal values and Western notions of gender norms are treated as evident and valid for everyone, they risk marginalizing the non-Western perspectives of immigrants. For example, Western natives enjoy here an inherent advantage due to their perceived alignment with established—liberal—norms and values. Concretely, this advantage stems from their identity, appearance, origin, and the authority vested in their home country, which champions liberal values where a determined expression of gender equality comes very high up. Historically, there are many instances in which gender equality has been used as a threshold for liberalism and as a universal standard (Wodak 2015). There the West positioned itself as the protector of the universal value of gender equality and the establisher of the norm to which others of goodwill should aspire. Consequently, Western natives are positioned as the exemplars of these shared norms and values, in opposition to non-Western immigrants. Thus, since non-Western immigrants lack equal standing in negotiating these norms and values, the proposed sharedness here risks seriously perpetuating the dominance of Western natives in embodying and benefiting from the inclusion of non-Western immigrants in these shared standards.

Holtug's approach has the advantage of making both social cohesion and redistributive solidarity tangible, enabling the move beyond purely normative accounts towards normative accounts substantiated by empirical evidence. But it overlooks the power struggles embedded in value attribution that challenge the cultivation of cohesion and solidarity in diverse societies. In the end, immigration-driven diversity raises questions for social cohesion that feed on racism, aporophobia, sexism, and Western-centrism (albeit not necessarily in blatant or conscious forms).[4] These are supposed to be countered by a shared commitment to liberal values, but are, in fact, not entirely captured and problematized in instrumental accounts aimed at bridging social capital. To be clear, a concern for the improvement of conditions for the worst-off in terms of resources and opportunities is good and certainly better than nothing. Rather, the point is that improvements that expand access to opportunities and resources for the worst-off do not affect the existing ranking imputed to social hierarchies that locate and trap the worst-off at the social bottom. Power relations are displaced, but not exactly disrupted. So long as diversity is conceived in opposition to the norm, the norm is reinstated while locking certain groups of immigrants in the permanent position of the "other". Even if they are included in the sharing of resources and opportunities,

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4   See Parekh's critique in this volume, which challenges the systemic racism and bias permeating social cohesion.

they might never cease being conceived of as the "other-we"—partially accepted and tolerated, but not sufficiently integrated to partake in the formation of a full-fledged, overarching identity. Despite interpreting resources and opportunities broader than previous accounts, including cultural and religious opportunities catering to non-Western immigrants' needs, these needs are, in Holtug's account, still locked into a defined interpretative framework that emerges primordially from the authority of Western natives.

5. CONCLUSION

Nils Holtug's *The Politics of Social Cohesion* is a book with many merits. Its review of empirical studies on the social cohesion-diversity nexus is extensive, and its methodological approach to combining empirical with normative analysis is carefully spelled out. These together should significantly increase the impact of Holtug's work. As a result, the book shows effectively that the impacts of immigration on social cohesion do not necessarily come at the expense of collective solidarity. This is partly because a commitment to liberal values serves as the basis for less restrictive and less assimilatory immigration policies. But these values can also, as a matter of fact, ground a type of social cohesion that is capable of sustaining collective solidarity. The "progressive's dilemma" is then solved, in his account, by the promotion of liberal values in diverse societies through the creation of an overarching identity that transcends differences. In this sense, *The Politics of Social Cohesion* is an expanded version of Putnam's *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*—and there are substantial merits to this as well.

Here, my critique has not aimed at questioning the book's merits. Rather, I have pointed out what I have called a shortcoming of its framework. The update of *Bowling Alone* could have eliminated some of the shortcomings of its framework by moving away from its primary focus on social justice in terms of resources and opportunities. Generally speaking, I have aimed to show that there is much more to social justice than resources and opportunities, and that these should not be singled out or considered the most fundamental basis for achieving social justice in diverse societies. More specifically, I have argued that Holtug's narrow approach to social cohesion, which is more aligned with the instrumental account of social capital, prevents him from articulating a more comprehensive and critical account of power relations and social hierarchies when fostering societal cohesion in the face of diversity. As a result, balancing the progressive's dilemma might still come at a high price

for marginalized immigrants who, despite incremental improvements, still risk being the ones tasked with bearing most of the unaccounted costs involved in attaining overall social gains. The role of majorities as norm setters, along with their power to decide how common values should be settled, has not been sufficiently questioned.

To be clear, this critique does not imply a defense of more restrictive and assimilatory immigration policies, but rather underscores the need for a more robust solution to the progressive's dilemma. Liberal nationalists have long invoked the role of majorities as norm setters and the potential social segregation that emerges from that in creating second-class citizens. They have defended national identity as a unifying form of identify that is capable of preventing this segregation, and have presented more restrictive and more assimilatory immigration policies as a way to preserve such identity. My critique has aimed to show that a stronger defense of less restrictive and less assimilatory immigration policies would not only challenge national identity as the optimal form for an overarching identity, but also question the power imbalances that might make the unifying attempt in itself problematic. This critique suggests, then, that less restrictive and less assimilatory immigration policies might be better safeguarded if the mechanisms of power in establishing an overarching identity rooted in shared values were critically scrutinized. This would reveal the need for a space of contestation among equals to lead to these values being constantly renegotiated, and perhaps, genuinely shared.

Finally, I want to mention that Holtug explicitly demarcates the ideal of equality that he is preoccupied with, and distinguishes it from the ideal of equality that problematizes power relations and social hierarchies, usually through references to social equality (81). He justifies this demarcation not by denying the importance of power relations and social hierarchies for achieving social justice, but by restricting the scope of the problem he aims to tackle. If this could be done, my critique here would seem unfair for charging Holtug with what he has not included in his book. At the same time, I have aimed to show that this shortcoming of his framework is significant enough to affect the success of his thesis in terms of social justice. Although what his book defends is significant, it still risks involving only incremental improvements for marginalized immigrants, as its approach is unable to decenter the power of the majority in extending (or learning how to extend) their collective solidarity to out-groups.

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