'Social Exclusion'

An Alternative Concept for the Study of Deprivation?

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1   Introduction

The concept of 'social exclusion' has rapidly gained popularity in international debates. It originated in France, spread through EU policy and research channels, has become a buzz word in the UK since New Labour came to power in the UK, and has been brought into the developing country debate mainly through the work of the International Institute for Labour Studies at ILO. The concept has been defined in different ways: in the 'official' French definition, as a rupture of social bonds; more broadly, as 'the process through which individuals or groups are wholly or partially excluded from full participation in the society within which they live' (European Foundation 1995: 4).

This article discusses whether the concept brings anything new to debates about deprivation in developing countries.[1] Can a concept developed in richer countries be applied usefully in poorer countries? How does social exclusion relate to more common concepts, such as poverty, vulnerability and entitlement, and the new notion of social capital? What are the implications for policy?

The article concludes that the concept of social exclusion can be a useful one. First, the concept focuses on the multi-dimensional character of deprivation. Poor people usually suffer from multiple disadvantages, related to, for example, precariousness of work, income, gender, ethnicity, and also 'participation' as it is described by Gaventa in this volume. In the focus on multi-dimensionality, there are large overlaps with other concepts that describe deprivation, such as vulnerability, entitlement, and human development.

Second, and this may be the more innovative aspect, the concept focuses on processes, and on the mechanisms and institutions that exclude people. It may take us beyond static descriptions of situations of deprivation, and focus on the causes and mechanisms that lead to these situations. As such, it has advantages over other approaches to deprivation. In this, it also has policy relevance, since it

identifies problems in existing institutions and options for improvement.

2 Social Exclusion: Genealogy of the Concept

The discussions and research on social exclusion have a French origin, and have been introduced only recently into British and other debates.[2] It seems that the spread has occurred to a large extent through EU channels: funding for social insertion via the European Social Fund, the European Anti-poverty Network, the Second and Third Anti-poverty Programmes, aid for developing countries, and research funds.

Many sociologists have used concepts akin to social exclusion, and in the French discourse, exclusion has always been a key concept. But the invention of the term social exclusion is usually attributed to René Lenoir, then Secrétaire d'État à l'Action Sociale in the Chirac government, who published **Les Exclus: Un Français sur Dix**, in 1974. The *exclus* according to Lenoir, were those excluded from employment-based social security systems – including the disabled, suicidal people, aged, abused children, substance abusers, etc. – altogether about 10 per cent of the French population at that time.

The term gained popularity in France during the 1980s. It was used to refer to various types of social disadvantage, related to the new social problems that arose: unemployment, ghettoisation, fundamental changes in family life (Cannan 1997). Old welfare state provisions could not deal with these problems, and, mainly during the government of Mitterand, a new set of social policies was developed.

In the new programmes, 'insertion' of individuals, families and groups was the main objective. Thus, education priority areas were developed in which extra money was allocated to marginal areas. The *Revenue Minimum d'Insertion* was set up, a programme providing work and training for people on long-term unemployment benefit who were under contract to perform a task that would help their re-insertion. Delinquency prevention programmes providing local youth centres were developed after

disturbances in the early 1980s. Finally, the biggest programmes were the 'social development of neighbourhoods' and 'urban social development'. These originated in housing programmes, but have moved towards community work, involving various local agents (public and private) and services.

These are substantial programmes. In the mid-1990s, there were three quarters of a million participants in RMI and 400 urban social development programmes. The approach is integrated, involving various departments and ministries. In 1995 a 'ministry for integration and combating social exclusion' was set up.

The new programmes have been evaluated, and the picture so far is mixed (Cannan 1997). On the positive side, the isolation of deprived neighbourhoods has been broken and new ways of working have been developed, with cooperation among partners and more responsiveness to the needs of inhabitants. Aspects that have been criticised include the proliferation of intermediate bodies, the low level of participation, and the variety and lack of clarity of goals. Nevertheless, according to Cannan, the schemes form one of the more impressive social experiments of the twentieth century.

Since the 1980s, the concept has spread very rapidly. Within France, many studies have come out with social exclusion as the central concept (see Cannan 1997). Paugam's research (1995) exemplifies the value of the concept: he discusses processes through which problems of individuals or households in France progressively accumulate. He found, for example, that people with a less stable job also experienced more marital breakdowns (especially if the man had the precarious job), that precariousness in employment was accompanied by a noticeable reduction in the intensity of social life, and that precariousness of employment was experienced as an expression of social disqualification.

Within Britain, some of the literature has concentrated on the difference between British and French approaches (Silver and Wilkinson 1995). Evans, Paugam and Prelis (1995) have compared the ways social security systems have been restructured in

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[2] A more detailed discussion and references with respect to the genealogy of the term are presented in a longer version of this paper (de Haan 1997).

Britain and France. Using a social exclusion approach, deprivation in London has recently been researched by the London Research Centre (1996).

In development studies, the concept of social exclusion has been used in the large project carried out by the IILS in preparation for the 1995 Social Summit. Six empirical studies were completed[3] showing the variety of situations to which the concept can be applied, and the variety of meanings it can acquire. The Peruvian group, for example, (Figueroa et al. 1996) emphasises that social exclusion is found in economic, political and cultural processes. In contrast, a welfare rights perspective is adopted in the studies of India (Appasamy et al. 1996) and Yemen (Hashem 1996: 103). The Tanzanian study (Kaijage and Tibaijuka 1996) uses a Townsendian interpretation of relative deprivation. The many interpretations reflect societal complexity and the variety of goods and institutions people can be excluded from as well as the authors' different theoretical backgrounds. Understanding these inevitable differences is important, as is also understanding different policy approaches. The next section will discuss the differences in definitions more systematically.

3 Commonalities and Differences in Definitions

The French experience provides one way into social exclusion. However, there are others. It has been defined, for example, to cover both subjective and objective features of people's lives, and as a description of individual disadvantage, as well as of attributes of societies (IILS 1996). Also, there is disagreement over the way social exclusion is defined vis-à-vis poverty. For example, whereas many authors would define poverty as an element of social exclusion, or as an alternative concept, Jordan defines social exclusion as responsible for poverty.[4]

Different traditions of social and political thought have given the concept different meanings. Hilary Silver (1994) has systematised these, and distinguished three paradigms: a solidarity paradigm, a specialisation paradigm, and a monopoly paradigm. These are summarised in Box 1. According to her, the definitions depend in particular on the ways *social integration* has been conceptualised. Choosing one of the definitions means, according to Silver, 'accepting the theoretical and ideological baggage associated with it'.

Silver's overview is extremely useful to help contextualise and understand debates related to issues of deprivation. Two warnings are in order, however. First, it is of course a schematic representation of (national) traditions. In practice, these will overlap, and most analysts or policy makers will be influenced by aspects of different traditions. Second, it is important to stress that Silver's paradigms are heuristic devices, ways of looking at reality rather than reality itself.

Bearing these caveats in mind, it is relevant that definitions of social exclusion vary, and that the reasons for this can often be traced to political and intellectual traditions. These differences are not only of theoretical interest: concepts of deprivation influence policies that combat deprivation. For example, in Britain, the debate has centred around reducing state intervention and creating incentives for individuals, whereas in France the opposite has been the case, and if anything the state has tried to take a more active role, to integrate its citizens.[5]

Nevertheless, definitions of social exclusion have characteristics in common, and these separate it from other concepts:

- Social exclusion is defined as *the opposite of social integration*, which reflects the perceived importance of being part of society, being integrated.
- It is a *multi-dimensional* concept. It refers to exclusion (deprivation) in the economic, social

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[3] IILS (1996) presents an overview of this project, discussing conceptual issues, patterns and causes of social exclusion, and policy implications (also Rodgers, Gore and Figueiredo 1995; Gore and Figueiredo 1997; ILO 1996).

[4] Jordan 'seeks to explain poverty in terms of action of exclusive groups... Exclusion and inclusion are universal

features of social interaction, and institutions serve to structure these processes, through states, markets, communities and voluntary associations' (Jordan 1996: 39).

[5] Evans et al. (1995: 16–17); Evans's contribution in this Bulletin stresses that theoretical discussions should be grounded in the respective policy contexts.

Box 1: Three Meanings of 'Social Exclusion'

- In the *solidarity paradigm*, dominant in France, exclusion is the *rupture of a social bond* between the individual and society that is cultural and moral. The interpretation draws on the philosophy of Rousseau. In this tradition, the poor, unemployed and ethnic minorities are defined as outsiders. National solidarity implies political rights and duties.

- The *specialisation paradigm* is dominant in the US. This interpretation of social exclusion is determined by individual liberalism, and draws on Hobbes. According to liberal-individualistic theories, individuals are able to move across boundaries of social differentiation and economic divisions of labour. Liberal models of citizenship emphasise the contractual exchange of rights and obligations. In this paradigm, *exclusion reflects discrimination*, the drawing of group distinctions that denies individuals full access to or partic- ipation in exchange or interaction. Causes of exclusion are often seen in unenforced rights and market failures.

- The *monopoly paradigm* is influential in Britain and many Northern European countries, and draws heavily on Weber. It views the social order as coercive, imposed through hierarchical power relations. Exclusion is defined as a *consequence of the formation of group monopolies*. Powerful groups restrict the access of outsiders through social closure. Labour market seg- mentation draws boundaries of exclusion. Unlike in the specialisation para- digm, group distinctions and inequality overlap. Inequality is mitigated by social democratic citizenship, which entails full participation in the community.

Based on: Silver (1994)

and political sphere. It goes beyond the analysis of resource allocation mechanisms, and includes power relations, agency, culture and social iden- tity.

- Social exclusion can refer to a state or situation, but it often refers to *processes*, to the mecha- nisms by which people are excluded. The focus is on the *institutions* that enable and constrain human interaction.

4 Comparison with Poverty Debates

The new French policies and debates marked a departure from earlier thoughts; but what does this mean for studies of developing countries? What can traditional debates around poverty and deprivation learn from this, and vice versa? In this section I will point at some similarities and dissimilarities with these poverty debates.[6]

It has been suggested above that poverty is mainly an Anglo-Saxon concept. In Britain, it has been an important concern at least since the Poor Law of 1597 (Lipton and Ravallion 1995: 2554 ff.). David Hume and Adam Smith altered the conception of poverty. Following technological progress in the UK, and reacting to mercantilist thoughts that saw poverty (i.e. cheap labour) as necessary for national development, economic development became

[6] Given space limits, this does not aim to be comprehensive. Recent publications in which different definitions of poverty have been discussed include **IDS Bulletins** Vol 27 No 1 (see in particular the editorial by Baulch, and the contribution by Shaffer on alternative epistemologies); and Vol 28 No 3, on the links between poverty and gender. Lipton and Maxwell (1992) describe various waves in the poverty agenda, suggesting that ideas often re-appear, rather than being completely new.

conceived of as a potential remedy for poverty. In this strand of thought, an individualistic approach has been central. While the market was conceived of as free individuals entering voluntarily into contracts, poverty was conceived of as an individual problem.

The concept of basic needs is founded similarly on an individualistic theoretical approach to society. In Rowntree (1901) basic needs were defined as a minimum consumption basket: the poor were those who could not afford this. The concept gained great popularity in development studies and policies, focusing on human needs (health, food, education, water, shelter). This approach is different from the eighteenth century economists' concern in that it is welfarist, but it is similar in that it focuses on the individual, on individual utility.

A basic needs approach is also similar to studies that focus on absolute (income or consumption) poverty. Studies on poverty in poorer countries usually make use of absolute poverty lines, often expressed in minimum calorie requirements. The World Bank has recently advanced the use of a poverty line of 1 dollar a day, in purchasing power parity (in 1985 prices), to enable international comparisons. In both the basic needs and the absolute poverty approach, the focus is on the individual, and not, as in the French social exclusion approach, on society and the individual's ties to society.

In the definition of social exclusion, there is some suggestion that the poor are permanently excluded. French social integration policies seem to be built on the fear that a permanent underclass may be formed. This is controversial; in any case, for policies it is quite crucial to distinguish groups that are temporarily and permanently poor. Recent research in developing countries has shed some light on the question of permanent versus transient poverty.[7]

Concepts of social exclusion seem close to notions of relative deprivation, of which Peter Townsend is one of the main protagonists.[8] Like others, he criticised the use of the concepts of basic needs, a minimum consumption basket, and absolute deprivation. In the concept of relative deprivation, the poverty line is not set as an absolute minimum but as depending on the country's wealth. This is now common in the debates on poverty in Europe, where a poverty line is set at a level of half the average national income, and in some developing countries.

The Human Development Index (HDI), developed by UNDP is often regarded as an alternative to income-based measures of welfare. The HDI is based on three indicators: longevity, education, and standard of living. This reflects the concern that 'human development', and not just rising income, is the central development objective. HDI has been expanded, first, by a gender-related development index, describing gender disparities in basic human capabilities. Then, in the 1997 Human Development Report the Human Poverty Index (HPI) was introduced, providing a disaggregation of HDI data, but excluding a measure of income poverty. HPI reflects the percentage of people who suffer from deprivation relating to survival, knowledge, and a decent standard of living. Whereas the HDI is similar to a social exclusion concept in stressing the multi-dimensional character of development and deprivation, HDI describes mainly the outcomes, and focuses less on the actors and processes that cause these. Also, despite the introduction of HPI, the HDI focuses on national averages, and less on specific groups suffering from deprivation.

Within development studies, Amartya Sen's work on capabilities and entitlements has perhaps been the single most influential source. The determinant of deprivation is not what people possess but what it enables them to do. Sen argued that Townsend's analysis confused the lack of certain commodities in households with their capabilities to meet social conventions, participate in social activities, and retain self-respect. A concept of relative deprivation measures relative standards, inequality; capabilities are *absolute requirements* for full membership of

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[7] For the UK, see the study of low income dynamics in the UK by Jarvis and Jenkins, in this volume. Panel data for developing countries is scarce, although information on mobility in and out of poverty is available for, e.g., China (Jalan and Ravallion 1996), Côte d'Ivoire (Grootaert 1996), and Peru (Glewwe and Hall 1995).

[8] A recent paper by Ravallion and Chen (1996) develops a concept of 'polarisation' (bi-modality of incomes in a country), i.e. a measure of the extent to which the society is divided into 'haves' and 'have nots'.

society. The entitlement concept draws attention away from the mere possession of certain goods, towards the rights to these goods and the command families have over them, using various economic, political, and social opportunities within the legal system.[9]

Perhaps closest to the concept of social exclusion in this list of approaches to deprivation are notions of vulnerability. According to Chambers (1989), vulnerability is not a synonym for poverty. Whereas poverty means lack or want – usually measured in terms of income or consumption – vulnerability means insecurity, defencelessness, and exposure to risk and shocks. Vulnerability emphasises people's own perceptions of their situation, rather than relying on definitions by outsiders.[10] Like social exclusion, the concept of vulnerability looks at a variety of dimensions of deprivation.[11]

At more or less the same time as the concept of social exclusion, the notion of social capital entered development debates. The notion is usually associated with Putnam's (1993) analysis of the differences between northern and southern Italy in forms of networks and civic engagement. This suggested that groups or regions with greater degrees of horizontal connections and more voluntary associations have more efficacious governments. A recent analysis of the role of social capital in Tanzania by Narayan and Pritchett (1997) suggests the relevance of social capital for incomes in poor rural areas. An increase in the social capital index of a village – measured by the survey respondents' membership in groups, the characteristics of these groups (heterogeneity, inclusiveness and group functioning), and the individuals' values and attitudes (particularly the expressed trust and perception of social cohesion) – is strongly associated with higher expenditure per person in each household in the village. The study shows no connection between the degree of inequality among households in the same village and social capital. This work on social capital obviously overlaps with discussions about social exclusion, but the latter focus more directly on issues of deprivation.

This brief overview of poverty debates shows that there are large overlaps between the way social exclusion has been conceptualised, and various definitions of poverty. This is not surprising, not only because new concepts always incorporate elements of older debates, but also because, as Silver stresses, *definitions* of social exclusion are determined by national intellectual and political traditions. The debate on *definitions* of poverty will go on for a long time, but I believe that the social exclusion concept has a certain advantage over many other conceptualisations: it takes us away from seeing deprivation in terms of individual attributes, and focuses on the societal mechanisms, institutions and actors that cause deprivation.

5 Comparison with Anti-Poverty Policies

The discussion in the last section is not merely of academic interest. As the French example shows, social integration policies have been driven by notions of social exclusion. In developing countries, anti-poverty policies similarly have been driven by ideas, changing over time, of what causes and what reduces poverty. This section briefly discusses different poverty alleviation strategies in developing countries, using Lipton and Maxwell's (1992) overview of development paradigms. They distinguish five phases, which are of course a schematic representation of complex changes, varying across countries:

- During the 1950s, growth through industrialisation was the dominant development paradigm, and approaches to poverty reduction relied on community development.
- In the 1960s, agricultural intensification was a central goal, and poverty was supposed to be reduced through the process of trickle down.
- During the 1970s, redistribution became a central concern. Poverty alleviation came to focus on basic needs, as discussed in the last section, and so did integrated rural development.
- The 1980s saw waves of structural adjustment

[9] E.g. Sen (1977 and 1981). According to Gore (1995: 13–14) a social exclusion approach goes beyond an entitlement framework by looking at processes behind entitlement failure.

[10] See also Dasgupta's (1993) interdisciplinary approach to human well-being, including social and political dimensions of poverty and emphasising the cultural basis of personal assessments of well-being.

[11] Approaches that focus on absolute (income) poverty or on vulnerability are not opposed. They measure different things, and are both valid in their own right (Ravallion 1996; Shaffer 1996b; de Haan and Koch Laier 1997).

programmes and a rolling back of the state. Partly contradictory (since more emphasis was placed on market incentives) but partly complementary, NGOs and participatory development became more central in poverty alleviation.

- The 1990s, finally, have brought, a new consensus, in which the strategy to reduce poverty has three core elements: broad-based (labour-intensive) economic growth, developing human capital, and social safety nets for vulnerable groups.

Comparing these different trends in thinking about poverty alleviation with approaches to combat social exclusion, I suggest that the emphasis on community development (in the 1950s) and on the role of NGOs (in the 1980s) shows clear similarities with French approaches for social integration. Partnership between state, private organisations and communities is central to the French approach. This was identified as one of the weaknesses in the new (1990s) poverty agenda (Lipton and Maxwell 1992: 9), but the new consensus – cf. the 1997 **World Development Report** – stresses the importance of forms of partnership and synergy between the public and private sector (Evans 1996). Few now argue for production of goods or services exclusively by the state or exclusively by the private sector. Within the literature on urban development and poverty, for example, there is some consensus about the devolution of governance, the increasingly important roles of NGOs and community-based organisations, and increased private sector participation. Also, there is increasing attention to participation and developing social capital as preconditions for the success of poverty reduction and development programmes.

Lipton's (1996) review of anti-poverty programmes shows, in my opinion, points of overlap with approaches that combat social exclusion. According to Lipton, poor people are unlikely to achieve durable progress, and may be unable to achieve lasting welfare gains, unless they can meet several requirements jointly. The poor need sufficient food, but also clean water and primary health care sufficient to transform nutritional intakes into decent health. They need either physical assets or job access, sufficient to turn their improved physical condition into income. In many cases, they also need access to education. Greater gain in child health is achieved if those resources are divided between those two uses than if the resources are concentrated on either one of the uses. Similar links have been found between education, especially female education, and the returns to resources used for health improvement or family planning.

Policy implications following from this seem in agreement with the principles of social integration programmes. First, it may not be feasible for the public sector to do the many things that need doing simultaneously. Yet these things are complementary. So poverty reduction may require a strong concentration of public actions. Second, exclusive reliance on either states *or* markets is likely to be ineffective in poverty reduction; all tools are likely to be needed, working together. Moreover, Lipton points to the need for political participation as a condition for success. In public works employment programmes, encouragement of workers' local pressure groups contributed to success, as did education and improvement of the social capital of the participants.

Thus, there is some convergence in the thinking about poverty-reduction programmes. The consensus on poverty in developing countries has shifted, away from reliance on trickle down, basic needs, redistribution, rolling back the state or NGOs, towards a recognition of the need for a limited role of the state and complementary roles of the private sector and civil society, and towards a recognition of the need for enabling policies to provide the poor or excluded with the capabilities to participate in economic growth and society. But this is not to suggest a global convergence of policy insights. Policy paradigms differ between countries, and are changing over time. The above merely points at the overlaps between social exclusion and poverty approaches. Comparing the approaches may enrich our insights into causes of deprivation, and effective ways to combat them.

6 Conclusions

This article has described approaches to social exclusion, and has briefly compared them with poverty approaches. I have stressed that the newness of the concept should not be overstated. In many cases, the concept is merely a different way of looking at old problems, and aspects of the policies that combat social exclusion can of course be found in many other policies. Moreover, a concept is only

as good as its use: what counts is the way it is used and operationalised in research and whether it provides insight into problems of deprivation.

The understandings of social exclusion depend on national traditions of social and political thought. This is often seen as a disadvantage, but the same applies to all concepts. The understanding of poverty (or wealth) is equally different in, say, Latin America, Western Europe and Asia – not only because the manifestations of poverty differ, but also because the problem is approached in different ways. The notion of social exclusion is dependent on a specific notion of social integration, but so are notions of poverty; with respect to any concept, the different interpretations have to be kept in mind. Therefore also, there is no *fundamental* problem in applying this Northern concept in the South: what is important is that the specific understanding of the phenomenon is made explicit. What the concept may help to do is to carry forward general concerns about deprivation, allowing the interpretation of the concept to be context-specific: notions of what exclusion means depend on what *form of inclusion* is deemed to be important in specific societies or by specific groups.

Social exclusion should not be seen as a substitute for approaches that focus on income or consumption poverty. A narrow definition of poverty remains important, because it does focus on a central aspect of deprivation (not having sufficient food), and because it is most equipped to measure and compare situations of deprivation, which is necessary for allocation of anti-poverty policies, and for the analysis of the effects of poverty. The concept of social exclusion is closer to approaches that focus on vulnerability and capabilities.

Likewise, there are similarities as well as differences between social exclusion and poverty policies. The social integration approach arose in France as a reaction to the welfare state, under a social-democratic regime. Evaluations of these policies are scarce, and those that exist are not positive overall. This article has pointed to the similarities of these policies with approaches to poverty in developing countries. But it does not suggest a global convergence. Policy approaches, like theoretical insights,

gain popularity at some point of time, but the popularity usually declines over time.

One should not add concepts unnecessarily; but I agree that the notion of social exclusion can be a 'way of integrating loosely connected notions such as poverty, deprivation, lack of access to goods, services and assets, precariousness of social rights' (Faria 1995). Its main advantages are twofold; first, the emphasis on the multi-dimensional character of deprivation. Some see this as a disadvantage of the concept, because the complexity would not allow clear indicators. This may be true, but it simply reflects the complexity of the problem of deprivation. If people continue to live in deprivation because of the combination of these factors, the multi-dimensionality should be reflected in studies and policies.

Second, the concept focuses on processes that exclude people: 'addressing social exclusion always brings you back to actors and institutions' (Rodgers 1997: 73). In this, I have argued, the concept has advantages over other approaches to deprivation. Also, it makes it more directly relevant for policy, since it identifies problems in existing institutions and options for improvements.

The advantages of the notion of social exclusion are still potential, to be realised with further work in research and policy formulation. The concept has to be operationalised, and measurement instruments devised.[12] This includes linking it closer to economics and the problems of the absolute poor in developing countries. It includes devising better ways of understanding the processual nature of exclusion, and operationalising the focus on institutions and agents. Finally, it includes developing instruments that help understanding the multi-dimensionality of the problems of deprivation, and also help answer the question – in my opinion crucial for the usefulness of the concept, and for policy interventions – whether deprivation is caused by a cumulation of disadvantages.

Finally, the concept may have not only analytical advantages but also political significance. It needs to be taken – as Evans in this volume rightly argues – beyond rhetoric. But in itself, stressing the need

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[12] I believe this is possible, for example, along the lines of Paugam's (1995) work; see de Haan (forthcoming).

for social integration and the risks (or costs, shown in Wilkinson's discussion in this volume) of social exclusion for the *whole society* may help to gain the necessary political support. Social integration needs to be carefully and critically defined, but if it incorporates a concern of social justice for all, it may prove a useful instrument in combating deprivation.

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