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Collective Identity and Voice at the Australian Citizens' Parliament

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Abstract

This paper examines the role of collective identity and collective voice in political life. We argue that persons have an underlying predisposition to use collective dimensions, such as common identities and a public voice, in thinking and expressing themselves politically. This collective orientation, however, can be either fostered or weakened by citizens' political experiences. Although the collective level is an important dimension in contemporary politics, conventional democratic practices do not foster it. Deliberative democracy is suggested as an environment that might allow more ground for citizens to express themselves not only in individual but also in collective terms. We examine this theoretical perspective through a case study of the Australian Citizens' Parliament, in which transcripts are analyzed to determine the extent to which collective identities and common voice surfaced in actual discourse. We analyze the dynamics involved in the advent of collective dimensions in the deliberative process and highlight the factors—deliberation, nature of the discussion, and exceptional opportunity—that potentially facilitated the rise of group identities and common voice. In spite of the strong individualistic character of the Australian cultural identity, we nonetheless found evidence of both collective identity and voice at the Citizens' Parliament, expressed in terms of national, state, and community levels. In the conclusion, we discuss the implications of those findings for future research and practice of public deliberation.

Keywords

deliberative democracy, deliberation, identity, voice, individualism, Australian Citizens' Parliament, Indigenous, ACP, collective, alienation, participation, Australia

The theory and practice of public deliberation continues to mature as the practicalities of public engagement test abstract theoretical ideals. Careful analysis of actual cases of deliberation have already sharpened pre-existing theoretical lenses and suggested the need for new ones.

In particular, early writings on deliberation (Barber, 1984; Chambers, 2003; Habermas, 1979; Mansbridge, 1983; Gutmann and Thompson, 1996) emphasized the common good in terms echoing Rousseau (1762/1950). Critics, however, questioned whether deliberation can take difference into account fully (Sanders, 1997; Young, 2000). As a result, more contemporary conceptions of deliberative democracy now better handle multiple publics and voices (Dahlberg, 2005) through concepts such as “meta-consensus” (Dryzek, 2010) and conceptualizing deliberation at different levels of analysis (Gastil, 2008).

One offshoot of this larger theoretical debate about publics and the common good concerns the role of identity and voice in politics. Fischer (2006) articulates this concern in his study of Kerala, India. Fischer shows how civic organizers employed “cultural strategies” to get local residents to participate in public meetings and express themselves effectively. In his view, this project had to open an inclusive “deliberative space.” Such political space “is not just filled up with competing interests but rather is understood as something that is created, opened, and shaped by social understandings.” This approach to empowerment “emphasizes the discursive construction of the meanings and identities of the actors, institutions, and practices inherent to it” (Fischer, 2006, 25-26).

Whereas Fischer and others have emphasized the need for a plurality of publics in deliberation, this essay turns back to consider when and how the collective identity presumed in early deliberative theory might manifest itself. After all, deliberation has been said to give rise to shared judgment (Dryzek, 2010; Mathews, 1994; Yankelovic, 1991), or at least a convergence of views (Fishkin, 2009), and some have posited that deliberation can create a more public-spirited self (Warren, 1993; Gastil et al., 2010).

But can deliberation spur people to think of themselves as part of a larger whole and speak in terms of a collective? And if so, what does such behavior look like? To answer those questions, this essay develops a theoretical understanding of the collective dimension of politics and how it works. The collective dimension is articulated in terms of two interrelated concepts—collective identity and collective voice. We examine how contemporary democratic practices regard common voices and group identities, and we then focus on the relationship between deliberative democracy and the collective dimension.

We augment our theoretical discussion with an analysis of citizen discourse during the Australian Citizen Parliament (ACP). This public engagement process culminated in a four day forum at Old Parliament House in Canberra, February 6-9, 2009 (Hartz-Karp and Carson, 2009). For research purposes, the participants’ conversations were audio recorded and transcribed. Our analysis of these transcripts explores how extensively Citizen Parliamentarians employed collective dimensions during their deliberations. Our study also seeks to identify the dynamics underlying collective expressions and suggests reasons for its emergence. In particular, we highlight

factors that appeared to increase participants' propensity to reference their collective identities and sense of common voice with fellow Australians.¹

A single case study cannot lead to a definitive understanding of the relationship between deliberation and group identity and voice. Nonetheless, the ACP case is particularly interesting because the individualistic Australian culture is considered an unlikely setting for the collective dimension to arise. In spite of that obstacle, this is precisely what occurred during the ACP deliberations, so there is much to learn from this case. Before turning to the data, however, we begin with an overview of ancient and modern political theory to develop our conception of collective identity and voice.

The Collective Dimension of Political Life

The vast literature on democracy illuminates the extent to which things have changed since the earliest human societies (R. Gastil, 1993). If our scope reaches back to the dawn of civilization, human beings have probably spent the vast majority of their existence living in a form of unitary democracy based on face-to-face meetings and consensus, wherein the idea of a common interest was central (Mansbridge, 1983, 8-12). Before reviewing modern political theory, it is therefore useful to revisit one of the best recorded ancient societies—that of the Greeks. This view gives us insight into our taken-for-granted assumptions about citizens, democracy, and the collective.

Collectivity in Ancient Greek Political Theory

The collective dimension of politics can be traced to ancient Greece, wherein Aristotle defines men as “political animals” (*zoon politikon*), the individual citizens who constitute a polis. Aristotle holds that it is natural for people to gather in public because those are the only places where men can achieve their “final purpose” (*telos*). In particular, citizens are not only entitled to take part in the political life of a polis, but since they are “complete humans,” they are believed to be naturally fit and expected to willingly participate in politics (Ober, 1998, 297). In Aristotle's words:

The man who is isolated, who is unable to share in the benefits of political association, or has no need to share because he is already self-sufficient, is not part of the city, and must therefore be either a beast or a god (Aristotle, 1995, 11).

In Athens' popular assembly (*Ekklesia*), all citizens were generally invited to participate directly. The *Ekklesia* was only one of many quasi-democratic institutions in Athens, and it carried out most of the decisions of the polis (Ober, 2008, 142-161). As demonstrated by a passage of “Pericles' Funeral Oration,” the idea of being an active and responsible citizen was extremely important. As Pericles says, “We do not say that a man who takes no interest in politics is a man who minds his own business; we say that he has

1. The Canberra deliberations we focus on in this paper were preceded by a one-day regional meeting in each constituency, as well as opportunities to join an Online Parliament to develop policy proposals that addressed the deliberative ‘charge,’ “How can Australia's political system be strengthened to serve us better?”

no business here at all” (Thucydides, 1954, 147). In the same passage, Pericles highlights the importance of discussion and open confrontation among Athenian citizens.

As these famous examples make clear, the collective dimension was relevant in the Ancient Greeks’ conception of democratic citizenship. Thus, efforts to foreground collective voice and identity are at most a *re-conception*—rather than an entirely modern conception—of democracy.

The Collective Dimension versus Individualism and Adversarial Democracy in Modern Political Theory

In spite of its classical foundations, the centrality of the common good in politics (and political theory) diminished over the centuries. For example, to Arendt (1958) the necessary distinction between the polis’ restricted political realm as the place where free individuals’ “action” could take place, as opposed to the private realm, was lost in modern times when mass society and its conformism also destroyed the deep meaning of both these spheres. One instance of this destruction, for example, is given by the fact that the public, from being the realm of the common, became a mere “function of the private” (Arendt, 1958, 69).

Habermas, instead, in analyzing one of the phenomena that led to the rise of class society, argues that the moment in which “the function of social integration passed from kinship relations to political relations” involved an important change in collective identity. In fact, it “was no longer based on the figure of a common ancestor but in that of a common ruler” (Habermas, 1979, 161). Moreover, Habermas points out that the “domain of decentralized individual decision” that followed the organization of society according to “capitalist principles... was organized on universalistic principles in the framework of bourgeois civil law” (Habermas, 1979, 114). Thus was the collective dimension of politics inexorably altered.

Along similar lines, Barber (1984) identifies liberal—or, what he calls “thin”—democracy as protecting the individual from protracted conflict rather than fostering collaboration among citizens. In his view, the liberal democratic ideal favours individualism and a distrust of collective power. Liberal democracy promotes an instrumental conception of political community and popular participation, which are no longer intrinsically valuable. Prudential arguments for democracy limit the political space for people to find common ground and become active citizens. Barber’s analysis then contrasts the status quo with “strong” (proto-deliberative) democracy, which takes the opposite view on each point.

The objective of our work, however, is not to express a judgment of the two alternatives Barber presents.² We limit ourselves to arguing that the dynamics Barber points out may have well weakened the role of a collective dimension in political life. If conflict is the outcome of “political animals” interacting, then pulling them apart from one another would weaken any collective social bonds and atomize society. Moreover, the community that

2. Arguably, for example those who consider Rousseau as the founder of “romantic individualism,” might well deem his political ideas, rather than liberalism, as being harmful for the role of collective dimension in political life.

once was believed to be the natural environment for interaction becomes an impediment to the self-actualization of (increasingly alienated) individuals (see also Knobloch, 2011). Once the perspective of a human collective dimension is gone, political space encompasses nothing more than *idealizations* of a collective—particularly those that are dangerously unrealistic.

At approximately the same time of Barber's critique, Mansbridge (1983) noted the overwhelming popularity of "adversarial democracy" in modern politics. "Adversary" and "thin" conceptions of democracy resemble each other in many regards. In particular, adversary democracy is characterized by the fundamental assumption that citizens' interests are in conflict: "Adversary democracy is the democracy of a cynical society. It replaces common interest with self-interest" (Mansbridge, 1983, 18). Mansbridge's alternative model, "unitary democracy," has the capability of fulfilling "human needs that adversary institutions cannot." The unitary approach relies on the collective dimension of public life to "encourage members to identify with one another and with the group as a whole" (Mansbridge, 1983, 4-5).

More recent works have confirmed the duality of individualistic and collectivist approaches to democracy.³ Notably Young (2000) analyzes similarities and differences between the deliberative and aggregative "ideal types" of democracy. She notes how the aggregative ideal type is intended as a competitive process in which preferences of "individualistic forms of rationality" are aggregated according to fair procedures. Young states that this model "expresses the way many political actors think about democracy" (Young, 2000, 18-21). In the deliberative ideal type, decisions are made by "determining which proposals the collective agrees are supported by the best reason," rather than by simply tallying votes (Young, 2000, 21-3).⁴

The Role of Deliberative Democracy in Balancing Collective with Individualistic Approaches

It is clear that the individualistic nature of the political system is connected to a certain approach to democracy. Alternative methods, such as the more deliberative one, may well lead to greater balance between the collective versus individualistic approaches.⁵ Although liberal ideas played a fundamental role in promoting the affirmation of individual freedom within society, deliberative democracy now may provide fertile ground to cultivate collective identity and voice. Unlike the liberal approach, deliberative

3. This perpetual contrast between individual and collective is not surprising, given the ubiquity of collectivist versus individualist impulses in culture generally (Hofstede, 2001), let alone in contemporary politics (Gastil et al. 2008).

4. For a detailed comparison of aggregative and deliberative democracy, see Gutmann and Thompson (1996, 2004) and Fishkin (2009). In particular, aggregative theories are said to stress the rationale of the methods of aggregation while paying "little or no attention" to reason giving (Gutmann and Thompson, 2004, 13-16). Communitarian critics have also assailed the individualist model; see, for instance, Jacobitti (1991).

5. We believe that different conceptions of democracy do influence the role of the collective dimension in politics. Nonetheless, we agree with the view that finding room for cooperation among different democratic ideas rather than proclaiming the mutual exclusivity between deliberative and aggregative approaches may prove to be a better way to improve democratic life (Fishkin, 2009, 85).

democracy initiatives strive for a more demanding form of citizenship that balances individual interests and collective goods.⁶ In fact, deliberative democratic goals, such as “accommodation and coexistence,” can only be reached through a deliberate effort to understand “the cultural grounding of [another] person’s perspectives” (Levine, Fung, Gastil, 2005, 284). When “citizens or their representatives actually seek to give one another mutually acceptable reasons to justify the laws they adopt,” a democratic process moves toward being deliberative (Gutmann and Thompson, 2004, 100).

Scholars have highlighted problems concerning collectivist politics. These range from the existing trade-off between an activist and deliberative political culture (Mutz, 2006) to participants’ exposure to problems such as groupthink, polarization, and conformism (Sunstein, 2005), along with concerns regarding internal and external exclusion (Young, 2000, 53-7) or external manipulation (Gastil, 2008). This attention to the quality of the deliberative environment is important because it may prove a key to facilitating reciprocal understanding and the emergence of collective identities and voice.

Conceptualizing Collective Identity and Voice

Just as the political role of the collective dimension has changed over the centuries, so has the concept of identity been unstable. In contemporary times, identity is increasingly selected and adopted. In a world in which macro-level changes are continuous, identity has acquired an even more critical role in defining who a person is (Howard, 2000, 367).

At this juncture, it is important to clarify what we mean by the concepts of collective identity and collective voice. We begin with a Habermasian definition of collective identity:

I would like to reserve the expression collective identity for reference groups that are essential to the identity of their members, which are in a certain way “ascribed” to individuals, cannot be freely chosen by them, and which have a continuity that extends beyond the life-historical perspectives of their members (Habermas, 1979, 108).

From this definition, collective identity is already at the disposal of individuals. Our focus is on the processes that allow people to *activate* this identity. According to Habermas’ definition, as long as a collective identity is already there, the individuals cannot freely choose the identities to which they adhere. In our view, however, social identities are embedded in socio-political contexts (Howard, 2000, 369), and there are degrees to which an individual can (or cannot) realize, understand, and acknowledge he/she has a collective identity.

Furthermore, since there are several reference groups for any given person, we are interested in discovering which types of identity people most

6. For a critique of these high expectations, see Riker (1988), who evidences some significant limits of the aggregative methods. Nonetheless, Riker warns that more high-minded sounding approaches may prove to be merely populist claims, likely to degenerate democracy rather than enrich it.

readily employ. We contend that there are certain democratic practices that help the individual to access a sense of collective identity and understand it, whereas others obstruct this process. We aim to show why deliberation may belong to the first class of practices. Furthermore, if “social identity is context dependent” (Hogg, 2004, 252), it would be useful to study how an “old” concept such as collective identity works in the relatively new settings of highly-structured deliberative democratic processes.

We analyze both collective identity and collective voice because we assume the two are interconnected. Despite the fact that a collective identity may already be nascent, it takes a cognitive process to recognize it. This can occur through a mix of communication and reflection. Therefore, a voice that speaks in collective terms may be a means to—or a sign of—a shared identity. In short, a *voice* can express the cognition of an *identity*.

Here, collective voice is intended as an act of speech in which a person evokes a collective. In our view, an act of speech that refers to collective identity involves reference to groups that belong to the public rather than the private sphere. A person who refers to his/her own family does not speak in terms of collective voice—though, in doing so, he/she may develop a basis for empathizing and identifying with other participants in a conversation. Moreover, to express oneself through collective voice it is necessary that the speaker feels part of the group he/she is referring to. The speaker has to be connected to the group through rational as well as emotional ties. It is the individual’s speech that manifests a collective voice, but it is through the interaction with others that the collective voice distinguishes itself from mere self-reflection.

It may also occur that a person manifests a connection to fellow individuals with whom he/she is just sharing a temporary experience without direct reference to a shared identity. These group ties might not be intended as manifestations of collective voice; nonetheless, they are relevant since they contribute to the construction of public ties.

Taking Aristotle’s view, individuals have an underlying ability to employ a collective voice, and when they are given occasion to express it, such a voice emerges. In particular, as shown later in our case study, an exceptionally strong desire to be heard and have a voice in politics does exist among citizens.⁷ This shared eagerness connects people and makes them even more likely to find collective identities and voices. Finding a common identity and speaking with a collective voice is, we contend, a way to claim political action. This appetite for public voice shows how citizens are capable of going far beyond atomistic and individualistic patterns of behavior.

Whereas collective identity is employed to illuminate those elements that make individuals feel part of a common group, groups of different scopes can serve unifying as well as divergent functions. Common identity can also be elicited through complaining about expectations that individuals feel entitled to (as part of a group) that the political system does not fulfill. Furthermore, in laying claim to political action, people appear to be oriented towards a more

7. In the following pages, we will explain how the partial self-selection of participants and the exceptional nature of the event in the deliberative forum being studied should not lead us to believe that we are dealing with exceptionally “active” citizens.

accessible political community with a special stress on the local level, where politics and everyday experience most often meet. Common identity can also emerge when, along with the desire to be heard, people are willing to become better informed and improve their understanding of politics in general. Striving to improve one's political knowledge can also lead an individual to see the relevance of a collective dimension in politics. Developing more articulated political thought, which realizes the role the community plays in politics, may lead to a less individualistic approach.

In sum, collective identity was once very important to political life, but individualistic liberal democratic ideals have superseded it. The diffusion of modern adversarial practices have further weakened the role of collective identity in politics (Crenson and Ginsberg, 2002). This diminishment of the collective dimension is valuable only if collective identity is thought to be an inherently dangerous or dysfunctional element of politics that needs to be curbed.

If, however, we view collective identity as an important aspect of politics, a dimension that individuals naturally employ in political life, then collective voice and identity deserve closer investigation and appreciation. As a starting point, if the collective dimension still plays a role in democratic political life, this fact needs to be acknowledged. At that point, collective identities can be respectfully expressed to enrich an inclusive democratic society, rather than ignoring, denying, or disregarding collective impulses.

Research Context: The Australian Citizens' Parliament

To advance this discussion, we now move away from theoretical exposition to consider an actual case of deliberation and its detailed record of public discourse. Through the data collected on the Australian Citizens' Parliament deliberations, we can better understand the dynamics that can give rise to a collective voice and identity. In doing so, this case study can help to explain why deliberative democracy may represent a valuable resource in enabling the development of collective voice and identities.

An Individualistic Cultural Setting

Australia is often described as a country with a highly individualistic culture, with an evolving national identity that is neither very distinctive nor characterized by specific values. Despite "mateship" being singled out as a distinctive feature of Australianness (Macgregor et al., 2004, 18-19),⁸ social scientists almost universally agree upon the fact that Australia is a typical case of very individualistic society. Australia is said to be characterized by a progressive movement towards a society that privileges individualism over solidarity (Altman, 2003, 56). It is a nation in which "the politics of ordinary people is grounded in pragmatic and commonsense individualism" – given the stress on individual responsibility rather than collectivities and groupings (Brett and Moran, 2006, 326). Australia has the second highest value on the individualism index (IDV) employed by Hofstede's cultural dimensions analysis. In fact, Australia's IDV is 90 out of 100 (second only to the USA's

8. The concept of "mateship" remains predominantly tied to social relations among males, rather than across the whole society (Pease, Pringle, 2004, 191).

91), against a world average that is 51 (Hofstede, 1997, 2001). As such, Australia represents a most unlikely place for the rising of the collective dimensions of political life that we consider in our case study.

Within this “inhospitable” context, we aim to observe and describe what happens in terms of a collective voice and identity when people participate in a deliberative assembly. Will they confirm the general individualistic culture that seems to characterize their society, or will they develop a different way of relating to others, for example, by identifying themselves and speaking of themselves in more collectivist terms? We investigate this question through an interpretative analysis of the transcripts of the event informed by relevant literature.

We do not seek to test the validity of this literature on Australian individualism. Rather, we limit ourselves to the Australian case to see whether instances of people expressing themselves as members of a collective can be found in a significant deliberative event, even if it takes place in a nation reputed to be highly individualistic. In other words, we believe this case study is particularly useful because Australia should be an unlikely place for a collective identity and collective voice to evolve during a relatively short deliberative forum. Thus, if we can find a collective voice and collective identity in a deliberative event in Australia, one also should be able to find these phenomena elsewhere. If future research confirms that a collective dimension emerges when people deliberate, then deliberation represents one possible way to resuscitate a collective dimension in political life.⁹

Qualitative Data Analysis

Our interpretative document analysis uses a qualitative method. As Denzin and Lincoln (2003, 4-5) explain, “Qualitative research involves an interpretative naturalistic approach to the world...Qualitative researchers study things in their natural setting, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.”

The initial aim was to identify every instance in the transcripts of a form of collective expression, ranging from local to national to global collective identities. A team of readers, under the direction of the first author, went through every table and plenary discussion at the ACP and generated the initial set of instances. These were then subjected to a secondary analysis, which gleaned the most representative or illustratively distinctive instances of collective speech. The interpretations of those key excerpts appear in the main results section below.

Of course, given the sheer amount of evidentiary material gathered over the course of a four-day event, a qualitative analysis of the Parliament’s transcripts permits presenting verbatim only a very thin slice of the

9. Methodologically, our work has taken inspiration from three critical case studies. Two of them, “A Town Meeting Government” and “A Participatory Workplace,” come from Mansbridge (1983). The other study, “Imperfect Inventory: Obstacles to Democracy at Mifflin Co-op,” is a chapter from Gastil (1993). These critical case studies highlight that, in real life, obstacles to the realization of ideals (participation and democracy) emerge even in the most welcoming environments. In this article, however, we use the same logic but reverse it in an attempt to show that significant instances of key democratic concepts (collective voice and collective identity) can be found even in a very unwelcoming context.

participants' interactions. (We did not rely on a quantitative analysis of the data, so we cannot advance claims on the typicality of these excerpts in terms of their frequency.)

Nonetheless, the evidence to be presented herein represent the best available data in terms of their capability to illustrate what occurred in terms of collective identity. This undertaking was carried out in consideration of the fact that our main effort is to offer an informed and reflexive understanding of the observed dynamics, make sense of them, and conceive plausible explanations of the complex phenomena observed.¹⁰

The Australian Citizens' Parliament

Our case study, the Australian Citizens' Parliament (ACP), was a deliberative assembly that took place in old Parliament House in Canberra February 6-9, 2009. This forum was the final event of a deliberative process that started in October 2008 and involved on-line deliberations as well as regional meetings. The Canberra ACP involved 150 randomly selected citizens, called Citizen Parliamentarians (CPs), who deliberated over four days with the help of experts and trained moderators. Each CP came from an electorate of Australia. The question or 'charge' that participants were called to address was, "How can the Australian political system be strengthened to serve us better?" The CPs eventually formulated a series of recommendations that were included in the ACP's final document and delivered to the Australian Prime Minister and members of Parliament.

The organizers aimed to reproduce a microcosm of Australia, without the size of the assembly impeding effective deliberation. Thus, 150 participants were randomly selected, including one from each Australian electorate (district). Along with geographical provenance, organizers considered gender, age, and level of education as variables of the selection. The CPs had to match the national distribution along these categories as much as possible. Nonetheless, it is important to mention that the participants needed to accept the invitation in order to participate in the event. This fact may lead the reader to believe that the CPs represent a more politically "active" part of the population, or even less individualistic people, given that they traveled to Canberra to deliberate on a broad national issue rather than spending a weekend with their families and friends. However, none of the data collected seem to support this assumption. Moreover, in this regard it is worth noticing that more than one-third of the almost 8,000 people who received the letter to participate to the Australian Citizens' Parliament accepted the invitation. Though mitigating the self-selection problem remains a concern in

10. It would have been interesting to limit ourselves to track specific participants or tables, but both options were not readily available. Microphones were not always capable of detecting who was the speaker being recorded. This fact made it almost impossible to carry out a systematic analysis of the speeches of individual CPs over the three days of assembly. In addition, we did not select specific tables because their composition kept on changing over the deliberation. However, we found that this major undertaking to read all of the available material, all of the interaction among people in different tables and settings (plenary and small-groups setting) gave us a unique opportunity to develop a rich understanding of the dynamics that took place. In this regard it is also important to notice that our research effort was also helped by the fact that three of the authors directly participated, as organizers or observers, in the deliberative assembly under study.

implementing deliberative ideals in real world assemblies (see Fung, 2003; Ryfe, 2005), the high response rate in this case suggests a relatively low level of self-selection.

Deliberation and Identity at the ACP

Having introduced the context of our study, we turn to the character of the deliberation at the ACP and present textual evidence of CPs talking in a collective voice. The first of these purposes simply aims to validate that the ACP counts as an instance of public deliberation, more than merely being such in name only. The second purpose concerns one of our principal aims—to see whether a clear collective voice emerges in deliberation even with a highly individualistic cultural context.

Evidence of Deliberation at the ACP

Though influence, per se, is not evidence of deliberation, it is a common feature to a rigorous deliberative process that involves efforts to persuade and willingness to listen to others' arguments (Gastil, 1993). The ACP process clearly influenced the CPs' positions on the issues (Dryzek, 2009) and their self-conceptions (Hartz-Karp et al., 2010).¹¹ As an illustration, consider a comment that typified many of the CPs' discussions. The quote below came from one CP after the intervention of an indigenous speaker during a plenary session:

Equally, as he called himself "the Australian," and we're Australian, but they feel excluded and left out, so how do we engage them to become included and basically self manage to a certain extent, that they become holistically Australian and not indigenous Australian and not lose their identity in any shape or form as indigenous? I mean, he was an exceedingly powerful speaker and it really raised the question in my mind, How do we engage more indigenous to become part of this nation?¹²

It is interesting to notice how a different CP at another table showed a similar reaction to the same intervention:

I feel comfortable in this setting. I love it, it's great. You can be heard, you can listen to anybody at any time and you can put up an argument. I will add though, I was really impressed by the young Indigenous person, Mark, yesterday. Not because he was Indigenous, but partly because he is Indigenous, but partly because he wasn't ranting on the banter about being Indigenous, but he was an Australian. I thought the way he presented himself as an Australian I thought was just, he did something for me.

11. This also was apparent in the daily written feedback collected during the event.

12. This, and all other, quotes from CPs are represented anonymously in this text to distinguish speakers in a single discussion.

Another CP made the following comment in response to a fellow participant's observation:

Yeah, well you're changing my mind now I was thinking we should have gone with states but now I'm listening to your point of view, I'm seeing something I didn't see before which is the Western Australian point of view to this. I keep thinking of the problems like water between Queensland, Victoria and New South Wales and things like that. So you're adding a new dimension now, I never thought of it from a Western Australian point of view.

Aside from persuasion and influence, the ACP enabled the CPs to realize two very important criteria for a democratic process: effective participation and "enlightened understanding" (Dahl, 1989; Gastil, 2008, 6-7).¹³ With regard to effective participation, the deliberative process ensured that every CP had the same chance as others to raise issues and voice his/her mind, and a generally adequate amount of time to do so.¹⁴ With regard to enlightened understanding, the ACP strove to offer the CPs the best conditions possible to achieve a clear understanding of the issues at hand. The ACP process was based on clear principles of deliberation, including thorough preparation, facilitated small group discussions, faithful recording of participant inputs in their own words, sufficient time for discussion, a respectful environment, regular reflection, mutual learning, immediate response to feedback, transparency, and the opportunity for real policy impact. Moreover, a post-ACP survey showed a remarkably high level of satisfaction with the whole event.¹⁵

Turning back to the transcript, we share two examples of how CPs viewed the process, as expressed near the close of the deliberations:

I had a chance to put my view across and I learnt some things from, especially from you [a fellow CP], very good; and it made me think about something I hadn't thought about before, so yeah, it's very good.

I reckon it's great. Different backgrounds and different ideas and sort of to bring a different perspective of a statement that's on a piece of paper. You know it's good. Everyone's got their own baggage, and they bring it out, and, yeah, it's great.

These reflections emphasize the value of hearing different points of view. Some participants emphasized their experience of listening and changing

13. Enlightened understanding refers to the ability to: reflect on values, one's own and others; empathize with others, including those with divergent viewpoints; and then incorporate the relevant facts to reach informed judgments.

14. Some CPs lamented that the tight schedule did not always allow them to discuss certain issues as much as they wanted. Many CPs also complained that sometimes the room became too loud and it took an extra effort to understand what other people at the table were saying.

15. For these and other details, see the archived Final Report at <http://www.newdemocracy.com.au>.

their mind, whereas others simply appreciated that everyone ‘gave each other room to speak’.

To get a sense for how some CPs changed their mind during the ACP, consider the comment made by a participant during the flow of the deliberation. In this excerpt, she explains her opinion shift in regard to the Australian electoral system:

Well, I actually had the original opinion [favoring] that first-past-the-post [system]. Then when our experts were talking and they were explaining and clarifying a lot of that, it made me realise, yeah, the optional preferential voting we’ve got in Queensland is a better way to go. Because I couldn’t see the pitfalls and things of the first-past-the-post thing before.

Two more CP comments show that the CPs viewed their changes in attitude not as the to-and-fro movement that might occur during a candidate debate, but rather, as a genuine increase in knowledge, understanding, and judgment—the very things theorized to happen during face-to-face deliberation (Burkhalter et al., 2002, 413). One CP reflecting on the event said of the experts who testified at the ACP, “I don’t think it’s swaying but I think it’s they’re telling us in a way that we can understand... We’re getting more educated as we talk to different people in different groups.” On the same subject, another said,

It’s giving us expert viewpoints because we don’t know and we don’t have that background and we can’t see why something will work and why something won’t work. Because we don’t have that knowledge whereas they’ve probably been through some of these processes before or think tanks or whatever.

This kind of comments characterized the whole process up until the end when some of the CPs were called to present their conclusions. At this final stage, in fact, there are plenty of comments similar to those reported below. Notice how the whole process changed this CP’s approach to politics by fostering a more collective kind of experience.

It’s gobsmacking to be here, it really is. I was never much into politics, and I’m walking away from here this weekend knowing a lot more about the system and what we can do to make it better... We worked together, deliberated, and we came up with these proposals. And you’ve heard the proposals but the proposals came through an understanding, and this deliberative process is something very special. It was about engagement, it was about empowerment, and it gave us an incredible energy. So out of this, we’re looking to the future and we can see that we’ve developed proposals, but we’ve also learnt three other things from this experience and that is how to be involved in democracy, how to be participate in your community, and we’ve gained energy and confidence to go out into the community and get involved. This

deliberative process, it's very special and I'd really commend to everyone around us to take this tool back to our community. Bring it to our community groups, bring it to our dialogue with our friends and our families, because it does give you energy, it does give you empowerment, it engages you and it brings us to a greater understanding. I'm very proud, and I would ask the politicians and the people around us to continue this process. It's got a value of its own, not just in the proposals but the community that we've created.

Emergence of Collective Identity on Three Levels

One subtle feature of the preceding comment (and so many others) is the choice to speak as “we” in reference to the full body of CPs and, less often, in reference to one’s particular discussion group. (The small discussion groups were randomly shuffled each day—and interspersed with full plenary sessions—to foster a broader collective identification with the full body of CPs.) In the same sense that Hart and Jarvis (1999) saw a strong sense of “we” among participants in the 1996 National Issues Convention held in Austin, Texas, so did the ACP yield a similar general collective identification among its members. Occasionally, the CPs even reflected on their use of the collective pronoun:

CP1: So, this is “We” as a Citizens’ Parliament, or this is “We” as in individuals?

CP2: As in a normal person, just like every other single person.

CP3: “We the people.”

CP4: Yeah, that’s how I understood it. Is that how everyone else understood it?

CP1: That’s why I was asking, I wasn’t sure whether...

CP4: I understood it to be, “We” individually and collectively. It’s the, “We,” so it’s a collective...You know, what can “We” do together maybe formal or informal, but any ideas, I think. I think it’s anything that’s appropriate.

Though the collective “we” was ubiquitous at the ACP, what’s more important from our perspective is the use of a collective voice that reached beyond and outside the tightly-bonding ACP itself. In identifying themselves as members of a group, the CPs often conceived of their collective dimension as being articulated on three different levels: nation, state, and community.

The first level of identification we consider was being “Australian.” Participants constantly referred to this level as the stronghold of their common identity. However, we noted that the CPs’ references to a common Australian identity were imbued with rhetoric. Unlike their debates on state and community, when it came to Australianness, instances of thoughtful discussions were rare. Instead, sentimental talk, prevailed. However, when people addressed issues like becoming a republic (versus being part of the British monarchy), the level of debate on national identity skyrocketed:

CP1: You must maintain it.

CP2: You must maintain it?

CP1: The Monarchy.

CP2: I reckon it's our history.

CP1: It's our heritage.

CP2: People try and chop off and just disassociate themselves from our history and it's like, no we need to look back and love our history....

As showed in the excerpt below, some facilitators also encouraged this type of discussion:

FACILITATOR: I like not having the, you know, "God Save the Queen." You know, I like having our own National Anthem. I don't know, I think Australia, it's our name for 200 years, it has a very strong [sound] ...

The second level articulated was that of the Australian state in which the CP lived. Although this level was employed to mark identity, it was usually perceived as a barrier to collaboration. According to the CPs, this was the level where legislation most needed to be improved if the political system was to avoid duplication and state redundancy:

CP1: I'd say to unify the country's state laws so that interstate travel and dealings are seamless. So whether you live there, whether you just travel there, whether you're dealing in business, that sort of stuff.

CP2: Yeah, you cracked it.

CP1: That covers everything.

CP3: Without jumping too far ahead, you know they are talking about cutting out the state parliament. You look at, apart from one to five, you think, look at car registration, licenses, you know if you move from New South Wales to Victoria, you've got to re-register your cars. You don't get your money back. You certainly don't get a pro-rata, we're in Australia, why not have Australian registration? Why not have Australian licenses?

Similar considerations were raised in several different tables in different moments of the deliberations:

So Occupational Health and Safety, Education, Police Forces all have different regulations. So [for] Occupational Health and Safety, a forklift driver out of South Australia cannot operate a forklift in Victoria. Occupational Health and Safety rules in every state are different, so it's extremely difficult to operate around the country. It's also difficult for individuals moving from state to state because you have to reregister yourself in each state....

...perhaps what we're talking about is instead of having one state government in, for example New South Wales and lots of town governments, if you had 4 or 5 regional governments, no state government, no council government but something in the middle of that so those two functions merge together....

Also carrying on from that, also keeping some uniformity across the country... We probably need uniformity in some issues, like ...our road rules, you drive from state to state, you don't want to know about different road rules for each state. Health is something that affects the whole of Australia, not just our state....

I think you need to, if common laws, like for education, when people move within those states, they find the same situation. But I wouldn't want to get rid of the state and territory governments because a centralized government, see in Canberra, you have Perth three thousand kilometers away, it's a completely different scenario. You end up with something like Russia and that if you force that, eventually it just falls apart. Then you end up with eight different countries.

Even in the midst of talking about the states and territories, the background assumption is that “we” are all Australians, even when setting different state laws. Thus, when the CP in the aforementioned discussion says, “We probably need uniformity,” we note not that this CP believes one nation needs one set of laws, but rather that the assumption is that the ACP participants speak on behalf of their common nation, not as much their particular interests. As it is possible to notice, such an assumption is reaffirmed throughout a number of group discussions.

When talking explicitly about common identity, one's community—the local place that one came from or lived in—was the collective level that CPs addressed most often. (This was partially due to the repeated act of storytelling based on everyday life experience as a means of sharing knowledge.) With regard to the collective voice, it was apparent that CPs' desire for greater political participation was largely oriented towards this level. Below, we illustrate this with the following examples, which extend across the course of the ACP:

...We have local government, cause that's where people do make their first step into politics, or you can actually voice one particular concern, if it's in where you live. You can often see somebody you know, or one of the pamphlets, so it's a far more personal thing and therefore you feel it's a more active vote, you feel that something is going to be done with people and issues in communities.

... I'd also like to touch on the theme that seems to be coming up as a front runner there on almost all of those things is empowering the people, let me find the right wording, empowering the people

to do something, empowering citizens to participate in politics through education, no, sorry, through community engagement. That's been in the top five [ranked proposals] almost every time [we vote], and that's what we need to make sure we're going to be doing when we get back and start the ball rolling now so in thirty years time it's just something that happens naturally, something that will just become part of our life...

Well, I reckon then that the shot would be that you know we go back to our communities, we go back to our local newspapers, you go to the editor, explain the whole situation. I know I've got support back up at my place...

I'm involved in quite a few community groups so I'd just sort of like to invite them, the average Aussie and by having their say and putting their views forward to be heard. A lot of people are daunted by the task and say, "Well, we never get to have input" and just let them know that we can have input, and if they want to come along to something like this and participate it's well worthwhile.

Political and everyday life tended to intersect the most at the community or local level. At this level people had a better understanding of the issues and believed their voice could be heard more effectively. CPs also used community to claim their origin. However, generally, these claims were not expressed in a divisive way. Instead, one's distinctiveness was intended as a means of fostering reciprocal understanding. In essence, the community level was more likely to perform a unifying function:

CP1: If I can just share my experience we've got in our community. We have got what's called a Community Voice, I live in a village of barely 1000 people and in that community, the broader community, there might be maybe a couple of thousand or so. So every month there's this community meeting and it typically deals with concerns in the community such as, building applications, development and tourism and so on. It's funded by the local council so it's an official voluntary set-up that's funded by I think, a mere \$400 a year just to fund whatever you might have, it could be the electricity, phones and so on. So, I dare say if you contacted your council, are you in Sydney?

CP2: No, no, I'm in Western Australia...

CP1: That's obviously quite a different setting to where we are.

Notice again that whereas the content of the discussion invokes one pair of collectives (local and state), the last comment invokes the ACP itself as "we," the Australian CPs talking about their nation's political system. As demonstrated in an earlier article (Hartz-Karp et al., 2010), it is no small feat

to get Australians to identify themselves as such, but at the ACP, collective voice was not only a background assumption for the ACP itself, but it was also invoked in reference to local, state, and national identities.

Forces Promoting Collective Identity

Through looking at the transcripts of the ACP, three elements appeared to bolster the rise of a collective identity and collective voice at this event. These included deliberative context, the national relevance and exceptionalness of the event, and the nature of the issue being addressed. At the end of this section, we also consider what unifying discourse the ACP employed in regard to Indigenous Australians.

The Deliberative Context

With regard to the deliberative context, it should be remembered that the whole event was based on a mesh of different deliberative approaches (Carson and Hartz-Karp, 2005). Trained facilitators guided the CPs' table discussions, stressing a deliberative attitude, including respectful discussion that discouraged adversarial approaches. As each issue was addressed, the CPs were led through a variety of procedures in order to come to a conclusion. A number of deliberative techniques were used over the four days. For example, a technique with some similarity to a "21st Century Town Meeting" (Lukensmeyer et al., 2005) was regularly employed to harvest individual and group ideas and priorities. When a table reached an agreement on a certain idea, they sent it to a Theme Team in charge of analyzing the submissions to find themes which were then displayed to the room. Notably, strongly held minority views were reported along with predominant ideas. These procedures involved careful consideration at the tables which allowed the CPs to discover what they expressed to be a surprising amount of commonality in their views as well as clarifying divergent positions.

Below is an intervention in which one CP explains his best moment during the ACP:

For me, it's a moment but one I thought is repeated every time you have these round tables, it's a visual thing, it's the amount of nodding that's going on. People just nodding, like lots of nodding, assent you know, and how it's even sort of spilled over into like last night on the bus and having a drink with people... Everyone's agreeing with each other but also disagreeing, not disagreeing but trying to find common ground, and I think that's been quite defining for me, the lack of that adversarial thing and lack of conflict.

The ACP's deliberative approach fostered respectful interaction, as showed, for example, by the following passage, in which other CPs reflect upon the importance of deliberating with others:

CP1: Listening to other people's opinions [chime] put together is also makes it easier for you to then come up with your own opinions, rather than say it like, when a politician just speaks for

you. Like when I say like, you know, blah, blah, blah, this is happening, and I sit there I go, oh, okay. But whereas I've got all of your view points, and I probably see your voice too, is that I am, it makes it easier for me to understand, for me to comprehend what you're supposed to go off, like what's happening.

[...]

CP3: You don't look, deliberating, particular in a big world, you've kind of just got your own, because you don't really get a chance to question your own points of view, it's only when your confronted with another point of view that you can even deliberate.

In sum, the deliberative structure of the ACP itself provided a fertile ground for the emergence collective identity and voice. Working together to solve a common problem through respectful discourse promoted a shared identification among the CPs and, in turn, with the other collectives to which they belonged.

Exceptional Event

In addition to the deliberative context, the exceptional nature of the national event may have played a role in the emergence of a collective voice and identity. Initiatives like the ACP that allow people to summon information, spend time understanding others' viewpoints, analyze the issues and select priorities, which would then be heard by politicians, represent a rarity in everyday people's political experience. This fact may have induced a level of enthusiasm that is not typical of citizens' everyday political experience, and that may have promoted a great openness towards fellow citizens, bolstering the CPs' willingness to embrace common identities. In other words, the very fact of being part of such a particular national assembly may have favored the rise of a common voice, more coherent and powerful than what usually happens in everyday life. The strong rise of an Australian identity during the ACP (Hartz-Karp et al., 2010) seems to confirm the above assumptions.

The following comment is representative of how some of the participants perceived the ACP as a unique occasion for having a say and sharing their political experience with fellow citizens from all over the country:

An experience of a lifetime, something I didn't ever expect to be taking part in. Such a wonderful community with everyone from everywhere and all getting together with these wonderful ideas and really, really a feel we're getting a unity that we never realized existed...

A related issue is the possibility that people's behavior during deliberations may be influenced by the excitement of being part of a deliberative assembly. Thus, what we observe in deliberative experiments may no longer occur in "institutionalized" deliberations. Nevertheless, the excitement that we may now find in deliberative experiments might well be

there even if deliberation becomes a more common political practice, akin to civil and criminal juries (Gastil et al., 2010).

Contemporary studies in deliberative democracy pay a great deal of attention to the selection process because organizers often seek to make them representative samplings of the whole population (Fishkin, 2009). For the average participant, this effort helps make such events an exceptional experience, when contrasted with ordinary political life. Although deliberation may become a more common and influential practice in political life, it is unlikely that taking part in deliberative assemblies is going to be a routine event for common citizens. The sense of excitement for the individual participants is more likely to be replicated than reduced.

A Unifying Issue for Discussion, and the 'The People' versus 'Politicians' Dynamic.

The final factor that likely increased sense of collective identity and voice was the “unitary” (Mansbridge, 1983) nature of the topic at hand. Political reforms are not always necessarily divisive subjects, and this may have been particularly true in the case of the ACP, in which the CPs were invited to respond to a very generic question, namely, “How can the Australian political system be strengthened to serve us better?”

A subject like this left the deliberators with numerous issues upon which consensus could be found. It should be remembered that no one required the CPs to address any specific issue—an option that is not always available outside the ACP, for example in those forums in which only very specific problems have to be addressed. Moreover, the outcome of the ACP's deliberation was not as difficult as, for example, the production of a piece of legislation, or material to be submitted to an electorate's judgment. This meant far less pressure on the CPs. In short, the fact that the CPs could focus on less divisive matters, leaving behind the hardest topics, and the fact that there was virtually no external accountability could have favored a more open approach in comparing and exchanging opinions.

The CPs were called to address a generic issue, which allowed them to find common ground upon which they could work. In our view, working together on the political matters addressed at the ACP enabled citizens to cooperate as members of the *same* group, *against* an out-group that was made of other people, in particular politicians. In other words, an evident in-group and out-group trend took place at the ACP. A number of discussions showed the tendency towards idealization and categorization of groups.¹⁶

The following is an excerpt from CPs talking about themselves in terms of the quality of their deliberations relative to their prior expectations:

FACILITATOR: So what then surprised you over the three days?...

CP1: I think the ability to have a voice when you don't think that you do, like that you're just a part of a community or something.

CP2: Yep.

16. According to Symbolic Convergence Theory, identifying outsiders, as well as sharing fantasies, stories, and jokes are all clear sign of a process of creation of common identity (Bormann et al., 2001).

CP1: So I think it's just that everyone does have a voice to be heard. That's the thing that surprised me.

Or in the words of another participant:

... we have all had a say whether we are right, whether we are wrong or whether our ideas have gone up there. But to get 150 people, and to get those from all of us, to get it all channelled down to just a few ideas or a few proposals. That's just absolutely fantastic the way it has been done.

The deliberation felt surprising to many CPs because their prior expectations came from observing more conventional political discourse. As this table's conversation continues, the tone of the discussion changes dramatically:

CP1: Thanks that's nice and how different. The thing that makes you think of is how different it looks to the real parliament on the floor and yelling [laughter] and booing...

[...]

CP4: I don't even like my kids to watch it because it just seems a bad waste.

CP5: Yeah, exactly.

CP2: It's their mode of conduct I think in the end.

CP3: And it seems very personal.

CP3: Yeah, because there's no respect.

CP2: Definitely.

[...]

CP2: Well we've got a parliament that can't show respect so what do we expect.

CP6: This is an interesting point. These guys treat each other poorly, they're rude to each other, they use each other... but we didn't choose them, the parties chose those people. We didn't choose them. We didn't choose them, that's the funny thing.

These dynamics can be explained to a certain extent as an attempt for in-group self-enhancement. Whereas the CPs speak of themselves almost exclusively in a positive manner, the opposite is true with regard to politicians. However, it should be noted that the CPs did not reject the representative political system unequivocally. Rather, they criticized a particular aspect of it—the political system's insensitivity to the public voice. Similarly, in other discussions, while CPs appreciated voting as a fundamental feature of a democratic political system, nonetheless, they harshly criticized it when it was perceived to be a tool to legitimize the political class to act self-referentially, rather than a means to connect politicians to the will of the people.

The complexity of the political task was acknowledged and some examples of admirable politicians were singled out (generally because of their uniqueness and distinction from the rest of the politicians). In particular, CPs appreciate those politicians close to the community which elected them, in other word those who were perceived as being more connected to the people. Nonetheless, in the main, politicians were referred to in negative terms.

CP1: I find with our member or in general, it's a one way thing. If I want something I need to ask him or I need to ask any local member but I think they need to come out in the community more often and get involved...

CP1: Not just at election time but whenever there's something on.

CP2: Instead of hiding in their office all the time, or going out onto a building site.

Whereas self enhancement of the in-group might have been at work here, it was more likely due to dissatisfaction with, hopelessness towards, and alienation from political life in general which clearly emerged over the deliberations, along with a desire for a greater involvement in political life and the need for more political information and civic education.

FACILITATOR: Do you feel empowered?

CP1: No.

CP2: Absolutely not. And again that's due to my ignorance where only now am I acutely aware of what's going around, being a home owner and living in a council group seeing the corruption and that that's going on and going hey I want to know how he got to that point, how we can do something else about it. And the fact of being asked to participate in this, I've suddenly had to go, oh damn, now I have to learn. So, but not before that, what empowerment have we got? We're just a subservient people that elect them into power and then we just have to sit back and accept whatever decisions they make for us.

CP3: Do you feel that you get jerked around a bit, when an election is coming up too, because the media sort of thing...

Indigenous Australians: Including a Potential Out-Group

Besides politicians, there was another potential out-group that CPs often mentioned: Indigenous Australians or the Aboriginal people.¹⁷ The CPs' stance towards this out-group was very different from the one held towards politicians. In fact, CPs tended to see Indigenous Australians as victims of the system, though there were exceptions (e.g., "They've got to stand and then you've got to be voted in, so it's not a lack of us offering them opportunities, it's a lack of them having initiative to do it."). The CPs generally agreed that it

17. In recognizing Indigenous Australians as vulnerable victims of settlers' racist oppression (Tyler 1993, 327; Butler-McIlwraith 2006), Australians have usually depicted Aboriginal culture has a monolithic entity, almost romantically attached to its own values (Thiele 1991; Kowal and Paridies 2005).

was necessary to pay attention to their problematic situation and do more to help them.

CP1: ..I understand that the Indigenous society have specific needs. We all have specific needs. Our needs need to be met accordingly and appropriately. Why can't we all just be Australian?

CP2: A blended nation. Well we are, aren't we?

CP1: We're the second most multi-cultural country in the world.

CP2: We're a very blended nation and I feel the disadvantaged whether they be white Australians, Asian Australians, Indigenous people, the really disadvantaged people of all community, they should be all treated equally in respect of resources and what we can give them to help them.

CP1: And be respected and given the same opportunities, everybody...

[...]

CP2: They are disadvantaged. There are some really disadvantaged Indigenous communities and we have to acknowledge that.

These considerations were aligned with the CPs' general appreciation of the concept of "equality" for all citizens. Indigenous Australians, disregarded for a long stretch of Australian history, must now have their claims heard. In this instance, the "good" in-group and "bad" out-group comparison did not enhance the image of CPs in the same way as with politicians. Instead, through a shared understanding and respect for Indigenous Australians, CPs in-group thinking led to higher satisfaction and self-enhanced identity.

CP1: ...Why in this discussion have we got to discriminate between different types of groups? We're talking about Australians....

[...]

CP2: Not Aboriginal Australians, but all Australians....

Similar considerations were raised in different tables as well. For example:

Well, for me the "We" as an Australian, has to include recognition of Indigenous people as the first people of Australia and I don't think Australia can move ahead without that occurring and for me it has to be at either Constitutional level, it has to be at the highest level of the land. It's no good, the [prime minister's] apology was wonderful and it was very fine but to me that recognition has to come at the highest level. And we move forward from there and I don't know how we move forward from there but until that recognition comes we don't move forward at all as a country.

That's my personal view and so I'm listening to how, that inclusion can occur.

In this final instance, the in-group tended to objectify an out-group in order to include it. Symbolically speaking, politicians were isolated and Indigenous Australians integrated.

Conclusion

Through analysis of the transcripts of the Australian Citizens' Parliament, we explored the rise in collective voice and identity that took place during the workings of a deliberative assembly. This phenomenon was particularly surprising given the individualistic nature of the Australian society.

More specifically, beyond identification with the ACP itself, three levels of the collective dimension were discerned—nation, state, and community. Australianness clearly emerged as an important source of shared identity. References to Australia, however, were often entangled in rhetorical disputes about the nation itself. In many instances, CPs also identified themselves with their state. Moreover, people often referred to the state as the political level where a great deal of legislative work is needed. The CPs claimed that, even if states are useful to safeguard differences among various areas of the country and address regional problems, they also appear as a burden to collaboration among different areas of Australia. Finally, the community level received the most frequent explicit invocation, and it was where CPs directed most of their hopes for an improvement of the quality of their political lives, especially in terms of meaningful public participation.

Three factors appeared to stimulate the rise of a collective voice and identity during the ACP. The deliberative context provided a structure and norms that promoted collaboration and a collective identification with the process itself that naturally spilled over into other shared identities. The exceptional nature of the event further reinforced the sense that the CPs all had something unique in common, the chance to work but also speak together—another push toward drawing on preexisting collective identities. Finally, the less adversarial nature of the topic permitted the public to stand against politicians rather than dividing within itself.

Though CPs often told stories invoking their more local identities, the main in-group they identified themselves with included the whole body of CPs and, by extension, the Australian people. Their shared identity was enhanced further through idealization and categorization of the two groups—Indigenous Australians and elected politicians. They manifested a clear appreciation of the Indigenous people, and strove to include the protection of the rights of minorities in general into the final document to be presented before the Australian Parliament. In doing so, the CPs further cemented their own collective identity by way of inclusive discourse. Such a result is encouraging for those concerned with deliberation's ability to maintain an inclusive spirit even when, numerically, a disadvantaged potential out-group lacks sufficient numbers to have a strong voice in a body.

Quite the opposite occurred with regard to the political class, which, with few exceptions, was repeatedly criticized, and this raises a challenge for deliberative processes. Though much conventional political discourse—and,

by extension, many politicians—may well-deserve criticism for their anti-deliberative behavior (Gastil, 2008), it remains necessary for an initiative such as the ACP to work effectively with the very government that establishes deliberative processes. Even the most radical reform approaches use citizen deliberation to complement, rather than replace electoral politics (Ackerman and Fishkin, 2004; Gastil, 1993; Leib, 2004; O’Leary, 2006). Thus, future research would do well to see whether collective identity readily forms even when public officials provide no easy out-group for deliberators.

In conclusion, our findings show the presence of a collective voice and collective identification at the Australian Citizens’ Parliament. Given the inhospitable nature of the Australian cultural terrain, it is likely that such collective expressions are regularly occurring in other deliberative forums elsewhere in the world. If future research shows this to be accurate, then deliberative democracy may well harbor the seeds of a renaissance in the collective dimensions of political life.

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