# Advocacy Planning and the Question of the Self and the Other

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**Human beings are born different: we are** different in both physical appearance and social/cultural identity. This holds true for individuals, as well as for groups and communities. The concept of differentiation, which is the starting point of advocacy planning, is therefore central to planning. As originally defined by Paul Davidoff, "advocacy planning referred to the defense of excluded interests" (Fainstein and Fainstein 1996: 270), and "the concept of equity planning contains an explicit recognition of a multitude of conflicting social interests, some

of which may become irreconcilable" (Fainstein and Fainstein 1996: 270). The same concept of differentiation was applied to the shift from a federal policy of assimilation—the "melting pot" myth—to a policy that begins to recognize the separate historical and cultural identities of different groups in American society—the "salad bowl" myth.

Certain aspects of democratic theory in planning recognize and respect differences. However, many democratic theorists equate the "public interest with the interests of the public, or at least with those of the majority" (Fainstein and Fainstein 1996: 276), while advocacy planners emphasize more the sanctity of groups as separate entities and try to avoid majority decision-making. Freedom for separate groups in society is problematic: recognition of differences changes the notion of equality understood as the provision of the *same* treatment to all. Indeed, the idea of "difference" inherently implies different needs, different resources, and different planning practices. Susan and Norman Fainstein claim that maximizing individual freedom (in order to respect differences) in its application is beneficial primarily to privileged social groups (1996: 282). Therefore, "while the advocate planner could theoretically work for any social group, the term has generally been interpreted to mean advocate for the poor" (Fainstein and Fainstein 1996: 270).

Advocacy planners, according to Davidoff, should adhere to very high values in order to serve "disadvantaged communities" (1996: 307). Davidoff discusses planning as an interactive process between the planner and the community, requiring the *inclusion* of citizens in the planning process. According to Davidoff, the community needs an advocate who will affirm the community's "position in language understandable to his client and to the decision-makers he seeks to convince" (Davidoff 1996: 307).

The counterpoint for this idea was expressed twenty-five years later by bell hooks, who criticizes the advocate point of view:

> No need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it to you in such a way that it becomes mine, my own. Rewriting you I write myself anew. I am still author, authority. I am still colonizer, the speaking subject, and you are now at the center of my talk (hooks 1990: 343).

This question of "speaking for others" and the relationship between the subject and the object—the self and the other—is one of the most complex issues currently discussed in planning and the social sciences. At the center of the debate is the impossibility of achieving objectivity or neutrality in any profession. Even Davidoff, in discussing planning, suggests that "it would become clear (as it is not at present) that there are no neutral grounds for evaluating a plan; there are as many evaluative systems as there are value systems" (1996: 310). Davidoff still gives the advocate planner—an individual with a personal value system—the authority and responsibility to decide what is proper for a certain community.

The issue of similarity versus otherness can be extended to all facets of social and professional life: Can a lawyer who is a black male represent a white woman? Can a male speak for feminism? In addition, the definition of community is fluid, and as Linda Alcoff (1995: 99) claims, there is always a narrower category. Accordingly, the definition of community could shrink to one individual. This leads to the question of *who* and *where* is the other? bell hooks refers to the marginal community and to herself as part of it as the other:

> Those scholars, most especially those who name themselves radical critical thinkers, feminist thinkers, now fully participate in the construction of a discourse about the 'other.' I was made 'other' there in that space with them… In that space in the margins, that lived in segregated world of my past and present,
> I was not 'other.' They did not meet me there. They met me at the center (hooks 1990: 343).

If "they" meet in the other's space, as hooks suggests, the categories of "self" and "other" are subversively inverted. In its own space, the community is no longer the other, but rather it is the outsider who enters the margins and becomes the other.

Speaking for others—assuming the needs of others—is an inherited part of the planning profession. In order to be able to speak for others, one must learn about the other. Learning about the other, however, is not obvious, since the definition of who is and where is the other is changing, depending on the central subject. Foucault (1973) argues that in the process of cumulating knowledge about the other, the central subject—the "knower"—is transformed. Henceforth, it is impossible to really *learn* to know the other. As Linda Alcoff claims, "the validity of a given instance of speaking for others cannot be determined simply by asking whether or not the speaker has done sufficient research to justify her claims. Adequate research will be a necessary but insufficient criterion of evaluation" (1995: 104). Alcoff, following Michel Foucault, describes these "rituals of speaking" as "politically constituted by power relations of domination, exploitation, and subordination. Who is speaking, who is spoken of, and who listens is a result as well as an act of a political struggle" (1995: 105). One can conclude that in order to avoid this conflict, the planner ought to be part of the community—part of the other.

To be part of the "other" community is a problematic requirement for the planner. It implies limitation on who can legitimately become a progressive planner. Should students applying to planning schools be part of certain disadvantaged groups, or agree to deal only with their own group? As an Israeli, I was born in a colonizing society that has deprived other communities of their basic rights. I criticize this domination and agree with bell hooks' writings, though there is no way I can change my "outsider-ness" among the suppressed/colonized groups.

I will also be the other—the outsider—among some communities I wish to work with, because of my status as a middle-class, well-educated, white woman. There is no way I can change either my affiliation, or the color of my skin, in order to be able to work with other communities if the basis for eligibility is similarity.

This basis for eligibility also brings with it the difficulty of determining to what extent one can be part of the community. bell hooks considers herself part of a marginalized community. She defines her community, her social identity, as "the site of resistance." hooks claims that if the scholars who considered her "other" would have met her in the margins, where she grew up, she would not have been other anymore. But is she still part of the margins? bell hooks is today a well-known scholar. She occupies a unique place in relation to the marginalized spaces of her upbringing. "Yet I want to talk about what it means to struggle to maintain that marginality even as one works, produces, lives, if you will, at the center" (hooks 1990: 341). If she claims to be in the center, hooks cannot play the same role in her marginalized community. Being in the center is a different position even if one grew up in the margins. Therefore, a professional planner from a marginalized background is not necessarily part of this community in the same way at a later time. S/he might be identified with the academic community, or the planning community. The professional planner becomes the other as well, even though s/he had the experience of being part of the margins and might know more than outsiders do.

I agree with Linda Alcoff's and bell hooks' critiques of the practice of speaking for others. To me, the solution is not in the delegitimization of the progressive planner who is not part of the margins, but rather lies in a revision of the *role* of the planner. This role should not be patronizing, nor should it repress the community from expressing itself. The definition of this role should stand in contrast with ideas of domination while serving the community and its needs.

Communities today have more power. Ethnic and cultural groups havedifferent opportunities to affirm their cultural identities. Marginality is viewed as a site of resistance, not only of repression. Communities express their needs and pursue changes more assertively. Davidoff himself mentioned that "much work along the lines of advocate planning has already taken place, but little of it by professional planners. More often the work has been conducted by trained community organizers or by student groups" (Davidoff 1996:311). Grassroots organizations and urban social movements are now recognized as part of the formal planning tradition (Friedmann 1987). One can ask, therefore, whether planners are needed at all and whether the community can manage without professional intervention.

I argue that the planner's professional intervention is still needed. What needs to be changed is the power structure. The key to a balanced intervention is what Hindess, reflecting on Foucault's work, has called "relationships between 'power liberties'"(cited in Hindess 1996:99). The core of the new critiques of advocacy planning, including those of Alcoff and hooks, is in my opinion the patronizing approach, which implies subordination and domination. Drawing from Foucault, Hindess explains that "domination refers, in other words, to those asymmetrical relationships of power in which the subordinated persons have little room for maneuver because their margin of liberty is extremely limited" (Hindess 1996:102). However, more balanced power relations--or power liberties--leave open possibilities of resistance. Balanced power relations between the planner and the community can therefore be seen as positive and healthy.

While urban social movements and grassroots organizations may initiate social change, planners and other professionals have unique skills. As part of their expertise, professionals should have a larger perspective and a wider frame for analyzing actions. Therefore they can engage with communities from a broader perspective. In order to succeed in their endeavors, communities do not need a patron or an advocate to speak for them. Communities do need to understand and familiarize themselves with specific technical language; they need a consultant.

The title "consultant" implies a different set of power relations. It assumes that those seeking consulting advice are capable of making decisions themselves. They seek professional advice, not a representative who will take responsibility for decision-making. Thus, the planner defined as a consultant rather than as an advocate does not need to speak for others— those others can speak for themselves. This would establish a different power structure implying equal power to each partner, allowing for more balanced relationships between the community and the planner. Foucault termed it, "strategic games between power liberties"(cited in Hindess 1996: 99).

Defining the planner as a consultant allows him/her to live in peace with the issue of otherness. As a consultant, the planner *should* learn about the other in order to understand and to give better advice, not in order to represent or speak for others. The relationship between the planner and the community is not trapped in the frame of similarity and otherness anymore. In addition, this more balanced power structure (i.e. power relations that do not imply domination) does not tag the label of the other on either of the planner or the community. The planner can be viewed as the other by the community and reversibly the community can be viewed as the other by the planner. If everyone can be the other and if power domination is out of the game, then there is no subject and no object. There is the self and the other, and those two labels are equally weighted and therefore can play "strategic games of power liberties."

Every community is unique, and as I have already discussed, planning cannot claim to be either scientific or neutral. Furthermore, it takes time to develop certain expertise in specific communities. Planning therefore must rely on the active participation of the community. A planner must work hand in hand with the community, and with experience, incorporate the past in order to understand present and future needs. Only active community participation can eliminate the unjust equation whereby the community is the passive object of research by knowledgeable outsiders who devise expert solutions. Community participation, which reflects a balanced power structure, should be based upon active cooperation within the planning process.

Under these conditions of equal power structure, even bell hooks welcomes the other: "Marginality as site of resistance. Enter that space. Let us meet there. Enter that space. We greet you as liberators" (hooks 1990: 343). As a professional and as the other, I accept hooks appeal as an invitation to participate in the process of liberation of the margins. The solution for this cooperation lies in crafting a different power structure. We need to arrive in the community as partners in order to work together. It is also a

matter of discourse: not to speak for others a discourse which "annihilates, erases," but to "move in solidarity to erase the category of colonized/colonizer" (hooks 1990: 343).

In my discussion of Davidoff's definition of the planner as advocate, I did not address the issue of the public arena (i.e., the situation of planners working for governmental agencies and other public organizations). In these arenas, my proposal to view the planner as a consultant poses some unresolved questions: How can a planner not be the other or how can s/he avoid using the power of domination, when s/he works for a governmental agency? What is the role of the planner when serving not as the consultant for the community, but as the consultant for the authority? Davidoff discusses plural and comprehensive planning processes. He limits the scope of these concepts to specific groups, because he challenges the existence of the general public interest. While all different groups need to be recognized as distinct, I would argue that these groups remain portions of the society as a whole. In the salad bowl image, it is possible to argue, without ignoring its different components, that the salad also exists as an entity. Likewise, planning is a comprehensive terrain and the professional planner must have the knowledge and expertise to tie specific communities with the society as a whole, without forsaking the uniqueness of each community (or of themselves). This calls for significant attention to professional ethics, its definition, and its roles, which I will leave for future discussions.

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