Discussing Women's Empowerment
– Theory and Practice

"Mind the gap please", warns a well-articulated, friend-ly although somewhat metallic sounding voice when passengers are about to leave or enter the trains on the London Underground. The expression could be used to illustrate the gap that often divides development theo-reticians and practitioners – a divide that can be bridged by a conscious dialogue.

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Sidastudies

Foreword

This volume offers a selection of papers presented at the conference 'Power, Resources and Culture in a Gender Perspective: Towards a Dialogue Between Gender Research and Development Practice', arranged by the Council for Development and Assistance Studies, Uppsala University, Sweden in cooperation with Sida, October 2000.

The objective of the conference was to create a forum for dialogue, where development practitioners and researchers could meet to focus on gender and power. Recent research in the field was presented in order to introduce new theoretical points of departure, relevant to the reassessment of development cooperation. Most development cooperation today has gender equality as one of its objectives. To achieve this, a new relationship is needed between researchers – with their theoretical tools for understanding and their empirical knowledge of local contexts – and development practitioners – with their tacit knowledge of the nature of how policies are generated, formed and implemented in developing countries. Probably, there is no linear, one-way relationship between research and implementation in policy formation. Rather, a close, ongoing dialogue between researchers and practitioners is required.

It was hoped that the conference would put in place the parameters for a vital, constructive dialogue of this type. Whether this will be so remains to be seen. There is some hesitation on both sides. However, as the debates of the conference proved, for those who cross the line and participate in the dialogue there is little doubt as to the value and need of this kind of encounter.

The papers, intended to encourage and inspire both practitioners and researchers, are a small selection from the conference, chosen for their policy and methodological implications and their variety of perspectives. Some papers represent research in progress, while others are written by theorists already well established in the international discussions on women and development. They are strongly related, in their various ways, to the issue of women's empowerment.

Birgitta Sevefjord
Gender Equality Adviser, Sida

Berit Olsson
Director, Department for
Research Cooperation, Sarec, Sida

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In the introductory chapter, Birgitta Sevefjord and Berit Olsson, Sida, discuss various experiences in trying to implement gender policies in development and research cooperation.

Dr. Naila Kabeer, from the Institute of Development Studies in Sussex, United Kingdom, leads the way towards setting critical, analytical standards as she discusses how prescribed processes of empowerment may violate the essence of the concept. Dr. Kabeer reviews and evaluates various measures of women's empowerment, the values they embody and the appropriateness of these values in capturing the idea of empowerment. Furthermore, she discusses methodological implications flowing from the analysis.

In the same vein of inviting critical thought and discussion, Dr. Patricia McFadden from Southern African Research Institute for Policy Studies SARIPS, in Harare, Zimbabwe discusses culture as a gendered practice which excludes women from sites and statuses related to power. She argues that colonial stereotypes about of Africans today are perpetuated through academic disciplines in the North and that they work hand in hand with strategies to control women's mobility in African patriarchal societies — both to prevent women's spatial mobility and ultimately from moving into modern times. Furthermore, she discusses exclusionary practices in the state and in the rural spaces of the continent to maintain a cultural authenticity through the denial of rights and entitlements to women in terms of material property. 'Customs' and 'customary law' have been used as a way to give a stamp of cultural authenticity on to what is in effect a denial of rights to property and land for many African women — a matter of central importance in the current tensions and debates within Zimbabwe.

Signe Arnfred from the Nordic Africa Institute in Uppsala, Sweden,

calls current development concepts into question by arguing that the language in which to address women's issues on global scale is not the language of political struggle. The use of the terms 'gender' and 'mainstreaming' have come to impede global solidarity/sisterhood and to obscure power relationships and a need for transformatory processes at a time when feminist struggle is needed more than ever – in the era of a neo-liberal agenda world wide. Inspired by ideas developed by e.g. Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era, DAWN, Arnfred discusses subversive ways in which to make gender mainstreaming meaningful from women's points of view. She encourages feminists in the North to listen more to feminists in the South and encourages all feminists to develop an astute critique of prevailing trends of marketisation and of the institutions that promote it.

By using recent political developments in Mexico, Edmé Dominguez, at the Universities of Gothenburg and Linköping, indicates that women may show the way to a new political culture. She argues that women's participation in the awakening of civil society in Mexico, and also the Zapatista women's rebellion against their life situation, with their 'Revolutionary laws against poverty', imply a serious transformation in the political culture and in related gender relationships. In the interviews that Dominguez presents, both women who have participated in organisations for change and also non-participants give their views on what citizenship implies, they discuss the need for women to change the political culture and whether the Zapatista women are showing a new way in political style for women.

Finally, stressing the need to draw sociological and economic pattens related to religion to the attention of development practitioners, Sherin Saadallah, currently working as a consultant in a project targeting Social and Economic Development in Egypt, explores the dynamics of gender in Islam, whilst differentiating between the texts and the interpretations. She discusses prerogatives for change and social development in Muslim societies and suggests policies and strategies for development that would focus on alleviating gender inequality and power imbalances in the delineated context.

Introduction

Gender Issues in Development Practice: Two Perspectives from a Development Cooperation Agency

BIRGITTA SEVEFJORD AND BERIT OLSSON

Birgitta Sevefjord, Gender Equality Adviser
Gender Equality: Sida's Efforts in a Global Context

The promotion of equality between women and men has been a consistent feature of Swedish international development cooperation. Measures that specifically target women have been emphasised for quite a few years. Many positive results have been achieved. However, when judging the achievements in a broad perspective, it becomes clear that most of them have remained isolated and development has not been affected at all to a desirable degree. Progress has been slow and strenuous, thus stressing the fact that gender issues are intimately related to, and even determined by, the formal distribution of power in society. Around 10 per cent of the world's parliamentarians are women, and furthermore, on a global scale, this figure is very unequally distributed.

There is a growing awareness of the importance of shifting the focus from the symptoms of inequality towards efforts to address the structural factors that cause it. The relationship between gender equality and sound economic development is becoming visible. When the potential of both women and men is utilised in development, there is less need for special compensatory support for women. To ensure effective and sustainable results it is necessary that both women and men participate in, and benefit from, development co-operation. Sida finds itself at the centre of this process.

Any organisation working with development co-operation has to be constantly attentive and observant, heedful of the ongoing dialogue between theoreticians and practitioners. Sida's mandate requires a keen ear to the demands, needs and critique formulated by its partners in development. The conference 'Power Resources and Culture in a Gender Per-

spective: Towards a Dialogue between Gender Research and Development Practice', arranged by the Council for Development and Assistance Studies, Uppsala University, in cooperation with Sida, has been a part in this endeavour. It is Sida's hope that some of the lively debate at the conference will be made visible through the contributions we have chosen for this publication. The dialogue continues.

In the following I intend to highlight some of the guidelines that govern Sida's contributions to the promotion of equality between women and men and how the organisation tries to apply these policies in its activities.

More than five hundred employees are stationed at Sida's headquarters, while a hundred more are active in the field. Of all these persons, one woman is working full-time as the gender equality adviser – myself – while twenty persons act as gender focal points in the various departments. For most of them, their work as gender focal points is additional to their ordinary workload, while others have ten to twenty-five per cent of their working time set aside for this particular work. With a few exceptions, all are women. This situation was one of Sida's main reasons for organising the conference. We are in great need of the expertise of various practitioners and theoreticians. We need their competence, support and constructive critique to strengthen the ongoing work with gender equality at Sida. We do not have enough time and resources to discharge the responsibility given us by Parliament, i.e. to mainstream gender in all areas of development co-operation.

At the present time Sida is crossing both the English Channel and the Atlantic Ocean in its search for researchers and consultants. However, we increasingly need to reach out to Swedish universities, NGOs and researchers from the South. Sida is trying to maximise its efforts to mobilise and utilise existing knowledge and experience related to the promotion of equality between women and men. The need for such an endeavour has been repeatedly expressed in the organisation. In 1999, an MA thesis[1] concluded that the entire staff of Sida is of the opinion that there is a need to increase gender knowledge in the organisation and that more active male involvement in this process would give this particular issue higher priority and status in the organisation.

Sida's objective of promoting equality between women and men has remained unchanged over the years. However, a considerable development of strategies and methodologies has taken place. The late 1980s saw a change of focus from separate, special efforts for women to a 'main-

1. Färnsveden, Ulf and Rönquist, Anders (1999), 'Why men – a pilot study of the existing attitudes among Sida's staff towards male participation in the promotion of gender equality in development', Peace and Development Research Institute, Padrigu, University of Gothenburg.

streaming strategy' that was intended to address 'relationships between men and women'. Incidentally, 'mainstreaming' is an exceptionally difficult concept to work with, particularly since it is not easy to translate to people who are unaware of its meaning and implications. Just one example – during a conference in Laos some members of staff from Sida tried to shed light on the concept. Afterwards, when the translator was asked how she translated 'mainstreaming' to Lao, she answered 'like some kind of a big river'.

In 1999, OECD/DAC presented a peer review of Sweden's development co-operation programme. The final report stated that the mainstreaming effort by Sweden to pay attention to gender issues is commendable. However, monitoring and reporting on gender take place on an ad hoc basis. There is a need of systematic monitoring and reporting systems.

Accordingly, Sida is in need of an efficient methodology to deal with gender issues. The support of both theoreticians and practitioners is crucial for the development of an efficient gender policy in the organisation.

In 1999, it was estimated that approximately ten per cent of Sida's disbursements were allocated to projects with a direct gender focus, while 40 per cent did not focus at all on gender, in spite of the fact that gender equality continues to be one of Sida's overriding goals. Despite all international efforts to put gender issues on the agenda for development policies in all countries of the world, progress has been slow and uneven: a state of affairs that is reflected by a stubborn continuation of the limited access of women to political power. However, information about violations of women's rights has increased over the years and bears witness to serious denials of access by women to human resources, as well as increasing violence against women. Personally I am convinced that violence against women is more widespread than ever before and that it is a major obstacle to economic development.

In 1995, the UNDP's Human Development Report established that there is no country in the world where gender equality has been achieved. The same year the women's conference in Beijing endorsed an Action Programme for the promotion of equality between women and men. The Beijing Platform for Action identified twelve common, critical areas of concern, including poverty, education, health, violence, armed conflict, environment, power, decision-making, and the situation of female children.

In 1996, the Swedish Parliament decided that gender equality should be one of the main goals of development cooperation and accordingly Sida adopted a policy that, among other things, stipulated that specific emphasis was to be placed on the empowerment of women to participate

more fully in political decision-making, since this is a precondition for advancement in other areas.

In June 2000, a follow-up of the Beijing conference was held in New York (Beijing+5). Five thousand delegates from one hundred and eighty-eight countries participated. The outcome document established that, although recognition of the gender dimension of poverty is increasing, the economic gap between women and men is widening. At the same time as globalisation is bringing opportunities and autonomy to some women, it has marginalised others.

The overall picture continues to be gloomy. One particularly sinister illustration of this sorry state of affairs was when Angela King, adviser to Kofi Anan, pointed out that every year hundreds of thousands, maybe even millions of women and girls are sold world-wide into slavery and prostitution.

According to UNICEF, domestic violence against women and girls has reached epidemic proportions. Due to sex-selective abortions, infanticide, malnutrition and other gender-based malpractice and injustices, there are 60 million less women in the world today than could be expected from demographic trends.

In view of this bleak picture it is easy to give in and yield to overwhelmingly bad odds. However, we have to continue to remain dedicated to our cause. Sida is committed to supporting and promoting gender equality. It was as a part of Sida's search for expertise, knowledge, constructive critique and sincere engagement that the organisation's gender unit funded the conference. It is our hope that the ongoing efforts to achieve gender equality are not halted or slowed down, but that this extremely important endeavour grows in strength and importance. I hope that this study will be a small contribution to this constant struggle.

Berit Olsson, Director of Department for Research Cooperation, Sarec
Addressing Gender Issues: In Search of a Research Agenda

Discussions on women in development have had a far-reaching impact on development cooperation. This may be contrary to what is aften argued. My experience as a director at a development oriented research-funding agency has convinced me that few people are unaware of the need to address gender issues. Five years ago, the promotion of equality between men and women became one of the main goals of Swedish international development cooperation. An understanding of the importance is nowadays reflected in policies, strategies and action programmes and gender is constantly present in discussions concerned with development. I dare to state that gender inequalities are more commonly discussed than inequalities in general. If this is good or bad is an open question.

However, awareness is just a start. We still lack adequate knowledge and we need further access to articulated experience. We need to compare what works, why, when and under what circumstances. In general, gender research tends to describe existing injustices, rather than looking for means and ways to address their underlying mechanisms, or evaluating attempts to correct them. I believe there is an 'uneasy relationship' between research and practice that needs to be analysed further. We need to find better ways of communicating across different types of skills; experience and knowledge can be gained from both sides and their different approaches. We need to learn from viable and successful solutions, thus gaining some hope for the future. New skills have to be produced and we need tools, useful instruments.

I would like to briefly mention some of our own experiences in supporting gender research. Sida's Department for Research Cooperation, Sarec has supported women's studies for many years. In the early days, this was a subversive type of support: a small, visible activist-oriented programme with a clear focus, funded through special arrangements rather than through regular channels. Women studies were something you did in resistance, working uphill. It was often considered to be a dangerous, even threatening, activity.

However, in the current phase, 'the phase of mainstreaming', it has become legitimate to address these issues, and they constitute a recognised field of knowledge. But what have been the results of mainstreaming? Well, 'invisibility' seems to be a characteristic of the present state of affairs. When we planned our participation in the conference, a member of staff drew up a list that summarised what Sida is supporting when it comes to gender-related research. I was positively surprised by the number of re-

search activities that are actually taking place. Gender studies are being supported as part of university support and as part of bilateral programmes, regional networks, organisations and social science studies in a wider context. All address gender issues in various ways. The fact that all this research is not supported in the form of a special programme may render visibility lower than before – but it does not mean that nothing is being done. Nevertheless, clearly there is a scope for doing more. Special research efforts could be promoted to enhance the mainstreaming activities, networks could be encouraged and many research efforts could be co-ordinated and made more visible.

Furthermore, we need to ask if some of the difficulties in discerning gender research could have something to do with it being low key, less political, and containing less dynamite. Has gender research ceased to constitute a threat? The aforementioned conference repeatedly addressed the issue of power. The insistence made me reflect on particularly two sets of questions. One of them is: 'What happens when gender researchers or gender activists who have been in opposition for a long time, actually gain power? Does anything happen at all? Is the power gained used to address problems that formerly were assumed to be of highest priority? Is this problem actually being studied and researched? If this is the case – why are the findings, and the debate on the findings, almost invisible?'

The discussions also inspired me to reflect on the potential political implications in the wider context. What would happen if a radical discussion on access to power and influence, such as the one we were engaged in during the conference, were adapted to the issue of development cooperation in general? We need to ask whether the radical gender discussion is kept alive and vivid because it is held by a very special group, within special parameters, set apart for the purpose of addressing a specific topic, exclusive to a certain group of people. In other words, is focusing on gender inequalities a way of deflecting the debate away from inequalities in general, a far more controversial subject? Are there then any possibilities for power analysis in the area of gender to ignite an overall debate on power in development cooperation, or indeed in development at large? I believe there is a seed in the discourse exposed during this particular conference.

Finally, I would like to mention some issues particularly related to my area of expertise, namely research funding. One problem we are facing, when it comes to gender, is that sometimes we do not even know *who* is being studied. Many studies do not make a separate breakdown of men and women. A great deal of statistical information does not distinguish between men and women. We know that this is particularly serious in health

research, and it is probably very serious in many other contexts as well. Gender does matter to the issues that are being addressed in research and other vital questions in development cooperation are: How relevant are the studied issues for whom and in what context? Who formulate the problems? Are they men or women? Do they come from North or South? Are they old or young?

We also need to pay increasing attention to *how* gender is reflected in research. In this context, I do not mean gender research exclusively, but research that addresses agriculture, health, engineering etc. How do these studies and their outcome affect men and women? We need to consider whether we are evaluating research properly. Are we refuting research that does not consider such issues? We are trying to address the problem of integrating gender issues in all the research initiatives we are involved in, but admittedly we are not yet sufficiently good at it.

A completely different set of questions concerns how researchers are evaluated. This has been studied in Sweden, and we are rather surprised at the findings. We find it embarrassing that, just a few years ago, among the full professors in Sweden, only 7 per cent were women. When these facts were attacked by some bold and determined critics, they were contested and even dragged into court at the European level. Swedish universities and research bodies have not been very sensitive to gender issues and should not be too proud of themselves. I would say that the Southern universities supported by Sida are often more gender sensitive than their Swedish counterparts. They are actively engaged in formulating programmes and activities to address the issue of gender at different levels in their activities. Of course, we, the development funders, are coaching them into doing so. However, they *are doing* it, and they have programmes. When we talk about partnership and about the importance of learning from each other, we may still have a way to go. Swedish universities have a massive resistance to overcome in these issues. Southern universities also show resistance, but the steps they are taking, their lively debates and the experience they gain, are certainly worth noting and learning from in our mutual search for a research agenda.

Resources, Agency, Achievements:

Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment

NAILA KABEER

Section 1: Conceptualising Empowerment

Introduction

Advocacy on behalf of women which builds on claimed synergies between feminist goals and official development priorities has made greater inroads into the mainstream development agenda than advocacy which argues for these goals on intrinsic grounds. There is an understandable logic to this. In a situation of limited resources, where policymakers have to adjudicate between competing claims (Razavi, 1997), advocacy for feminist goals in intrinsic terms takes policymakers out of their familiar conceptual territory of welfare, poverty and efficiency into the nebulous territory of power and social injustice. There is also a political logic in that those who stand to gain most from such advocacy viz. women, particularly women from poorer households, carry little clout with those who set the agendas in major policy making institutions.

Consequently, as long as women's empowerment was argued for as an end in itself, it tended to be heard in policy circles as a 'zero-sum' game with politically weak winners and powerful losers. By contrast, instrumentalist forms of advocacy which combine the argument for gender equality/women's empowerment with demonstrations of a broad set of desirable multiplier effects offer policymakers the possibility of achieving familiar and approved goals, albeit by unfamiliar means. The persuasiveness of claims that women's empowerment has important policy payoffs in the field of fertility behaviour and demographic transition, children's welfare and infant mortality, economic growth and poverty alleviation has given rise to some unlikely advocates for women's empowerment in the field of international development, including the World Bank, the major UN agencies and the OECD-DAC group.

However, the success of instrumentalist forms of advocacy has costs. It requires the translation of feminist insights into the technicist discourse of policy, a process in which some of the original political edge of feminism has been sacrificed. Quantification is one aspect of this process of translation. Measurement is, of course, a major preoccupation in the policy domain, reflecting a justifiable concern with the cost/benefit calculus of competing claims for scarce resources in the policy domain. And given that the very idea of women's empowerment epitomises for many policy-makers the unwarranted intrusion of metaphysical concepts into the concrete and practical world of development policy, quantifying empowerment appears to put the concept on more solid and objectively verifiable grounds. There has consequently been a proliferation of studies attempting to measure empowerment, some seeking to facilitate comparisons between locations or over time, some to demonstrate the impact of specific interventions on women's empowerment and others to demonstrate the implications of women's empowerment for desired policy objectives.

However, not everyone accepts that empowerment can be clearly *defined*, let alone *measured*. For many feminists, the value of the concept lies precisely in its 'fuzziness'. As an NGO activist cited in Batliwala (1993) put it: 'I like the term empowerment because no one has defined it clearly yet; so it gives us a breathing space to work it out in action terms before we have to pin outselves down to what it means. I will continue using it until I am sure it does not describe what we are doing.' This paper offers a critical assessment of the various measures of women's empowerment evident in the burgeoning literature on this topic. It uses this assessment to reflect on the implications of attempting to measure what is not easily measureable and of replacing intrinsic arguments for feminist goals with instrumentalist ones. However, given the contested nature of the concept, it is important to clarify at the outset how it will be used in this paper, since this will influence how the various measurement attempts are evaluated. This is attempted in the rest of this section. In subsequent sections, I will be reviewing various measures of women's empowerment, the extent to which they mean what they are intended to mean, the values they embody and the appropriateness of these values in capturing the idea of empowerment.

Conceptualising empowerment: resources, agency and achievement.

One way of thinking about power is in terms of the *ability to make choices:* to be disempowered, therefore, implies to be denied choice[1]. My under-

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1. Choice has strong neo-liberal connotations but some notion of choice is also implicit in the Marxist distinction between the 'realm of necessity' and the 'realm of freedom'. I hope that »

standing of the notion of empowerment is that it is inescapably bound up with the condition of disempowerment and refers to the processes by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such an ability. In other words, empowerment entails a process of change. People who exercise a great deal of choice in their lives may be *very powerful*, but they are not *empowered* in the sense in which I am using the word, because they were never disempowered in the first place.

However, to be made relevant to the analysis of power, the notion of choice has to be qualified in a number of ways. First of all, c*hoice necessarily implies alternatives*, the ability to have chosen otherwise. There is a logical association between poverty and disempowerment because an insufficiency of the means for meeting one's basic needs often rules out the ability to exercise meaningful choice. However, even when survival imperatives are longer dominant, there is still the problem that not all choices are equally relevant to the definition of power. Some choices have greater significance than others in terms of their consequences for people's lives. We therefore have to make a distinction between first and second order choices where first order choices are those strategic life choices, such as choice of livelihood, where to live, whether to marry, who to marry whether to have children, how many children to have, freedom of movement and choice of friends, which are critical for people to live the lives they want. These strategic life choices help to frame other, second-order and less consequential choices which may be important for the quality of one's life but do not constitute its defining parameters.

Empowerment thus refers to the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them.

Changes in the ability to exercise choice can be thought of in terms of changes in three inter-related dimensions which make up choice: resources, which form the conditions under which choices are made; agency which is at the heart of the process by which choices are made; and achievements, which are the outcomes of choices. These dimensions are inter-dependent because changes in each contributes to, and benefits from, changes in the others. Thus, the achievements of a particular moment are translated into enhanced resources or agency, and hence capacity for making choices, at a later moment in time.

» the qualifications offered to the concept of choice in the course of this paper will help to steer it away from its roots in methodological individualism and to give it a more post-structuralist interpretation.

Figure 1. Dimensions of empowerment

Resources
(conditions)

          Achievements
          (outcomes)

Agency
(process)

Resources can be material, social or human. In other words, they refer not only to conventional economic resources, such as land, equipment, finance, working capital etc. but also to the various human and social resources which serve to enhance the ability to exercise choice. Human resources are embodied in the individual and encompasses his or her knowledge, skills, creativity, imagination and so on. Social resources, on the other hand, are made up of the claims, obligations and expectations which inhere in the relationships, networks and connections which prevail in different spheres of life and which enable people to improve their situation and life chances beyond what would be possible through their individual efforts alone.

Resources are distributed through a variety of different institutions and processes and access to resources will be determined by the rules, norms and practices which prevail in different institutional domains (eg. familial norms, patron-client relationships, informal wage agreements, formal contractual transactions, public sector entitlements). These rules, norms and practices give some actors authority over others in determining the principles of distribution and exchange within that sphere. Consequently, the distribution of 'allocative' resources tends to be embedded within the distribution of 'authoritative resources' (Giddens, 1979), the ability to define priorities and enforce claims. Heads of households, chiefs of tribes, directors of firms, managers of organisations, elites within a community are all endowed with decision-making authority within particular institutional contexts by virtue of their positioning within those institutions.

The terms on which people gain access to resources are as important as the resources themselves when the issue of empowerment is being considered. Access may be conditional on highly clientilist forms of dependency relationships or extremely exploitative conditions of work or it may be achieved in ways which offer dignity and a sense of self-worth. Empowerment entails a change in the terms on which resources are acquired as much as an increase in access to resources.

The second dimension of power relates to *agency*, the ability to define one's goals and act upon them. Agency is about more than observable action; it also encompasses the meaning, motivation and purpose which individuals bring to their activity, their *sense* of agency, or 'the power within'. While agency often tends to be operationalised as 'individual decision-making', particularly in the mainstream economic literature, in reality, it encompasses a much wider range of purposive actions, including bargaining, negotiation, deception, manipulation, subversion, resistance and protest as well as the more intangible, cognitive processes of reflection and analysis. Agency also encompasses collective, as well as individual, reflection and action.

Agency has both positive and negative meanings in relation to power[2]. In the positive sense of the 'power to', it refers to people's capacity to define their own life-choices and to pursue their own goals, even in the face of opposition from others. Agency can also be exercised in the more negative sense of 'power over', in other words, the capacity of an actor or category of actors to over-ride the agency of others, for instance, through the use of violence, coercion and threat. However, power can also operate in the absence of any explicit agency. The norms and rules governing social behaviour tend to ensure that certain outcomes are reproduced without any apparent exercise of agency. Where these outcomes bear on the strategic life choices noted earlier, they testify to the exercise of power as 'non-decision-making' (Lukes, 1974). The norms of marriage in South Asia, for instance, invest parents with the authority for choosing their children's partners, but are unlikely to be experienced as a form of power – unless such authority is questioned.

Resources and agency together constitute what Sen refers to as capabilities, the potential that people have for living the lives they want, of achieving valued ways of 'being and doing'. Sen uses the idea of 'functionings' to refer to all the possible ways of 'being and doing' which are valued by people in a given context and of 'functioning achievements' to refer to the particular ways of being and doing which are realised by different individuals. These realised *achievements*, or the failure to do so, constitute our third dimension of power. Clearly, where the failure to achieve valued ways of 'being and doing' can be traced to laziness, incompetence or some other reason particular to an individual, then the issue of power

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2. The concepts of positive and negative agency echoes the distinction between positive and negative freedom made by Sen. Negative freedom corresponds to freedom from the effects of the negative agency of others or their use of 'the power over'. Positive freedom, which corresponds closely to the way in which I am defining positive agency, refers to the ability to live as one chooses, to have the effective power to achieve chosen results (Sen A.K., 1985).

is not relevant. When, however, the failure to achieve reflects asymmetries in the underlying distribution of capabilities, it can be taken as a manifestation of disempowerment.

Qualifying choice: difference versus inequality

However, a concern with 'achievements' in the measurement of empowerment draws attention to the necessity for further qualifications to our understanding of choice. As far as empowerment is concerned, we are interested in possible *inequalities* in people's capacity to make choices rather than in *differences* in the choices they make. An observed lack of uniformity in functioning achievements cannot be automatically interpreted as evidence of inequality because it is highly unlikely that all members of a given society will give equal value to different possible ways of 'being and doing'. Consequently, where gender differentials in functioning achievements exist, we have to disentangle differentials which reflect differences in preferences and priorities from those which embody a denial of choice[3].

One way of getting around the problem for measurement purposes would be to focus on certain universally-shared functionings, those which relate to the basic fundamentals of survival and well-being, regardless of context. For instance, it is generally agreed that proper nourishment, good health, adequate shelter, reasonable clothing and clean water all constitute primary functionings which tend to be universally valued. If there are systematic gender differences in these very basic functioning achievements, they can be taken as evidence of inequalities in underlying capabilities rather than differences in preferences. This, for instance, is the strategy adopted by Sen (1990). However, focusing on basic needs achievements addresses one aspect of the problem but raises others.

Inequalities in basic functionings generally tend to occur in situations of extreme scarcity. Confining the analysis of gender inequality to these achievements alone serves to convey the impression that women's disempowerment is largely a matter of poverty. This is misleading for two reasons.

On the one hand, it misses forms of gender disadvantage which are more likely to characterise better-off sections of society. Prosperity within a society may help to reduce gender inequalities in basic well-being, but intensify other social restrictions on women's ability to make choices

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3. A discussion by Folbre offers a pithy example of the distinction I am trying to make here: she points to the very differing implications of a model of gender equality which seeks to achieve equal of participation by women and men in the labour market as its indicator of achievement and one which seeks to equalilty of leisure.

(Razavi, 1992). On the other, it misses out on those dimensions of gender disadvantage among the poor which do not take the form of basic functioning failures. For instance, marked gender differentials in life expectancy and children's nutrition, two widely used indicators of gender discrimination in basic wellbeing, do not appear to be as widespread in the context of sub-Saharan Africa as they do in South Asia. This is usually attributed to the greater economic contributions that women are able to make in the former context compared to the latter and to the cultural rules and norms which have evolved in recognition of their contribution. However, this does not rule out the possibility that gender disadvantage can take other forms in these contexts. Shaffer (1998), for instance, found little evidence of income or consumption disadvantage between male- and female-headed households in Guinea. However, both men and women in his study recognised women's far heavier workloads as well as male domination in private and public decision-making as manifestations of gender inequality within their community.

A second way out of the problem might be to go beyond the concern with basic survival-related achievements to certain other functioning achievements which would be considered to be of social value in most contexts. This is the strategy adopted in the UNDP's gender-disaggregated Human Development Index as well as its Gender Empowerment Measure. Such aggregated measures play a useful role in monitoring differences in achievements across regions and over time, drawing attention to problematic disparities. However, while there are sound reasons to move the measurement of achievements beyond very basic functionings, such as life expectancy and nutritional status, to more complex achievements, such as education and political representation, we have to keep in mind that such measurements, quite apart from their empirical shortcomings, entail the movement away from the criteria of women's choices, or even the values of the communities in which they live, to a definition of 'achievement' which represents the values of those who are doing the measuring. We will return at a later section to the problems that external values can raise in the analysis of women's empowerment.

Qualifying choice: 'choosing not to choose'

The use of achievements to measure empowerment draws attention to a second problem of interpretation deriving from the central place given to choice in our definition of power. There is an intuitive plausibility to the equation between power and choice as long as what is chosen appears to contribute to the welfare of those making the choice. In situations where we find evidence of striking gender inequalities in basic well-being

achievements, the equation between choice and power would suggest quite plausibly that such inequalities signal the operation of power: either as an absence of choice on the part of women as the subordinate group or as active discrimination by men as the dominant group. However, the equation between power and choice finds it far more difficult to accommodate forms of gender inequality when these appear to have been chosen by women themselves. This problem plays out in the literature on gender and wellbeing in the form of behaviour on the part of women which suggests that they have internalised their social status as persons of lesser value. Such behaviour can have adverse implications for their own wellbeing as well as for the wellbeing for other female members of the family. Women's acceptance of their secondary claims on household resources, their acquiescence to violence at the hands of their husbands, their willingness to bear children to the detriment of their own health and survival to satisfy their own or their husband's preference for sons, are all examples of behaviour by women which undermine their own wellbeing. It is worth noting, for instance, that in Shaffer's study from West Africa cited earlier, both women and men recognised the existence of gender inequalities in terms of women's heavier workloads and men's dominance in decision-making, but neither considered these inequalities *unjust*.

In addition, women's adherence to social norms and practices associated with son preference, discriminating against daughters in the allocation of food and basic health care to the extent to compromising the survival chances of the girl child, promotion of the practice of female circumcision, the oppressive exercise of authority by mothers-in-law over their daughters-in-law, a problem often identified in the South Asian context, are examples of behaviour in which women's internalisation of their own lesser status in society leads them to discriminate against other females in that society.

While these forms of behaviour could be said to reflect 'choice', they are also choices which stem from, and serve to reinforce, women's subordinate status. They remind us that power relations are expressed not only through the exercise of agency and choice, but also through the *kinds* of choices people make. This notion of power is a controversial one because it allows for the possibility that power and dominance can operate through consent and complicity as well as through coercion and conflict. The vocabulory of false consciousness is not a particularly useful description here, implying as it does the need to distinguish between false and authentic consciousness, between illusion and reality. The consciousness we are talking about is not 'false' as such, since how people perceive their

needs and interests is shaped by their individual histories and everyday re-
alities, by the material and social context of their experiences and by the
vantage point for reflexivity which this provides. In any situation, some
needs and interests are self-evident, emerging out of the routine practices
of daily life and differentiated by gender in as much as the responsibili-
ties and routines of daily life are gender differentiated. However, there
are other needs and interests which do not have this self-evident nature
because they derive from a 'deeper' level of reality, one which is not evi-
dent in everyday life because it is inscribed in the taken-for-granted rules,
norms and customs within which everyday life is conducted.

   One way of conceptualising this deeper reality is to be found in Bour-
dieu's idea of 'doxa', the aspects of tradition and culture which are so
taken-for-granted that they have become naturalised. Doxa refers to tra-
ditions and belief which exist beyond discourse or argumentation, 'undis-
cussed, unnamed, admitted without argument or scrutiny' (Bourdieu,
1977). The idea of doxa is helpful here because it shifts our attention away
from the dichotomy between false and authentic consciousness to a con-
cern with differing levels of reality and the practical and strategic inter-
ests which they give rise to. Bourdieu suggests that as long as the subjec-
tive assessments of social actors are largely congruent with the objective-
ly organised possibilities available to them, the world of doxa remains in-
tact. The passage from 'doxa' to discourse, a more critical consciousness,
only becomes possible when *competing* ways of 'being and doing' become
available as material and cultural possibilities, so that 'common sense'
propositions of culture begin to lose their 'naturalised' character, reveal-
ing the underlying arbitrariness of the given social order.

   The availability of alternatives at the discursive level, of being able to
at least imagine the possibility of having chosen differently, is thus cru-
cial to the emergence of a critical consciousness, the process by which
people move from a position of unquestioning acceptance of the social
order to a critical perspective on it. This has an obvious bearing to our
earlier discussion about functioning achievements as an aspect of em-
powerment. As I pointed out, the possibility that power operates not only
through constraints on people's ability to make choices, but also through
their preferences and values and hence the choices that they may make,
appeared to pose a serious challenge to the basic equation made in this
paper between power and choice. However, it is possible to retain the
equation by a further qualification to our notion of 'choice', extending
the idea of alternatives to encompass discursive alternatives. In other
words, in assessing whether or not an achievement embodies meaning-
ful choice, we have to ask ourselves whether other choices were not only

materially possible but whether they were conceived to be within the realms of possibility[4].

Empowerment: dimensions, levels and processes of change

To sum up, the ability to choose has been made central to the concept of power which informs the analysis in this paper. However, choice has been qualified in a number of ways to make it relevant to the analysis. Qualifications regarding the conditions of choice point to the need to distinguish between choices made from the vantage point of real alternatives and choices which reflect their absence or punishingly high costs. Qualifications relating to the consequences of choice reflect the need to distinguish between strategic life choices, those which represent valued ways of 'being and doing', and the other more mundane choices which follow once these first-order choices have been made. The consequences of choice can be further evaluated in terms of their transformatory significance, the extent to which the choices made have the potential for challenging and destabilising social inequalities and the extent to which they merely express and reproduce these inequalities. Choices which express the fundamental inequalities of a society, which infringe the rights of others or which systematically devalue the self, are not compatible with the notion of 'empowerment' being put forward in this paper.

These qualifications represent an attempt to incorporate the structural dimensions of choice into our analysis. Structures operate through the rules, norms and practices of different institutions to determine the resources, agency and achievement possibilities available to different groups of individuals in a society: our criteria of 'alternatives' (could they have chosen otherwise?) recognises these larger constraints. However, the actions and choices of individuals and groups can in turn act on structural constraints, reinforcing, modifying and transforming them: our criteria of 'consequences' draws attention to these possibilities. Such a conceptualisation of empowerment suggests that it can reflect change at a number of different possible levels (Figure 2).

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4. The importance of alternatives, material as well as discursive, is common to a number of analyses of power. Lukes refers to the absence of actual or imagined alternatives as a factor explaining the absence of protest to the injustices of an unequal order. Geuss (1981) suggests that knowledge about social life and the self requires not only freedom from basic want but also the material and cultural possibility of experimentation, of trying out alternatives, the freedom to experience and to discuss the results of that experience. Shklar puts the question of alternatives eloquently when she declares, 'Unless and until we can offer the injured and insulted victims of the most of the world's traditional as well as revolutionary governments a genuine and practicable alternative to their present condition, we have no way of knowing whether they really enjoy their chains…' . (1964. Legalism).

Figure 2. Levels of empowerment

'Deeper' levels:	Structural relations of class/caste/gender
Intermediate levels	Institutional rules and resources
Immediate levels	Individual resources, agency and achievements

It can reflect change at the level of individuals and groups, in their sense of selfhood and identity, in how they perceive their interests and in their capacity to act. It can occur at the intermediate level, in the rules and relationships which prevail in the personal, social, economic and political spheres of life. And it can occur in the deeper, hidden structures which shape the distribution of resources and power in a society and reproduce it over time. However, for any such change to translate into meaningful and sustainable processes of empowerment, it must ultimately encompass both individual and structural levels. The institution of rights within the legal framework of a society is meaningless unless these rights have a real impact on the range of possibilities available to all individuals in that society. Equally, changes in the resources that individuals enjoy, but which leave intact the structures of inequality and discrimination may help to improve their economic welfare without necessarily empowering them.

In the rest of this paper, I will be reviewing a selection of studies which attempt to measure women's empowerment drawn largely from the economic, the population and the gender literature in development studies. As we will see, there are some important differences in how these various studies deal with the idea of empowerment. They differ in the dimensions of empowerment which they choose to focus on and in whether they treat power as an attribute of individuals or a property of structures. They also differ in how social change is conceptualised.

In some cases, change in one dimension or level is presumed to lead to, or be symptomatic of, changes in others so that they confine themselves to indicators of that change. The UNDP's Gender Empowerment Measure which focuses on women's political representation or percentages of women in managerial posts is an example of this approach. It is assumed that such indicators tell us something important, if indirect, about women's ability to make strategic choices in other aspects of their lives. Others adopt a linear cause-and-effect logic to model the relationship between changes in different dimensions or levels of empowerment. These tend to confine themselves to changes at the individual level, for in-

stance, between changes in women's access to income earning opportunities and their decision-making power within the household although a few have also sought to model the effects of changes at the structural level for individual choice[5]. What is understandably missing from the measurement literature are examples of the more processual model of social change subscribed to by many feminists and exemplified in the following quotes from Batliwala:

> …the exercise of informed choice within an expanding framework of information, knowledge and analysis…a process which must enable women to discover new possibilites, new options…a growing repertoire of choices…to independently struggle for changes in their material conditions of existence, their personal lives and their treatment in the public sphere…The process of challenging existing power relations, and of gaining greater control over the sources of power… (Batliwala 1993 and 1994).

A processual understanding of social change tends to treat it as open-ended. It is premised on the unpredictability of human agency and on the diversity of circumstances under which such agency is exercised. While it may identify certain key elements of structure and agency as having a catalytic potential, it does not attempt to determine in advance how this potential will play out in practice. Consequently, empowerment is seen as a form of social change which is not easily captured by quantitative data.

Section 2: Measuring Empowerment: the Problem of Meaning

Measuring 'resources'

The 'resource' dimension of empowerment would appear at first sight to be the most easy to measure. However, a critical reading of attempts at measurement suggest that the task is less simple than it appears, even when resources are defined in narrow material terms as they generally tend to be. There is a widespread tendency in the empowerment literature to talk about 'access to resources' in a generic way, as if indicating some relationship between women and resources automatically specifies the choices it makes possible. In reality, however, resources are at one remove from choice, a measure of *potential* rather than *actualised* choice. How changes in women's resources will translate into changes in the choices

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5. The study by Hodinott et al. on the reduction in married women's suicide rates apparently as a result of changes in the divorce law in Canada is an example.

they are able to make will depend, in part, on other aspects of the conditions in which they are making their choices. By way of example, let us take women's 'access' to land.

At the systemic level, this is often captured by distinguishing between different categories of land rights with the assumption that women are likely to exercise a greater degree of autonomy in those regions where they enjoy some rights to land (e.g. Dyson and Moore, 1983; Boserup, 1970). Yet studies which use measures of women's access to land as an indicator of empowerment seldom reflect on the pathways by which such 'access' translates into agency and achievement, let alone seeking to understand these pathways empirically. It is noteworthy, for instance, that a causal connection is often made between patrilineal principles of descent and inheritance in the northern plains of the Indian sub-continent compared to the south and the lower levels of female autonomy beli in the northern plains of the Indian sub-continent, compared for instance, with the south. However, land inheritance rules are by no means uniform within this region. Among Hindus, joint family property is a central tenet shaping inheritance practices with some local variation in how this is interpreted. Joint family property is generally held in a coparcenary system by men, usually fathers and sons, to the total exclusion of women (Mukhopadhyay, 1998). Among Muslims, on the other hand, women have always enjoyed the right to inherit property and to inherit as individuals. Muslim women and men consequently enjoy individual, absolute but unequal rights to property: men tend to inherit twice the share of women. Hindu law has been reformed after Indian independence to give men and women equal rights of inheritance; Muslim inheritance principles have been left untouched.

However, despite these differences in the customary and legal positions of women in the two communities, both Muslim and Hindu women tend to be treated as effectively propertyless in the literature. For Hindu women, older norms and customs remain powerful and Agarwal (1994) provides evidence of the difficulties they face they seek to assert legal over customary practices around land inheritance. Muslim women, on the other hand, generally prefer, or are encouraged to prefer, to waive their rights to parental property in favour of their brothers with the result that they too are treated as effectively propertyless. Thus the critical measure of women's access to land which characterises the Indian literature is *de facto* rather than *de jure* entitlement and by this measure, there is little difference in the Hindu and Muslim community.

Yet it is by no means evident that de facto ownership tells us all we need to know about the potential domain of choice. It has, for instance,

been pointed out that although Muslim women do waive their land rights to their brothers (and may be under considerable pressure to do so), they thereby strengthen their future claim on their brothers, should their marriage break down. While brothers have a duty under Islam to look after their sisters, the waiving of land rights by sisters in favour of brothers gives a material basis to a moral entitlement. The necessity for such an exchange may reflect women's subordinate status within the community but the fact that women's land rights are in principle recognised by their community gives them a resource to bargain with in a situation in which they have few other resources. Moreover, as the situation changes, they may begin to press their claims on such a resource. I found evidence of women beginning to claim their inheritance rights in rural Bangladesh, although sometimes under pressure from their husbands (Kabeer, 1994) while Razavi also notes evidence from in rural Iran of a greater willingness of women to press for their property rights in court, this time to compensate for their diminishing employment opportunities (Razavi, 1992). These are potentials which are not easily available to women in communities where such rights were not recognised by customary law and tradition, even if they have, as in India, subsequently been brought into existence by legislative action. Indeed, Das Gupta (1987) has pointed out in the context of her study in the jat kinship system in Punjab that there was no question of women owning land: 'If she should insist on her right to inherit land equally under civil law, she would stand a good chance of being murdered'.

The main methodological point to take from this discussion therefore is that the 'resource' dimension has to be defined in ways which spell out their potential for human agency and valued achievements more clearly than simple 'access' indicators generally do if it is to be useful as a measure of empowerment. One of the limitation of de facto measures of land entitlements discussed here is that they ignore the diverse processes by which the de facto possession or dispossession occurs and hence fail to appreciate possible differences in women's choices implied by differences in the de jure position. In addition, the power of *customary* constructions of rights over recently introduced legalistic ones noted in these studies also raises a question about processes of social change which has yet to be satisfactorily answered in the empowerment literature: how do attempts to change deeply entrenched structures, in this case, pitting the law against rules legitimised by custom and religion, translate into changes in individual agency and choice?

The recognition by many analysts of the need to go beyond simple 'access' indicators in order to grasp how 'resources' translate into the realisation of choice has led to variety of concepts seeking to bridge the gap

between formal and effective entitlement to resources, generally by introducing some aspect of agency into the measure. The most frequently used of these bridging concepts is that of 'control', usually operationalised in terms of having a say in relation to the resource in question. However, while the focus on 'control' is an important conceptual step forward, it does not necessarily make the question of what to measure any easier to answer. Instead, what we find in the literature is a tendency to use concepts such as access, ownership, entitlement and control interchangeably so that there is considerable confusion about what 'control' actually means.

Sathar and Kazi (1997), for instance, equate both 'access' *and* 'control' with having a say in decisions related to particular resources within the household. Their measure of 'access to resources' is based on whether women had a say in household expenses, cash to spend on household expenses and freedom to purchase clothes, jewellery and gifts for their relatives while 'control over resources' is measured by asking who kept household earnings and who had a say in household expenditure. In Jeejheboy's analysis (1997), concepts of 'access', 'control' and 'decision-making' are all used in relation to resources, with 'control' sometimes referring to ownership and sometimes to decision-making. Kishor defines empowerment as 'women's control over key aspects of their lives' but her attempts to measure this 'control' varies between decision-making in relation to earnings and expenditures; control defined in terms of self reliance (can women support themselves without their husband's support); control as decision-making (who has final say in making decisions about a variety of issues); and control as 'choice' (choosing own spouse or being consulted in the choice of marriage partner).

Nevertheless, despite lack of clarity or consensus about what exactly 'control' might mean and how it can be measured, the focus on control in relation to the resource dimension of empowerment reflects a recognition on the part of analysts that 'access' to resources will only translate into empowerment if women are able to act on, or because of, these resources in some definitive way. Thus, one criteria for evaluating the validity of a resource-based measure as an indicator of women's empowerment is the validity of its implicit or explicit assumptions about the kinds of agency or entitlement that women are able to exercise as a result of their 'access' to the resource in question.

Measuring 'agency'

There are a variety of ways of measuring women's agency in the development studies literature, including negative forms of agency such as male violence as well as positive forms, such as women's mobility in the public

domain in regions where female seclusion is the norm[6]. However, I will restrict my discussion of measures of agency in relation to women's empowerment to the form which features most widely in the literature which is 'decision-making' agency. Measures of such agency are usually based on responses to questions asking women about their roles in relation to specific decisions, with answers sometimes combined into a single index and sometimes presented separately. Examples of decisions which typically apppear in measurement efforts and the geographical context covered are summarised below:

Typical decisions in decision-making indicators
- *Egypt:* Household budget, food cooked, visits, children's education, children's health, use of family planning methods (Kishor, 1997)
- *India:* Purchase of food; purchase of major household goods; purchase of small items of jewellery; course of action if child falls ill; disciplining the child; decisions about children's education and type of school (Jejeebhoy, 1997).
- *Nigeria:* Household purchases; whether wife works; how to spend husband's income; number of children to have; whether to buy and sell land, whether to use family planning; to send children to school, how much education; when sons and when daughters marry, whether to take sick children to doctor and how to rear children. (Kritz, Makinwa and Gurak, 1997).
- *Zimbabwe:* Wife working outside; making a major purchase; the number of children (Becker, 1997).
- *Nepal:* What food to buy; the decision by women to work outside; major market transaction; and the number of children to have (Morgan and Niraula, 1995).
- *Iran:* Types and quantities of food; inputs, labour and sale in agricultural production (Razavi, 1992).
- *Pakistan:* Purchase of food, number of children, schooling of children; children's marriage; major household purchases; women's work outside the home; sale and purchase of livestock, household expenses; purchase of clothes, jewellery and gifts for wife's relatives (Sathar and Kazi, 1997).
- *Bangladesh:* Ability to make small consumer purchases: ability to make large consumer purchases; house repair; taking in livestock for raising; leasing in of land; purchase of major asset (Hashemi et al, 1996).
- *Bangladesh:* Children's education; visits to friends and relatives; household purchases; health care matters (Cleland et al, 1994).

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6. These are discussed in the longer version of this paper published by UNRISD (1999).

Even a preliminary reading of these different decisions suggests that they are not all equally persuasive as indicators of women's empowerment because they do not all have same consequential significance for women's lives. Few cultures operate with starkly dichotomous distributions of power with men making all the decisions and women making none. More commonly we find a hierarchy of decision-making responsibilities recognised by the family and community, which reserves certain key areas of decision-making for men in their capacity as household heads while assigning others to women in their capacity as mothers, wives, daughters and so on. The evidence from South Asia, for instance, suggests that, within the family, the purchase of food and other items of household consumption and decisions related to children's health appear to fall within women's arena of decision-making while decisions related to the education and marriage of children and the market transactions in major assets tend to be more clearly male.

This is clearly illustrated in Sathar and Kazi (1997). They found on the basis of data from Pakistan that the only area of decision-making in which women reported both participating (71%) as well as playing a major decision-making role (51%) was in relation to the purchase of food. They participated, but did not play a major role in number of children to have (65% and 16% respectively); schooling of children (53% and 17%) and the marriage of children (52% and 8%). They had lower levels of participation and even less likelihood of playing a major role in decisions relating to major household purchases (17% and 5%) and livestock transactions (21% and 5%). Thus major economic decisions were largely reserved for men while women played a more significant role in minor economic decisions. They participated, but did not have a major role, in decisions relating to numbers of children and their schooling and even less of a role when it came to children's marriage.

In methodological terms, such distinctions suggest the need for greater care in selecting and quantifying the decisions which are to serve as indicators of empowerment, with attention given to consequential significance of different categories of decisions or of different stages in the decision-making process. Evidence that women played a role in making decisions which were of little consequence or else were assigned to women, anyway, by the pre-existing gender division of roles and responsibilities tell us far less about their power to choose than evidence on decisions which relate to strategic life choices or to choices which had been denied to them in the past. We could also distinguish between various critical 'control points' within the decision-making process itself where such control is defined in terms of the consequential significance of influencing outcomes at these

different points (Beneria and Roldan, 1987). Pahl (1989), for instance, distinguishes between the 'control' or policy making function in making decisions about resource allocation and the 'management' function, decisions which pertain to implementation. This distinction may explain the finding by the Egyptian Male Survey in 1992 (cited in Ali, 1996) that men were dominant in the decision to adopt contraceptives, the policy decision, but tended to leave the choice of contraception largely to women (although Ali's qualitative study found men's continuing involvement in women's choice of contraceptives as well).

Finally, however, 'statistical' perspectives on decision-making should also be remembered for what they are: simple windows on complex realities. They may provide a brief glimpse of processes of decision-making, but they tell us very little about the subtle negotiations that go on between women and men in their private lives. Consequently, they may underestimate the informal decision-making agency which women often exercise. This can be illustrated by comparing Silberschmidt's (1992) account of formal and informal decision-making among the Kisii in Kenya. The formal account of decision-making given by women ascribed most of the power to men: 'The husbands were said to be 'heads' of households and their 'owners' – as an afterthought the wives might add, "they can buy us just like cattle". Their accounts of 'actual' decision-making, however, gave a very different picture:

> '(Women) admitted that men should be consulted on all sorts of issues, and that they were supposed to determine various actions that must be taken. In reality, however, many women took such decisions themselves. Their most common practice was to avoid open confrontation while still getting their own way… There is no doubt that many women do often manipulate their menfolk and make decisions independently. For example, since the land belongs to the man, he is expected to decide where the various crops are to be planted. If his wife disagrees, she would seldom say so, but simply plant in what she feels is a better way. If he finds out that she has not followed his instructions, she will apologise but explain that because the seeds did not germinate they had to be replanted in a different manner/spot'. (p. 248).

The inability of a purely statistical approach to capture this informal aspect is not simply a measurement failure, it has conceptual implications. There is an important body of research from the South Asian context which suggests that the the renegotiation of power relations, particularly within the family, is often precisely about changes in informal decision-

making, with women opting for private forms of empowerment, which retain intact the public image, and honour, of the traditional decision-maker but which nevertheless increases their 'backstage' influence in decision-making processes (Chen, 1983; Kabeer, 2000; Basu,1996). Such strategies reflect a certain degree of caution on the part of women, strategic virtues in situations where they may have as much to lose from the disruption of social relationships as they have to gain.

Measuring achievement

As with the other dimensions of empowerment, the critical methodological point to be made in relation to achievement indicators relates once again to the need for analytical clarity in the selection of what is to be measured. I have already pointed out the need to make a distinction between gender-differentiated achievements which signal *differences* in values and preferences and those which draw attention to *inequalities* in the ability to make choices. An examination of some of the studies which have included indicators of achievement in their analysis of women's empowerment will help to throw up other criteria for the selection of such indicators.

Kishor (1997) has used national Egyptian data to explore the effects of direct, as well as indirect, measures of women's empowerment on two valued functioning achievements: infant survival rates and infant immunisation. These achievements were selected on the basis of her conceptualisation of women's empowerment in terms of 'control' which she defined as the ability to 'access information, take decisions, and act in their own interests, or the interests of those who depend on them (p. 1). Since women bore primary responsibility for children's health, she hypothesised that their empowerment would be associated with positive achievements in terms of the health and survival of their children. Her analysis relied on three categories of composite indicators to measure empowerment: 'direct evidence of empowerment'; 'sources of empowerment' and 'the setting for empowerment'. I have summarised these below, together with the variables which had greatest weight in each indicator:

1) *Direct evidence of empowerment*
  i) Devaluation of women:
     reports of domestic violence; dowry paid at marriage
 ii) Women's emancipation:
     belief in daughters' education; freedom of movement
iii) Reported sharing of roles and decision making:
     egalitarian gender roles; egalitarian decision-making

iv) Equality in marriage: *fewer grounds reported for justified divorce by husbands; equality of grounds reported for divorce by husband or wife*

v) Financial autonomy:
   currently controls her earnings; her earnings as share household income

2) Sources of empowerment

i) Participation in the modern sector:
   index of assets owned; female education

ii) Lifetime exposure to employment:
   worked before marriage; controlled earnings before marriage

3) Setting indicators

i) Family structure amenable to empowerment:
   does not now or previously live with in-laws

ii) Marital advantage:
   small age difference between spouses; chose husband

iii) Traditional marriage:
   large educational difference with husband; did not choose husband

The results of a multivariate analysis found that the indirect source/setting indicators of women's empowerment had far more influence in determining the value of her achievement variables than the direct measures. There are two possible and mutually compatible explanations for this finding. One is that her direct indicators of empowerment did not in fact succeed in capturing empowerment particularly well. This is quite plausible given that many entailed highly value-laden information about attitudes and relationships within marriage eg. the grounds on which women believed that a husband was justified in divorcing his wife; whether husband and wife were justified in seeking divorce on the same grounds; and whether women should speak up if they disagreed with their husbands. However, other more factual direct indicators (eg. 'financial autonomy' and 'freedom of movement') also proved insignificant.

The other possible explanation was that the achievements in question did not in fact depend on whether or not women were directly 'empowered' but on other factors which were better captured by the 'source' and 'setting' variables. A further 'deconstruction' of Kishor's findings suggests that child mortality was higher in households where women were currently, or had previously been, in residence with their parents-in-law as well as in households where there was a large difference in the age and education levels of husband and wife. Child mortality were lower if the mother had been in employment prior to her marriage. As far as the im-

munisation was concerned, children were more likely to have been immunised in households where their mothers had extended experience of employment, where they reported exposure to the media, where they were educated and where they were not under the authority of in-laws as a result of joint residence. In addition, where the age difference between husband and wife was small and where women expressed a belief in equality in marriage, children's survival chances were likely to be higher. Thus the only direct measure of empowerment which proved significant in the analysis was her 'equality of marriage' indicator and it proved significant only in relation to child immunization.

Returning to a point made earlier, if, as is likely, the care of infants came within women's pre-assigned sphere of jurisdiction, then improvements in functioning achievements in this sphere should be seen as increased efficacy in pre-assigned roles rather than as evidence of their empowerment. In other words, what mattered for achievements in relation to children's wellbeing was women's agency as *mothers* rather than as wives. This is why the direct measures of empowerment, which dealt largely with equality in conjugal relationships, proved insignificant in explaining the achievement variables. Instead, it was variables which captured women's ability to take effective action in relation to the welfare of their children which played the significant explanatory role. For instance, women who lived, or had lived, with their in-laws , were more likely to have been subordinate to the authority of a senior female, with less likelihood of exercising effective agency at a time when such agency was critical to children's health outcomes. Women who were less educated than their husbands or much younger were also likely have been less confident, competent or authoritative in taking the necessary actions to ensure their children's health. Female education and employment both had a role in explaining child welfare outcomes but with slight variations. Lifetime experience of employment by women had a *direct* positive effect on their children's chances of survival as well as the likelihood of child immunisation. Female education influenced children's survival chances indirectly through its association with improved standards of household water and sanitation but had a direct influence on the likelihood of child immunisation. The differences in the determinants of the two achievement variables are worth noting. The fact that women's education and employment as well as 'equality in marriage' all had a direct influence on the likelihood of child immunization but only women's employment affected their survival chances, suggests that the former activity may have required a more active agency on the part of mothers than did the more routine forms of health-seeking behaviour through which child survival is generally assured.

The case for analytical clarity in the selection of 'empowerment-related' measures of achievement can also be illustrated with reference to a study by Becker (1997) which used data from Zimbabwe to explore the implications of women's empowerment on a different set of functioning achievements: the use of contraception and the take-up of pre-natal health care. Regression analysis was carried out in two stages. First of all, he explored the effects of some likely determinants of these outcomes. He found that contraceptive use appeared to be positively related to household wealth, as measured by a possessions index, the number of surviving children, the wife's employment and husband's education. Older women, women who lived in rural areas and who had polygamous husbands were less likely to use contraception. The likelihood that women received pre-natal care was positively related to household possessions, rural residence, women's age, education and employment and husband's education. In the second stage, Becker added a measure of women's empowerment to his equations to see what difference it made. Empowerment was measured by an index of women's role in decision-making in three key areas: the purchase of household items, the decision to work outside and number of children to have. Adding the empowerment indicator did little to improve the fit of the equation in relation to contraceptive use, but significantly improved the fit as far as take up of pre-natal care was concerned.

Speculating on the meaning of these findings, Becker pointed out that, given the commitment of the Zimbabwean government to family planning, contraceptive services were widely available through community-based distribution systems and contraceptive prevalence was correspondingly high. Over 50% of the women in his sample used it. In a context where contraception was both easily available, and had also become a relatively routine form of behaviour, women's employment status increased the likelihood of use, but otherwise, it did not appear to require any great assertiveness on the part of women to access the necessary services. By contrast, women's take up of pre-natal care was more closely related to their role in intra-household decision-making as well as to both their education levels and their employment status, suggesting that it may have required far greater assertiveness on the part of women than contraceptive use. In other words, women who were assertive in other areas of household decision-making, who were educated and employed, were also more likely to be assertive when it came to active and non-routine health-seeking behaviour on their own behalf.

In both the studies discussed here, direct measures of women's agency were far more significant in determining outcomes when women were required to step out of routine forms of behaviour – getting their children

immunised, in one case, and pre-natal health visits in the other – than outcomes which allowed them to conform to prevailing practice.

However, apart from the extent to which outcomes require women to go against the grain of established custom, achievements also have to be assessed for their transformatory implications in relation to the gender inequalities frequently embedded in these customs. While both child survival and immunisation are highly valued achievements from a number of variety of perspectives – of policy makers, of the family and, above all, of women themselves – and while both were quite evidently the product of women's greater effectiveness as agents, neither achievement by itself necessarily implied a shift in underlying power relations. In this sense, women's ability to access pre-natal health care is more indicative of the kind of transformative agency we are talking about.

A similar distinction between achievements which testify to women's greater efficacy as agents within prescribed gender roles and those which are indicative of women as agents of transformation would apply to the determinants of under-five child mortality and gender differentials in child mortality in India reported by Dreze and Sen (1995). They found that female literacy reduced under-five child mortality while both female labour force participation as well as female literacy reduced excess female mortality in the under-five age group. They interpreted these effects as evidence that women's access to education and employment enhanced their ability to exercise agency. While accepting this interpretation, I would nevertheless argue that the meanings conveyed by the two functioning achievements carried rather different implications in terms of women's empowerment. The reduction in under-five mortality associated with women's access to education can be taken as evidence of more effective agency on the part of women but does not, by itself, testify to a transformatory agency on their part. On the other hand, the reductions in excess female mortality associated with higher levels of female education and employment does suggest something more than greater efficacy of agency. Given that the reduction in excess female mortality represented an increase in the survival chances of the girl child rather than a decrease in the survival chances of boys, it suggests that women who have some education and are economically active are more likely than others to give equal value to sons and daughters and to exercise equal effort on their behalf.

Our discussion therefore suggests that in situations of gender discrimination, evidence that the enhancement of women's agency led to a reduction in prevailing gender inequalities in functioning achievements can be taken as evidence of women's empowerment. The fact that this may, as in Becker's study, entail agency on their own behalf is not intended to

equate empowerment with self-interest, but as acknowledgement that, by and large, gender inequalities often take the form of women's well-being being given a secondary place to that of men[7]. In some contexts, this secondary place results in extreme and life-threatening forms of gender inequality. In others, it may take less life-threatening forms, for instance, gender inequalities in education. In most contexts, it would be a reasonable hypothesis to assume that improvements in women's wellbeing are likely to also imply improvements in the wellbeing of other family members, whereas improvements in the wellbeing of other family members do not necessarily imply improvements in women's wellbeing.

Triangulation and meaning: the indivisibility of resources, agency and achievements

The review so far of the 'fit' between the different dimensions of empowerment and the indicators used to measure them has essentially been a review about the 'fit' between the meanings attributed to a measure and the meanings empirically revealed by it. What the discussion has thrown up very clearly is that it is not possible to establish the meaning of an indicator, whatever dimension of empowerment it is intended to measure, without reference to the other dimensions of empowerment. *In other words, the three dimensions are indivisible in determining the meaning of an indicator and hence its validity as a measure of empowerment.* Specifying 'access' to a resource tells us about potential rather than actual choice and the validity of a 'resource' measure as an indicator of empowerment largely rests on the validity of the assumptions made about the potential agency or entitlement embodied in that resource. It is similarly difficult to judge the validity of an achievement measure unless we have evidence, or can make a reasonable guess, as to whose agency was involved and the extent to which the achievement in question transformed prevailing inequalities in resources and agency rather than reinforcing them or leaving them unchallenged. Similar considerations apply to evidence on agency: we have to know about its consequential significance in terms of women's strategic life choices, their ability to realise valued ways of being and doing, and the extent to which their agency transforms the conditions under which it is exercised.

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7. As far as the Becker study is concerned, it should be noted that unlike South Asia, sub-Saharan Africa is not characterised by marked gender inequalities in mortality and life expectancy. However, in as much as it has higher rates of fertility than many other parts of the world, and correspondingly higher rates of maternal mortality, exacerbated by the absence of good health services, women's ability to access both ante-natal health care and contraceptive services can be taken as helping to redress a gender-specific form of functioning failure. Obviously we would need to take account of the terms on which such contraceptives were offered before taking evidence of take up as evidence of empowerment.

The methodological implication flowing from this is the critical need to triangulate, to cross check through other sources and methods the evidence provided by an indicator in order to establish that it means what it is believed to mean. Indicators not only compress a great deal of information into a single statistic but make assumptions, often implicit, about what this information means. The more evidence there is to support these assumptions, the more faith we are likely to have in the validity of the indicator in question. Let me illustrate the importance of triangulation by analysing the very conflicting conclusions regarding the empowerment potential of loans to women which were reported by a number of evaluations of the same sub-set of credit programmes in Bangladesh. As I have argued elsewhere, these conflicting conclusions reflected very different understandings of empowerment rather than contradictory sets of evidence (see Kabeer, 1998 and 2001 for a more detailed analysis of these evaluations).

Pitt and Khandker (1995) attempted to infer gender differences in bargaining power within the household from the extent to which a set of pre-selected decision-making outcomes varied according to the gender of the loanee. In terms of the terminology of this paper, they were seeking to make assumptions about agency on the basis of evidence on the relationship between resources and achievements. However, the value of their analysis was undermined by the fact that no rationale was offered for the selection of the particular decision-making outcomes in question, nor was it always clear whether these outcomes constituted achievements of some valued goal or a failure to realise a valued goal. For instance, the authors themselves interpret their finding that women loanees spent *more* time on market-related work than did women in male loanee households as evidence of women's empowerment but explained as an 'income effect' the finding that men in households that had received credit spent less time on market-related work, and probably more time on leisure, regardless of whether the loan in question had been a male or a female. However, the increase in women's market-related work as a result of their access to credit has been given a much more negative interpretation by others who have suggested that increases in women's loan-generated labour may simply add to their increased work burdens, overwork, fatigue and malnutrition (Montgomery et al.; Ackerly, 1995; Goetz and Sen Gupta, 1994). Similarly, men's greater leisure as a result of loans to their household, regardless of who actually received the loan, could quite plausibly be interpreted as evidence of male privilege and power rather than (or as well as) an 'income effect'. Further information on what their findings actually meant would have helped to distinguish between these alternative hypotheses.

A similar absence of information on the agency involved in the achievement of particular decision-making outcomes also characterises a study by Rahman (1986). However, her selection of outcomes at least had a plausible bearing on women's empowerment since they relate to basic welfare achievements in a context characterised by considerable gender discrimination. She found that women who had received loans enjoyed higher levels of welfare (food, clothing and medical expenditure) compared to women in households where men had received the loans or in economically equivalent households which had not received any loans at all. Her findings would lead us to conclude that women's access to credit reduced, but did not fully eliminate, gender differentials in intra-household welfare. However, as evidence on women's empowerment, they would have been strengthened by information on whose agency was involved in translating loans into impact. Did increased expenditures on women's wellbeing represent the more active and direct exercise of purchasing power by women; did it represent their greater role in household decision-making about the distribution of household resources; or did it represent the greater weight given by the household head to women's wellbeing in recognition of women's role in bringing in economic resources? Clearly each of these possibilities throws a different light on the issue of power and agency within the household so that while we can arrive at some firm conclusions about the effects of their access to credit on women's welfare, there is still a question mark about its implications for their empowerment.

If there are problems with inferring agency on the basis of inadequate information about achievements, attempts to infer achievement possibilities on the basis of restricted understandings of agency are equally problematic. This is evident in a study by Goetz and Sen Gupta (1996) in which they used an index of 'managerial control' as their indicator of women's empowerment. This index classified women who had no knowledge of how their loans had been utilised or else had played no part in the enterprise funded by their loans as having 'little or no control' over their loans at one end of the spectrum while at the other end of the spectrum were those who were described as exercising 'full control' over their loans, having participated in all stages of the enterprise, including marketing of their products. The large numbers of women found to be exercising 'little' or 'no control' over their loans according to this criteria led the authors to extremely pessimistic conclusions about the empowerment potential of credit programmes for women.

However, if we return to our earlier point about the hierarchy of decisions within decision-making processes, a major problem with their

index of 'managerial control' was that it conflated quite distinct moments in the decision-making processes by which access to loans translates into impact on women's lives. In particular, it conflated 'control' and 'management', making no distinction between the *policy* decision as to how loans were to be utilised and repaid, and the *management* decisions by which decision regarding loan use were implemented. If this distinction had been taken into account, then apart from the unknown proportion of the 22% women in their 'no control' category who reported that they did not even know how their loans were used, the remaining 78% of women in their sample could, *in principle*, have exercised much greater control over their loans than allowed for by the authors. Putting this point to one side, if, as Goetz and Sen Gupta apppear to be hypothesizing, control over the loan-funded activity is in fact a critical 'control' point in the process by which access to loans translates into a range of valued achievements, then certainly 'managerial control' can serve as an *indicator* of empowerment.

However, this hypothesis is directly contradicted by yet another evaluation of a similar set of credit programmes in rural Bangladesh. Hashemi et al. (1996) classified all the women loanees in their sample according to the categories of 'managerial control' spelt out by Goetz and Sen Gupta. While the results varied considerably according to both the length of women's membership of credit organisation as well as by credit organisation, they confirmed that large percentage of women in certain villages did indeed 'lose' control over their loans by Goetz and Sen Gupta's criteria. By then going on to examine the relationship between women's access to loans and a range of empowerment indicators, Hashemi et al were essentially asking whether women's access to credit could have any transformatory significance for their lives, regardless of who exercised 'managerial control'. The indicators they used were: mobility in a number of public locations; the ability to make small purchases as well as larger purchases, including purchases for women themselves; involvement in major areas of economic decision-making; land-related decisions or purchase of major assets; whether women had suffered appropriation of their money or any other asset; been prevented visiting her natal home or from working outside; the magnitude of women's economic contribution to the family; and participation in public protests and campaigns; political and legal awareness; economic security viz. assets and savings in their own names.

The results of their analysis suggested that women's access to credit contributed significantly to the magnitude of the economic contributions reported by women; to the likelihood of an increase in asset holdings in their own names, to an increase in their exercise of purchasing power, in

their political and legal awareness as well as in the composite empowerment index. Furthermore, access to credit was also associated with higher levels of mobility, political participation and involvement in 'major decision-making' for particular credit organisations. Finally, the study explored the separate effects of women's economic contribution to the household budget and their access to credit on the various empowerment indicators and found that separating out women's economic contribution reduced the impact of women's access to credit, but the independent impact of access to credit on the empowerment indicators remained significant. In other words, access to credit and the size of reported economic contributions were each *sufficient but not necessary* for the achievement of empowerment-related outcomes. Together, their effects were mutually reinforcing.

This comparison of different approaches to the quantification of empowerment in the context of the same set of credit programmes highlights very clearly the need for the triangulation of evidence in order to ensure that indicators mean what they are intended to mean. The absence of such supportive evidence carries the danger that analysts will load meanings onto their indicators which reflect their own disciplinary, methodological or political leanings rather than the realities they are seeking to portray. Triangulation requires that multiple sources of information are brought to bear on the interpretation of an indicator thereby guarding against the interpretative bias of the analyst. It should be noted that the indicators used by Hashemi et al. were devised on the basis of a prior ethnographic study, rather than being derived from a priori assumptions, and explains their greater persuasiveness as measures of what they sought to measure. While their indicators focused largely on different aspects of women's agency, it could be argued that each manifestation of agency measured also constituted a valued achievement in itself.

Section 3: Measuring Empowerment: the Problem of Values

Status, autonomy and the relevance of context

I have so far focused on the problem of *meaning* in the selection of indicators of empowerment: do indicators mean what they are supposed to mean? I want to turn now to the question of values and how they complicate attempts to conceptualise and measure women's empowerment. Let me start with the question of emic or 'insider values' before going on to consider the complications introduced by outsider values. The main way in which 'insider values' have been captured in studies dealing with

women's empowerment has been through variables measuring 'cultural context'. Such studies tend to be comparative in nature and explore how differences in cultural context influence resources, agency and achievements. For instance, we have already noted the findings reported by Dreze and Sen that women's literacy and employment status helped to explain variations in overall child mortality and in excess female mortality among children across India. However, the single most important variable in their study explaining excess female mortality was a dummy variable standing for geographical location: gender differentials in mortality rates were far less striking in the southern states of India than in the northern and western states.

These regional dummy variables can be seen as compressing information about a whole range of inter-related norms and practices related to marriage, mobility and inheritance which make up gender relations in different parts of India. If we accept that investments in the survival and well-being of a family member tells us something important about the value attached to that member, then the analysis by Dreze and Sen tells us that the structural variables which make up gender relations in different parts of India were far more important in determining the extent to which the girl child is valued within the family than the individual characteristics of her parents.

Jejheeboy's study (1997), which compares Tamil Nadu, one of the southern states of India, with Uttar Pradesh, one of its northern states, offers some lower-level insights into the relationship between cultural context and individual preference. Her study explores the effects of a range of variables on women's autonomy, some of which reflected factors traditionally associated with female status (e.g.. number of children and more specifically, number of sons, co-residence with mother-in-law and size of dowry) as well as education and waged employment, variables associated with the modernisation paradigm. Measures of women's autonomy included their role in decision-making, mobility, incidence of domestic violence, access to economic resources and control over economic resources. Predictably, women in Tamil Nadu fared better on most indicators of autonomy than women in Uttar Pradesh. However, she also found that the determinants of women's 'autonomy' varied in the two regions.

In general, the traditional factors conferring status on women – the number of sons they bore, the size of their dowry and nuclear family residence – were more closely linked with the autonomy indicators in the restrictive context of Uttar Pradesh than they were in the more egalitarian context of Tamil Nadu. In Uttar Pradesh, women who had brought large dowries to their marriages, who lived in nuclear families and who

produced sons were far more likely to report a greater role in household decision-making and greater freedom from domestic violence than others. While female employment also had significant and positive implications for most of the autonomy indicators in the Uttar Pradesh, education had a far weaker and less significant impact. In Tamil Nadu, however, the effects of these more traditional 'status'-related variables were far weaker and female employment and, even more strongly, female education were both more consistently related to women's autonomy.

Jeehheboy's study points to the strong rationale that women are likely to have in certain contexts for making choices which are essentially disempowering. The contextual variables in her study, as in Sen and Dreze's, are a shorthand for the deeply-entrenched rules, norms and practices which shape social relations in different parts of India and which help to influence behaviour, define values and *shape choice*. Since women are likely to be given greater respect within their communities for conforming to its norms, and to be penalised if they do not, their own values and behaviour are likely to reflect those of the wider community and to reproduce its injustices. There is evidence, for instance, that women in the northern states like the Uttar Pradesh are far more likely to express strong son preference than those in southern states like Tamil Nadu (Dyson and Moore, 1983). The apparently 'voluntary' nature of such choices should not detract our attention from their consequences. If empowerment is simply equated with role in decision-making and 'control' over household resources, then having sons and bringing in a large dowry would be considered conducive to women's' empowerment. Yet dowry is a practice which simultaneously expresses and reinforces son preference and transforms daughters into financial liabilities for their parents. Both dowry and son preference are central to the values and practices through which women are socially defined as a subordinate category in a state which is associated with some of the starkest indicators of gender discrimination on the Indian subcontinent.

Two related studies from rural Nepal offer further interesting insights into the relationship between contextual and individual factors in shaping women's choices (Morgan and Niraula, 1995 and 1996). 'Context' was captured in these studies through the comparison between a village located in a *tarai* or plains setting (and sharing many of the social characteristics of Hindu culture in northern India, including its rigid caste and gender relationships) and a village located in the hills (and characterised by a less orthodox Hinduism which incorporated aspects of tribal and Buddhist beliefs and practices and a generally more relaxed caste and gender regime).

The analysis contained three sets of variables. The first set, which captured the degree of agency and choice permitted by local social practices, related to a number of marriage-related behavioural variables: the likelihood of 'choice', rather than 'arrangement' in women's selection of their marriage partners; the ability to leave unsatisfactory marriages and enter new ones; to maintain contact with one's natal family after marriage; willingness to let children choose their own spouses. The second set, which related to 'women's autonomy', was made up of measures of individual agency: their role in household decision-making and their freedom of movement in the public domain. The third related to measures of reproductive choice: family size preferences, son preference and use of contraception.

The first stage of the analysis, which explored the relationship between 'social' and 'individual' agency, found not unexpectedly that women who exercised greater choice in marriage-related behaviour also enjoyed a greater role in household decision-making and freedom of movement. However, once context was controlled for through the introduction of a village dummy, there was a marked reduction in the association between individual aspects of behaviour and the indicators of women's autonomy. For instance, the strong association between women who had exercised choice in relation to their marriage partner and mobility in the public domain disappeared once context was factored in.

Context not only helped to explain variations in women's autonomy between the two villages, but also mediated the effects of women's autonomy on their apparent preferences. Explored in separate equations, the village dummy and measure of women's autonomy had the expected effects. Women in the more restrictive *tarai* village expressed stronger son preference, wanted larger numbers of childen, were less likely to use contraception and also less likely to have educated children, particularly educated daughters. The relationship between individual autonomy and reproductive choice was also predictable: women with greater freedom of movement were more likely to use contraception when they did not want any more children. When the effects of both individual autonomy and village setting were explored together, they remained significant but in a reduced form. The authors concluded that, while individual agency did increase women's ability to implement reproductive choice, such agency itself was largely shaped by social context rather by individual characteristics of women.

In terms of our discussion of empowerment, the influence of social context, 'the structures of constraint', on individual behaviour and capacity for choice raises a number of important issues. It reminds us that while individual women may play an important role in challenging these

constraints, structural inequalities cannot be addressed by individuals alone. Individual women can, and do, act against the norm, but they may have to pay a high price for exercising such autonomy and their impact on the situation of women in general remains limited. It goes back to the point made earlier that individual empowerment is a fragile gain if it cannot be mobilised in the interests of collective empowerment. The project of women's empowerment is dependent on collective action in the public arena as well as individual assertiveness in the private.

In methodological terms, the discussion in this section reminds us why empowerment cannot be conceptualised simply in terms of choice, but must incorporate an assessment of the values embedded in agency and choice, values which reflect the wider context. It points, in other words, to the need make a distinction between 'status' and 'autonomy' as criteria in evaluating agency and choice from an empowerment perspective. 'Status' considerations relate to the values of the community, whether these communities are hierarchical or egalitarian, and they draw attention to the influence of the larger collectivity in ascribing greater value to certain kinds of individual choices over others and hence in giving greater value to those who abide by these choices.

When such considerations set up a trade-off for women between their ability to make independent choices in critical arenas of their lives – such as marriage, reproduction, friendship and so on – and their ability to enjoy status within the family and community, status becomes antithetical to autonomy. As Sen comments in relation to reproductive choice: "The point is especially apparent in gender hierarchies where, for example, a woman's status may be linked to her fertility. Bearing the approved number of children will grant a woman the rights and privileges accorded to a fertile woman, but do not necessarily give her greater autonomy in decision-making' (Sen G., 1993, p. 198).

More strongly, in such contexts, status is also likely to be antithetical to empowerment. The need to bear the approved number of children in order to secure social status and family approval takes its toll on women's bodies and on their lives as they bear children beyond their capacity. Furthermore, status considerations in cultures of son-preference require women to give birth to a certain number of sons, to favour their sons over their daughters in ways which help to reinforce social discrimination against women and to bring their daughters up to devalue themselves, thereby acting as agents in the transmission of gender discrimination over generations. Status considerations also lead to the more hidden costs of dependency, difficulty to measure but testified to eloquently by women all over the world (Kabeer, 1998; Rowland, 1997; Villareal, 1990, Silber-

schmidt, 1992). Finally, in the extreme, status considerations can lead to cultures where female infanticide and foeticide, female circumcision, widow immolation all become 'rational' responses to social norms.

Outsider values and women's empowerment: between altruism and autonomy

I have spelt out in greater detail the rationale for the various qualifications on the notion of choice which informs my understanding of empowerment by pointing to the significance of social values in justifying the subordinate status of women and to the internalisation of these values by women themselves. However, these qualifications entail an external normative standpoint, a set of values other than women's own, as the basis for assessing the meaning of their choices. The problem that this raises is not one of a normative standpoint per se – the whole idea of development is, after all, based on some kind of normative standpoint – but in determining the extent to which this normative standpoint expresses values which are relevant to the reality it seeks to evaluate. There is always the danger that when we assess 'choice' from a standpoint other than that of the person making the choice, we will be led back to ourselves and to our own norms and values.

The tendency to re-present 'the self' in representing 'the other' has been noted by Mohanty (1991) who describes the way in which third world women from a variety of contexts tend to get reduced and universalised, particular in texts coming out of the field of women and development: 'This average third world woman leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and her being third world (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized etc.)' (p. 56). Although this portrayal of the 'average' disempowered third world woman was intended to evoke sympathy and action on their behalf, its reductionism reflected the fact that the social distances of location, class, nationality and language which often separate researcher and 'researched' in the social sciences are particularly large in the field of development studies.

The same distances help to explain why attempts to define and measure women's empowerment have given rise to similarly 'averaging' tendencies in the portrayal of the *empowered* woman. I want to point to two distinct examples of these tendencies, coming out of quite different forms of scholarship and advocacy, both containing some elements of truth but large elements of simplification. One model promotes what could be called 'the virtuous model of the empowered woman' and is associated with the instrumentalist forms of gender advocacy that we noted before. It draws on various examples of gender scholarship which document the

greater connectedness of women's sense of selfhood in order to endow them with various traits which form the basis of policy advocacy on their behalf: altruism, of course, and the dedication to the collective family welfare ; thrift and risk-aversion; industriousness in the form of long hours of work and in little need for leisure; a sense of civic responsibility, manifested in their willingness to take on unpaid community work and so on. These presumed traits have given rise to a range of interventions which seek to exploit their pay-off in terms of policy, exemplified in the now familiar 'win-win' format asserting that 'gender equality/women's empowerment is both an important end in itself and also essential to the achievement of efficiency/fertility decline/environmental sustainability/family welfare/poverty alleviation/good governance'.

The fact that many of these interventions are justified on instrumentalist grounds does not mean that women do not obtain any benefits from them. Instrumentalism is, after all, a game that two can play and studies suggest that not only have women benefited from such interventions which have ensured them access to a range of development benefits that had previously been withheld from them but that they have also drawn on this policy discourse in instrumental ways to promote their own interests (Harrison, 1997; Villareal, 1990). However, instrumentalism has its costs. Women's empowerment as a central element of social justice and as a valued goal in itself has had to take second place to the demonstration of its synergy with official development goals. The language of empowerment has been co-opted by scholars, governments and international development agencies who have little interest in empowering women beyond whether or not it is capable of 'delivering the goods'. Instead of an open-ended process of social transformation, we find a notion of empowerment as a form of electric shock therapy to be applied at intervals to ensure the right responses: 'empowerment appears to be best 'learned' early and needs reinforcement through constant exposure to empowering circumstances' (Kishor, 1997, p. 16).

Agencies who seek to delivering resources for women's empowerment on instrumentalist grounds may fail to realise their full transformatory potential because empowerment was never really on their agenda. Alternatively, they may empower women but not in intended ways. While there may be sound reasons why women are likely to see their interests better served by investing effort and resources in the collective welfare of the household, 'altruism' may often be a manifestation of their disempowerment, a response to their restricted options rather than a 'natural' female attribute. Consequently, if efforts to channel resources to women succeed in empowering them, they will also succeed in bringing a number of op-

tions within the realms of possibility options which had previously been denied to them. Not all women will choose options which are likely to receive the official stamp of approval. In some cases, their greater 'voice' within the household can lead to greater conflict within the household, particularly within marriage, and possible intensification of male violence. In other cases, they may choose the 'exit' option.

In the us context, England and Farkas suggest that the rising access to employment by women since the 1950s and the rise of single motherhood, as a result of divorce or nonmarital births, is not coincidental: 'the short version of the story is probably that employment gave women the freedom to leave unhappy marriages' (England, 1997). There is similar evidence from Ghana (Roberts, 1989) Zimbabwe (Hoogenboezem, 1997), Thailand (Moore, 1994), Mexico, Philippines and Costa Rica (Chant, 1997) and Bangladesh (Kabeer, 2000 and 2001) that access to independent resources allowed many women the ability to walk out of unsatisfactory marriages.

While the instrumentalist notions of empowerment tend to emphasise women's greater altruism and 'connected' sense of self, an alternative model of empowerment is also evident in the literature which focuses on the conflictual element of gender relations and hence favours a more individualised model of the empowered woman. What is valued as evidence of altruism by some is interpreted by others as evidence of women's internalisation of their own subordinate status, their tendency to put the needs of others in the family before their own. Fierlbeck, (1995) for instance, argues that women would be much more likely to expand their ability to make choices if they were to view themselves as individuals rather than members of a social group (p. 29) while Jackson (1996) comments: 'It may well be true that women prioritise children's needs, but there is a sense in which one might wish women to be a little less selfless and self-sacrificing' (1996, p. 497) .

It is certainly the case that in contexts where the separation of resources within the family, and indeed, some degree of separation within the family, has cultural sanction, women may view greater autonomy as a desirable goal for themselves and we have noted some examples of this already. In such contexts it may make sense to ask, as Lloyd (1995, p; 17) does: 'If income permits, wouldn't a mother-child unit prefer to form a separate household with its own decision-making autonomy rather than join a more complex household under other (most likely male or older female) authority?' However, in contexts where households are organised along more corporate lines, where a powerful ideology of 'togetherness' binds the activities and resources of family together under the control of

the male head, such a question would have very little resonance. In such contexts, even in the situations of rising female employment and wages cited earlier, women do not *actively* seek the opportunity to set up separate units from men because such autonomous units are neither socially acceptable nor individually desired. Instead, they invest considerable time and effort in maintaining their marriages, in strengthening the 'co-operative' dimension of 'co-operative-conflict', seeking separation only in exceptional circumstances.

Conclusion

Indicators of empowerment need merely 'indicate' the direction of change rather than provide an accurate measurement of it. However, there are various reasons why they may prove inaccurate and even misleading. We have seen how single measures, disembedded from their context, lend themselves to a variety of different meanings. We have also noted how notions of women's empowerment is a field of struggle between protagonists who subscribe to very different values about development itself and their own place within it. Finally, there are problems of measurement associated with capturing a particular kind of social change. Many of the indicators discussed here provide one-off 'snapshot' accounts, often using cross-sectional variations to capture change. There is an implicit assumption underlying many of these measurements that we can somehow predict the processes of change involved in empowerment whereas human agency is indeterminate and hence unpredictable. Any change in the structure of opportunities and constraints in which individuals make choice can bring into existence a variety of different responses, which can have quite different impacts and meanings in different contexts.

This suggests that there is no single linear model of change by which a 'cause' can be identified for women's disempowerment and altered to create the desired 'effect'.

To attempt to predict at the outset of an intervention precisely how it will change women's lives, without some knowledge of ways of 'being and doing' which are realisable and valued by women in that context, runs into the danger of prescribing process of empowerment and thereby violating its essence, which is to enhance women's capacity for self-determination.

Despite these caveats, however, there are two general practical points to make on the basis of the discussion in this paper. Many of the resources, forms of agency and achievements which feature in the empowerment literature are integral to the broader developmental agenda. The arguments

for equalising access to health, education, credit, land, livelihoods and employment opportunities (as well as equality in the wider political domain which has not been dealt with in this paper) rest solidly on grounds of gender equity and social justice, regardless of their implications for intra-household relationships and female autonomy. Whatever the specific priorities in different contexts, the paper suggests that both official development agencies as well as social movements have important contributions to make to the project of women's empowerment, based on their comparative advantage in these different fields. Creating equality of access to these various valued resources for sections of society who are otherwise excluded from them is clearly a vital and legitimate area for public policy interventions. Changes in access to the kinds of goods we are talking about here are far simpler to measure, regardless of context, than the subtle and open-ended negotiations that may go on within culturally-differentiated families as a result of such improvements in access. They are also indicative of changes in the conditions of choice. Greater investments in women's health and well-being in contexts where they previously suffered deprivation, greater access to paid activities in contexts where they were previously denied such opportunities, greater evidence that they participate in the political processes of their communities in situations where they were previously disenfranchised are all critical dimensions in changing the conditions of choice.

At the same time, equity requires that poorer women and other excluded groups are not just able to gain access to valued goods but to do so on terms which respect and promote their ability to define their own priorities and make their own choices. Such achievements are less easy to quantify since they deal more directly with the renegotiation of power relations and have to be far more sensitive to local cultural nuances. They would would have to be monitored through methodologically pluralist approaches combining quantitative and qualitative data, preferably by grass-roots-based organisations whose greater embeddedness in local realities and commitment to long term places them in a better situation to combine 'emic' understandings with 'etic' analysis (Harriss, 1994).

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Cultural Practice as Gendered Exclusion:

Experiences from Southern Africa

PATRICIA McFADDEN

Summary:

I will attempt a definition of culture as gendered practice which excludes women from sites and statuses related to power (in both social and material senses), as it interacts with notions of citizenship, nation and development. I will speak to culture as a 're-invented' and heavily contested phenomenon and terrain, especially in relation to issues of identity, belonging and authenticity in the context of Africa (as a broad geo-political and historical space) and in particular reference to the struggles of African women for rights and new statuses in Southern Africa as it becomes 'post-colonial'.

I want to begin this brief intervention by locating my use of the notion of culture in a resistance discourse that reflects a development of the meaning and uses of culture beyond its traditional definition as an expression of past human creativity and interaction, *"…all those practices, like the arts of description, communication and representation, that have relative autonomy from the economic, social, and political realms and that often exist in aesthetic forms, one of whose principal aims is pleasure"* (Said, 1994).

That is only one multi-faceted side of culture as a phenomenon. However, as Said goes on to say, culture is *"a source of identity, and a rather combative one at that, as we see in recent 'returns' to culture and tradition… In this second sense culture is a sort of theatre where various political and ideological causes engage one another"* (ibid.).

Drawing particularly from the work of both Amina Mama (1997), Kum Kum Bhavnani (1993) and the work edited by Filomena Steady (1981), among an array of feminist scholars who have engaged with notions of culture in relation to the struggles by women of color for inclusion into the conceptual and territorial spaces of Africa and Europe respec-

tively, I will be arguing that culture is best understood as a heavily contested source of identity (in gendered and ethnic terms) and power (in a political and material sense), which is located in the historical struggles against colonialism and racism on the African continent, and in the more recent struggles by women for rights of inclusion into that space called 'the nation', as it is emerging in the countries of South Africa in particular.

Through reference to the Gramscian notion of hegemony (Munck 1986) which I too find interesting in its ability to explicate the experience of power by those who are excluded from it, particularly in relation to the state and issues of property and citizenship, Mama (1997) argues that *"In post-colonial African states culture is a heavily contested terrain, because of the widespread disruption of the continent's cultural fabric and the dynamics of its cultural production"*. Having made reference to the attempts by national liberation movements to *"…articulate and define what they understood to be national cultures in the hope of unifying the emerging (African) nation states"*, Mama poses the following questions:

Are men and women culturally different in Africa?
What are the conditions under which women become
the bearers and men the articulators of culture?
Where are women in African political cultures?" (Mama, 1997).

In the following pages, I would like to take up some of these questions as a means of continuing a discourse which African feminists have launched in response to several conceptual and historical discrepancies within what is now commonly, but problematically referred to as 'Western' discourses of colonialism and culture, and here I am referring particularly to Western feminist colonial and 'post-colonial' discourses; and to persisting African political and cultural discourses which are deeply marked by androcentricity and nationalist ideological rhetoric.

However, from the onset, I would like to distance myself, ideologically as a feminist, from two strands of what I would refer to as 'feminine' claims in relation to culture as a gendered concern, and as an exotic, albeit intellectual, adventure. The first of these strands is a discursive and deeply political stance that is represented by the work of a growing number of indigenous African anthropologists/ethnographers, pre-dominantly West African female scholars based in the North (see Oyewumi, 1997 and Chikwenyi, 2000 in particular), who dismiss the notion of gender as it is widely used within feminist discourse, based on the claim that it is epistemologically Western and therefore inapplicable to African societies. This contestation has been going on within the African women's

movement for a while and various positions and arguments have been made over the past two decades as African women began to actively participate in global feminist discourses, especially about the intersections between health, sexuality and rights, on the one hand (including issues of female genital mutilation and child marriage) and rights as a notion which comes into its own largely through the public struggles of Northern women during the 20th century (Steady, 1987; Mogwe, 1993; Parpart (undated); Hendricks & Lewis, 1994; Mannathoko, 1992; Palla-Okeyo, 1986; McFadden, 2000).

In making this claim, they refer specifically to the particular empirical realities of Nigeria as a country, and more directly to the ethnic communities that they have focused upon in each respective study. Interestingly, their common dismissal of the notion of gender as 'Western' comes from a peculiar reliance upon the very intellectual traditions that underpin the disciplines of social anthropology and ethnography. The academic language of lineage, the family, and notions of hierarchy and status are drawn largely, in methodological and conceptual terms, from the stock of traditional ethnographical and anthropological sense making, different only in that it is applied via a claim that because it is an African female academic who is using the language, it therefore assumes a different meaning and implies different and previously unknown features and characteristics about those societies and communities (Epprecht, 2001).

Here I am not dismissing the attempts by these African scholars, which are part of a long and very crucial Africanist tradition of resistance discourse to the hegemonic interpretations of who Africans were and are; a tradition within which I position myself most proudly and essentially in political and cultural terms. However, I am casting a critical, albeit casual, eye upon an intellectual practice which, to me, seems new only in its claims to African authenticity, but which resonates with a well known white, largely male, intellectual practice in epistemological and political terms.

From where I am positioned, I cannot afford the intellectual luxury of pretending that I live in an African society without gendered relationships and structures that are directly linked to systems of power, control and violation. Nor can I even imagine that the notion of gender could be anything but a product of the difficult, life-taking but often life changing struggles of women across the world (Mies, 1986; Miles, 1996) – definitively inclusive of African women's struggles for rights, common entitlements and a dignity – all of which are not dependent upon idiosyncratic notions of ethnic and or cultural locality in any way. Ethnic and cultural localities obviously impact directly and in intimate ways upon the lives

and realities of each and every woman, especially in societies that still treat women in basically feudal and undemocratic ways, but ethnic and cultural location cannot be used as the sole or even major basis for the definition of gender as a heuristic construct within the African context.

However, the really problematical features of such claims are that they not only assert that the notion of gender as currently applied in non-African societies did not exist in certain African societies (Amadiume, 1978) which is a plausible anthropological claim; but they go on to extrapolate that 'women' as a construct is also Western (Oyewumi, 1997) and feminism is therefore also a 'Western' invention. When gender and women disappear from the conceptual landscape, then feminist resistance politics is also displaced, leaving us without a political means of responding to patriarchal exclusion, and therefore largely dependent upon some fancy notion of cultural complimentarity that is somehow supposed to authenticate the uniqueness of such societies.

It is the extrapolation from an anthropological claim onto the current realities of Africa which causes me most discomfort as a social scientist and feminist activist, because this is not only a typically Northern anthropological gimmick of re-inventing African societies as 'unchanged and static', but it also allows for the insertion of a conservative nationalist politics which locks African women into the past, especially in relation to ongoing rights and entitlement discourses. This is where the interface between old, European appropriational practices of studying Africa as an exotic landscape, inhabited by pre-capitalist natives, on the one hand, and the claims of indigenous African anthropologists meet in rather strange consonance. This compatibility of interests is further reflected in the replacement of feminism with the notion of 'Womanism', a notion that supposedly speaks more realistically to the realities of African women it is argued (Arndt, 2000).

Given the limited time and space of this text, I wanted only to make reference to the political implications of the above claims. The interesting coincidence of claims by white anthropologist and essentialist feminists that Africa is different and must stay different (otherwise, what would they do as anthropologists if they no longer had an 'Other' to study and scrutinize) and the claims of difference by indigenous African female scholars which attempt to assert an authentic gaze (supposedly in response to these very colonial anthropological practices they seek to counter), are based on a notion of culture as the 'preservative' of Otherness and Difference.

Colonial Stereotypes – Reinforced by Researchers Today

The insistence that African women remain a 'Cultural Other', in the same way that Sarah Baartman was paraded semi-nude across Europe at the turn of the nineteenth century, in a cage, for the entertainment of and study by white men who were fascinated by her 'large buttocks' (Mama, p. 67) is an expression of colonial arrogance and racism. The colonial narrative is replete with texts which claimed to have 'understood and dissected the native' as part of the civilizing mission within the colonial project of the past four hundred years. In terms of the feminine, such insistence that Africa remain an anthropological play ground is deeply embedded in the arrogant and racist traditions of women like Mary French Sheldon who strode across Africa on the backs of semi-nude Black men, declaring herself a 'white African Queen' (Boisseau, 1995). Very few European feminists researchers take the time to ask why it is that they continue the colonial traditions of studying Africans, (and other colonial subjects in Asia, the Caribbean and Latin America) as though there were no anthropological subjects in Europe, for that matter (Chaudhuri & Strobel, 1992).

What is it that is so intriguing about the mutilated vaginas of poor peasant women in a remote village of the Sudan or the Casamance and why is it a matter of 'scholarly curiosity' rather than a violation of a woman's fundamental right to bodily and sexual integrity? The fascination by Europeans, male and female, with the sexuality of Africans, is as old as the colonial idea itself. Evidence of this is replete in numerous anthropological and literary texts and this issue has become a source of tremendous tensions between white and Black women on the continent and in the Diaspora. Black women have consistently rejected the construction of Africans, wherever they live, as the colonized and exoticised 'Other' of white scholarship (duCille, 1994; Christian, 2000; Hill Collins, 2000; Rooks, 2000; Abraham, 1999; Lewis, 2000; McFadden, 1999).

Nevertheless, the practice of appropriation persists, and I wonder if maybe it is per-chance due to the fact that racially and socially privileged individuals can enter such communities wearing the colour of privilege and the nationality of a former colonizer; armed with 'scientific' jargon and claims of 'objectivity' as well as the currency of Northern economies which remain dependent on the cheap labour and vast mineral resources of these 'backward' societies; and not have to be accountable to anyone for whatever text one produces, because after all they are illiterate and very remotely located?

It seems to me that it is long past the moment when Europeans should

have come to terms with their colonial academic practices and transformed those discipline which perpetuate racist, colonial stereotypes about Africans by acknowledging that Africans have a dignity and a presence which demands respect and recognition (see Kuster, 1994). I felt wounded by the narratives of continuing colonial scrutiny as I sat listening, to how individuals have carved little personal colonial spaces where they return year in and year out, analyzing the sexual and ritual practices of 'backward' villagers (in comparison to the implicit assumption that such behaviour is peculiarly African and native); narratives which represent African societies as untouched and unchanged by the dramatic transformations of the 20th century just past. How could it be that a discipline such as anthropology continues to produce texts that are carbon copies of the very colonial claims made by white men over a hundred years ago, and people sit in a room and do not feel disturbed by such objectionable rhetoric? For me, it is only explicable in relation to privilege and the lack of a critical consciousness which buttress privileging ideologies and structures so effectively as to inhibit critical new thinking about anthropology as a discipline and Africa as a place in transition to modernity and change (Minh-ha, 1989).

In terms of the practices of European women in the academy, this 'culturalisation of the native' is also perpetuated through claims that African women cannot possibly be feminist, and if we do persist in this self-naming, then the concession is that we can only be 'Third World' feminists – i.e. heterosexual, nurturing and caring – but we most certainly cannot articulate a feminism which encourage and facilitates the autonomous presence of an individual with a consciousness of rights and entitlements. That is Western and we must be 'copying' such radical ideas from Northern feminists.

Interestingly, this is a claim made by both Black men (who are usually radical nationalists located in the state, and who have a stake in preventing the development of a feminist consciousness among African women; by white essentialist feminists whose only claim to fame is that they study something about the lives of African women). For years I have been locked in arguments with essentialist white feminists who claim that even the notion of patriarchy is Western and therefore we as African women who 'aspire' to be radical must be cautious of such notions because they are 'foreign' to the cultural landscape of the continent. Underlying these cautions is an incipiently arrogant assumption that African feminists cannot construct radical feminist theory to free themselves from the patriarchal bondage which provides such interesting anthropological practices as 'female genital cutting' (the revised naming for Female Gen-

ital Mutilation, FGM, by presenting it as merely the 'cutting of the genitals' – for a typical example of this de-politicized re-naming see Masterson and Hanson Swanson, 2000) – and all sorts of fascinating expressions of sexual exotica.

Such academic practices not only perpetuate the 'colonial gaze' within the North, but they reinforce the exclusionary practices used by Black men who occupy the neo-colonial state and who have a vested interest in keeping African women outside the most critical sites of power in those societies. Who would have imagined that essentialist white feminists and Black 'womanist' anthropologists would become intellectual and political bed-fellows with myopic white male anthropologists and Black male nationalists who occupy a neo-colonial state on that tragic continent I call home. But that is what it looks like from where I am positioned as an African feminist scholar engaged in the struggle for my rights and the rights and dignity of my sisters.

I would like to move on and look at some of the exclusionary practices used by men in the state and in the rural spaces of the continent to maintain a 'cultural authenticity' through the denial of rights and entitlements, especially in terms of bodily integrity and material property, to African women. I will reply on examples drawn mainly from Zimbabwe, South Africa.

Restricting Women's Rights to Property and to Mobility

Through the re-invention of culture as the central trope of nationalist discourse, and it's deployment as the authentic expression of anti-colonial, anti-racist ideology, African men were able to position women outside the most critical social, political and economic institutions in both colonial and neo-colonial societies (Barnes & Win; Prinsloo, 1999). The notion of exclusionary practice is useful to an understanding of how this was done, because culture is so easily constructed as untouchable and sacrosanct; as something which must be guarded and protected, especially from external influences and pollution; and by positioning women as the custodians of these sacred cultural texts, women themselves become trapped in an unchanging phenomenal reality which allows for their exclusion in structural, ideological and other terms.

One of the earliest expressions of cultural exclusion as a gendered expression of women's 'Outsiderness' can be seen in the manner through which African and white men colluded to keep African women outside the emerging urban spaces of the colonial town and city (Barnes, 1992;

Schmidt, 1992). Through colonial legal interventions and the deployment of what became known as 'customary law and practice', Black and white men colluded in keeping most Black women in the rural spaces under the surveillance and control of older patriarchal males who ensured that they reproduced cheap Black labour for the emerging capitalist industries even as they maintain the cultural and sexual sites of authentication for Black men, most of whom were forced to sell their labour power as migrant workers in the urban and mining areas of the colony. Traditional land tenure systems were maintained, albeit in the limited spaces where Africans were pushed by white settlers and African women were denied any relationship with the land as a critical resources, except as users for the purpose of reproducing the African heterosexual family. African men were also denied a propertied relationship with land in those circumstances, and so-called communal tenure systems were preserved, farcical though it had become – given that limited land space, a changed division of labour, and the absence of many of the social and ecological elements which define communal tenure as a specific form – had been disrupted by colonization and the extraction of male migrant labour for white commercial farms. There is a vast literature on Southern Africa which substantiates the commonalties in colonial land appropriation and labour extraction for all the societies of the region.

However, in the neo-colonial period, Black men have engaged in intense battles with white men over the ownership of land as private property on an individual basis, arguing that this is what they fought for. For Black women in Zimbabwe, for example, this has not been so automatic, and the only Black women who own land are those who have had access by virtue of their class status as educated women; business women; professionals and or heirs (Gaidzanwa, 1995), although the latter is very rare as the Zimbabwean courts have been used most efficiently by Black males to exclude women from property ownership, once again resorting to 'custom and tradition' as an excuse for the denial of women's property rights (see Magaya versus Magaya, 1999 in e.g. Zigorno, 2000).

For the majority of Black women, a relationship with property, whether intellectual property or material property in the form of land and housing, remains a heavily contested, culturalized issue, because such a relationship clearly disrupts certain structural and ideological relationships of power between women and men and between women and the state (McFadden, 2000; Hassim, 1999). I shall return to this point below because it is of central importance in the current tensions and debates within Zimbabwe at the present time.

The terms of the relationship between women and the creation of civic

spaces where rights and entitlements become a realistic possibility and such engagements provide the possibility for a change in the gender relations between women and men, the restriction of women's mobility was directly linked to cultural claims that women who left the authentic rural spaces – khumusa/ekaya – were loose, de-culturalised, and polluted by Westerism; they had ceased being African women in the sense that they did not accept the authority and dominion of Black men, and or did not have a man to legitimize their presence in the city. Colonial law constructed them as 'interlopers' who had entered the urban civic space illegally, and any man (usually a Black man) was licensed to 'arrest' such women and return them to the custody of their chiefs or head-men (McFadden, 1987). All in the name of protecting the integrity of Black women in the face of modernization and the cultural vacuum which the city represented.

This is an old 'Othering' strategy in patriarchal societies, aimed at keeping women outside those civic spaces that offer the possibility of autonomy and independence from male control and dependence. The demonization of women's sexuality as an expression of exclusion worked particularly well in relation to Black women, who had already been constructed as the ultimate sexual Other within dominant colonial discourses, and whose bodies had been conflated in sexual terms with the dangers and mysteries which Africa as a continent presented to the colonizer. The novels of Rider Haggard in particular, who entertained European audiences with his novels about the hazards of Southern Africa in novels like 'King Solomons Mines' and 'Sheba's Breasts', served to inscribe a rampant sexual identity on the bodies of all Black women; a sexuality which needed to be contained and controlled; kept under close surveillance in the safe and distance spaces of rural Africa (Mama, 1997; Mire, 2000).

Therefore, although Black women left the rural spaces in defiance of such restrictions, often enlisting the support of Black men who agreed to 'make them decent' by claiming that they were wives, these arrangements often turned into 'live-in' arrangements whereby the woman became a 'wife', cooking, cleaning and providing the man with sexual services, without the couple having actually married in either the traditional or civic sense (Barnes, 1992; Jeater, 1993; Raftopoulos, 1995). Most women simply disappeared into what became the informal economy of the countries of the region, often having to resort to prostitution as a means of survival while they sold food and provided entertainment to Black men who worked in the homes and industries of colonial capitalism. These became the 'culture-less' women who had positioned themselves outside the control and definition of ancient African patriarchy, and whose struggles for

inclusion into the formal economy and the civic spaces of modern African existence continues to this day. Most laws in the region continue to treat Black women as interlopers; outsiders in the city, without any rights to housing as the research from the GRUPHEL project has clearly shown, often located on the margins of a rapidly modernizing region (Sithole-Fundire et.al, 1995).

'Customary System' – Used as A Weapon Against Women

Another strategy which has served to keep women outside modernity under the pretext that modernity for women is un-African, is the perpetuation of a dual system of laws which applies only to Black women. White colonial women were never affected by the so-called 'customary laws' which both White and Black men re-constituted and codified in the face of women's resistance to patriarchal restrictions and surveillance. What had been largely conventions and cultural practices became 'legalised' and entrusted to those men who occupied surveillance statuses within the traditional hierarchy as chiefs and head-men. They became the repositories of supposedly centuries old untouchable rules and regulations which aimed mainly at regulating cheap labour for the colonial state, but most importantly, ensuring that Black women remained in the backward, privatized realities of ancient patriarchal social existence.

The re-invention of custom and conventions into 'customary law', which is a misnomer because if something is 'law' then it must apply to everyone, has become a powerful weapon against women's demands for equal rights within their societies, and has served both the interests of Black men who feel threatened by the civic demands of Black women, and the interests of White feminists who continue to study African women within these fossilized contexts. Few question the gendered character of such a system, and several European scholars have claimed that actually these customary laws are better for African women than the modern, civil law – because they insist, such systems provide women with a place of belonging (Arnfred, 1994; Greer, 1999; Armstrong, 1998).

What are the implications of maintaining a customary system that targets mainly women and which has serious consequences for the struggles of Black women in terms of the right to integrity (both bodily and sexual) as well as protection against violation and impunity? I want to touch very briefly on some of these consequences as an indication of how exclusionary they are for Black women of all classes, but particularly women who are rural and poor.

First of all, customary practice functions through the perpetuation of rituals and systems that put Black women outside the protections and entitlements which civic spaces provide to all citizens in a modern society. Africans fought against colonialism and racism, and African women participated in numerous ways and in large numbers in those struggles for justice and freedom to become citizens. We created the civic spaces that encompass the justice system; the economic and political structures; educational institutions and other civic resources that are the products of the collective struggles of a people in any society. The law, in general, is supposed to ensure that every person in a society at least has the theoretical right to such protections and entitlements, even if in reality class and gender mediate to make this assumption often more difficult to be realized for certain groups (MacKinnon, 1993).

In the context of Southern Africa (and across the continent) the existence of 'customary law' only compounds the difficulties faced by Black women in particular in exercising their rights, essentially because it supersedes the civic rights which a constitution guarantees to women as citizens, putting women outside the parameters of the law, and therefore applying a different standard to Black women as Africans and as citizens of their societies. Section 23 of the Zimbabwean Constitution states clearly that 'African' custom and tradition shall supersede any rights and entitlements that women may have been granted by the Constitution, as long as those rights and entitlements threaten the hegemony of custom and tradition (Zigomo, 2000). It is the most ludicrous but most fiercely guarded section of the constitution, and although Zimbabwean women have fought it for years, they have not been able to change it yet because the Black judges (in collusion with white male judges) have used it effectively to block any attempts to break down the barriers these customs and conventions put between Black women and their civic rights.

These are the laws which make it acceptable for men to continue violating women in the home even though it has become a crime to do so, because often women find themselves outside the justice delivery systems which are constructed as 'anti-family' and 'anti-custom'; conventions which facilitate the use of girls as compensation when men kill each other or one family commits a wrong to another, and the police and other legal practitioners do not seem to know how to eradicate the practice, claiming that it is 'cultural' and 'significant to the identity of the Shona as a people'; practices which allow for widowhood rites which construct women as witches; a evil and dangerous; as women in need of cleansing because they are polluted and must be made clean through humiliating practices which destroy the woman's self-esteem and mark her as a 'husband killer'.

In many African communities such women, when they are older, are ban-
ished to isolated villages where they live as pariahs, inscribed with the sta-
tus of exiles in their own societies, simply because the husband died; these
are practices which make it possible for fathers to sexually violate and rape
their daughters under the claim that they are preparing them for marriage
and increasingly, because women and girls fall outside the civic protec-
tions of their societies, they are vulnerable to rape for purposes of 'curing
HIV/AIDS' and also to ritual murder. The list of violations is seemingly end-
less – and it is linked to the existence of so-called customary laws which
exist specifically to ensure male cultural and sexual privilege; making it
possible for males to behave with impunity towards women and girls,
often without redress for those who are affected by such behaviour.

This for me is one of the greatest challenges we face as feminists and
as Africans. We have to find ways of removing this impediment to
women's dignity and rights; an impediment which presents itself in the
garb of culture and which has become institutionalized as 'an authentic
cultural system which is appropriate to African women'. Worst of all, it is
defended by certain anthropologists and 'feminists' like Greer (1999) who
claim that there are some good things in it and African women should not
throw out the baby with the bath water, so to speak.

Well, my position is that that is total hogwash. Such people do not
have to live under these so-called 'appropriate' customs and if they did
they would change them as they did when such backwardness prevailed
in Europe. Why is it culturally appropriate for African women to be treat-
ed as less than human; for inhuman and barbaric patriarchal practices to
be perpetuated because it applies to Black women? If white women love
these customs so much, why don't they re-invent them in their European
societies and enjoy them there instead of bothering us with their nonsense
about 'preserving our authentic cultures'.

Most African women, given the choice, would opt for a modern, dig-
nified life, with education for themselves and their children, with tap
water and a school in close proximity; with choices on what contracep-
tives to use and how many children to have; with electricity and a safe,
aesthetically pleasing home to live in, and with the right to be an au-
tonomous individuals who can relate to other humans through systems
and choices which fulfil them as persons and as part of their communities.
It is a vicious myth to claim that African women like 'belonging' to back-
ward spaces, where their worlds are so limited they never experience even
a fraction of what life has to offer a modern day person; where they do
not know their rights because these are encoded in languages and signs
that they cannot decipher because they are unable to read (and please do

not tell me that there is beauty in illiteracy because you know as much as I do that illiterate people remain poor and excluded in every society of the world today); where their lives are simply one long, miserable nightmare of poverty and dispossession.

The fact of the matter is that Africa has to become modern, and we will not allow anyone to stop that process, whether they think it is part of their privilege to continue studying Africans as 'exotic objects' or to exploit Africa for profit and gain. Through the struggles of African women for rights and justice we are moving our continent out of the backwardness that has been so 'exciting' and 'profitable' for certain groups of people. As far as I am concerned, Europeans cannot continue to have the monopoly of modernity at the expense of the rest of the world. We can move forward together, or we can do it the harder way and continue the contest over each persons right to define themselves as complete and dignified human beings – we have a choice, and I hope that we will choose the path of cooperation in making the world a place of dignity and justice for all human beings. Then culture can become what it was meant to be, and aesthetically, life-enhancing artifact in the service of all those who craft and use it as a source of pleasure.

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Questions of Power:

Women's Movements, Feminist Theory and Development Aid

SIGNE ARNFRED

In the 1970s and 1980s insights from the Western women's movement were fed into the thinking and practice of development aid, resulting first in the WID (women-in-development) programmes, and later in their transformation to GAD (gender-and-development) approaches. Up to a certain point it looked like a success story, culminating in the UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing 1995. The jubilant editorial of Women's Studies Quarterly, celebrating 'Beijing and Beyond' in a double issue 1996, proclaims the total conflation between women's studies, women's movements world wide, and the Beijing Platform for Action: The platform for Action is described as "a women's studies curriculum", producing scholars and activists "carrying the women's movement into the twenty-first century" (Howe 1996, p. 14).

This very confident feeling of progress regarding women's issues was – and is – quite widely shared. According to Rounaq Jahan "there has been a sea-change in knowledge and awareness. Affirmative action policies have been introduced. Special measures have been designed to remove barriers to women's participation. Women's voices are stronger than ever. (…) These changes in awareness, expertise, policies, laws and women's voice were brought about by the efforts of many different actors – women's movements as well as national governments and international donor organizations" (Jahan 1995, quoted in Hannan 2000, p. 379). This may be so, but such advantages – if indeed they are real – have come at a price. There is a backside to the success story. The series of UN conferences – added to the four conferences on women, 1975 in Mexico, 1980 in Copenhagen, 1985 in Nairobi and 1995 in Beijing, also the Conference on Environment and Development in Rio 1992, the Conference on Human Rights in Vienna 1993, the Conference on Population and Development in Cairo 1994, and the Social Summit in Copenhagen 1995 –

these conferences have played a major role in the creation of a unified language in which to address women's issues on a global scale. This language is the language of development agencies; it is not the language of political struggle. Ifi Amadiume makes a comparison between Nairobi 1985 and Beijing 1995: "The intensity of interaction [i.e. the series of conferences in the early 1990s (SA)] has led to participants almost speaking the same language as opposed to the creative dissent and tensions of Nairobi 1985" (Amadiume 2000, p. 10). Over this same period of time, according to Amadiume, focus has shifted from the articulations of grass-root women's movements to a global formalized language regarding women's issues: "With this shift from a community or grass-root articulated focus to professional leadership imposed from above, issues and goals have become repetitive in a fixed global language, and discourse is controlled by paid UN and other donor advisers, consultants and workers" (Amadiume 2000, p. 14).

A major problem with this unified global language is that it obscures the *inequalities of power* between governments and development aid institutions on the one hand, and women's movements/feminist scholarship on the other. It also makes difficult the critique of dominant gender policies. Thus in the following I shall discuss 1) issues highlighting inequalities of power, 2) problematic aspects of dominant policies, and 3) challenges for women's movements.

Section 1: Inequalities of Power

Power contexts of change in terminology from women to gender

Insights from women's movements and women's studies have been co-opted by state and development institutions, in the process being transformed into something very different. The change of language from women to gender is a case in point. When the vocabulary of gender-and-development was introduced into the development debate in the 1980s, it was advocated by feminists, who wanted to criticize the dominant women-in-development (WID) approach for dealing only with *integration* of women into existing development policies, with no critical analysis of development as such, and with no criticism of the unequal power relationships between men and women.

Seen from the point of view of these feminists, the term 'gender' as compared to 'women' had a double advantage. Firstly, it put 'women' into a context, focusing on the socially constructed relation between women and men, and by doing so it made visible the aspect of *power* in gender

relations. Concurrently it became clear that changing gender relations, as being relations of power, was bound to be contested, and thus to be a struggle, in the South as well as in the North. Since such changes were likely to be perceived as threatening to male privileges, they would cause male resistance. And secondly, thinking in terms of gender power relationships also pointed to the *epistemological aspects* of male dominance, calling for a deconstruction of apparently gender neutral development language. Terms like 'farmer', 'household' and 'community' (to name but a few) carry an implicit male bias, hiding possible gender disparities as well as gender hierarchies, struggles and conflicts.

Nevertheless, in spite of the good intentions, which were through gender-and-development (GAD) thinking to politicize the WID debate, the opposite seems to have happened. Where talking about *women* implied awareness of women's marginalisation and subordination (this being the reason for specific efforts for integrating women) the term *gender* is used as a neutral term, referring to both women and men. As also acknowledged by Sally Baden and Anne Marie Goetz "a problem with the concept of 'gender' is that it can be used in a very descriptive way and the question of power can easily be removed" (Baden and Goetz 1998, p. 25).

Thus to a large extend the gender language has implied a *de-politization* of women's issues in development, turning gender into a matter of planning and monitoring and not of struggle. The term gender, in development agencies today, is obscuring power relationships more than illuminating them. At the NGO Forum in Huairou, during the Beijing conference, women from the South are reported to have argued along these lines. Nighat Khan, director of the Applied Socio-economic Research organization of Pakistan "argued that gender analysis had become a technocratic discourse, in spite of its roots in socialist feminism, dominated by researchers, policy-makers and consultants, which no longer addressed issues of power central to women's subordination. She identified factors underlying this shift as the professionalization and 'NGO'isation' of the women's movement and the consequent lack of accountability of 'gender experts' to a grass-root constituency. (…) Nighat Kahn asserted that the focus on gender, rather than women, had become counter-productive in that it had allowed the discussion to shift from a focus on women, to women and men, and, finally, back to men" (Baden and Goetz 1998, p. 21). As also pointed out by Indian feminist Kamla Bhasin: "There is money in gender but little passion, there is objectivity in gender but no stakes" (Bhasin n.d, p. 4).

Discussion on women's issues is being robbed of its struggle aspects,

at a time when struggle is needed more than ever. Since the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 neo-liberal politics have been on the increase world wide, promoting market relations on a global scale. And according to the analysis presented in this paper, global market forces are *not* gender neutral: They tend to promote the power positions of men, while many aspects of the kind of work that women usually do, and which are unrelated to the market – e.g. food production from self-grown crops and taking care of children – are rendered invisible. As pointed out by Kamla Bhasin there is today a resurgence of male and patriarchal power. "Patriarchy and patriarchal violence are definitely not on the decline" (Bhasin n.d, p. 5).

Further adjustments of GAD discourse: Gender mainstreaming

In the context of development discourse gender has become an issue of checklists, planning and 'political correctness'. Through the terminology of gender women's issues have become de-politizised. In my view the language of gender *mainstreaming* has continued and exacerbated the trends just described regarding the shift from 'women' to 'gender'. Lots of nice words are produced, with lots of good intentions – but when you look at the outcome, the picture is different.

'The mainstreaming approach' has grown in importance since the 1995 Beijing conference. A Sida definition of gender mainstreaming goes like this: "Mainstreaming implies that attention to equality between women and men should pervade all development policies, strategies and interventions. Mainstreaming does not simply mean ensuring that women participate in a development agenda that has already been decided upon. It aims to ensure that women as well as men are involved in setting goals and in planning so that development meets the priorities and needs of both women and men. Mainstreaming thus involves giving attention to equality in relation to analyses, policies, planning processes and institutional practices that set the overall conditions for development. Mainstreaming requires that analysis be carried out on the potential impact on women and men of development interventions in all areas of societal development. Such analysis should be carried out *before* the important decisions on goals, strategies and resource allocations are made" (Sida 1997, quoted in Hannan 2000, p. 289, emphasis in original).

Carolyn Hannan produces a table with characteristics of the 'integration strategy of the 1980s' as opposed to the 'mainstreaming strategy of the 1990s' which reads much like previous WID/GAD juxtapositions (e.g. Razavi and Miller 1995). According to Hannan, the integration strategy is about "women's *involvement* (participation, representation, parity, 'num-

bers') usually in a development agenda decided upon by others" (Hannan 2000, p. 287, emphasis in original), with a focus on 'women' out of context and often at household level, and on technical aspects – development of methods, tools and technical skills, with no consideration of the political aspects. In contrast, the mainstreaming strategy is "going beyond 'numbers' – bringing the *perceptions, experience and interests of women as well as men to bear on the development agenda*". Furthermore the mainstreaming strategy is characterized by "use of *analysis to focus on relations/power* – uncovering inequality, conflict and confrontation", "a focus on *political aspects of promoting gender equality* – relations, power, transforming the agenda, and changing of organizations and institutions" (ibid., emphasis in original). A key element in the mainstreaming strategy, according to Hannan, is "that there should be a shift from quantitative aspects of participation of women to more *transformatory aspects* – bringing the perceptions of women as well as men to bear on the development process itself, rather than simply trying to integrate women into existing development agendas formulated by others" (Hannan 2000, p. 285, emphasis added, SA).

This may be the programme of enthusiastic feminists, working in the development sector, but judging from my own (of course limited) experience the justifications for mainstreaming by non-feminists (which happen to be in the majority in development organizations) run along very different lines. The transformatory aspects are not in high demand. Rather the arguments put forward in support of gender mainstreaming tend to focus on *better quality* and on *efficiency* – from an economic point of view. Regarding 'better quality' the argument goes for instance like this: A precondition for good planning is relevant knowledge and adequate conceptualization of the reality in question. Social realities are gendered, in third world countries often even more explicitly than in Europe. Development planning must acknowledge and respond to this gendered reality. And regarding 'efficiency': Women are potential wage labourers and producers of marketable goods. Integration of women in market economy gives higher GNP. In the latest World Bank document on gender *Engendering Development* (Consultation Draft May 2000) a recurring punch-line runs like this: *Gender Inequalities are Costly to Development.* Or to put it the other way round: Gender Equality is Good Business! It is stated in the document that gender equality is a development objective in its own right – "but gender equality also enhances development by strengthening the ability of countries to grow, to reduce poverty and to govern effectively" (World Bank 2000, p. 1).

The message is that 'development needs women' – development understood as expanded market relations. The market needs women as pro-

ducers of marketable goods and services (through so-called income-generating activities) and consumers – provided that they have the money. Mainstreaming becomes a means for economic growth and more successful mobilization of women on a neo-liberal economic agenda. The development establishment is concerned about the market, i.e. economic growth; only few non-market aspects of social life remain visible, human rights being one. The caring and food-providing work of women is not considered. "Income generating activities for women are promoted, but a redefinition of sex roles to alleviate the resulting double burden is ignored" (DAWN 2000, p. 106).

'Development needs women' – but do women need development? Or rather: Which type of development do which women need? According to Hannan the mainstreaming strategy should be geared for asking – and answering – just this type of question. To me, however, this looks too much like wishful thinking. And wishful thinking is not enough to change economic agendas.

De-politicising of feminist theory?

Initially the issues of WID and later of GAD were pushed by women engaged in feminist theory and in the women's movement. In the 1970s in general there was quite a close connection between women's movements, feminist theory and the launching of gender issues in political contexts, nationally and in development organisations. At the level of the nation state feminists got involved in government politics for gender equality – a collaboration which in the Scandinavian context has been dubbed 'state feminism'. Similarly in the North a kind of 'development feminism' emerged, increasingly integrated in and with issues of investigation defined by the big and powerful development institutions – the World Bank, the UN and donor governments – and not by feminist movements.

While a part of feminist scholarship has been integrated in government and development institutions, another part has withdrawn from political involvement. Concurrently with the global process of increasing marketisation, feminist theory in the North has developed in directions away from engagement in issues of global inequality. The implicit context of most post-structural feminist theory does not go far beyond Western middle class concerns, an example being Judith Butler's very influential theoretical work, the political scope of which is a struggle for more open definitions of sexual identity (Butler 1999:xxvi). Maria Mies and Veronica Bennholdt-Thomsen point to this kind of shortcomings in their rather blunt statement that "feminism has been narrowed down mainly to equity politics and cultural feminism, to mean a change in one's sexu-

al orientation, in linguistic and social behaviour. (…) The postmoderns continue to discover ever more differences between people, supposedly as barriers between them, but they never talk of exploitation and oppression" (Bennholdt-Thomsen and Mies 1999, p. 183-4).

It is my own opinion that there is ample *potential* in post-structuralist feminist theory for an epistemological as well as a political critique of global relations of power, but that so far these potentials remain largely un-developed. Feminist theorists from the South are, however, working on the issue. The potential for epistemological critique, developed by the first generation of gender-theorists (among others Sandra Harding 1987, 1991 and Joan Scott 1988) can readily be extended with a third world dimension: Just as presumed gender neutral thinking, seen with *feminist* eyes reveals itself as heavily male biased, in so far as the subject of Western thinking almost always is implicitly male – this same Western thinking, seen with *third world* eyes reveals itself as not only male, but also ethnocentric. Feminists from the South are scrutinizing not only Western presumed 'gender neutral' theories, but also Western feminist thinking, finding much of it gender aware, but ethno-blind (cf. Ifi Amadiume 1987, 1997, Chandra Mohanty 1991, Oyeronke Oyewumi 1997, among others).

Often in social science a view from the margin, from the periphery or from below, is necessary in order to reveal what the centre itself is not able (or willing) to see. One problem with the by now established gender-and-development and gender mainstreaming discourse is that it has moved from margin to centre, loosing in the process its critical itch. Mainstreaming GAD discourse today is talking from the centre of powerful development institutions. Thus a gap has emerged between the kind of gender thinking expressed in the unified global language of development discourse (the GAD, mainstreaming and World Bank 'engendering-development' way of thinking) and the kind of feminist theory which draws its energy and direction from questions and concerns posed by feminist activists and by women's movements from the South.

WID/GAD and women's movements

According to some observers (and I agree) the whole development set-up has rendered difficult relations of solidarity between women's movements in North and South. Programmes of WID and GAD "potentially displace/disrupt/interrupt political connections among autonomous women's groups and activists in 'third' and 'first' worlds. Relations between donor and recipient are fostered instead" (Angela Miles 1998, p. 168). I see this as a very important observation, because it focuses on the unequal power relationships embedded in all development work, no mat-

ter how much the development discourse itself is trying to neglect the basic situation of unequal power, by talking about 'development dialogue', 'partnership' etc. No real solidarity between partners can emerge when mutual dependence is not acknowledged. The important thing is for feminists in the North to realize that *we* too, if we want to change the male bias of the market system, *need* the support of feminists and women's movements in the South.

What WID and GAD discourses further achieve, according to Angela Miles, is to obscure the fact that transformative feminist trends do exist in the North. Not all feminists have been engulfed in 'state' or 'development' feminism, or withdrawn to apolitical theorising. As a matter of fact new feminist movements are emerging in the Scandinavian countries – but so far they remain unrelated to feminist movements of the South. "The unequal discourse of development that shapes and contains WID and GAD relationships means that they cannot provide an adequate frame for the development of political sisterhood/solidarity. On the contrary, if they are understood by 'third world' women to reflect the whole of Western feminisms, these WID and GAD relationships can mask the existence of transformative feminisms in the 'first world' and impede the development of global solidarity/sisterhood. When this occurs the necessary and difficult process of building political relations among 'first world' and 'third world' movement counterparts is *supplanted by suspiciously well-funded relations between women in the development industry in North and South, and between these women and some activists in the South*" (Miles 1998, p. 169, emphasis added, SA). This point echoes the observations made by Ifi Amadiume and Nighat Khan, quoted above, regarding 'discourse as controlled by paid UN and other donor advisers, consultants and workers' and 'the professionalization and NGO'isation of the women's movement'.

A further problem in this context is the split, created by national governments and development institutions, between elite and grass root women of the South. As argued by Amina Mama "post-colonial women's organisations tend to be hierarchical in structure, dominated by elite women and dedicated to quiet and comparatively genteel politics of pursuing legal and policy reforms" (quoted in DAWN 2000, p. 151). Such women's organisations tend to "be co-opted or absorbed by the state, resulting in their ineffectiveness as vehicles for women's struggles. Furthermore they rarely retain their linkage with grass-root organisations and women whose interests they claim to represent" (ibid.).

Seen from the point of view of the WID/GAD development establishment – including many South women's organisations – a lack of correspondence between local women's concerns and the GAD development

discourse, will be explained as due to the grass-root women's ignorance and limited knowledge. Through gender training courses women all over the world are being taught to express themselves in the unified global language of gender-and-development discourse. But to which extend is this language useful as a tool for changes in consciousness and self-perception of grass-root women? An example from my own experience in northern Mozambique: In 1998-99 I was conducting anthropological fieldwork in an area only marginally integrated in market relations, where food products were controlled by women, and where matrilineal kinship structures provided some older women with quite powerful positions. Here the way in which you would know if women had been in contact with gender-and-development efforts was that in this case they would have acquired a language of women's subordination, having learned to see themselves as powerless and oppressed. They had *not* learned to see their importance in the family and in community rituals as positions of power, nor to perceive their knowledge and skills as valuable potentials.

Section 2: Critique of Dominant Gender Policies

Gender mainstreaming – limitations and pitfalls

Gender mainstreaming is a policy adopted – if at all – from above. Notwithstanding the keen and struggling feminists who, like Carolyn Hannan, insist on interpreting 'mainstreaming' as another word for 'agenda-setting' (Hannan 2000, p. 284) – mainstreaming is an institutional devise. Hannan herself points to a series of possible pitfalls: There is *a risk* that mainstreaming is taken to simply mean integration into existing agendas (Hannan 2000, p. 285); it is important that *special attention* should be given to gender equality, and this aspect must be *explicitly* treated and made *very visible* if mainstreaming (as Hannan understands it) is to be successful (Hannan 2000, p. 290, emphasis added, sa). An overriding problem when it comes to the question of promoting gender equality, according to Hannan, is *the lack of political will*. Relevant frameworks and tools have been developed in abundance, but they are not being used according to the intentions. There is a tendency, Hannan notes, within development co-operation "to reduce the promotion of gender equality to a technical issue, and to neglect the important political implications" (Hannan 2000, p. 244). This observation is not at all new. Rather it is the order of the day in development institutions. The ways in which this side-lining of the gender mainstreaming issues work -gender mainstreaming understood in the inclusive, transformative way which Hannan advocates – are

diverse. The DAWN group of South feminist researchers[1] list a series of structural barriers to gender mainstreaming in this inclusive sense: Conspicuous neglect, wilful misconceptions, low position of 'national women's machineries' in government hierarchies, stubborn male resistance within bureaucracies and a generally hostile environment (DAWN 2000, p. 105-106). The prominent position in the policy papers of many development agencies of gender equality as a political goal is *not* reflected in the (often precarious) staffing of the gender office, nor in the (often low) prestige of working with gender issues. Very often, thus, progress in the matter will depend entirely on committed individuals, i.e. on the chance existence of feminists, male or female, in the departments.

Another factor is that the conspicuous neglect, wilful misconceptions, stubborn male resistance etc. in the face of an official policy in favour of gender equality, tends to keep feminists busy in fighting for gender mainstreaming with the risk of diverting their/our attention from the overall impossibility of the task. It might be more useful to realize that feminist visions regarding mainstreaming as a tool for changing gender power relations, do *not* match the reality of governments and development institutions. These bodies simply understand the matter differently, "equating gender equity with providing access and opportunities for women to participate in the production of goods and services that can contribute to the country's GNP trade and dollar reserves" (DAWN 2000, p. 95).

Thus as feminists we'll have to accustom ourselves to more subversive ways of working, taking advantage of 'cracks in the edifice' of states and development institutions (as developed by DAWN, cf. below) and of the existence of the odd feminist in a key position. An important aspect of DAWN's work is discussions regarding the character of state and development institutions, highlighting their male bias and their sensibility to market concerns more than to women's and poor people's needs, *but also their composite character with internal cracks and contradictions*. At a time and in an age when the state increasingly is being re-organised to serve the interests of market forces rather than the interests of the dispossessed (DAWN 2000, p. 162) attempts to make states attentive to women and poor people may look like a contradiction in terms. "More progress has been made in the adoption of policies and the setting up of institutions to support global markets than to support people and their rights" (UNDP Human Development Report 1999, quoted in DAWN 2000, p. 65). It is evident from

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1. DAWN (Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era) is a feminist network of women activists, researchers and policy makers from the South who are committed to developing alternative frameworks and methods in order to attain the goals of economic and social justice, including gender equality. DAWN was established in 1984 and has its headquarters at University of the South Pacific at the Fiji Islands.

much of the general debate on the nature of political changes (including changes for democracy and human rights) and processes of governance that the dominant discourse does not include perspectives and concerns of poor people, nor of women. Feminists have to realise that states are institutions where male privileges remain deeply embedded; "we cannot add gender or women to frameworks that have led to the exclusion of women in the first place, and to the marginalization of the majority of poor people" (DAWN 2000, p. 163). "Gender equity thus goes beyond equal opportunity; it requires the transformation of the basic rules, hierarchies and practices of public institutions" (DAWN 2000, p. 94). Pushing for gender mainstreaming in the inclusive and transformative sense thus is no easy task, and the pitfalls and blind alleys are many. Nevertheless, according to DAWN: Disengagement is not an option. "Despite the formidable obstacles faced by women, to abandon the project of institutionalizing gender is *not* an option" (DAWN 2000, p. 116). The challenge for feminists is to find ways in which to make gender mainstreaming meaningful from women's points of view.

The gender bias of market economy

A major problem of global market forces is the way in which they render invisible much of what women actually do. Again on this point I shall quote from the work of the DAWN researchers: "There is a major flaw in these monetized and market-driven presuppositions that affect women. Indeed in many countries women provide products, labour and services as part of family obligations, reciprocal household responsibilities, mutual aid and the like. Further this theory [i.e. neo-classical economic theory, SA] considers work performed, services rendered and products made that do not have an explicit price to have no economic value. Thus, much of what society classifies as women's work is rendered invisible and unimportant for understanding how economics works" (DAWN 2000, p. 79).

One consequence of this determined blindness – the market's purposeful inability to see, perceive and acknowledge aspects of social life which are external to market relations – is a disregard for women's double workload. And states follow the lead of the market: "The state assume that women's labour time is available as a reserve, subsidiary and complementary source for capitalist development" (DAWN 2000, p. 68), the fact being that the vast majority of women are overburdened by reproductive burdens that have not been equally shared by men. In addition to this, women's (and men's) roles and positions at other levels: in rituals, religion, healing practices etc. are entirely disregarded. Conducting fieldwork in Northern Mozambique I became aware that local culture to a

large extend was based on connections between the living and the dead, between body and soul, and between the individual and the community – many of these connections in this place (a rural matrilineal community) being handled and taken care of particularly by women – as spirit mediums and female 'chiefs', as healers/diviners and as grandmothers /family elders. In contexts of 'development' however, such connections tend to disappear from sight. What is seen and considered are the living, the bodies and the individuals, while the links to the dead, the souls and the community are discarded. In this reduction much of women's lives and local importance is erased.

Thus the blessings of the global market tend to be limited from women's points of view. Only few women are integrated in market relations as wage labourers, more often than not on lousy terms. e.g. in Free Trade Zones which are "characterised by women working for cheap wages, on a piece-rate basis, in substandard working conditions with a high degree of job-insecurity. The jobs are repetitive and monotonous and require concentration and nimble fingers – considered as 'assets' of female workers, who are never valued as 'skilled'" (DAWN 2000, p. 62). In actual fact most poor women operate outside the formal markets, in subsistence production and/or in the so-called 'informal sector'. As however the market proper only responds to needs expressed in cash, "the emerging state/market relationships perpetuate the exclusion of poor women from mainstream economic and social activities" (Taylor 1999). While just a tiny minority of middle class women are likely to experience the advantages of development, the majority of women are being excluded – in a world where transformation to market conditions is increasingly taking place.

Section 3: Challenges for the Women's Movements

Reversals of learning

Mainstream development aid is implicitly based on a model saying: *They* (the development aid receivers) have the problem, *we* (the donors) have the solution. This line of thinking produces the overall conception of economic poverty as the dominant problem, matching economic growth, in the shape of marketisation, as the universal solution. In the field of gender *their* problem is women's oppression and subordination, *our* solution is equal rights and market relations. But does it work? Maybe time has come for North/South reversals of learning.

Reversals of learning is an idea adapted from Robert Chambers (1983,

1993, 1995). He advises the development practitioner to sit down, to ask and to listen (1983, p. 202). In Chambers' context initially in order for the development practitioner to be able to communicate more effectively with the local farmer (man or woman?), later increasingly in order to "turn the spotlight round and look at ourselves" (1995, p. 6). In order for us from the North to look at ourselves with the eyes of men and women from the South. "Papers on the poor proliferate, like this one" Chambers writes in a paper titled *Poverty and Livelihood: Whose Reality Counts?* "One may speculate on what topics the poor and powerless would commission papers if they could convene conferences and summits: perhaps on greed, hypocrisy and exploitation? But the poor are powerless and cannot and do not convene summits, and those papers are rarely written" (Chambers 1995, p. 5-6).

In feminist contexts 'reversals of learning' have a lot to do with feminists from the North listening to and learning from feminists from the South, picking up on concepts and critiques, learning to see our own realities with eyes from without, "reinventing ourselves as other" as Sandra Harding says (1991, p. 268) and "learning from the outsiders within" (1991: 131). The idea of "outsiders within" is developed by Patricia Hill Collins, pointing to Black feminist scholars as "marginal intellectuals whose standpoints promise to enrich sociological discourse" (Hill Collins, quoted in Harding 1991, p. 131). The idea of the critical view from the margin, from the periphery, from the ones excluded as 'others' by the dominant discourse, has much as yet un-developed potential for feminist thinking and practice in the North.

Taking advantage of cracks and contradictions

Much practical work in South women's NGOs and feminist research in the South are only possible with money from donor organisations. Feminists from the South have had to learn to navigate in donor-dominated waters, taking advantage of the money and the contacts while making efforts to use it according to their own agendas. In the 2000 DAWN document an analysis of the state and development organisations as complex and contradictory sites is emerging, sites with cracks and contradictions that can be used to lever spaces for alternative strategies. "Feminists have moved beyond regarding the state as a homogenous, patriarchal and capitalist entity to understanding it as a complex site. The state is a group of arenas, discourses, institutions, the result of political struggles and specific contexts…" (DAWN 2000, p. 145). "There are cracks emerging in the edifice of global decision making. How we use these spaces that are being created is going to be very important in determining the alternative paths

that we develop to promote the type of transformation that all of us are working towards" (Taylor 1999). The idea is to work inside, but to some extent 'against the grain' of state and development institutions, the strategy not being attempts to make these institutions take over a transformatory agenda, which is not going to happen, but rather to work in a more subversive manner, taking advantage of person-to-person contacts, and of the spaces opened up by cracks and contradictions in the institutional set-up of states and development agencies.

This strategy of taking advantage of 'cracks in the edifice' may be seen as an initial concretisation of the 'there is no other option' – position. Feminists North and South have to develop an astute critique of prevailing trends of marketisation, and of the institutions – governments, multinational financial institutions and agencies of development aid – which promote this marketisation. Feminists have to be acutely aware of the relations of power – of class, race and gender – embedded in these institutions. But at the same time we have no other alternative but to work through these same structures. These are major challenges for North/ South women's movements.

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Citizenship and Women in Mexico:

Searching for a New Political Culture? Views and Experiences of Participants and Non-Participants in Political Action

EDMÉ DOMÍNGUEZ

Introduction

Mexico has finally left behind the era of the one party-system to start its career on a multi-party track where stability may be sacrificed to the legitimacy provided by democratic elections. To a great extent this transformation is the fruit of general dissatisfaction with the official party. The first expressions of this unrest were seen in the 1980s with the awakening of civil society in Mexico. And, in this awakening, women's participation has been particularly relevant. It is mostly women who participated in the new urban movements of the 1990s. Through their work in all kinds of organizations, from the housing activists to the feminists and even the armed movements, women are playing a new role that implies a serious transformation in the political culture and gender relationships. Furthermore, women's demands have given the Zapatista movement one of its main features in comparison with other Indian or guerrilla movements in Mexico or Latin America.

Even women who do not participate in political action share somehow the awareness of certain problems, of the need to change, to democratize and to transform gender relations. In our research we have looked at what notions these women – participants and non-participants – have of concepts such as citizenship and democracy. Are participant women trying to enter the system or are they aiming to change it? Have non-participant women similar notions to the participants in respect of gender issues and the need for a new political culture?

In this paper I argue that both participants and non-participants share the view of an authoritarian system that needs to be changed. They also agree on the importance of participation in order to realize these changes, in order to achieve citizenship – understood as rights and obligations to-

wards the community and as an awareness of, and responsibility for, public affairs. And they agree on the qualities women may need to contribute to transform this system.

This paper is a presentation of some of the partial results of our research into women's urban and rural movements and citizenship in Mexico.[1] It is also a continuation of the articles already published, or in process of being published, within the framework of the project (Domínguez and Castro, 1998, Domínguez, 1998).

Taking as the point of departure some theoretical reflections on the concepts of gender and citizenship, and the most recent and relevant events as to the political participation of women in Mexico, I will present some of the empirical material on urban women that I have been able to gather at the end of 1998, the beginning of 1999 and, most recently, in June-July 2000.

Theoretical Questions

From an analytical perspective, the concept of citizenship recalls a conflictual practice associated to power and reflecting the struggles of 'who can attain what' in the process of defining the social common problems and how they are to be approached. Both the citizenship and the rights attached to it are always in a process of construction and change. Feminists have centred their criticism to the following classical notions:
- Public Responsibility, Civic Activity and Political Participation;
- Equality (for whom?, in what way?);
- Divisions and Antagonisms: How are they to be solved? How can socio-economical and political differences be reconciled with equality?;
- The Dichotomy Public-Private; used as a principle for exclusion and for the subordination of women. Everything concerning the private sphere – the family context – has been regarded as irrelevant for the exercise of citizenship;
- Pluralism and Multiculturalism; as features of all contemporary democracies. How does the recognition of different cultural identities affect women's rights as citizens?.

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1. This joint research project involves also Ines Castro, a Mexican researcher, and studies of the Zapatista and other women's organizations in Chiapas in order to compare them with urban women's organizations. The project has received financial support from Sida-SAREC in 1998-2000.

In general, the criticism have focused on the abstract model of a citizen within a patriarchal society based on the exclusion of all groups that cannot adjust to the model in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, class and religion (Massolo, 1994, p. 13-17).

One of the first currents opposing the universality of the patriarchal model has tried to find a feminine model naturally associated to equality and rather superior to the patriarchal one (Jelin, *Las Mujeres…* 1996). However, such currents in their turn have been criticized on the grounds that the relationship established by maternity cannot be taken as a model of egalitarian democracy as it is naturally unequal (mother-child are not equal). Moreover, and perhaps the most serious criticism to this model concerns its belief in a common essence to all women, for example, the experience of maternity (Dietz, 1985). It is generally admitted that we cannot speak of *a woman* but of *women*, a heterogeneous group of social agents with a huge diversity of cultures, identities, experiences and positions. Their different situation in the intersections of power relations is also important to notice. Finally, according to the criticism, masculine superiority is being replaced by a feminine superiority that, trying to focus on the notion of difference, only reproduces a hierarchical order (Jelin, *Women, Gender…* 1996).

Another criticism of the liberal notions of citizenship implies that it is impossible to reduce the diverse identities into a single and abstract 'citizen identity'. As Mouffe (1992, p. 372) has pointed out, the subject's different positions affect or are even determinant in collective social practices, such as those recently known as 'new social movements'.[2] Within this conception, sexual difference is one of the recognized identities but the goal is to make this as well as other identities irrelevant in many of the social relations where it is relevant today. For Mouffe the liberal interpretation of rights is based on an abstract equality, but these rights are nevertheless fundamental if seen together with an active political participation and the sense of belonging to a political community. In this way "citizenship cannot be understood only as an identity but as an articulating principle that affects the different positions of the subject and allows for a plurality of specific loyalties and respect to individual freedom." (Mouffe, 1992, p. 378). The public-private dichotomy is thus reconstructed at each level: the desires, decisions and options are private but their

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2. The so called 'new social movements' are described, since the beginning of the 1980s as heterogeneous, focusing in short-term goals and mostly engaged in local changes without ever aiming at the conquest of power. Examples of the movements are the urban-colonos movements or the indigenous movements. Women can thus have several identities: mother, 'colona' or Indian, corker or peasant, etc. (Escobar, Alvarez 1992, p. 1-8)

realization is public. Equality at home, within the family, is recognized as a pre-condition and a requisite for public equality (Mouffe 1992).

Furthermore, citizenship is associated to *public responsibility and political participation.* These notions are also analysed by the 'democratic partici-pation' perspective. Within this perspective, democracy is conceived as a common, active project involving all active citizens who seek to partici-pate and to influence all levels of society. Politics then include all kinds of areas and issues that affect citizens' autonomy and rights, thus engaging people that normally would not be interested in participating and/or those who are traditionally regarded as passive, or excluded, like women or immigrants. These excluded groups become active participants by transforming their local and daily concerns into political issues. Partici-pation becomes a process of learning of acceptance, of tolerance in rela-tion to difference and to the possibility of influencing decision-makers (Dahlstedt, 1999, p. 81-83).

A citizen participation perspective involving notions of social and wel-fare rights would oppose both liberal individualism and an elite and 'del-egational' perspective that focuses only on electoral rights. It would be much closer to those citizen-, women-, consumer- or neighbourhood-movements that flourished in Latin America during the 1980s, the so-called 'new social movements', or social actions already mentioned above. Thus, politics would encompass "power struggles enacted in a wide range of spaces culturally defined as private, social, economic, cultural and so on" (Alvarez et al 1998, p. 11) And these political struggles are "crucial in fostering alternative political cultures and potentially in extending and deepening democracy in Latin America" (ibid. p. 12).[3]

Summarizing, we propose to use a feminist radical interpretation of citizenship focusing on a plural and participatory democracy. Such an in-terpretation focuses on those social relations that give place to oppression, questioning such oppression and looking at the way of making all daily and local issues political. We thus emphasize the concept of public *respon-sibility and political participation* but also the issue of multiplicity of identities. This framework makes it possible to articulate different issues and move-ments, like those of working women, Indian women and homosexuals,

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3. However, it is necessary to remember that not all social participation leads necessarily to pro-jects of democratization. Even this participation can be manipulated by authoritarian regimes, fanatical religious movements (for example Islamic or even Catholic). An example of this is the 'new communitarianism' which gives priority to the needs of the community over those of the individuals and privileges the notion of responsibilities over that of rights. This has severe impli-cations for the debates on social policy in general and on women rights in particular. This new movement has even been regarded as an alternative to both liberal individualism and socialism. Focusing on virtues of 'self-help' and voluntary work, this kind of movement targets specially women. (Moulineaux, 1996).

based on the principle of democratic equivalence respecting these differences. However, there is a problem; the recognition of the different identities can lead to their "essentialization", to their de-historization. In order to avoid this, according to Phillips (1987), we must try to find a new version of democratic equality that is able to recognize and represent these differences without creating absolute barriers. Dietz (1985) speaks of a "transcendent vision" that overcomes the narrow group interests and even feminism in order to undertake a citizen activity that includes and requires a masculine participation.

Analysing women's actions and movements we try to account for their heterogeneity but also for their 'nodal points', common interests, and taking as point of departure certain identities. These identities, even if they prove to be conjunctural, may find experiences, interests, goals or common aspirations that can be politically articulated. In this sense, feminist analyses can be considered an effort to discover all forms of subordination where the notion of woman is relevant. Consequently there will be as many feminist perspectives as forms of women subordination.[4]

The Political Participation of Mexican Women

Mexico was one of the last countries in Latin America to recognize the political rights of women (the right to vote in municipal elections in 1947 and in federal elections in 1953). Nevertheless the political participation of women was important even before the Mexican revolution (1910) as part of trade union, peasant and middle class movements, especially during the 1930s, in order to obtain electoral rights. In the 1940s the feminist movement started, mainly among middle-class sectors, and it was not until the 1970s that the urban-popular movement, that had mostly women among its rank and file, started to include women's claims. However, no close cooperation between the latter movement and the feminist movement would take place, despite the first UN Women's World Conference in Mexico City in 1975 and the parallel activities associated with it, until the 1980s.[5] Since the awakening of civil society in the 1980s, and particularly after the near defeat of the offical party, Partido Revolucionario Institucional, PRI (the Institutional Revolutionary Party), new women's organizations (organized by feminists committed to democratization) were cre-

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4. This is inspired by Mouffe (1992, p. 382): "there will be as many feminisms as forms of women subordination may exist".

5. On the parallel activities associated with this Conference see E. Jelin (1996), "Ciudadanía Emergente o Exclusión.

ated and their numbers had increased noticeably by the end of 1991.

The entry into NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) and the EZLN (Ejercito Zapatista de Liberación Nacional) rebellion in Chiapas in 1994 gave way to deep changes in Mexico. This rebellion that started as a symbolical reaction to the Mexican entry to NAFTA, aimed to remind both the Mexican government and the people of the miserable realities that most Indian people faced in Mexico. These realities were the other side of the coin the Mexican government wanted to show foreign investors attracted by NAFTA. However, it was not only an Indian rebellion, it also aimed to revive the Mexican civil society's participation in a structural transformation of the Mexican political system and political culture.[6] Moreover, the Zapatistas created a new political style symbolised in their motto: "to command by obeying" ('mandar obedeciendo') which means: leaders must listen to the people, they should be accountable and always in direct contact with the people, in other words: 'get rid of all authoritarianism'.

The Zapatistas also presented the situation and demands of Indian women ('The Women's Revolutionary Laws') that questioned the Indian women's traditional role and oppression within their communities and in society as large, thus creating for the first time in Latin America what we could call a feminist Indian movement. These revolutionary laws were the Zapatista women's demands to their communities, to their families and to the state. They demanded, among other things, the right to choose their husbands and the right to be elected to the community's decision-making positions (Rojas, 1994, 1996). The Revolutionary Laws that the Zapatista women called 'the program of demands' focused mainly on reviewing women's rights within the communities in general: women's rights to go to meetings, to participate in community councils, to continue studying after the basic school years, to choose the men whom they wanted to marry. The second version of the revolutionary laws again formulated these demands but stressed more on 'equality' and 'morality', which meant that women, as well as men, should be responsible for the family and should avoid any relationship outside marriage. (This is why urban

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6. The actual armed confrontation was short and it led to a period of peace negotiations up to 1996 when a peace treaty was signed ('Acuerdos de San Andres'). However, the lack of respect for these agreements from the government's side led to an escalation of the military presence and violence in the region, a sort of low intensity conflict with thousands of victims and refugees. It also led to the splitting of most Indian communities in two camps: pro-Zapatistas and pro-government, resulting in bloody internal strifes. In July 2000 a new federal government was elected and the PRI era came to an end. The new president Vicente Fox promised to put an end to the conflict and so far some troops have left certain areas of the region and some Zapatista sympathizers have been released from jail. However much is still to be done in order to reestablish peace. The Zapatistas' demands for autonomy and agrarian and cultural reforms demand a long-term perspective as to the solution of the conflict.

feminist women, as we shall see in the interviews, reacted so forcefully to the second version which they regarded as a "backlash" and concession to men's rules.)

All in all, the Zapatistas' contribution to the termination of the official party's hegemony, to the activation of civil society and to the democratization of Mexico was fundamental. In 1994, hundreds of civic organizations and NGOs gathered under a non-partisan umbrella coalition, the 'Civic Alliance', with the purpose of carrying out independent observations of the elections, through comprehensive monitoring of the entire electoral process (Alianza Civica/Observación 94). The organizations that made up the Civic Alliance came from a wide range of fields including human rights, labor, education, health, development and women's issues.

The leftist victory in the federal and municipal elections of 1997 provided new opportunities for women to participate, since the new Mexico City government invited several women organizations to take part in government policies by working with government agencies, thus establishing a bridge between the "institutionalized" and "autonomous" women's movements. However, not all organizations approved of this type of participation and this created new conflicts in the movements.

On March 8, 1998, 1300 women from all states of the country came to the Chamber of Deputies and opened the Women's Parliament of Mexico.[7] This event was the result of negotiations between a broad political spectrum of female deputies, politicians, academics, NGOs activists and representatives of several social movements. The mission of this Parliament was to discuss and promote a national legislative agenda and public policies to fight gender discrimination. In June the same year a national political and feminist association, Diversa, was created with more than 6,000 activists from different social sectors, e.g. trade unions, university women (teachers and students), feminists, representatives of NGOs and homosexual movements from all over the country. By the beginning of 1999, Diversa had already managed to gather the 40,000 members required to obtain its registration as a political association. Diversa's goals were to try to open new spaces for women and other minorities in public policies, to achieve equality between men and women at both private and public levels, to pursue politics in a *different way*, such as to increase the participation of citizens, to help local leaders, and to build a new political culture that respects diversity. In a certain way, Diversa represented the turning

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7. The Women's National Assembly for transition to democracy took the initiative to call for a Women's Parliament where the National Chamber of Deputies was symbolically occupied by women representatives from all sectors.

point for that part of the feminist movement that decided to pursue an active political role, to build political alliances and to become an active political force in order to achieve its goals.[8]

Moreover, the different parties generally accepted a quota system that required that at least 30% of the candidates in public elections should be women. However, not many parties respected this quota. Another important event was the selection of Rosario Robles to govern Mexico City, replacing Cuauhtemoc Cardenas who left this position to become the presidential candidate of 'Alianza por Mexico', the leftist coalition headed by 'Partido de la Revolución Democrática', PRD (the Democratic Revolution Party). The importance of this selection was not only symbolical – the first woman to become the mayor of Mexico City – but also political. Her performance during the last year of the PRD government was so positive that PRD retained control of the city government during the elections in the year 2000.

However, where the political presence of women during the July 2000 elections was concerned, not everything was positive. These were the first elections in which Diversa took part and they were a disappointment for this organization. The small leftist party to which Diversa offered its support was not able to win any representatives. Diversa did not appear during the political campaigns and women's issues lost ground both during and after the elections as a result of the rightist PAN's ('Partido de Acción Nacional') victory.[9]

Summarizing, and recalling the earlier political experiences back to the 1930s and 1940s, it can be noted, that even though the women's struggle to have their political rights recognized did gather a broad spectrum of social sectors, this alliance disappeared once these rights had been formally attained, i.e. when Mexican women got the right to vote in federal elections in 1953. Afterwards, as described above, women activists lost a common platform and there was a fragmentation of the groups that reflected their different social origins, interests, identities, goals and tactics. While middle class women gave priority to demands for political participation and sexual rights, peasant women, working women, indigenous women and urban-popular women struggled for the satisfaction of their practical and socio-economic demands. These two groups had hardly any

8. See: La Jornada: 14 June 1998. Also: interview with Patricia Mercado, Diversa's vice-president, December 1998.

9. PAN, 'Partido de Acción Nacional' is Mexico's Catholic and traditional right. Even though the declarations of the elected president (Fox) favored women's issues, one of the first consequences of these elections was the reaction of the most conservative groups of the Catholic Church against all kinds of abortion, even in cases of rape, of malformation or of diverse health risks for the mother.

point of contact. In addition, there was the context of a hegemonic party-system, authoritarian and repressive, where autonomous organizations had little margin for action. The economic crises of the 1980s and 1994, the rebirth of the citizen movement in 1988, the Zapatista uprising in 1994 together with the Zapatista women's rebellion against their life situation, their Revolutionary laws against poverty and the oppression of tradition, transformed this context. Women's organizations and other social movements became active and, as a result of these new conditions, diversity and heterogeneity was overcome in the form of new alliances, new 'nodal points'. Even the contradiction institutionalization – autonomy seemed to be temporarily overcome through the Parliament of Women (where all kinds of women's groups tried to press for changes to discriminatory laws).[10] Finally, Diversa tried to take the political initiative to attain certain goals of the feminist movements and to change the old political culture into something more democratic and respectful of diversity.

The new situation made many of the women's groups and women activists in all kind of groups aim to transform the Mexican political culture through participation – defined as a social practice that wants to exert an influence over the distribution and control of resources, mediated by the state. This participation is part of the reactivation of an active democracy in which individual citizens or groups claim their rights and express their responsibilities vis-à-vis the institutions represented by the nation state. However, even non-participants are aware of many of the problems the participants want to solve. Although sometimes lacking the same kind of experience and information possessed by the participants, non-participants reflect on these problems and even see participation as part of the solution, as we shall see through the empirical material.

If we define political culture as a set of beliefs, values and attitudes, norms and practices through which the citizens relate to the state, to political institutions and to government authorities (Massolo 1994:31), we see that women in Mexico are fighting against an authoritarian political culture born from the legitimacy of the Mexican revolution, based on the be-

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10. This is not the case of Chiapas, where the political conflicts have polarized positions even among women groups. Those who collaborate with the government in any way, the so called ''institutionalists', are totally rejected by those of the 'autonomous' movements, who oppose any collaboration with official institutions. This contradiction arose since the opportunities to participate in government policies opened in the 90s. This has created serious divisions concerning goals, risks and strategies. For the 'institutionalists' (those willing to work with official-state agencies, the goal is the feminization of the state, while the autonomous (those reluctant to cooperate with such official agencies) regard this option as unrealistic. They point out the risk of co-optation and mediatization of the movement and argue that can lose its long term goals of changing not only the policies, but also the rules and the style of making politics. This conflict can be reflected in the 'NGOization' of the movement, that is to say, as more NGOs are created from previous social movements. (Alvarez 1998)

lief in the omnipotence of a presidential system that concentrated power and provided goods and privileges. This system encouraged 'clientelist' relations and passivity as well as a lack of information on citizens' rights, and punished or neutralized critical attitudes or the search of alternatives. Furthermore, it inspired a general lack of credibility in its functionaries and authorities. This political culture, apart from being nationalistic and authoritarian, was also extremely paternalistic and masculine-oriented. Moreover, its influence has permeated even the opposition parties and several old and new social movements.

Many of the women participating in organizations aiming at the solution of various social problems, including those dealing mainly with women's demands, have tried to find new ways of transforming the system, of creating a new political culture that rejects most of the characteristics mentioned above. Whether the new rightist government elected year 2000 will change this political culture is difficult to say but most of the women we are to present are conscious that the whole system, including the opposition, share these authoritarian, masculine characteristics and that it needs to be changed if any real democratization is to take place in Mexico.

Women and Citizenship at the Urban Level:
Some Views of Both Participants and Non-Participants

Methodology

During the period between November 1998 and the end of January 1999, I carried out about 39 interviews in three cities in Mexico: Mexico City, Puebla and Guadalajara.[11] Several organizations were identified and selected. These were both women's organizations (such as Women Citizens in the Movement for Democracy and Diversa) and mixed organizations (such as the Zapatista support groups and the Civic Alliance). The women subjects of the interviews were selected with the help of the contact persons in the various organizations, although I tried to choose women from the grassroots level and not from the leadership level. Some interviews were also conducted with leaders but mostly for the sake of obtaining information about the organization. It is also necessary to make clear that several of the interviewees participated in several organizations at the

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11. At first my plans were to limit my interviews to two organizations only: Women in the Struggle for Democracy, 'Mujeres en Lucha por la Democracia', MLD) and Women Citizens in the Movement for Democracy, 'Ciudadanas en Movimiento por la Democracia', CMD). However, this proved difficult, as contacts with these organizations were temporarily broken. (Ciudadanas… 1996)

same time. Their ages varied between 23 and 60 years. Their levels of education and social origins are also diverse, although many of them belong to the lower urban middle class.

In the summer of the year 2000, I carried out a second round of interviews, this time mostly with non-participants (twelve in number). The criterion for the selection of interviewees was that their profiles should coincide with some of the profiles of the participants interviewed in the first round of fieldwork – in respect of age, social class, education levels etc. These interviews were not as extensive as those carried out during the first round, but they were also performed in three different cities.

All the interviews carried out in both rounds of the fieldwork were semi-structured, i.e. open with certain key themes. Starting with the interviewee's profile (age, educational level, etc.), three major themes were covered:

– Participation by Citizens in Politics. The history of their participation, goals of their organizations, experience of this participation and their vision of citizenship: rights, duties, possibilities, views on the Mexican political situation and the perspectives of change.
– Gender and Citizenship. Views on gender differences regarding participation, consequences for their private lives and families of this participation, views on the relationship between women and political power and of the Mexican political culture in a gender perspective, and their views on certain events such as the Zapatista Women's Revolutionary Law, the Women's Parliament and the creation of Diversa.
– The External Context. Points of view on Mexico's situation in the global context, on the relations of their organizations with other international organizations or women's movements, on regional economic integration and the effects of this integration in their daily lives, etc.

As in other types of qualitative studies, it is necessary to bear in mind that the aim is not to present a representative study of the views or situation of women. I do not pretend to generalize but to offer a glimpse, a sample of perceptions, views, and experiences from a diverse group of women whose only common denominator is their participatory activities or non-participatory activities. And I try to interpret these views, perceptions and experiences in relation to the concept of citizenship as these women understand it in Mexico at the end of the century.

In this article I present just a sample of this material in the form of four interviews with participant women and five with non-participants. I focus on the aspects of citizenship, participation, the specificity of women's contributions to the changes needed in the Mexican political system, and their views on the Zapatista women's movement.

The Interviewees

The profiles of the persons interviewed are as follows: two of the participants are young women, 23-26 years old, both with a university education although their social origins are different. Neither of them is married or has children. Both of them participate in young women's organizations: one in a group called 'Las Brujas' (The Witches), a cultural group of young women critical of the established culture as well as many feminist currents, and the other in the 'Red de Jovenes por los Derechos Sexuales y Reproductivos' (Young people's network for sexual and reproductive rights). They also belong to other organizations: one is a member of a mixed (men and women) organization, 'La Guillotina' (the Guillotine), a cultural group based on a journal of the same name, and the other is a member of one of the women's citizen organizations we have already described: Women Citizens in the Movement for Democracy.

The other two participant women presented here come from the urban popular movement, 'Asamblea de Barrios' (Slumquarters Assembly) and from 'Alianza Civica' (Civic Alliance). One of them also belongs to 'Caravana todo para todos' (the Chiapas support movement). Neither of these interviewees has a higher education, one is 38 years old and the other is 58. One of them has school-age children and the other adult children.

From the group of non-participants, two are middle-class, middle-aged housewives (43 and 38 years old) with university studies and secondary studies respectively. Only one of them has children (of school age). Both live in Colima, an industrial and university city with about 700,000 inhabitants. The other three are young women (20, 21 and 28 years old), two are students and one a working woman with secondary education. None of these young women is married or has children and they all live in Mexico City.

Regarding the group of participants we will start with their history of participation. Even though this varies from one to another, it can be seen that the young ones were influenced by their university environment. One of them also had a special family background. Her parents have participated in one way or another in popular movements since the 1968 student movement in Mexico. The 58 year-old woman started to participate

at a fairly young age as a result of her interest in social issues. Where the 38 year-old woman is concerned, her reason for participation had to do with concrete needs: the lack of a house. However, her parents also exerted an influence on her. They started to participate in the urban-popular housing movement long before her.

All these women give very positive accounts of their participation experiences, of an increase in their self-confidence, of personal development, of the establishment of friendship and solidarity links, of increasing engagement in a social project that tries to open "new spaces". However, they also describe several obstacles to this participation in the form of family conflicts (one of the women is in the process of obtaining a divorce) or even conflicts in their organizations. Some of these conflicts had to do with 'gendered reactions', 'paternalistic attitudes' or 'masculine protagonism'.

The non-participants agree that participation is a very important aspect and instrument for exercising citizenship. Their reasons for their non-participation vary. According to one of them, the 43 year-old housewife, she never found an organization that "convinced her", one in which people "were decent, not selfish or just wanted to be protagonists". According to another, also middle-aged, "people who become engaged grow tired"; it is difficult to get organized "without any support". Time is also mentioned as an obstacle to participation. The students do not speak of their own lack of engagement, but see in the lack of participation "a great deal of apathy and lack of interest" perhaps, in their opinion, because the state has not promoted it. The other young woman says that people are not used to participating, they are apathetic and even hostile because of their lack of understanding of what participation is. Mass media also bear a great deal of responsibility for this lack of participation: they lie and they identify politics with corruption and everything that is rotten in the country. And the people buy this kind of information; they do not care to make comparisons between different sources.

Views on Citizenship

Regarding citizenship, the four participant women seem to agree that the notion implies a number of rights and duties but they all refer to the importance of participation in the exercise of citizenship. For them participation is the only way to fulfil their rights as citizens. Another common view is the need to respect diversities and to incorporate plurality and tolerance.

For one of the young interviewees the notion of citizenship is linked to that of a nation and community project:

> "Citizenship (as a concept) implies the project one has for one's own community, for one's own neighborhood and in general for the nation, for example the duty to participate, the compromise one must make to participate. For example in your neighborhood there are several needs that have to be satisfied and the citizen has to help to solve these needs. I think that if constant citizen participation is attained, important changes can take place both at the level of the political structures and at that of the social structures." (Cid8-23a)[12]

For non-participants citizenship is naturally associated with rights and duties, mostly social, where the community is concerned. These rights take into consideration the family, the working place, and the local and national community. However, for one of the middle-aged women, these rights should not encompass all: criminals and in particular rapists should not benefit from "human rights". For both students citizenship has to do with cooperation in the community, rights and obligations, and mutual understanding. For the 28 year-old woman, citizens formally have the right to modify their environment but people are not aware of these rights and the notion of citizenship is thus a myth.

> "The notion of community is itself in the process of dissolution as well as the family. The notion of citizenship should encompass social and basic rights such as the right to food and to justice. Participation should also be a right but in Mexico it is a duty because it is the only way to make things change. In Mexico even the concept of fatherland has become devalued. The notions of country, nation, region and community have lost their real sense, everything centers round the individual." (N.P.10-28a)

All non-participants in this group stress the importance of information and awareness of the notions of political culture and citizenship. Participation is seen as part of this political culture but, they say, it is lacking in the Mexican political system; people are not informed, there is a lack of awareness and of engagement, even though, as some admit, more spaces for participation have opened up in the last few years.

Is being a woman of any significance for participation? For the young

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12. All quotations have a code: 'Cid' is the name code of the project for participants and 'N.P.' is the code for non-participants; the first number is the interview number and the second the age of the person interviewed.

participants, the exercise of citizenship by women is totally linked to the private context. They have to confront the private context before being able to participate. For men the private-public relationship is less evident.

"…yes, I think that we girls, we try to relate our political participation with personal processes, in contrast to the boys for whom the personal process is completely disassociated from their political participation, for us it is very close and I think that the experience of many girls that have worked in The Witches project is that the personal process is always there, you have to confront the family because, in order to participate and to be at the meetings, you have to confront your father and mother. Moreover, when you grow up and you have other kinds of experiences, love experiences, you continue to confront the political and the personal, you want to maintain consistency between them. This happens in all social classes and organizations. There is a moment when we women, we question our participation in relation to our personal life." (Cid8-23a)

"In a woman… this implies a much longer process to modify all internal things. It is not only to feel comfortable when you speak in public, it is something else and… I don't know, from those things that are very deep to basic things." (Cid6-26a)

Besides this confrontation, participation also demands time and energy that have to be taken from family tasks, especially when nobody else cares or wants to do them:

"Yes, it is different, the participation of women from that of men, yes I think so because, as I was telling you before, the double day's work, at home and outside, implies a lot of responsibilities for women, it's more difficult for them to say: "I'll soon come back", because they have to clean, wash dishes, make the beds etc. Even when men try to help, their help is mostly symbolic…" (Cid7-58a)

Thus participation finally questions the gender roles within the family and creates conflict situations when the men see their authority at risk:

"Our husbands see that we participate that we are pressed…they feel somehow mistreated… (for example) we have coordinating meetings on Thursdays and we finish at about ten, eleven o'clock, at night, our husbands are already at home and we arrive after them and that makes them

feel mistreated.". "I'm the one who has the right to come home late, not you, why do you do it"? (Cid36-38a)

The difficulties faced by women where participation is concerned are not discussed by non-participant women to the same extent as they are by the participants. This is somehow natural given the fact that these women lack actual experience of participation. The young ones point nevertheless to the fact that women participate in a different way to men, that women become engaged and involved in a much deeper way than men, they are also more steadfast, they work more. One of the middle-aged women also confirms that most women have not been given the opportunity to participate politically because they have been told they are inferior, their self-confidence has been mutilated. But, she adds, this is mostly their own responsibility since they are the ones who educate the children and who perpetuate the gendered patterns of behavior.

All the confrontations and conflicts referred to by participant women relate to a form of participation not formally considered to be political, but if politics includes all the areas and issues that affect citizens' autonomy and rights, participation becomes political and necessary for the exercise by citizens of their rights. Participation in all areas becomes political, since it is the expression of demands; it also represents the need to assume public responsibility.

> "…For example when we, in the young people's network for sexual and reproductive rights, understood these rights as part of the family… as part of our citizens' rights, it was very nice, very important because it helped us to integrate this issue in several places where it was previously very difficult to speak of sexual and reproductive rights.." (Cid6-26a)

When asked to specify which rights and duties they associate with citizenship, the interviewees try to refer to their own experiences in their organizations. The woman working in Asamblea de Barrios (the neighborhood assemblies) associates these duties with solidarity:

> "…Citizenship participation, what can I tell you, it takes many forms, many approaches, for example, when they are on the verge of dislodging people from their houses, let's say in a neighboring district, we come to give them support, we try to help them, to advise them on the alternatives they have…" (Cid36-38a)

Another aspect related to citizenship, that arises in all these interviews, is the need – the duty – to be tolerant when confronting diversity, especially if participation goes from the local to the national level:

> "We have responsibilities in the sense that the rights of others should be sacred for us, we should not try to impose our points of view but try to respect the diversity of opinions, actions and lifestyles. Our constitution should reflect this diversity of Mexican men and women if the Indians have a particular way of being, the Mestizos have another, and all of them should be recognized as citizens, as people who have the same rights in spite of the color of their skin or their social origin…" (Cid7-58a)

> "I think that when we think of participating at the local level we also have to think of participating at the national level. Linking this to the idea of diversity, you cannot think of local or national participation if you don't think about diversity, that we are different, have diverse points of view and different forms of participation and different ways of solving problems. I think that the issue of recognizing diversity and differences is a key point that could make it possible to transform this authoritarian culture." (Cid8-23a)

For non-participants citizenship is also associated with mutual help, with solidarity, with giving something to the community. But where tolerance is concerned, one of the middle-aged women in this group is, as we have already seen, very emphatic on the limitation of rights for rapists and other kinds of criminals. This can be explained as being a result of the authoritarian political environment Mexico has lived under for centuries, but it may also be related to a climate of sexual violence against which women are now reacting forcefully.

Summing up, we see that for these women (participants and non-participants), whatever their social origin, age or educational level, political participation is fundamental in order to exercise a form of citizenship that aims to solve the existing social problems and even to create a new political culture. The problems they relate to are not automatically linked to women's issues, they are sometimes local, sometimes of a national character and they have to do with their different identities. However, all interviewees agree that participation has different implications for men and women (they thus assume their common identity as women, although not as feminists). Participation for women is always connected to the private sphere as an encouragement, an obstacle or a limitation. Women, according to participant women, always search for coherence, linking personal and public processes – something that quite often results in conflicts

at the level of family relations. There is also an agreement to link rights and duties to solidarity as well as to respect for plurality and diversity.

Among non-participant women, such tolerance is not so clear where criminals are concerned. On the whole, non-participants are very critical of the Mexican population in general due to its lack of awareness, information and engagement. They give participation the same importance that the participants do and somehow justify their own lack of engagement by pointing to obstacles that even the participants admit to – namely lack of time, lack of good "decent" organizations, disappointment with past experiences and even a certain lack of self-esteem.

But if more women participated, if they all became interested in the public domain, could this change the existing power structures? What is the image these women have of women as politicians?

Would the Political System Change if There Were More Women?

Both participants and non-participants agree that women in Mexico are mostly tied up with the practical tasks of daily life, i.e. that they are the ones who take care of families' practical needs, that they are nearer to local life realities, and that their skills and experiences would make a positive contribution to political participation that aims at solving social needs.

> "I think that (the system) would change (if there were more women) in the sense that women are very much linked to the needs of daily life, not to the politics of pamphlets or to that of structures and institutions. We women, we don't normally lose our link with daily realities." (Cid8-23a)

However, only the older women among the participants seem to idealize women's virtues as superior to those of men, for example honesty, sense of justice and sensibility. The younger women are somehow more sceptical of this image. Nevertheless, when they speak of women's attitudes to power, all the four participants agree that being a woman is no guarantee of totally different behavior to that of men. Moreover, some of these women who reach power have to imitate a masculine model in order to succeed.

> "…the problem is that when I see the news or TV and I see a woman like Maria de los Angeles Moreno and many other Congresswomen that were in the feminist movement for some period, it would seem there is no difference (to men). Then I'm somehow confused because I'm convinced that women relate in a different way to power, but I'm also convinced that

women in power positions can also react like men, …it's very difficult to go alone against the world,…there is a whole structure and even if you can change it in a certain moment you must be able to function in those structures…" (Cid8-23a)

"I think it depends on which women you speak of, there are all kinds.. those that act in a "machista" way when they have power, they have all the macho attributes, they give orders, and take decisions as such. There are others that try not to fall into such a pattern, they try to find a balance, but it is very complicated for these women, they risk being eliminated by the men" (Cid6-26a)

For the older participants, women who make a political career are expected to have more qualities than men, "they have to be more intelligent, more competent" in order to succeed.

"Look, I think that when a woman comes to power, more attention is paid to what she does, she is expected to do more, to be more honest, to be more intelligent and to have more visions and I think that women in general, with certain horrible exceptions, have played a very positive role, trying to have a better government. It is true that there are few who have succeeded in attaining important positions but they have done a good job." (Cid7-58a)

But, according to some of these women, in order for the massive participation of women to have any effect in terms of changes in the political system, one has to define what changes one is speaking about, at what level. In brief there is a need of a new political style As some interviewees argue, this is what many women, both in the Zapatista movement and in different feminist groups, have been looking for:

"I think that more is required than an increase in women's political participation. What most women have proposed is a new form for politics… the Zapatistas have been very clear in this matter when they ask for new forms for politics and from my viewpoint these new forms are somehow linked to feminist movements since one of the first movements to refer to this was the feminist movement…" (Cid8-23a)

Nevertheless, participation by more women is also relevant, according to the participants. And an increase in women's participation will, of necessity, result in new styles of politics and other major changes, since women have something to contribute:

> "But anyhow it is relevant that women participate in increasing numbers
> because of the experience we have and even the Zapatista experience has
> been a key factor. In the transformation of community life in Chiapas, not
> only have women occupied important positions in the leadership of the
> Zapatista movement, in the community assemblies, but they have also
> achieved important cultural transformations in the communities. I don't
> know if one can do the same at the city level but I think that women have
> an advantage – our link with daily life allows us to go from our daily tasks
> to formal politics. This guarantees that we can transform our local reality,
> the one in which we live." (Cid8-23a)

Many of the above-mentioned viewpoints are shared by non-partici-
pant women.

However, there is more idealization of women's qualities in this group.
Both young and middle-aged interviewees agree that women do have spe-
cial qualities that could improve politics. Women, according to these
views, are more sensitive to social issues, more honest, responsible, en-
gaged and efficient – they are not looking for protagonism and leadership.
The example of the new mayor in Mexico City, Rosario Robles, is men-
tioned in a very positive way. On the other hand, women are also more
sentimental and conflictive.

> "The massive participation of women would really make a difference.
> Even those women who don't participate, who are housewives, we also
> think and have dreams, all women think, we are all human beings.
> Women are subordinated but they have potentialities, sensibility, they are
> more realistic, and more revengeful". (N.P.1-43a)

The non-participants agree that the phenomenon of 'machismo' is still
a major obstacle to the career of women politicians. Nevertheless, women
have become more aware and active in the last few years, women politi-
cians are more plentiful, and a massive participation of women as a group
would be very positive for the system, it could become more democratic
and human.

As we have seen both participants and non-participants stress the im-
portance of participation and even agree that a massive participation
would start changing things. Some of the women of both groups idealize
women qualities in politics – sensitivity, responsibility – realism, near to
local realities, pragmatism etc. Some of them also point to the prize
women must pay when they become politicians within the framework of
masculine rules, they become as authoritarian and sometimes as corrupt

as men. Therefore, something else – apart from participation – is needed. A new political style, a new way of doing politics, the way the Zapatistas have introduced. Consequently, it is necessary to see how do these women appreciate and perceive the Zapatista movement.

Are the Zapatista Women Showing a New Way?

What do these women think of the Zapatista experience in Chiapas? It is important to look at these views to get a glimpse of how and if this movement has changed Mexican political parameters. In the first place, all of the participant women support the Zapatista movement; they look at it as a symbol of the new style mentioned above.

> "I think that the Zapatista movement has a value, more as a form of giving expression to the people and organizations that try to build alternative projects, than in their concrete political proposals. The Zapatista movement created renewal, not only of the women's movement, but also of many other movements. Before 1994 most leftist organizations found themselves in a kind of lethargy as a result of the blows they received from the government. The Zapatista movement came to remind us that it was not true that we were becoming part of the First World and that the only alternative was wild capitalism, that there were several other alternatives apart from capitalism -socialism, that there were possibilities for a struggle as well as for democratic transformation." (Cid8-23a)

The Zapatista women's demands are also supported in principle by all the participant women. The older women are the most positive to these demands but they are also the least informed of their content. The younger women's support is somewhat conditional.

> "The Revolutionary Law (of Women) is rather loose because women's participation in the communities is complicated even if they are very strong and resolute, even if their demands are included. The ones that participate are few, they are like an elite, they speak Spanish, they are the ones that have already broken the household barriers, the ones that are no longer locked in their houses". (Cid6-26a)

> "The first version (of the Revolutionary Law of Women) provided good encouragement for all women that have been participating in youth organizations or women's organizations because it spoke of the need to make women juridical subjects in the case of Indian communities and of the need to establish equality in rights and duties. The second version was a

shock to us because if we imagine that movements tend to evolve, to advance, the second version was a reverse. I have not seen it myself but I have heard several comments of people who have seen it and made a comparison from our viewpoint as women." (Cid8-23a)

We return to the issue of heterogeneity and tolerance. What we see in the opinions is that while the older women participants are very enthusiastic about the Zapatista women's movement; they are the ones that have less concrete information about the movement. They are aware of the problems faced by Indian women, of the discrimination they have always suffered, of their weaknesses, and they express an eager wish to help. The younger participant interviewees seem to know more about the Zapatista women's demands, they are also supportive in principle but at the same time they are highly critical. For them, the changes are slow or "loose" or even reactionary – such as the second version of the Revolutionary Law for Women was perceived to be. These views can be regarded as urban feminist positions and they could be interpreted as a lack of tolerance, at least regarding 'methods'. This would lead us to the problem of unity and the discussion of common strategies, to the problem of the rift between the institutionalists – those who accept to cooperate with the government and the autonomous – those who reject such a cooperation (see footnote 10).

Among non-participant women there is no general support for the Zapatistas. But it is not disapproval; it is a lack of information, of clarity about the Zapatista demands. One of the middle-aged women says she thought everything would change when the uprising started but then nothing happened. The other middle-aged woman even says that the Zapatistas do not know what they want, but she also admits she lacks information and that most mass media channels have distorted their news on this issue. As to the Zapatista women's demands, none of the interviewees has any knowledge of them and thus they have no opinion on the issue. However, the 28 year-old interviewee makes a reflection on the enormous differences of realities and rights between urban-mestizo and Indian women. Her information comes from her mother who is active in an organization supporting the Zapatista struggle, and she says that when she travelled with her mother to Chiapas she was deeply affected by the reality of poverty she saw.

"I don't know so much about the revolutionary law of the Zapatista women but I know something about Chiapas because of my mother. As a woman in Mexico I take some rights for granted, that is why I was

surprised to hear their demands (the Zapatista women's demands). When I went to Chiapas I discovered a world totally different to mine, people are very simple but they are good people, with their traditions, their poverty, living in conditions that should not exist." (N.P.10-28a)

As we can see, non-participant women, even more than participant women, are affected by a lack of information that, in their case, is made more serious by a lack of interest and engagement. However, they themselves seem to be aware of this lack of information, they admit that they rarely read any newspapers, and most of the information they get is through TV and radio, which they also admit, provide a highly distorted picture of events. This could be an example of what they themselves call lack of political culture, of social awareness.

On the other hand something else can be seen in these interviews. Both the young participants and the 28 year-old non-participant underline the difference between their perspective and the Indian women's perspective. For the young participant women the revolutionary laws are not what they expected, they express a certain disappointment about the Zapatista women's radicalism. For the young non-participant, it was a shock to see the difference between her world as a young urban woman and the realities of Indian women, it was a surprise to hear demands for things she takes for granted in her urban middle class life. This would take us to the question of whether one can speak of the same sort of citizenship for women from such different worlds – who nevertheless share the same country.

Final Reflections

As we have seen, in Mexico as well as in many other countries, the citizen struggle of women is not only about their right to vote and to be elected, or their right to be able to exercise their rights within their community, families and the state – but also about transforming an authoritarian and 'masculinist' political culture.

Women – whether they participate or not – are aware of the existence of this culture. And both groups agree that participation, engagement, involvement, and public responsibility are essential for the exercise of citizenship, for change in a system that is highly undemocratic. Participant women – whether in their feminist movements or in popular organizations – have learned that it is only through participation, understood as a social practice that wants to exercise an influence on the distribution and control of resources, that they can have an impact on the system against

which they are struggling. This participation can be also regarded as part of the reactivation of an active democracy where individual citizens or groups claim their rights and express their responsibilities vis-à-vis the institutions represented by the nation state. These groups see active participation as the only way to end their marginalization, their subordination, and to fulfil their citizenship.

The experiences of participation of the women we have presented here suggest that both personal development processes and family background are important in the development of this type of participation. Their experiences of participation are also diverse although most experiences are very positive. However, these experiences have implied a cost in terms of time, energy taken away from family tasks and life, and even family conflicts. According to their own views, participation demands much more of women. Their private life is intimately linked to any public actions and if they start asking for equality as citizens, their search for coherence will soon bring them to ask for equality at home.

Both participant and non-participant women in this sample agree that, apart from increasing women's participation it is necessary to impact the system by changing the *political style*. There should be a search for alternative political methods, for an alternative *political culture*. This alternative style for politics is not necessarily feminist – although feminists have claimed such a renewal as a need – but can also come from such a movement as the Zapatista movement. In any case, it has to break with the authoritarian 'masculist', 'machista' model that exists today. And according to the interviewees, women have special skills to contribute: they are more in contact with daily realities, they have more sensibility, they are more honest, they work more and carry out what they undertake to do, although they can be more conflictive and revengeful. If the political style and the political culture changed, women who became politicians would not have to pay the price of having to become like men in order to succeed. This would also result in a real tolerance of diversity.

This is a somewhat idealized picture of women's contribution to politics that not many feminists in the Western world would agree with if we look at the criticism leveled at the maternalist models. Women's special experiences, caring skills, contact with local realities and needs, are these qualities associated with traditional societies such as that in Mexico? Is the identity of women as traditional caring beings in Mexico so strong as to claim a generalization of such qualities beyond class, age and educational level? I don't think this is the case but the private situation of each of them (the famous private-public dichotomy) is certainly relevant to explain these women's views and possibilities of participation.

Participation is certainly linked to citizenship – participation in general, not only that traditionally linked to public affairs, to politics. *Public responsibility and political participation* are both needed to change a political culture considered highly undemocratic (even after the recent election results). Public responsibility is linked to the idea of a community project at both the local and national level. Citizenship is engagement and engagement is participation. But – as the non-participant group shows – it also requires information, interest, awareness, personal development and strong self-confidence. Is this a challenge these women are prepared to meet? As I noted in the beginning, this work should be regarded as one of the partial results of a research project that hopes to explore empirically, in two diverse contexts, a much debated notion that has lost its concrete meaning for many people, but which is the basic element for the construction of any real democracy, namely citizenship.

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Gender and Power in Muslim Societies:

Issues for Development Practice

SHERIN SAADALLAH

Introduction

This paper is mainly dedicated to offering a descriptive and analytical introduction to mechanisms of gender and power in Muslim Societies, whilst also discussing the problematic framework for development practitioners. Thus the first section of the paper mainly deals with the most important elements affecting and shaping the status of women in Muslim societies. These include the role of factors such as Islam as a religion and faith, Islamic and historical memory, the development of Islamic resurgence and emergence of political Islam-Fundamentalism, the process of Islamization at the societal level, and also the pertinent, intrinsic compounds and dynamics of patriarchy. The second section of the paper is dedicated to policy level recommendations that may assist development practitioners in undertaking gender-targeted development projects as part of overall social development in such societies.

The uneven status of men and women in Muslim societies has attracted considerable attention. It has been suggested both at academic, developmental and layman levels that the unequal relationship between the sexes and the non-amelioration of gender inequality are products of Islam as a religion. This hypothesis is questioned within the thematic evolution of this work, which emphasizes that it may be a culmination of factors which exert an effect on the stratagems of society and its workings in a Muslim societal organization. The restriction or use of Islam as a scapegoat to blame or legitimize injustices against women is a shortsighted approach, that consolidates these injustices rather than contributes to alleviating them. Hence, it is important to address the situation from a multifaceted, multidisciplinary level of inquiry to try to reach optimum understanding, albeit at a minimal level, as a prerequisite to reach a struc-

tured, efficient developmental policy.

Some of the most basic questions that we may raise at this point are: What role does Islam actually play in defining the role and status of women in Muslim societies? Is it the religion, or a variant of male, patriarchal-based interpretations that affects women's place in society? What other related factors affect and reinforce this status? How do we deal with the prerogatives for change and social development aiming at a gender-just society, within the delineated context?

Religion and the Dialectics of Interpretation: Gender and Power in Islam

Islam as a religion has laid the foundations of the relationship between the sexes in the Koran, the *Sunna*[1], and the body of Islamic Jurisprudence or *Fiqh*, built up over the centuries. When we explore the dynamics of gender in Islam as a religion, we have to do it at two levels:
  - the level of 'Text' comprising the Koran and
    the Hadiths[2].
  - the level of interpretation, comprising the influx of historical/cultural influences that are external to Islam.

Considering the first level, as Bodman (1998, p. 5) reiterates "the Koran makes it unmistakably clear that in the eyes of God women are the equal of men". This equality, however, is limited to the relationship of men and women to God, and the carrying out of religious duties and rituals. There are also certain exceptions in certain circumstantial situations (ibid., 1998, p. 5). Stowasser (1984, p. 21) further confirms that "both men and women have their full humanity and bear the burden of equal moral responsibility".

Within human relationships the picture becomes even more complex. A specification of roles is delineated where women are portrayed as being under the protection of males, be they husbands or next of kin. The hierarchical role[3] of men is mentioned in Surah 4 (Women, verse 34): "Men

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1. Sunna is the traditions and sayings (also known as Hadiths) of the Prophet.

2. The Hadiths were recorded across different epochs of Islamic history. They have numbered in the thousands. Some have been discovered to be forgeries, whereby they were used as a tool to legitimize certain matters of issue across Islamic empires, in trying to consolidate the position of Muslim rulers, and patriarchal tendencies and traits that were assimilated cross culturally from conquered territories.

3. Here I stress the use of the subjective 'role' rather than status in the light of a more liberal interpretation of the verses, where hierarchy stems from the nature of responsibilities accrued upon men, and hence from a specific form of division of labor and role-assignations.

are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has made one of them excel the other, and because they spend (to support their women) from their means."[4] (See also Mernissi, 1996, p. 68).

Different verses proceed to regulate the relations between the sexes in the area of marriage, divorce and family. The Koran also regulates inheritance and testimonial leverage by explicit verses. Our first impression when analyzing the verses that denote the rights and duties of men unto women and vice versa in marriage, family and divorce, is that they are based on a patriarchal reproduction of gender roles. Hence, according to the text:

– "Marriage is regarded as a sacred institution where men are economically responsible for the maintenance of their wives.
– Men are able to take up to four wives.
– Men are the natural initiators of divorce, except under specific circumstances.
– Men are allowed to marry women of other heavenly religions, while women are restricted to monogamy and are only allowed to marry Muslims.
– The testimony of one man is equivalent to the testimony of two women. While women are entitled to inheritance, this right is distinctly regulated not to equal men" (Stowasser, 1984, pp.15-22).

These are only a few examples presented for the benefit of our present analysis. However, as Stowasser (1984, p. 14) confirms, it is important to study the Koran against the background of pre-Islamic society – i.e. *Jahiliyya*[5] society. Hence one may make some further clarifications to the above-cited regulations:

– The inferior status of women in pre-Islamic society made the abuse of women an accepted aspect of life, where women were treated as property, and even inherited along the male line in the tribe, or clan. The sanctity of marriage according to the Koran has come to re-instate the institution of marriage as a "contract between a man and a woman" (ibid., p. 15).

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4. The Koran is cited from the translation by Dr. Mohammed Taqi-ud-Din Al Hilali and Dr.Mohammed Muhsen Khan. Medinah:King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Holy Qu'ran, p. 113.

5. Name denoted to pre-Islamic society, which means ignorance reflecting the state of ignorance that prevailed before the advent of Islam.

– The ability of men to take up to four wives was checked
by the same verse that allowed it. Thus, "a verse allows (a
man) to have four wives, provided he treats them equally,
but a later passage casts divine doubt: 'Ye are never able
to be fair and just as between women even if it is your
ardent desire'" (Bodman, 1998, pp. 5-6).

– Men are the natural initiators of divorce, but women are
allowed to request the right to initiate divorce by stating
in the marriage contract their possession of 'Isma'a[6].
Women can further opt for divorce under more general
circumstances if they ransom themselves, by forfeiting all
economic rights they are entitled to after divorce, accord-
ing to the principle of Khul'a[7].

– The monogamy of women and the restriction to their marry-
ing a Muslim derives from the patrilineal social system where
the children inherit the name and religion of the father.

– The regulation of inheritance on an unequal basis
between men and women derives from the regulation of
roles, whereby men are declared as economically
responsible for providing for the women. This emulates in
essence a patriarchal division of labor, and role definition.
But taken against the background of pre-Islamic society,
where "women were not allowed the holding, or in any
case the uncontrolled disposal, of their possession"
(Stowasser, 1984, p. 15; Levy, 1969, pp. 95-96), it may be
viewed from a different perspective, if reminiscent in our
analysis of a level of historical determinism.

It is thus evident that when studying the Koran against the back-
ground of pre-Islamic society, both the social status and the legal rights
of Muslim women were improved through Koranic legislation (Stowass-
er, 1984, p. 15). Stowasser further argues that in spite of the different vers-
es overseeing a level of difference between men and women in the con-
duct of their relationships within a social unit, "woman's essential equal-
ity with man is more complete in Islam than it is in Judaism and Chris-

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6. Right to initiate divorce.

7. Egypt has just passed an amendment to the personal Status Law, which establishes this principle
as a legal ground for women to obtain divorce (Law No. 1 for the year 2000). This is considered
a breakthrough in legal reform at the level of Muslim societies, aimed at relieving women and
ordering their unfulfilled legitimate rights (according to Islamic text). This trend has long been
fought by the more conservative, traditional clergy who resolve to the active limitation of
women's space in Muslim societies.

tianity". In this regard she explains that this level of diminished equality stems from the treatment by the two religions of Eve as transgressor, cursing her before Adam, while according to the Koran Adam and Eve were portrayed as transgressors jointly held responsible for mortal sin (ibid., p. 22).

In spite of this argument about women's essential equality with men in the Koran, we are witnesses of strong conservatism within Islam today that has superseded, in some of its aspects, the legitimate rights bestowed upon women according to the sources[8]. This regression in the status of women, and the further unequal treatment and confinement of her space did not evolve solely due to source texts. Interpretation (which had been historically restricted to males), has contributed greatly in solidifying the patriarchal status quo in Muslim societies rather than dismantling it. Thus, in the light of religious commentaries, or interpretation (known as *Tafseer*) or super commentaries[9] (known as *Hawashi*) – a trend has developed through history, whereby confinement and inequality have been further reinforced. Hence Stowasser confirms that "the process of progressive exclusion and increasing restrictions imposed on women (was clearly) visible through comparison of the original Koranic legislation with the series of commentaries which later ages produced" (ibid., p. 28). The same can be argued for the Hadiths which prove in their compilation that "the later the source, the more abundant, detailed and normative-restrictive the information on women (which) it contains" (ibid., p. 31).

One may conclude that the Koran has improved the *status* of women compared with pre-Islamic times, in spite of its tendency towards a patriarchal model of *role-play*. However, the unequal role-play between men and women is clearly more defined in contemporary Muslim societies. The Koran is, as mentioned above, based on the 'man as breadwinner' model (to use a modern connotation in analyzing a classical Text), where the division of labor specified reflects a society where women are dependants, and the weaker sex. This does not, however, negate the equality between men and women unto God, and hence equal gender entitlements to opportunity.

Islam (and more specifically the Koran), in spite of starting from a level above other scripture religions (Ahl al-Kitab, 'People of the Book', is the name given by the Koran to the Jewish and Christian communities) in its treatment of women, has been relegated to becoming more conservative and static towards their emancipation even within the boundaries of the

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8. That is the Koran and the Sunna.

9. Extra commentaries on interpretation that are built on the practice of what is known as Iqtias or interpretation of implicit meaning through the use of dialectic analogy.

basic Text. Male-dominated interpretation and jurisprudence[10] have contributed in part to this. I will now move on to discuss other factors contributing to the distinct institutionalization of patriarchy and gender inequality encountered in Muslim society.

Shaping the Status of Women: Islamic Historical Memory

The effect of Islamic and historical memory on shaping the status of women is an important aspect for understanding the present social realities present in most Muslim countries today. Mernissi states that the Koran, in similarity with the other holy texts of the scripture religions, Christianity and Judaism, "proffers a model of hierarchical relationships and sexual inequality" (Mernissi, 1996, p. 14). This is reinforced by the historical legacy of Islam whereby the "concept of Jawari[11] (or highly accomplished, learned, exquisite female pleasure slaves) came into being … these sacred and secular models[12] of woman had enormous influence on the creation and maintenance of sex roles in Muslim civilization" (ibid., p. 14).

Thus, counter to the developments in other scripture religions, Islamic historical memory has contributed to the reinforcement of the patriarchal foundations already existent in the Arab society where Islam first appeared. It has also integrated other exogenous cultural aspects, and influences that came to be assimilated during the spread of the Islamic Empire allowing for "sexual inequality to reassert itself" (ibid., p. 69). Thus the Golden Age of Islam[13] is directly associated with an extreme form of patriarchal social and ruling order. As Mernissi (1996) elaborates, this has been depicted in works of fiction produced throughout Islamic History, centuries after the passage of the Golden Age, such as Arabian Nights, and also in non-fictional accounts by historians such as Al-Asfahani, Al-Massoudi and others (ibid., pp. 70-71). Mernissi proceeds to confirm that those directly contesting and resisting women's entitlements to their rights, and an ameliorated form of gender inequality (let alone complete gender equality), have selected the most absolutist period of Islamic memory as embodied in and symbolized by the figure of 'the Jariya' or female slave (ibid., p. 89).

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10. Body of Islamic Law and regulations.

11. Described by Mernissi as a fabricated archetype.

12. Mernissi denotes the sacred Model as 'the Houri' mentioned in the Koran, and the secular as the concept of Jariya assimilated during the Abbasid Empire. For a more detailed account, refer to Mernissi (1996), chapter VII.

13. The age of the spread of the Islamic Empire and its consolidation.

In addition to Mernissi's argument offered above, one finds the picture deficient if no mention is made of the role and interplay of the modern historical experience of Muslim societies. Particular emphasis is to be placed here on the colonial and nationalist experience. This in many aspects confirms the conclusion made by Kandiyoti that "an adequate analysis of the position of women in Muslim societies must be grounded in a detailed examination of the political projects of contemporary states and of their historical transformations" (Kandiyoti, 1991, p. 2). As Muslim nations resorted to build their 'imaginary communities' of post colonial, independent nation states in the first half of the Twentieth Century, a distinct cultural nationalism came to the fore. This new cultural nationalism called for a return to authenticity and the question of women's position within society became an integrated part of the discourse (ibid., pp. 2-7).

Two main trends appeared when dealing with the issue of women in a transforming society, namely a liberal, modernizing force, and a conservative, ultra-nationalist force. The first wave was represented by a group of feminists who sought to modernize the existing ideology on women's space and options for emancipation in accordance with the Western-oriented discourse on women's rights. The resisting group considered these modernizers as serving to the West and considered their attempts as a colonial production, hitting at the essence of the cultural particularism of the indigenous society. The resisting group resorted to a regression to authenticity through stressing Islamic values, and using women's demarcation to private space as a tool and a symbol of this new, evolving form of nationalism. Hence, "colonial domination and continuing ties of dependence with the West created an area of cultural resistance around women and the family" (ibid., p. 7). The parameters of class were also of relevance in this formula, where the upper and upper-middle advantaged classes composed the former group, while the second derived its membership from a grassroots base, at the top of which was a growing petite bourgeoisie. Thus it is safe to say that "the issue of gender overlaps nationalism, colonialism, class, and even (in some cases) ethnic boundaries" (Gerami, 1996, p. 76) in Muslim societies[14].

Gender and Fundamentalism: The Discourse for Regression

Deriving from the forces of cultural nationalism, movements advocating a return to an Islamic ethos developed. One of these movements was 'Is-

14. For a discussion along the same lines also refer to Kandiyoti, Introduction, pp.7-9.

lamic Fundamentalism'. The term 'Islamic Fundamentalism' has been used throughout the literature interchangeably with 'Islamism' and 'Political Islam', Islamic Fundamentalism being a category of Islamism, and a concrete embodiment of the ideological, and activist characteristics of modern Political Islam (Ciment, 1997, p. 78).

Islamic Fundamentalism should, however, be distinguished from any connotations that may derive similarities between it as a phenomenon, and other forms of religious fundamentalism, especially Christian Fundamentalist movements. In many ways Islamic Fundamentalism is not comparable to its Christian counterpart, since the difference between the two phenomena is as real as the difference between Islam and Christianity (ibid., pp. 3-4).

As Ciment (p. 62) further confirms, "Fundamentalism is a problematic concept when applied to Islam as a religion and Islamism as a political ideology". And in spite of being originally a concept emanating within the West to label such trends in twentieth-century Christianity, it is "applied cross-culturally to a religion that shares much with, and differs much from, Christianity" (ibid., p. 62). The difference between the two types of 'Fundamentalism' emanates predominantly from the assumption that "Islam possesses an elaborate historical body of religion-inspired law and state theory, and a tradition of applying them, that has no precise counterpart in the development of Christianity" (ibid., p. 62).

Furthermore, within the argument presented by Emara (1998) in his book *Fundamentalism between Islam and the West*, a clear distinction is made between Islamic and Christian fundamentalism. He emphasizes the revolutionary characteristics of the Islamic hybrid, in its return to, and use of, the original sources and religious texts, represented by the Koran and the Shari'a[15]. It is a modernizing trend, in spite of its calls for regression to the original texts. In the same vein, Ciment (1997, p. 79) claims that Islamic Fundamentalism "while seemingly a return to Islamic roots, is, in fact, inherently modern in its outlook .. it tries to modernize authentic Islamic sources" (Ciment, 1997, p. 79).

But this "modernizing activity" is, as Gerami (1996, p. 34) confirms, a selective one. He presents an alternative, more holistic image, departing from the distinctly discursive analysis presented above. He reiterates that Fundamentalism in general (including the Islamic hybrid) is defined as "an all-encompassing social phenomenon responding to and rejecting modernism" (ibid., p. 34). Attempts to limit issues concerning women to the private sphere is partly connected to a conservative stance against

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15. Shari'a is the body of Islamic Law or guiding principles.

modernism[16]. Due to the practical difficulties of doing away completely with modernism, "the goal (becomes) the selective adaptation of modernism… It is in this selective adaptation of modernism to Islam that the private domain is singled out to be the bastion of incorruptible Islam" (ibid., p. 37).

This argument may entail what I choose to denote as the 'fallacy of Islamic Fundamentalists as modernizers'. In spite of their call for new interpretation, the direction is more conservative and regressive than that of the traditionalists[17] themselves, affecting directly women as a vulnerable group within the parameters of the absolutist patriarchal delineation their ideology represents.

Categories of Feminism

Karam (1998, pp.9-13) has divided feminism developing in contemporary Muslim societies, taking Egypt as an example, into three categories.
- *Secular Feminists,* grounding their discourse outside religion, and stressing in their activism the international discourse on human rights.
- *Muslim Feminists,* who resort to use Islamic sources such as the Koran and the Sunna to validate their discourse on equality between the sexes in an attempt to reconcile Islam and the human rights discourse.
- *Islamist Feminists,* who comprise women from the rank and file of Islamic Fundamentalists/Islamists, who are conscious of a level of oppression directed against women: in their resistance they resort to Islamic principles.

Karam herself recognizes in her analysis that 'Islamist Feminists' as a label is meant to categorize this group of women, but may not imply structurally and ideologically a level of authentic feminism, but an ameliorated level of confined struggle. One tends, however, to reiterate that the labeling of this group as 'Islamist Feminists' may cause a degree of ambiguousness due to the confinement of women's struggle within this group. Furthermore, the Islamist Feminists' voiced opinion that "women are oppressed precisely because they try to be 'equal' to men and are therefore

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16. A distinction should be made here between the connotation of the process of Fundamentalism as 'modernizing' within a restricted approach to interpretation per se, and 'modernism' as exemplified by the paradigm of modernity.

17. Those calling for the closure of the door of interpretation, and restricting it to Islamic Jurisprudence as represented in the Four Schools of Islamic Law also known as madahheb.

being placed in unnatural settings and unfair situations, which denigrate them and take away their integrity and dignity as women" (ibid., p. 10) is a distinctly gendered outlook.

In spite of this ambiguity, Karam upholds that their activism and mission of 'structured *Jihad*' or struggle aiming at the Islamization of society, has allowed them to "enhance and reconceptualize women's roles within the family (as mothers and wives), and gives women a sense of value, political purpose and confidence" (ibid., p. 10). They are thus equal in importance to men, but in different ways (ibid., p. 10). Whether this level of activism is denoted as feminist or emancipatory is clearly debatable. The role of women as domestic agents is hereby reinforced, rather than their aptitude for acting as economic agents (Mernissi, 1996, p. 66)[18].

The discussion presented above is crucial in delineating the realities being shaped in Muslim societies today. The calls for regarding Islamist/Fundamentalist activists as a new breed of feminists does little to limit the injustices and power imbalances resulting from gender inequality between the sexes. Furthermore, it acts to reinforce the hierarchical power relations that have become rooted between men and women in Muslim societies. The Islamist feminists' argument is very much in line with the gender role 'functional paradigm' presented by Gerami (1996, pp. 9-10) where "the functional differentiation of the sexes is (regarded) as a natural truism, man the provider and woman as the nurturer". The result, he maintains, is a "hierarchical dichotomy delineating the feminine and masculine functions of the sexes" (ibid., p. 10).

Another Shaping Influence: Societal Islamization

In addition to the above discursive attempt to delineate the nature of gender and power in Muslim societies, one may add an additional factor that has come to constitute an indirect but strong influence. The development of a level of societal Islamization in Muslim countries has gained momentum in the last two decades. By this we mean a process of popular/grassroots level of transition towards a more religiously devout style of life in Muslim society, independent of Fundamentalism/Islamism. It is hence basically a popular trend that lacks the organized framework of Islamic Fundamentalism and its political, resistance discourse. It is basically a grassroots phenomenon attributing a higher level of conservatism and strengthening of the traditional value system within society as a whole. In

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18. For a discussion on role of women as domestic versus economic agents refer to Mernissi, *Women's rebellion…*, p. 66.

spite of being an independent process it has, however, been affected and accelerated in many ways by the factors presented above, the most of prominent of which has been Islamic Fundamentalism. This Islamization of societies has resulted in a milieu that is less sympathetic to women's issues, and to equality between the sexes.

'Non-class Actors' and the Effects on Development

Casting our eyes, albeit extremely briefly, to new trends in perceiving development at the academic and practical levels, we see that e.g. disenchantment with the modernization theory, the depleted influence of the dependency paradigm, and globalization of the political economy has led to renewed foundations for development analysis and implementation (e.g. Hettne, 1991; Mittleman and Pasha, 1997). An example of a variable, not limited to earlier paradigms, is Mittleman and Pasha's (1997) analysis of the elements of cultural determinism and social transformation. In their critique of the modernization theory and its reliance on the replication of a Western model of development, which is taken as universal (but not necessarily so), the authors resort to delineating the important role of capital accumulation (within a national and global perspective). They underline the importance of new dynamics of interaction based on the materialist paradigm (class actors), but extend such a vision of development to include 'non-class actors' (such as gender activists, environmentalists, religious and ethnic groups) and the role of social transformation (ibid., ch. 2 and 4). Non-class actors/forces may be further defined as "those groups in society that transcend class lines. Most important among them are religious, ethnic or gender-based groups as well as the single-issue social movements" (ibid., p. 100)

The importance given to social transformation in the development process, and the role of these non-class actors is pertinent to our analysis. This framework gives prominence to the interactive nature of relations between class and non-class actors, where the latter have come to play an active role in development, and especially so in contexts pertaining to Western-oriented models and methodologies. The assertion that "the ideological orientations of non-class forces help set the parameters of political discourse with real effects on development" (ibid., p. 92) indicates that we – as practitioners and theorists – need to pay close attention to the power of such groups in the development process, and hence in the adaptation and design of development projects as such. The Islamist instigated judicial debates over the legality of capital interest in Muslim society

"leading to the creation of regulatory mechanisms that have rendered an effect on the pace and magnitude of investment, and more indirectly, development" (ibid., p. 92) is just an example that illustrates this point. Similar conclusions can be drawn when referring to gender and gender-targeted development projects.

Concluding Remarks

Islamists, as has been analyzed in this paper, have created a maze of societal resistance to the 'woman question' and issues of gender equality. This resistance has been the product of various factors, including historical, cultural and societal transformation. To adapt development to these realities is a growing necessity, notwithstanding the maintenance of a level of active parameters for change and transformation. Hence, the transformation should not only tackle the traditional society, but also the growing effect of non-class actors, their role and conservatism, as in the case of Muslim Islamists, or Islamizing societies[19]. As Mittleman and Pasha (1997, p. 95) conclude "Islamists *are* active in 'development'".

What is suggested here is a development practice that is sensitive to the indigenous reality of third world countries and, particularly in this case, of Muslim societies. The incapacity to achieve an accountable level of success in the practice of gender-targeted development in Muslim societies sometimes emanates from a disregard of the important realities that exert a direct effect on this typology and level of development. Accordingly, it is important to consider indigenous and cultural realities while development projects are designed and implemented.

Muslim societies present a framework of hierarchical gender role division between the sexes. In addition to this, gender inequalities, and pertinent power interplay between men and women are grounded in important factors that are intrinsic to the religion, Islamic and historical memory, Islamic resurgence, and the Islamization of society. It is a most difficult context for the realization of projects aiming at social development, and gender-targeted goals. The most important point of departure is the awareness of the role played by the factors cited above (in addition to their role in enhancing non-class forces). Any strategy and policy for change have therefore to be accountable to these factors and forces within a cultural-sensitive approach.

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19. Islamizing societies refers particularly to the the 'Islamization' process mentioned earlier in our analysis affecting the gender and power dynamics in Muslim societies per se.

Another vital point of departure is the recognition that – as Oxaal and Baden state "adopting women's empowerment (or gender equality)[20] as a policy goal in development organizations (and projects) implies a commitment to encouraging a process of more equitable distribution of power on personal, economic, and political levels" (1997, p. 24). Strategies that aim at dismantling some long-standing traditional manifestations in Muslim societies, and the institutional frameworks that reinforce them thus need to be focused on alleviating gender inequality and power imbalances within a holistic, offensive yet accommodative framework. They may include a gender component in all development projects to ensure the tackling of traditional constructs and non-class forces that reinforce gender inequality. The concept of 'Community Involvement', is necessarily complemented by a new concept, namely that of 'Women Involvement' in development practices. Women and Development (WAD) and Women in Development (WID) are to be complemented by Women Development (WD) per se. This would highlight the necessity to focus on women's development, in particular in relation to ceding opportunities for the rational use of resources (equally between the sexes) to reach gender equality. Male involvement is a requirement in this process, as promoters of women's development and participants in attitudinal change that would enhance gender equality in the particular context of Muslim societies. Furthermore, a deeper involvement of civic society is needed especially women NGO groups advocating a woman-friendly change (this is accentuated due to the existence of several forces in civic society that advocate the unequal treatment of women as a means of alleviating oppression, e.g. Islamist feminists/non-class actors).

The recognition of the role of non-class forces – especially religion and religion-related constructs – is vital within the framework of development strategy and policy. As instruments for analysis and action, country-specific profiles for development projects, specifically dealing with a gender approach in Muslim societies, need to be elaborated. (This translates as a total disassociation with the 'prescription' model, with modernization theory overtones, applied by International Financing Organizations, such as the IMF and the World Bank in the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s in dealing with structural and economic adjustment. It is worth repeating what many others have already said, that the prescription for development has to be context-specific, and culturally sensitive – to ensure a minimum level of success.)

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20. I choose to add gender equality here, as similarities are implicit and exist between it and women's empowerment on the level of aggregate effects on social development, and the society as a whole.

In the same vein, projects targeting research in the area of gender and Islam need to be expanded with country-specific, comparative studies to illuminate levels of similarity or differences in social development experiences. Action-targeted research may be used a complementary process. Finally, a focus on institutional reform and on capacity building, training, and adult education projects that may cede a level of grassroots involvement and awareness-raising in the area of gender, may facilitate a bottom-up cycle of change.

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Notes on the Authors

Dr. Naila Kabeer has been a Fellow at the Institute of Development Studies, United Kingdom, since 1986. She is a social economist who has done research, training and advisory work on a range of gender and development issues as well as on poverty, household livelihoods, microfinance, population and fertility behaviour and social policy issues. She has also been involved in developing analytical frameworks and training in gender-aware planning, both at IDS and with various donor agencies, non-governmental organisations and governments. Her main research has been conducted in Vietnam, Bangladesh and India.

She is currently manager of the Social Policy Programme and team at the Institute of Development Studies as well as team manager for a project to mainstream gender and poverty in policy and planning in the Gambia. She is author of 'Reversed Realities: Gender hierarchies in development thought' and more recently, 'The power to choose: Bangladeshi women and labour market decisions in London and Dhaka', both published by Verso in London. She has also co-edited two collections of essays: 'Institutions, relations and outcomes: A framework and case studies on gender aware planning', published by Kali for women and Zed Press and 'Needs versus rights: child labour and the right to education in south Asia' to be published by Sage, India.

Dr. Patricia McFadden is a radical African feminist activist/scholar living in Zimbabwe and working in the southern African region. Her main areas of work are in sexuality, health and rights. However, more recently she has developed an interest in the emergence of new forms of citizenship among African women and the centrality of the African Women's Movement in providing the continent with a conceptual and political alternative, given the collapse of nationalism and pan-African politics in gener-

al. She is also drawn to the issues of violation and militarisation and how they undermine the realisation of political and human rights entitlements and will be working more in these areas in the future.

She works internationally as a human rights/women's rights activist, and teaches feminism on the Southern African Research Institute for Policy Studies, SARIPS Masters Course. She has also served as an adjunct professor on the Syracuse University programme in Harare for the last seven years.

Between 1998 and 2000 she worked as a co-dean with a German professor and participated in the implementation of the first International Women's University (IFU) which was held in Germany from July to October, 2000. The total project brought together over one thousand students and staff from all over the world.

For the last six years Patricia McFadden has edited SAFERE (Southern African Feminist Review) published by SAPES/SARIPS. She writes for local, regional and international feminist journals and newsletters. She also trains journalists in feminist analysis in the region and young women in conceptual and writing skills as feminists.

She currently lives with the younger of her two sons in Harare, is active in the cultural and social life of the city, and loves living in Zimbabwe – her country of choice in the region.

Signe Arnfred is Associate Professor in International Development Studies at the University of Roskilde, Denmark. She is also a feminist, having published – from the 1970s onwards – in the fields of gender studies and feminist theory. Her contact with southern Africa dates back to the early 1980s when she lived in Mozambique, working as a sociologist/social anthropologist in the National Women's Organization. Since then much of her writing has been concerned with understanding changes in gender relations in southern Africa, including analyses of different discourses on gender. In the 1980s and 1990s she worked intermittently in southern Africa as a short-term consultant, in 1998-99 conducting anthropological fieldwork in Mozambique. In October 2000 she took up a three-year assignment at the Nordic Africa Institute in Uppsala, Sweden, as the programme coordinator of a new research programme on Sexuality, Gender and Society in Africa.

Edmé Domínguez is Associate Professor in Peace and Development Studies. She is a part-time researcher at the Iberoamerican Institute, University of Göteborg and a part-time lecturer in Political Science at the Department of Political Science and Economics, University of Linköping.

For several years she worked and published on the issue of Soviet foreign policy towards Latin America, but since the beginning of the 1990s she has been working on the social implications of NAFTA for Mexico and on gender issues relating to academics, citizenship and transnational networks.

Sherin Saadallah is currently concluding a third Master's Degree at the Political Science Department at Stockholm University, specialising in the area of Gender/Women and Islam. She has completed a second Master's degree in the Social Sciences in the field of Political Science (June 2000) at Stockholm University with special focus on the Islamic presence in Europe, in addition to her first Master's degree in International Development Policy which she took in 1992 from Duke University in the United States.

Ms. Saadallah is currently working as a consultant in the area of social development in Muslim and Arab societies, providing expertise in the areas of gender/women and development, gender/women and Islam, modern Islamic political thought and movements, and issues pertaining to the implementation of development projects in Muslim and Arab societies. She is currently engaged in a project targeting Social and Economic Development: Gender Awareness and Institutional Strengthening in Egypt, implemented by Kvinnoforum/Qlara Management AB with the Egyptian Ministry of Social Affairs. This project is being sponsored by Sida. Prior to this Ms. Saadallah worked as a diplomat for eleven years, which enabled her to develop her insight, experience and depth of knowledge in respect of the Middle East, development issues, and the international system of organisations including the UN.

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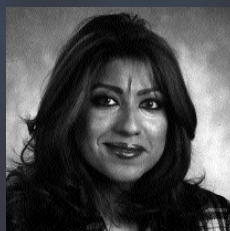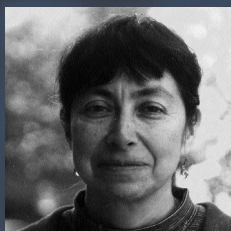
This volume represents a search for analysis that may influence and inspire
the work of practitioners and theoreticians aiming to address the core of the
issue of women's empowerment. The authors shed light on questions such as:
Does the conceptualisation and rhetoric concerning 'empowerment' signal a
genuine and meaningful transformation? Will a real power balance be struck
between the sexes by the way 'empowerment', 'gender' and 'mainstreaming'
are addressed in development agencies? How do sociological, academic and
economic patterns related to culture and religion exclude women from exercis-
ing power – and ultimately from development? Do women seek new approach-
es to politics and citizenship?