**(Re)defining empowerment, measuring survival**

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Empowerment has become the mantra of development practitioners and theorists -- the unquestioned 'good' aspired to by such diverse institutions as the World Bank, Oxfam and the most radical non-government organizations. Initially the term was most commonly associated with alternative approaches to development, with their concern for local, grassroots community based movements and initiatives. It drew its inspiration from people centered approaches to education and the growing disenchantment with mainstream, top-down approaches to development. More recently, empowerment has been adopted by mainstream development agencies as well, albeit more to improve productivity within the status quo than to foster social transformation. We now have various methodologies to measure empowerment – UNDP's Gender-Related Development Index and Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM); OECD's Social Institutions Indicator, the World Economic Forum has the Gender Gap Index and the World Bank advocates economic empowerment through Smart Economics by making markets work for women. Empowerment has thus become a 'motherhood' term, comfortable and unquestioned, something very different institutions and practices seem to be able to agree on. Yet this very agreement raises important questions. Why is empowerment so adaptable, so acceptable to such disparate bedfellows? What can empowerment mean if it is the watchword of such different and often conflicting development approaches and institutions? How can such a fluid, poorly defined term address issues of women's empowerment in a still largely male dominated world?

We are not the only scholars raising these questions. Empowerment, especially for women, has been on the minds of a number of scholars and practitioners, most notably Haleh Ashfar (1998), Jo Rowlands (1997), Naila Kabeer (1994), and Srilatha Batliwala (1993). However, most interrogations of the term and its uses have focused on the limitations of the empowerment

approach as development praxis and ways to improve its effectiveness at the local level. This emphasis on the participatory, community-based character of empowerment reflects the concerns and practice of empowerment advocates in the development and activist community. While a welcome antidote to the development community's long-standing focus on state-led, top-down development, we believe this focus on the local *also* has profound limitations. It has encouraged a rather romantic equation between empowerment, inclusion and voice which papers over the complexities of em(power)ment both as a process and a goal, at a multiplicity of governance levels – local, national and global.

This critique raises a number of issues. First, understanding and facilitating women's empowerment requires <u>a more nuanced analysis of power.</u> Empowerment is not simply the ability to exert *power over* people and resources. Drawing on Foucault's writings, we argue that empowerment involves the exercise rather than possession of power. This approach cautions us that empowerment cannot transcend power relations; it is enmeshed in relations of power at all levels of society. Without such an analysis of 'power at work' an accumulation of accepted/dominant understandings of roles, relations and social spaces takes place, which can only contribute to the depoliticisation of the concept of empowerment. If, on the other hand, we take a more nuanced approach to power, such an analysis allows us to open up development praxis to scrutiny by feminist theory in order to explore issues of structure and agency. We are reminded that empowerment includes both individual conscientization (*power within*) as well as collective action, which can lead to politicized *power with* others *to* bring about change.

Second, we believe <u>empowerment must be analyzed in global and national as well as local terms</u>. Even the smallest, most seemingly marginalized and impoverished communities are affected by global and national forces. As Christine Koggel queried in her 2003 article 'Globalisation and Women's Paid Work', we have to ask how "global forces of power and local systems of oppression operate and interact"[1]. Global production and new technologies are both marginalizing some and enhancing the power of others. Moreover, this is a highly gendered process. To ignore the multi-level, interrelated character of struggles over power, even in poor,

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[1] Christine Koggel, 2003, 'Globalization and Women's Paid Work', *Feminist Economics*, 9(2-3), p. 167

marginalized communities is, we believe, to misunderstand empowerment in our increasingly interconnected global/local world.

Empowerment is thus a process through which women and men experience as well as challenge and subvert power relationships, but it takes place in institutional, material and discursive contexts. Consequently, we argue that empowerment must be interrogated in these contexts. Individual empowerment, whether it is gaining skills, developing consciousness, or making decisions, takes place within the structural constraints of institutions and discursive practices. Groups become empowered through collective action, but that action is enabled or constrained by the structures of power that they encounter. Thus, much closer attention must be paid to the broad political and economic structures, cultural assumptions and discourses, notions of human rights as well as laws and practices and the daily struggles of women and men trying to survive and even flourish in marginalized communities around the world.

Finally, we believe <u>empowerment is both a process and an outcome</u>. It is a process in that it is fluid, often unpredictable and requires attention to the specificities of struggles over time and place. Empowerment can also be seen as an outcome that can be measured against expected accomplishments. However, in agreement with Naila Kabeer (1999) we caution against a too sanguine assumption that empowerment can be measured and declared a success (or failure) by how much it does or does not achieve measurable goals. Such measurements often either give us snapshots without a rigorous analysis of either the outcomes or the stability of the measurement. The World Bank's Action Plan to achieve economic empowerment through Smart Economics, for example, targets four key markets: land, labor, product, and financial[2] and measures this through policy initiatives to make markets work for women as well as agency initiatives to empowerment women to compete in markets. What it doesn't do is to ask how and why markets are gendered and how this might be challenged within the structural constraints placed by global capitalist economy? After years of discursive and political struggles we still see an essentially WID approach empowerment here – including women in already established gender hierarchies

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[2]'Gender Equality as Smart Economics: A World Bank Group Gender Action Plan (Fiscal years 2007–10)' September, 2006, World Bank,
http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTGENDER/Resources/GAPNov2.pdf

that in turn support the political economy of competition in key spheres of capitalist production: land, labour, and commodities – goods and services, including finance.

## Empowerment and Power

The concept of empowerment has a long history and an impressive array of advocates, from progressive educators, social workers, and community activists to business and personnel managers. While Paulo Freire (1973) did not use the term, his emphasis on education as a means for conscientizing and inspiring individual and group challenges to social inequality provided an important backdrop for social activists concerned with empowering the poor and marginalised. Intellectuals and activists in the South, and to a lesser extent the North, drew on Freire and others to expand the concept of empowerment. Social activists concerned with poverty issues saw empowerment as a local, grassroots endeavour, concerned with inspiring the poor to challenge the status quo. On the other hand, business and personnel managers generally thought of empowerment as a means for improving productivity within established structures. Mainstream development agencies adopted this interpretation in the 1990s, when they too began to use the language of empowerment, participation and people's development. Thus, empowerment seems to fit many shoes.

How can we explain this seeming paradox? How can empowerment have such different meanings and consequences? The explanation may lie in the fluidity of the term 'power'. To empower implies the ability to exert *power over*, to make things happen. It is an action verb that suggests the ability to change the world, to overcome opposition. It has a transformatory sound, an implicit promise of change, often for the better. Empowerment has often been the watchword of those who are crusading to make the world a better place, who wish to upset established power structures and replace them with more equitable communities. These struggles tend to be cast in terms of inclusion and exclusion; you either have power or you do not. Gaining power thus requires a revolution or at the very least, fundamental social transformation (Wolf 1999: 4-8). Others hold a more benign view of power, one that emphasizes the potential for rational discussion and evolutionary change within modern societies. Associated with liberal arguments about modernization, deliberation and democracy, this approach focuses on the cooperative possibilities of power, on the way even marginalized people can mobilize to convince the

powerful of the need for change. Nevertheless, both perspectives assume that some people and institutions have *power over* others and some do not (Held et al 1999).

In the 1970s, a more complex, nuanced notion of power began to emerge. Steven Lukes challenged the notion that power is determined by whether one has control over institutions and resources. He argued that power is also exerted by controlling the agendas and thinking of others, by mystifying key issues and convincing people to accept the present order as natural and unchangeable (1974: 23-24). Michel Foucault moved the analysis further. Rejecting the notion that power is something held by individuals or groups (and not others), he argues that it permeates society. It is fluid, relational and exists only in its exercise. Thus, power exists and is expressed in the everyday relationships of people, individually and in institutions. It often leads to the internalization of repressive practices which are expressed in disciplined bodies, actions and thoughts/discourses. While much of Foucault's work has centered on the disciplinary, disempowering nature of modern power, he recognizes that relations of power inspire resistances as well (Foucault 1979, 1991; McNay 1992). In this regard, we find Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson's reading of Foucault useful, especially their argument that Foucault did not see resistance 'in a disembodied duel with power' (1997:19), but rather emphasizes the complex interaction between the two. People are empowered and changed through resisting disciplinary power relations, but this very action may also strengthen their incorporation into the status quo. While this analysis illuminates the workings of power (and empowerment) at the individual and institutional level, Foucault has less to say about the impact of larger political and economic structures. Moreover, his analysis is relentlessly European and male-focused. A more feminist and global analysis is required if we are to rethink women's empowerment in comparative perspective.

Since the 1980s, feminists have in fact contributed important insight to these debates. Most feminists have started from querying the concept of power as simply 'power over' people and resources. Some have found the Foucauldian theory useful to challenge the dominant assumption that power is a possession exercised over others within familiar boundaries of state, law or class. They have been attracted to his focus on bodies as sites of power and to his notion of power as fluid, relational and embedded in struggles over meanings/discourses (Sawicki 1996; Hekman

1996). Others have used the expanded boundaries of power that Foucauldian thought opens up to query the concept of empowerment itself. Yeatman, for example, wonders 'whether this term reproduces the relationship of tutelage between powerful protector [the state] and those who, being powerless, are seen to need help [women, children, the poor]'. She would rather use the term 'empowering', which is interchangeable with 'capacitating' or 'enabling', rather than a focus on empowerment as a form of power over others (1997:152). Other feminists have criticized Foucault's visions of power, arguing that it encourages a relativist position where all transformative politics became suspect (Fraser 1989; Harstock 1990).

Black and Third World feminists have approached empowerment from somewhat different perspectives. Most regard the issue of participation as central to empowerment. Participation in the process of challenging hegemonic discourses has been seen as often leading to deeper understandings of the self, which often empowers individuals and inspires political action in both their private and public lives. Involvement in the politics of subversion is thus empowering in itself, without necessarily leading to the immediate outcome of transforming dominant power relations. As Patricia Hill Collins points out: 'change can also occur in the private, personal space of an individual women's consciousness. Equally fundamental, this type of change is also empowering' (1991: 111). It is important to recognize, as well, that conscientization of individuals to act for change does not necessarily lead to progressive politics. Indian feminists have reminded us that the language of women's empowerment has been used by right-wing political groups and parties to inspire Hindu women to resist the 'pseudo-secularism' of the male, westernised elites who have granted Muslim and other minorities 'concessions' not available to the Hindu majority (Butalia and Sarkar 1996). While Hindu women have felt empowered through this rhetoric of women's agency in the defense of the *dharma* (faith), such empowerment obviously poses important questions for other communities, as well as for Hindu women who do not subscribe to this understanding of empowerment.

We believe these different approaches/arguments need to be brought together. Foucault's exposition of power allows us to move away from the dualistic relations within formal structures of *power over* that more traditional accounts of power suggest. It reminds us that power is fluid, relational and connected to control over discourses/knowledge. It is therefore an important

insight for feminist analyses of power and empowerment. However, we would also insist upon focusing on the relationship between structures and agency, of challenge and transformation which transcend the bounds of discursive 'normality' (see also Deveaux, 1994:230-237). This allows feminists to make judgements about the nature of their experience of structures and discourses of power, and their own political judgments and actions. It also allows us to incorporate notions of power that recognize the importance of individual understanding/consciousness (*power within*), which can lead to collective action (*power with*) in order to challenge gender hierarchies and improve women's lives (*power to*) (see also Rowlands 1997:13). These insights need to inform our analysis of empowerment, power and gender as it relates both to broad questions of development and gender equality as well as to the more specific efforts to empower women undertaken by the development policy makers and practitioners in an increasingly global/local world.

## Empowerment in a global/local world

Various interpretations of power and empowerment have influenced the thinking and practice of development practitioners and theorists. The development enterprise was initially introduced in the 1940s as a very top-down affair. Development was largely regarded as a technical problem, which could be solved by transferring Northern knowledge and expertise to the less developed South. Development experts assumed power resided in the North, but the willingness to share this power for the good, ie development, of the South was rarely questioned. However, by the 1970s, the failure of development projects to alleviate poverty, much less eradicate it, undermined this easy assumption. Some economists in the South, most notably South America, blamed Southern underdevelopment on capitalism. They argued that Northern capital deliberately kept the South as an underdeveloped peripheral region which could provide them with raw materials and markets for their manufactured goods. They called for de-linking from the North, self-reliance and the transformation of the world system. In this case, power was seen as residing in the North, but this was a power based on class, with no interest in sharing the bounty of capitalist development (Amin 1974; Wallerstein 1979). Both perspectives assume power is defined by power over resources and institutions.

More recent critiques have retained this critical stance towards the Northern establishment, including development 'experts', but, inspired by the thinking of Foucault and other poststructuralists, they have focused on the power of development discourse to define development as a technical 'problem' requiring intervention by Northern expertise. They argue that this effectively silences the voices and knowledge of marginalized peoples around the world. They call for a new approach to development, one that that advocates collaboration and partnership between the North and the South as well as attention to local knowledge and accumulated wisdom in the periphery (Crush 1995; Escobar 1995; Friedmann 1992). While recognizing the power of discourse, Cooper and Packard (1997) remind us that even the supposedly powerless have often managed to turn development discourse on its head, using it as a basis for legitimating their own demands. Both of these critiques, see empowerment as a process whereby individual and group actors manage to challenge the hegemonic knowledge structures and agents (such as development experts) of the North, as well as the process of creating a space, finding a voice that validates the importance of 'traditional' local knowledges. The relationship between structure and agency is critically important – though these are conceived of differently.

Within Development Studies, these critiques have found allies in the work of small-scale alternative development organizations, most notably Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) that take pride in working outside and even challenging 'the system'. These agencies have tended to focus on local communities and have been deeply influenced by the participatory, people-first approach to development of Robert Chambers (1997). His set of practical, assessable methods for grassroots, participatory development, characterized as participatory rural appraisal (PRA), has become the staple methodology for alternative development practioners (Parpart, 2003). Understandably this methodology and approach initially found little support among established development agencies with their government to government agreements and their concern to protect established power structures.

At the level of individual development, Amartya Sen's work on human capabilities stresses empowerment as both a means and an end. It is a process of developing individual capacities through gaining education, skills etc. in order to improve the life-chances of individuals and

empower them so they can have a better quality of life (1990; 1995). Sen argues that poverty is an indication of the inability of people to meet their basic needs. These needs are both physical, minimum levels of calorie consumption for example, as well as intangible, what Sen calls 'agency achievements' - of participation, empowerment, and community life (1989). Thus, Sen criticizes development economics for emphasizing quantity, such as longevity, rather than the quality of lives led (Crocker, 1995:156). He points out that women in particular face social as well as physical problems and that 'the remedies sought have to take note of the nature of the constraints involved and extent to which they can be removed' (Dreze and Sen 1989: 44). While one may quarrel with Sen's argument about the universal right to development, and his lack of attention to the political processes required for equitable resource distribution, his focus on capabilities does provide a framework for the study of empowerment. He stresses the need to focus on the processes of development as well as the goals and outcomes. He too accepts the importance of participation and assumes that human development is best carried out at the local, specific sites where most people live their lives.

While mainstream development agencies have for the most part been rather skeptical of these arguments, the many failures of mainstream development practice have undermined the easy belief in top-down, state-led development practice, at for some. On the one hand, the failure of state-led development in the South has reinforced the assertions of neo-classical economists that states should be reduced both in size and function and development should be left to the wisdom of market forces. This has been argued with increasing force as the globalization of world markets reduces the relevance of states around the world (Hoogvelt 1997). At the same time, growing doubts about state capacity and commitment to development goals has led to demands that collaboration with states be hedged round with demands for good governance, democracy and economic liberalization. These demands are seen as requiring institutional reform based on accountability, democracy and grassroots participation in governance, including recognition of the importance of 'listening to and learning from the poor' (World Bank 1999: 153). In their efforts to operationalize these goals, mainstream development agencies have adopted many of the techniques of alternative development practices. The language of participation and empowerment has entered mainstream development discourse. No project can get through without proving its sensitivity to community concerns and its willingness to collaborate and

cooperate with the poor. Even the current preoccupation with knowledge based development, which apparently runs counter to this tendency by reinforcing the superiority of Northern knowledge, is often cast in terms of participation, empowerment and partnership within specific, small-scale communities (Rugh and Bossert 1998; World Bank 1998).

**Empowerment, Gender and Development**

Scholars and activists concerned with women, gender and development have both contributed to and been influenced by these debates. While women rarely surfaced as an item on the development agenda until the 1970s, and then only reluctantly, once women were placed squarely on the development agenda, Women in Development (WID) policies and programs for the most part tried to increase women's options and opportunities without altering the status quo. The failure of this approach to fundamentally improve women's position in the South (and North) led some scholars and activists from the South, and to a lesser degree the North, to call for new ways of thinking. They argued that the cultural assumptions and practices defining women and men's roles often impeded women's development (Young 1993: Sen and Grown 1988). This gender and development (GAD) approach raised crucial issues around gender relations, culture and socio-economic inequalities, but its modernist roots made it difficult to escape Western-centric notions of development with their tendency to locate answers within Western frameworks and assumptions (Hirshman, 1995).

However, Gita Sen and Caren Grown did raise the issue of empowerment in their book Development, Crises and Alternative Visions: Third World Women's Perspectives, where they argue that 'the empowerment of women can provide new possibilities for moving beyond current economic dilemmas' (1988:18). While primarily concerned with issues of class and economic growth, the vision of empowerment offered by Sen and Grown is rooted in a commitment to collective action and their involvement in the Third World women's organization, Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN)[i]. This collective action, however, must be based on the specific problems and contexts facing women (and men) in the South, and a concern for inequalities based on class, race and nationality as well as gender. In sympathy with people centered approaches to development, Sen and Grown emphasize the need to listen to the voices and experiences of poor women, particularly their collective action, such as the much

admired Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India. While rather utopian in tone, the book calls for a collective vision, a set of strategies and new methods for mobilizing political will, empowering women (and poor men) and transforming society. The execution of this vision remains largely undeveloped, but the authors put considerable faith in the transformative potential of 'political mobilization, legal changes, consciousness raising and popular education' (p.87). DAWN also argues that women will be empowered by participating in education, health care and training, all of which build capacity for consciousness and collective action to gain control over the productive resources needed for exercising autonomous decision making (Banerjee, 1995:2-4).

Writings on empowerment and gender as an approach to development have continued to emerge in the alternative development literature, especially from the South (see Medel-Anonuevo 1995; Shuler and Kadirgamar-Rajasingham 1992). For example, in 1994 Srilatha Batliwala expressed concern about the growing popularity of the term empowerment, which had virtually replaced terms such as poverty alleviation, welfare and community participation. She argued that 'empowerment' was in danger of losing its transformative edge and called for a more precise understanding of both power and empowerment. Defining power 'as control over material assets, intellectual resources, and ideology' (1994:129), empowerment then became 'the process of challenging existing power relations, and of gaining greater control over the sources of power' (1994: 130). Moving away from the more grassroots, participatory approach to women's empowerment, Batiliwala argues for an assault on cultural as well as national and community power structures that oppress women and some men. Such combined action has the potential for creating an 'empowerment spiral' that can mobilize the political forces to challenge and transform existing power structures (1994: 131-34). Thus, while acknowledging the need to improve the lives of grassroots women, Batliwala argues that women's empowerment requires transformative political action as well.

Naila Kabeer has written extensively on women's empowerment as well. She (1994) places her analysis of empowerment more specifically within gender analysis, asserting its central place in any efforts to achieve gender equity. She also takes a more explicit approach to power. Drawing on Lukes' focus on institutional *power over* agendas and discussions, she also highlights feminist

concerns with *power within,* which emphasizes conscientizing women so they can both understand and challenge gender inequality in the home and the community (1994: 224-229). Indeed, she argues that the multidimensional nature of power requires women 'to build on "the power within" as a necessary adjunct to improving their ability to control resources, to determine agendas and to make decisions' (1994: 229). Above all, Kabeer sees collective, grassroots participatory action -- the *power* to work *with* others -- as the key to women's empowerment. More concerned with action than theory, she continues to explore practical, measurable ways to empower women and remains largely focused on local, grassroots transformation (1999).

Jo Rowlands (1997) brings a broader analytical perspective to the discussion of participation, power and empowerment. She draws on Foucault's notion of power as both relational and permeating all of life, but adds a feminist concern with internalized oppressions and their role in maintaining gender inequality. She argues for an understanding of power in its multiple guises, including *power over*, *power to*, *power with* and *power from within*. She argues that 'empowerment is more than participation in decision-making; it must also include the processes that lead people to perceive themselves as able and entitled to make decisions' (1997: 14). It is personal, relational and collective. She recognizes that empowerment is not just a gender issue, but a development issue affecting women and men. While acknowledging the complexity and difficulties of empowerment as a concept and a practice, she remains convinced that the key to empowerment lies in mobilizing the participation and knowledge of marginalized people, especially women. She cautions, however, that empowerment is a process rather than an end product, and will vary according to circumstance. At the same time, she believes 'there is a core to the empowerment process … which consists of increases in self-confidence and self-esteem, a sense of agency and of "self" in a wider context, and a sense of <u>dignidad </u>(being worthy of having a right to respect from others' (1997: 129-30). This theme has been reiterated in her more recent work (1998).

Initially, mainstream development agencies concerned with women's development ignored the language of empowerment, but that has changed dramatically in the last five years. As top-down development policies have failed to alleviate poverty, especially among women, even mainstream agencies have become increasingly persuaded that empowerment of the poor and

women can only come 'through shared knowledge and the experience of action' (Thomas-Slayter et al 1995: 9). Empowerment has entered the lexicon of mainstream women and development discourse. The Beijing Platform of Action states emphatically -- women's empowerment is 'fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace' (1995: para.13). The Canadian International Development Agency's (CIDA) 'Policy on Gender Equality' includes women's empowerment as one of the eight guiding principles for its policy goals (1999). While mainstream development agencies generally emphasize the reformative rather than transformative nature of empowerment (World Bank 1995), at the level of discourse, both alternative development practitioners and mainstream empowerment advocates increasingly use the language of empowerment when discussing women/gender and development (Friedmann 1992; Craig and Mayo 1995).

This seeming congruence of policy and approach obscures the difficulties faced by those trying to understand, implement and measure women's empowerment. While the very instability of the term has its advantages -- for empowerment varies by context and condition -- that same fluidity impedes our understanding of empowerment and the ways one might enhance both the process and outcomes of empowerment projects. Some practitioners and scholars focus on personal empowerment. Without self-empowerment, they argue, collective empowerment is impossible (Townsend et al 1999). Indeed, Caroline Moser places self-reliance and internal strength at the centre of empowerment. For her, empowerment is the ability 'to determine choices in life and to influence the direction of change, through the ability to gain control over crucial material and non-material resources' (1993:74-75). Others emphasise collective empowerment, noting the fragility of individual efforts (Kabeer 1994). Always concerned with transforming ideals into practice, Moser remains sceptical about the willingness of mainstream development agencies to embrace the grassroots, participatory small-scale methods of the empowerment approach in a meaningful way (1993:87-79). Moreover, as Kabeer points out, attempts to measure (and direct) empowerment are often based on the assumption that 'we can somehow predict the nature and direction that change is going to assume. In actual fact, human agency is indeterminate and hence unpredictable in a way that is antithetical to requirements of measurement' (1999: 462).

Rethinking Empowerment was in many ways a response to these challenges for we believed the tension between agency and structures, and their interrelationships, lies at the heart of the empowerment debate. While Moser is correct in pointing out that any challenge to structural power will alienate the mainstream development agencies, one also needs to reflect upon how the capacitating/agency of women (and poor men) can be achieved without some transformation of existing power relations. Anne Phillips has addressed this question in the following way: she argues that today few would expect to be able to eliminate (as opposed to ameliorating) structural inequalities embedded in the production regimes of capitalism. The focus of the debate should be on inequality of distribution (1999:17). It is only in this context that the issue of capacity enhancement can be directly linked to that of redistribution of resources. Negotiations with, and challenges to the state (and global forces) then become an important part of collective action leading to empowerment of women. This factors in the agency of political actors as much as it pays regard to structural power. David Marquand, for example, has argued that only an empowered and active citizenry can make any further progress towards social equality (1997: 41). The two aspects need to be held together, sometimes in tension, to understand the nature of change through the politics of collective (and individual) action that encompasses all levels of political institutions – local, national and global. Thus, we believe empowerment for women (and men) cannot be understood only at the local level. It requires attention to the specific historical struggles of women and men within the structures and discourses of power operating at micro-, meso- and macro-levels.

## Empowerment: Local, National and Global

While the focus on the local remains central to most empowerment advocates, the development studies community has become increasingly concerned with the role of national and global politics as well (Stiles 2000). The growing power of global corporate and financial forces in an increasingly unequal world has inspired new thinking about potential solutions to the disempowerment and marginalization of peoples around the world. However, there are opposite views about the nature of globalisation, its innovative character and its potential as a tool for empowerment. One view emphasizes the 'ideologies of free trade and open markets...[and] the increased potential for such flows [of international market transactions], resulting from the reduction of elimination of national and local barriers to all kinds of trade and investment'

(Piccioto 1996:3). From this perspective, globalization and economic liberalization have gone hand in hand, providing benefits for women, the poor and the world (Held et al 1999). A more nuanced view of globalization acknowledges the fact that free trade and global shifts in productivity have led to casualisation and feminisation of certain labour sectors, resulting in additional burdens on women and tensions within the family for women as gender relations get reconfigured. However, it also points to the opening of opportunities for women, albeit often affected by race and class. Professional women inhabiting the world of international finance or involved in international bureaucratic machineries are positioned very differently to white Russian women looking to improve their life chances by consenting to become 'catalogue brides', and still more differently from Filipina domestic workers in Canada. Globally, women own little of world's property; and therefore tend to be involved in the globalisation process through their access to labour markets rather than financial or production markets. They are providers of services – domestic, sexual and increasingly as workers in export production - and are often employed in lower paid work. They rarely control the huge financial and export flows in a globalised economy (Marchand and Runyan 2000).

Yet within the limits of women's opportunities, some possibilities for empowerment exist. We need to analyze the impact of gendered roles for women within markets if we are to understand the possibilities and the challenges facing women in this context. Women's specific positioning in markets pose questions about the nature and functioning of markets, the values and behavior that they generate and the controls and mechanisms of accountability that are required to participate (see Lairap-Fonderson, 2003). We also have to know what factors facilitate the emergence of a consciousness of rights and a willingness to undertake collective and individual actions to improve women's position in the global workforce (see Gardiner Barber, Lairap-Fonderson and Desai, 2003). Questions need to be raised about how women can be empowered to take advantage of the markets they can access, or to push open the doors of those they cannot?

If globalisation is about markets, it is also about space. James Rosenau, for example, writes of 'globalization as boundary-eroding' and 'localization as boundary-strengthening' (1997:81). On the one hand, the development of technologies is allowing a space-time distanciation such that we have the possibility of thinking about the world as one. Some argue that this 'overcoming' of

space through communication technology is producing new identities as well as opportunities for men and women (see Youngs). On the other hand, we also need to be aware of the locatedness of technology itself – it is more urban than rural, points of access are far greater for the middle classes than for the poor, for men rather than women. This is not to minimize the importance of technological advances which allow for reaching out and networking, only a caution about the limits of its possibilities. A second set of issues about the 'boundary-strengthening' under globalization arises when the increased pace of globalisation is perceived as hegemonic cultural domination. As Paul Lubeck has argued, the rise of Islamism under globalisation can be seen as, on the one hand, as a reaction against the dominant political power of the USA, and on the other as an integration of the wider, global Islamic community through communication, travel, and trade (2000:153). For Muslim women this participation in a global community of Islam poses particular problems as well as opportunities. These issues raise important questions for thinking about women's empowerment.

A third aspect of the globalisation debate is governance. Some believe the state's regulatory role is being taken over by multi-lateral organisations. They look to international organizations and legal instruments for solutions, pinning their hopes on the regulatory effect of the United Nations, the World Court and bodies such as the World Trade Organizations (WTO), the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). While international institutions remain an important lever for change, recent protests at the WTO meeting in Seattle and the World Bank/IMF meeting in Washington reveal a growing skepticism about this option. Although some authors argue that the recent protests demonstrate the potential of citizen activists to reign in global institutions (Liebowitz 2000: 4, and 2007; Finnegan 2000), others believe these global organisations are no longer accountable to citizens of nation-states. They are regarded as more accountable to global civil society, primarily through the mobilisation of people world-wide against particular market miscreants, through the participation of INGOs in drawing up codes of conduct to regulate the labour market or the environment, and through the increased transparency of global institutions as a result of struggles with international pressure groups.

Increasingly, scholars and activists are looking to the nation state for solutions. The Work of Nations, as Robert Reich makes abundantly clear with the title of his book, is the only

governance mechanism we have left, for corporate nationality is increasingly irrelevant (1992). Nation states, of course, vary markedly in their ability and/or desire either to confront and/or negotiate with global forces, corporations, and finance. And within states, considerable variation exists in the degree to which democratic accountability exists to all or most people, who are never monolithically equal in political and power terms. Class, geography, and gender are notable factors determining access to and/or experience with state power. Nevertheless, national politics is increasingly seen as a key arena for struggles against poverty and marginalization. Not surprisingly, good governance and the empowerment of citizens and groups so they can ensure responsible governance, is beginning to become a more central issue for some empowerment scholars and activists, including the contributors to this book (Stiles 2000, Staudt 1998; Rai, 2004).

At the same time, it is important to remember that states represent historically institutionalised male interests (see for example, Charlton, et.al. 1989; Parpart and Staudt 1989; Rai and Lievesley 1996). This is reflected in the small numbers of women in decision making positions in state structures – a mere tenth or less of women legislators is the global norm (HDR 1995; Staudt, 1996). Such minority positioning often inhibits women within governance institutions from taking up strategic issues for women. The arguments for challenging this situation are being pursued at two different levels. First, the argument is for greater participation of women in national political bodies as part of the processes of democratisation (Rai,2003). Second, some call for mainstreaming gender in both national and global policy making and institutional politics (see McBride Stetson and Mazur 1995; Rai forthcoming).

Empowerment in this context is dependent upon the space women are able to create within political structures, as well as the issues that they are able to raise (or not) in their own strategic interests. We need much more careful, historically specific analysis of women's attempts to develop political strategies and networks that challenge male power structures and improve state responsiveness to women's issues, both at the local and national levels (Cockburn 2000:61). Globalising issues of governance, as well as networking globally to challenge hegemonic institutional politics within the local/national space are also critically important in the struggles for women's empowerment.

**Measuring Survival**

A nuanced reading of power in order to understand, measure or analyse empowerment as a concept, strategy or outcome is important. With the move from a focus on women to a concern with gender relations, feminist theorizing took a big step. Instead of adding women to male dominated institutions, policies and frameworks of analyses, this challenge allowed us to explore the underlying biases of socio-economic contexts and political institutions; it also allowed us to get away from viewing women as victims in need of rescue and see them as actors in struggles against their oppressions. The study of empowerment then, as we have seen, allowed us to examine the various modes of struggle – within oneself (conscientization), with others (women's groups, movements and networks) and for change. However, I have increasingly become convinced that it is also important to assess the costs that are attached to these modes of struggles for empowerment, to know who pays these costs, what vulnerabilities are made visible and which ones overlooked.

Take for example the question of women's work. Feminist economists have long been arguing that domestic work needs to be counted; methodologically there has been the development of time use surveys to measure women's work in the home. They have also been arguing for making employment markets more accessible to and equal for women. There has been a concern about child care, health and safety issues at work, equal opportunity, equal pay for equal work; the argument has been made about sharing of domestic work; there has been talk of the double burden that women carry (and sometimes of the triple burden – organizing as well as working inside and outside the home). But there has been little work done on what the economists would call depletion in terms of women's lives. In a recent article, Catherine Hoskyns and I have argued that However, the gaps in social provision resulting from the inadequate recognition of social reproduction in wages as well as in state services are met by the unpaid work in households and community in both North and South. This creates a depletion of resources unless support is given from elsewhere. The depletion presented in the diagram is at the moment unmeasured. However, while economists talk of the depletion (depreciation) of machinery,

capital goods and the environment, they rarely talk about depletion or depreciation in terms of the household and social reproduction.[ii] Depletion of household and social reproduction, if counted, could include increasing concerns about 'food security' in Southern countries, variable access to health as commercialization kicks in, and the patchy nature of child and adult care. While UNICEF has initiated some discussion about the social costs of economic adjustment, these have not so far been represented in the economic accounting upon which economic policy is based. And yet the consequences of globalization in a situation where these factors are not measured seem to us to us to warrant concern and further investigation and not just by feminists. This gap in statistics also makes accurate research difficult as the following example shows. While attempting to assess the effect of women's employment in tourism on the family and social provision in three Central American countries, Ferguson was surprised to find that none of the criteria in which she was interested (forms of child and adult care, household maintenance and health provision) were measured in formal statistics. She has therefore had little statistical data to support and check interview material, which make her findings less easy to transpose and generalise. She reports that the governments concerned are only just beginning to realise that there might be social consequences as a result of the increased employment of women in these areas. No attempts seem to have been made beforehand to estimate or consider this possible depletion.[iii]

If we take another example, that of violence against women, we find that an overlooking of the costs 'empowering' women through programmes can be catastrophic. Uma Chakravarti has written a moving as well as politically sophisticated analysis of the Women's Development Programme in Rajasthan, India. The tensions resulting from the important but flawed WDP came to a head with the gruesome gang rape of one *sathin* - Bhanwari Devi - in 1992. Bhanwari Devi was paraded naked through the streets of the village and her husband was also beaten up for not being able to keep his wife under control. The men involved were acquitted by the Magistrates' Court on the grounds that "an upper caste man would not disregard caste…differences to rape a low caste woman." (ibid. :16) In the last few years, the *sathin* programme has been bureaucratised, as well as starved of funds. Chakravarti concludes from this that "The government wants empowerment without breaking into the power of those including themselves, who have power over the disempowered....while the sathins struggle...for the statutory minimum

wage of workers and the survival and expansion of the scheme, the government claims credit for the 'success' of the sathin programme in Beijing, Vienna and Geneva" (p. 18). This story raises many questions – for the state, for international organisations such as the UNICEF, for women activists. For my argument here, I worry about the issues that the *sathins* face - there is the real question of levels of risk involved in doing their work without adequate support, as well as of how to translate conscientisation into practical results when the structures of power are supported by political hierarchies at every level.

So, when analyzing or measuring empowerment, can we afford to overlook the risks? When developing programmes that might empower women, can we overlook the perils of participation? When seeing women as agents, can we afford to overlook their vulnerabilities which do make them victims as well as actors in their struggles for empowerment?

My final thought on the issue of measuring risks in the search of empowerment is this – often what is presented as empowerment is really a struggle for survival. I started thinking about this distinction some time ago when I read the Indian Canadian writer Rohinton Mistry's fabulous book – A Fine Balance. What he describes in that epic story can of course be easily represented as triumph of spirit over adversity. However, what I could trace was the nature of the Indian politics and economic inequalities such that all the energy that is put into surviving is often expended for short periods of calm before the next crisis. A cost benefit analysis of this energy – which flows through the book with humour, pathos but never sickly sentimentality – would perhaps show us that the costs far outweigh the benefits, even though some of the characters survive while others go under. So, given the starting question which led me and my colleagues to edit Rethinking Empowerment – what makes empowerment a 'motherhood' term acceptable to all - does this distinction between empowerment and survival strategies, the risks and costs attached to these, make a difference to our analysis? I think it does. By insisting upon counting costs, whether as depletion or more qualitatively in terms of violence, fragility etc., we are also insisting upon the recognition of structural barriers to empowerment; re-politicising the concept. This would then allow the focus of empowerment strategies to include not only individuals but also the contexts in which individuals function; not only recognition of disadvantage but the redistribution of advantages.

**In conclusion**

First, we need to

- move beyond conceiving of empowerment and power as something that one either has or does not have, as simply a matter of control over key institutions and issues.
- consider the importance of language and meanings, and the need to think about identities and cultural practices when considering women's empowerment.
- understand the many ways that power can be understood and acted upon, and the importance of incorporating feminist insights into their analysis.

Second, while the local is important as a focus for debates on empowerment, we think the local must be embedded in the global and the national and vice versa. This is necessary if we are to be aware of the interconnectedness of the three levels that frame our debates about struggles for empowerment. The dynamic interconnectedness of the three levels is an essential component for evaluating women's empowerment in this collection.

Third, the empowerment literature has focused on consciousness raising and individual and group activity/agency without perhaps paying enough attention to the ways in which institutional structures and politics frame, constrain and enable these activities. We would suggest that the institutional, material and discursive framework within which individual and group agency can develop must be taken seriously. This does not mean that the process of implementing 'empowerment' policies and projects, and the agency involved, is less important. It does, however, point to the need to situate individual and group action/agency within the material, political and discursive structures in which it operates. Thus we call for careful, historically situated analyses of women's struggles to gain power in a world rarely of their own choosing.

Finally, we see empowerment as much as a process as outcome. At times the two are indistinguishable, at others outcome becomes part of the process itself, and at still others the process is the outcome. We need to focus on specific outcomes of empowerment politics that can be documented by economic, budgetary and spatial indicators; we need to remember the importance of seeking evidence of empowerment if we are to analyse the most appropriate

strategies for pursuing women's strategic interests. At the same time, we need to be aware of the difficulty of measuring women's empowerment. While specific women-friendly legal instruments do not guarantee women's empowerment (Patel, 2003), subtle and often unexpected strategies have the potential but not the certainty of empowerment (Desai, 2003). Thus, while conceptual clarity demands some distinction between process and outcome, Rethinking Empowerment suggests that empowerment practice needs to see process and outcome not simply as measurable or quantifiable, but as untidy and unpredictable rather than linear or inevitable. At the same time, we recognize that some attempts to measure or at least understand gains (and losses) in empowerment are important if we are to keep development practitioners honest.

In sum, we have argued the following:  First, empowerment may be sequential, moving from a process that develops power *within* to the *power to* act on one's own and with others to engage publicly in action for change that produces a redistribution of power and resources toward women and resulting in gender balance.  Second, gender balance alone cannot be the process or outcome in a world ridden with poverty and class inequality.  All classes of women must occupy protected public space, whether they seize it and settle in or have it reserved.  Third, we should use the empowerment language, but contest the way it has been neutralized and even abused. Political institutions have divided us into complicated jurisdictions that make public engagement easily transformable into struggle against one another, even women, in our "own" spaces.  It remains a challenge to build solidarity across class, local, and gender boundaries.  But we must recognize that engagement begins at and is grounded in the local.

Challenges to globalization and unfettered capitalism use slogans to remind us of the global-local connections:  "resistance must be as global as capitalism;" "resistance must be as local as capitalism."  James De Filippis echoes the work of our contributors:  "social movements need places in which to develop and prosper, and the privileging of the global scale over other, smaller scales of organizing threatens to undercut the ability of the protests to realize the transformative changes that are its goals (2001:2).

This analysis behooves us as writers (and readers, we hope) to rethink our own participation in this local.  It is up to us all to de-neutralize what institutions have, in practice, done to the

discourse of empowerment.  Power must be restored as the centerpiece of empowerment, through global, national, and local lenses.

**Bibliography**

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James DeFilippis, "Our Resistance Must Be as *Local* as Capitalism:  Place, Scale and the Anti-Globalization Protest Movement."  (http://comm .org.utoledo.edu/papers2001/defilippis.htm)

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[i] DAWN developed in Bangalore in 1984 when committed women from a number of different countries came together to share their experiences with development strategies. It became organized to prepare for the 1985 UN World Meeting on Women in Nairobi.

[ii] The US Department of the Treasury, Internal Revenue Service, advises that "Depletion is the using up of natural resources by mining, quarrying, drilling, or felling. The depletion deduction allows an owner or operator to account for the reduction of a product's reserves" http://www.irs.gov/publications/p535/ch09.html  (accessed 7 March 2007).

[iii] Personal communication from Lucy Ferguson. doctoral student at Manchester University, UK.  Thesis title: 'Production, Consumption and Reproduction in the Global Political Economy: the Case of Tourism Development in Central America'.