Ethical Empowerment and Women's Education: Proceed With Care

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Abstract

The empowerment of women has become ubiquitous in the discourse of development. However, as the term 'empowerment' has found its way into more policy documents and programs for action advanced by various organisations in the development fora, it has also been informed by particular assumptions that are embedded within traditional neo-liberal theorising. I will advance that in order to pursue empowerment in a way that transforms unequal power relations in society, it must be reconceptualised from a feminist ethics of care based on relationality and sensitivity to context. Furthermore, I will outline a critical pedagogy of care which is an approach to education that integrates critical education as outlined by Paulo Friere with a caring approach to education following Nel Noddings. A critical pedagogy of care is a strategy to begin a process of transformational empowerment that 'trickles up' from the grassroots to the national and international levels.

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Introduction

On the evening of June 22, 2002 Mukhtar Bibi, a peasant in the village of Meerwala, Pakistan, was gang raped to settle a dispute between the men in her family and the men in another local clan. Mukhtar Bibi's story is not an uncommon one in Pakistan and other regions of the world, as "when a man's honor in Pakistani society is centred around women" the women become 'merchandise to help resolve conflicts and exact punishment' usually through compulsory marriage or rape."¹ What is unique about Mukhtar's case, however, is that she fought the impunity that characterises many similar cases. With the help of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and international women's groups, Mukhtar became an agent for change in Pakistan.

Illiterate and uneducated, Mukhtar was unable to write, read or even sign her own statement upon reporting her ordeal to the police. A version of her statement was later used against her in court, and it was only when international pressure was applied that her case was actually taken seriously by authorities. After a long and difficult battle, Mukhtar's abusers were found guilty and she received roughly US \$8500 in compensation from the Pakistani government. Rather than keeping the money for herself, Mukhtar embarked on a campaign to educate young girls in Pakistan with the goal of empowering future generations of women through education.²

Mukhtar, who now goes by the name Mukhtar Mai, has since learned how to read and write, and she has attended international conferences to tell her story. She

¹Mukhtar Mai (2006) *In the Name of Honor: A Memoir*, New York: Washington Square Press, 109.

²Ibid.

also used the money from her settlement to start a school for girls in her home village. With the help of international supporters, NGOs and women's groups, Mukhtar's dream of a school for girls became a reality. By the end of 2005 Mukhtar had more than two hundred girls attending her school. Mukhtar has devoted her life to educating girls in a region where basic skills such as reading and writing are not considered a priority for young girls. However, Mukhtar has gone beyond the regular syllabus to teach girls that the injustices perpetrated against women are neither natural nor just. The rape or murder of women in the name of honour "is not what Koran teaches."³

Building her school and persuading parents to allow their daughters to attend was not an easy task. Mukhtar herself went door to door to plead with parents to allow their daughters to attend the school. The difficulties Mukhtar has faced in convincing parents to allow their daughters to attend school are not unique to her village, or to her country. Young girls in many places around the world are often denied education due to their household obligations. Therefore, Mukhtar's experience shows that the norms that understand women and girls primarily as caregivers in the home may act to impede their abilities to partake in potentially empowering activities such as education. Furthermore, patriarchal norms that consider educating girls as less valuable must be addressed; simply building a school will not ensure girls' enrollment.

Mukhtar's devotion to education is not only inspiring, but it is also instructive. Education, literacy and critical knowledge are the most important building blocks for women's empowerment. As Mukhtar herself articulated, "(i)n a few years, I hope

³Mai, 109.

these little girls will have enough ideas about education to consider their lives in a new light.”⁴ Not only will these young girls think differently, but they will also have more opportunities and skills that will allow them greater choice and freedom in their lives. There was no school for girls in Meerwala until Mukhtar established her school. Young girls were only taught what they must and must not do to maintain their honour, and their family’s honour. For Mukhtar, this lack of education “teaches us [girls] distrust, obedience, submission, fear, abject respect for men. It teaches us to forget ourselves.”⁵ Mukhtar set out to teach girls how to know, trust and respect themselves through education. Mukhtar Mai’s story is one of empowerment, Mai’s own empowerment and her devotion to empowering young girls in Pakistan through education.

The above story is evidence that education can challenge the norms of patriarchy and injustice that allow for crimes like those committed against Mukhtar to occur with impunity. Mukhtar’s slogan is: “End oppression with education,” and she notes that following her efforts in her rural village, attitudes regarding violence against women have changed for the better.⁶ It is precisely stories like Mukhtar’s that make the concept of ‘empowerment’ so inspiring. Through education Mukhtar has devoted her life to challenging and altering the oppressive gender norms that are characteristic of her society. However, as ‘empowerment’ has caught on as a buzz

⁴Mai, 118.

⁵Ibid, 91.

⁶Mukhtar Mai cited in Masood Haider (2006) “Mukhtaran Honoured as ‘Hero’ at UN” *Dawn*, available at: <http://www.dawn.com/2006/05/04/top11.htm>. Accessed June 1st, 2009.

word in development discourse— a panacea to address the subordination of women— it has often lost its transformative value and truly meaningful potential.

The popularisation of the term ‘empowerment’ as it relates to women in development can be attributed to the convergence of two trends in development theorising over the last thirty years. First, the important role of women in development was realised, largely due to the work of Ester Boserup. Second, following critiques of development practice as ‘top-down’ policies aimed at ‘westernising’ the Third World, development organisations moved to more participatory approaches.

Until the 1970s, development theorising focused on gender-neutral individuals; the specific role and needs of women were largely ignored. Ester Boserup’s groundbreaking 1970 study, entitled *Women’s Role in Economic Development*, “demonstrated how development actually weakened the status of women in many traditional societies.”⁷ Boserup’s argument that the fruits of economic development might be distributed on the basis of gender was the catalyst for a large body of development literature regarding the specific role of women in development (WID).⁸ As feminist engagement with development increased in this period, international organisations, and development theorists in general, also began to examine the ways in which particular development policies affected women.

Five years after Boserup’s initial study, the United Nations declared 1975 “the

⁷Rekha Datta (2002) “The State, Development, and Empowerment in India” in Rekha Datta and Judith Kornberg, eds., *Women in Developing Countries: Assessing Strategies for Empowerment*. 76

⁸Brett O’Bannon (1994) “The Normanda River Project: Toward a Feminist Model of Women in Development” *Policy Studies*, Vol.27, No.2/3. pp.247-267. 247.

Year of the Woman,” and the years 1976-1985 as the “Decade for Women.”⁹ In the years following the “Decade for Women,” several conferences took place to address inequalities affecting women in the developing world. During this time, development theorists began to understand that development cannot be pursued with gender-neutral subjects in mind and that development policies often have different effects on women than they do on men. In the decade proceeding Boserup’s pioneering study, women went from being ‘invisible’ to being firmly entrenched in development theorising— at least in theory.

At the same time that women’s ‘visibility’ in development theorising was increasing, the definition of development became more comprehensive and resulted in the notion of “human development.”¹⁰ Mainstream development organisations began to respond to critiques that the economic focus of development was too narrow, and they began advancing more human-centred approaches to development. In 1990, the United Nations unveiled the Human Development Index (HDI) to assess development based on several dimensions of human welfare including health, education, and social and political freedoms. These indicators replaced the more narrow emphasis on gross national product per capita, which was previously used to capture the effects of development.¹¹

As the definition of development grew more inclusive, more attention was paid to those development programs which actually improved the general well-being

⁹Datta, 76.

¹⁰Ibid, 75.

¹¹Allen C. Kelley (1991) “The Human Development Index: ‘Handle with Care’” *Population and Development Review*, Vol.17, No.2. pp. 315-324. 315.

of development recipients, rather than just their economic situation. The underlying aim of development shifted towards improving the lives of human beings which afforded, and indeed necessitated, the participation of people in the developing world regarding policies that affected them.¹² Following the influential works of theorists like Denis Goulet and Paulo Freire, and aided by Amartya Sen's account of agency, mainstream development organisations began to understand development recipients as agents or stakeholders in their own development, as opposed to grateful recipients of programs of actions 'designed' for them.¹³

The intersection of human-centred development and women in development paved the way for 'empowerment', and specifically the empowerment of women, to become a central feature in the development jargon. However, "(t)he more widely that a new term or phrase is adopted— especially in the policy world— the more varied its meaning can become ... such has been the misfortune of the concept of empowerment."¹⁴ By the 1990s 'empowerment' had found its way into so many development documents, especially those concerning women, that it began to lack any tangible meaning.

On the surface, the extensive use of 'empowerment' in policies addressing women in development appears to demonstrate how the trends of human-centred development and women in development have become important within development

¹²Datta, 76.

¹³David A. Crocker (2008) *Ethics of Global Development: Agency, Capability and Deliberative Democracy*. New York: Cambridge University Press. 9.

¹⁴Jay Drydyk (2008) "How to Distinguish Empowerment from Agency" paper presented at the Human Development and Capability Association (HDCA) Annual Conference, New Delhi, India, September 11, 2008. 1.

theorising. As the need to empower women is more pressing than ever, the integration and popularisation of ‘empowerment’ as it relates to women should be a positive step in improving the lives of women around the world. However, despite the fact that ‘empowerment’ crops up in almost every document that addresses women in development, an examination of ‘empowerment’ in practice suggests that “the popular rhetoric employed by development specialists and institutions– specifically those that emphasize women’s participation and empowerment– seems disconnected from actual practice.”¹⁵

An examination of the ways in which ‘empowerment’ came to be used in the current development discourse suggests that the concept has been mainstreamed, and even co-opted, to serve the dominant neo-liberal discourse. Far from resembling Mukhtar Mai’s inspiring story of grassroots empowerment aimed at generational change through education, ‘empowerment’ as promoted in mainstream development remains a top-down process that pursues largely instrumental aims. For the most part, development agencies have focused on bringing women into the development process rather than “altering the overall development process ... and even changing the oppressive gendered relations that the process often creates or maintains.”¹⁶ Thus, in many cases, ‘empowerment’ has become part and parcel of neo-liberal development theorising. It is based on abstract individuals for whom one-size-fits all development programs in free market societies will result in modernisation and empowerment for everyone in the developing world. Unfortunately, these approaches used by

¹⁵ Robin G. Isserles (2003) “Microcredit: The Rhetoric of Empowerment, the Reality of ‘Development as Usual’” *Women’s Studies Quarterly*, Vol.31, No. 3/4. pp.38-57. 38.

¹⁶Ibid, 38.

mainstream development agencies have in many cases resulted in disempowerment rather than empowerment.

The purpose of this thesis is to rearticulate empowerment in a way that reclaims its transformative potential to alter unequal gender hierarchies in a way that will enhance the agency and well-being of women in particular societies. Therefore, this is a critical project based largely on theoretical and normative research. I will seek to uncover how particular discursive and normative frameworks lead to disempowerment, oppression, marginalisation and exclusion. A discursive analysis of mainstream development theorising reveals that the dominant neo-liberal paradigm that informs empowerment in practice has become entrenched to the extent that it is difficult to question and challenge, even in the face of widespread disempowerment of the oppressed and marginalised around the world. I will argue that rethinking the discursive and normative frameworks that dominate development theorising will open up new avenues to conceptualise and pursue empowerment in practice. Furthermore, as I am focusing on the specific role of women in the developing world I will adopt a feminist orientation to consider the gendered outcomes of particular empowerment projects.

In Chapter One I will analyse how empowerment is currently conceptualised. Although I acknowledge that development theorising is not a monolithic project, I will examine the mainstream development discourse that informs ‘empowerment’ and its processes. I will examine several mainstream development policies in order to demonstrate that empowerment has not been well-defined, even though the term is often used (even overused) in policy documents. I will analyse the discourse that informs development theorising to argue that the failure to engage with the definition

of empowerment is primarily due to the fact that ‘empowerment’ as a grassroots and transformative process is at odds with the mainstream, neo-liberal normative framework within development. The lack of conceptual clarity regarding the concept of empowerment cannot simply be attributed to the fact that empowerment is difficult to define. Rather, the contested nature of empowerment allows it to be seamlessly integrated into the neo-liberal discourse, making neo-liberal policies dominant while stripping empowerment of its more radical and transformative aims.

In Chapter Two I will focus on how ‘empowerment’ can be extracted from the neo-liberal development discourse that has limited its potential, and how it can be reclaimed as a strategy that holds real promise for redressing unequal power relations. Development discourse is always a moral discourse– it identifies problems and develops solutions to address these problems. Therefore, it is and must be, informed by a moral framework. I will argue that a feminist ethics of care is the most appropriate moral framework through which to reconceptualise and pursue processes of empowerment in development. As a theoretical framework, feminist ethics of care would precipitate a radical restructuring of development discourse to make it more receptive to facilitating the empowerment of women and the powerless. Although a feminist ethics of care has not been applied to development theorising in general, or to empowerment specifically, its relational and contextual principles provide a meaningful starting point for processes of empowerment for all members of a given society, including women.

A feminist ethic of care is a unique moral framework in that it considers the most important values that should guide moral judgement should be those that are integral to the practice of care. The practice of care is defined as the responsibility to

attend to the specific, contextually located physical and spiritual needs of others.¹⁷ In this sense, moral frameworks are not based on abstract principles of reason as advanced by liberal theories, instead they are grounded in context and situation. Furthermore, a feminist ethics of care framework begins with fully relational subjects, understanding that all people exist only in relations to others. From this relational perspective, people must be attentive to and cognisant of the needs of others. This approach is far more representative of the way people actually live their lives than the way neo-liberal theorising understands people as autonomous individuals. Finally, a feminist ethics of care perspective is sensitive to, and critical of, unequal power relations in society. Any analyses of possible empowerment strategies must begin with an assessment of the power relations in a given society. Applying a feminist ethics of care to empowerment challenges the ways in which ‘empowerment’ has come to connote what an *individual* can do for him or herself. This individualist perspective does not account for the ways in which most people in the world do not live their lives or understand their well-being in isolation from others. Furthermore, the same individualist assumptions preclude the possibility of addressing the wider structures and institutions that act as obstacles to ‘empowerment.’ The failure of neo-liberal theories to undertake such critical examinations grounded in relational theorising has contributed to, and perpetuated, unequal power structures and has undermined the importance of relationships at the local, global and national levels in empowerment processes.

¹⁷Kimberly Hutchings, “Feminist Perspectives on a Planetary Ethic” in William M. Sullivan and Will Kymlicka, eds. *The Globalization of Ethics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 181.

The second purpose of this thesis is to delineate a strategy through which meaningful and transformative empowerment can be pursued in practice. I will argue that education has the potential to be the most transformative, and empowering strategy for women, and other oppressed groups, around the world. I aim to demonstrate that education is a foundational tool of empowerment, without which secondary tools of empowerment, such as microcredit, expanded employment options, women's rights and even health care initiatives, fall short of their intended goal of empowerment. However, for education to be a catalyst for transformation, the type of education is of the utmost importance to the empowerment process.

I will argue that traditional approaches to education remain largely instrumental and often maintain and perpetuate unequal power relations. In effect, instrumental approaches to education fall short of initiating a meaningful process of empowerment because they fail to question the dominant institutions in education and the larger society that disempower particular groups of people. In other words, traditional approaches to education, similar to traditional approaches to empowerment in general, anticipate transformation by simply 'adding women,' but they do little to critique and alter the oppressive gender structures that already exist in ways that limit empowerment. Therefore, it is necessary for education to generate critical knowledge based on contextual realities in order to be empowering. Only when women, and men, become aware of the structures and ideologies that perpetuate inequality can they act to change them and begin a process of transformative empowerment.

In order to articulate a method for critical education I will examine Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* which outlines a methodology for education that is rooted in context and requires participants to engage critically with their realities to

transform their world. However, applying Freire's methods has not always resulted in the anticipated outcomes, and this is because they require an ethical framework that is attentive to the actual lived experience of students when articulating transformative goals. Thus, I will advance that a feminist ethic of care framework is the appropriate ethical perspective to facilitate such an approach. Caring in education understands that the goal of education is to promote the quality of life as well as the moral and intellectual growth of students. Furthermore, pursuing education as a caring activity means that students' needs are taken into account, and teachers are cognisant that their students' day to day activities are affected during or after empowerment processes. I will outline a critical pedagogy of care which posits an ethics of care as a guiding moral framework for Freire's methodology. A critical pedagogy of care is predicated on giving and receiving care, while engaging critically with unequal relationships to pursue transformative empowerment from the 'bottom-up.'

Through an examination of the discursive framework that informs empowerment I will argue that the concept of 'empowerment' has been reduced to a buzz word that legitimates neo-liberal policies. The ostensibly neutral development discourse must be challenged for its embedded assumptions which impede the empowerment of women and the oppressed in the developing world. I will argue that a relational and contextual approach to empowerment, such as a feminist ethics of care, is best suited to redress the shortcomings of neo-liberal theorising. However, my argument here is not simply how to conceptualise empowerment in theory, but how to pursue strategies of empowerment in practice. I will therefore outline a critical pedagogy of care as a methodology to pursue empowerment through education. The

contemporary global reality of the ‘feminisation of poverty’ is now well documented, and in 1998 an estimated “70 percent of the world’s poor [were] women.”¹⁸ Over the last ten years, the dominance of neo-liberal policies have exacerbated the conditions of women living in the worst poverty in the world.¹⁹ Therefore, the urgency of pursuing meaningful empowerment of women that addresses and revises power structures, including neo-liberal policies that relegate women to positions of subordination is of immeasurable importance. I intend to advance one such strategy.

¹⁸Alain Marcoux (1998) “The Feminization of Poverty: Claims, Facts and Data Needs” *Population and Development Review*, Vol.24, No.1. pp.131-139, 131.

¹⁹See Zo Randriamaro (2008) “Trade, Poverty and Women’s Economic Empowerment in Sub-Saharan Africa” United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women. New York: United Nations.

Chapter One

Empowerment: Western Liberal Capitalism Disguised?

“...there is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women.”

Kofi Annan

Empowerment has become ubiquitous in the discourse of development, as it has the potential to increase the agency and well-being of women and the powerless in a given society. A review of various policy documents written by international organisations such as the United Nations and the World Bank, as well as policies and programs enacted by various national governments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), reveals the extent to which the concept of ‘empowerment’ has found its way into the development discourse. However, despite the prolific use of the concept in the numerous documents, the meaning of ‘empowerment’ and the strategies through which to pursue it are far from clear. In many of these documents the meaning is merely inferred; it is left up to the reader to decipher what ‘empowerment’ really entails. Unfortunately, the meaning of ‘empowerment’ and the strategies to undertake such a process are necessarily limited by the discourse in which they are expressed. In order for ‘empowerment’ to move beyond rhetoric and to truly become an effective tool for development, it must be taken out of the neo-liberal discourse that currently informs it and critically engage with, rather than perpetuate, unequal power relations.

Empowerment, as I conceptualise it, connotes something quite inspiring. It is a transformational and grassroots process in which people mobilise to change their lives in important ways. Empowerment is a continuous process, as people can become more or less empowered over time. The circular and ongoing nature of empowerment means that empowerment strategies cannot be pursued as linear processes that end when

certain goals or indicators are met. Furthermore, empowerment is a process that begins from the bottom-up. Various actors in development institutions cannot develop empowerment strategies without considering, and prioritising, the expressed desires and needs of those who are to be empowered. Various organisations undertaking empowerment strategies should understand their role as enabling subjects to pursue specific goals that the subjects themselves define.

Empowerment strategies must be sensitive to context and the everyday experiences, and challenges, of agents who are to be empowered. Sensitivity to context will reveal the structures, institutions, norms and power hierarchies in a given society that act as barriers to meaningful empowerment. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, empowerment entails a transformation of unequal power relations through a redistribution of power. Empowerment occurs when people become aware of the structures that oppress them and mobilise collectively to challenge the institutions or ideologies that impede their well-being. This understanding of empowerment requires unique strategies for specific situations, rather than a universalising framework that will be applicable to all situations. The concept of empowerment as I have articulated it has not been easily translated into development practice. In fact, ‘empowerment’ remains loosely defined, its transformative and inspiring potential has been glossed over, and it has become just another buzz word in development jargon.

As a result, it is necessary to examine who defines ‘empowerment,’ how they define it, and how it is put into practice in the field of development. Empowerment processes often fail to meet the criteria identified above. As a result, these processes often uphold the status quo and undermine empowerment’s transformative potential. International organisations such as the United Nations and the World Bank have taken

to using the term widely, often without outlining what empowerment actually entails. Jay Drydyk calls the proliferation of meanings within international organisations a “conceptual drift,” and identifies cases in which the United Nations has used the term so diversely as to leave the reader of such policies to decipher what the term actually means; in some cases the usages are simply “mystifying.”²⁰ National governments have also embraced the term in public policy, but they have attached different and sometimes contradictory meanings to the term. Non-governmental organisations were likely the first to employ the term, but they also attach their own meanings to the term. In their study on international population discourse, Sônia Corra and Rosalind Petchesky argue that “feminist-sounding rhetoric is being used by international population agencies to legitimate and gloss over what remain instrumentalist and narrowly quantitative ends.”²¹ I would argue that the same is true of empowerment within the discourse of development.

Thus, it is not the lack of conceptual clarity that is the most pernicious impediment to a process of empowerment, but it is also the discourse in which it is articulated. Examining the various ways in which empowerment is conceptualised in mainstream development discourse reveals many embedded western, liberal and capitalist assumptions that are part of a larger ‘universal’ ethical framework. These features present serious obstacles for meaningful empowerment, especially for women. Attempts to empower women by improving their access to human rights, the paid work

²⁰Jay Drydyk (2008) “How to Distinguish Empowerment from Agency,” 1.

²¹Sônia Corra and Rosalind Petchesky (1994) “Reproductive and Sexual Rights: A Feminist Perspective” in Gita Sen, Adrienne Germain, Lincoln C. Chen, eds., *Population Policies Reconsidered: Health Empowerment and Rights* Boston: Harvard University Press, 119.

force or even credit programs often fail to question and transform the very structures in society that have historically excluded women from such activities.

According to Kate Young, these approaches do not distinguish between the “condition,” that is, the material state in which poor women live, which is characterised by poor wages, bad nutrition and lack of access to health care and education, and the “position” of women, that is their social and economic status as compared to men.²² According to Young, approaches to empowerment that simply strive to improve the conditions in which women live may perpetuate inequality because they fail to examine and develop awareness of the structures in society that place women in a ‘position’ of subordination and inequality relative to men.²³ Improving women’s ‘condition,’ or addressing their basic needs is important and necessary to facilitate empowerment. However, for empowerment to result, simply addressing the conditions of women’s lives alone is not sufficient. Rather, critical engagement and significant changes to women’s ‘position’ that often makes them unable to meet their basic needs in the first place must be challenged and altered for meaningful empowerment to occur. Therefore, I would advance that it is the role of development to focus more on the material needs or ‘condition’ of women, while empowerment processes are more concerned with enhancing the status or ‘position’ of women to increase their ability to meet their material needs. Unfortunately, many development organisations fail to make

²²Kate Young (1988) *Gender and Development: A Relational Approach*. Oxford: Oxford University Press in Srilatha Batliwala (1994) “The Meaning of Women’s Empowerment: New Concepts from Action” in Gita Sen, Adrieen Germain, Lincoln C. Chen, eds., *Population Policies Reconsidered: Health Empowerment and Rights* Boston: Harvard University Press, 128

²³Ibid, 128..

this distinction and they continue to pursue instrumental policies to improve women's 'condition' with the expectation that improvements to women's 'position' will necessarily result.

In this chapter I intend to articulate and critically examine some of the current definitions of 'empowerment' that are espoused by various actors in the field of development. Using empowerment approaches as a means to pursue development is a critical step towards making development more responsive to the needs of women and the most powerless internationally. However, practical applications of empowerment strategies are often problematic. In the first section of this chapter I will outline some of the features of the mainstream ethical discourse that informs both development and empowerment processes. When empowerment strategies are informed by the mainstream neo-liberal discourse and its assumptions of individualism and capitalism, these strategies have limited potential and are often ineffective.

In the second section of this chapter I will examine the ways in which empowerment strategies are defined, if defined at all, in the field of development. I will draw from sources including the United Nations, national governments and non-governmental organisations. An examination of the ways in which empowerment strategies are being defined and implemented demonstrates that empowerment processes have been confined within a particular discourse that often does not result in meaningful transformation in the lives of women and the powerless. Although I acknowledge that the definitions used in this examination are not exhaustive, by examining the concept from various organisations that differ in size, scope and membership I will be able to provide evidence that while empowerment is a concept

that has been applied diversely, it is often in pursuit of neo-liberal goals. Finally, I will briefly examine the related concepts of ‘agency’ and ‘power.’ It is important to consider both of these concepts when pursuing empowerment, as understanding these terms provides important foundations for conceptualising and advancing empowerment strategies. However, many development organisations undertaking empowerment strategies rarely define or consider these two terms, despite their importance.

Empowerment: New Concept, Same Old Discourse

The shift towards people-centred development certainly appears to represent a positive change within development theorising. As I outlined in the introduction, the realisation that development theories must re-centre human beings as the agents, rather than the passive recipients of development has been a primary catalyst for the popularisation of empowerment processes. In fact, development practitioners have adopted the mantra that they should “act as facilitators to articulate the perceived needs of the poorest women as formulated by themselves.”²⁴ This new rhetoric in development is admirable. However, integrating terms such as ‘empowerment’ and ‘participation’ into the development discourse has not translated into practice. Andrea Cornwall and Karen Brock question if the “appropriation of nice-sounding words” is simply an attempt to “dress up ‘business as usual’ of development.”²⁵ An examination of development in practice lends credence to this assertion as the integration and

²⁴Haleh Afshar, ed. *Women and Empowerment: Illustrations from the Third World*, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1.

²⁵Andrea Cornwall and Karen Brock (2005) “What to Buzzwords do for Development Policy? A Critical Look at ‘Participation’, ‘Empowerment’ and ‘Poverty Reduction’” *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No.7. pp. 1043-1060. 1044.

popularisation of terms such as ‘empowerment’ has done little to alter the discourse that informs empowerment concepts and strategies.

First, however, it is useful to define what I mean by ‘discourse.’ ‘Discourse’ refers to the “ensemble of ideas, concepts and categories through which meaning is given to phenomena.”²⁶ Discourse, therefore, has an effect on how concepts and programs of action are understood and pursued. Discourse “frames certain problems,” and imposes parameters on the possible debates and solutions desirable to address such problems.²⁷ The discourse of development creates policies that fit into particular frames of reference. Although the same term may be used diversely by different development practitioners and organisations, discourse guides the practical applications of concepts like empowerment by prioritising certain programs of action and neutralising others.²⁸ Therefore, simply inserting a term like ‘empowerment’ into mainstream development discourse allows for certain ways of knowing and for programs of action to be perceived as common-sense. ‘Empowerment’ is defined in such a way that it seamlessly fits into the ‘business as usual’ of development. However, the ways in which empowerment strategies are pursued in practice do not reflect universal or neutral goals. Rather, empowerment strategies should be aimed at improving the ‘position’ of the powerless, although this is regularly carried out by addressing the

²⁶M. Hajer “Discourse Coalitions and the Institutionalisation of Practice” in Andrea Cornwall and Karen Brock (2005) “What to Buzzwords do for Development Policy? A Critical Look at ‘Participation’, ‘Empowerment’ and ‘Poverty Reduction’” *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No.7. pp. 1043-1060. 1044.

²⁷Cornwall and Brock, 1044..

²⁸Ibid, 1047-1048.

‘conditions.’ Simply addressing women’s condition fails to engage with, or generate lasting and beneficial changes to the structures that are responsible for inequality.

In the current discourse of development, ‘empowerment’ has been framed within the dominant culture of western capitalism, and improvements to economic conditions are primary goals.²⁹ Therefore, the dominant discourse that informs empowerment processes is a moral framework because it outlines what ought to be and how to achieve it. In mainstream development practice, normative theorising is heavily influenced by neo-liberal ideologies. The appropriation of nice-sounding words like ‘empowerment’ merely establishes the moral authority for international development agencies to pursue the neo-liberal model that they would have us all inhabit.³⁰ Certainly, there are those working in the field who are critical of this discourse and who eschew its methods. However, I am referring to the dominant, mainstream discourse that powerful international organisations perpetuate and maintain. An analysis of this dominant neo-liberal discourse presents many impediments for meaningful empowerment, and limits the scope of debate on the types of strategies that are both possible and desirable to achieve empowerment.

Given the discourse that informs development theorising, development practice has long been accused of prioritising western, liberal and capitalist goals as the way to prosperity and modernisation for the ‘developing’ world. Despite attempts to ‘re-package’ development to make it more relevant to the developing world and to the

²⁹ Jo Rowlands (1998) “Empowerment and Development” in Haleh Afshar, ed. *Women and Empowerment: Illustrations from the Third World*, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 11.

³⁰ Cornwall and Brock 1056-1057.

realities of impoverished people, development continues to be criticised for its top-down policies which are implemented at the behest of the ‘developed’ world onto the ‘developing’ world. Currently, mainstream development discourse is a neo-liberal discourse that “is still for the most part obsessed by the agenda of economic efficiency, articulated largely through privatization and liberalization programmes.”³¹ Neo-liberalism is thus a theory that is based upon the writings of Adam Smith, and is centred on a commitment to the self-regulation of the market as well as the need to restrict the capacity of the state. Neo-liberalism is a variant of classical economic liberalism, which rejects government intervention in the economy and undermines the role of the state as a provider of social supports for its citizens. It therefore emphasises the supremacy of the market, and pursues policies such as deregulation, privatisation, the cutting of government spending and is often described as “historically intrinsic to the rise of capitalism as a mode of production.”³² Finally, neo-liberalism takes the political ideal of individual freedom as fundamental and proposes that human well-being can best be achieved by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms.³³

Given the features identified above, the neo-liberal discourse that informs development did not develop in a cultural or religious vacuum, rather it refers to distinctly western ways of life. Inherent in mainstream neo-liberal moral theorising is the understanding that humans are autonomous individuals who pursue self-interested

³¹David Simon (1997) “Development Reconsidered: New Directions in Development Thinking” *Geografiska Annaler. Series B, Human Geography*, Vol.79, No4. pp. 183-201.189.

³²Hugo Radice (2008) “The Developmental State under Global Neoliberalism”, *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 6. pp.1153-1174. 1155

³³David Harvey (2005) *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 3-5.

goals. In fact, mainstream normative theorising that informs development appeals to a “liberal-individualist moral ontology...[and] is thus incapable of integrating the crucial normative dynamics of relational power, collective responsibility and mutual dependence into its analysis.”³⁴ Rather than understanding humans as relational beings who are dependent on others, liberal theorising understands independent and autonomous subjects as the most ‘free.’

Tola Olu Pearce’s research in Africa finds that liberal theories that understand society as being made up of “autonomous, self-managing, self-contained individuals” are not reflective of the how people in Africa view themselves as beings in relation.³⁵ I would add that an individualist-ontology is neither reflective of how most people, especially women, in both the developed and developing worlds actually live their lives. Development theories that are based on the assumption that the most ‘empowered’ state for humans is one of complete independence may fundamentally misunderstand how women, and indeed all people, in the developing world view themselves and will, therefore, not be empowering.

The tendency of liberal theories to ‘universalise’ western values is often accomplished through abstract theorising that attempts to come up with general strategies or ‘blueprints’ through which to pursue empowerment programs. Rather than paying attention to the context, power relationships and various institutions that

³⁴Fiona Robinson (2006) “Beyond Labour Rights: The Ethics of Care and Women’s Work in the Global Economy,” *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, Vol. 8, No. 3. pp.321-342. 322.

³⁵Tola Olu Pearce (2001) “Human Rights and Sociology: Some Observations from Africa” *Social Problems*, Vol.48, No.1. pp.48-56. 52.

influence the degree to which people are empowered or disempowered, traditional moral theorising relies on notions of rights and justice that are meant to be applied to all situations.

For example, increased access to human rights is often a goal of empowerment. Increasing women's access to their human rights is important and should play a role in women's empowerment, but these approaches are limited when used alone. This is primarily because pursuing empowerment under the guise of human rights is a 'top-down' approach that appeals to specific international standards that are inherently western. They do not necessarily enhance "an individuals's capacity to make choices and transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes."³⁶ Despite the rhetoric of more 'bottom-up' development, the strategies that are advanced remain part of a larger normative project that attempts to codify and translate poverty and underdevelopment into 'problems' that must be solved through policies or strategies that are advanced by economists and theorists headquartered in major cities in the 'developed' world.

The mainstreaming of empowerment strategies, then, simply glosses over the very realities that must be considered and critiqued in order to achieve meaningful empowerment. In effect, "one-size-fits-all development recipes stripped of any engagement with culture, politics , power or difference" may simply act to uphold, and even entrench, structures and ideologies that are responsible for disempowerment.³⁷ It

³⁶Ruth Alsop and Nina Heinsohn (2005) *Measuring Empowerment in Practice: Structuring Analysis and Framing Indicators* World Bank, Washington D.C. , 1.

³⁷Cornwall and Brock, 1058.

is these ‘top-down’ approaches that rely on notions of justice and rights that allow the discourse of development to neutralise the more transformative aspects of terms like empowerment, and to integrate the term into the common-sense development policies designed by international organisations *for*, not in consultation with, the developing world.

The normalising, or even co-opting, of strategies such as empowerment “reduces them from agendas for change... into little more than shopping lists which are hawked to donors for implementation, commonly more in line with donors’ than recipients’ priorities.”³⁸ In the wake of economic globalisation the ‘priorities’ of international organisations often result in negative, and sometime disastrous, outcomes for the developing world. Not only do international organisations commonly articulate how to ‘do’ development, according to western value systems, but these policies are enacted in a climate of economic globalization that exacerbates existing inequalities between the rich and the poor, at local, national and especially global levels. In effect, as Christine Koggel notes, “lives at the local level are being increasingly shaped by factors at the global level and specifically by features of economic globalization.”³⁹ However, as it is primarily powerful international organisations that control development theorising, there is little room to challenge these very organisations for the ways in which they create conditions that impede meaningful empowerment for the

³⁸Simon, 188.

³⁹Christine Koggel (2006) “A Critical Perspective on Measuring Empowerment: The Role of the World Bank and Economic Globalization” Presented to the Panel “Examining the World Bank’s *Measuring Empowerment*,” at the 2006 International Conference of the Human Development and Capability Association, Groningen, Netherlands, 29 August - 1 September 2006, pp. 7.

developing world. Rather, these organisations use words such as empowerment that sound transformative and inspiring in order legitimise their agenda and turn programs of action into moral imperatives that are beyond question.⁴⁰

For example, neo-liberal policies such as structural adjustment programs (SAPs), which the World Bank implements, reduce social services in favour of debt repayment leaving people in many developing nations without important social supports such as healthcare and education. Such policies are immensely disempowering for women and marginalised people around the world. However, “SAPs and their conditionalities have been described by their prescribing doctors as harsh medicine required to effect a systemic cure;” in this case the cure is often worse than the disease.⁴¹ For women, the negative affects are two-fold. First, such policies often leave women unemployed as women make up a large number of those employed in places such as hospitals, schools and clinics. These are the same services that are cut by structural adjustment programs. Second, when these programs are reduced, women face a heavier burden of unpaid care work for children, the sick and the elderly. Unfortunately, “the direction of public policy under neoliberal stringencies... means that women living in the worst poverty in the global South have been deprived of even the prospect of the progressive realization of a non-discriminatory system of decent jobs, public services and broad-based social security systems.”⁴² This brief examination of the diverse and extensive impacts of neo-liberal globalization on women

⁴⁰Cornwall and Brock, 1055.

⁴¹Simon, 189.

⁴²Diane Elson (2002) “Gender Justice, Human Rights, and Neo-liberal Economic Policies.” In M. Molyneux and S. Razavi (eds.), *Gender, Justice, Development and Rights* Oxford: Oxford University Press. pp. 98.

demonstrates how global forces play an important role in women's prospects for empowerment. Documents produced by international organisations such as the World Bank notably omit these limitations which act as barriers to empowerment.

Finally, within neo-liberal discourse the concept of empowerment is often understood as being intrinsically related to economic participation and consumerism. These distinctly western concepts have restricted the meaning of 'empowerment' and orientated it "to serve the present drive of western capitalism."⁴³ The discourse adamantly professes that successful development and integration into the world economy will eventually allow developing countries to reach a degree of economic prosperity that will 'trickle down' to those living in the worst economic conditions. However, this is rarely the case as the paralysing conditions which rich nations and international organisations place on Third World countries "have magnified relationships of power between rich and poor countries and in ways that shape its effects on citizens of a country and the power they have, either individually or collectively, to change oppressive conditions."⁴⁴

Despite this trend, the neo-liberal discourse still advances that the free market or capitalism is *the way* to effective development and empowerment. Following this line of thinking integrating women into the workforce is an effective– and indeed central– step to empowering women. Little attention is paid to the immense pressures and constraints on women who already perform a wide range of 'unproductive,' or

⁴³Manoranjan Mohanty (1995) "On the Concept of 'Empowerment'" *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 30, No. 24: pp. 1434-1436. 1434.

⁴⁴Christine Koggel (2007) "Empowerment and the Role of Advocacy in a Globalized World" *Ethics and Social Welfare*, Vol. 1, No.1. pp. 8-21.

unpaid, work. This type of work does not disappear when women are integrated into the 'productive' or paid labour force. In fact, neo-liberal theories understand poverty as an individual rather than highly gendered social and structural problem.

Disciplining individuals to become self-sufficient thereby obscures the "constraints that unpaid reproductive and caring work place on women."⁴⁵ Even more 'grassroots' approaches to development stay within the purview of the neo-liberal discourse by appealing to the market as a key mechanism for 'empowering' women.

The immense popularity of programs that provide micro-loans or micro-credit to women are heralded as an extremely successful method of achieving the 'empowerment' of women. Although micro-credit is a viable, and often useful empowerment tool, it is also associated with western models of development that appeal to free-market, neo-liberal policies. As Heloise Weber argues, micro-credit strategies implemented as an empowering approach to poverty reduction in the context of SAPs merely advances and legitimates neo-liberal restructuring.⁴⁶ Furthermore, when micro-credit programs are used in isolation from other programs, they often do little to challenge the unequal power structures that are the cause of women's oppression. In effect, many micro-finance programs that support home-based businesses or cottage industries reinforce women's roles in the home. They do not always provide women with new skills or knowledge that will allow them to

⁴⁵Isabella Bakker (2003) "Neo-liberal Governance and the Reprivatization of Social Production: Social Provisioning and Shifting Gender Orders" in Isabella Bakker and Stephen Gills, eds., *Power, Production and Social Reproduction*. New York: Palgrave McMillan, 71.

⁴⁶Heloise Weber (2004) "The 'New Economy' and Social Risk: Banking on the Poor?" *Review of International Political Economy*, Vol.11, No.2. pp. 356-386. 360.

challenge the unequal power relations in a given society, nor do they make provisions to help with the care work that can impede women from working outside the home. Therefore, micro-credit programs that ignore many of the societal features that have left women unable to access credit or gain employment in the formal sector are limited as a developmental strategy; these programs become little more than a market solution to poverty alleviation.

According to Katherine N. Rankin, micro-credit is a governmental strategy that appropriates the feminist language of empowerment and solidarity to shift development from a state-led to a market-led approach.⁴⁷ The state is therefore relieved of its burden to provide development assistance, and traditional gender roles become further entrenched. Rather than addressing the structural inequalities and job losses in the formal sector due to economic globalisation and SAPs, micro-credit strategies rely on the informal economy to ‘empower’ women as entrepreneurs. In effect, “(w)ithout blaming the failures of current economic-development policies...microcredit becomes a vehicle through which to stress the importance and need for self-reliance, efficiency and independence.”⁴⁸ Although many micro-credit programs use a group approach to lending, credit is still provided to women on an individual basis, which amounts to “using solidarity to foster individuality and competition.”⁴⁹ Given these limitations, micro-credit should not be viewed as empowering in itself. Often, it does not expand women’s choices, independence or

⁴⁷Katherine N. Rankin (2001) Governing Development: Neoliberalism, Microcredit, and Rational Economic Woman” *Economy and Society*, Vol. 30, No.1: pp. 18-37.

⁴⁸Isserles, 41-42.

⁴⁹Ibid, 53-54.

power in a given society. In fact, many micro-credit programs perpetuate neo-liberal values of individualism while positioning the market, not the state, as the most effective means to overcome poverty and inequality. Thus, micro-credit as it is currently applied in the neo-liberal framework, it is not a panacea for improving the status of women in society. Rather, the goal of micro-credit within this framework is access to capital, but this does not necessarily support the process of empowerment.

Examining the theoretical underpinnings of development and their implications for development in practice “means challenging the conventional practices and beliefs which serve to perpetuate inequality and lack of effective (em)power(ment) in the name of humanitarian intervention.”⁵⁰ Conceptualising empowerment within mainstream development discourse means that the concept is necessarily altered to fit within the normative neo-liberal paradigm. The integration of empowerment into this discourse has exposed it to similar critiques levelled at development practice as a whole. Such critiques are not without merit. An examination of some of the conceptualisations and practical applications of empowerment reveals many embedded assumptions that are indeed problematic. When words such as empowerment are integrated into mainstream development discourse “they lend the legitimacy that development actors need to justify their interventions... examining the ways in which particular development buzzwords have come to be used, then, sheds interesting light on the normative project that is development.”⁵¹

⁵⁰Simon, 183.

⁵¹Cornwall and Brock, 1044.

Conceptual (Mis)understandings: Empowerment in Policy and Practice

Mainstream approaches to development commonly view the ‘empowerment of women’ as a central goal, and empowerment as it relates to women is mentioned in numerous United Nations and World Bank documents. Following this example, national governments and NGOs around the world have embraced various programs to ‘empower’ women. Jay Drydyk points out that despite the prolific use of this term, development theorising has endorsed participation, “yet its support for empowerment has been uneven, and it has never probed into the meaning of empowerment to any great depth.”⁵² A single definition of ‘empowerment’ is neither plausible nor desirable as the methods of empowerment are not universal; they are rooted in the context and the needs of those being empowered. Thus, it can be difficult to clearly define the concept of empowerment because it “means different things to different persons” and a single empowerment process will inevitably have unique outcomes for the different people involved.⁵³

However complicated the concept of empowerment might be, the lack of clarity on what ‘empowerment’ means cannot simply be attributed to the difficult nature of the concept. Rather, the failure or the inability of mainstream development theorising to engage with the meaning of ‘empowerment’ can also be attributed to the fact that the discourse which informs development thinking simply does not permit an in-depth analysis of empowerment. In effect, the more transformative and even radical

⁵²Jay Drydyk, “Durable Empowerment” *Journal of Global Ethics*, 3 (forthcoming).

⁵³Andre Batille (1999) “Empowerment” *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.34, No.10/11. pp. 589-597. 589.

aspects of the concept are at odds with the neo-liberal discourse in which empowerment is espoused. As the above critique demonstrates, international organisations may simply appropriate compelling concepts such as empowerment to lend credence to their claims that they are practising more participatory and ‘bottom-up’ programs of development. Furthermore, it is easy to co-opt terms like ‘empowerment’ because they are contested. This allows international organisations to adopt terms once used by radical alternative movements without necessarily “swallow[ing] them whole.”⁵⁴ Instead, ‘empowerment’ has been seamlessly integrated into mainstream development discourse to pursue neo-liberal programs, which are often not ‘empowering’ for women or the most powerless internationally.

The concept figured widely in the United Nations publications throughout the 1990s. An examination of how the UN conceptualised empowerment during this period of time supports the argument that ‘empowerment’ has been used as a panoptic term in development and has become diluted.⁵⁵ The Beijing Declaration, which came out of the United Nations’ Fourth Conference on Women in 1995, is full of references to empowerment. The document espouses empowerment as a central goal, but it never explains or defines the term. The Beijing Declaration simply states that the UN is committed to enhancing “the advancement and empowerment of women all over the world.”⁵⁶ Empowerment in this context reads more like an end rather than a process.

⁵⁴Cornwall and Brock, 1055.

⁵⁵Srilatha Batliwala (1994) “The Meaning of Women’s Empowerment: New Concepts from Action” in Gita Sen, Adrieen Germain, Lincoln C. Chen, eds., *Population Policies Reconsidered: Health Empowerment and Rights* Boston: Harvard University Press, 129.

⁵⁶United Nations, Fourth World Conference on Women, *The Beijing Declaration*, September 1995, United Nations, Beijing, article 7.

Empowerment is the final result of a linear process, but the means to achieving it are far from clear. Many United Nations documents, like the Beijing Declaration, merely cite empowerment as an overarching objective without actually explaining what it means or how to achieve it. In another example, the United Nations' Millennium Declaration resolved "to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women as effective ways to combat poverty, hunger and disease and to stimulate development that is truly sustainable."⁵⁷ Thus, empowerment is a means to an end, as well as an end in itself, but how to achieve 'empowerment' or what such a process entails is far from clear.

In a similar manner, the United Nations Human Development Report 2000 also contains multiple references to empowerment that range from problematic to simply puzzling. The document outlines the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM), which "measures gender inequality in key areas of economic and political participation and decision-making."⁵⁸ The GEM compiles figures that assess national governments' commitments to the protection of an array of human rights, but the focus is on economic and political rights. The document also posits a strong relationship between empowerment and the realisation of human rights, suggesting that empowerment is a step towards the realisation of rights. Within the document, then, empowerment could be understood as the result of increased political and social rights, or a means to enable human rights, or even a process that ends discrimination

⁵⁷United Nations, General Assembly 2000, *Resolution 55/2. Millennium Development Goals*, New York. para 20, p.5.

⁵⁸United Nations Development Programme (2000) *Human Development Report 2000*, New York: Oxford University Press, 18.

against women. The document never mentions the degree to which women should be involved in their empowerment, instead it focuses on the role of national governments and international human rights documents in securing empowerment.

In other cases, usages of ‘empowerment’ in UN documents could leave readers baffled as to what the term actually means. One such usage can be found in The Human Development Report 2000 which reads, “(s)ince the process of human development often involves great struggle, the empowerment involved in the language of claims can be of great practical importance.”⁵⁹ Therefore, many of the usages within UN documents undermines the agency of those who are the ‘recipients’ of development projects. The ‘top-down’ nature of empowerment as espoused by the UN, then renders the term ‘empowerment’ insignificant by not endorsing meaningful grassroots participation that would facilitate power transformations in particular contexts.

Given the extensive use of empowerment in many UN documents in the 1990s, it is interesting to note that early into the new millennium, the concept has virtually disappeared in several of the UN’s reports. For example, the 2005 report produced by the UN Economic and Social Council, entitled *Right to Development* does not contain any references to empowerment, even though empowerment was considered an essential goal for human development in previous documents.⁶⁰ Similarly, the UNDP’s Human Development Report 2007/2008 contains only cursory

⁵⁹United Nations Development Programme (2000) *Human Development Report 2000*, 22.

⁶⁰United Nations, General Assembly 1986, *Declaration on the Right to Development*.

mention of empowerment, and most of them pertain to the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM).⁶¹ Finally, The Millennium Development Goals Report 2008 mentions empowerment only once as a strategy used by “development partners.”⁶² This brief overview of central UN documents shows that the UN has not been able to develop a coherent definition of empowerment, and the concept that was once presented as a panacea for development intervention remains inadequately defined and only nominally mentioned today. Interestingly, while the United Nations has virtually eliminated empowerment in its documents, the World Bank continues to produce documents that feature empowerment as a central policy goal.

The World Bank has been more successful than the United Nations at articulating a definition of empowerment, although it too has had problems putting empowerment into practice. The World Bank has produced two rather insightful documents that address empowerment in principle, both of these documents warrant a brief examination. The first document, entitled *Empowerment and Poverty Reduction: A Sourcebook* by Deepa Narayan, discusses the concept of empowerment, sketches elements pertinent to empowerment in practice, and mentions the importance of context within empowerment strategies. The document notes that empowerment is relevant at the individual and collective levels, and that it has both intrinsic and instrumental value.⁶³

⁶¹United Nations Development Programme (2008) *Human Development Report 2007/2008* New York: Oxford University Press.

⁶²United Nations (2008) *The Millennium Development Goals Report 2008*, United Nations, New York. p.19

⁶³Deepa Narayan (2004) *Empowerment and Poverty Reduction: A Sourcebook* World Bank, Washington D.C. p. 10.

According to *The Sourcebook*, empowerment broadly encompasses the “expansion of freedom of choice and action,” and more specifically “the expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives.”⁶⁴ *The Sourcebook* differentiates between material assets, which include physical and financial resources, and capabilities which refers to the ability of people to use those assets for their own betterment. In addition, the document acknowledges that exclusion from decision-making institutions is inherently disempowering, and it argues that challenging unequal institutional relations is essential to empowerment strategies. However, the document mainly focuses on state policies and only briefly mentions the role of international organisations in facilitating or limiting empowerment. The document also recognises the importance of context in any process of empowerment. It notes that “(t)here is no single model for empowerment [and] what is possible and appropriate will vary by context.”⁶⁵ Finally, the World Bank professes to recognise that the voices of the poor are important, yet “its stated role as advocate for the poor is problematic given its failure to acknowledge the effect of imbalances of power between [itself] and the people and governments of Third World countries.”⁶⁶

In 2005, the World Bank published another document entitled *Measuring Empowerment in Practice: Structuring Analysis and Framing Indicators* to expand upon previous insights related to empowerment, such as those discussed above. *Measuring Empowerment in Practice* acknowledges that despite the fact that

⁶⁴Narayan, *Empowerment and Poverty Reduction: A Sourcebook*, 11

⁶⁵Ibid, 21.

⁶⁶Koggel, “Empowerment and the Role of Advocacy in a Globalized World,” 15.

empowerment is now found in over 1,800 World Bank documents, it is still difficult to conceptualise and put into practice. *Measuring Empowerment in Practice* defines empowerment as process of “enhancing an individual’s capacity to make choices and transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes.”⁶⁷ Furthermore, *Measuring Empowerment in Practice* incorporates the concepts of ‘agency’ and ‘opportunity structure’ into its definition of empowerment. ‘Agency’ is the ability to make meaningful choices, while ‘opportunity structure’ refers to the context and institutions within which actors operate.⁶⁸ *Measuring Empowerment* also acknowledges that institutions play a role in the empowerment of individuals, and it outlines domains in which empowerment takes place: the state, the market and society. Each domain increases or decreases the degree of empowerment which particular individuals or collectives can realise.

What is notably missing from this document is an understanding of the role played by international organisations, such as the World Bank itself. In fact, the most *macro level* “comprises the vicinity which is the furthest away from the individual... most likely to be the national level.”⁶⁹ The World Bank fails to recognise and address its own role as an institution that affects the degree of empowerment subjects are able to achieve. Since the World Bank is “arguably the most prestigious and... most powerful producer...of international development knowledge” its role in producing and implementing policies that affect people at the local, national, and global levels

⁶⁷Alsop and Heinsohn, 1.

⁶⁸Ibid, 6.

⁶⁹Ibid, 13.

must be examined for its empowering, and disempowering, outcomes.⁷⁰ Although the World Bank has done some notable work in conceptualising empowerment, there is a disconnect between the rhetoric of policy documents that appeal to empowerment through the involvement and the participation of the poor and the actual programs and policies of the World Bank.

Like their international counterparts, national governments have also embraced the concept of empowerment. Their engagement with the process has in many cases been comparable to that of the United Nations as national governments have also failed to articulate a clear definition of empowerment, and empowerment is often understood as a means to realise human rights. For example, within Canada's Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT), the Glyn Berry Program has pursued projects that appeal to the United Nations' Security Council Resolution 1325 to realise women's empowerment.⁷¹ Resolution 1325 recognises that women are among the most adversely affected by war, and reaffirms that women should be involved in all aspects of peace and reconciliation processes.⁷² Although this resolution was essential in recognising the role of women in post-conflict reconstruction, it is a top-down approach that relies on abstract concepts of rights as

⁷⁰M. Berger and M. Beeson (1998) "Lineages of Liberalism and Miracles of Modernisation: The World Bank, the East Asian Trajectory and the International Development Debate" *Third World Quarterly*, Vol.19, No.3. pp. 487-504. 487.

⁷¹Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada, Glyn Berry Program, *Women, Peace and Security*. Available at: <http://www.international.gc.ca/glynberry/women-femmes.aspx?lang=eng>. Accessed October 12, 2008.

⁷²United Nations Security Council, 2000, *Resolution 1325*. Adopted by the Security Council at its 4213th meeting, October 31, 2000. Available at: http://www.un.org/events/res_1325e.pdf. Accessed October 12, 2008.

they apply to individuals to realise empowerment. According to DFAIT, “bringing together women’s rights advocates with media practitioners, the elements of resolution 1325 are translated into concrete tools for action and reach a broader base of rural women to empower them to take part in formal and informal peacebuilding processes.”⁷³ Indeed realising the goals of the resolution would be positive for many women in post-conflict states, but it is unclear if such goals could actually be translated into a meaningful process of empowerment. Furthermore, like the United Nations, projects undertaken by DFAIT do not attempt to define empowerment. Rather, the term is often inserted into diverse policies with incongruent meanings to address the situation of women around the world.

The national government of India has articulated a policy on the empowerment of women in a similar manner. In 2001 the Ministry of Human Resource Development within the Department of Women and Child Development introduced the *National Policy for the Empowerment of Women*. The first section of the policy clearly states that its goal is “to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women.”⁷⁴ Although empowerment is not defined, the policy outlines specific goals that would contribute to the stated objectives regarding the advancement, development and empowerment of women.

⁷³Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada, Glyn Berry Program, *Women, Peace and Security*.

⁷⁴Government of India (2001)Ministry of Human Resource Development, Department of Women and Child Development *National Policy for the Empowerment of Women*. Available at: http://www.whoindia.org/LinkFiles/Policy_Empowerment-of-Women.pdf. Accessed October 15, 2008.

These goals include: positive economic and social policies designed to enable women to achieve their full potential; the full realisation of human rights for women in an equal fashion to men in political, economic, cultural and social spheres; equal access and participation of women in public activities; the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women; and equal access to healthcare, education and employment.⁷⁵ Once again, despite the fact that this policy aims to empower women, it is unclear what ‘empowerment’ means. Additionally, the processes by which women would achieve the goal of empowerment are primarily implemented in a top-down fashion that relies on state compliance, which often does not translate into meaningful empowerment for women.

Many national governments have forged relationships with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to counter the top-down approach of government policies and facilitate increased grassroots activity and inclusion. Although there is a plethora of NGOs acting in every corner of the world, each with their own diverse and unique strategies aimed at empowering women, micro-credit programs are among the most popular. Many of these programs are based on the model developed by the Grameen Bank and the vision of its founder Muhammed Yunus. Micro-credit programs provide credit service to the rural poor, and have cropped up as especially effective ways to empower women as many projects intentionally target women as suitable candidates for loans. Generally such projects organise women into small groups of up to five and provide small loans to support women in home-based or small business projects. One woman at a time receives a loan and the other women support her in starting and

⁷⁵Government of India (2001) *National Policy for the Empowerment of Women*.

maintaining her business until she is able to repay the loan. The loan is then extended to each of the women in the group individually until they each have their own sustainable business.

The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) has actively supported and expanded many micro-credit programs around the world. CIDA has worked with international NGOs to implement micro-credit programs as a primary strategy to realise women's empowerment.⁷⁶ In a like manner, in India "three of the four national programmes for women's empowerment focus mainly on micro-credit schemes, and micro-credit is the central component of the country's largest poverty alleviation programme, where 40 per cent of the resources are targeted to women."⁷⁷ Although these programs are notable for their grassroots, participatory approaches, as noted above they still understand empowerment as intrinsically related to economic participation. Furthermore, they fail to interrogate the increased burden this often places on women who are already active, and indeed often constrained by, their unpaid, 'unproductive' labour.

The brief overview of empowerment in developmental practice shows the obscurity in the meaning of empowerment and demonstrates that the term has become a catch-all word in the women in development discourse. Srilatha Batliwala notes that

⁷⁶The Honourable Josée Varner, Minister of International Cooperation and Minister for La Francophonie and Official Languages (2008) *Minister's Message Canadian International Development Agency's Report on Plans and Priorities 2007-2008*. Available at: <http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/rpp/0708/cida-acdi/cida-acdi-eng.pdf>. Accessed October 15, 2008.

⁷⁷Kalyani Menon-Sen (2001) "Gender, Governance and the 'Feminization of poverty'. The Indian Experience" United Nations Development Programme, India.

“(i)n grassroots programs and policy debates alike, *empowerment* has virtually replaced terms such as *welfare*, *upliftment*, *community participation* and *poverty alleviation* to describe the goal of development and intervention.”⁷⁸ International organisations, national governments and NGOs alike all articulate that empowering women is important, but what empowerment entails and the approaches to realise it are far from clear. In fact, those who attempt to comprehend what empowerment entails from the field – that is, from actual activities undertaken by development agencies– may be misled by projects enacted by such organisations.

Furthermore, with the exception of the World Bank, development policies have failed to engage with the concepts of ‘power’ and ‘agency’ as they relate to empowerment. What is often implied in ‘empowerment’ processes is a perceived or real increase in power, but whether this necessarily means women gain power to the detriment of men is unclear. Additionally, although empowerment also suggests an increased degree of participation by empowerment subjects, the role and meaning of ‘agency’ in empowerment processes is also unclear. Thus, it is necessary to examine of both of these terms as they relate to empowerment.

Contextualising Empowerment: The Underlying Concepts of Agency and Power

The concept of power is a contested one; however, articulating some of the various understandings of power is essential in an examination of empowerment. Analyses of power permeate discussions related to politics, international relations, gender, and development and these perceptions influence theory and practice in each

⁷⁸Batliwala, 127 (emphasis original).

realm. A pervasive trend to conceptualise power as ‘power-over,’ or power as dominance is evident within mainstream political discourse.⁷⁹ Those who have power control or influence the distribution of material resources, knowledge, and the ideology that impacts both political and private life.⁸⁰ From this perspective power takes on a negative connotation as those who have it wield it over others, and the competition to increase or maintain one’s power is constant.

Undertaking a process of empowerment through understanding power in strictly ‘power-over’ conceptions, is inherently problematic. Empowering one segment of society, in this case women, could entail the disempowerment of another segment, men. Despite the limitations, within development discourse the ‘power-over’ model has predominated mainly focusing on how to bestow ‘power’ on women. Pursuing empowerment as giving ‘power’ to women means that power can just as easily be taken away from them without making any structural changes in power relations.⁸¹ Although pursuing empowerment by understanding power as strictly ‘power-over’ is problematic, forgetting the ‘power-over’ model within an empowerment approach is also limited. In effect, “(a)n analysis of empowerment...needs to explain who has power-over resources and people and what structures, practices and conditions act as barriers to empowerment, resistance and solidarity efforts.”⁸² Therefore, a discussion of empowerment must include and go

⁷⁹V. Spike Peterson and Anne Sisson Runyan (1993) *Global Gender Issues*. Colorado: Westview Press, 34.

⁸⁰Batliwala, 129.

⁸¹Rowlands,12.

⁸²Koggel, “Empowerment and the Role of Advocacy in a Globalized World,”10.

beyond the conventional understanding of power as ‘power-over’ in order for it to be meaningful and transformative.

In “Rethinking Power” Amy Allen distinguishes between different modalities of power. Allen defines ‘power’ as “the ability or capacity of an actor or set of actors to act,” and divides power into three different “senses” including: ‘power-over’ ‘power-to’ and ‘power-with.’⁸³ According to Allen, ‘power-to’ refers to the ability of an individual actor “to attain an end or series of ends,” while ‘power-with’ is the “ability of a collectivity to act together for the attainment of a common or shared end or series of ends.”⁸⁴ For Allen, then, any analysis of ‘power’ must include all three senses of power, as they are all present to some degree in every situation. For example, in a patriarchal society, men may hold ‘power-over’ women, which gives them the ‘power-to’ define a set of norms or practices that may oppress women. However, women also have the ‘power-to’ act to address the various ways in which power is wielded over them. In many cases, women may engage in collective action or organising, ‘power-with’, to challenge a law or a set of practices that is disempowering.

Thus, the more generative forms of power have different implications when applied to empowerment processes compared to the ‘power-over’ model which is characterised by domination and antagonism. The ‘power-to’ and ‘power-with’ models hold greater promise for empowerment as they allow women to move individually and/or collectively out of positions of subservience to positions where they have greater psychological and social power in a particular context. By using

⁸³ Amy Allen (1998) “Rethinking Power” *Hypatia*, Vol.13, No.1. pp.21-40, 36.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 35-36.

their ‘power-to’ and ‘power-with’ women are able to challenge or alter who exercises the ‘power-over,’ sometimes this results in women exercising ‘power-over’ others to constrain their actions.⁸⁵ For example, women may mobilise collectively, using their ‘power-with,’ to pressure governments to enact laws to restrict the marriage of girls under eighteen. These women will be challenging the structures and ideologies that have the ‘power-over’ ideologies and institutions that allow girls to be married at a young age. However, if the women are successful in using the ‘power-with’ to enact laws, their actions will result in ‘power-over’ those who wish to marry their daughters at a young age by limiting their actions.

This is a brief overview of some of the various theoretical perspectives on power, a more in-depth analysis of power is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, understanding the different forms of power for different theorists contributes to the difficulties inherent in defining empowerment, and provides context for the diverse understandings of empowerment as it relates to power. Finally, understanding the role of power within empowerment cannot be fully appreciated without considering the crucial role of agency in an account of empowerment.

The relatively new concept of agency is an important one within the discourse of development. The same shift in development theorising that posits people as the central subjects who help to define their own development goals, has popularised the notion of agency just as it has with the concept of empowerment. Amartya Sen is credited with introducing the term within the capabilities approach to development, a theory that was instrumental in transforming development theory from its original top-

⁸⁵Allen, 37.

down approach to the more participatory approaches advanced today. Therefore, it is necessary to understand how Sen envisioned the concept, and the reformations that ‘agency’ has undergone within development practice. Sen conceptualised agency as a process of freedom, and Jay Drydyk defines agency within Sen’s capability approach as “a person’s scope for achieving that person’s valued goals.”⁸⁶ Thus, agency from this perspective is highly personal, and valued goals may not always be empowering. For example, if a woman values marriage as a highly important goal, she has successfully exercised agency upon getting married. However, if her marriage leads to a highly dominant relationship in which she is unable to leave her home, her act of agency has not led to empowerment.

In *The Structure and Agency of Women’s Education* Mary Ann Maslak defines agency in a similar manner to Sen. Maslak states that agency is a deliberate movement by individuals or collectives to achieve some stated goal or purpose.⁸⁷ Maslak, however, differentiates between two types of agency. First, oppositional agency is when an individual challenges the established norms in a given society. Second, allegiant agency is an act that conforms to the established norms or popular thought in order to achieve a goal.⁸⁸ From this perspective, the example of marriage above would be an act of allegiant agency on the part of an individual woman that did not lead to empowerment, but it is also important to note that not all acts of oppositional agency would necessarily result in empowerment and may rather result in disempowerment.

⁸⁶Jay Drydyk (2008) “How to Distinguish Empowerment from Agency,” 3.

⁸⁷Mary Ann Maslak (2008) *The Structure and Agency of Women’s Education* Albany: State University of New York Press, *introduction* xv.

⁸⁸Maslak, xv.

For example, if the same woman decided not to get married, going against societal norms or perhaps her family's desires, she would be asserting oppositional agency. However, by refusing marriage she may find herself in a precarious economic and social position in a society that views marriage as necessary for women, and thus may end up disempowered.

Given these difficulties, it is important to conceptualise agency as it relates to empowerment. Jay Drydyk makes an important point in his article "How to Distinguish Empowerment from Agency" when he notes that the degree of personal involvement that people have in the activities to which they contribute is essential to understanding how agency leads to empowerment. For Drydyk, not all cases of increased agency lead to empowerment. Rather, the crucial component of agency in empowerment is the degree to which people are involved in actually shaping their lives, or "the degree to which one's activities are one's own, or...the ownership of one's own activities."⁸⁹

Therefore, in order for agency to lead to empowerment, agency cannot simply refer to an increased scope of action or to an individual's ability to achieve their goals.⁹⁰ Rather, for agency to lead to empowerment, people must be actively involved in the activities that expand their well-being based on their own choices. Therefore, an increase in agency does not always result in empowerment if the goals are neither valued or beneficial to the individual or group being empowered. Furthermore, passive involvement in programs of action designed by international organisations or national governments may not result in empowerment, as meaningful participation

⁸⁹Drydyk, "How to Distinguish Empowerment from Agency," 3-4.

⁹⁰Ibid, 3.

may be limited, and goals may be more reflective of the dominant structures and ideologies of a given society than women's actual goals. This has often been the case with empowerment in practice within neo-liberal policies outlined above that appeal to top-down approaches that assume particular programs of action (such as workforce involvement) are empowering. If an 'empowerment' project is designed by an international organisation with little involvement on the part of women to be 'empowered,' their lives may improve but empowerment may not result if the women were not involved in making their lives better.⁹¹ This brief overview of agency, therefore, demonstrates that it is also an extremely multifaceted term. What is clear, however, is that increased agency or successful attainment of specific goals does not always lead to empowerment.

The above examination of the difficulties inherent in understanding and pursuing empowerment in development practice sheds an interesting light on the discourse of development. The contested, and multifaceted meanings of 'empowerment' have allowed the concept to be integrated into development jargon without requiring a substantial change in the top-down, neo-liberal approaches to development. Certainly, applying 'empowerment' as I articulated it at the beginning of this chapter would represent a departure from the contemporary ways that mainstream development agencies approach development programs. In fact, it would necessarily precipitate a fundamental change in the way that development organisations pursue policies and programs for empowerment and development in general.

⁹¹Drydyk "How to Distinguish Empowerment from Agency,"3.

For example, a pervasive trend in development practice is to focus on outcomes, the tangible and measurable changes that take place within societies during a specified period of time. Thus, ‘empowerment’ processes that can be quantitatively measured (*e.g.* the number of women in the workforce, the number of laws enacted to address ‘women’s issues,’ the number of girls attending school) necessarily orientate empowerment strategies towards more narrow instrumental approaches. In “Empowerment and Development” Jo Rowlands refers to development practitioners and their organisations as “change agents” and “supporting organisations,” respectively.⁹² Rowlands argues that supporting organisations face challenges in implementing processes of empowerment as short project time spans do not necessarily comply with the long-term aims of empowerment. With this in mind, Rowlands notes that the pressure for quantifiable results can undermine or even contradict empowerment processes in pursuit of specific measurable outcomes or goals. In effect, the means of empowerment can often be confused with the ends and ‘empowerment’ becomes an end that can be implemented quickly and measured quantitatively– this is the ‘business as usual’ of development.

Therefore, it is necessary to significantly change how ‘empowerment’ programs are conceptualised and carried out in practice. Currently, ‘empowerment’ can be used to describe just about any activity or goal of development. In fact, its usages are so diverse that it is sometimes inserted as a substitute for ‘development’ writ large. It becomes an instrument to improve the condition instead of the position of women in a given society through employment, access to rights, education or legal

⁹²Rowlands, 27.

reforms. However, empowerment is, or should be, about effecting meaningful changes in the distribution of power in society; it should address women's position, and not just their condition, in society. Thus, for some empowerment may be "irrevocably contaminated" as a result of being mainstreamed in development discourse, and empowerment "might be abandoned and replaced with a sexy, urgent new term."⁹³ Although 'empowerment' is a concept that grew out of animated struggles for equality and change at the grassroots level, it has been appropriated in ways that have obscured its meaning.⁹⁴

Furthermore, even the most novel and inspiring of new buzz words will be adopted and co-opted to suit the needs of mainstream development discourse. Although its transformative potential has been lost in mainstream development theorising, 'empowerment' is a term that is worth pursuing. Empowerment as I defined it at the beginning of this chapter is about meaningful transformation that begins at the grassroots and challenges the inequalities in a given society. Therefore, it is not the concept of empowerment but the discourse in which it is articulated that must be changed. In order to reclaim the term in a meaningful way it must be conceptualised in a new discourse that is sensitive to context, and is relational and critical of power hierarchies in society. Thus, in the next section I will argue that reconceptualising empowerment from a feminist ethics of care has the ability to harness the truly meaningful and transformative potential of empowerment that has been lost in contemporary, mainstream neo-liberal development discourse.

⁹³Cornwall and Brock, 1056-1057.

⁹⁴For example in "The Meaning of Women's Empowerment: New Concepts from Action" Srilatha Batliwala links the concept of empowerment to 'popular education' as developed by Paulo Freire in the 1970s.

Chapter 2

Caring About Empowerment: Beyond What is 'Just' and 'Right'

Conceptualising empowerment within a feminist ethics of care could result in vastly different understandings of empowerment than those that have been articulated within the current mainstream ethical discourse that informs development. Changes to traditional liberal moral discourse, and normative theorising in general, have been precipitated by feminists who have been some of its most vocal and active critics. Feminists have not only been active in critiquing gendered assumptions in normative theories, but there is a rich body of work that outlines significant and feasible proposals for the reformulation of moral theorising within many different disciplines.

Feminist accounts of ethics of care have provided real and innovative solutions to the limitations of mainstream normative theories in international relations, and such reconceptualisations and innovations would also prove highly useful within development theory. Rethinking the dominant discourse of rights and justice would greatly improve how strategies of empowerment are both understood and pursued within development. In this chapter, I will outline that a feminist ethics of care provides the most compelling solutions for some of the limitations inherent in undertaking strategies for the empowerment of women, as it challenges many assumptions outlined in the previous chapter which often go unquestioned in normative theorising. However, there are multiple and diverse understandings of a feminist ethics of care, not all of which are necessarily beneficial in how I intend to conceptualise empowerment.

In the first section of this chapter I will outline some of the diverse perspectives that have been articulated within feminist care ethics. Although I

acknowledge that the perspectives included in this examination are by no means exhaustive, an understanding of the trajectory of feminist ethics of care provides a necessary framework that posits care, not rights or justice, as the central normative component that could inform development discourse. In the second section I will examine how positioning a feminist ethics of care within development theory will overcome many of the limitations inherent in the mainstream liberal discourse in which empowerment is understood. Finally, in the third section, I will articulate how empowerment can be understood within a feminist ethics of care, and the truly transformative implications for empowerment when it is conceived from a perspective of care, as opposed to a western, liberal perspective based on justice and rights.

Understanding Care as a Normative Concept

Although feminists have long been active in the expansion of ethical discourse, many point to Carol Gilligan's 1982 book *In a Different Voice* "as the pivotal work in the development of one prominent branch of feminist ethics now widely known as the 'ethics of care.'"⁹⁵ Therefore, feminist ethics based on notions of care are a relatively new addition to normative thought. Accounts of an ethics of care have diversified since Gilligan's early 1980s work garnered attention. For this reason, the expansion of an ethics of care necessitates a brief examination of the early perspectives, and some of the subsequent understandings that have been articulated in the last few decades. From Gilligan's pioneering works within the field of psychology, many feminists in other disciplines such as political science, international relations,

⁹⁵Fiona Robinson "Methods of Feminist Normative Theory: A Political Ethic of Care for International Relations" in *Feminist Methodologies for International Relations*, Brooke A. Akerly, Maria Stern and Jacqui True, eds. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 224.

sociology and philosophy have expanded upon and developed Gilligan's early findings. More recent works which succeeded Gilligan's within feminist care ethics inform the normative basis for how I hope to conceptualise empowerment, however an understanding of the foundation of these ideas is essential here.

Gilligan's work began largely in response to Lawrence Kohlberg's findings on the moral development of male and female subjects within the field of developmental psychology.⁹⁶ Gilligan argued that the problem with Kohlberg's assertion that girls' moral development was inferior to that of boys stemmed from Kohlberg's understanding of morality, rather than from the moral inferiority of female children. Through her own study, Gilligan discerned a "different voice" in women and girls when interpreting, reflecting upon, and speaking about moral problems. Women and girls were more likely to be concerned with actual relationships and the contexts in which moral decisions were being made than with abstract rules and individual conscience.⁹⁷ Kohlberg's study overlooked the different ways in which women approach moral problems, and failed to perceive the importance of relationality in normative thinking. Gilligan's work therefore identified that it was the masculine norms that were used to measure moral development that resulted in lower scores for the women in the study.

In an effort to explain the different ways in which men and women interpret moral problems, Gilligan differentiated between a "justice perspective" and a "care perspective." The "justice perspective" emphasizes universal moral principles and

⁹⁶Virginia Held (2006) *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political and Global* New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 27.

⁹⁷Ibid, 27.

relies on rational arguments about how to apply these principles in a given situation. The “care perspective” pays more attention to actual relations between people and the context in which moral judgements are being made.⁹⁸ Gilligan found that women most often approached morality from the care perspective, while men approached the same moral decisions from the justice perspective. Although Gilligan did not advance that she was essentialising ‘male’ and ‘female’ processes of moral thinking, the ‘different voice’ she found in women’s moral processes subjected her work to many criticisms from feminist and non-feminist moral theorists alike.

For many feminists Gilligan’s work was construed as problematic, or even anti-feminist because it valorised traits understood as typically “feminine,” and was taken as thereby justifying women’s more ‘private’ roles. For Catherine Greeno and Eleanor Maccoby, Gilligan’s work perpetuates gender stereotypes that have trapped women in traditional gender roles for generations.⁹⁹ For liberal feminists, Gilligan provided justification for stereotypical understandings of women as selfless nurturers, lending currency to the idea that women should do the bulk of care work in the home and in society. Indeed, for many feminists, Gilligan’s work echoed first wave feminist sentiments that stressed the value— and even the superiority— of female morality based on maternal characteristics.

Gilligan did not explicitly state that there were different moral processes for men and women, but her work created a dichotomy between care and justice— a

⁹⁸Held, 27.

⁹⁹Catherine Greeno and Eleanor Maccoby (1986) “How Different is the ‘Different Voice’?” *Signs*, Vol. 11, No.2. pp. 310-316 cited in Grace Clement (1996) *Care, Autonomy and Justice: Feminism and The Ethic of Care* Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 50.

dichotomy in which women predominately fit into the former and men into the latter. Gilligan's account of moral development was therefore linked to gender, and to the idea that women approach morality 'differently' than men who reflect the mainstream norm. For Joan Tronto, equating 'care' with 'female' is "a strategically dangerous position for feminists because the simple assertion of gender difference in a social context that identifies the male as normal contains an implication of the inferiority of the distinctly female."¹⁰⁰ Therefore, the dichotomy between care and justice made it difficult to reconcile the two ethics, which left care as either an add-on or as a subordinate normative framework to justice. Furthermore, Gilligan's study was criticised for the generalisations made based on a small sample size, that largely ignored class, race, religion or ethnicity.¹⁰¹ Regardless of its many limitations Gilligan's work was an important precursor for feminist evaluations of some of the main assumptions and preoccupations of mainstream ethics, beginning an illuminating discourse on the value of care in normative thinking.

In 1984, Nel Noddings published an influential book entitled *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* which also advanced the importance of care and relationality in normative thinking. Noddings argued that care was superior to impersonal theories of justice, as it required one to consider others' needs and desires. Such a perspective necessitated particular and contextual moral judgements. However, Noddings also felt that caring took place primarily between

¹⁰⁰Joan C. Tronto (1993) "Beyond Gender Difference to a Theory of Care" in Mary Jeanne Larrabee, ed. *An Ethic of Care: Feminist and Interdisciplinary Perspectives* New York, NY: Routledge, 240.

¹⁰¹Judy Auerbach, Linda Blum, Vicki Smith and Christine Williams (1985) "Commentary on Gilligan's *In a Different Voice*" *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 11, No.1. pp. 149-161.

intimates and friends and thus she was unable to extrapolate it into a framework for a general moral or political theory.¹⁰² Noddings' work in its early forms, like Gilligan's, was subject to criticisms for appealing to understandings of care that could actually prove detrimental for women. For example, Diemut Bubeck argued that Noddings' definition of care "lies at the heart of women's exploitation as carers," as it is focused on caring for others rather than oneself.¹⁰³ Furthermore, the necessity of knowing those for whom one cared was inherently parochial and threatened "to exclude as ethically insignificant our relationships with most people in the world, because we do not know them and never will."¹⁰⁴ Noddings work was also understood as a central work in the expansion of care ethics and its application to education, although it was subject to much criticism. Therefore, the early works of Noddings and Gilligan were not without faults, but they began an important discussion within normative thinking, a discussion that has led to the growth and diversification of care ethics in the valuable work of subsequent feminist ethicists.

Feminists working in the discipline of political science and international relations have made some notable contributions to care ethics, and have greatly improved the initial understandings of care advanced by Gilligan and Noddings. Scholars such as Joan Tronto, Kimberly Hutchings and Virginia Held have etched a prominent place within normative theory for feminist ethics of care. In *Social Policy*

¹⁰²Daniel Engster (2004) "Care Ethics and Natural Law Theory: Toward an Institutional Political Theory of Caring" *The Journal of Politics*, Vol.66, No.1. pp. 113-135. 144-115.

¹⁰³Diemut Bubeck (1995) *Care, Gender and Justice* Boulder, CO: Westview Press,176.

¹⁰⁴Claudia Card (1990) "Caring and Evil" cited in Grace Clement *Care, Autonomy and Justice: Feminism and The Ethic of Care*, 17.

and the Ethic of Care, Olena Hankivsky refers to the feminist ethicists that rearticulated care ethics after the early works of Noddings and Gilligan as “second generation care theorists.”¹⁰⁵ Joan Tronto is often seen as leading the way in challenging some of the major criticisms of the early care perspectives. Tronto, posited care as “a species of activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue and repair our ‘world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible.”¹⁰⁶ For Tronto, care in practice included distinctive features such as attentiveness, responsibility, and responsiveness to one’s loved ones, third party others, and the world.¹⁰⁷ By expanding notions of care beyond one’s intimate circle, Tronto addressed the parochial shortcomings of Noddings’ work and placed care ethics on a trajectory to becoming a viable theory for shaping institutions and policies in the public sphere.

Adding to Tronto’s work, theorists like Grace Clement and Kimberly Hutchings have addressed the relationship between the ethics of care and justice, providing persuasive arguments that suggest that the two ethics should in fact work in tandem. Additionally, theorists such as Virginia Held and Fiona Robinson have articulated care as a viable normative approach to pursue issues in political life, law, policy and international relations. In a short period of time, the work of many feminists in the field of care ethics has transformed the initial care theories into “a

¹⁰⁵Olena Hankivsky (2004) *Social Policy and The Ethic of Care* Vancouver, BC: UBC Press, 27.

¹⁰⁶Joan C. Tronto (1995) “Care as a Basis for Radical Political Judgements” *Hypatia*, Vol. 10, No. 2, pp. 141-149. 142.

¹⁰⁷Engster, 117.

promising alternative to the dominant moral approaches that have been invoked during the previous two centuries.”¹⁰⁸ Care ethicists have successfully called into question the biases in mainstream normative discourses, and suggested a re-examination of normative theorising to make it more reflective of all people, including women.

Challenging Normative Homogeneity Through Care

A feminist ethics of care suggests a radical restructuring of mainstream ethical discourse to make it more receptive to the needs of women, subjugated groups and indeed all people. Although there is not a single feminist ethics of care perspective, appealing to the work of the second generation care feminists outlined above makes it possible to identify several central and pervasive themes that provide significant improvements to the challenges the current neo-liberal discourse presents to the pursuit of empowerment. First, a feminist ethics of care is not based on a liberal-individualist ontology that posits humans as completely independent subjects. Rather, feminist ethics of care focus on the intricate and interconnected nature of relationships that exist for all people; subjects are actually constituted by and through relationships. Second, a feminist ethics of care requires that the most important values that guide moral judgement should be those integral to the practice of care; responsibility to attend to the specific, contextually located physical and spiritual needs of others.¹⁰⁹ Thus, a feminist ethics of care focuses on the moral importance of attending to the needs of particular others for whom we are responsible.¹¹⁰ A feminist ethics of care

¹⁰⁸Held, 3.

¹⁰⁹Hutchings, “Feminist Perspectives on a Planetary Ethic,”181.

¹¹⁰Held, 10.

recognises that all people give and receive care throughout their lives, and the moral importance of care is discernable within the ongoing relations of care in an interconnected society.

Further, a feminist ethics of care does not start from a universalized perspective. Instead, actual relations and context play a central role in normative decision-making. In fact, relying on abstract principles in normative theorising is insufficient. For example, Margaret Urban Walker argues that “the adequacy of moral understanding decreases as its form approaches generality through abstraction.”¹¹¹ Therefore, moral frameworks are not based on abstract principles of reason and universal ideals, which means moral theorising is not based on essentialised ideals. Furthermore, positing care as a central activity for normative theorising, then, politicizes care. In this sense, care is not an activity that is carried out solely in the private sphere, but it is a central feature of public life and of all lives.

Finally, most importantly, this perspective is sensitive to unequal power relations and examines how oppressive institutional structures are affecting people. Moral theories should not merely generalise and describe what ought to be, but should interrogate the structures and values in society that maintain unequal power relations, especially those within close ‘private’ relationships such as the family. Pursuing reconceptualisations of mainstream normative theory from the perspective of a feminist ethic of care allows for recognition of the importance of care in socio-political arrangements, but it also recognises how caring practices may involve or

¹¹¹Margaret Urban Walker (1989) “Moral Understandings: Alternative ‘Epistemology’ for a Feminist Ethics” *Hypatia*, Vol.4, No.2. pp. 15-28. 20.

produce patterns of inequality or oppression.¹¹² Thus, a feminist ethics of care does not simply outline moral principles, it also provides a critical lens through which to examine unseen or invisible assumptions in moral discourse. This can inform how particular processes, such as empowerment, are pursued in practice.

A feminist ethics of care begins with subjects who are constituted by their relationships rather than with people understood as independent individuals. In essence, “the ethics of care is an approach to morality that begins from an ontology of fully relational subjects existing in complex webs of interdependence with others.”¹¹³ Thus, humans are not merely independent individuals who selfishly pursue personal interests as liberal theorising assumes, but are always interconnected and often dependent on others. As Selma Sevenhuijsen states, “the guiding thought of the ethic of care is that people need each other and that they can only exist as individuals through and via caring relationships with others.”¹¹⁴ Therefore morality is not an individually-based activity, but rather morality is a socially informed way of appreciating and understanding through which people shape their own identities and values that in turn define their responsibilities.¹¹⁵

From these relational perspectives, people must be attentive and cognisant of the needs of others. A relational ontology then focuses on what we should do for one

¹¹² Robinson “Methods of Feminist Normative Theory: A Political Ethic of Care for International Relations” in *Feminist Methodologies for International Relations*, 226.

¹¹³ Robinson, “Beyond Labour Rights: The Ethics of Care and Women’s Work in the Global Economy,” 322.

¹¹⁴ Selma Sevenhuijsen (2003) “The Place of Care: The Relevance of the Feminist Ethic of Care for Social Policy.” *Feminist Theory*, Vol. 4, No.2, pp.179-197. 183.

¹¹⁵ Margaret Urban Walker (1998) *Moral Understandings: A Feminist Study in Ethics* New York: Routledge, 61.

another, rather than on the liberal perspective that defines what we should not do to one another. As Joan Tronto states, “[r]ather than seeing people as rational actors pursuing their own goals and maximizing their interests, we must instead see people as constantly enmeshed in relationships of care.”¹¹⁶ From this relational ontology then, moral decisions include others with whom we share relationships, precluding the possibility of articulating a single normative framework applicable to human beings understood as interchangeable entities in abstract situations. These relational perspectives are much more reflective of the way people actually live their lives, even though there remains a preoccupation in western liberal theorising to understand all humans as independent individuals.

Therefore, a feminist ethics of care does not start from a single universalized perspective, but takes differences rooted in context and situation to be the starting point. Moral decision-making from this perspective is not based on abstract principles of reason, but is grounded in giving and receiving care. The use of care as a basis for a normative framework has the ability to be much more meaningful for all people than the overtly abstract nature of traditional moral philosophy. In effect, mainstream normative language adheres to notions of justice and reason in its moral claims, which lack currency for many women in the developing world. From this perspective all people are subsumed under ‘universal’ norms and codified rules, which provide prescriptive responses that are often not reflective of actual lived experiences.

A feminist ethics of care, on the other hand, does not advance abstract rules and laws. Rather, there is only one prescription: “always be sceptical of any kind of

¹¹⁶Tronto, “Care as a Basis for Radical Political Judgements” 142.

moral essentialism or claims to ethical necessity.”¹¹⁷ Ethical decisions are not, and should not be made in a vacuum, but are made in the context of everyday life which is heavily influenced by society, politics, culture and gender. Therefore, abstract moral theories run the risk of glossing over or ignoring completely the actual facets of the moral and political lives of individuals.¹¹⁸ Additionally, generalised moral theories operate on the assumption that morality is static and free of emotion, rather than fluid and negotiable. Moral problems, when approached from a feminist ethic of care, act as “nodal points in progressive histories of mutual adjustment and understanding, not ‘cases’ to be closed by a final verdict of a highest court.”¹¹⁹ Thus, a feminist ethics of care advances that while all people give and receive care, the particular circumstances in which caring takes place influences and informs moral judgements. These moral judgements are affected by factors including culture, history, religion, race and gender— all of which are fluid and specific to particular contexts.

The same societal factors which make it impossible to delineate a generalised moral perspective, also allow feminist ethics of care to be sensitive to unequal power relations and oppressive institutional structures. Certainly, a feminist ethics of care is sensitive to and critical of the fact that women disproportionately perform devalued care duties. However, a feminist ethics of care perspective also articulates a new moral framework that illuminates the ways in which traditional moral theories

¹¹⁷Kimberly Hutchings cited by Fiona Robinson “Methods of Feminist Normative Theory: A Political Ethic of Care for International Relations” in *Feminist Methodologies for International Relations Feminist Methodologies for International Relations*, 226.

¹¹⁸Tronto (1995) “Care as a Basis for Radical Political Judgements” 143.

¹¹⁹Margaret Urban Walker (1989) “Moral Understandings: Alternative ‘Epistemology’ for a Feminist Ethics” *Hypatia*, Vol.4, No.2, pp.15-28. 21.

perpetuate power relationships within supposedly universal moral ‘norms.’ Walker’s work is insightful for its articulation of a critical feminist ethic. For Walker, traditional ethics are often a reflection of ideologies of social dominance, which act to perpetuate oppressive gendered arrangements.¹²⁰ Walker argues that it is necessary to examine and question the origins of moral thinking and the discursive spaces from which they arise, as well as to consider who has the authority to construct and challenge what is morally valuable and appropriate.¹²¹ For Walker then, feminist ethics must examine how moral understandings are situated historically and socially in order to assess if, and to what extent, they are constitutive of existing power hierarchies. In a similar fashion, Fiona Robinson has advanced a “critical care approach” to traditional ethical understandings within international relations. For Robinson, a feminist ethic of care is not:

a universal perspective... nor is it a sentimental ideal...[r]ather it is a starting point for transforming the values and practices of international society; thus it requires an examination of the contexts in which caring does or does not take place, and a commitment to the creation of more humanly responsive institutions which can be shaped to embody expressive and communicative possibilities between actors on a global scale.¹²²

A feminist ethics of care, recognises that specific normative theories must be interrogated for the ways in which they maintain the broader values, structures and

¹²⁰Margaret Urban Walker (1992) “Feminism, Ethics, and the Question of Theory” *Hypatia*, Vol.7, No.3, pp.23-38.

¹²¹See Margaret Urban Walker, “Moral Understandings: Alternative “Epistemology” for a Feminist Ethic” *Hypatia*, Vol.4, No.2. pp.15-28.

¹²²Fiona Robinson (1999) *Globalizing Care: Ethics, Feminist Theory and International Relations* Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 47-48.

institutions of world politics.¹²³ Only through examining the inherent power dynamics in which ethical judgements are based will it be possible to eschew a moral framework which acts to uphold these unequal dynamics in its application.

Finally, it is essential to note that feminist re-conceptions of ethics as outlined above do not have limited applicability to women, or to the private sphere. Rather, despite the fact that “care is ubiquitous in human life...it has remained hidden from the conceptual lenses of social and political thought.”¹²⁴ Feminist ethics therefore, questions what is relevant to traditional normative thought and attempts to posit often devalued ‘private’ ethics, such as care, as central to understanding morality in the public spheres of law, politics and international relations. Thus, care is politicised and is extended beyond intimate relationships to include states and international institutions as agents of care. From this perspective, “(c)are is often and should be delivered by a wide variety of agents including family members, friends, neighbours, communities, schools, health care organizations, as well as states, corporations and even regional or international organizations.”¹²⁵ Through this perspective, caregivers and care receivers are expanded to include all members of society, and extrapolation to the global level is possible. The ontology of traditional normative theorising, that of unrelated, independent and mutually indifferent individuals, is replaced by a moral theory that sees as morally significant the previously overlooked ‘private’ domains

¹²³Kimberly Hutchings (2000) “Towards a Feminist International Ethics” *Review of International Studies*, Vol.26, pp.111-130. 128.

¹²⁴Joan Tronto (1995) “Care as a Basis for Radical Political Judgements,”142.

¹²⁵Fiona Robinson (2006) “Care, Gender and Global Social Justice: Towards a Moral Framework for Ethical Globalization.” *Journal of Global Ethics*, Vol. 2, No.1, pp. 5-25. 16.

characterised by relationality and responsibility.¹²⁶

Why Care about Empowerment?

Empowerment strategies always, whether implicitly or explicitly, include an ethical component, as such strategies aim to reduce inequalities in a given society or to address some identified injustice. This said, it is essential to understand the assumptions, which often go unquestioned, within the moral framework in which empowerment strategies are embedded. Far from being a neutral discourse, empowerment is prescriptive— it prescribes what ought to be and why. For this reason, it is imperative to understand the ways in which normative frameworks can act to uphold particular power relations through defining what is, and what is not, considered morally relevant.

Feminist ethical analyses demonstrate that it is not only unequal social and economic policies, “but also a complex moral order which acts to uphold and vindicate particular patterns of power.”¹²⁷ Therefore, as articulated in Chapter One, for meaningful empowerment to be pursued, it is necessary to challenge or alter the current ethical discourse that informs what is considered appropriate and desirable action in pursuit of empowerment. Feminist ethicists have long been engaged in the discourse of empowerment; however conceptualising the concept from a feminist ethic of care has yet to be explored. Given that empowerment strategies are often pursued for women, a feminist ethic of care provides valuable insights for conceptualising and developing empowerment strategies. Further, pursuing

¹²⁶Held, 13.

¹²⁷ Fiona Robinson “Methods of Feminist Normative Theory: A Political Ethic of Care for International Relations” in *Feminist Methodologies for International Relations*, 227.

empowerment within a feminist ethics of care requires a (re)articulation of the underlying concepts of power and agency as discussed in Chapter One.

It is useful to restate the central components of empowerment according to my earlier conceptualisation. First, empowerment should be conceptualised as a process, one without a finite end. For the purposes of this paper, I focus on how the processes of empowerment should expand women's choices, agency, well-being and role in a given society. This process is a continuous one; women may become more empowered over time, but empowerment does not end if certain indicators or needs are being met. Second, empowerment strategies cannot be developed by various actors in the development fora without considering, and prioritising, the expressed desires and needs of those to be 'empowered.' Various organisations undertaking empowerment strategies should understand their role as enabling subjects to pursue specific goals as defined by themselves. Moreover, empowerment must be sensitive to context, and the power relations in a given society and work to challenge relationships characterised by dominance. A moral framework characterised by a feminist ethics of care provides a relational and contextual ethical perspective as compared to traditional moral theories. In fact, altering the ethical discourse that informs empowerment by beginning from a feminist ethics of care will result in empowerment strategies that are truly meaningful for women, and society in general.

Beginning a process of empowerment by understanding people as fully relational subjects has important implications, especially for women. In fact, any approach that specifically attempts to empower women but that fails to interrogate the importance of relationships may end up lacking any real meaning in the lives of the women. Feminist analyses of empowerment processes have been quick to point out

that it is actually the largely unchosen, intimate familial relations that will increase or decrease the effectiveness of empowerment initiatives. Therefore such relationships should be the starting point for empowerment strategies as “empowered women are not necessarily those who wish to or can separate their personal and familial needs.”¹²⁸ For example, Pinar Uyan-Semerci’s research on women in Istanbul describes women as “crowded selves” as the women she interviewed did not think of themselves as *I* singular, rather they saw their needs and desires as linked to those of their families, articulating their selfhood as including fathers, brothers, sisters, husbands, children and mothers.¹²⁹

However, despite the importance of relationships for empowerment strategies, mainstream ethical theories continue to understand subjects as autonomous agents who act independently, an understanding that is unreflective of the realities of women’s lives. A feminist ethics of care, on the other hand, understands that the subjects of empowerment are never independent individuals, rather they are “encumbered” selves who are always embedded in relationships and are at least partly constituted by these relations.¹³⁰ A feminist ethics of care challenges ‘universal’ conceptions of independent individuals by understanding that all people are dependent and influenced by their relations with others. Conceiving human relations from this perspective is much more meaningful in the lives of women, and all people, around world than the western individualist account in mainstream moral and political theory.

¹²⁸ Afshar, 9.

¹²⁹ Pinar Uyan-Semerci (2007) “A Relational Account of Nussbaum’s List of Capabilities” *Journal of Human Development*, Vol.8, No.2, pp.203-221. 209.

¹³⁰ Jean Keller (1997) “Autonomy, Relationality and Feminist Ethics” *Hypatia*, Vol.12, No.2, pp.152-164. 152.

In other words, all people live their lives relationally, but western liberal theories (and many western people) theorise themselves as independent individuals– an understanding that is unreflective of actual lived realities.

With this in mind, it is important to note that agency from the perspective of a feminist ethics of care as it relates to empowerment must also be understood as a relational concept. In effect, moral agents should not be understood as abstract agents that act for purely self-interested reasons. Instead, people are embodied relational agents who make decisions considering the needs of concrete others to whom they are responsible. Despite evidence that most people make decisions with particular others in mind, the concept of agency as it relates to empowerment within traditional theorising often refers to the ability of *an individual* to achieve a desired goal. However, understanding agency as relational and rejecting the individualist understandings, does not mean that people lack independence or autonomy altogether. Rather “autonomy is made possible by our social relations,” and I would add sometimes constrained by the same relationships.¹³¹

Thus, agency may be most usefully articulated from a relational perspective that examines the duty of care within the actual lives of all people, and the possible empowering and disempowering results of particular caring relationships. For example, Selma Sevenhuijsen advances that moral decisions are situated events of responsibility and agency that question how one can best deal with vulnerability, dependency, and suffering. Such considerations inform people of the proper course of

¹³¹Diana Meyers in Jean Keller “Autonomy, Relationality and Feminist Ethics,” 157.

action.¹³² Furthermore, many feminist ethicists who appeal to a relational ontology agree that recognising that we take others' needs into consideration when making judgements does not eclipse the possibility of agents resisting or controlling attachments that are undesirable.¹³³ Thus, "[t]he various aspects and expressions of care and caring relationships need to be subjected to moral scrutiny and *evaluated*, not just observed and described."¹³⁴

Understanding the role of the women themselves in deciding what goals to pursue requires an examination of social relationships and attachments in the context of the actual lived experiences of women. For Fiona Robinson, a feminist ethics of care is "socially situated" in that it focuses on, rather than overlooks, "the everyday lives, the permanent background, of real, embodied people."¹³⁵ By applying feminist ethics to empowerment, then, the previously disregarded features of women's lives, including unpaid care work, personal relationships and basic needs, would be a central focus when articulating a possible plan of action. Furthermore, a crucial component of agency as it relates to empowerment is how involved people are in actually shaping their lives, or "the degree to which one's activities are one's own, or...the ownership of one's own activities."¹³⁶

By beginning with the contextualised, everyday experiences of women,

¹³²Selma Sevenhuijsen (2000) "Caring in the Third Way: The Relation Between Obligation, Responsibility and Care in *Third Way* Discourse" *Critical Social Policy*, Vol.20, No.1, pp.5-37.10.

¹³³Jennifer Radden (1996) "Relational Individualism and Feminist Therapy" *Hypatia* Vol. 11, No. 3, pp. 71-96. 88.

¹³⁴Held, 11.

¹³⁵ Robinson "Methods of Feminist Normative Theory: A Political Ethic of Care for International Relations" in *Feminist Methodologies for International Relations* 232.

¹³⁶Jay Drydyk (2008) "How to Distinguish Empowerment from Agency," 3-4.

empowerment strategies would be sensitive to specific needs and resist top-down strategies that apply universal solutions to very unique situations. Therefore, it is within the very contextualised focus of a feminist ethics of care that women will be able to exercise their agency in deciding what goals have the likelihood of resulting in empowerment. However, it may be necessary to negotiate and critically examine the ‘power-with’ model that focuses on collective empowerment to determine if desired goals are really reflective of oppositional agency (challenging the established norms in a given society), or allegiant agency (conforming to the established norms or popular thought to achieve a goal), as outlined in Chapter One.¹³⁷ Incorporating critical analyses of care into discussions of social relations would provide an useful starting place for the more generative ‘power-to’ model that attempts to resist or manipulate power arrangements that are characterised by domination.

Conceptualising empowerment as a process of collective resistance may allow for discussion and critical analyses of particular caring relationships that should be a focus for change or development. Using care as a critical lens to examine power relationships in a given society would be an instructive place for women to begin challenging features of their daily lives. In “Empowerment and Development,” Jo Rowlands differentiates between personal empowerment and collective empowerment. Rowlands argues that, collective empowerment occurs on a more community level and includes such aspects as group identity, a collective sense of agency, group dignity and self-organisation and management. Personal empowerment, on the other hand, is more individual-centred and includes self-confidence, self-

¹³⁷Maslak, *introduction* xv

esteem, a sense of agency, a sense of ‘self’ in a wider context, and dignity.¹³⁸ With this understanding, women may become more empowered individually, and/or collectively, or empowerment may result in varying degrees of both individual and collective empowerment. Conceptualising empowerment as such, includes both an individual, psychological component of knowing one’s power as well as an external, demonstrable component of being able to exercise power within a particular situation.

In contrast with the above account, Karen Monkman, Rebecca Miles and Peter B. Easton argue, “collective action and collaborative struggle are key to the development of both personal empowerment and political empowerment,” as it is the structural inequalities embedded in social relations that are the basis for conditions of social and gender inequities.¹³⁹ In effect, a collective process of empowerment may be a necessary strategy for women to develop awareness and to take action to address inequalities in both society and personal relationships. For Iris Marion Young, “empowerment refers to the development of a sense of collective influence over the social conditions of one’s life,” which means that collective empowerment is a necessary condition for personal empowerment.¹⁴⁰ Thus, returning to the understandings of power articulated in Chapter One, the ‘power-with’ model that focuses on group action to challenge unequal social structures is necessary to develop the ‘power-to’ model that generates new abilities to challenge and alter current power arrangements.

¹³⁸Rowlands, 23.

¹³⁹ Maslak, 109.

¹⁴⁰Iris Marion Young (1997) *Intersecting Voices: Dilemmas of Gender, Political Philosophy, and Policy* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 89.

Feminists have made very convincing arguments that women's access to power and their ability to partake in decision-making are constrained by intimate 'private' relations, as well as by features of the 'public' realm of society. However, research has shown that private relationships are often the most difficult to change.¹⁴¹ Thus, any analysis of the relative amount of power afforded to women in a particular society needs to begin with a consideration of how care is delivered and received in both private and public relationships. An examination of the delivery of care reveals that women are not expected to act as the primary givers of care in a vacuum. Women are caregivers in the context in which society expects them to perform these tasks, often upholding particular power relations. A critical examination of relationships may reveal "who has 'power-over' resources and people and what structures, practices and conditions act as barriers to empowerment, resistance and solidarity efforts."¹⁴²

Using care as a critical lens to examine who wields the 'power-over' would produce new possibilities for strategies rooted in the realities of peoples' daily lives and relationships. Importantly, beginning an analysis of empowerment processes with a relational ontology would allow for an understanding of the often overlooked, yet highly important, caring activities that are central to all peoples' lives. Examining the ways in which care is necessary for all humans allows unpaid care work to be taken into consideration for any policy that is attempting to achieve social justice, equality

¹⁴¹See Mary Ann Maslak (2008) *The Structure and Agency of Women's Education* Albany: State University of New York Press; Kate Bedford (2008) "Governing Intimacy in the World Bank" in Shirin Rai and Georgina Waylen, eds., *Global Governance, Feminist Perspectives* UK: Palgrave and The World Bank (1996) *Ecuador Poverty Report*. Washington: D.C..

¹⁴²Christine M. Koggel "Empowerment and the Role of Advocacy in a Globalized World," 10.

or empowerment.

Mainstream approaches to empowerment assume that women's access to the public sphere via credit, employment or reproductive and human rights will increase the likelihood that women will become empowered. However, such approaches often fail to interrogate the ways in which an increased public role for women does not decrease the burden of care work carried out within the private sphere, nor does it challenge power arrangements that are involved in unequal caring relations. In effect, these methods tend to focus on improving women's material conditions to achieve empowerment, without addressing the ways in which women's position is often not improved by these efforts. Further, the possible empowering effects of material conditions may be ineffective without significant changes to women's unequal social position that has them perform the bulk of the 'unproductive' care work. Therefore, viewing care as "unproductive work," and work outside the home as "productive" as a method to alleviate poverty and strengthen empowerment merely doubles the burden of women who must perform both¹⁴³ In a climate of economic globalisation, "[a] useful critique on global inequality, then, must look not only at the 'macro' picture, but at the actual conditions and relations that obtain within working and caring households."¹⁴⁴

The World Bank has recently attempted to address the importance of

¹⁴³Kate Bedford (2008) "Governing Intimacy in the World Bank" in Shirin Rai and Georgina Waylen, eds., *Global Governance, Feminist Perspectives* UK:Palgrave, pp.84-106, 87.

¹⁴⁴Fiona Robinson (2005) "Care, Gender and Global Social Justice: Towards a Moral Framework for Ethical Globalization" paper presented at Canadian Political Science Association (CPSA) University of Western Ontario, June 4th, 2005. 13.

reproductive caring work within its policies in Ecuador. For example, the 1996 *Ecuador Poverty Report* observed that household and care duties “are the major reason why women do not participate in the workforce, and these are more pressing the poorer they are.”¹⁴⁵ In an attempt to resolve the excess burden of participation in the labour force that is placed on women, the Bank developed a strategy that advanced a dual model of empowerment that included men and women as a couple. In effect, the Bank understood women as gaining empowerment through employment while their husbands became liberated via an increased role in the love and care of their families.¹⁴⁶ Sharing the responsibilities within relationships was thus posited as natural and prescribed for meaningful empowerment of both sexes.¹⁴⁷

Although the Bank’s attention to care work as an impediment to women’s empowerment is notable, the partnership-based empowerment strategy requires hetero-normative relationships to absorb the costs of care.¹⁴⁸ Thus, rather than considering the role of the state or international organisations (such as the Bank itself) as possible deliverers of care, reproductive labour is further entrenched as an activity that must be carried out within the private sphere to facilitate neo-liberal capitalist policies that promote paid work as empowering in free market structures. Although the Bank should be credited for taking care into consideration, and trying to alter unequal familial relationships between men and women, placing care as an activity that only belongs in the private sphere effectively denies that empowerment strategies

¹⁴⁵The World Bank (1996) *Ecuador Poverty Report* in Bedford “Governing Intimacy and in the World Bank,” 89.

¹⁴⁶Bedford, 102-103.

¹⁴⁷Ibid, 102.

¹⁴⁸Ibid, 102.

may need to see the *public* good of caring as meaningful for women, men, children and society as a whole.

From the perspective of a feminist ethic of care, the importance of care work within both the private and public realms is central as care is intrinsically important in each of these spheres. Conceptualising empowerment strategies within a feminist ethics of care, then, would not conceptualize the caring work of women as biologically driven or simply an expression of love, or even as a natural gender role. Instead care work must be understood as the very foundation upon which society thrives. In fact, focusing on care as a central aspect of all human lives politicises care by making it an integral part of public life, thus challenging the dichotomies of private vs. public and paid vs. unpaid labour. Empowerment strategies must not simply focus on restructuring the ways in which care work is performed in ‘private’ households (although this is immensely important), but also on the ways in which care work is influenced by, and a duty of, institutions of the state, NGOs, international organisations, and perhaps even international corporations.

For example, Ruth Pearson has advanced what she terms a “Maria Tax” which would be placed on exports by national governments in proportion to the number of women in the workforce. The revenues would then be funnelled into initiatives that increase gender equity in such areas as childcare, education and health programmes.¹⁴⁹ For Selma Sevenhuijsen such initiatives reflect, a “political ethic of care” which does not see care as confined to the private sphere but is a “public virtue” which should

¹⁴⁹Ruth Pearson (2004) “The Social is Political: Towards the Re-politicization of Feminist Analysis of the Global Economy” *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, Vol.6, No.4. pp. 603-622. 617.

inform the decisions of policy makers.¹⁵⁰ By understanding care as valuable in the public sphere and that it is something that public institutions have a duty to provide, empowerment strategies aimed at women would be better suited to address the ways in which unequal divisions of care labour are a major impediment to realising empowerment. Care work must be valued, and policies that advocate increased productive labour without taking into account the inequitable division of ‘unproductive’ care work should not be understood as empowering for women, or for humanity in general.

Reconceiving empowerment from a feminist ethics of care perspective radically alters how empowerment strategies should be undertaken and presents solutions to many of the impediments entrenched in the discourse of empowerment by traditional western liberal theorists. Empowerment from a feminist ethics of care perspective is not simply about what independent individuals can do for themselves. Rather, pursuing empowerment using this perspective means that people cannot be understood as living their lives and making moral decisions in isolation from others, instead people must be understood as always enmeshed in relationships. Thus, empowerment must evaluate relationships that are a feature of every person’s life and also assess the wider structures and institutions that are responsible for disempowerment. Furthermore, understanding the importance of relationships in the lives all people would make empowerment about responsibilities, that is, what we should do for each other– rather than about a focus on individual goals and interests. Paying attention to context and the actual daily lives of people will ensure that

¹⁵⁰Sevenhuijsen “Caring in the Third Way: The Relation Between Obligation, Responsibility and Care in *Third Way* Discourse” 12.

empowerment strategies are relevant to those that need to be empowered.

Understanding the context and history that inform how power relationships are shaped in societies necessitates a grassroots approach to empowerment. This attention to context would also importantly provide opportunities for women themselves to define their needs and desires in a way that would facilitate meaningful empowerment for them.

Using care as a base from which to critically and collectively analyse social and political structures will allow for negotiation and discussion among women regarding what action should be taken to pursue meaningful empowerment.

Understanding care as a societal good, and as a valuable foundation of communities, places responsibility on societal institutions to provide proper care. Care should not be further entrenched in the private sphere, but should be seen as an activity that benefits all people and sustains families, communities, nations and even global economies.

In order for care to occupy a meaningful place in societies and contribute to processes of empowerment, moral discourses must change. Appeals to abstract universal rights that are applicable to disconnected, self-interested individuals must be challenged, and morality must centre on the dependent and interconnected realities of human existence. Articulating empowerment from a perspective of care has the propensity to encourage societal transformations that would benefit all people. Certainly empowerment processes must look into the basic needs of people; ensuring that people are fed, sheltered and safe are important foundations for such processes.¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹Christine Koggel (2007) "Agency and Empowerment in a Globalized World," available at: <http://www.ethicsofempowerment.org/papers/EmbodimentKoggel.pdf>. pp.1-19.2. Accessed September 28, 2008.

In other words, the 'conditions' in which women live are extremely important.

However for empowerment to result, women's 'position' or status in society must become a central feature of empowerment activities. In fact, truly transformative empowerment must develop critical knowledge to question and challenge oppressive societal structures, develop self-confidence and solidify meaningful relationships.

Pursuing empowerment through a process of education, based on care and critical thinking can develop the knowledge and confidence for such transformative empowerment.

Chapter 3

Care and Critical Pedagogy: Education for Empowerment

“The education and empowerment of women throughout the world cannot fail to result in a more caring, tolerant, just and peaceful life for all.”

*Aung San Suu Kyi*¹⁵²

I have argued that conceptualising empowerment from a feminist ethic of care also necessitates pursuing strategies for empowerment from a basis of care. In this chapter, I will argue that education is one such strategy. Although there are many strategies that may be used to empower women, education has the potential to illicit the most transformative change, and should therefore be understood as a foundational tool of empowerment. Integrating women into the public spheres of paid labour and politics, or articulating the particular concerns of women in laws or conventions may indeed be empowering in some cases. However, such approaches often assume that women’s entrance into politics, paid labour or other ‘public’ spaces will necessarily result in empowerment. I have argued that without changing deeply held values and assumptions about women’s roles in society empowerment may not result. Therefore, education can provide women and girls with the knowledge to pursue social change, and schools can become a forum for women to share experiences and discuss problems that affect their lives. Education may also allow for the creation of solidarity groups which allow women to identify as *women* across polarizing social differences, and to generate social consciousness that could lead to collective action to accomplish

¹⁵²Aung San Suu Kyi, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate and leader of Burma’s democracy movement in Barbara Stahura “Making the Grade: Women and Girls Gain in Education” *Soroptimist*, available at: http://www.soroptimist.org/articles/article_education.html. Accessed April 12, 2009.

ideological change.¹⁵³ Thus, schools may not only provide women with new skills, but they may also create new forums that may allow women and other oppressed groups to mobilise so that they tackle issues within their community that affect them.

The empowering potential of education has not gone unnoticed by development theorists and practitioners alike. Numerous educational programs aimed specifically at women have been implemented by international organisations, NGOs and national governments around the world. Unfortunately, many of these programs have failed to initiate a meaningful process of empowerment. In the wake of educational programs that fall short, culture, societal norms or poverty are often blamed as factors that undermine women's abilities to translate their newly acquired skills into meaningful empowerment. For example, some studies have demonstrated that education has not always contributed to the process of empowerment due to social and religious constraints placed on women.¹⁵⁴ Although such constraints are evident, educating women, and men for that matter, is perhaps the most effective way to begin the process of social change. Certainly particular cultural practices, societal norms, gender hierarchies and the challenges of surviving poverty day to day play a significant role in the success— or failure— of educational programs designed to empower women. However, the *type* of education being pursued, and whether it engages with difference rather than glosses over it, also plays an extremely important

¹⁵³Katherine N. Rankin "Governing Development: Neoliberalism, Microcredit and Rational Economic Women" 31.

¹⁵⁴See Swarna Jayaweera (1997) "Women, Education and Empowerment in Asia" *Gender and Education*, Vol.9, Issue 4: pp. 411-424 and Anju Malhotra and Mark Mather (1997) "Do Schooling and Work Empower Women in Developing Countries? Gender and Domestic Decisions in Sri Lanka, *Sociological Forum*, Vol. 12, No. 4: pp. 599-630.

role in the likelihood that empowerment will ensue.

Contemporary approaches to education as a means to empowering women often appeal to educational models that understand students as passive repositories of knowledge that is imparted on them by an all-knowing teacher.¹⁵⁵ Further, educational programs aimed at women are often geared towards the acquisition of particular skills intended to integrate women into more ‘public’ roles through workforce involvement or credit programs. The limitations of these instrumental approaches to education are twofold. First, they fail to understand the ways in which education is itself an activity of care within which teachers and students are engaged in learning together; it is not simply a transaction of knowledge from teacher to student. Second, traditional education models based on rigid curricula often fail to develop critical knowledge and consciousness to challenge and alter the oppressive realities of students’ everyday lives. Although increasing education in any capacity is a positive step, it is necessary to understand that education has far greater potential. Education is a caring activity with intrinsic benefits in itself, as relationships based on attentiveness and responsiveness can be built that increase the well-being of both students and teachers. Moreover, education can, and should be, a source of critical knowledge. Critical engagement with the structures that have been cited as barriers to more traditional educational initiatives—oppressive gender codes, societal and cultural norms—would be questioned and challenged by curricula.

In the first section of this chapter I will outline some of the traditional approaches to education that aim to empower women. Although I admit that there are

¹⁵⁵See Paulo Freire (1988) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: The Continuum Publishing Corporation.

diverse approaches to educational programs undertaken by various actors in the development fora, I will examine some of the approaches that have been problematic given their delivery methods, curriculum and intended goals. Furthermore, I will show how many approaches to education are merely instrumental as they give women skills to act in public spheres of society from which they have been excluded, but they do not interrogate or challenge the structures that are responsible for women's historical exclusion from the public sphere. In the second section, I will examine how understanding education as a caring process has the ability to provide more than just knowledge. Pursuing education as a caring activity means sustained, patient attentiveness and responsiveness to the particular needs of particular persons to encourage both moral and intellectual growth. In the third section, I will examine Paulo Freire's methodology for education as articulated in the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Such methods have been employed diversely, particularly in Latin America with various degrees of success. Despite the fact that Freire's work contains important insights regarding emancipatory education, failure to pay close attention to the particular details and context of the lives of women being empowered has, in some cases, resulted in unanticipated and detrimental outcomes.

In the final section, I will argue that Freire's methodology for critical education would be vastly improved if undertaken in tandem with an ethics of care. Although both perspectives provide useful alternatives to traditional, instrumental education, neither is sufficient on its own. Despite the fact that applying an ethics of care to education means that education is responsive and attentive to students needs within their particular contexts, it may lack the critical perspectives to illicit truly transformative change in societies that are characterised by highly unequal power

relations. Freire's methods when used alone often lack the attentiveness to difference, context and the day to day lives of students who are to be empowered. The revolutionary goals of Freire's methods require an ethical framework that focuses on the realities of those to be empowered, otherwise they may lose sight of the actual values and goals of particular people. However, both ethics of care and Freire's approaches to education are based on learning through dialogue and mutual engagement by students and teachers, and require teachers to be empathetic or caring towards their students. Because the basic tenets of the two approaches are so similar, they can be integrated to allow for critical education that is based on care. Therefore, I will outline a critical pedagogy of care to overcome the limitations of these two paradigms when they are each used alone. Applying the insights of a feminist ethic of care to Freire's education for liberation approach would create a curriculum that is based on attentive and responsive care and rooted in the everyday lives of students. This would allow students to engage critically with unequal power structures to allow for meaningful and transformative empowerment.

Traditional Education: Perpetuating the Status Quo?

Within the field of development, education has been pursued as an important method of empowering women, and development practitioners around the world have begun to invest heavily in women's education. The United Nations included educating women as a main strategy of empowerment in its Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), listing education as a main indicator of women's empowerment according to

the third MDG.¹⁵⁶ The World Bank, national governments and NGOs have also promoted education as an important tool to reduce women's subordinate status in various countries. Despite the fact that educating women has become a key tool for empowerment, the types of education pursued remain instrumental. These instrumental approaches often aim to provide particular skills in pursuit of some other end, such as employment options or access to credit, rather than understanding the acquisition of knowledge as intrinsically important in and of itself. Further, instrumental educational initiatives often expect empowerment without providing critical knowledge that is essential to an empowerment process.

Mary Arends-Kuenning and Sajeda Amin refer to traditional educational models enacted by development practitioners as the "human capital approach," which sees education as "an input into a productive process, [in which] enhancing human capital increases the commodities that a society is able to produce."¹⁵⁷ Traditional education, then, focuses on women's education as a means to integrate women into economic production and fails to interrogate the norms and practices that are harmful to women. Thus, the human capital approach to education often amounts to a perpetuation of the status quo, which addresses women's condition but not their position, leaving women in subordinate positions relative to men and falling short of meaningful and transformative empowerment as outlined in Chapter One.

¹⁵⁶Naila Kabeer (2005) "Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: A Critical Analysis of the Third Millennium Development Goal" *Gender and Development*, Vol.13, No.1. pp. 13-24.

¹⁵⁷Michael Todaro (1997) *Economic Development*, Sixth ed., Reading, MA: Addison Wesley Publishing cited in Mary Arends-Kuenning and Sajeda Amin (2001) "Women's Capabilities and the Right to Education in Bangladesh" *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, Vol. 15, No.1, pp.125-142.

In her article, “Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment: A Critical Analysis of the Third Millennium Development Goal,” Naila Kabeer outlines several limits to education as a route to empowerment. In this section I will discuss the limitations as identified by Kabeer and integrate examples from various countries which demonstrate Kabeer’s arguments regarding the empowering effects of education for women. First, Kabeer argues that the empowering effects of education are likely to be conditioned by the context in which education is pursued. In effect, “if women’s role in society is defined purely in reproductive terms, education is seen as equipping girls to be better wives and mothers, or increasing their chances of getting a suitable husband.”¹⁵⁸ Mary Arendres-Kuenning’s and Sajada Amin’s study of education in rural Bangladesh supports Kabeer’s assertion that the roles assigned to women in a given society may limit the meaningful effects of education. Educational initiatives then become means to achieve other goals.

According to Arendres-Kuenning and Amin, the families in the Bangladeshi villages which they studied “emphasize the value of education as a desirable attribute in the marriage market,” or as form of “marriage capital.”¹⁵⁹ Rather than understanding education as something that contributes to women’s and girls’ well-being, many of the subjects interviewed in the study valued education as a benefit in the marriage market, or as an alternative option if marriage prospects are limited for a young woman. Further, the practice of dowry was not questioned, but strengthened by the presence of educated girls. In this sense, education was understood as a factor

¹⁵⁸Kabeer, 17.

¹⁵⁹Mary Arends-Kuenning and Sajada Amin (2001) “Women’s Capabilities and the Right to Education in Bangladesh” *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, Vol. 15, No.1, pp.125-142. 130.

which allowed the bride's parents to negotiate dowry, as educated wives were more desirable and would be able to better educate children, which lessened dowry costs. In some cases education was valued because it gave women the skills to partake in income generating activities to contribute to their own dowry.¹⁶⁰

The extent to which girls were educated in these Bangladeshi villages was also constrained by the value placed on marriage. Since cultural norms dictate that a woman should not be more educated than her husband, parents limit their daughter's education to avoid paying an expensive dowry for a more educated groom.¹⁶¹ Thus, education in these villages did nothing to challenge the norms of patriarchy that insist that the most important aspect of a girl's future is a good marriage. In this respect, education did little to challenge gender inequalities and simply reinforced that a good marriage was a women's most important acquisition. This example underscores Kabeer's assertion that women must be given the critical knowledge to question the subordinate status assigned to them in a particular context in order for education to contribute to empowerment.¹⁶²

Therefore, the way in which education is administered, the type of curriculum studied, and the overall quality of education for girls is of immense importance. According to Kabeer, the content and delivery of education is the second obstacle that thwarts the prospects for empowerment via education.¹⁶³ In order for education to be empowering it must be sensitive to the inequalities in a given society and precipitate

¹⁶⁰Arends-Kuenning and Amin, 130.

¹⁶¹Ibid, 131.

¹⁶²Kabeer, 17.

¹⁶³Ibid, 17.

change to alter those inequalities. However, in many instances simply increasing the enrollment of girls in school is understood as a panacea for gender inequality, and little attention is given to the actual substance and administration of such educational programs. As the numbers of students enrolling increases, state funding remains scarce, which often has a negative impact on the quality of education that students receive. Such shortcomings are often more detrimental for disadvantaged groups, including girls.

Kabeer identifies several interrelated problems with the content and delivery of education in the developing world that impede empowerment. These include: the ways in which social inequalities such as class, caste, race and gender are perpetuated in the school system; the tendency of curricula to reinforce messages about girls' inferiority and their roles as mothers, wives and caretakers; and the lack of female teachers which reinforces male dominance in the public realm.¹⁶⁴ As women's education becomes synonymous with empowerment in the development discourse, analyses and case studies of education initiatives for women in diverse countries demonstrate that the obstacles outlined by Kabeer pose significant challenges to realising empowerment through education in practice.

Gender parity in schools around the world has been pursued vigorously with the support of international organisations such as the United Nations and the World Bank in the hopes of eliciting meaningful social change that will improve the lives of women and girls. Although national governments have been cooperative in embracing such initiatives in many instances, simply increasing the numbers of girls in school

¹⁶⁴Kabeer, 17.

has yet to yield transformative change in unequal gender relations.

David W. Chapman's and Shirley J. Miske's analysis of UNICEF's African Girls' Education Initiative (AGEI) which took place between 1996-2003 in thirty-four African countries assessed the methods used to increase girl's education, as well as the relative success of the programs in the different countries. Their analysis of the program found that the encouragement of the wider international community, led by UNICEF, initially strengthened government action for girls' education. However, the focus of the programs across various countries was to simply improve access to education for girls with little attention given to the quality of the education. Thus, the bulk of the activities were focused more on increasing the number of schools, classrooms, textbooks and other learning materials than on actually encouraging girls' enrollment and success in school.¹⁶⁵ Few activities successfully engaged the local community of parents, teachers and students to find ways to increase girls' participation. Thus, few activities found meaningful ways to influence parents to send their girls to school, or to encourage teachers to use gender-sensitive strategies in classroom instruction.¹⁶⁶ Therefore, although the UNICEF program did increase the numbers of girls attending schools in Africa, the outcomes of increased enrollment were tempered by the lack of attention given to the prevailing attitudes in the community that may have constrained girls' meaningful participation and achievement in school.

¹⁶⁵David W. Chapman and Shirley J. Miske (2008) "Promoting Girls' Education in Africa: Evidence from the Field Between 1996 and 2003" in Mary Ann Maslak, *The Structure and Agency of Women's Education*. Albany: State University of New York Press. pp.87-105, 101

¹⁶⁶Ibid, 87-88.

Lucy Mule's study on female education in Kenya had similar findings to Chapman's and Miske's AGEI study. Mule found that the focus on enrollment alone often negated the quality of education, and did little to address the gender inequality in the formal school system. In fact, according to Mule "the current educational system [in Kenya] has failed females and will continue to do so unless educational gender equity becomes a priority of the state."¹⁶⁷ Mule explains that education in Kenya relies on the "expansionist discourse" which focuses primarily on enrollment and gives little thought to quality and equity in schooling.¹⁶⁸ With the lack of attention to the way that unequal power relations between girls and boys are perpetuated in the delivery of education, schools provide a source of legitimacy for the subordinate status of women in society. Failure to address and evaluate the negative implications of gender relations in schools is a major shortcoming. Policies that describe education as a panacea for gender inequality while ignoring these realities may simply "serve to promote gender inequality."¹⁶⁹ Mule traces the subordination of women in the education system back to the patriarchal ideology inherent in colonial discourse which saw little value in educating girls as it preferred that women embrace 'traditional' roles.

Numerous other scholars have found that education is often complicit in upholding patriarchal gender norms. Their findings echo Kabeer's concerns regarding the lack of empowering effects of education. Ila Patel argues that education of women

¹⁶⁷Lucy Mule (2008) "Feast or Famine for Female Education in Kenya? A Structural Approach to Gender Equity" in Mary Ann Maslak, *The Structure and Agency of Women's Education*. Albany: State University of New York Press. pp. 67-83, 68.

¹⁶⁸Ibid, 68.

¹⁶⁹Ibid, 73.

in India has historically been “promoted to improve [women’s] traditional roles within the patriarchal family.”¹⁷⁰ Similarly, Salam Al-Mahadin study on women’s education in Jordan found “‘disciplined’ gender politics in education, perpetuating traditional discursive practices, roles and stereotypes instead of acting as an emancipatory power.”¹⁷¹ Furthermore, class, caste and race inequalities are often reproduced in a similar manner, leaving girls and boys of lower classes in a disadvantaged position compared to their peers. Anju Malhorta and Mark Mather found that the amount of schooling women receive in Sri Lanka is dependent on their socioeconomic class and ethnic status, and that wealthier women have better access to educational opportunities.¹⁷² As Structural Adjustment Programs are implemented around the developing world, education is scaled back and access for children of poorer families is increasingly limited. This, in turn, magnifies the already existing inequalities in many countries. As universal primary education is not yet a feature of every country in the developing world, many parents cannot afford to send their children to school and, when given the choice, the prevailing opinion in patriarchal societies is that it is more productive to educate boys than girls.

Finally, the absence of female teachers in many countries is also a problem.

Even when women are integrated into the teaching profession, such as in India, they are often hired for their nurturing and teaching abilities at the primary levels.

¹⁷⁰Ila Patel (1998) “The Contemporary Women’s Movement and Women’s Education in India” *International Review of Education*, Vol. 44, No. 2, pp. 155-175. 158

¹⁷¹Salam Al-Mahadin (2004) “Jordanian Women in Education: Politics, Pedagogy and Gender Discourses” *Feminist Review*, No. 78, pp.22-37. 22.

¹⁷²Anju Malhorta and Marker Mather (1997) “Do Schooling and Work Empower Women in Developing Countries? Gender and Domestic Decisions in Sri Lanka” *Sociological Forum*, Vol. 12, No. 4. Pp. 599- 630. 607.

However, female teachers still remain notably absent in the upper levels of education.¹⁷³ Given these findings, it is evident that enrolling more girls into schools that promulgate oppressive gender stereotypes is not empowering and that critical perspectives aimed at transformation are necessary.

Following the prioritising of education for women and girls by international organisations and national governments, a large body of scholarly literature began to promote education as a means to acquire human capital. As more women and girls were integrated into schools, various development organisations realised that educating women had a “high payoff” as it has resulted in lower fertility rates, an increase in children’s schooling and improvements to children’s health.¹⁷⁴ In other cases, education has been linked to the empowerment of women by providing them with the skills to enter the paid workforce or to gain access to credit to start their own businesses.¹⁷⁵ These findings have often been interpreted as signs of women’s empowerment, and certainly in some cases women were indeed empowered by the acquisition of new knowledge. However, the empowering potential contained in instrumental approaches to education remains tenuous at best, and many scholars have

¹⁷³Sandra L. Stacki (2008) “Structure and Agency in India’s Teacher Education Policy: Women Teachers’ Progress Through a Critical Feminist Lens, in Mary Ann Maslak, *The Structure and Agency of Women’s Education*. Albany: State University of New York Press. pp.49-65, 62.

¹⁷⁴Arends-Kuenning and Amin, 125.

¹⁷⁵See for example: Karen Bradley and Diana Khor (1993) “Toward an Integration of Theory and Research on the Status of Women” *Gender and Society*, Vol. 7, pp. 346-378, Karen O. Mason (1986) “The Status of Women: Conceptual and Methodological issues in Demographic Studies” *Sociological Forum*, Vol. 1, No. 2. pp. 284-300.

begun to question the seemingly linear links between education and empowerment.¹⁷⁶

Pursuing education without paying attention to the inequalities in society simply popularises and legitimates these various unequal power relations. Critical analyses of class, caste, race, and gender relations must be pursued in educational programs that intend to empower students. As empowerment entails a transformation of power relations, the types of knowledge that students acquire in schools must generate change rather than uphold the status quo. Finally, education should not simply be understood as a means to achieve other ends. It should be valued as an essential activity that increases the well-being of students, teachers and the community as a whole. Following my argument in Chapter One that instrumental approaches to development often do not result in empowerment, neither do instrumental approaches to education. Therefore, understanding education from the perspective of a feminist ethics of care, as with empowerment in general, means that education is an activity that must be sensitive to particular contexts and to the particular needs of others with the aims of maintaining and repairing relationships in society.

An Ethic of Care in Education: From Theory to Practice

The above examination has attempted to illuminate that not all education is empowering, indeed in some cases education has been disempowering for women and oppressed groups. In this section, I follow Nel Noddings' application of an ethic of

¹⁷⁶See for example: Mary Arends-Kuenning and Sajeda Amin (2001) "Women's Capabilities and the Right to Education in Bangladesh" *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, Vol. 15, No.1, pp.125-142; Naila Kabeer (2005) "Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: A Critical Analysis of the Third Millennium Development Goal" *Gender and Development*, Vol.13, No.1. pp. 13-24; Anju Malhortra and Marker Mather (1997) "Do Schooling and Work Empower Women in Developing Countries? Gender and Domestic Decisions in Sri Lanka" *Sociological Forum*, Vol. 12, No. 4. Pp. 599- 630.

care to education which understands education as a caring activity as well as a moral activity. Applying an ethics of care to education means that teachers must have knowledge and concern for those whom they are teaching. Education is about more than the acquisition of basic skills to achieve some other end such as employment or credit; it is about a supportive relationship between teacher and student. Moreover, according to Noddings, teaching from a caring approach means that “each student must be guided toward an ethical life” and such education cannot be “formulated into a course of study or set of principles to be learned.”¹⁷⁷ In applying the ethics of care to education, Noddings outlines four components of “moral education.” These include: modeling, dialogue, practice and confirmation.¹⁷⁸

According to Noddings’ methodology, teachers engage in modeling by showing desirable methods of interacting with other people. Following this example, students are encouraged and learn to act in similar ways. However, understanding education as a caring and moral activity does not stop teachers from developing intellectual growth in students; rather caring teaching enhances learning by creating relationships of respect and receptivity between teachers and students. Thus, students and teachers must also have open dialogue to discuss perspectives, problems and solutions.¹⁷⁹ In order for a meaningful dialogue to be possible, students and teachers must develop a partnership of mutual trust and respect. Caring teachers must go beyond considering the intellectual goals and concerns of students, and engage with

¹⁷⁷Nel Noddings (1988) “An Ethic of Caring and Its Implications for Instructional Arrangements” *American Journal of Education*, Vol. 96, No.2. pp. 215-230, 222

¹⁷⁸*Ibid*, 222.

¹⁷⁹*Ibid*, 223.

students' realities in order to understand their needs. bell hooks similarly argues that teachers must embrace "the reality of the other" in order to respond to the unique concerns of each student.¹⁸⁰

Therefore, teachers engaged in learning based on care, must pursue meaningful and attentive relationships with students to genuinely care for them. For Noddings "[a] teacher cannot 'talk' this ethic. She [or he] must live it."¹⁸¹ Moreover, education based on care also means that students practice caring through supporting each other in academic and non academic endeavours.¹⁸² The mutual engagement of teacher and student in both academic and moral growth, should result in the students confirming or recognising the care given to them by teachers. If care is not received by students, or they do not feel like teachers truly care for them, teachers have not responded to students needs in attentive and appropriate ways. For Noddings confirmation is essential and takes place when teachers "support, anticipate, evaluate and encourage worthwhile activities" that are mutually constructed and approved by students who then respond in meaningful ways.¹⁸³ Applications of care to education, then, understand education as more than an instrumental activity or an intellectual process; education is an ethical activity that fosters the moral growth and well-being of students and teachers collectively and thus has reason to be valued in and of itself.

¹⁸⁰bell hooks (2003) *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*. New York: Routledge, 132.

¹⁸¹Nel Noddings (1984) *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 179.

¹⁸²Noddings. "An Ethic of Caring and Its Implications for Instructional Arrangements," 223.

¹⁸³Noddings, "An Ethic of Caring and Its Implications for Instructional Arrangements," 221.

Certainly, Noddings' theories are a departure from contemporary understandings of education and her work has been criticised as radical, parochial and even "dangerous" for equating care with the 'feminine.'"¹⁸⁴ However, in addressing such critiques, Noddings notes that caring is not only a feminine activity but something everyone does, and can do, although care work has traditionally been performed by women.¹⁸⁵ Moreover, to address and demonstrate how ethics of care apply to education, it is instructive to examine a school which has embraced and embodied the ethics of care in its approach to education. The school's innovative approach to caring education does not equate care with the feminine, as male and female students and teachers are engaged in caring activities on a daily basis. Furthermore, the radical approach to education proved both transformative for the students and their families, and the caring approach was expanded beyond the school to the wider community in which the students lived.

Wanda Cassidy's and Anita Bates' study, entitled "'Drop-Outs' and 'Push-Outs': Finding Hope at a School That Actualizes the Ethic of Care" provides an illuminating example of the possibilities of caring education. The study took place at a North American high school for at-risk students who had histories of addiction, violence, learning disorders and criminal activity, and had been expelled from public high school based on one or several of these factors. The founders of the school were aware that many of the students referred to them had negative experiences at their

¹⁸⁴See Anne Diller (1988) "Review: The Ethics of Care and Education: A New Paradigm, its Critics, and its Educational Significance" *Curriculum Inquiry*, Vol.18, No.3. pp.325-342.

¹⁸⁵Noddings "An Ethic of Caring and Its Implications for Instructional Arrangements" 220.

previous schools, so they designed their school to be “different from the norm.”¹⁸⁶ The most fundamental difference of the school was that its core values were based upon care. In fact, care factored into almost every aspect of the school. Teachers actively sought to forge meaningful relationships with students in order to help them to develop their potential. In order to achieve this, teachers “focused on creating a culture of care where each student would thrive, developed policies and practices that were in the students’ best interests, and worked with the families and community to alter the environment outside the classroom.”¹⁸⁷ Each of Noddings’ four components of caring education are evident in both the school’s vision statement and activities.

First, each staff member attempted to model and practice care. Teachers treated all students with respect from the outset and approached their interactions with other teachers and guests to the school in a caring and non-confrontational manner; a practice which students learned and adopted themselves.¹⁸⁸ Teachers and administrators became actively involved in the lives of their students and developed meaningful relationships based on care, trust and respect. Awareness of the difficulties and challenges of each of the students’ lives were considered extremely important and many of the students approached teachers for help in their personal lives, citing the support as a component of being cared for.¹⁸⁹ Students were encouraged to talk to teachers and caring dialogues led to friendships between students and teachers.

¹⁸⁶Wanda Cassidy and Anita Bates (2005) “‘Drop-Outs’ and ‘Push-Outs’: Finding Hope at a School That Actualizes the Ethic of Care” *American Journal of Education*, Vol. 112. pp. 66-102. 76

¹⁸⁷Cassidy and Bates, 71.

¹⁸⁸Ibid, 84.

¹⁸⁹Ibid, 90.

Moreover, teachers adapted curricula to meet the specific needs and interests of their students, often through discussion and negotiation with them. Teachers sought to build upon students' strengths, discover their talents, and adapted the curriculum in ways that would enable every student to succeed.¹⁹⁰ Finally, when care was given, it was often recognised and confirmed. Many students felt cared for (some for the first time), considered their decisions more carefully (often with teachers), and many felt more optimistic about their futures and expressed feelings of self-worth.¹⁹¹

The immense potential for the place of care in schools and education is illustrated by the above study. However, expecting caring education to be empowering without adding a more critical pedagogy is likely to encounter some significant obstacles, many similar to those outlined in conventional educational approaches. In the above example, all of the students were marginalised in the wider community for a variety of reasons. Although both male and female students came from diverse ethnic, racial and class backgrounds, all of the students had been ostracised due to their troubled histories. The students in this school were also living in a context where gender, race, ethnic and class barriers did not exclude them, at least formally or legally, from participating and excelling in school. Therefore translating a caring approach to education without a more critical pedagogy to engage with entrenched inequalities based on gender, class, race and/or caste may not be empowering for women in the developing, or developed world. For these reasons, a Freirean approach that attempts to engage critically with students' realities may be necessary in a context where gender, racial, ethnic and class barriers create significant obstacles for some

¹⁹⁰Cassidy and Bates, 84.

¹⁹¹Ibid, 94.

students' empowerment.

Alternative Education: Consciousization in Theory and Practice

Transformative empowerment requires more critical perspectives in education than that offered by an ethics of care. In this section, I will assess an alternative paradigm which encourages critical thinking in its educational and literacy programs. Brazilian scholar and teacher Paulo Freire developed a methodology for education that aims to liberate students through critical knowledge. Freire's work challenges the paternalistic teacher and passive student relationship and presents a methodology for education that is rooted in context and requires participants to critically engage with their realities to transform their world.¹⁹² Despite the immense possibilities contained in Freire's educational methodologies, feminists have been wary of his methods given the lack of attention he paid to gender.¹⁹³ Furthermore, practical applications of Freire's methods have not always resulted in the desired outcomes, and its revolutionary aims require an ethical framework that is attentive to the actual lived experience of students in their contexts when articulating transformative goals.

Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* articulates a methodology for education that uses critical consciousness, or consciousization, as a method for liberating subjugated peoples. Freire's methods are in stark contrast to traditional

¹⁹²Richard Shaull, Introduction in Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 15.

¹⁹³See for example: bell hooks (1993) "bell hooks Speaking About Paulo Freire- The Man, His Work," in Peter McLaren and Peter Leonard, eds., *Paulo Freire: A Critical Encounter*, New York: Routledge; Anna E. Bosch (1998) "Popular Education, Work Training, and the Path to Women's Empowerment in Chile" *Comparative Education Review*, Vol.42, No.2. pp.163-182; and Srilatha Batliwala (1994) "The Meaning of Women's Empowerment: New Concepts from Action" in Gita Sen, Adrienne Germain, Lincoln C. Chen, eds., *Population Policies Reconsidered: Health Empowerment and Rights* Boston: Harvard University Press.

education methods that have the effect of perpetuating oppressive relationships through lack of critical engagement with students' realities. Pursing Freire's methods in education requires significant adjustments to the ways in which education is typically administered and delivered. In fact, delivery of education must not rely on what Freire calls the 'banking' concept of education, which views students as passive receptacles in which teachers deposit knowledge.¹⁹⁴ In this traditional model, teachers unilaterally decide what knowledge students will obtain, and students passively memorise and accept the knowledge that is given to them. For Freire, such methods of education are inherently dehumanising and this education "mirrors oppressive society as a whole."¹⁹⁵

Therefore, according to Freire students and teachers must engage dialectically to pursue education that allows for the creation of a critical consciousness. Following this approach, education is liberating in that it consists of acts of knowledge acquisition through dialogue, rather than through a mere transferral of information. This aspect makes it similar to the ethics of care. Consciousness is pursued through "problem-posing" in which teachers and students are co-investigators of the problems relating to themselves and their world.¹⁹⁶ Following this approach, the teacher is no longer the authority in teaching the students, but both student and teacher are engaged in a process of learning collectively. Consiousization, then, occurs when people begin to realise their own value and knowledge, and are inspired to build a new society. Importantly, following Freire's methodology teachers must not only be receptive to

¹⁹⁴Freire, 58.

¹⁹⁵Ibid, 59.

¹⁹⁶Ibid, 68.

the involvement of the students, but they must also be reflective of their own assumptions. They must learn from, and with, the students. Teachers or leaders of such programs, then, must respect students' worldviews and resist imposing their own views. Differences in worldviews should be the basis of dialogue.¹⁹⁷

For this sort of education to be meaningful it must be rooted in context and history. In fact, within 'problem-posing' education people "perceive critically the way they exist" in the context of their existence; their history and reality is the critical starting point.¹⁹⁸ It is at the level of the historical and real lived experiences of students that dialogue begins and learning programs and plans for action take place. For this reason, educators and leaders must be informed and aware of the history and context in which they are teaching. Organisers of such programs must investigate, comprehend and critically examine the contexts in which they are working. However, initial investigations of context do not permit educators to develop the content of the education program themselves. Rather, the development and preparation of programs is always done dialectically, and new themes may be introduced by students and teachers throughout the learning process.¹⁹⁹ For this reason, educators must be committed, and empathetic to, their students' struggles. This ensures that the content and themes of education programs are recognisable and important in the lives of students allowing for meaningful critical engagement with the material. It is through this contextualised and communicative method of education that teachers encourage "the people to help themselves critically perceive the reality that oppresses them" and

¹⁹⁷Freire, 85.

¹⁹⁸Ibid, 71.

¹⁹⁹Ibid, 114.

take action *with*, not for, them.²⁰⁰ Therefore students are able to perceive who has ‘power-over,’ and would be encouraged to take collective action, ‘power-with,’ each other and with teachers to challenge unequal power relations. However, the revolutionary rhetoric inherent in Freire methods often perceive ‘power-with’ as a means to achieve ‘power-over,’ which is problematic in a relational context. If the powerful are always disempowered as society is remade, then empowerment has not resulted in a more caring and equal society. I will address this criticism further in the final section of this chapter.

Freire’s methods are significantly different than traditional education paradigms, and pursuing such education may contain immense potential for transformation and liberation. Indeed, for Richard Shaull, Freire’s model of education does not facilitate integration into the present system or bring about conformity. Instead, education “becomes ‘the practice of freedom’ the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.”²⁰¹ However, undertaking such methods in practice necessitates a great deal of attention and consideration to the specific context in order to generate the anticipated outcomes. Failure to engage with and analyse the situation of the ‘oppressed’ can produce unforeseen consequences which may not empower the students, and which may have significant and detrimental political consequences.

Lauren Leve’s study “‘Failed Development’ and Rural Revolution in Nepal: Rethinking Subaltern Consciousness and Women’s Empowerment” explores the

²⁰⁰Freire, 166.

²⁰¹Shaull, in Freire, 15.

unexpected results of a consciousness project in the Gorkha district of Nepal where women have become sympathetic and active supporters of the Maoist insurrection. Leve explores two different theses for the active participation of women in the Maoist rebel movement. First, following the arguments of many development practitioners Leve examines if women's involvement can be explained as the outcome of 'failed development.' This attributes the rural women's support for the insurrection to their dissatisfaction with the government's responsibility for increased poverty due to uneven distribution of aid.²⁰² Second, Leve explores the hypothesis that the politicisation of women may in fact be due to the success of development programs, in particular a literacy campaign enacted by an American international non-governmental organisation (INGO) that used a Freiren model of consciousness-raising to increase women's activity in public life.

However, more important than the competing explanations for the women's support of the rebels, Leve's study demonstrates the dangers of failing to pay attention to the lived (and gendered) realities of the subjects of a consciousness project. Leve's study provides support for both the 'failed development' thesis as the government was not meeting its peoples' needs, and the successful development thesis as the INGO program did politicise women. However, most importantly it points to the need to understand the values women hold in such situations. In this case, the

²⁰²Lauren Leve (2007) "'Failed Development' and Rural Revolution in Nepal: Rethinking Subaltern Consciousness and Women's Empowerment" *Anthropological Quarterly*, Vol. 80, No.1. pp. 127-172. 129.

politicised women supported the political group that was more in line with their relational values. The Maoist insurgents claimed to be acting for the well-being of others, a claim that the women valued which, in turn, caused the newly politicised women to support the rebels. The INGO program did not foresee these results as it theorised the women as individuals who make moral decisions without the needs of others in mind, rather than relational beings that make decisions in the context of complicated social relations. The insights and lessons learned from this study are multifaceted and complex, and thus require a more in-depth analysis.

Leve's study centres around an adult literacy class designed by an American INGO, Development for All (DFA), that began in 1983.²⁰³ The course was available to men and women, but most of the participants were female. The number of women increased in subsequent years of the study and by the end of the program in 1987, roughly two-thirds of the women in the district had participated in the program.²⁰⁴ Contrary to other education programs that had been implemented in the region that reflected the neo-liberal goal of integrating women into income-generating activities, the DFA program concentrated on participation and critical engagement with community problems.

Thus, the curriculum package *Naya Goreto* (New Path) "aimed to combine community development, literacy learning and critical empowerment in a way that

²⁰³Leve, 134.

²⁰⁴Ibid, 135.

would transform the consciousness of its participants.”²⁰⁵ The three year program used a key-word approach that attempted to engage students critically with problems that affect their lives such as class, caste, race and gender. A cursory analysis of the program could easily qualify it as highly successful. In fact, many women went on to form savings and loan groups, open small businesses, join local development committees, express increased self-confidence or continue on to study at the university level.²⁰⁶ Further, parents expressed the belief that boys and girls were equal and understood the value in educating both their sons and daughters. These new understandings allowed girls to postpone marriage in order to complete their schooling. Despite these achievements, many of the women in the study also went on to support, either directly or indirectly, the Maoist insurgency. Many women noted that their support for the rebels was based on the fact that “the Maoists work for social justice” a term and concept that was a central feature of the adult literacy courses.²⁰⁷ Admissions such as this from women in the Gorkha district have led some scholars to attribute women’s radicalisation and politicisation to the success of the literacy program.²⁰⁸ For Leve, however, the reality is not that simple.

Similar to my critiques of the unquestioned assumptions of dominant discourse that informs empowerment, Leve advances that the consciousization approach to

²⁰⁵Leve, 135.

²⁰⁶Ibid, 137.

²⁰⁷Ibid, 137.

²⁰⁸See for example Rita Manchanda (1999) “Empowerment with a Twist” *The Hindu*, November 21; Shobha Gautam, Amrita Banskota and Rita Manchanda (2003) “Where There Are No Men: Women in the Maoist Insurgency in Nepal” in Deepak Thapa, ed., *Understanding the Maoist Movement of Nepal*. London: Sage Publications, pp.93-124.

education for empowerment, much like the neo-liberal approach, is critically out of sync with the women she studied in Nepal.²⁰⁹ Despite the fact that the neo-liberal and Freiren approaches to empowerment seem radically different, they contain many of the same underlying assumptions. In fact, Leve outlines five main assumptions inherent in both approaches that pose serious challenges to women's empowerment. First, they perceive development as a linear process in which people increase agency through economic activity, political involvement, or by overturning power hierarchies. Second, they understand empowerment as a process that uses subjective transformation to pursue action that is appropriate in objective reality (although what this 'reality' is differs for each approach). Third, the empowerment subjects are understood as lacking something central to their well-being (credit, employment or self-knowledge). Fourth, both models assume that the subjects are political or economic beings that are fully liberated once they become completely independent. Finally, neither of these theories understand the agents of empowerment as gendered; thus the agent is implicitly male.²¹⁰ Although on the surface Freire's model appears distinctly different from traditional approaches to education for empowerment, I would argue that it too appeals to an individualistic ontology and to instrumental ends and glosses over the very realities of women's lives.

Therefore, for Leve the conciousization effort in Nepal and the women's support for the rebel groups is due in part to the fact that development efforts have failed to provide women with the support they needed, but also because the

²⁰⁹Leve, 142.

²¹⁰Ibid, 142.

consciousization program understood women as independent agents who were not bound by their social and moral realities. By appealing to western liberal conceptions that theorise people as independent individuals, the program was not reflective of the way the women lived as beings in relation. For these women “(s)ocial and material labor are both necessary if families are to reproduce themselves and individuals are to eat, and both are inescapably intertwined with the suffering that women are, in most cases, expected to bear. The alternative is not considered empowerment, but selfish individualism.”²¹¹ Therefore, the consciousization program overlooked the real, existential realities of women who saw themselves as necessarily suffering for the continuation and flourishing of families and society. These realities may have been “less matters of consciousness and more matters of morality... subsistence and politics meet in the realm of values,” and these existential needs were not altered by reeducation.²¹² Thus, when the Maoists claimed to work for the well-being of the people and they contrasted this with the suffering the state had caused, they reflected women’s values of sacrificing for others in a relational society. In response to these claims, one woman framed the differences between the government and rebels as that of selfishness verses being-for-others, respectively, and praised the rebels for acting in a virtuous and brave way.²¹³

Therefore, the women in the study defined themselves as beings in relation, as subjects that were at least partly constituted by their relations. The DFA program did politicise women, and the women in turn supported the movement that was in line

²¹¹Leve, 158.

²¹²Ibid, 160.

²¹³Ibid, 161.

with their value-systems. The program also successfully altered women's consciousness and increased their role in society. However, by failing to understand the women's basic values and particular commitments and responsibilities the program may have had little or no impact on who women supported. Put another way, the consciousness program may have merely given women a place in the political sphere but their rejection of selfish individualism, and their understanding of suffering as a necessary feature of survival, won the rebels their support. In the end, perhaps the most important lesson from Leve's study is not why the women supported the rebel groups, but about the shortcomings of ontological assumptions made by Freire's model and the unexpected ways in which these misjudgements manifest themselves.

An analysis of this study, then, shows that consciousness efforts must be extremely sensitive to the values and needs of the subjects in particular contexts. It also shows that the imposition of values contrary to those held by the subjects will not change such values, but may simply alter the ways in which people pursue what they perceive as morally just or right. The problem with the DFA program, therefore was not that it was individualist per se, but it failed to understand the relational values of women. Therefore, any educational activities that aim to empower women must begin by understanding subjects as beings-in-relation and must be guided by an ethical framework that is sensitive to the embodied, gendered and contextual realities of women.

Furthermore, such approaches must not see empowerment as a necessarily linear process that has a definite end point, but a process that is ongoing and committed to enhancing the well-being of its participants. The consciousness

program described above was successful in integrating women into the public sphere by providing them with opportunities to pursue further education or employment and by changing prevailing attitudes to support the education of girls. However, it is difficult to definitively describe the outcomes as empowering. The reason that the program may not have been empowering is precisely because the ultimate goal of the program—unburdened and ungendered independence—was not a goal that the women necessarily valued or desired. Therefore, following Freiren methods of education may indeed have the ability to produce transformative change, but in order for the change to be meaningful Freire’s methodology requires an ethical framework that is relational to inform and guide such activities. An ethics of care would provide a valuable complement and foundation for emancipatory education approaches outlined above. Moreover, a feminist ethics of care may be necessary to prioritise gender concerns in empowerment projects aimed specifically at women.

Towards a Critical Pedagogy of Care

Pursuing what I will call a critical pedagogy of care would retain many of the important features of a Freiren model to education, but would also prioritise “the maintenance and enhancement of caring” in educational efforts.²¹⁴ Education from a care perspective is similar to Freire’s methodology in its desire for dialogue between teachers and students. Therefore, both methods reject the ‘banking’ method of education and understand that the goals of education must be mutually decided upon by students and teachers. Following the dialectical approach to education also

²¹⁴Nel Noddings (1984) *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*, 172.

necessitates that teachers and students engage unequal power relationships outside the education setting, for women this would importantly include engagement with relations in the household. Moreover, teachers and students are both engaged in the learning process and education becomes a collective activity through mutual engagement and discussion.

Furthermore, for Freire teachers should be empathetic to the struggles of their students, and such empathy would be more easily facilitated if teachers truly cared about their students. Finally, both Freire and care perspectives pay attention to context. For Freire the students' history and reality is the starting point for critical action, while from a caring perspective the day-to-day lives of students are central in educational initiatives. Beginning with the lived realities of women would allow for the "underlying features of oppression within a household's decision making and power structures [to be] revealed and eliminated, [without which] the process of empowerment may literally end at the doorstep."²¹⁵

Thus, a caring approach to education has many features in common with a Freire approach, but care has the ability to greatly improve some of the shortcomings of Freire's methodologies. In fact, I will argue that a Freire approach to education may ultimately fail to result in empowerment for women without an ethics of care as a foundational moral framework. In effect, critical knowledge must be grounded in the giving and receiving of care. Educators must care about how their students may react to knowledge that challenges their ways of knowing. If educators do not address the

²¹⁵Anna E. Bosch (1998) "Popular Education, Work Training, and the Path to Women's Empowerment in Chile" *Comparative Education Review*, Vol.42, No.2. pp.163-182.

discomfort some students may feel when exposed to different worldviews, the students may not use their new knowledge to challenge oppressive structures. Rather, they may react by upholding the status quo. Second, students must acknowledge the receipt of care. If the receipt of care is absent, teachers must reconsider their approach as the failure to accept care may be a sign that the program is not in line with the actual goals and values of the students. As outlined in Chapter Two, positing an ethics of care as a guiding moral framework for empowering education would rely on similar foundations as empowerment itself when approached from an ethics of care. The focus would be on more generative forms of power such as ‘power-with’ to engage men and women in the creation of a better society. Therefore, such an approach would need to be relational, contextual, ongoing *and* critical of public and private relationships.

In “Meeting the Challenge of the Future: The Place of a Caring Ethic in Educational Administration” Lynn G. Beck argues that “a liberationist ethic” such as Freire’s requires the “perspectives offered by caring as a complement, guard and guide” to be effective.²¹⁶ In fact, for Beck there are three aspects of a liberationist ethic that pose problems for meaningful education if they are not guided and informed by an ethics of care. First, the liberationist ethic has an incomplete view of power as such perspectives tend to view power as something that must be redistributed or taken away from those who possess it.²¹⁷ Therefore, this model relies on the ‘power-over’

²¹⁶Lynn G. Beck (1992) “Meeting the Challenge of the Future: The Place of a Caring Ethic in Educational Administration” *American Journal of Education*, Vol. 100, No. 4. pp. 454-496. 484

²¹⁷*Ibid*, 485.

approach to empowerment rather than the more generative forms of power such as ‘power with’ or ‘power to’ that are essential for a caring approach to empowerment as outlined in Chapter Two. By positioning liberation perspectives within an ethics of care, empowerment seeks to enhance the well-being of all people in society, not to reverse who has ‘power-over’ possibly leading to new structures of domination.

Second, the liberationist ethic calls for a radical overthrow of existing structures of both educational and societal institutions. For Beck, these liberation approaches to education may end up having more of a rhetorical than actual impact as they may not allow for “constructive or creative dialogue with those in power.”²¹⁸ Certainly, challenging the status quo and acting to alter inequalities is of the utmost importance, but all stakeholders in a community must be involved in changing processes to ensure that they are meaningful and lasting.

For example, women in several villages in India were able to stop liquor sales in their villages by collectively organising following a literacy primer that depicted the plight of a poor woman whose husband drank away his wages.²¹⁹ Although the women were able to get alcohol venders out of their villages, greater structural changes were not made because men were not involved and changes to familial relationships were not necessarily discussed and challenged. Therefore, men reacted “passively” to the movement and liquor is still being smuggled into many of the villages.²²⁰

²¹⁸Beck, 486.

²¹⁹A. Joseph (1993) “Brewing Trouble” in Gita Sen, Adrienne Germain and Lincoln C. Chen, eds., *Population Policies Reconsidered: Health, Empowerment, and Rights*. Boston: Harvard University Press, 133.

²²⁰Joseph, 133.

Finally, the liberationist perspective is useful for providing a critique of structural oppression, but its application is limited. In effect, a liberationist ethic says little about the day to day life of subjects who will be affected by a change process.²²¹ Such a shortcoming of the Freiren approach is evident in Leve's study of the women in Nepal discussed above. By glossing over the lived realities of women who saw their caring activities as a moral imperative, the conciousization effort resulted in unintended consequences as it did not understand how women valued relationality, and were willing to endure hardship to maintain their valued relationships. The conciousization approach in Nepal simply dealt with the structural or gender inequalities that excluded women from the public sphere, but apparently had little knowledge of the women's more 'private' lives. An ethic of care, then, is an ideal complement as it is concerned with the experiences of subjects in their daily lives and understands humans as fully relational subjects.²²²

Moreover, when conciousization intends to specifically empower women, it must begin from a gendered perspective. By appealing to "gender specificity" such theories would be "forced to confront the more general problem of how we theorize *people*."²²³ Put another way, starting from a gendered or feminist perspective would reject an understanding of women, or people in general, as autonomous individuals instead of their being embedded in complicated social relations, nor would it attempt to conciousize women to become 'unencumbered' selves. Rather by theorising all people, not just women, as relational subjects, a critical pedagogy would be enriched

²²¹Beck, 486.

²²²Ibid, 486-488.

²²³Leve, 160, emphasis original.

“by taking the emotional core of human connectivity seriously [and] by expanding our understanding of interconnectedness.”²²⁴ Therefore, such consciousness efforts would have to pay attention to the real and morally significant relational commitments that all people have reason to value, while challenging aspects of those relationships that act as constraints. Thus, a critical pedagogy of care would have to engage in a meaningful and caring way with the often messy realities of women’s lives. It would need to be attentive to, and critical of, the relationships that are an essential part of women’s lives. Education for empowerment, then, would not be a linear process or a project with a defined lifecycle. Rather it is a spiral process of “changing consciousness, identifying areas to target for change, planning strategies, action for change, and analysing actions and outcomes.”²²⁵

A critical pedagogy of care would therefore begin by critically engaging with the realities of fully relational subjects who are involved in, and limited by caring relationships. Applying Freire’s methods would allow for the critical perspectives not offered by an ethics of care as it applies to education. Certainly, Cassidy’s and Bates’ study on the application of the ethics of care in a school for at risk youth outlined above shows the importance of care in education, however in extremely patriarchal societies a more critical perspective may be necessary to illuminate the power structures that are entrenched in society. Without more critical engagement with the realities of students, the ethics of care when used alone may end up maintaining the

²²⁴Heidi Ross (2003) “Rethinking Human Vulnerability, Security, and Connection through Relational Education” in Wayne Nelles, *Comparative Education, Terrorism and Human Security*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. pp.33-46, 35.

²²⁵Batliwala, 132.

status quo in a way similar to the more instrumental approaches discussed at the beginning of this chapter. In fact, in many contexts where patriarchal norms that oppress women are firmly entrenched, women must be consciousnessized to “recognize the ideology that legitimizes male domination and perpetuates their oppression” as most women have internalised gender hierarchies as natural and just, leading them “to participate in their own oppression.”²²⁶ Consciousization approaches, then, often require external agitators to develop this awareness, and such leaders or educators must appeal to an ethics of care in their activities. They must pursue meaningful dialogue with the women and understand the daily struggles and activities of these women to assess how changes precipitated by educational programs will play out in the women’s lives.

For bell hooks, when students are suddenly exposed to ideas and worldviews that are different from, even adversarial, to the values and beliefs they have already learned at home or through religious or cultural teachings, educators must care. In fact, hooks argues if there is no recognition and care on the part of educators for the inner conflicts students face when introduced to new values, students can either ruthlessly uphold the status quo or fall into states of apathy and depression.²²⁷ Thus, teachers must be aware of the realities that students are coming from, and deal with the discomfort and fear that may be associated with addressing entrenched societal structures that have become internalised and natural, yet are responsible for oppression.

²²⁶Batliwala, 131.

²²⁷hooks, *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*, 132-133.

Moreover, educators who truly care about the women with whom they are working would prioritise the goals that the women themselves understand as worthwhile. Caring about the women in such circumstances would also mean that educators would allow women to act as capable agents in deciding what action should be pursued, even if it differs from the educator's understandings of empowering action. However, as discussed in Chapter One, educators will need to also provide a critical perspective to allow women to assess whether their actions are in pursuit of oppositional agency which challenges the established norms in a given society, or allegiant agency, which conforms to the established norms or popular thought to achieve a goal. Following this approach, educators selected from within particular communities may be the most appropriate to begin consciousness efforts. Educators who are keenly aware of the power structures and challenges faced in particular contexts are necessary to begin a process of altering oppressive structures and norms that are particular to a given society. However, in some cases external agents may need to begin dialogues that challenge ostensibly neutral norms and structures in particular societies in socially and culturally appropriate ways. These educators need not inform people of their oppression, instead they must reveal oppressive norms and institutions to allow women, and people in general, to engage critically with them. Non-governmental organisations that are active in particular communities may be the appropriate facilitators for such activities, one such approach as used in Chile will be discussed below.

Furthermore to ensure that the goals of education programs are appropriate for a particular group of people, educators, both external and internal, should appeal to

Noddings' understanding of confirmation by "supporting, anticipating, evaluating and encouraging worthwhile activities" that are mutually constructed and approved by students.²²⁸ Following Noddings, change processes that are informed by care would necessitate recognition that care has been received. In effect, if the conciousization process is truly caring, students will receive and respond to the care of the educators. However, "if the caring is not received by students, the claim 'they don't care' has some validity. It suggests strongly that something is very wrong."²²⁹ Thus, by understanding the importance of students' receiving care, educators would have to reassess education programs and plans for action if recognition of care is absent. If the receipt of care is absent, it may be a sign that educators have inadvertently imposed their values and programs of actions on the students, as in the case of the women in Nepal. Acknowledgement of care on the part of students would be evident when they find the confidence to tackle issues that are important to them on their own.

Further, a critical pedagogy of care would appeal to understandings of power beyond the 'power-over' conception of power as domination. Certainly such power structures need to be assessed. However, as noted in Chapter Two, incorporating critical analyses of care into discussions of social relations would provide a useful starting place for the more generative 'power-to' or 'power-with' models. These models rest on collective action that sees power as a generative resource that can be used to resist or manipulate power arrangements that are characterised by domination. Similar to Stall and Stoecker's insights on women-centred community-organising

²²⁸Noddings "An Ethic of Caring and Its Implications for Instructional Arrangements," 221.

²²⁹Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*, 86.

which is based on the maintenance and development of personal connections that allow people to grow, change and develop, a critical pedagogy of care would focus on enhancing and maintaining caring relations for the betterment of all people, rather than encouraging self-interested individuals to gain institutional power.²³⁰ Educational initiatives that pursue women's empowerment, then, should not necessarily be understood as disempowering for men. Rather, "women's empowerment also liberates and empowers men" as it frees men from the role of the oppressor and increases women's access to material resources and knowledge that may generate new ideas for a better quality of life for entire communities.²³¹

Anna Bosch's research into popular strategy education in Chile provides an instructive example here. One activity used by the Centro de Investigación y Desarrollo de la Educación (CIDE) in Chile uses a deck of 32 cards containing stereotypical phrases about male and female gender roles that men and women read aloud to decipher if the phrase refers to a man or a woman.²³² Once a student identifies the gender to which the card refers they must justify their decision, other students are encouraged to agree or disagree and explain their decision. The goal of the activity is to make students aware of various gender stereotypes and encourage them to realise the discrimination that stereotypes perpetuate, and to suggest ways to change such situations.²³³ An activity such as this one could allow students to realise how gender

²³⁰Susan Stall and Randy Stoecker (1998) "Community Organizing or Organizing Community? Gender and the Crafts of Empowerment" *Gender and Society*, Vol.12, No.6. pp. 729-756. 739.

²³¹Batliwala, 131.

²³²Bosch, 174.

²³³Ibid, 174.

codes are often oppressive for both men and women. When informed by an ethics of care would further encourage them to change the structures in order to create a more caring and just environment for both men and women.

A critical pedagogy of care would aim to evaluate the structures that are an impediment to caring relations in general, and would aim to change societal structures in ways that would benefit the well-being of all people, allowing them to maintain, continue and repair [their] 'world' so that [they] can live it as well as possible."²³⁴ Education from this perspective would be intrinsically as well as instrumentally valuable, as it would pursue a sense of community among students and provide a venue for discussing problems and differences. Using an ethics of care as the ethical foundation of education would understand that the goal of education is to promote the quality of life as well as the moral and intellectual growth of students. A critical pedagogy of care would support "caring relationships among people who see their own lives and the lives of others as intrinsically valuable and meaningful."²³⁵ It would also provide a forum for problem-solving and discussion among different groups to promote relationships that encourage the development and cohesion of the community. For Heidi Ross,

(n)egotiating, not negating the distances that separate us by persistent attention and care is the work we have before us as human beings seeking multiple alliances of dignity and equality. Deliberative examination of the vital connections between ourselves and others is what is missing from education—and what is necessary to our task of reimagining global education.²³⁶

²³⁴Joan C. Tronto "Care as a Basis for Radical Political Judgements,"142.

²³⁵Beck, 461.

²³⁶Heidi Ross "Rethinking Human Vulnerability, Security, and Connection through Relational Education" in *Comparative Education, Terrorism and Human Security*, 43.

A critical pedagogy of care as I have outlined it here is one such strategy to begin this important project.

Education for women's empowerment is not a new strategy, however this does not mean that education does not have the potential to be empowering. Educational initiatives must move beyond purely instrumental approaches, and must resist perpetuating harmful stereotypes. It is not acceptable to simply attribute failed attempts at empowering education to repressive cultural or gender norms in a given society. Empowering education should begin by encouraging the oppressed and oppressors to engage critically with these divisions to create a more just and caring society for all. For this reason, the type of education is of immense importance. On the one hand, pursuing education from a care perspective alone has the propensity to pursue attentive and responsive relationships between teachers and students, which can produce education that is responsive to the specific and contextualised needs of students. On the other hand, Freire's perspectives to education have transformative potential by encouraging students to engage with their realities and to use their knowledge to transform their lives in important ways. However, neither of these approaches are satisfactory on their own.

Therefore, a critical pedagogy of care would posit an ethics of care as a guide and foundation for Freire's critical consciousness approach. A critical pedagogy of care would begin with relational subjects and this would enable "connections between our small spheres of personal experience and the wider world— that is, the caring environment that could help us to remain vigilant about the impulse to dominate and

to enable us to listen to and live with strangers.”²³⁷ Education would be about illuminating structures of oppression and dominance and acting to change those structures in ways that would enhance the well-being and empowerment of both women and men. Finally, a critical pedagogy of care would overcome the limitations of purely instrumental education outlined at the beginning of this chapter in two ways. First, it would create a forum for building relationships based on care and respect. This would allow for education that considered the particular needs of students when considering their intellectual and moral development. Second, it would integrate critical perspectives to address the position, not just the condition, of women and the oppressed in a given society. Given the importance of women’s empowerment in the development for today, advancing new and ethical ways to create relationships for change that resist domination and challenge oppression are immensely important. Pursuing women’s empowerment from a critical pedagogy of care may be one strategy for educating in a way that is truly empowering.

²³⁷Ross, 43.

Conclusion

The popularisation of the concept of empowerment as it relates to women and development should represent a significant and positive change in the way development policies and programs are approached. Certainly, in theory, the focus on women and participatory approaches in development represents a positive step in realising the goals of equality and poverty reduction for women. However, despite the fact that ‘empowering women’ has become a central goal of development organisations in the last twenty years, women still remain in the most precarious economic and social positions around the globe. As the concept of empowerment has become synonymous with women and development, the reality of the ‘feminisation of poverty’ and its concomitant effects such as ‘the feminisation of HIV/AIDS’ make the progress of empowerment strategies aimed at women questionable.

Thus, there is a real and urgent need to reconceptualise strategies aimed at empowering women in ways that challenge oppression and gender inequalities. Replacing the term ‘empowerment’ in the discourse of development is neither desirable nor sufficient to begin the important task of minimising women’s subordination. Doing away with the concept of empowerment entirely would undermine the fact that the term did come out of grassroots movements for change that were initiated by women themselves who struggled for meaningful change around the world. Stories like Mukhtar Mai’s as outlined in the Introduction demonstrates that empowerment as a transformative and ‘bottom-up’ process is possible, even against the most exceptional odds. Further, adopting a new concept that suggests ‘doing development differently’ will likely suffer the same fate as empowerment, and

become mainstreamed and co-opted to legitimate the policies of the current neo-liberal discourse. What is necessary, then, is to reconceptualise empowerment in a new discourse that challenges the embedded western, liberal and capitalist assumptions that remain entrenched in development theorising and practice. Moreover, new strategies that challenge, rather than uphold or perpetuate, oppressive gendered arrangements must be advanced if women are to be ‘empowered’ in meaningful ways.

In Chapter One of this thesis, I articulated perceptible and basic elements of empowerment that should be present in any empowerment process, even though the means through which to pursue empowerment will differ in unique contexts and situations. First, empowerment is a continuous process that is never complete, women may become more or less empowered as circumstances change over time. Second, empowerment is a grassroots process in which particular goals and plans for action originate from the women who are to be empowered themselves. Empowerment is also a process that is rooted in the context and everyday realities of women in a particular society. It is neither possible nor desirable to design a single plan for ‘empowerment’ that can be applied in the same way in diverse situations. Finally, empowerment is a process that aims to generate social change. The empowerment of women means that oppressive gender hierarchies that characterise women’s lives must be challenged and altered in meaningful ways. Importantly, this means that a process of empowerment cannot simply address the needs or material state of women, although this is extremely essential, but it also must address the structures and ideologies that have kept women in subordinate positions in a given context. Clearly,

“(e)liminating male bias and moving women out of the condition of near-universal subordination they still currently occupy will require cultural, economic and political changes; it will not be achieved by tinkering with the structures of employment or national accounting.”²³⁸

In order for ‘empowerment’ to occur as I have outlined above, the rhetoric of more participatory approaches to development that engage with the particular realities of women in particular contexts must be realised in practice, not just in theory. In the Introduction, I identified that empowerment was popularised precisely because development theorists began to respond to critiques that development practice was too ‘top-down,’ focused on economic indicators and ignored the specific roles of women in development activities. Responding to these critiques, development theorists began to include women as a distinct category in their programs, and began to measure more than economic factors to gauge the success of development programs around the world. However, assessing the ‘empowering’ effects of development more than thirty years after the convergence of these two trends suggests a major disconnect between theory and practice.

Beginning in the 1970s, following Boserup’s initial study on women in development, women became a central focus for development agencies when designing and implementing programs. However, the focus on women has not necessarily meant that development theorising has become more responsive or cognisant of the particular roles and needs of women in the developing world. Rather, “(t)he view is that women should somehow be ‘brought into development’ and

²³⁸Rowlands, 17.

become ‘empowered’ to participate within the economic and political structures of society.”²³⁹ The strategy of ‘add women and stir’ has prevailed, which has failed to change the features in development theorising and practice that have often left women disempowered.

Thus, empowerment remains an instrumental approach, or a means to achieve other ends. More often than not, the desired ends simply attempt to integrate women into the ‘public sphere’ with little, if any, attention to the entrenched gender hierarchies that will not simply disappear with women’s entrance into these domains. Furthermore, the reality that women perform the bulk of the unpaid, caring labour still remains largely invisible to development theorists and economists who design development policies. Thus, the integration of women into development has largely been focused on ‘empowering’ women via the paid workforce, or through quota systems in national and international decision-making to increase political participation. However, the failure to pay attention to the ways in which these new ‘public’ activities do not minimise the unpaid care labour women perform, has often had the result of disempowering women. These new ‘public’ roles simply double the burden of work women in the global south, and the global north, are expected to perform. The visibility of women in development theorising has thus been unsuccessful in engaging with or challenging the gendered nature of development. Instead, “gender inequality gets the same superficial treatment today as mainstream

²³⁹Rowlands, 12.

developer-economists once gave it thirty years ago, adding the words ‘and women’ here and there.”²⁴⁰

Similarly, the narrow focus on economics as the way to development and empowerment has not subsided, nor has development been able to facilitate meaningful participation on the part of development subjects– including women. Development is still largely pursued as a ‘top-down’ process in which policies are designed by economists and experts in the west to improve the lives of people in the developing world by following the same modernisation strategy that ‘developed’ the west. In fact, “(a) particular view of ‘development-as-Westernisation’ has come to dominate to such a degree that [it] has become virtually impossible for any different possibility even to be imagined.”²⁴¹ The unquestioned paradigm that is development then allows powerful international organisations to define what is and is not empowering, and what policies will result in the empowerment of women living in the most dire economic and social conditions around the world. A survey of the policies and programs enacted by mainstream development organisations to ‘empower’ women has precious little in common with the understanding I have articulated above. Instead, empowerment remains ill-defined and confined within a discourse that prioritises individualism, consumerism and economic goals. The fact that empowerment is articulated within this discourse is not insignificant, as it “contributes to the construction and validation of changing emphases of the global and economic

²⁴⁰Kathleen Staudt, Shirin M. Rai and Jane L. Parpart (2001) “Protesting World Trade Rules: Can We Talk about Empowerment?” *Signs*, Vol. 26, No.4, pp. 1251-1257.1252

²⁴¹Rowlands, 12.

and political system and, indeed, of legitimising particular policies and practical approaches to development efforts which involve women.”²⁴² In other words, despite the rhetoric of development that is conscious of gender, empowerment has been orientated to justify the same old discourse of development and women have simply been ‘tacked on’ as a group to be ‘empowered’ by the same economic and political policies that have long characterised development.

What is inherently problematic about pursuing empowerment within the neo-liberal discourse is that it not only prioritises certain goals, but it neutralises others. Terms like ‘empowerment’ are funnelled into this discourse to lend legitimacy for certain programs of action; the use of inspiring terms makes the neoliberal agenda seem beyond question. Therefore, there is little room to question the role of the mainstream development agencies themselves for the ways in which they create conditions that are inherently problematic for processes of empowerment. This is especially crucial in the wake of economic globalisation, which often has disempowering effects on women. The lack of attention to the realities of economic globalisation obscures the fact that it is “multinational corporations, international financial institutions, world trade organizations, neoliberal policies and market economies,” not women, who are ‘empowered’ by globalisation’s effects.²⁴³ Thus, the concept of empowerment has remained ill-defined in development practice because defining it as I have challenges the embedded assumptions of the neo-liberal model, and would require a significant shift in development theorising to be realised. In

²⁴²Rowlands, 11.

²⁴³Koggel, Christine (2007) “Agency and Empowerment in a Globalized World,”17.

contemporary development theorising the use of inspiring terms like empowerment simply provides legitimacy to pursue the same neo-liberal policies that have dominated development over the last thirty years.²⁴⁴ Therefore, in order to reclaim the concept of empowerment in a way that would truly challenge unequal power relations and produce tangible benefits in the lives of women, the neo-liberal discourse that defines what is possible and desirable to achieve women's 'empowerment' must change.

I have argued that a feminist ethics of care is an appropriate ethical framework through which to begin the important process of reconceptualising empowerment in a way that would allow it to be both meaningful and transformative in the lives of the powerless. Empowerment always involves normative theorising. Because it is a process that identifies what people need to improve their well being, and what strategies will produce the desired results, a moral framework is always present. However, the analysis of the strategies and understandings of what is empowering for women in mainstream development discourse reveals how it is not only unequal social and economic policies, but a dominant moral framework which legitimates and perpetuates particular power hierarchies.²⁴⁵ Beginning a process of empowerment from the perspective of a feminist ethics of care alters how empowerment is conceptualised and pursued in practice. To show this, in Chapter Two I used insights from a feminist ethics of care to reconceptualise empowerment in a way that would

²⁴⁴Cornwall and Brock, 1044.

²⁴⁵ Fiona Robinson "Methods of Feminist Normative Theory: A Political Ethic of Care for International Relations" in *Feminist Methodologies for International Relations*, 227.

facilitate a process of empowerment as defined in the first chapter.

Appealing to the work of second generation care feminists, I outlined several features of a feminist ethics of care that overcome many of the shortcomings of traditional liberal theorising. First, a feminist ethics of care does not start by understanding people as independent individuals. Rather, all people exist in relations, and the interconnected nature of human existence means that people are constituted by these relations. Second, a feminist ethics of care does not start from abstract principles of reason that appeal to codified moral rules that define what is right and just. Instead, a feminist ethics of care views activities of care that occur in relation to others as the most important values for informing moral judgement. Thus, it is not possible to delineate a single moral code that is applicable to all contexts, as moral judgements are made in response to the particular needs of particular others with whom we share relationships.

A feminist ethics of care is then able to reveal the historical, gendered, political and cultural influences that play an integral part in the moral decisions that people make. This means that rather than obscuring difference, a feminist ethics of care must start from the very situations in which care is given and received. Attention to the delivery and receipt of care also allows a feminist ethics of care to examine, and indeed critique, particular caring relations that are disempowering for women. The focus on the importance of care also makes care a societal good, care is politicised because women's caring labour supports the very foundations of communities, nations, and even global economies. Therefore, it is neither appropriate nor valuable to understand care as something that women 'do' in the private sphere. Rather, care

work should be something that states, international organisations and even multinational corporations have a duty to provide citizens. Replacing the traditional neo-liberal normative framework with a feminist ethics of care, then, eschews moral theorising that begins with independent, unrelated and indifferent individuals pursuing self-interested goals in favour of a moral theory that sees as significant the overlooked importance of relationality and responsibility.²⁴⁶

Applying this perspective to a process of empowerment, then, considerably alters what is considered morally relevant and the strategies that are desirable in a process of empowerment. First, empowerment is a social process that always “occurs in relation to others,” it is appropriate, and indeed necessary, to begin from a fully relational ontology.²⁴⁷ By applying feminist ethics of care to empowerment, subjects are never merely independent individuals; rather they are “encumbered” selves who are always embedded in relationships and are at least partly comprised by these relations.²⁴⁸ Importantly, any approach that specifically attempts to empower women but fails to interrogate the empowering or disempowering effects of unchosen, intimate, familial relationships may end up lacking any real meaning in the lives of the women. Therefore, relationships would be the starting point for empowerment strategies. For many women complete independence and selfish individualism is not a goal they wish to, or can, achieve. For this reason a feminist ethics of care focuses on, rather than overlooks, the everyday lives, and histories, of real interconnected people.

²⁴⁶Held, 13.

²⁴⁷Mann Hyung Hur (2006) “Empowerment in Terms of Theoretical Perspectives: Exploring a Typology of the Process and Components Across Disciplines” *Journal of Community Psychology*, Vol.34, No.5. pp.523-540. 524.

²⁴⁸Keller, 152.

By applying feminist ethics to empowerment, then, the previously disregarded features of women's lives including unpaid care work and personal relationships would become a central focus when articulating a possible plan of action.

By beginning with the contextualised, everyday experiences of women, empowerment strategies would resist top-down strategies that apply universal solutions to very unique situations. Thus, any analyses of the relative amount of power afforded to women in a particular society needs to begin with a consideration of how care is delivered and received in both private and public relationships. Examining the delivery of care reveals that women are not expected to act as the primary givers of care in a vacuum: women are caregivers in particular contexts that have assigned these duties to women, often upholding particular power relations. A critical examination of relationships may reveal "who has 'power-over' resources and people and what structures, practices and conditions act as barriers to empowerment, resistance and solidarity efforts."²⁴⁹ Using care as a critical lens to examine who wields the 'power-over' would produce new possibilities rooted in the caring realities of particular peoples' lives within particular relationships.

Additionally, agency from the perspective of a feminist ethic of care as it relates to empowerment must also be understood as a relational concept. In effect, moral agents should not be understood as agents who make decisions in pursuit of purely self-interested goals. Instead, people are embodied relational agents that make decisions with the needs of concrete others to whom they are related in mind.

²⁴⁹Christine M. Koggel (2007) "Empowerment and the Role of Advocacy in a Globalized World," 10.

Understanding agency as relational, however, does not mean that people lack autonomy altogether. Rather “autonomy is made possible by our social relations,” and can be constrained by the same relationships.²⁵⁰ Thus, intimate caring relationships as well as unequal gender hierarchies in societies must be assessed for their empowering or disempowering effects.

Moreover, care work would not be invisible, nor would it be devalued as it so often is by mainstream ethical theorising. Rather, caring labour is essential to the well-being of all people at the community, national and global levels. Care work is the very foundation upon which society thrives. This real and necessary work that women perform must be taken into account when pursuing empowerment. Thus, simply integrating women into the ‘public’ sphere would not be an acceptable strategy without examining the important care work that does not disappear in the wake of women’s involvement in the paid workforce. Such a strategy would have to be assessed for the ways in which it merely doubles the burden on women to perform unpaid and caring labour. This increased burden is more often than not disempowering. Empowerment strategies, then, must not simply focus on restructuring the ways in which care work is performed in ‘private’ households (although this is immensely important), but the ways in which valuable and essential care work should be provided by institutions of the state, NGOs, international organisations, and perhaps even international corporations. This means that if women are to take on new roles in conjunction with their caring labour, provisions for care must be provided by public institutions. As care work can often be an impediment to

²⁵⁰Diana Meyers in Jean Keller “Autonomy, Relationality and Feminist Ethics,” 157.

empowerment for women, care work cannot remain entrenched in the private sphere but must be understood as a public good. Increasing women's 'productive labour' to ensure empowerment will not be achieved without interrogating the unequal division of 'unproductive' care work in a given society.

A change in the moral discourse that informs empowerment processes would precipitate a significant shift in the way that empowerment is conceptualised, and the strategies through which to pursue it. Conceptualising empowerment from a feminist ethics of care also necessitates that strategies for empowerment are predicated on giving and receiving care. I have argued that education does have the propensity to contribute to meaningful empowerment, but the traditional educational approaches used to 'empower' women by development practitioners must change. Instrumental approaches to education that merely attempt to give women skills to pursue some other end, can actually result in a perpetuation of unequal gender relations. Often ideologies and values that are oppressive to women in society are replicated in educational environments. Following Naila Kabeer's argument as discussed in Chapter Three, it is evident that there are limits to education as a source of empowerment for many women in the developing world. First, the success of education programs are influenced by context, and the roles assigned to women in a given society. If women's roles are confined as essentially reproductive, education may simply become a means of equipping women to be better wives or mothers.²⁵¹ Furthermore, Kabeer argues that gender norms can be replicated in curricula and simply act to legitimate women's 'traditional' roles and reinforce messages about

²⁵¹Kabeer, 17.

girls' inferiority.²⁵² Therefore, I have argued that for education to be empowering it must critically examine the ideologies and values of a particular society, or it may simply perpetuate unequal relations. Simply enrolling girls in school with little or no attention to the ways in which education is actually administered is unlikely to result in empowerment.

Therefore, new paradigms that go beyond purely instrumental approaches to education are necessary. Education must not be viewed as simply a means to other ends, but as an activity that is valuable in itself because it facilitates students' moral and intellectual growth. Following Nel Noddings' application of care to education, I outlined that education based upon care is sensitive to context, receptive to the needs of students and aims to maintain and repair relationships in society. Teachers and students are mutually engaged in designing the curriculum, and teachers must be attentive and responsive to the particular needs of each student. When care is delivered appropriately, students will respond by confirming that care has been received. If, however, the care is not received or students report that teachers do not care, teachers have failed to provide meaningful care. Although applying the ethics of care to education could make education more responsive and attentive to the needs of students, it may not have the critical perspectives needed to challenge highly oppressive power relationships, and thus may resemble instrumental approaches in upholding certain values that are disempowering.

In order to integrate more critical perspectives into education, I then examined Paulo Freire's methodology which 'consciousizes' students to realise and challenge

²⁵²Kabeer, 17.

their oppression. Freire's method of 'popular education' is often credited as one of the original sources of the term 'empowerment.'²⁵³ However, I have argued that reclaiming education for empowerment following Freire's methodologies may not always have empowering outcomes for women when applied in practice. Freire's methods pursue revolutionary aims, however they often view the oppressed as a group that needs to exercise the 'power-over' to become empowered. Thus, for women to be 'empowered,' men may have to be disempowered. The revolutionary rhetoric can, therefore make it difficult for the oppressed to engage with their oppressors to alter power relations in ways that would benefit all people. Therefore, for education to be engaged with the power hierarchies that impede women's empowerment it must generate critical knowledge that is predicated upon giving and receiving care. Such an approach will overcome the limitations of traditional education programs implemented in the developing world that tend to see education as purely instrumental– it is beneficial only in pursuit of other ends. Therefore, the critical pedagogy of care I have advanced grounds Paulo Freire's methodology of critical knowledge and emancipatory education in an ethics of care to attend to the relational and contextualised realities of students.

A critical pedagogy of care is one strategy to begin a process of empowerment that addresses women's position in society and transforms unequal power relations in ways that benefit all people. A critical pedagogy of care would attend to the everyday needs of students, while encouraging students to perceive their everyday realities

²⁵³For example in "The Meaning of Women's Empowerment: New Concepts from Action" Srilatha Batliwala links the concept of empowerment to 'popular education' as developed by Paulo Freire in the 1970s.

critically. As a relational approach, a critical pedagogy of care would resist viewing students as autonomous individuals who are pursuing self-interested goals. Rather, this approach to education would understand that all people are embedded in relationships, and make decisions and moral judgements in the context of their specific relationships. A critical pedagogy of care would then be predicated on giving and receiving care while encouraging critical engagement with students' realities, contexts and relationships. Importantly a critical pedagogy of care would allow for women themselves to identify and pursue issues that are important in their lives.

My critiques of traditional models of education are therefore similar to my critiques of the ways mainstream normative theorising approaches empowerment in general. Both empowerment and its strategies, such as education, are generally viewed as instruments to achieve other ends. Furthermore, neo-liberal policies have influenced education in ways that suggests “neo-liberal marketised solutions to educational problems,” which makes education programs subjected to the same limitations as empowerment processes within mainstream development theorising in general.²⁵⁴ Michael W. Apple argues that the objectives in education have been influenced by neo-liberal policies that expand the ideas of competitive individualism both inside and outside the school, reduce the expectation that governments provide social needs and prioritise the rule of the free market. For Apple all educational programs are visions of a just society that attempt to create good students, and when influenced by the neo-liberal ideology educational programs seek to create students

²⁵⁴Michael W. Apple (2001) “Comparing Neo-Liberal Projects and Inequality in Education” *Comparative Education*, Vol.37, No.4. pp.409-423. 410.

who are enterprising and competitive individuals.²⁵⁵ When empowerment is understood as something that can be achieved simply by changing the conditions, the material state in which women live through competitive engagement with the free market, few changes are made to the position of women in a given society.

Improvements to conditions do little to challenge the underlying values that inform gender hierarchies and curtail women's enjoyment of better conditions. By failing to challenge the norms that dictate that women should be in the home, or that educating girls is less valuable than educating boys, already entrenched gender norms are legitimised and perpetuated by dominant structures and ideologies in society. Thus instrumental empowerment programs and education policies only address women's practical needs or condition, but do little to improve women's status or position in a given society.

For example, expecting the empowerment of women to result from engagement in the paid workforce overlooks the fact that women who enter the workforce get paid less than men, have less job security, work in the informal sector more often than men, and are often the most affected by job loss when state services such as healthcare are scaled back at the behest of international organisations. Thus, as a result of entrenched gender norms women perform stereotypical 'feminine' caring activities in the public sphere that are either undervalued or devalued entirely. Entrance into the paid workforce does not attempt to alter gender norms that have historically kept women in the private sphere, nor does it see the ways in which

²⁵⁵Apple, 414.

women are already productive in maintaining societies through their unpaid caring labour.

Similarly, traditional, instrumental models of education have the propensity to legitimise women's 'traditional' roles as natural and just. These instrumental approaches to education are notably lacking the acquisition of critical knowledge to engage with the deeply held values and norms in patriarchal societies that are responsible for oppression. Failure to engage critically with the realities that have kept women out of educational systems will not alter those norms, and the education women receive may simply further entrench those deeply held, and often oppressive, values and norms. Therefore, often oppression becomes so entrenched in society, that 'power-over' becomes more subtle, even unnoticeable. Without critical perspectives women may not be able to identify ideologies and norms that are unjust, and may end up "participat[ing] in their own oppression."²⁵⁶ In other words, women may simply accept the roles that society has imposed on them, and fail to understand how deeply held values and assumptions (including their own) have kept them in a subordinate position to men.

Therefore, women, and the oppressed in general, must become aware of the dominant ideologies that are responsible for their oppression. Educators play an important role in illuminating these oppressive structures and encouraging women to take action to challenge inequalities of all sorts. However, simply addressing these inequalities and giving women the 'power-over' men will not result in empowerment, but in new forms of domination that are disempowering for both men and women.

²⁵⁶Batliwala, 131.

Meaningful and transformative empowerment will result in shifting oppressive power relations to allow people to pursue and maintain caring relationships. Therefore, it is through dialogue, discussion and negotiation within a critical pedagogy of care that unequal power arrangements should be challenged for the ways in which they impede the well-being and quality of life of all people.

Pursuing empowerment as a process that challenges deeply held norms and values means that empowerment will not occur overnight. Empowerment is a generational process that will always be ongoing. Therefore, empowerment cannot be understood as a means to an end, or as an end in itself. Empowerment is always an unfinished process of negotiating and altering structures and ideologies in a given society. 'Empowerment' is not something that can be 'completed' in a project lifecycle, and often it cannot be measured quantitatively by the number of women in the workforce or the number of women in schools. Instead, empowerment is an ongoing process of changing values and norms, and women can become more or less empowered by circumstances in a given society. For this reason, education that is contextual and critical will illuminate the particular realities of particular persons to allow them to design strategies and mobilise collectively to address the features of their society that are disempowering.

This means that empowerment processes should begin from the bottom up. 'Empowerment' strategies cannot be designed by international organisations following one-size-fits-all programs that 'give' women power. Rather, empowerment occurs when people perceive the structures that oppress them and mobilise to change these structures in ways that are appropriate to their contextual realities. However, this

does not mean that ‘empowerment’ can, or should, only happen on a local or community level. As my examination of the effects of global forces on empowerment processes shows, empowerment strategies need to engage with institutions at the local, national and community levels. Therefore, empowerment may be best understood as a process that ‘trickles up,’ as women must start by mobilising in their own communities, but this does not preclude the possibility of challenging features of national or international institutions that are disempowering. Furthermore, the support of state and international institutions in such activities would make empowerment processes that begin from the bottom-up much more effective as they would not be confined to the local level.

For example, in “Women’s Empowering Carework in Post-Soviet Azerbaijan,” Mehrangiz Najafizadeh describes how Azeri women mobilised in response to a caregiving crisis in their nation through women’s organisations, and how the organisations opened up a space that empowered Azeri women through community organising that challenged oppressive gender hierarchies. Following the declaration of independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, Azerbaijan began the transition to a free-market economy that resulted in privatisation and the elimination of many social services. The decrease in social services led to unemployment and increased care duties for women, as is the case following economic globalisation in many countries. In response to the “caregiving crisis” women’s associations proliferated to address the pressing needs of women, the poor, refugees, the sick and the elderly.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁷Mehrangiz Najafizadeh (2003) “Women’s Empowering Carework in Post-Soviet Azerbaijan” *Gender and Society*, Vol.17, No.2. pp. 293-304. 294.

The diverse organisations that grew out of the crisis are organised by women and for women, with the common purpose of providing a network of care and support for Azeri women within diverse communities.²⁵⁸ Importantly, these organisations have not only been focused on filling the gap in caring labour that has resulted from the move to a free-market economy, but the organisations have also developed networks to place Azeri women's issues on the public agenda both nationally and internationally. Although there are diverse organisations that operate independently, the organisations are characterised "by very high levels of consciousness and commitment to enhancing the *position* of women in the new Azeri society" by pursuing activities that "raise women's consciousness and seek to alter traditional, gendered social relations and consequently give Azeri women more power and control over their own well-being."²⁵⁹ Thus Azeri women have been empowered at the local level through knowledge which gives them greater control over their position in the family, and at national and international levels by mobilising to have their issues and concerns recognised by public institutions.²⁶⁰ In this case, women's carework has been empowering as it led to community organising that generated critical consciousness aimed at changing women's position in society by challenging oppressive gender conditions. However, the women in Azerbaijan began their campaign due in large part to the crisis created by national and international policies that disempowered women by scaling back social services. The ability of women to change their position remains limited by the scarce resources available to continue their efforts. Therefore, women's

²⁵⁸Najafizadeh, 298-299.

²⁵⁹Ibid, 303, emphasis added.

²⁶⁰Ibid, 303.

engagement with international organisations may continue to be limited if national and international organisation do not view care work a necessary activity; this will also limit the level of empowerment women are able to achieve.

Although this example shows how grassroots movements can elicit meaningful empowerment of women, a significant shift in the way macro national and international organisations view carework is necessary for the empowerment of women in an era of economic globalisation. Until international organisations begin to value carework as an activity that sustains communities, nations and international economies, movements such as the one in Azerbaijan may remain movements that empower women in response to— as opposed to in conjunction with— the policies of international organisations. Therefore, these institutions must begin to see care as an activity that is necessary for all humans, and as an activity that local national and international institutions have a duty to provide. Not only does care work sustain communities, nations and global economies, but caring labour is necessary for the survival of the most vulnerable— including children, the sick and the elderly around the globe.

Although what I have defended would entail a significant shift in the way development theorising has traditionally been undertaken, the contemporary economic recession may provide the impetus for national and global institutions to provide provisions of care for citizens. As Frederic C. Clairmont argues, “(t)he entire ideological paraphanelia of neo-liberalism is daily becoming more discredited as

millions and millions of men and women are dumped into the jobless pit.”²⁶¹ As national governments are dealing with increased rates of unemployment and poverty, the need to provide social services is becoming more pressing. States around the world have begun to, and will need to continue to, invest in the well-being of their citizens in the wake of the financial crisis. This coupled with an aging population in the west, and increasing rates of fatal diseases like HIV/AIDS around the world, makes the need for the provision of care all the more necessary.

Therefore, the current economic situation may allow for the importance of care to be realised and for provisions of care to become a duty for the state and global organisations. Certainly, this is an avenue that those concerned with the empowerment of women and the oppressed around the world must pursue. In the meantime, however, new strategies for the ways in which national governments and global organisations can support and facilitate grassroots movements must be advanced. Development theorists and practitioners must understand that challenging gender norms in contextually relevant ways is necessary for the empowerment of women to occur. Importantly, supporting these movements means that the goals and programs must be developed by the subjects themselves, and various external organisations need to work with, not for, subjects to support the achievement of their goals. States and international organisations have been active in supporting educational initiatives, but all too often little attention is paid to how the education is being delivered and received and educational programs end up mirroring the oppressive structures of societies in general. Thus, the role of the state and international organisations in

²⁶¹Frederic C. Clairmont (2002) “Debate of Neoliberalism” *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.37, No.5. pp.384-388. 385.

education for empowerment as I have articulated through a critical pedagogy of care is to support programs that are enacted at the grassroots level and work with them, not against them, to achieve goals that are appropriate to unique contexts. States and international organisations must not attempt to simply integrate girls into oppressive systems, or advance a single educational model that will work in all circumstances—they must take their cues from local organisations and support goals that grassroots movements have articulated as useful and beneficial in their realities.

The empowerment of women is an important goal, one that development organisations must take seriously. The (over)use of the term ‘empowerment’ as it applies to women in development has yet to result in meaningful changes in women’s position around the world. Rather, women still remain in precarious positions in both the developing and developed worlds. Therefore, ‘empowerment’ must be reclaimed in a manner that precipitates changes in women’s subordinate positions around the world. Simply attempting to ‘add women and stir’ is not sufficient to begin this project. Integrating women into various public institutions without addressing the underlying values and assumptions that contribute to, and perpetuate, their oppression will fail to produce transformative empowerment. Realising empowerment in practice means that it must move beyond instrumental approaches that view it as a means to a particular end, as articulated by mainstream development theorising. Therefore, it is necessary to alter the discourse that informs empowerment and to develop new strategies that allow for contextual, ongoing, relational and critical empowerment processes to produce meaningful changes in the lives of women around the world. Most importantly, empowerment that results in transformative and meaningful changes in the lives of women around the world should be pursued with care.

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