

Triologue

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Power!



Why is progress so slow toward change for gender equity? Why is this work so hard? In part, it is how we think about the problem.

Many writers have pointed out how social science has adopted the **epistemology** of 19th century Newtonian physics, particularly the belief in the importance of analyzing parts of a system while ignoring both the relation between those parts and the behavior of the whole system. Ironically, physical scientists in this century have developed a much more sophisticated epistemology, influenced particularly by quantum physics. Physicist David Bohm would say that **fragmentation** and **reductionism**, leftovers from the Newtonian way of thinking, are illusions and lead to endless conflict and confusion. Accordingly, in this Triologue we would like to explore both old and new ways of thinking about power.

We can look to recent discoveries in quantum physics to find new ways to think about power. Quantum physics tells us that what scientists have generally thought of as sub-atomic particles are not really "things" as previously imagined, but remain as fuzzy bundles containing dual potential forms - *until we observe them*. In other words, they may be either particles or waves but they do not "decide" what to be until we observe them. The act of observation determines what we see. This reminds us of how looking at organizations using a gender lens enables us to see a variety of gendered dynamics. When we look at organizations through another lens, gender disappears.

Similarly, once we begin to look at power in one way, we move from the quantum world into the Newtonian one. We break down power into separate images then observe and study each. How do we imagine our way out this kind of fragmented thinking about power? How do we apply this learning to gender and organizational change?

In this *Triologue*, we present a series of conceptualizations of power - some Newtonian and others more quantum - and examine their implications for gender and organizational change. Pregs Govender, a South African Member of Parliament, gives a policymaker's perspective on power. She highlights the kinds of strategies and alliances within and outside the governmental system in South Africa that were used to press for the Women's Budget and that continue to keep the issues alive for women all over the country. Next, two practitioners reflect on observations from their own work. Rieky Stuart, drawing from work with BRAC, discusses two common ways of thinking about power sharing, providing examples of each. In discussing interpersonal power, Itziar Lozano juxtaposes strategies women have used to seek power when they have been expected to act in "traditionally feminine" ways, and ends with a call for breaking new conceptual ground and building new alliances of the type Pregs Govender's piece highlights in South Africa. Joyce Fletcher provides an insightful look at some of the theory behind ideas of power in a discussion of Stephen Lukes' "three dimensions of power." She adds a **poststructuralist perspective** which suggests useful paths to **deconstructing** organizational cultures, structures and practices. Susan Griffin speaks of the power of imagination (you might call it the power of belief) to create a vision that is new and healing and that can lead us out of our political and psychological despair - a vision, you might say, that leads us back to a **quantum consciousness**.

From these various conceptualizations of power, we draw out strands and attempt to weave our way into a new way of understanding power. We hope this new way of understanding power leads to a new exercise of power, one which transforms organizations towards people-centered development driven by feminist values such as

equity and empowerment. ☸

-Aruna Rao and David Kelleher

Lukes, Stephen (1974). *Power*. London: MacMillan Education. Lukes is Fellow and Tutor in Sociology and Politics at Balliol College in Oxford, England.

Epistemology: a theory of the nature of knowledge.
Fragmentation, our tendency to see things as separate bits, results, at the personal level, in seeing individuals and groups as "other," leads to isolation, selfishness and conflict. At the conceptual level, fragmentation keeps us from seeing the whole system and the pattern that connects seemingly disparate events.
Reductionism is a tendency to focus on a very small part of a complex system and then to act as if the knowledge of this small part is sufficient.
BRAC is the world's largest indigenous NGO, founded in Bangladesh in 1972 to re-settle refugees after the war. It is now an organization of 14,000 full time and 48,000 part-time staff delivering health, education, employment training and micro-credit services to over 55,000 villages in rural Bangladesh. BRAC focuses on empowerment and poverty reduction, particularly with rural women.
A poststructuralist perspective challenges the notion of one transcendent "truth." It asserts that the definition of what is good, true, and beautiful is ideologically determined - not based on an objective reality. To **deconstruct** is to look for what is hidden, de-valued or absent in text.
Quantum consciousness is a way of looking at the world that implies a radical revision of our understandings of the measurement, context and definition of reality. In particular the role of the observer of the system is no longer seen as detached but in fact the observer "creates" the reality she sees.

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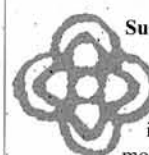
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PREGS GOVENDER
ANC Member of Parliament
South Africa

Strategizing for a Political Voice: The Women's Budget in South Africa

Policymaker

Pregs Govender is a member of the Finance Committee and the Working Group on Gender and Economic Policy. She headed the SA Women's National Coalition which was responsible for getting women's issues included in the transitional constitution for the New South Africa. Ms. Govender was for many years a teacher, union organizer and activist.

Dora Tamana's words inspired the idea of the Women's Budget in South Africa. The Women's Budget is an attempt to ensure that women's voices are heard - that we break the silence and invisibility of women's contribution to society, in particular to the economy.

The Budget

A country's budget reflects its values - who it values, whose work it values, who it rewards, and who and what and whose work it doesn't. Past budgets are clear reflections of the priorities of apartheid, capitalist and patriarchal South Africa. The budget is the most important economic policy instrument of government. It can thus be an important tool in transforming our country to meet the needs of the poorest.

Government budgets and policies are often assumed to affect everyone, more or less equally; to serve the "public interest" and the needs of the "general person." In reality the average citizen targeted has been white, male, Afrikaans and middle class. In SA the average citizen is actually black, poor and is a woman. In SA, it is difficult to maintain the mythical neutrality of the economy. Deep analysis is not necessary to recognize whom the economy valued and whom it did not. We know, for example, about the invisibility of millions of women in the "homelands" keeping children alive who, according to the minimum living level statistics, should have been dead.

Disaggregated data is needed to demystify the apparent neutrality and, specifically, the gender neutrality of the budget. It will expose how tariffs, industrial relations, taxation, education, employment or industrial policy impact on women due to their different location in the family and in the economy. Who gets the jobs and what is the nature of the jobs which are created, who gets the subsidies, who gets the housing and

the nature of the homes and communities which are being developed? What are the traditional policy assumptions in the budgets, e.g. that women are dependent and men are the breadwinners? The fact is that the same rules and procedures can often tend to reinforce existing inequalities and work against the interests of women.

**"YOU WHO HAVE
NO FOOD, SPEAK
YOU WHO HAVE
NO HOMES,
SPEAK
YOU WHO HAVE
NO JOBS, SPEAK
YOU WHO HAVE
TO RUN LIKE
CHICKENS FROM
THE VULTURE,
SPEAK"**

-DORA TAMANA

The Women's Budget

The roots of the Women's Budget Initiative (WBI) go back to February 1994, at the ANC Conference on "Putting Women on the Agenda." There was agreement that we must ensure that in the new government departments must indicate the impact of their programs on the status and condition of women when requesting funds. When making their reports, they must make specific reference to whether the objectives spelt out in this regard have been met.

South Africa faces the challenge of removing the divide between the public and the private that isolates and undervalues the reproductive arena and keeps so much of women's oppression silent and hidden. As women begin to engage in economic debates, they will initially have to run the gamut of dismissive responses which puts issues such as poverty or the lack of child-care or reproductive and parental rights outside the arena of economic debate because those are "concerned with the much more serious and significant macro level." The SA economy is complex and the transformation debate cannot be allowed to get away with simplistic analysis or solutions which isolate women's experience from mainstream economic issues.

It should be clear that the Women's Budget is not a separate budget for women. It proposes that all programs of every department, at national, provincial or local level be examined for their impact on women. If it succeeds, the impact will be felt in all groups in which women are generally at the very bottom - youth, workers, unemployed, rural people, the disabled. The work government departments will have to do in the targeting of a specific group will have useful lessons and implications for targeting other community groups. The main question is whether the budget for mainstream programs reflects gender equity objectives? Our objective is that each government department undertakes this exercise on an annual basis.

The First Steps Forward

Department reports will have to spell out the gender and poverty indicators (to achieve equity), their targets, time frames, performance mechanisms and the policy, program, budget, staff, training and systems they have put into place to evaluate revenue and expenditure flows. It is necessary to know whether there is a budget for the transformation of the civil service, which is in charge in each department of the budget and whether they are trained in gender analysis. These reports must be available to parliament and to the public so that it can clearly be seen which departments are re-prioritizing and which are not. In recognition of March 8, 1996 (International Women's Day), I put a motion forward to the above effect. Parliament, with only one party abstaining, adopted this motion. On Sunday, March 11, the WBI was

launched. In his Budget Speech on March 13, as a result of work between women in the Joint Standing Committee on Finance and the Finance Department, the finance minister, Chris Liebenberg, made a commitment to developing a statistical database on the impact of expenditures disaggregated by gender, to implementing gender equality and equity targets using specific indicators; and to developing a performance review mechanism to evaluate progress and report to parliament. In Liebenberg's presentation to the hearings he and Deputy Director-General of Finance, Maria Ramos, made a commitment to ensuring that their department would develop the capacity necessary to integrate gender in all aspects of its work.

Liebenberg also committed to ensuring that women's unpaid labor would be recorded. In parliamentary hearings with the Central Statistical Services (CSS) the issue of ending the invisibility of women and their contribution to the economy has been repeatedly tabled. This year, CSS committed itself to ensuring that all their data collection will be made gender-sensitive by developing gender-disaggregated data and that they will be conducting a time-use survey. A few ministries are beginning to develop gender-sensitive policy and budgets. There has also been interest expressed in how this exercise can be conducted at a provincial and local government level.

Women's Political Voice to See It Through

The Women's Budget must be owned by the women of SA. If there is no strong political base, we will be reduced to interventions dependent on goodwill and patronage. Or worse, to the wish lists of history. The Women's Budget has received an enthusiastic response in meetings and workshops across the country with women in civil society - in unions or women's organizations, from national and provincial parliaments, local councils or in government departments, (e.g. at the Conference on Government Commitments on the Beijing Platform for Action at which there were over 300 women from many of these sectors). This means that the time is right for a Women's Budget. These initial networks will be the basis of a strong network of women on the economy. Women will ensure that through the various organizations and institutions they are involved in, a campaign is developed to ensure that the economy is shaped not just by businessmen but by the needs of the poorest and most powerless. Gender critiques of existing economic policy and gendered economic alternatives will be systematically developed. These will strengthen the campaign (which as activists we have used the Women's Budget to initiate) to remove the fear that women, particularly working class and poor women have of "the great economic debate."

There can be no illusions of the difficulties that SA faces in achieving the goals of transformation that it has set itself (one has only to think of the endemic violence against women). However, SA has the unique possibility of developing creative solutions which are people-centered and not just profit-centered for a few. ☸



Pregs Govender

Dialogue

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Dialogue is a publication of the Association for Women in Development. Through *Dialogue*, AWID hopes to stimulate critical thinking and dialogue among professional WID/GAD researchers, policymakers and practitioners. AWID welcomes your comments and encourages debate and discussion regarding the issues raised herein. However, the opinions expressed in *Dialogue* are those of the authors alone and do not necessarily reflect the position of AWID.

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The Association for Women in Development is an international membership organization which works to redefine development based on women's perspectives. The Association promotes research, policy and practice to fully engage women in building a just and sustainable development process.

☸ *Dialogue is printed on paper made from 100 percent postconsumer waste.*

RIEKY STUART

Canadian Council for International Cooperation

ITZIAR LOZANO

Psychotherapist

Practitioners

Conceptualizing Power

How do women think of and exercise power? How do men? Who leads? Who follows? In organizations, reflections on these questions can point to what works and what doesn't - for women and for men.

A helpful way to begin thinking about power is to take a few minutes to think of examples in your organization and in your society of relationships between women and men that illustrate the truth of the following two sayings:

POWER SHARED IS POWER HALVED

POWER SHARED IS POWER DOUBLED

Commonly, power is thought of as a limited commodity - if I have more, you have less. While this is often true, the converse, that power - like energy - increases the more it is shared and nurtured, is also true. If we think of power as something which increases as more people have and use it, we create different relationships and different kinds of organizations.

Power shared can be power halved in various ways. Individuals' power to act is often limited by the law. Under Islamic law, for example, a man does not have the power to divorce his wife instantly. He has given up (or been forced to give up) some of his rights to arbitrary action in order to protect his wife. Through the marriage contract, he must "share" power with his wife and community. Within organizations, divisions often compete fiercely to protect their own budget - when money is power, losing one's share means losing power. When we think of power as a limited commodity, we are likely to guard it jealously and keep as much as possible for ourselves.

Conversely, power-sharing can increase the power of all actors. In an organization, a manager who encourages independent feedback and oversees problem-solving initiatives in his/her subordinates will seldom take instant and arbitrary decisions. While s/he has shared power with his/her subordinates, the result will be increased power for all. More can get done more quickly, as only important matters need the manager's attention. When done well, the unit will function effectively and creatively - resulting in recognition and advances for all concerned - an overall increase in power. Again, if we think about power as something which increases as more people have it and use it, we create different relationships and different kinds of organizations.

Usually an individual will have one of these two fundamental beliefs about the nature of power which in turn shapes his or her behavior and relationships with others, based on early role models or life experiences. Sometimes these beliefs are situational - a person may act on the concept of power as a limited commodity in competitive work situations, and the opposite way with his/her own team - or vice versa.



Rieky Stuart

Interpersonal Power

Often, when people talk about gender relations and organizational change, they look outside, to what goes on within large systems. It is also important to take a look at ourselves. What do we carry around inside that helps perpetuate gender inequity? How do we collude in our own oppression? In this article, Itziar Lozano highlights "traditional" ways women have used power, and ends with a call for women to seek power in new ways.

"Traditional Femininity" and Power

Gender plays a dramatic role in determining power allocation among people. Some "traditional" visions of femininity conceive of women's identity as naturally given, in line with their role and destiny as mothers and caregivers who lack a sexuality of their own. Women are assigned subordinate power over the narrow domestic sphere where they are meant to carry out their motherly tasks. They are denied power in the public sphere, both under the thesis that searching for it implies denial of their own nature and under the assumption that they are not able to manage this kind of power.

As women discover that they are not the "power-deserving" sex, they tend to find basic psychological strategies to regain self-esteem and access to power. For example, women may tend to idealize being somebody's wife, and search desperately for a husband and a family. Women sometimes use fragility, a great virtue of "traditional feminine women," as a means to attract a man's attention and keep him proud of his capacity to "save and be a hero." Finally, a woman may find a man who will play the role of a father or who will take the place of a son who she will back up and support to the end, often turning into the "strong woman behind the successful man." All of these options hide men's own dependency needs and fear of losing power by focusing on female weakness and limitations.

Additionally, "traditional femininity" sets women up in opposition to one another. Each woman becomes the judge of the other - is she a good or a bad mother? caregiver? wife? For women to claim power for ourselves, we must find a way to overcome the conflictual relationships that "traditional femininity" necessitates. We need to abandon the exercise of repressive power over other women, and go beyond these limited ways of relating to other women.



Anne S. Walker/IWTC

New Ways of Seeking Power

Increasingly, women have been able to internalize public power as a desire of their own, integrating both "feminine" and "masculine" modes of addressing the world into their identity. While risking hostility and criticism from both men and women, women who have made explicit claims to power outside the private sphere have forced other women to come to terms with the reality of powerful women in the public sphere. Women are beginning to realize that recognizing each other's accomplishments might raise the status of all women.

What are some of the ways forward? Building a body of common knowledge on subordination and resistance; voicing the differences among ourselves, while supporting each other's identities; owning our own sexuality and developing our own desires and choices; encouraging non-idealized identifications among us (sisters, not mothers); sharing pain and channeling anger to build new alternatives; fostering the unfolding of as-yet-unnamed vitality hidden in each woman; being clear and straightforward about our dependency needs and our goals; strengthening democratic systems regarding all other sources of domination - all of these and many more represent sources and mechanisms of interpersonal-power that women can use to change the power relationships in which we live and work. ☸

Itziar Lozano was born and raised in Bilbao, Spain. She studied Clinical Psychology in the States, and got her PhD in 1975 (Miami University, Oxford, Ohio). She has lived in Mexico for twenty years, working as a private psychotherapist, as a founding member of CIDHAL, a Women's Center in Mexico and Cuernavaca, and as an active member of the women's movement. She has done extensive work with women's groups, both therapeutic and around organizational development, and now works as an independent development consultant.



Anne S. Walker/IWTC

How we think about power influences how we exercise it or resist its abuse. It shapes our organizations and our societies. If women want to develop new ways to exercise power, we must tap into our own creative power - the power to build something new, to innovate, to solve a problem, to learn, to grow. Exercise of this type of power is exhilarating, energizing, absorbing, and engaging. Whether done collectively or individually, at work or at home, it is one of the most satisfying dimensions of

human activity. It builds competence and capacity, and represents an important aspect of empowerment. ☸

Rieky Stuart is the Program Manager for the Canadian Council for International Cooperation, the umbrella group for Canadian organizations working in international development. She has worked for the past thirty years as a development programmer, manager, teacher, and consultant primarily with NGOs and also with bilateral and multilateral organizations. She has lived and worked in Asia and Africa, and has written and taught on gender and organizational change.

ARUNA RAO

Aruna Rao is President-elect of the AWID Board. She is Advisor to the Gender Team of the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC). She is involved in building a global network of theorists and practitioners to build collective knowledge and practice in the area of gender and organizational change. She is currently a Visiting Fellow at the Simmons Institute for Leadership and Change in Boston. She holds a master's degree in International Education and a PhD in Educational Administration with a specialization in Organizational Behavior, both from Columbia University, New York.



Power, Gender, and Organizational Change: Images of Power

In our work as gender and organizational change specialists, we have long been aware of the importance of power in gender relations. For example, in one recent project, while our client organization was able to make many changes toward gender equity, we felt that deeper, more pervasive change was blocked by a style of leadership that could be arbitrary and concentrated power at the top of the organization. This concentration of power limited the scope of experimentation with equitable work practices at the field level. In another project, we worked with an organization in which power was much more diffuse. What we discovered was that even though the concept of gender equity had considerable support, it seemed that movement toward equity had been slowed, along with much else in this organization, because everyone had a little power but no one seemed to have very much. These very different situations caused us to re-think our understandings of power as it affects gender equity in organizations.

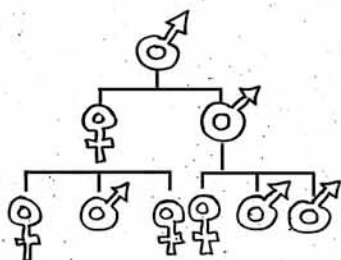
Although we do not begin by explicitly defining power, it is clear that there are a number of different understandings of it in our discussions and in our work. Many of us agree that power is traditionally seen as something that is limited, that can be **quantified** roughly, and as something that has **unidirectional** and predictable effects. (A makes B do something s/he would not otherwise do - Stephen Lukes' first dimension of power). But power can also be seen in a completely different way - as a "force field" of energy, circulating in an organization in a variety of guises. In this understanding, power can be created and is therefore, non quantifiable. It is the product, not only of a person's position, but of their information, relationships and spirit. In fact we can see love as the most potent form of power we have.

As a way of thinking about this "force field" of power and how it effects gender equity, this essay will discuss four "images" of power: hierarchical power, hidden power, power of dialogue, and power of conflict. Each of these images brings to mind different aspects of power - many of which are operating at the same time and pushing the equity agenda in a variety of directions. Each has positive and negative manifestations, a face and an underbelly, a force and a counter force.

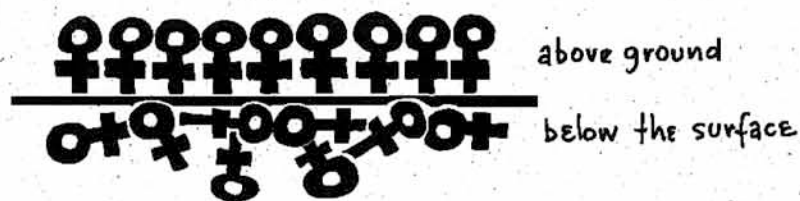
Hierarchical Power

Hierarchical power is the power of position and authority. It can be used, for example, either to release or to withhold money, time, information or other material resources. It can be used to bring people into an organization or to expel them. In most organizations, however, this power is far from absolute.

There are a variety of ways this power is subverted, and in times of organizational change or crisis, this power can become quite tenuous. This kind of power is often associated with a male approach to organizing and generally operates to prevent gender equity from making much



progress. For example, in their **typology** of organizational cultures, Itzin and Newman, British social scientists and consultants, identify the "Gentlemen's Club" and "The Barrack Yard" as two male-dominated, authority-based cultures that are very unfriendly to gender equity.¹ As the name implies, the first has a veneer of politeness, but both systematically exclude women from positions of influence.



At the same time, we know that authority-based leadership is needed to create space first for organizational change and then to put gender on the agenda. The difficulty is that gender work may challenge many of the previously undiscussed aspects of the power relations which benefit those in the hierarchy; so that even though the leadership of the organization may have made space for the initial work on gender, they generally have not anticipated the potential impact on their own power of successful work on gender. Still, hierarchical power is needed to continue the process and to legitimize changes.

Hidden Power

Hidden Power is our image of power that is exerted in many ways which, though less obvious than hierarchical power, are embedded in and maintain the system. Perhaps the best-known example of hidden power in an organizational setting is the resistance of workers to management's incentive schemes first documented by Mayo and his associates in the Hawthorne studies of Western Electric in the 1930's. Mayo found that although extra pay was offered to those who produced more units than others, work groups enforced what they saw as a "fair" level of production and punished "rate-busters" who produced more. So, though we may often see the power of management as **hegemonic**, workers still have and do claim their own **agency**.

A more subtle understanding of hidden power can be found in Stephen Lukes' analysis of power. Lukes shows us how power is being exerted when certain ideas become accepted as "common sense," or "just the way things are." Bailyn, Kolb, Merrill-Sands and others associated with the Simmons Institute for Leadership and Change have shown how unquestioned assumptions about work practices are in fact very powerful ways of maintaining inequitable systems.² For example, in a high performance computer software engineering group, no one questioned the inequity of all-night work sessions expected of female staff with child care responsibilities. At an agricultural research organization, no one questioned the belief that in order to do good science, one had to work extremely long hours at far away field research sites and unquestioningly place work ahead of all else. Nor did they question the gender impact of such assumptions.

Hidden power also includes manipulative power, or what is sometimes called the "I Love Lucy" approach to power. In the 1950's TV comedy program, Lucy flattered powerful men, allowing them to believe that they were in control while she was, in fact, achieving her goals. Although it has a flavor of being less than honest and straightforward, it is an important "weapon of the weak" by which many women (and men) escape some of the more harmful results of their powerlessness in organizations.

Itziar Lozano's description of power and interpersonal relations alerts us to another way power is hidden. As individuals, women are often trapped by understandings they have developed about their place in the society. Lozano says that "The logic of domination orders the social context. . .conveying messages of how much and which type of power a child ought to have given its gender, age, or socio-economic and ethnic status." This is reinforced by the processes of group identification and membership which exert strong pressures to conform to a code of behavior.

Perhaps the most interesting example of hidden power supporting power which dominates is found in historian Joan Scott's writing on language. She argues that the way people conceptualize gender itself is a signifier of power. "Gender is a primary field within which or by means of which power is articulated. . . Established as an objective set of references, concepts of gender structure perception and the concrete and symbolic organization of all social life. To the extent that these references establish distributions of power (differential control over or access to material and symbolic resources), gender becomes implicated in the conception and construction of power itself." Scott tells us that gender can be used to decode meaning in conceptual languages that employ differentiation including sexual difference to establish meaning. She discusses a number of examples of how rulers have conceptualized domination, strength, central authority as "masculine," thereby giving them legitimacy, and enemies, outsiders, subversives and weakness as "feminine."

Hidden power generally functions to reinforce inequity although, as seen above, it can also be used to limit some of the impacts of inequity. As we will see in the next section, uncovering the hidden dynamics is a critical tool of the **change agent** or intervenor.

Power of Dialogue

Through dialogue we uncover hidden power and expose how it prevents equity. Dialogue is also the path to collective imagination: Susan Griffin, in an article reprinted on page 7 from the Spring '96 *Whole Earth Review*, reminds us of the power to imagine that builds from the present and creates new energy: ". . .to imagine is not simply to see what does not yet exist. It is also a profound act of creativity to see what is. . . Every important social movement reconfigures the world in imagination. What was obscure becomes forward, lies are revealed, memory shaken. . . it is from this new way of seeing the present that the future emerges."



Organizational Change: Issues of Power



David Kelleher is an independent organizational consultant specializing in work with NGOs and other non-profit organizations. He is co-author of a recent book on organizational change in NGOs, *Grabbing the Tiger by the Tail*. He is located in Ste Anne de Prescott, Ontario, Canada and is currently a Visiting Fellow at the Simmons Institute for Leadership and Change in Boston.

A conference in Canada in April 1996 focused on the work of a number of organizations that were using the power of dialogue to move organizations toward gender equity.⁴ Common to many of these change efforts were the surfacing of silent voices and finding ways to link the concerns of disempowered staff with the issues of the organization. This gets at the issues of Lukes' false consciousness raised by Fletcher in her article on page 6. By excavating other consciousnesses, we take the first step toward informed choice. In BRAC, a large Bangladeshi NGO, groups of staff in area offices analyzed gender issues both in the office and in the program. They then designed small scale changes that would lead to more equity and enhance program effectiveness. When women in one office realized that they had far more experience than the men but they had less information because they did not write the reports, they learned to write the reports and take over a share of report production. This resulted in more flexibility and the elimination of some backlogs in the office as well as more equitable power relations.⁵ Similarly at Xerox, a private company, after discussion indicated how the pressure to produce resulted in long hours, late nights and difficulties for staff trying to care for children, new ways of working were invented that were more family-friendly and increased productivity.⁶

This attention to the dual agenda (the **instrumental** goals of the organization and gender equity) was critical to the success of these interventions, but the power of instrumental needs is a double-edged sword. While it can be used to justify work on gender or work-family issues, it can also submerge gender work. Much of the discussion in the Simmons case conferences has focused on the question of how consideration of gender equity "disappears" when it is folded in to more instrumental concerns such as achievement of targets. Instrumentality and a focus on efficiency can lead organizations to focus on "business as it is" and not to take time and resources to explore new ways of working which may benefit the organization in the longer run.

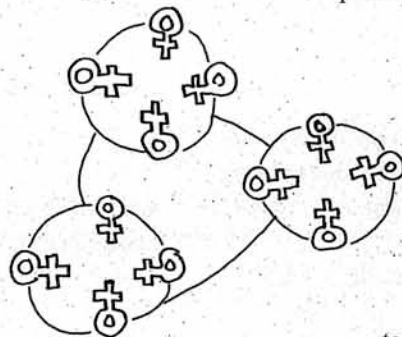
As well as attempting to connect with instrumental needs of the organization, this method also works with the self interests of men who share concerns about work practices that may be gendered in ways that also adversely affect them. For example, overtime work is particularly difficult for women with child care responsibilities. In a culture where child care is predominately a woman's responsibility, overtime is a primary way organizational life is gendered. However, overtime is also an issue that many men would like to deal with. They too would like more time at home with their families. In order to move in this direction, the learning from a number of projects was that a critical mass of women was needed to enunciate issues of particular concern to women.

Power of Conflict

The dialogic work described above is in sharp contrast to the work of many intervenors who have utilized more

"guerrilla" strategies to get gender on the agenda. These intervenors use the power of outside pressure as well as legislation such as affirmative action to re-shape organizations to be more equitable. They use a mixture of alliance building, dialogue and pressure tactics. Chesler,⁷ an American writer and consultant, contrasts consensus-based approaches with conflict-based ones and asserts that if change agents seek socially just and anti-sexist/anti-racist organizations, then monoculture power and norms must be confronted. For this confrontation, conflict is critical. Similarly, Jackson and Holvino⁸ found that purely consensus-based strategies are not effective.

The apparent choice between conflict and compromise is in reality not a choice at all; both are needed. In a recent discussion at Simmons, we explored how conflict is so integral to other images of power. For example, it is often conflict or pressure that makes some parties willing to come to a dialogue. It is the conflict that arises from the surfacing of silent voices that can promote learning or result in hierarchical power shutting down the process.



Pregs Govender's description of the Women's Budget project in South Africa is an example of how pressure is woven into a multi-strand strategy: working with women in civil society to build a dialogue on the budget, marshalling the power of large numbers of women to maintain pressure for equity, building alliances inside government, developing the best possible information through careful research and networking and finally, paying careful attention to bureaucratic politics to build a platform for implementation.

In drawing implications from 20th century science for 20th century organizations, management writer Margaret Wheatley says that "power in organizations is the capacity generated by relationships."⁹ Power needs to flow through organizations like energy and we need to build relationships and the capacity of individuals and groups to take, create and shape power for humane and graceful ends. But to do that sometimes seems like a fantasy. As we ponder our Newtonian fragments and try to see our way out of our diverse conceptions of power and the jarring consequences they have wrought, we are constantly brought down to hard, cold realities that seemingly sneer at our very attempts. As we were writing this essay, we received a message from Pregs Govender in South Africa describing such a reality.

Life has been hectic again with work - I am particularly distraught today after being phoned at 1am last night by a comrade who had been raped - somehow the violence has to stop and the world made a safer place for the future - perhaps if all the young people went through a process that taught them a sense of themselves and a sense of respect for themselves we could begin to see the light at the end of this terrible tunnel - somehow I know that we have to turn around this cycle of violence and anguish and guilt and blame that eats into all our souls. This country thrived on disempowering and destroying

the soul - the worst of it continues to mock our best efforts. Somehow all the changes that need to happen at the level of economic change, justice, criminal systems etc won't mean anything if they aren't accompanied by a revisiting of what were the values and vision of the better life we all spoke of and fought for and to start from that to revalue human life so the babies, and the girls and the women that get raped and beaten ends. There must be a way that also reinforces for the survivors of such brutality the truth that they own their essence and no brutality must be allowed that final victory to claim that they have even touched that gentle beautiful core. . . my friend told me how she sang a song her grandmother used to sing to her as a child in the Transkei. She sang it in her head as she was being raped - she sang it for me today and I know that if she holds that through her anger and sadness she will scream and cry but will not give him the victory and let him take her power, touch the essence of her being. For every man who is a rapist or a batterer I am convinced there is a son, a father, a lover, a friend who feels the pain of those they love. There must be ways of harnessing their energy with ours to create not another campaign against violence against women and children but a campaign for the vision and values we all fought for. . . ☸

-Pregs Govender

Authors' note: This essay (an understanding-in-process) comes most immediately from two sources. The first is our reflection on the short pieces from the various contributors to this issue of *Dialogue*. The other is the discussion at the ongoing Case Conference at the Simmons Institute for Leadership and Change in Boston.

Please see footnotes on page 8.

GRAPHICS BY ANNE S. WALKER, INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S TRIBUNE CENTRE

Quantified: measured.
Unidirectional: moving in one direction only.
Typology: a systematic classification.
Hegemonic view is a set of ideas that are privileged over other sets. It is hegemonic if the prevailing view is not questioned but accepted as true, normal or natural.
Individual agency refers to the power of an individual to influence events. If we believe solely in individual agency, we ignore the power of larger social forces and end up blaming or lionizing individuals as an explanation for social phenomena.
 The term "**change agent**" has come to mean a person (generally external to the system) whose role is to work with the people in the community or organization to bring about a change in power relations, material living conditions or ways of working. Change agents may utilize a variety of strategies ranging from dissemination of agricultural research data or community development, to more confrontational approaches such as strikes and demonstrations.
Instrumentality is a way of thinking that focuses on a limited number of clear outcomes. For example, a micro-credit program may focus all its energy on making loans and maintaining re-payment rates. While this focus is needed to stay in business, an exclusive focus on these goals means ignoring other important issues such as whether the loans are having an effect on the lives of the borrowers or whether the program is benefiting women differently than men.



JOYCE FLETCHER
Northeastern University

Academic

A Radical Perspective on Power

Joyce K. Fletcher is Associate Professor of Cooperative Education at Northeastern University. She uses feminist theory to understand organizational change and transformation. She is a founding partner of LUME International, L.L.P., a consulting firm that facilitates collaborative learning projects to address issues of gender equity, work-family integration and organizational learning.

Stephen Lukes' "three dimensions of power" provides a framework for understanding the power underpinnings of gender and organizational change interventions. Although Lukes' framework does have some practical limitations which will be discussed below, it offers a useful way of conceptualizing the deep structures in organizations that affect gender equity. These limits, I believe, can be addressed by adding a poststructuralist perspective to Lukes' third dimension of power. Adding this perspective to Lukes offers a radical view of power that can help us think about how best to sustain and maintain gender-related organizational change efforts.

Lukes outlines three dimensions of power and discusses characteristics of each. The first dimension, a "traditional view" of power, refers to the power to make and enforce decisions. The second dimension refers to the power to determine what is and is not on a given agenda. The third dimension refers to Lukes' own view of power.

Lukes' view focuses on the unobtrusive exercise of power. Here, people do not realize that power is being exercised at their expense; therefore, there is no resistance or conflict. He states: "Is it not the supreme and most insidious exercise of power to prevent people, to whatever degree, from having grievances by shaping their perceptions, their cognitions, their preferences in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things either because they see or imagine no alternative to it or they see it as so natural and unchangeable and they value it as divinely ordained and beneficial?"

In Lukes' third dimension, the exercise of power lies in the creation and maintenance of "false consciousness" - the oppressed do not recognize their oppression; in fact, they agree with and even support the conditions that create it.

Therefore, if you go into a system as a change agent and find an absence of conflict, that doesn't mean that power is not being exercised. Indeed, it may be evidence that it is being exercised in its most powerful and insidious way. Here, agency - who or what is actually exerting this power - is extremely ambiguous. The locus of power lies more in the deep structures of the system itself - in the way people understand the world and their role in it - than in individuals. People may even be happy with the current situation and wonder why anyone is advocating change on their behalf.

What are the practical implications of Lukes' third dimension of power in terms of gender and organizational change? In this dimension, the "oppressed" do not conceive of themselves as such. The elite know their interests and act on them; the oppressed do not. For example, looking at gender inequities in organizations, we find that many people - even women - often accept the status quo until we, as change agents, come in and suggest that there is an equity problem. Many women do not think of themselves as operating in a "pink ghetto" and are unaware of the forces that create that ghetto and the inequities. They may even be active agents in keeping the situation exactly the way it is. Often, this collusion occurs in the way they define problems as individual, rather as systemic. For example, a woman may construct her lower salary and career immobility as a trade-off for her individual decision to have a job; her commitment to family is not questioned. If she is not aware of the systemic factors that contribute to these inequities, she remains unable to resist them.

From Lukes' perspective, then, intervention starts with consciousness raising, which helps move towards an alternative in which the oppressed can define their "real"

interests. Once the oppressed are conscious of their real interests, they will want to challenge the status quo, which is not serving their interests. It is in this notion of "real" interests that the practical limitations of Lukes' third dimension of power surface. A poststructuralist perspective helps to address these limitations.

Poststructuralist Perspective on Lukes

The central limitation in Lukes' view of power is that he does not address the role ideology plays in determining the status quo. This is important because Lukes posits that an elite group exercises power through the status quo. In his own change efforts, Lukes used his framework to challenge the status quo of capitalist ideology with a Marxist one. Because he assumes that all challenges would come from this Marxist perspective, he doesn't talk about the general role that ideology plays in this model.

This is where a poststructuralist approach to Lukes is helpful. A poststructuralist perspective asserts that the status quo is not based on some objective reality but is ideologically determined. In the same vein, challenges to the status quo are rooted in an alternative ideology. Not being specific about these ideologies is a problem because it leaves open the question of what alternative "reality" should determine the "real" interests of the oppressed group. Critics have argued that a third party cannot determine the real interests of the oppressed. In response, Lukes replies that the way to determine someone's interests (or their false consciousness) is to bring them together in a truly democratic forum and encourage dialogue.

Poststructuralists would assert that this is a naive view of the world, because there is no space - even a democratic forum - that is completely free from ideology.

What does this add to Lukes' third dimension of power? Many ideologies could be used to challenge the status quo; each might challenge different assumptions and they might be in conflict with each other. For example, from a purely Marxist perspective, gender equity might mean one thing; from a feminist perspective it could mean something different. Thus, to understand the assumptions we are challenging as change agents, we need to be clear about what ideology we are challenging and what we are offering as an alternative. Clearly advocating the use of one alternative ideology among many possible ones clarifies that we are not advocating the replacement of one dominant ideology with another. Rather, we are opening up the discourse to alternatives.

A poststructuralist perspective also gives us a way to uncover the process of making meaning. Here, language is the medium through which power is exercised. It is the way the dominant ideology exerts its strength as the "way things are." Thus, poststructuralists use the art of deconstructing oral and written text to reveal the power of language and the way meaning is set in an organization.

Implications for Gender and Organizational Change

Adding a poststructuralist perspective to Lukes' notion of the unobtrusive exercise of power focuses attention on the power that resides in dominant discourse assumptions about "good work," "good workers," "organizational success," and the deep structures that support these assumptions. A poststructuralist perspective offers a powerful framework to use in thinking about gender and organizational change. It suggests a different strategy for change from most gender equity interventions.

Specifically, this way of thinking about the exercise of power relaxes the guilt and blame that often accompany efforts aimed at changing power relationships. It looks

at the assumptions themselves as the locus of power. Here, agency in the exercise of power lies not in individuals who are actively suppressing or oppressing a marginalized group, but in the systemic, common, everyday assumptions that underlie organizational behavior and the way members of an organization make sense of their world.

Therefore, if we want to challenge the organizational status quo from a feminist ideology, we must uncover the gendered assumptions that drive behavior and make meaning in the organization. The first step is to listen to women in order to understand their experience. Listening to formerly marginalized voices and adding them to the discourse uncovers assumptions that are rarely questioned by those who are more mainstream. For example, women often question the value of norms such as extensive off-site training sessions that take them away from their families for long periods of time, or norms about valuing aggressive behavior over more collaborative methods.

The next step is to understand why this experience was silenced in the first place. Deconstructing text reveals the suppressed contradictions, the inconsistencies and silences in the discourse.

Practically, this means analyzing spoken words as well as written, in things like personnel manuals, mission statements and performance appraisals. The goal is to find the gendered assumptions that underlie these texts and give them meaning. This might include things such as assumptions about what leads to success, what behavior is valued and rewarded, and what is the organizational definition of "competence." Challenging these assumptions challenges the power dynamic they reinforce. It changes the discourse by raising new possibilities and new ways of thinking about things.

Once assumptions are uncovered, the issue of their consequences can be raised. What is their impact on organizational effectiveness? For example, what effect does valuing aggression over collaboration have on the organization's ability to meet its business goals or its ability to move to a team-based structure? Examining the unintended consequences of gendered assumptions helps us develop a "dual agenda" - one that focuses on changing assumptions that have negative consequences both for gender equity and organizational effectiveness. Bringing in questions of organizational effectiveness gives the organization an increased motivation to change.

In summary, a poststructuralist perspective on the third dimension of power provides a useful framework for thinking about the deep structures that influence gender equity in an organization. It helps identify leverage points that might be invisible in other change methodologies. With this method, it is crucial to specify the ideology that is being used to challenge the dominant discourse. In our case, we need to be clear that we are listening for one particular marginalized voice, women's voice. Other minority voices could be added. The organizational assumptions questioned by this voice need to be surfaced and the unintended consequences of these assumptions identified, both for the equity issues of the marginalized group and the effectiveness of the organization. This creates a dual change agenda and increases organizational motivation to work on the change effort. ☘



Joyce Fletcher

To Love the Marigold: the Politics of Imagination

In Paris recently I went to see a small exhibit of photographs taken by Tina Modotti. In one photograph, taken by Modotti, a line of Mexican men, mostly workers or peasants, stand staring at the camera. They have assembled at the headquarters of the Communist party in Mexico. One of them is holding a flag taken from the United States Army in that year (was it 1928?) by the first Sandinistas in Nicaragua. The moment is a victory and you can see this in the men's faces. But the camera's eye also catches a tender quality of innocence and hope, an expression one so seldom sees any longer even on the faces of any but the youngest children.

One might say that life is so difficult now, or that there has been so much violence in this century that innocence is no longer possible. But this explanation is too easy.

The lives of the men in the photographs were undoubtedly very difficult and violence was palpably present - another series of newspaper photographs in this show depicts Tina Modotti as she is questioned by police just after her lover, a militant organizer, was assassinated. She was with him on the street when he was shot. He died in her arms.

Out on the street again the lone skyscraper of Montparnasse towers over me, reminding me again that this is a different age than the one Modotti recorded. Outwardly the most obvious change is technological. Faster cars and airplanes, television, computers, e-mail, faxes, medical miracles, buildings, even whole small cities rising as if overnight. Yet strangely, in this brave new world with its promise of every possible sensation and comfort, one feels diminished. The unapproachable immensity of the skyscraper in front of me, blotting out the immensity of the sky, appears now as an icon of an anonymous power, in whose shadow I feel powerless.

Among those who would seek or want social change, despair is endemic now. A lack of hope that is tied to many kinds of powerlessness. Repeating patterns of suffering. The burgeoning of philosophies of fear and hatred. Not to speak of the failure of dreams. Where once there were societies that served as models for a better future, ideologies, understandings, grand plans, utopias, now there are distrust, confusion, and dissatisfaction with any form of politics, a sense of powerlessness edging into nihilism.

In these years after the end of the Cold War, a time of the failure of old paradigms and systems of thought, perhaps hope lies less in the direction of grand theories than in the capacity to see, to look past old theories that may obscure understanding and even promise. To assume what the Buddhists call beginner's mind. And to see what exists freshly and without prejudice clears the path for seeing what might exist in the future, or what is possible.

Even in the grimmest of circumstances, a shift in perspective can create startling change. I am thinking of a story I heard a few years ago from my friend Odette, a writer and a survivor of the holocaust. Along with many others who crowd the bed of a large truck, she tells me, Robert Desnos is being taken away from the barracks of the concentration camp where he has been held prisoner. Leaving the barracks, the mood is somber; everyone knows the truck is headed for the gas chambers. And when the truck arrives no one can speak at all; even the guards fall silent. But this silence is soon interrupted by an energetic man, who jumps into the line and grabs one of the condemned. Improbable as it is, Odette explains, Desnos reads the man's palm. *Oh, he says, I see you have a very long lifeline. And you are going to have three children.* He is exuberant. And his excitement is contagious. First one man, then another, offers up his hand, and the prediction is for longevity, more children, abundant joy.

As Desnos reads more palms, not only does the mood of the prisoners change but that of the guards too. How can one explain it? Perhaps the element of surprise has planted a shadow of doubt in their minds. If they told themselves these deaths were inevitable, this no longer seems so inarguable. They are in any case so disoriented by this sudden change of mood among those they are about to kill that they are unable to go through with the executions. So all the men, along with Desnos, are packed back onto the truck and taken back to the barracks. Desnos has saved his own life and the lives of others by using his imagination.

Because I am seized by the same despair as my contemporaries, for several days this story poses a question in my mind. Can the imagination save us? Robert Desnos, a surrealist poet, was famous for his belief in the imagination. He believed it

could transform society. And what a wild leap this was, to imagine a long life at the mouth of the gas chambers! In his mind he simply stepped outside the world as it was created by the SS.

In the interests of realism, this story must be accompanied by another. Desnos did not survive the camps. He died of typhus a few days after the liberation. His death was one among millions, men, women and children who died despite countless creative acts of survival and the deepest longings to live.

In considering what is possible for the future one must be careful not to slide into denial. Imagination can so easily be trapped by the wish to escape painful facts and unbearable conclusions. The New Age idea that one can wish oneself out of any circumstance, disease, or bad fortune is not only sadly disrespectful toward suffering, it is also, in the end, dangerous if escape replaces awareness.

But there are other dangers. What is called "realism" can lead to a kind of paralysis of action and a state of mind that has relinquished desire altogether. Especially now, when the political terrain seems so un navigable, the impulse is toward cynicism. For months before the World Conference of Women met in Beijing, an informal debate circulated among women in the United States. Alongside the serious question of whether or not one should boycott China because of its many violations of human rights, another question was continually posed. Why should we meet at all? What good will it do? The fear was that few of the agreements reached there would be implemented by governments.

What is required now is balance. In the paucity of clear promise, one must somehow walk a tightrope, stepping lightly on a thin line drawn between cynicism and escape, planting the feet with awareness but preserving all the while enough playfulness to meet fear. For those who went to the conference in Beijing, though, something momentous occurred, not the immediate shifting of governmental bodies, but a rising of spirits, despite the odds, in the creation of a different arena, defined in different ways by women from all over the world, another possible world began, if even temporarily, to exist and this has nurtured desire and imagination.

One of the most powerful sources of inspiration for the French Revolution was desire, the simple hunger for bread. This led to a demand for bread that required a leap of the imagination kindred to the leap Desnos took when he envisioned long lives among the condemned. In a highly hierarchical society, to perceive hunger as a social circumstance subject to change is a creative act. To see clearly is not only an act of scrutiny. The most obvious fact can be obscured by an unexamined assumption or an old way of seeing. And to free oneself from those old ways requires imagination.

This is why vision is a collective activity. The act of perception is not simply an intellectual accomplishment, it is also a psychological choice. What one is willing to see is dependent on what others see. The emotional ability to perceive, know, or eventually imagine is affected by the social atmosphere. Conversely, since what is known by the social body is woven into the social fabric of perception, to introduce a perception that has before been excluded from vision, can rend and reweave that fabric.

One of the most creative moments in the French Revolution occurred on October 5, 1789, when six thousand women marched to Versailles to see the King. Early that morning, the market women, who had learned that there was no bread in Paris, organized the protest. A delegation of women entered the National Assembly. They demanded that the price of bread be fixed. And Reine-Louise Audu, Queen of the Markets, asked the King to sanction the Declaration of Rights.

To do this the Queen of the Markets had to imagine herself as having the right to make a demand on the King of France. And six thousand other women had to imagine that with her. One might argue that the revolution lay as much in the act of making demands as in what was demanded.

Is the story of Desnos' spectacular success at the mouth of the gas chambers of Buchenwald true? I cannot know for certain. But the story itself keeps the knowledge of something alive in me, my belief in a saving grace.

What remains with me from Modotti's images is not just the portraits of dreams that failed but those of dreams that are still alive and of aspiration itself, that learning of the soul that never ceases. No one can stop us from imagining another kind of future, one which departs from the terrible cataclysm of violent conflict, of hateful divisions, poverty and suffering. Let us begin to imagine the worlds we would like to inhabit, the long lives we will share, and the many futures in our hands. ✽

Susan Griffin is an award-winning writer and social thinker. Her work, which includes Women and Nature: the Roaring Inside Her, Pornography and Silence, and A Chorus of Stones: the Private Life of War, has been influential in several movements, shaping both ecological and feminist thought. She lectures widely throughout the US and Europe, and lives and teaches privately in Berkeley, California.

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Susan Griffin

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FOOTNOTES FOR RAO AND KELLEHER,
PAGES 4-5

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Other resources from reader on mainstreaming gender in organizations, Eurostep workshop, May 1996. Further details available from Sue Smith, Gender and Learning Team, Policy Department, Oxfam (UK and Ireland). E-mail: ssmith@oxfam.org.uk

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