

Power and social justice in community development

Improving 'government towards development'

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I declare that this dissertation is my own account of my own research. It contains as its main content work which has not been previously submitted for a degree at any university.

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Abstract:

Whilst there exists a strong academic tradition regarding the importance of critique and reflexivity within community development theory, it is evident that the vast majority of the critical examination undertaken constitutes internal, methodological critiques of specific aspects of community development practice. This thesis sets about critically examining the theory of community development in its entirety, through an identification and comparison of the field's core tenets and principles by way of a review of the prominent literature. Through this examination, two key issues will be identified. The first is that, partly due to conceptual unclarity, community development has the potential to place the responsibility for rectifying inequality unjustly. The second is that community development theory generally seems to reflect an inadequate understanding of the concept of power. Born out of this critique will be some further analysis, designed to propose some potential ways in which to address the issues identified. It is argued that community development should strive to model community involvement specifically within a framework of social justice, through the adoption of a rights-based approach, as well as attempt to incorporate a more complex, Foucauldian conception of power into its core theorising. It is further proposed that community development must overtly recognise that it, as a discipline, constitutes a form of government. Finally, the thesis advocates for a shift in community participation, away from a simple involvement in decision making, towards processes which act to challenge the dominant discourses and political rationalities which serve to perpetuate inequality.

Introduction:

In 2001, Bill Cooke and Uma Kothari published a widely-cited book *Participation: The New Tyranny?* The subject of the work compiled in the volume was the discourse of participation in the theory and practice of international development. This thesis begins with a reference to this book, not for its critical content regarding participatory development as such, but rather for the manner in which the subject is considered; the methodology of the critique, rather than the substance of the critique itself. The purpose of the book was to move beyond internal critiques of the methodology of participation, to enable the critical examination of discourse of participation as a whole. Cooke and Kothari (2001, 4, 7) introduce the book by explaining:

We wanted to move away from the methodological revisionism that characterized the limited self-reflexivity within participatory development and to address more directly how the discourse itself, and not just the practice, embodies the potential for an unjustified exercise of power ... [T]he time has come to ask whether the constant methodological revisionism ... has obscured the more fundamental problems within the discourse, and whether internal critiques have served to legitimize the participatory project rather than present it with a real challenge.

In the style employed by Cooke and Kothari, the aim of this thesis is to embark on a critique of the theory of community development as an entire discourse, theory and discipline. Rather than focussing on one or more of its elements in isolation, an attempt is made to consider the prominent tenets which inform the community development discourse, both as they relate to one another and as they intersect with the society which they endeavour to develop. As will become more clear as the thesis progresses, the importance of this type of critique is of invaluable importance to disciplines surrounding the implementation of planned development. As will be explained throughout the thesis, planned development involves the government¹ of groups of people defined as 'disadvantaged' and must not only recognise this fact, but endeavour to constantly reflect on and improve upon the theory and discourse which informs that government.

The thesis will begin by identifying the key tenets and principles which constitute the theory of community development, through a review of some of the core community development literature. A particular focus will be given to seminal text books and journal articles. The

¹ Government here refers not to the government of a state over its citizens, but the 'government' of people as conceptualised by Michel Foucault. This concept will be expanded upon in Chapter 3.

next step will involve a consideration of these tenets in relation to one another and in relation to some prominent social science theories of change. This critique will lead to the identification of some internal dilemmas and contradictions evident within the theory of community development. The chapters which follow this critique will represent an attempt to deal with some of these inherent dilemmas, suggesting some possible directions for future theories within the field.

The dilemmas identified will expose two potential weaknesses or problematic issues inherent within the discourse of community development. The first is the potential for community development theory to see the solutions to social issues as lying within sites of disadvantage, opening up the possibility that the responsibility for rectifying social issues is placed unjustly, with disadvantaged communities themselves. Chapter Two will consider this potential in detail, proposing that community development must always act to address disadvantage in a manner which is consistent with basic theories of social justice, suggesting that adhering to a rights-based approach to development has the potential to address justice on a societal level, whilst ensuring the continued involvement of individuals and groups at the community level.

The second weakness identified is that community development theory seems to reflect inadequate and overly simplistic understandings of power. This idea will be briefly considered in Chapter One through a short overview of some of the differing conceptions of power which exist within the social sciences. However, it is Chapter Three that will represent the major attempt to address the issue, advocating for a more Foucauldian conception of power to be adopted throughout all community development theory. Power will first be considered specifically in relation to how it is at play within the discourse and practice of community development itself. It will be proposed that community development cannot escape relations of power, that any community development activity is inevitably an act of power and that community development is itself a form of government. A consideration of how power operates in society at large will also be undertaken, exploring the links between power, knowledge, rationality and discourse.

Born out of this critique will be a proposal for some useful future directions for community development theory, not least of which is the need for an overt recognition of community

development as an act of power and a form of government. It will further be proposed that any community involvement initiated and guided by community development projects should aim to comply with basic notions of social justice in terms of where it places the responsibility for rectifying inequality. The framework of rights-based approaches will be offered as one possible tool to assist in achieving this aim. Moreover, it will make suggestions as to the level at which this community involvement should be aimed. The argument will be levelled that community involvement aimed not simply at the level of decision making, but also at the levels of problem posing and discourse formulation will be more *powerful* in affecting social change.

Chapter 1: Defining community development

“The claim to expertise in optimising the lives of others is a claim to power, and that merits careful scrutiny” (Tanya Murray Li, 2007)

Community development has always been defined in somewhat ambiguous terms. The nature of the discipline, in terms of its awkward location somewhere between professional endeavour and community led action, tends to lend itself to perhaps intentionally vague and open definitions of its purpose, aims and methods. This fact has been widely recognised in academic circles for many years (see Rawsthorne and Howard 2011, 11; Tesoriero 2010, 1; Bhattacharyya 2004). There are, however, a few common elements which run through the majority of attempts to define the field and practice of community development. Through a review of the literature, this chapter will set about identifying some of these key tenets and principles. The second half of the chapter will be dedicated to considering the way in which these principles relate to one another and are combined to create the theory and discourse of community development. This critique will lead to the identification of some important contradictions and paradoxes which exist within the theory, a discussion which will then serve as the basis for the arguments developed in subsequent chapters.

However, before embarking on an identification of the key element of community development theory, we must first address what is meant by the term ‘community’ itself. Whilst traditionally the term has been used to denote a geographically defined population, many authors have problematised the notion of community as being intrinsically tied to ‘place’, advocating for conceptions of community based more upon sets of interest (see for example Bhattacharyya, 2004). As Kenny (2005, 41) notes, the term community can be used as a way to link groups that share a common identity “derived from class position, geographical location, cultural values, gender, race and ethnicity, disability, workplace or age”. The common use of terms such as ‘community level’ or ‘grass roots level’, also seem to suggest that community may refer more to a location within the political context or terrain: the community level as opposed to the national or central, institutional level.

Equally important is the term's combination with its partner 'development', a combination which implies upon the former, that the 'community groups' targeted will be those groups in need of development assistance, groups which have been "excluded from or 'adversely incorporated' into" development processes (Hickey and Mohan 2004, 10); essentially 'disadvantaged' groups. As Li (2007, 15) points out, "planned development is premised upon the improbability of the target group". Community development as a discipline is born out of the existence of societal inequality (Tesiriero 2010, xi) and therefore its target communities, whether they be geographical communities or communities of interest, are generally those located in positions of disadvantage. As Rawsthorne and Howard (2011, 7) point out: "Working with communities is about ...confront[ing] and challeng[ing] inequality and disempowerment".

So what precisely is community development and how is it defined? One core tenet that can be found in almost any definition of community development is the idea that it is a bottom-up process, whereby it is the community itself directing and informing the development. It is suggested that this bottom-up, change-from-below type approach, is what sets community development apart from other forms of top-down 'imposed' development. This notion of change-from-below can in large part be traced back to the seminal work set out in Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy Of The Oppressed*. Freire (1970) makes a highly compelling case for the necessity of liberating development processes to include and be driven by those groups who are the 'targets' of development, in Freire's case, the oppressed. His work distinguishes between charity, which he terms 'false generosity', and true solidarity with the oppressed in which they are afforded the space and education to fight for their own liberation. His argument is largely based on the idea that no fight for liberation can remain distant from the oppressed, as it is this very exclusion and prescription which has acted to dehumanise and oppress them in the first instance. He argues that "no pedagogy which is truly liberating can remain distant from the oppressed" nor can it be implemented with models developed by the oppressive class (Freire 1970, 36).

Although often not as coherently articulated as in Freire's pedagogy, this notion of the importance of change-from-below, or bottom-up development, has been consistently invoked as a core tenet of the academic theory which informs community development practice (see for example MacKinnon 2011; Bhattacharyya 2004; Kenny 2006; Tesoriero

2010; Hoaston 2003; Hustledde and Ganowicz 2002 & Turner 2009). Tesoriero devotes an entire chapter of his text book to change-from-below, noting that “[a]t the heart of community development is the idea of change-from-below ... that people at the local level know best what they need and that communities should be self-directing and self-reliant” (Tesoriero 2010, 120).

This central idea of change-from-below, leads to another tenet that is constantly included in almost all definitions of community development: that of participation. Community participation, often in decision making, is seen as the means to the ends of change-from-below, on the basis that the participation and inclusion of community members in decision making processes will translate to effective, relevant bottom-up development. Countless authors identify that a key role of community development is to enable communities to actively participate in the decision making process (Bhattacharyya 2004; Tesoriero 2010; Kenny 2006, 3; Paulin 2006, 3; Week, Hoatson and Dixon 2003, 39). Turner (2009, 234) defines bottom-up community development as that which encourages participatory decision making through local activity driven by the responses of local communities. Some academics also broaden the scope of participation from decision making to problem posing, an important distinction that will be discussed in more depth later in the thesis.

While change-from-below development achieved through community participation may represent, in the broadest sense, the most basic aim of community development, there are a few other guiding principles which run consistently throughout the academic literature and tend to guide community development practice. One of these principles is that of ‘don’t blame the victim’. This principle is born out of a rejection of the individualist perspective on disadvantage, which locates the cause of, and therefore solution to, social issues or disadvantage with individuals themselves, whilst failing to take into account external or structural factors (see Tesoriero 2010, 55). The adherence of community development to a rejection of the ‘blame the victim’ principle is enlightening as it helps indicate the conceptual position or theoretical framework from which community development aspires to work.

Tesoriero (2010, 55-57) provides a succinct overview of four major theoretical frameworks in the social sciences that may account for social issues. The first is the individualist

perspective outlined above; that of 'blame the victim', where the cause of and solution to disadvantage is seen as lying with those individuals experiencing disadvantage. The second, the institutionalist perspective, which locates the cause of social problems with the inadequacies of social institutions such as the justice system or social security system; a perspective he labels 'blame the rescuer'. The third perspective is the structural perspective, which sees the root of social problems in unequal power relations and oppressive social structures such as patriarchy and capitalism. Broadly speaking, this perspective is consistent with Marxist type approaches and may be termed 'blame the system'. The final perspective he considers is the post-structural perspective, which proposes that it is the discourses associated with social issues and the validation of certain types of knowledge which perpetuate oppression and disadvantage; a perspective he terms 'blame the discourse'.

Tesoriero concludes by stating that "community development as normally practiced has been largely concerned with ... institutional reformist and structuralist perspectives" (2010, 57). Kenny's (2006, 21) work further reflects this opinion. She notes that "blaming the victim ... locates the cause of disadvantage with individuals themselves ... [whilst] community development theory locates the cause of disadvantage in the entrenched and systematic inequalities of our social system". Authors such as Bhattacharyya (2004) call for a heightened consideration of macro issues in community development theory, further reflecting that structural understandings are an aspiration within the field. In fact, most of the discourse surrounding community development theory suggests a degree of recognition of the role structural factors play in disadvantage (see for example Hustledde and Ganowicz 2002; Eyben et al. 2008; Tesoriero 2010; Kenny 2006). Whilst the structuralist perspective is often alluded to in relation to general, overarching theories of community development, the post-structural perspective is more often used as tool to critique individual elements of community development methods, rather than serving as the main basis for the theory of community development itself, a matter that will be considered in more length in Chapter Three.

A second guiding principle that is salient throughout the literature is that of 'helping people help themselves'. Tesoriero (2010, 120) notes that "communities should be self-directing and self-reliant", whilst Bhattacharyya (2004, 5) defines community development as "the pursuit of solidarity and agency adhering to the principles of self help, felt needs and

participation” . Kenny, (2006, 10) proposes that “community development refers to the processes, tasks, practices and visions for empowering communities to take *collective responsibility* for their own development” (original emphasis). This notion of community development as a facilitator or enabler of self-help is consistently alluded to in much of the academic theory, and, as noted by Kenny above, it is often through a process of ‘empowerment’ that this aim is hoped to be achieved.

Although it is rarely made clear whether empowerment is a means to achieve community development or an end in itself, throughout the past few decades, it has undoubtedly become a key component of almost all community development theory and programming. Kenny (2006, 158) describes collective empowerment as the “the lynchpin of community development”. Tesoriero (2010, 65) defines empowerment as the aim to “increase the power of the disadvantaged” and to “redistribut[e] power from the ‘haves’ to the ‘have nots’”. Schuftan (1996, 260) defines the term as “a continual process that enables people to understand, upgrade and use their capacities to better control and gain power over their own lives”. Craig, as quoted by Toomey (2011, 182), taking a slightly broader view, defines empowerment as “the creation of sustainable structures, processes, and mechanism, over which local communities have an increased degree of control”. Green (2012), coming from more of an international development standpoint, views individual empowerment as a catalyst for further empowerment, suggesting that the way forward is through an empowered citizenry demanding the redistribution of power and assets in such a way as to further empower the poor and increase their role in decision making. At their most basic level, the majority of definitions of empowerment in community development constitute the ‘powerless’ gaining ‘power’ by one means or another, be it through building their capacities and skill bases, the redistribution of power between groups or the restructuring of social institutions to make them more accessible to the ‘powerless’.

Empowerment is often seen as being tied up in handing a degree of control over decision making to local communities and individuals, an assumption that directly links power with decision making. Whilst many tools are utilised in this quest for community empowerment, one such tool, the use of which will be further considered in the following section, is that of capacity building. Whilst capacity building can mean many different things (James and Hailey 2007, 12), the practice of capacity building in community development usually

involves increasing the ability of individuals, groups and communities to do things, through education and the teaching of skills (Kenny 2006, 168). Capacity building can be viewed as a tool which sees empowerment as a means rather than as an ends; the empowerment of people to participate in decision making and better engage in community processes that will then allow them to participate in their own development. Whilst by no means the only tool utilised in processes of empowerment, capacity building is one example of a methodology which is highly consistent with the notion of helping people help themselves.

Through this brief review of some of the core community development literature, we can see that, despite the lack of a precise definition of what exactly constitutes community development, there are certainly some key tenants and guiding principles that are consistent across much of the academic literature. In its broadest sense, it could be proposed that community development aims to promote bottom-up development through facilitating community level participation. Moreover, the literature seems to imply that it aims to tackle social problems from more of a structuralist - or at least institutionalist perspective - and is dismissive of the 'blame the victim' principle inherent in individualist perspectives. Furthermore it strives to allow communities to take control of their own development, with the aim of empowering people and local communities to be able to 'help themselves'.

Viewed individually, each of the above tenets, aims and principles do not appear to be overly problematic. They each seem, at first glance, to fostering an attractive notion of giving power to disadvantaged groups in order that they may effect their own 'change-from-below'. However, when you consider each element as part of a unified theory of community development, you start to notice some seemingly irreconcilable contradictions between its internal elements, which gives rise to a number of issues. The two main issues, which will be identified in the next section (and will subsequently inform the discussions of the following two chapters) are as follows: the contradictory theoretical bases upon which the principles of 'don't blame the victim' and 'helping people help themselves' are based and the paradoxical notion of top-down initiated change-from-below.

Some internal dilemmas and contradictions

The first contradiction that we will consider here is in relation to two of the guiding principles of community development that have been identified throughout the literature and outlined above; that of 'don't blame the victim' and that of 'helping people help themselves'. The former can be seen as relating to the causes of social issues and inequalities while the latter can be viewed as relating to their solutions. As discussed, 'don't blame the victim' implies a rejection of the individualist perspective of social problems, attributing social issues to broader structural factors which lie outside of the control of underprivileged individuals. As Tesoriero (2010, 55-56) notes, the blame the victim approach "therefore seeks individually based solutions" whereas structuralist perspectives search for solutions in the "major restructuring of society." The equally prominent principle of 'helping people help themselves' on the other hand, which is quoted in the literature alongside that of 'don't blame the victim', clearly has the connotation that underprivileged individuals at the community level have the potential, if not the responsibility, to rectify the social issues and inequality which are the causes their underprivileged.

At this juncture, it again becomes important to consider the concept of 'community', as one might question how something that works with 'communities of people' could be considered to be reflecting an individualist approach. If we glance back to our original definition of the types of communities targeted by community development, we are not considering large communities, such as a national community, which could be viewed more in terms of a diverse society. Rather, the types of communities being considered, are specific sub-sections of society, importantly, those sections experiencing disadvantage.

Given this understanding, it is important to reject the notion that simply addressing issues in terms of communities rather than individuals will ensure that community development can avoid the pitfalls of the individualist approach. The notion of 'helping people help themselves', whether applied to an individual or a community, is still suggesting that disadvantage be tackled at the site of that disadvantage and using the agency of those experiencing this disadvantage. It implies not only that disadvantaged communities have the ability to alter their positions of disadvantage, but also that they themselves bear the responsibility to do so.

This idea, that the simple participation of disadvantaged individuals (in decision making, empowerment or capacity building programmes) within existing social structures has the potential to solve, or significantly impact upon social issues and inequality - that community members can be empowered to 'help themselves' - is quite in contradiction to a structuralist 'don't blame the victim' type approach. This is due to the fact that it sees the solutions to social issues, at an individual or community level; at the level of those experiencing disadvantage. Essentially, what is being proposed is that community development theory which combines these two principles views the cause of and the solution to social issues at different locations. This implies it is unlikely to be successful in the long term or on any substantial scale.

This contradiction raises two dilemmas, the first of which has to do with the internal consistency of the theory of community development. Whilst the implication of the 'don't blame the victim' principle is that community development theories of changes have transcended individualist perspectives and are based more in the realm of structuralist understandings, many of the methods and tools called upon in the practice of community development in fact greatly resemble a response based on individualist understandings, especially those designed to 'help people help themselves'.

The tool of capacity building considered above provides a good example of this. It sees the solution to issues of disadvantage and underprivileged in the 'improvement' of underprivileged individuals or communities themselves, rather than in external, structural causes of this disadvantage. If a subset of individuals within a community, or a community as a whole is experiencing disadvantage, the answer is to better equip these individuals (or this community) with skills and knowledge and they will be able to work themselves out of these disadvantaged positions. Moreover, as Eade (1997, 3) points out, capacity building actually has the potential to undermine or de-value local skills and knowledge, as it emphasises the need for communities to learn the skills deemed necessary by the practitioner and society at large. Capacity building is a good example of a tool which implies that a change in individual or communities behaviours is an appropriate and effective way to achieve lasting change.

Even if it is argued that locating the solution with disadvantaged individuals or communities does not necessarily infer the problem also lies with these groups, it seems at best unlikely to affect any real and lasting change and at worst a socially unjust method of development. It hardly seems just that a theory of development which recognises that inequality has its roots in structural issues beyond the control of the affected individuals and groups, would then expect these disadvantaged groups to take responsibility for eradicating their own under-privilege, or for solving the social issues caused by this under privilege. It seems that community development projects which aim to build community capacity and empower people to 'help themselves' are essentially assisting people to better negotiate the constraints of their disadvantage rather than acting to decreasing the inequality which causes their disadvantage in the first instance.

A number of academics have boiled this issue down to the problematic nature of attempting to affect broad social change from a local level. Bhattacharyya (2004) for example problematizes the notion of 'community' as being intrinsically tied to 'place', proposing that communities based on sets of interest, rather than physical location, may be better starting points for the solidarity needed to drive development. Other writers such as Mohan (2001) consider the tendency of locally focused action to ignore wider structural issues. The issue of where responsibility lies in bottom-up theories of development, has also not gone unaddressed, with rights-based approaches to development, to be discussed in the following chapter, shedding some much needed light on these dilemmas.

If this ambiguity in the theoretical perspectives upon which community development theory is based represents the first major internal inconsistency in the academic literature, the second contradiction may seem even more paradoxical. This is the blatantly problematic notion that bottom-up development can be steered from above by community development professionals; community development as top-down led and funded bottom-up development. If community development is to fulfil its main aim of being bottom-up, change-from-below development, surely the fact that it consists of an activity that is initiated, facilitated, and more often than not funded from the top-down, should raise some major concerns.

This conflict between bottom-up and top-down is perhaps most easily conceptualised in cases of government funded community development programmes or government-community partnerships, where more often than not, projects are upwardly accountable yet maintain that they are fostering bottom-up development. In cases such as this, it is easy to see the conflict between the bottom-up objective and the top-down reality due to a recognition that centralised governments hold a concentration of power and influence. As such, in these specific instances, the issue of top-down subversion of change-from-below is often recognised in the academic literature or in project analysis (see for example Varley and Ó Cearbhaill 2002; Turner 2009; Mowbray 2011). However, beyond the government-community context, relatively little attention has been given to this seemingly paradoxical element of the theory of community development.

Kenny (2006) for example, suggests that a community worker's solidarity with the community with whom she or he works, can act as a defence against the subversion of bottom-up change-from-below. Moreover, it is often implied that the good intentions of NGO funded and facilitated community development is also free of this top-down subversion as NGO's are often not upwardly accountable to governments. It is almost inferred that good intentions, somehow act to transcend power relations. However, it seems nonsensical that any theory of development, developed in academia, initiated and facilitated by professionals trained in the academy and almost always funded from outside 'the community', could ever really be considered a unproblematic form of bottom-up development, despite the best intentions of those involved or the level of participation by community members. The most likely explanation for the idea that external organisations or professionals can enter a community and *implement* 'change-from-below', is that the theory on which this is based, is itself based on a highly inadequate understanding of power and power relations. In order to consider how some specific understandings of power may have led to this seemingly problematic oversight, we will briefly consider here two aspect of power; firstly the nature of power, and secondly some differing perspectives on how and where power operates in society.

Power: a very brief introduction

If we are considering the very *nature* of what power is, we can begin by considering two different conceptions of the term. The first conception of power is that it exists, more or less, as an entity that can be possessed, traded and redistributed. Under this conception, power is often seen as zero sum; that the more power group x has, the less power group y has (Rowlands 1997, 9), lending itself well to powerful – powerless type dichotomies (Parker et al. 1999, 151). However, there exists another well recognised view of power that is in stark contrast to that outlined above, a conception perhaps best articulated by Michel Foucault.

Foucault's conception of power suggests that power in and of itself does not exist, it cannot be 'given', rather it exists only in relationships, it exists only when it is being exercised. He asserts that 'power' does not act directly on subjects, rather, on their actions; it constitutes a set of actions which act upon the actions of others; it is the ability to structure the possible field of actions of another; "*a conduct of conducts*" (Foucault 1994, 341). His conception of power implies that power relations are rooted deep in the social nexus, consisting of a complex interplay of relationships at all levels of society, not a "*supplementary structure over and above society*" (Foucault 1994, 343). He also considers the relationship between power, knowledge and social control (Foucault, 1969) but this aspect of his work will be considered separately and in more detail in Chapter Three.

Much of the language used in community development theory, seems to indicate that the understanding of the nature of power at play corresponds much more closely with the former, zero-sum, conception of power, or is at least in line with the idea that power is something that can be given. The idea of 're-distributing' power is consistently referred to throughout the literature, as noted earlier in the chapter. This conceptualisation of power, as something which is possessed, certainly goes part of the way to explaining the belief that it is possible for a top-down intervention to initiate true bottom-up change without subverting it; that community development projects can assist in 'redistributing' power whilst remaining not entwined in power relations.

This understanding of power as something that can be given or distributed, rather than a *conduct of conducts* that exists at all levels of society, goes a long way to explaining why community development theory often seems to suggest that community work can exist

outside of power relations. However, the *nature* of power itself is by no means the only aspect which needs to be taken into consideration. There exists a number of different perspectives on power which inform the theory and practice of different disciplines throughout the social sciences. In the case of community development, with its preoccupation with empowerment, a close evaluation of the perspectives at play is both enlightening and necessary. A useful starting point for the evaluation of some different perspectives on power is the work of Steven Lukes (1974) *Power: A Radical View*.

In his work, Lukes begins by describing two traditional perspectives on power. The first he terms the One Dimensional, or Pluralist view, which sees power as being tied up with who has control over decisions regarding issues over which there is conflict (Lukes 1974, 15). Tesoriero (2010, 66) notes that the Pluralist perspective legitimises 'the system' and implies that empowerment should simply consist of making individuals or groups "better 'players' in the 'game'". The second perspective outlined by Lukes, the Two Dimensional view, consists of a slightly more complex understanding of power, conceding that the One Dimensional view neglects the fact that certain powerful groups or individuals are in better positions to defend their interests through a certain degree of control over what issues make the agenda (Lukes 1974, 17). Tesoriero (2010, 66), terms this the Elitist Perspective, noting that certain groups "exercise disproportionate influence over decision making ... [through] informal networks and contacts ... [and] disproportionate shares of the nation's resources".

Lukes then goes on to make a highly compelling case for the inadequacy of both the One and Two Dimensional views, proposing that each of the two perspectives places too much emphasis on the exercise of power in situations of conflict, stating that "it is highly unsatisfactory to suppose that power is only exercised in situations of conflict" (Lukes 1974, 22). Based on this analysis, Lukes goes on to propose his own Three Dimensional view of power, which recognises that "*the most insidious exercise of power is to prevent people from having grievances by shaping their perceptions, cognitions and preferences*" in such a way that no alternative can be imagined. Lukes' Three Dimensional perspective can be viewed in a similar light to concepts of hegemony, whereby the ruling classes maintain power and control through a set of beliefs, attitudes and relationships that support existing power relations; that "dominant groups set agendas...contain alternatives...[and] identify what is realistic and reasonable" (Kenny 2006, 159).

Two further perspectives on power which remain prominent in the social sciences are the structuralist and post-structuralist perspectives. The main tenet of the structuralist perspective is that it is oppression and structural inequality, along lines of class, race and gender, that lead to an unequal distribution of power. It draws heavily on Marxist and feminist analysis and sees any meaningful solution to inequality as necessarily involving some form of broad structural change within society (Tesoriero 2010, 67). The post-structuralist view on the other hand, posits that power can be better understood when viewed as the manner in which language, dominant discourses and knowledge accumulation reinforce relations of power and dominance. It is a set of theories largely based upon a consideration of how meaning is created and reproduced (Belsey 2002, 5). Tesoriero (2010, 67) notes that when a post-structuralist perspective of power is adopted, empowerment becomes about challenging and changing discourses and validating alternative voices and perspectives on truth and knowledge.

Whilst understandings regarding the *nature* of power may help us to understand the general lack of concern over the top-down bottom-up paradox, it is a combination of both the understandings of the nature of power and the perspectives which inform the study of power which have the potential to shed some light on some potential issues with some of the core methods and tenets of community development outlined at the beginning of the chapter: namely participation and empowerment. If we take empowerment for example, the understanding of power on which processes of empowerment are based, will obviously play a crucial role. For example, if one rejects the notion of power as a zero sum entity, some of the definitions of empowerment explored above become problematic. Tesoriero's (2010, 65) definition of empowerment as the "*redistribution of power from the 'haves' to the 'have nots'*", as well as the kind of language used by Green (2008, 10), who proposes that a "*redistribution...of power [is needed] to break the cycle of poverty and inequality*" become necessarily problematic if one is of the view that power as an entity does not exist to be 'redistributed' or 'given'.

Moreover, definitions such as Schuftan's (1996, 260) that empowerment should entail "a continual process that enables people to understand, upgrade and use their capacities to better control and gain power over their own lives" greatly reflects a One Dimensional, Pluralist view of power, born out of the Individualist perspective that people simply require

the skills necessary to 'play the game', with a complete lack of consideration of structural or post-structural issues. Craig, as quoted by Toomey (2011, 182), definition draws from both the institutionalist perspective and the structuralist perspective, defining empowerment as "*the creation of sustainable structures, processes, and mechanism, over which local communities have an increased degree of control*". Perhaps the closest conception of empowerment to a Three Dimensional verging on post-structural perspective may be those definitions which include the importance of control over problem posing as oppose to simple decision making. Kenny (2006, 161) for example identifies the role of needs discourses in empowerment, suggesting that the question of who has power over the determination of needs is an important one.

Different conceptions of power also have important implications regarding the idea of participation as a tool for bottom-up development as well as its link to empowerment. In Cooke and Kothari's (2001) *Participation: The New Tyranny*, the pair propose that "proponents of participatory development have generally been naïve about the complexities of power and power relations" and that "(mis)-interpretations of how and where power is expressed within participation compels us to reconsider the notion of empowerment" (ibid, 14). Amongst other points, they suggest that participatory practices often act to hide and indeed perpetuate certain sets of power relations within and around communities. In a chapter written by Giles Mohan, it is further suggested that participation has the tendency to reinforce authoritative relationships between practitioners and participants, ignore wider structural issues and treat communities as homogenous, framing the insider/outsider division as the most important.

Conclusion

As demonstrated above, it becomes clear that when considered in more detail, the different elements of the theory informing community development host a number of internal contradictions and inconstancies and reflect an inadequate or at best incomplete understanding of power. The aim of this chapter has been by no means to dismiss the foundations upon which community development theory is based, but rather to point out that certain aspects of the theory have the potential to undermine other aspects, with some

tenets leaving the theory of community development open to individualist or even neo-liberal type interpretations which seem inconsistent with notion of social justice.

The chapters that follow represent an attempt to address some of the issues identified here, to extract the indispensable aspects of the theory and those aspects that promote socially just development and combine them with a deeper understanding of power aimed at ensuring the effectiveness of community development in reducing social inequality. Chapter Two will consider the best framework upon which to model community involvement in development, focusing on the problems born out of the contradiction between the principles of 'don't blame the victim' and 'helping people help themselves'. The third chapter will then consider in more detail the dilemma of the top-down, bottom-up paradox, and advocate for the need for a deeper understanding of power to be incorporated into all community development theory.

Chapter 2: *How to involve the community: A rights-based approach to community development*

Social justice and responsibility

In this chapter, we will consider the contradiction of the principles of ‘don’t blame the victim’ and ‘helping people help themselves’ by evaluating each principle under a framework of social justice. As outlined earlier, whilst the ‘don’t blame the victim’ principle implies a commitment to structuralist understandings of the causes of social issues and inequality, the commonplace community development aim of ‘helping people help themselves’ places the onus for rectifying these issues on individuals and communities themselves. We will begin here with an attempt to address the seemingly unjust notion that that a theory which recognises that inequality has its roots in structural factors beyond the control of individuals, would then expect disadvantaged groups of individuals to take responsibility for eradicating these very issues.

Before arriving at the concept of social justice, a concept reliant upon notions of rights and responsibilities, we must first briefly consider the notion of liberal rights versus the historically more recent and broader notion of human rights. Rights, as conceived under classical liberal notions, focus largely on individual freedoms (Blau and Moncada 2005, xvii). Liberalism, in its classical form, proposes that all individuals should be treated equally under universalistic laws common to all citizens, with the basic aim to ensure the equal rights of individuals to pursue their own interests (Barry 1986, 4). Barry (1986, 4) suggests that classical liberalism is based on the ontological assumption that the comprehension of social reality “necessitates an entirely individualistic orientation”; that individuals are autonomous and their actions are the result of choice and purpose. Classical liberalism relies on the maxim that individuals have the right to “do whatever they want, provided no one but, at most, themselves is harmed by their doing it” (Conway 1995, 8).

Another central tenet of classical liberalism concerns the role of government in society. Classical liberals believe that the role of government is simply to enforce the rule of law, to ensure the rights of citizens to freely pursue their own interests. This tenet is based on the argument that “spontaneous individual activity *accidentally* maximises social well-being

more effectively than any deliberate, rationalistic plan could" (Barry 1986, 4). Classical liberalism rejects the notion that resources can be distributed by governments based on external moral principles (Barry 1986, 5) and rejects any measures of egalitarian public policy (Conway 1996, 26). The main issue with classic liberalism's notion of rights as 'individual freedoms', is its rejection, or lack of consideration, of injustices caused by inequalities inherent within society, which are nondependent upon ones individual choices. Essentially, it does not address *justice* within society: *social justice*.

Notions of human rights, on the other hand, extend well beyond individual freedoms to incorporate social and cultural rights into their purview, for example, the right to education. As an example of this, Blau and Moncada (2005, xviii) note that "the right to food security and a job, are necessary to achieve a life of freedom and dignity". One theory, bridging the gap to some extent between liberal and human rights, is John Rawls' *Theory of Justice as Fairness*, which recognising what classical liberalism fails to; that society inevitably plays hosts to inequalities. In Rawls' *A Theory of Justice*, it is proposed that "the justice of a social scheme depends essentially on how fundamental rights and duties are assigned" (1971, 7). His theory insists upon the primacy of justice (Rawls 1971, 4) and the subject upon which he imposes this ideal of justice is "the basic structure of society" (Rawls 1971, 7). Rawls considers justice with regards specifically to the manner in which major social institutions, including governments, distribute rights and duties and divide up the advantages gained by social cooperation (Rawls 1971, 7). Under this conception, responsibility lies largely with governments as opposed to individuals. Moreover, if one is working with notions of human rights, the responsibilities of government move far beyond enforcing the rule of law, towards an obligation to fulfil a range of socio-economic and cultural rights.

The relationship between justice and the location of responsibility within society is of the utmost importance to theories of social justice. Clayton and Williams (2004, 1) suppose that "issues of social justice...arise when decisions effect the distribution of benefits and burdens between individuals or groups". The idea of where duties and responsibilities lie within society is central to social justice, and this is where the notion of 'helping people help themselves' begins to become problematic, due to where it seems to place the *responsibility* for rectifying inequality. The idea of social justice is essentially taking the connotations of justice and fairness from their traditional legal context and applying them to society as a

whole, and the fact of the matter is that the notion of ‘helping people help themselves’ often places the responsibility for social change unjustly. It can simply not be considered just or fair that the responsibility for rectifying macro level inequality be placed upon those who themselves have borne the burdens of this inequality. Rather, ‘helping people help themselves’ is a notion that is much more closely aligned with both classic and neo liberalism. As Blau and Moncada (2005, xvii) point out “liberalism fosters nearly an exclusive emphasis on the responsibilities adults themselves have to educate themselves, to get and keep a job and so forth”.

At this point, one might question why the idea of ‘helping people help themselves’ is even part of a theory of development that aims to promote socially just development, such as that of community development. To answer this, we have to circle right back to the beginning, to the notion that effective development must be bottom-up, and driven by those who are the targets of development. ‘Helping people help themselves’ can be traced back, like a number of tenets of community development, to the work of Paulo Freire outlined briefly in the first chapter. Freire (1970) proposes that it is the oppressed who must themselves fight for their own liberation, as it is their very exclusion from participation in reflexive praxis that has acted to dehumanise and oppress them in the first instance. He states that “attempting to liberate the oppressed without their reflective participation in the act of liberation is to treat them as objects which must be saved” (Freire 1970, 47). Freire’s argument suggests that those in positions of disadvantage must themselves take on a degree of the responsibility for their own emancipation from these positions (Ibid.).

Whilst one could attempt to justify the tenet of “helping people help themselves” by framing (or cloaking) the notion in Freire’s argument, any such assertion would constitute a gross misuse of Freire’s work. A clear distinction must be maintained between ‘fighting for liberation’ from oppression or unjust circumstances and ‘pulling oneself up by one’s bootstraps’. What we must remember is that Freire’s pedagogy was always presented within the context of liberation, almost to a revolutionary degree. It has the aim to liberate oppressed people through challenging the current social order not by assisting them to work more effectively within the existing one. Freire (1970, 48) was very clear: “political action on the side of the oppressed must be pedagogical action”. What it is, is participation in critical thinking towards a recreation of knowledge and traditional understandings (see Freire 1970,

51) aimed to challenge the existing status quo. What it is not is building the technical capacities of individuals to be better equipped to navigate the unjust waters of their current under privilege. Building the capacities of people within the realm of privileged forms of knowledge and skills sets so that they may then be expected to pull themselves into slightly better positions within the existing unjust social order, was never Freire's intention.

It is thus proposed that the terminology 'helping people help themselves' be removed from the theory and literature surrounding the field of community development, in order that community development practice is not subverted towards neo-liberal agendas valorising the primary importance of individual agency. This notion does not fit with the more structuralist accounts of disadvantage much of the rest of the theory of community development is based upon and it has the potential to distribute responsibility in a manner which is inconsistent with theories of social justice. It is essentially placing all the responsibility on disadvantaged individuals and communities without addressing the issues themselves. It is suggested that definitions which rely on notions of self-help such as Bhattacharyya's (2004, 5) "the pursuit of solidarity and agency adhering to the principles of self-help, felt needs and participation" and likewise those which place responsibility with communities themselves such as Kenny's (2006, 10) "community development refers to the processes, tasks, practices and visions for empowering communities to take *collective responsibility* for their own development", be revised.

At the very core of social justice is the notion that fairness must be considered on the level of society as a whole, on "the basic structure of society" (Rawls 1970, 7). This means that community involvement and participation must not simply be based on building capacities at the community level, without engaging with broader issues of inequality. Community involvement must remain within the pedagogical and political context proposed by Freire and responsibility for rectifying social issues must not be handed over to individual communities and labelled empowerment. The fact remains however, that there is an indispensable importance tied up in Freire's notion of the necessity of the *involvement* of the 'targets of development' in the development process. How therefore, can community development be expected to incorporate this idea whilst remaining engaged with macro structural issues? One possible answer is by using a broad social justice framework to set some very fundamental guidelines as to *how* community involvement should be envisioned.

It will be suggested here that the starting point for such a theory may find its basis in the rights-based development discourse which incorporates the notion of active citizenship with that of government responsibility. It will be argued here that the rights-based approach allows for the involvement and participation of individuals at a community level, whilst remaining engaged with the idea of justice on a macro-societal level, ensuring that responsibility for rectifying under privilege does not fall solely on under privileged groups themselves. It has the potential to foster a type of politicised participation which ensures communities themselves are not expected to shoulder the burden of responsibility, yet remain directly engaged in the fight for socially just development.

A rights-based approach to development

The rights-based approach to development is already highly influential in the field of international development. The approach is based on a framework of rights and obligations and the notion that society consists of both rights holders and duty bearers (Roche 2009; Australian Council for International Development 2009; *International Center for Research on Women* 2006). As pointed out by the International Human Rights Internship Program (2000), the rights-based approach is intrinsically tied to the Human Rights movement. They state that a “rights-based approach is founded on the conviction that each and every human being, by virtue of being human, is a holder of rights” and that “the legal and normative character of rights and the associated governmental obligations are based on international human rights treaties and other standards, as well as on human rights provisions in national constitutions” (International Human Rights Internship Program and Asia Forum for Human Rights and Development 2000).

In the development context, the rights-based approach focuses on the relationship between citizens and states, identifying the former as rights holders and the later as duty bearers (*International Center for Research on Women* 2006; United Nations Development Programme 2003). As a duty bearer, the state has an obligation to protect, promote and fulfil the rights of rights holders (International Human Rights Internship Program and Asia Forum for Human Rights and Development 2000). Another key tenet of the rights-based

approach is the participation of rights holders in claiming their rights and holding governments to account. The International Center for Research on Women (2006, 7) notes that “a high degree of participation... [is a] critical feature of a rights-based approach”.

There are two elements of the basic foundation of this rights-based approach which make it a particularly good candidate for marrying the notion of ‘don’t blame the victim’ with that of the importance of community involvement. Firstly, the strict notion of where responsibility lies, with governments rather than citizens, is consistent with the social justice approach discussed above, as it considers justice and fairness on a societal level as opposed to looking for solutions within individual segments of society. The second is the notion that citizens must be involved in claiming their rights and ensuring they are upheld and fulfilled by the duty bearers of society. This notion, which we will consider in more detail below, ties in the participation and involvement of the ‘targets of development’ without making them responsible for the rectification of social injustice. The element of the rights-based discourse which highlights the importance of the active participation of rights holders in demanding their rights, is often termed active citizenship.

Green (2008), in *From Poverty To Power: how active citizens and effective states can change the world*, carefully develops a theory of active citizenship within the international development context. He begins by identifying the paramount importance of inequality in the production and perpetuation of poverty. He views poverty as a direct result of inequality (Green 2008, 6) and proposes that this inequality can be most effectively addressed through the promotion of a civil society in which an active citizenry can hold effective states to account. His theory is based on the complex relationship of rights and obligations that intrinsically link both states as duty bearers and citizens as rights holders, stating that citizens “are crucial in holding states...to account”; that they must assert their rights and insist on their governments responsibility to uphold them (Green 2008, 11).

As the title of the book implies, Green sees the pursuit for active citizenship as heavily related to and reliant upon power. He sees empowerment as an important step on the road to active citizenship, noting that “at an individual level, active citizenship means developing self confidence and overcoming the insidious ways in which the condition of relative

powerlessness can be internalised” (Green 2008, 18). Moreover, his argument is consistent with Freire’s notion of the importance of the involvement of the oppressed, or the targets of development, as subjects themselves. He notes that “the system...cannot tackle poverty and inequality by treating people as “objects”...rather, people must be recognised as subjects, conscious of and actively demanding their rights” (Green 2008, 11).

However, his theory is also consistent with broad notions of social justice and does not let a focus on individual citizen involvement obscure the importance of macro level social issues, or allow community involvement to equate to community responsibility. He notes that while citizens have a responsibility to demand their rights and hold governments to account, it is “powerful individuals and organisations, notably governments [that] bare a particular burden of responsibility” in ensuring the existence of an equitable, fair society (Green 2008, 21-22). Green’s theory represents a clear example of how a rights-based approach to active citizenship has the potential to link both the indispensable work of Paulo Freire with theories of social justice.

Politicising participation

The way in which the active citizen, rights-based approach achieves this, is in essence, quite simple; it bridges the gap between community level involvement and social justice by always seeking to overtly link participation to broader structural change. It aims to scale up community based projects to national level reforms. This notion, often referred to as re-politicising participation, has found voice over the past decade in academic circles, and is an argument particularly well articulated by Giles Mohan. Mohan (2001, 166) notes that “only by linking participatory approaches to wider, and more difficult, processes of democratisation, anti-imperialism and feminism will longer term changes occur”. He proposes that participation must be relocated within the radical politics of development and warns that participatory approaches “lacking a strong theoretical basis [may be] easily co-opted within disempowering agendas” (Hickey and Mohan 2005).

Hickey and Mohan (2005, 237) propose that “participation needs to be theoretically and strategically informed by a radical notion of ‘citizenship’”. Through a review of some

participatory projects and practices that appear to have transcended participatory critiques and been effective in bringing about transformative social change, the pair suggest that:

... participatory approaches are most likely to succeed: (i) where they are pursued as part of a wider radical political project; (ii) where they are aimed specifically at securing citizenship rights and participation for marginal and subordinate groups; and (iii) when they seek to engage with development as an underlying process of social change rather than in the form of discrete technocratic interventions... (Hickey and Mohan 2005, 137).

They argue that participation often fails to achieve meaningful social change precisely because it fails to “engage with issues of power and politics” (Hickey and Mohan 2005, 137).

Whilst this critique and the rights-based approach more generally have been born out of the international development academic discourse, the ideas and arguments are easily transferable to minority world community development theory and practice. As pointed out by Rawsthorne and Howard (2011, 7), community development most often aims to challenge inequality, and inequality, by its nature, is an issue which must necessarily be addressed at a societal level. Whilst specific issues may differ greatly between majority world international development and minority world community development, the principles of social justice that the rights-based approach upholds are relevant to both areas. The notion of responsibility is integral to any socially just theory of development, whether it be international or community development. That issues of justice are addressed at a *social level* and the notion that governments, rather than citizens, are accountable for upholding rights and dividing up the advantages gained by social cooperation (Rawls 1971, 7), must remain central to theories of community development.

The importance of having a rights-based underpinning becomes evident when considering some of the more recent drifts in the community development literature towards an avocation for communities to take on some of the roles and responsibilities of the state. Tesoriero (2010, 11) writes that “the crisis of the welfare state is simply another of these historical transitions, where the state, for which such great hopes were held, is demonstrating its inadequacy as new forms of social, economic and political structures emerge”. Instead of calling for citizens to hold states to account, to insist on their responsibility to fulfil the human rights of their citizens, he instead advocates for

communities as appropriate sites for social service provisions, supposing that “from this perspective it is inappropriate to put too much energy into defending or strengthening the welfare state ... it may now be the turn of the ‘community’ to carry the major responsibility for the provision of services in fields such as health, education, housing and welfare”.

It is also important to ensure that the discourse of active citizenship is never delinked from that of government responsibility. Disturbingly, some of the academic literature within core community development text books often closely resembles that of the right wing neo-liberal welfare reform agenda. By de-linking the notion of active citizenship from state responsibility, government papers (Vanstone & Abbott, 2001) as well as bodies such as the OECD (1988), have been able to drag the concept of active citizenship into proposals for welfare reform which advocate for an “active” as oppose to a “passive” welfare system and which place requirements on unemployed people to “actively participate” in the community in order to receive income support. It is a discourse which emphasises notions of mutual obligation, requiring income support recipients to find paid work, or otherwise become actively engaged within their communities. Some distressingly similar discourses have been echoed in the community development literature. Kenny (2006, xi) for example, writes that “community development practices generate social capital, they contribute to the development of active citizenship and they provide alternatives to *passive welfare*” (emphasis added) without any mention of the role of states in securing the rights of these active citizens. The danger comes from de-linking the notion of active citizenship from that of government responsibility. In the rights-based approach, the role of active citizenship is to hold governments to account in as duty bearers, not to shift responsibility to individuals through the language of ‘mutual obligation’.

Conclusion

This chapter, whilst rejecting the notion of ‘helping people help themselves’ as a valuable or just tenet of community development, has developed a potential starting point for incorporating the principle ‘don’t blame the victim’ with the necessity for community involvement born out of the work of Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy Of The Oppressed*. As we have seen, the rights-based framework allows for an approach to development where community involvement does not equate to community responsibility, yet remains central to the

process. The active citizenship approach allows for development that is community driven, but ensures that the *responsibility* for bringing about a socially just society remains with governments, not with under privileged communities themselves.

This is not to suggest that the rights-based approach represents, by any means, the end game of community development theory or that it somehow holds all the answers. There are still a number of issues raised in the first chapter that remain unaddressed by this rights-based framework. Moreover, the fact that a theory is consistent with a social justice framework by no means implies its effectiveness, it simply ensures that the processes by which it operates, and where it locates social responsibilities, are not unjust; an important stating point, to be sure. Rawls' theory of *Justice As Fairness* has itself been accused of being simplistic and lacking in certain areas. One criticism of his theory is that it does not address the *why*: why is it necessary that resources be redistributed to the advantage of the under privilege? Why does inequality and under privilege exists? Why does injustice exists to be rectified in the first instance (see Tesoriero 2010, 54)? In fairness to Rawls, addressing the *why* was never the intention of his work; he simply set about developing a theory which justly dealt with the inequalities evident in society.

Taking this into account, it is not enough that a theory of community development is simply socially just. In order to effect meaningful change towards the reduction of inequality, it must also be effective, engaging with questions of *why* inequality exists and *how* it may be rectified. The rights-based approach goes part of the way towards achieving this, suggesting that the *how* may consist of enabling citizens to actively demand their rights and hold governments to account. It also recognises that social issues such as poverty are brought about by overarching structural inequalities. It does however, often fall short of addressing *why* these structural power inequalities exist and *how* they come about and are perpetuated, opting to simply settle for the notion that a redistribution of power and resources will act to largely rectify these issues.

It will be argued in the following chapter, that a deeper consideration of why inequality exists and how it comes about and is perpetuated, is necessary to any theory of community development which includes a fight for equality within its purview. It is further suggested that to effectively consider this, a deeper and wider understanding of power is needed.

Through a consideration of some more complex, structural and post structural conceptions of power, with a particular focus on the work of Michel Foucault, it will be argued that society and the way power operates within it are simply too complex to support a theory supposing that the simple act of a group of rights holders demanding something of an institutional duty bearer, will itself be sufficiently effective in bringing about meaningful and lasting social change.

The purpose of the following chapter however, is not to dismiss the arguments developed this chapter, but rather, to build upon them. It will be suggested that a framework of a rights-based approach to development makes for a good starting point from which to further develop strategies for change. Whilst the rights-based approach may not be sufficient in alone addressing all the problematic issues encountered in community development theory or in alone affecting substantial social change, it is none the less a necessary starting point for any form of planned development. Basing community development action within the rights-based framework ensures that community development projects will at a minimum be socially just and not consciously or unconsciously advancing a neo-liberal, individualist agenda where social issues are removed from their broader societal context and handed off onto disadvantaged communities to rectify in the name of 'change-from-below'. Community development projects should at a minimum adhere to the basic principles of a rights-based framework, where the primary responsibility remains with governments, not with communities and where issues are tackled on the societal, not the individual or community level alone.

Chapter 3: Power, knowledge and discourse: *where to aim community involvement*

“In some remote corner of the universe, bathed in the fires of innumerable solar systems, there once was a planet where clever animals invented knowledge. That was the grandest and most mendacious minute of ‘universal history’” - Friedrich Nietzsche

As we have seen, the notion of power is central to community development thinking, and as noted in Chapter One, community development has often conceived of power in overly simplistic terms. This chapter will advocate for a broader understanding of power to be incorporated into community development theory, both in relation to how power is at play *within* community development itself and *outside* of it, in society at large. The first part of the chapter will address the top-down versus bottom-up paradox identified in Chapter One and suggest that it is impossible for community development to escape the power relations it is itself trying to impact upon. It will further suggest that community development itself, as a discourse and discipline, in fact constitutes a form of government. The second part of the chapter will analyse how power exists in society as a whole, in an effort to ensure that the level at which community involvement is aimed is the most appropriate level to most effectively impact upon power and affect social change. Whilst notions from both the structuralist and post-structuralist camps will be drawn upon, the issue which will be isolated as the most important is that of the link between knowledge, power and discourse and, as such, the work of Michel Foucault will be a major focus.

Power within community development

As Rawsthorne and Howard (2011, 7) note “power is central to thinking and working with communities to achieve just change”. It is clear that power is a fundamental element in community development theory. As such, our consideration of power will be well served by beginning with an analysis of power from within the community development context; the ways in which power and power relations are at play in community development practice itself. It is a discussion which largely focusses on the nature of power itself; what it is and

what forms it takes. We may begin this discussion by addressing the fundamental paradox of community development outlined in the first chapter; how can a top-down initiated, led and funded activity be expected to produce a bottom-up development outcome that isn't entirely adulterated and subverted by its top-down origins?

As outlined in the first chapter, bottom-up development or change-from-below is identifiable as a main tenet of community development. However, despite its centrality to the theory of community development, relatively little earnest consideration has been given to the paradoxical nature of this aim in relation to community development's practice as a top-down implemented form of planned development. A belief that this can be overlooked, that it does not constitute a significant paradox, is a view that can only be justified if it is based on the notion that community development practice somehow exists outside of the relations of power it is itself trying to alter and effect. This notion, as already explored in the first chapter, reflects an overly simplified conception of power in which power is seen as an entity; something that can be traded and distributed; something that can be possessed, and is often concentrated at institutional centres of society.

As we have seen, this conception is evident within much of the language used to build the very foundations of community development theory, in relation to 'redistributing' power and in the very assumption that community development professionals can initiate processes of 'empowerment' whilst remaining independent of power relations. However, if we consider more complex notions of the nature of power, we can see that the idea of an organisation or individual influencing the distribution of power, or relationships of power, without itself being involved in and effecting these relations of power is simply not possible. As we have seen, Foucault's (1994) conception of what power *is*, recognises that power in and of itself does not exist, it cannot be 'given', that it exists only in relationships and only when it is being exercised. Power relations are rooted deep in the social nexus, consisting of a complex interplay of relationships at all levels of society, not a "*supplementary structure over and above society*" such as the state apparatus (Foucault 1994, 343).

The implications of this conception are twofold. Firstly if we accept a more Foucauldian view regarding the *nature* of power, we must view any community development project or activity as constituting an act of power. If we take Foucault's (1994, 341) notion of power as

a *conduct of conducts*; that power consists of a set of actions which act upon the actions of others and structure the possible field of actions of another, then any community development project, in its initiation of community action in a particular direction, epitomises an act of power. Given this understanding of what power is and how it operates, it is inconceivable that any professional community worker or NGO can assist in the “redistribution” of power, or initiate community action towards effecting social change in any manner in which they are not themselves taking part in an act of power, not themselves part of a power relationship with the community, not acting on the actions of others and structuring the possible field of outcomes for others. It is simply inconceivable that community development work can operate outside of power relations in such a way that it could independently initiate bottom-up development without first influencing it from the top-down.

The fact that any community development project constitutes an act of power is simply inevitable due to the very nature of the type of development perused. Unlike more organic types of ‘immanent’ development - “development as a historical process of social change” (Hickey and Mohan 2004, 10) - which are indeed governed by different forms and modes of power, community development is clearly classifiable as an ‘imminent’ form of development. Imminent development is “led by the belief in the ‘makeability’ of society ... as a means of managing those ‘surplus’ populations that have either been excluded from or ‘adversely incorporated’ into processes of immanent development” (ibid.). Any form of imminent, planned development that initiates projects with the specific aim to alter the social terrain, is clearly and inevitably going to consist of actions upon actions; of acts of power; of engaging in relationships of power.

This almost seems self-evident, if even the most simplistic and naïve conceptions of power are dispensed with. The danger however, consists of not making this fact overt in the theory of community development; in implying that the practice is somehow a purely bottom-up, change-from-below activity, unaffected by power relationships between, within and surrounding communities, individuals and community workers and organisations. Moreover, the notion that the tool of participation can somehow ensure this bottom-up style of development also has to remain overtly problematized, for the same reasons. In the same vein as the assertion that community development equates to bottom-up development,

participation is another element of community development theory, and development theory in general, that has also traditionally relied on overly simplified notions of power; on the homogenisation of 'communities' and the creation of simple binary power oppositions.

Born primarily out of a rejection of the blueprint style of top-down imposed, one-size-fits-all development model and advanced through the argument that participatory processes will act to ensure relevant, context driven development activity (Hochfeld and Bassadien 2007, 219, 227; Cooke and Kothari 2001, 5, 139), the link between participatory processes and bottom-up development has cemented itself in development and community development theory. Participation is widely recognised as an indispensable aspect of any community development practice and as such is rarely problematised. This recognition of the indispensability of participation may to some degree have prevented a thorough and thoughtful critique of the discourse of participation as a whole within community development.

The myriad of problems associated with the notion that participation equates to, or will somehow ensure a bottom-up process of development, is explored in detail in Cooke and Kothari's (2001) *Participation: the new tyranny*. The collection of work assembled in the text presents the fundamental concern that "a misunderstanding of power underpins much of the participatory discourse", and that "proponents of participatory development have generally been naïve about the complexities of power and power relations" (Cooke and Kothari 2001, 14). Drawing on more complex conceptions of the nature of power, the text develops many important criticisms of the broad acceptance of the participation orthodoxy as an unproblematic manner in which to ensure true change-from-below development.

Amongst other points, it is suggested that participatory practices often act to hide - and indeed perpetuate - certain sets of power relations and hierarchies within and around communities (ibid, 11). It is suggested on multiple occasions that participatory programmes often focus on broad dichotomies of power, for example between centralised institutions and 'communities' situated at the periphery. These binary oppositions between peripheral communities and central institutions act to homogenise communities, thereby dismissing the differences and power hierarchies inherent *within* communities. It is an understanding which neglects to recognise that power exists on all levels of society, including within communities themselves, and thus, that the participatory processes being utilised may in fact act to reinforce the existing power relationships *within* communities. Kothari, for example, by way of an analysis of Participatory Research Action through a Foucauldian lens, recognises that power is exists at all levels of society rather than being concentrated at

institutional centres, and thus problematises the assumption that 'local knowledge' is somehow pure and unaffected by power relations (ibid, 140). There is a profound rejection of the idea that 'the local' is a site void of power and thus must be consistently juxtaposed against the powerful 'centre'.

As we have seen, power is inherent and inescapably present within both community development practices and projects themselves and within the communities with which these projects engage. Moreover, following on with the Foucauldian line of thought, just as the actions of community development practitioners and organisations can be viewed as individual acts of power, similarly, community development itself, as a discipline and a discourse must also be fundamentally viewed as a form of *government*. Through an analysis of the Foucauldian concept of governmentality, Dean (2010, 16) considers how and where government operates in modern society. Dean (2010), based on a an analysis of the work of Foucault, rejects the traditional quest to understand government as existing primarily on the state level, and rather posit that government exists throughout all levels of society, right down to the individual level of self-government. The argument can be traced back to Foucault's notion of power as a *conduct of conducts*. Dean (2010, 17) notes that "'to conduct' is to lead, to direct or to guide and... implies some sort of calculation as to how this is to be done".

Dean further supposes that the act of government relies on the fact that human conduct is something that can be shaped and regulated and "turned to a particular ends" (Dean, 18). He defines government as an "attempt to deliberate and to direct human conduct[:];... to rationally shape human conduct" (ibid). Here, he elaborates on the term *rational*, noting that the term "refers to the attempt to bring *any* form of rationality into the calculation about how to govern" defining rationality as "any way of reasoning, or way of thinking about, calculating, and responding to a problem, which is more or less systematic and which might draw upon formal bodies of knowledge" (Dean 2010, 18, 24). Under this conception, the classification of community development as a form of government is unavoidable. It is an endeavour which aims to guide human conduct towards a particular ends, based on a systematic rational which draws upon specific bodies of knowledge. In the next section, these concepts of knowledge, government and rationality will be elaborated upon in an attempt to better understand how power operates in society at large and how community development practice may be best positioned to influence it. However, it is important to bear in mind that the analysis also sheds light on how community development itself constitutes a form of power and government.

Power within society at large

Whilst it is undoubtedly imperative to consider how power operates *within* the practice of community development and recognise that community development is itself a form of government, it is also of considerable consequence to consider how the theory of community development conceptualises of power as existing outside of its own context, within society at large. Given that as we have seen, considerations of power are central to almost all aspects of community development theorising, then how power is conceived, and hence how this conception impacts upon the aims, methods and principles of community development, is of paramount importance. If power is so central to the purpose and aims of community development practice, then an accurate conception of what it is and how it operates in society will determine, to a large degree, its effectiveness in achieving its aims. It will be argued here that a deeper understanding of power has the potential to inform the level at which community involvement should be aimed to ensure maximum effectiveness.

As mentioned in the first chapter, community development normally engages with perspectives of power that range from individualist type approaches through to structural type approaches. However, it will be proposed here that for community development to be truly effective in its efforts to impact upon broad social inequalities, it must move away from notions of power which focus on broad dichotomies of power between community peripheries and institutional centres and away from notions of the redistribution of power through opening up the decision making process. Building on the notions raised at the end of the previous section regarding government, it will be suggested that community development must consider, with much more conviction, the links between power, knowledge, rationality and discourse; the way in which knowledge and discourses frame problems and debates and how the constraints of these frames have the potential to rationalise and perpetuate societal inequality.

Perhaps the easiest starting point when considering the notion that power transcends coercive activity, is with the idea of ideological hegemony. "Ideological hegemony theorizes the way in which relationships of domination and exploitation are embedded in the dominant ideas of society" (Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology Online). Departing from the notion that power is *possessed* by dominant groups, the concept of ideological hegemony

proposes that power exists in dominant ideas and ways of thinking that permeate all levels of society. A simple 're-distribution' of power or a restructuring of society alone cannot bring about social change if the ideas that perpetuate these structural inequalities remain unaltered. Although it will be developed in more detail, bringing in specifically Foucauldian analysis, this is at its most basic level the argument that will be proposed here; that it is not coercive power, but rather, the creations of discourses and knowledge that in fact create, sustain and rationalise the hierarchical power relations and inequalities that exist within society.

In order to consider in more detail the notions of discourse and political rationality, introduced in the previous section, and the links between discourse and power and its relevance for community development, we must first begin with a deconstruction of the very assumptions regarding what 'knowledge' itself actually is. In order to achieve this, we will consider some of the central ideas developed around the concept by Michel Foucault. For Foucault, 'knowledge' can be broadly described as the *outcome* of social practises and struggles for power. Knowledge is "governed by rules... [that] define a system of conceptual possibilities that determines the boundaries of thought in a given domain and period" (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy Online, 2014). Foucault argues that knowledge is not somehow 'a given', but rather that it is a socially constructed phenomenon (Foucault 1994, 2) the outcome of a process. He notes that "knowledge itself has a history" and that social practices "engender domains of knowledge...[that] the history of knowledge is connected to social practices" (ibid).

In order to truly engage with the Foucault's argument, one must attempt to reconceptualise one's very understanding of knowledge at its most basic level. The concept of knowledge is very often associated with truth, reason and objectivity - that it is something that is somehow inherently truthful and distinct from subjectivity - the empiric discovery and articulation of given facts, of a set of realities. Positivism, for example, posits that society can be objectively understood through evidence gathering and scientific method whilst modernism values unifying metanarratives with the ability to objectively explain social phenomenon (Rawsthorne and Howard 2011, 147-8). The more post-structural stance, on the other hand, and the work of Foucault, rejects this notion entirely. It sees knowledge not

as something with an empirical origin, but as something created and constructed. Belsey (2002, 7) for example, proposes that “the distinctions we make are not necessarily *given* by the world around us, but are instead produced” (emphasis added).

Friedrich Nietzsche (1976) once remarked: “In some remote corner of the universe...there once was a planet where clever animals invented knowledge”. Foucault references this quote, and further reflects on Nietzsche musings on the nature of knowledge, as a way in which to deconstruct the concept of knowledge at its most fundamental level, at the level of its manufacture. He points out that Nietzsche uses the word ‘invention’ precisely in order not to say ‘origin’ (Foucault 1994, 6). This notion that knowledge is invented, constructed, manufactured, is central to the his understanding of what knowledge is. A second central tenet is that knowledge is by no means subsequent to, or in continuity with truth:

There is nothing in knowledge that enables it, by any right whatever, to know the world ... What is it, really, in western philosophy that certifies that things to be known and knowledge itself are in a relation of continuity? What assurance is there that knowledge has the ability to truly know the things of the world instead of being indefinite error, illusion and arbitrariness? (ibid, 9-10)

So given that knowledge is not subsequent to fact and does not constitute a relation of continuity with truth, what in fact is it and where does it come from? For Foucault, knowledge is the result of struggles for power; it is “an event that falls under the category of activity[;] ... there is a battle, and knowledge is the result of this battle” (ibid, 13-14).

It is at this point of Foucault’s analysis that the link between knowledge and power comes into sharper focus. Knowledge is strategic, it is manufactured and it is irrevocably linked with struggles of power. It should not be conceptualised as a representation of objective truth, or as occupying a position of continuity with a subject to be known, but rather, as something that is infinitely subjective, unequivocally constructed and unquestionably strategic:

Knowledge is at the same time the most generalising and the most particular of things. Knowledge simplifies, it passes over differences, lumps things together without any justification in regards to truth. It follows that knowledge is always a misconstruction [*méconnaissance*]. Moreover, it is always something that is aimed, maliciously, insidiously and aggressively at individuals, things, situations. (ibid, 14)

Having hopefully reconceptualised our understanding of knowledge, at least to a small degree, it is now possible to analyse, with a deeper level of understanding, the links between knowledge, discourses, rationality and power. Knowledge, or 'regimes of truth', produce discourses that function as truth in a certain specific historical and geographical locations. Discourses, like knowledge itself, are inherently strategic. Foucault (1994, 2-3) notes that "on one level, discourse is a regular set of linguistic facts, whilst on another level is an ordered set of polemic and strategic facts" and calls for a consideration of "the historical construction of a subject through a discourse". It is through these strategic constructions of discourses, he argues, that forms of rationality are constructed which thence allow for the government of certain individuals or groups by others:

The government of men – whether they form small or large groups, whether it is power excreted by men over women, or by adults over children, or by one class over another, or by bureaucracy over a population – involves a certain type of rationality. It doesn't involve instrumental violence. (Ibid, 324).

The government of people involves rationality and rationality derives its influence from the strategic construction of knowledge and discourses. Therefore the root of power lies in the manufacture of knowledge and discourses.

However, throughout the social sciences, the complaint has often been levelled that perspectives that depart from modernism, and focus on the discontinuity between knowledge and truth, have little or nothing to offer in a practical sense, that outside of the theoretical context they are unequipped of arsenal (see Whitson 1995). Within the field of critical pedagogy and education, this argument has often been encapsulated in the idea that postmodern and post-structural perspectives may be "disposing of the baby of critique along with the bathwater of universal reason", that "the promise of critical and transformative solidarity [may] be abandoned in the rush to unburden ourselves of "modernistic" visions of enlightenment and emancipation" (Whitson 1995, 121). Habermas argues that post-structuralism's distinction between subject and object undermines its own claim to truth and "saps the basis for social action (see Ingram 1987, 77) whilst others have accused such positions of being not only politically neutral but also outright nihilistic in regards to truth claims (see Whitson 1995, 127).

The dilemma often boils down to the notion that the modernist commitment to emancipation will be lost if objective reason is abandoned. However, arguments such as Foucault's do not propose that there is no objective reality, rather, that it is subjective forms of knowledge and discourse that dictate the way in which this objective reality is known or understood, and thus the way it is problematised. Paulo Freire's thoughts on the interdependency of objectivity and subjectivity are very useful in visualising this relationship between the objective and the subjective in relation to knowing and altering social reality. He proposes that objective reality, for example real, existing oppression, must be recognised, but to "reject the role of subjectivity in the struggle to change structures" is naïve and simplistic (Freire 1970, 32). He proposes that "one cannot conceive of objectivity without subjectivity. Neither can exist without the other, neither can they be dichotomised...subjectivity and objectivity [exists in a] constant dialectical relationship" (Ibid).

The Foucauldian argument, and other arguments that link power primarily with the production of knowledge, do not deny the existence of structural inequality or the existence of dominant groups in society. They do however reject the notion that these structures and patterns of dominance are a result of coercive power, of an unequal 'distribution' of power or a monopoly of decision making control within certain realms or with certain 'powerful' groups or institutions. They posit rather, that these patterns of dominance and inequality are created and perpetuated, at the most elementary level, by constructed discourses that 'rationalise' the actions and policies that lead to the existence of these patterns in the first instance. So how then can perspectives which propose the pre-eminence of the link between power and discourse contend with the critique that it is of little practical, actionable value? In analysing post-structuralism's concern with the power inherent in discourses, Tesoriero (2010, 57) notes a prominent critique of post-structuralist positions: "while [post-structuralism] provides an interesting analysis of power and disadvantage, it has relatively little to say about what one should actually do about it and so has little relevance for the community worker".

Tesoriero's own answer to this question provides us with an interesting starting point. Whilst conceding that post-structuralism "allows space and legitimacy for alternative voices to be heard and validated and for alternative discourses to emerge as part of a development

process” he also posits that is simply cannot “provide the neat prescriptions of a structuralist account (e.g. smash capitalism, dismantle patriarchy)” (Tesoriero 2010, 57). The interesting thing about Tesoriero’s response is that, for him, there seems to be no link between validating alternative discourses and the smashing of capitalism or the dismantling of patriarchy. It is implied that validating alternative voices and discourses has little transformative value, it is simply another form of community engagement and participation, an ends in itself, rather than a means of contesting power relations or political rationality. The “neat prescription” of smashing capitalism and dismantling capitalism, is in no way a prescription of “what one should actually do” or how it should be done, it is simply a proposed aim.

Community development often attempts to dismantle structural inequality through a process of broadening participation in arenas of decision making; proposing that granting control over decision making to communities will act to empower them. Whilst a number of projects and academic literature have transcended this simplified thinking (see for example Hickey and Mohan, 2004), there exists a long history within the theory and practice of community development linking empowerment directly to access to decision making (see Bhattacharyya 2004; Tesoriero 2010; Kenny 2006, 3; Paulin 2006, 3; Week, Hoatson and Dixon 2003, 39). As discussed, this approach is based largely on simplified and naïve conceptions of power and does not take into account how these decision making processes are themselves heavily influenced by the types of power discussed by thinkers such as Foucault.

Moreover, the claim that discourse based analyses of power offer little in the way of practical or instructive value is simply not the case. If one accepts the premise of the links between knowledge, rationality, discourse and power, Foucault, for example, is in fact quite specific in his prescriptions for contesting power: challenge prominent discourses and question how power relations are rationalised. He proposes that “those who resist or rebel against a form of power cannot merely be content to denounce violence or criticise an institution ... what has to be questioned is the form of rationality at stake...The question is how ... relations of power are *rationalised*” (Foucault 1994, 324, emphasis added).

Based on a Foucauldian perspective of power, which does not dismiss the objective reality of inequality, but rather seeks to identify its origins in the realms of knowledge creation and political rationality, *the site for challenging this inequality in power relations is at the level of discourse, not the level of decision making*. The participation of communities or individuals in decision making processes constrained within existing regimes of truth and framed by existing discourses will simply not do. As Foucault (1994, 325) suggests; “liberation can come only from attacking...political rationality’s very roots”. The battlefield for change is within societies’ prominent discourses, those which act to rationalise the elements within society which create and perpetuate inequality. The position being proposed here is one which rejects the notion that a “redistribution” of power and a simple decentralisation of decision making will alone result in social change towards equality. Firstly, because it rejects the idea that power exists as an entity that can *be* distributed, and secondly because the same political rationality that perpetuates inequality, also heavily constrain decision making processes. Struggles for equality must be fought at the level of knowledge accumulation, discourse and rationality; considering notions of problem posing, issue framing and needs discourses.

The relevance of the Foucauldian critique for community development

In order to understand the full relevance of Foucault’s perspective on power for community development theory and practice, we must attempt to unpack and understand the links between knowledge, discourses, framing, political rationality and decision making. A number of these concepts are very well defined within the community development literature. Whilst we have already covered the concept of knowledge above, and to an extent the definition of a discourse; “an ordered set of polemic and strategic facts” (Foucault 1994, p2-3), the work of Rawsthorne and Howard (2011) is a good starting point from which to extend these understandings and define the remaining terminology we wish to work with.

Unlike the use of post-structuralist thought within critiques of specific community development techniques, or the incorporation of post-structuralist arguments to bolster or rationalise certain aspects of community development practice (see for example the

textbooks of Kenny 2006 or Tesoriero 2010), Rawsthorne and Howard's (2011) text represents more of an attempt to theorise community development as a whole from a poststructuralist standpoint and engages directly with the work of Foucault. As such, much attention is paid to concepts and phenomenon which are tied in with the link between knowledge and power. The authors define a discourse as "a group of statements that belong to a single system of formation" proposing that "discourses, via language create cohesion and produce meanings about a particular field [which] then act to powerfully define and shape [these] fields" (Rawsthorne and Howard 2011, 5). They refer directly to Foucault, arguing that discourses "privilege particular concepts and understandings while silencing or discrediting others" (ibid). As Belsey (2002, 6) notes, "Most of the time the language we speak is barely visible to us...yet few issues are more important in human life", playing a crucial role in determinations of thought processes and social relations.

Another important concept to define is that of *framing*. Framing, as the metaphor implies, involves a decision over what is to be included and what is to be excluded in the scope of an issue, argument or subject of discussion. Rawsthorne and Howard (2011, 49), paraphrasing George Lakoff, note that a frame is a "self-contained system of language that operated to capture peoples imagination and dominate debate, by defining the language, metaphors and ultimately the ideas that can be debated as well as the rules of engagement in the debate". Whilst it is obvious that framing is inevitable, necessary and productive, it must always remain overt that it is a highly political exercise; an exercise in power. As Moncrieffe and Eyben (2007, 2) point out, framing influences "how we understand something to be a problem" and how "particular issues and categories of people are regarded and treated". They note that "framing and labelling processes are linked to the distribution of social, political and economic power [and] are critical for securing hegemonic meaning" (ibid).

The recognition of framing as a political activity leads us also to a consideration of ideas surrounding notions of needs discourses and problem posing. As Fraser (1989) points out, needs claims (for example: A needs x in order to y) "overlook the fact that who gets to establish authoritative ... definitions of people's needs is itself a political stake" (163-164). This idea of a needs discourse is similar to the concept of problem posing; the notion that who has control over the definition of problems themselves is as important, if not more important than who has control over the decision making regarding these problems (see Kenny 2006, 164). As well as aligning with

Foucault's analysis on power, these types of arguments are also constant with Lukes' Three Dimensional View of power considered in the first chapter; essentially rejecting the notion that power lies in the decision making 'power' of groups or individuals over pre-defined issues over which there is discussion and conflict: "it is highly unsatisfactory to suppose that power is only exercised in situations of conflict" (Lukes 1974, 22).

From a Foucauldian perspective, all of these factors are linked and are intrinsically important to any theory of social change. They are of particular importance to community development, as a field which sets out, as one of its main aims, to decrease inequality and challenge the 'distribution' of power within society. *Decision making*, the participation within which community development often defines as a means for change-from-below, is heavily constrained and informed by the *problem posing* which proceeds the decision making process and is *rationalised* through the *framing* of debates, a framing which is created through the strategic construction of *knowledge* and *discourses*. The implication of this is that community development projects which intervene at the level of decision making, are unlikely to affect social change, or impact upon the flow of power throughout a society as they are intervening too late. At the level of decision making, power has already shaped, constrained and rationalised the possible actions and outcomes of the decision making process. The further implication is that community action must attempt to impact upon the very creation of knowledge, the very development of discourses; it must question the political rationalisation which informs existing decision making processes and aim to intervene at the level of the framing of issues and the posing of problems. Based on this analysis, the level for action is at the level of discourse.

Another reason that Foucauldian type accounts may be useful for community development is that, despite critiques to the contrary, they are full of possibilities for challenging and contesting power. The power inherent in discourses can be used to both sustain and contest hegemony and regimes of truth and their societal outcomes. As Moncrieffe and Eyben (2007, 3) point out "because power is multifaceted and not unidirectional, contestation and resistance are not only possible but common". Frames for example, can be used to stigmatise groups and sustain forms of hegemonic control, *or* to contest political rationality and make political claims (ibid). For example the rights-based framework outlined in Chapter Two, is a good example of how framing an issue, in this case in terms of rights and

obligations, can be used to validate alternative discourses *within* the development field. Discourses can both “entrench and challenge existing power relations” (Rawsthorne and Howard 2011, 5). The articulation and validation of subjugated knowledges along with the challenging of accepted political rationality can act to destabilise dominant discourses (see Rawsthorne and Howard 2011, 5; Foucault 1994, 325).

One area of development studies where the importance of discourse, hegemony and truth claims has already been partly accepted and incorporated into theory and practice, is that of Gender and Development. The Gender and Development (GAD) approach (replacing the earlier Women in Development approach which focussed largely on the simple *inclusion of women* in the economic sphere) places a high degree of importance on the social construction of gender roles and identities within society (Rathgeber 1990, 494). It recognises that accepted discourses regarding the gender roles and identities of men and women are incredibly powerful in sustaining gender inequality. As Flood (2004, 45) points out “patterns of gender injustice are tied to *social constructions* of masculinities and male identities” (emphasis added). Cornwall (1997, 8) further notes that the simple inclusion of women in decision making, does little to challenge perceived gender roles on which patterns of power hierarchies are based. This overt recognition of the link between power and discourse is less established in other subsections of the development community, such as that of community development.

To consider the power inherent in language, discourse and the framing or creation of a social issue, one can pick almost any issue on the social map, any policy document, newspaper article or conversation between friends. For example, if we consider ‘unemployment’, the fact that a percentage of society is unemployed, and consider the domains of knowledge that have been created around this objective reality, we can see how language and discourse have constructed ‘unemployment’ as a social issue and framed that issue in a certain way. In the post-war era, welfare policies were largely premised on the idea that it was structural problems that caused unemployment; that individuals were “‘victims’ of their environment” (Martin 2004, 79). Since the mid 1980’s, this discourse has given way to the notion that disadvantage and unemployment is rather, largely due to the behavioural and motivational problems of the unemployed themselves (Martin 2004, 79).

This discourse led to a host of policy reform throughout the 1980’s and 1990’s, both in Australia and other OECD countries, towards what has been termed by policy makers as a

more “active” less “passive” welfare system, aimed at hastening the transition of income support recipients into paid employment or social participation (Cass 1988; Hoefler and Midgley 2006, 4; McDonald and Chenoweth 2006, 109; Dean 2007, 582 & Miller 2005 p23). This policy reform was largely rationalised through the proliferation of discourses proposing the existence of an idle, amoral and welfare dependent “underclass” of people. The discourse of welfare recipients making up an “underclass” has become salient in recent decades (Dean 2010, 76; Bessant et al. 2006, 141; Watts 1999 & Martin 2004, 80). The theory of the underclass, proposes that the welfare system sustains and promotes a “culture of welfare dependency”, resulting in an underclass prone to criminality, substance abuse and financial dependency (Watts 1999, 23; Bessant et al. 2006, 141).

Not only has this language framed the debate surrounding unemployment, and thus dictated to a large degree any public policy on the matter, it has also created the very notion of unemployment and government subsidy of unemployed people as a fundamentally negative, problematic phenomenon. The discourse has squarely placed unemployed people outside of or inactive within “normal society”. By framing the issue primarily in relation to its link to the welfare state, and by attributing a set of empirically unfounded (Dean 2007, 567) moral attributes to unemployed people, the discourse has successfully been able to conceptually locate unemployed people outside of mainstream society as opposed to an integral part of it.

As an exercise in evaluating the power of discourse in framing social phenomenon, and without advocating for legitimacy of one understanding over another, let us instead, for example, view unemployment, not as a social evil, but as an integral part of any free market capitalist society. If the unemployed population are conceptualised as a necessary segment of the supply and demand cross-section of the labour market, then it follows that unemployed people do not somehow exist “outside” of society, but rather, occupy an integral position *within* it. Working with this understanding, the unemployed population are in fact integral to any benefits gained from free market capitalism; freedom from exercise government control, efficiency, innovation and economic growth and are thus entitled to a percentage of the revenue collected by the state as a result of the process of which they are a part.

So, taking the unemployment example, one way of framing the issue is to view it structurally, to recognise that unemployed individuals have little control over the circumstances of their unemployment. This would direct policy initiatives towards, for example, job creation initiatives on state or national levels. The neo-liberal frame discussed above would lead to initiatives designed to build the individual capacities of unemployed people to find work and or encourage or obligate them to participate in “mainstream community activities” to prevent their spiral into the welfare dependent underclass. A third discourse, that of viewing unemployment not as a problem in itself but as an integral aspect of a functioning free market society, may place policy initiative in the realm of the socially just distribution of benefits of capitalism to all members of the process which make it possible, including the maintenance of the supply segment of the labour market. Whilst of course there exists many other possible ways to frame the issue, for example, a complete rejection of the capitalist system altogether, the example simply acts to illustrate how the accepted truths and discourses surrounding social issues act to rationalise and set the scope for proposing solutions; how power is intrinsically linked to knowledge and regimes of truth.

Conclusion:

“If humankind produce social reality...then transforming that reality is an historic task, a task for humanity” - Paulo Freire

The methodology of this thesis has involved critiquing community development theory as an entire discourse, as opposed to focussing on certain methodological aspects of its practice. An attempt has been made to consider, from an external viewpoint, the discourse of community development in its entirety; how its tenets and principles relate to one another and how its understandings of certain concepts such as power, impact the manner in which it is carried out and its potential for realising its aims. As proposed at the outset, a truly reflexive critique of the core problematic issues within community development is not only necessary, but useful in informing possible future directions for the discipline.

By considering some of the prominent understandings of the core aims and principles of community development and analysing how these principles are positioned in relation to one another, as well as to some prominent theoretical frames, the first chapter allowed us to identify some contradictory, if not paradoxical aspects of community development theory. The seemingly irreconcilable notions of ‘don’t blame the victim’ and ‘helping people help themselves’ led to the analysis of community development theory against a framework of social justice in the second chapter, whilst the paradoxical notion of top-down led bottom-up development allowed for a deeper analysis regarding ideas of power developed in the third chapter.

The analysis of the second chapter resulted in a rejection of principle of ‘helping people help themselves’ as a tenet of community development and led to a careful consideration of the importance of where the theory of community development places the *responsibility* for rectifying issues of inequality and disadvantage. It concluded that community development should always act to address justice at a societal level, and thus remain engaged with broad social issues, however it also recognised the importance of the involvement of the targets of development in the development process as a central, important and indispensable tenet of the discipline. As such, it was suggested that the rights-based approach to development,

incorporating the notion of active citizenship and government responsibility, may represent an appropriate model on which to base community involvement; a model for *how to involve the community*. However, it was noted that whilst representing a solid starting point for the development of socially just community development theory and practice, it left a number of issues identified in the first chapter unaddressed and did not go far enough in addressing the question of *why* inequality exists to be rectified in the first instance.

The third chapter set out to extend upon the analysis developed in the second chapter, proposing some possibilities regarding *where to aim the community involvement* modelled in the second chapter. In an attempt to explore the major paradox of community development, the top-down versus bottom-up paradox, an analysis of power was undertaken based largely on the work of Michel Foucault. The analysis concluded with the recognition that community development theory has largely been based on overly simplified notions of power. It was proposed that not only does any community development activity inevitably represent an act of power, but that the discipline of community development itself is in fact a form of government. Moreover, through a recognition of more complex theories of power which recognise its link to knowledge, political rationality and the creation of discourses, the chapter advocated for a change in the level at which community involvement was aimed; *where to aim community involvement*. It was suggested that moving away from a focus on community involvement in decision making towards an involvement in processes of problem posing, the framing of discourses and the challenging of political rationality, may be more effective in bringing about real social change. Essentially it promotes the idea that discourse is the most appropriate site of resistance.

So what does this analysis mean for future directions in community development? Do these complex notions of power in fact complicate things further for the discipline? Does the fact that community development simply constitutes another form of government render it a less than productive endeavour, one which simply adds to the government of the actions of under-privileged communities? An unequivocal “yes” in response to the above questions, would represent an understanding of power which only meets Foucault half way. The fact that power is everywhere, that it exists and will always exist in the theories and activities of community development and to view this as a wholly negative fact, neglects the reality that power is not only repressive, but also productive. Foucault proposes:

If power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but to say no, do you really think one would be brought to obey it?... It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression. (Foucault 1994, 120)

Just because an activity represents an act of power, or even a form of government, does not necessarily make it repressive or negative. Power can be productive, one form of government may at to challenge a more dominant and repressive form of government. Moreover, as Li (2007, 2) points out, “there is no sign that schemes for improvement are about to be abandoned”. There is something inherent within the idea of altering social reality ‘for the better’, that continues to drive development workers. As Freire (1970, 32) suggests, to recognise that oppression is a reality and yet to do nothing tangible to transform that reality, would be a farce. Inequality exists, and for those who see it as a reality which impacts negatively on the lives of great numbers of human beings, the “attempt to deliberate and to direct human conduct” (Dean, 2010, 18) towards a reduction of this inequality, must remain a form of government worth pursuing. The danger is in not recognising and making overt the fact that what is being pursued is indeed a form of government and an activity of power.

Bearing this in mind, it may be worth reconsidering the terminology of bottom-up development in the community development discourse, or at least exercising caution before employed it. Terming an activity born out of the government of people by a particular discipline ‘change-from-below’, has the potential to, as Whitson (1995, 131) writes, reflect a mode of domination which is “achieved precisely through the structural articulation of diverse interests, which functions by partly incorporating oppositional interests into the articulated structuring”. Perhaps, the only way to resolve the top-down, bottom-up paradox, is to dismiss the terminology in its entirety. It may be suggested that community development practice is neither top-down, nor is it bottom-up, it is simply *a specific form of government which aims to incorporate the opinions, ideas and actions of disadvantages groups in directing development.*

The implication of recognising that community development is a form of government is by no means a call for its abandonment. Rather, it is a call for the overt recognition of this fact within the discourse itself, a recognition which will leave the discourse and discipline of community development open to constant reflexive analysis and critique, on the basis that

it does in fact constitute a form of government. The critique developed here for example, advocates for the adherence of community development, as a form of government, to at a minimum adhere to notions of social justice. It does not reject the importance of community involvement, rather, fully appreciates its importance and seeks to locate community involvement within a framework which aims to address justice on a societal level. It proposes the tool of a rights-based approach, along the rejection of the principle of 'helping people help themselves' to in part achieve this, by ensuring responsibility for rectifying inequality is not placed at the sites of disadvantage.

The critique also engages with how to ensure that this community involvement may best be directed towards effectively impacting upon processes of power in order to decrease inequality within society. It is proposed that community development projects should direct community involvement not at the level of decision making, but at the level of problem posing, discourse development and the challenging of political rationalities which act to perpetuate inequality. Recognising that power creates social reality through knowledge creation, rationality and the development of discourses, brings with it a recognition that challenging these prominent discourses and ways of understanding and posing problems, has the potential to impact the social reality they create. Changes in actions, or policies, stem from changes in the way subjects are understood, or 'known', based on the discourses surrounding them and the way they rationalise action relating to them.

Of course inclusion in decision making is important, but when dealing with issues of broad and ingrained social inequality, it is important to recognise that the decision making process has already been heavily influenced and constrained by power. Problems have been posed and discourses have been manufactured to rationalise the way possible solutions are envisioned. The potential to decrease inequality lies in the way the issues of disadvantage and inequality are understood, and this understanding, or knowing of the subject, is derived from the discourses used to frame and explain it. Dr King did not set out to simply increase the power of black Americans in opposition to their white counterparts, rather he challenged the fundamental way in which the under-privilege of black Americans was understood. Modern feminism does not simply counter patriarchy by involving women in decision making, it does so by challenging the very discourses surrounding fundamental understandings of what it means to be of a certain gender. Actions leading toward the

major redistribution resources or the major reconfiguration of public policy, will not come about through simply widening participation in decision making. Any *major* shift will come about only through a reconceptualisation of the way in which issues and their subsequent solutions are understood, by redefining what it is that needs deciding and to what ends.

It is the accepted truths and discourses surrounding social issues which set the scope for social action. As such, community development must strive to constitute a productive and socially just form of government which aims to enlist the agency, ideas and experiences of communities in the reconstruction and challenging of dominant discourses surrounding important social issues in an attempt to reframe the scope of political and social action in responses to these issues. The challenge moving forward may be in identifying the best practical methods by which to achieve this, whether it be through community arts projects, political pedagogy, community development as political activism or in simply demanding a true commitment to problem posing and issue framing in community consultation processes. If community development practice can shift community involvement away from a simple inclusion in decision making towards a process of fundamentally challenging some of the dominant discourses and political rationalities which perpetuate inequality, all whilst remaining within the bounds of a framework of social justice, it stands to remain a form of government well worth pursuing.

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