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## Differential Participation: Men, Women and Popular Power

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The muddy road sloped down towards the gully that carried away the sewage from the surrounding houses. The house we were in, like all those in La Nazareno, was simple but sturdy, built out of concrete and zinc sheets, equipped with electricity and running water. The thing most noticeable was not the house but the tremendous pride of the men and women sitting around the kitchen table. They were from two of the 350 families that had occupied this land several years before and had forced the Costa Rican government to buy the land and provide building materials and basic infrastructure. Carlos Corrales was the first president of the community association, a job that was now carried out by Yadira Umaña, his wife. At one point we asked her if she had changed since she joined the urban housing movement. She said no, she didn't think so. Her husband smiled at her, in his modest smile, and said simply that she had changed, that she was speaking in public, that she was leading a community. She smiled back in acknowledgement.

We asked him had he changed. He said no. But he hinted at a new found respect for his wife and the women in his community. Women are better leaders in the community, he says, 'because they are closer to the problems of everyday life.' He said, however, that many men try to keep their wives from getting too active.

A couple of thousand miles away elections were being held for the Executive Assembly in Santa Cruz, a Cuban community to the east of Havana. Following a decade-old model, the Municipal Assembly was choosing its executive and its mayor from among its elected members. One candidate for mayor was a woman who had received the highest vote percentage in the local elections, an acknowledgement of her skills, energy, and her supportive style of leadership. Another was a man who was capable – but by many accounts

not nearly as capable as the woman – and quite authoritarian in his leadership style. The man was elected the mayor, the woman his deputy. It was hard for Cuban observers from outside the community to make sense of the choice on the basis of candidates' capabilities.

To the south and east in a crowded neighbourhood of Port-au-Prince, Haiti, a group of men and women gathered outside a house. One person was from one of the many groups within a network of grass-roots organizations that had mobilized over the past decade, first against the Duvalier government and then against the military. In this group, as in some groups of community groups in Haiti, there were no leaders, for in a country where two centuries of male leaders have promised solutions and brought only misery, there was a massive distrust of leaders. The women and men were forging a new style of social activism and social leadership.<sup>1</sup>

These stories have some common features. Each is part of an attempt to develop new forms of popular participation and grass-roots mobilization, directly aimed, in the first community, at providing housing and a decent life, in the second as part of a delegate system of formal governmental power, and, in the third, as an attempt to organize and mobilize the poor. Another common feature is that within these structures of power and empowerment, we see an ongoing struggle to define the degree and the style of participation by women and men.

Among activists and progressive intellectuals in much of the world, there is increasing interest and debate on the interlocked themes of democracy, popular participation, and social transformation. Democracy bereft of popular power is better than nothing but is a limited democracy; social transformation without democracy is either impossible or incomplete; development without some form of popular participation has little chance of transforming the relations of socio-economic power. The fundamental issue in emerging conceptions of change is how to build inclusive structures of social, economic and political power, ones that overcome existing inequalities and that fundamentally shift the basis of social power.

Perhaps there really are different problems buried within this one statement. One problem has to do with the need to develop democratic structures of participation and empowerment throughout the society as a whole. Another is to ensure these new structures are as fully participatory and democratic as possible. This is distinct from the first problem because we can not talk of popular participation or popular empowerment in general. Rather we must acknowledge the existence of what I call *differential participation*.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter explores the problem of differential participation. It defines two aspects of differential participation. The first locates the source of

the problem in structures of inequality, the second within the hegemonic definitions of power that exist within patriarchal society. It examines solutions to the first within the framework of participatory democratic or critical liberal democratic theory, while solutions to the latter require a redefinition of power and the development of radically different structures of social power. It concludes by looking not only at how women, but at how men as well, are negatively effected by the very structures in which they have differential power and privilege.

Throughout, I will draw on the case studies presented in other chapters of this book.

### **The Two Aspects of Differential Participation**

Participation does not exist in the abstract. Participation is defined through specific institutions, processes, and ideological and cultural factors. It is defined through the individuals and groups of individuals involved (or not involved) in a participatory process. Within any participatory structures, overall forms of social inequality and oppression are usually reflected and maintained. The challenge we face is to develop not only participatory mechanisms of empowerment but means to overcome the structured inequalities in social power. These structured differences in participation apply to the many categories of social hierarchy and oppression – relating to class, sex, colour, age, religion, nationality, physical well being, and sexual orientation. These categories are often intertwined and mutually determinant – the categories of race and class in the Caribbean being one obvious example. This chapter will focus on aspects of differential participation between men and women, but we could just as well develop parallel studies of other groups.

Different possibilities, capacities, and modes of participation by men and women are the outcome of the structures of women's oppression and the ideology and practices of male domination. There are two aspects to this problem of differential participation. First are the ways that existing structures and ideologies relating to women's oppression have tended to marginalize women in many economic and political institutions or have shaped the practice of participatory institutions. This aspect, as we shall see, can be addressed theoretically by an extension of a participatory democratic theory or what we might call critical liberal democratic theory to deal explicitly with issues of sex.

The second, which we will look at later, is more fundamental. It is my belief that the underlying problem shaping differential participation is not inequality between men and women in the narrow sense but the very conception of power that has become hegemonic in today's patriarchal societies through-

out the world. This is a definition in which power is understood as the capacity of certain humans to control and dominate other humans and control social and natural resources. Such a conception of power is not simply a matter of ideology but is the organizing principle that is embedded in a vast range of political, social, and economic relations. While it shapes the capacity of all humans to participate, men's capacities have been less limited than women's to exercise power in this form. Nonetheless, as we shall see, men's own capacities for participation are distorted and limited through this process. In other words differential participation negatively affects men as well as women, although differentially, of course and, in most cases, not as severely.

### **Women and the Dynamics of Differential Participation**

Men's overall social domination is reproduced within participatory and democratic bodies, bodies which are supposed to be a means for all of the population to be equally represented or involved in democratic processes. In both sheer numbers and positions of importance, men control political parties and trade unions, government bureaucracies and many voluntary organizations. Other social institutions that we might like to bring under democratic control – corporations, the media, the education system, and so forth – are similarly controlled by men, although for this paper I will focus on the explicitly political and governmental institutions, especially those at the local level.

This control by men is perpetuated in different ways. The most obvious is that men still tend to be valued more highly as social leaders than are women. For example, in Cuba as of 1986, only 17 percent of delegates to the municipal government – the Organs of Popular Power – were women, a figure typical or even high compared to other countries. Commenting on the results of his study of the electoral process in the municipality of Santa Cruz, researcher Haroldo Dilla suggests with only a some hyperbole that the women who managed to win seats have a level of education, political and work experience three times as great as their male opponents.<sup>3</sup>

This valuation of men's abilities over women's as social leaders can have the impact of reducing men's participation in organizations where women do play an important role. The Dominican Republic, for example, hosts a range of social movements that do organizing work and education in the poor barrios of the cities. In some of these groups women make up a majority of the membership and leadership. This majority can be self-reproducing because the response by some men is that they are not interested in participating in what are perceived as women's organizations. These organizations have had

to encourage men to participate in spite of the high percentage of women in the membership and leadership.<sup>4</sup>

In societies where the work that men tend to do and the qualities that men have nurtured are valued most highly, men have an automatic advantage in any electoral process or for positions of leadership within community and national bodies. In one example, also drawn from our Cuban study, a woman and a man were opponents for a seat in the municipal assembly. The woman had lived in the community only three years but in that time ‘had developed a notable prestige for her social sensitivities and her high level of community work. Her opponent, a man born in the area, was a leader in a factory where many of the people in the area worked. His prestige came basically from this work relationship, according to interviews with voters. The man won the vote. The study doesn’t say he was a bad choice, although it is implied that the woman was a better choice because of higher capabilities as a community leader. Rather it is making the point that the existing structures of social prestige and power reproduce themselves within the electoral process: ‘The status of leadership in a work centre helped reproduce masculine supremacy in the community setting.’<sup>5</sup>

Overall social values shape the conception of the electoral process itself. In Cuba the only written form of campaign literature is a biographical sketch of each candidate which is posted in the neighbourhood to show his or her capacities to carry out the job. Education, work, and political experience form the centrepiece of these sketches. Those capacities that can be quantified in terms of experience will have weight over other qualities that can not be listed. This format, concludes Dilla and co-researcher Armando Fernández, ‘tends to privilege adults and those who are male because they are able to demonstrate the richest level of participation in politics and work and, on the other hand, it tends to penalize women because of their double workday as members of the community and as the ones responsible for the family.’<sup>6</sup>

The same privileging is true in other cases of electoral democracy where the qualities that are valued in a leader have traditionally been those values that men have nurtured or the areas of skill and prestige that men have had greater access to. Such privileging is also seen in cases where substantial financial resources are a requirement of candidacy, a requirement that has a major impact on the possibility of a woman being a candidate (as well as anyone who is working class, a small farmer, poor or young.)

This process of penalization of women goes beyond formal electoral processes. If women have most responsibility for childcare and domestic work, especially if they also have work responsibilities outside the home, then they

will be hard pressed to find the time or the energy to prioritize leadership roles within the community. If women have to clean dinner dishes and put children to bed at night, or if in some countries they are scrounging for a scrap of food for the next day to feed their children, they are less able to participate fully in community meetings which typically happen in the evenings or on weekends. These demands, and the resultant limitations on women's participation, is a story repeated throughout the world and forms the single major impediment for women's participation in political organizations.

Forms of blatant sexism also limit women's participation. In Costa Rica, where a squatters housing movement arose during the 1980s, land was occupied and the government was pressured to give squatters land and supplies to build modest houses. In the months or years of organizing that would lead up to an occupation and in the subsequent negotiations with politicians and civil servants, women played an increasingly important role in many communities. Many occupations were backed by roadblocks of key highways – roadblocks staffed by women and children that lasted only a day until the government would agree to negotiate. Despite this role by women, some men placed limits – or tried to place limits – on their wife's participation. They were jealous of their wife going to town with another man from the community or meeting with, and possibly having a meal with, a politician or bureaucrat. Some women struggled against this, others didn't.<sup>7</sup> Similar problems arise in the self-help economic organizations of poor women in the *poblaciones* in Chile. In these communities where material deprivation is high and the threat of political repression was an ever-present feature for two decades, various forms of workshops emerged to produce goods for consumption or trade. Veronica Schild comments:

'Housewives who decide to join the workshop have, more often than not, done so after having waged a battle at home for "permission" to join. How very difficult it is for a woman to take part in an organization has been illustrated by Filomena, a young mother of two who is active both in a Church group and in the women's group in the Southern *Población*: "When there is a meeting, and the husbands are at home, even if they are chatting at the corner with friends from the club, the women's can't go".'<sup>8</sup>

We can also think of the horrible impact of violence against women on women's participation. If a woman is one of many to suffer from wife battering (and studies in North America, for example, suggest about one in four women have been hit by their spouse with a smaller, but still sizeable number, being assaulted on an ongoing basis) her self-confidence and sense of self-worth might well be reduced. As a result, her ability to see herself as a contributor to society, as someone worthy of respect, as someone with a valid

voice might well be limited. Or if women in the community are subject to sexual harassment or derogatory remarks in public, this too will reduce their capacity to act as community leaders. Finally, fear for safety in the streets at night will limit women's participation outside the home.

Perhaps the most subtle but also most telling example of differential participation is the extent to which the whole problem of differential participation is rendered invisible. Of those oppressed, marginalized, or subordinate, their presence or absence in the democratic and participatory organizations is often rendered invisible. Because their specific concerns have been treated as secondary in the dominant economic and political discourses, we cannot assume that their concerns are addressed in existing forms of social expression, including within forms of popular participation.

In spite of such examples, the notion of differential participation isn't meant to imply that men participate and women don't.<sup>9</sup> After all, one of the characteristics of many community-based, grass-roots movements of popular power is the high percentage of women among the active membership. The experience in much of the Third World is of women taking a leadership role within community affairs. Some of this might be explained by the greater presence of women within communities during the day. This, however, isn't the only factor for the communities where grass-roots/community organizing is highest are often poor communities with high levels of unemployment among men and, in some cases, a relatively equal level of paid employment by women and by men, particularly when one counts the informal sector.

Another factor is thus of importance: the impact of women's traditional role as caregivers to children and as the ones responsible for domestic affairs. For women, these responsibilities can build an awareness of issues concerning health, education, food supplies, water and sewage, garbage disposal, and community safety. Participation in community organizations is an extension of overall roles and responsibilities. The daily work of making ends meet, the preoccupation with the health and safety of the family, worrying about those unglamorous details of daily life, are matters that many men simply are not concerned about. In some parts of Central America and the Caribbean, for example, this lack of concern has the extreme expression in the large number of men who abandon their families or who come and go as they see fit.

Women have traditionally created many forms of informal networking to organize matters of daily life – neighbours look after each other's children while one shops or takes a child to a doctor; neighbours shop for each other or sew together; they speak on the street, in the home, or at the market about their common problems; in many countries, women set up informal cooperative savings networks. The very factors of crowding onto small lots where climate

allows for dwellings where front doors and windows (if the houses actually have windows) always stay open, can increase informal contact among neighbours. Thus the formal organization of workshops, neighbourhood organizations, or community political action groups is a logical extension of these networking activities.

Perhaps another reason for women's high representation in community affairs is that within both the political systems and forms of popular organization in First and Third World countries alike, matters of health, food, social services, and education have tended to be seen by men as less prestigious endeavors for male political leadership than the supposedly-gutsy tasks of business and workplace organization, international diplomacy, the army, police, and large-scale economic and infrastructural development. One reason for women's role in community affairs is that men have abdicated responsibility.

If these are some dimensions of the problem of differential, how might they be addressed?

### **Critical Liberal Democratic Theory and Differential Participation**

Emerging within a democratic socialist tradition over the past three decades, a new body of thought has recast the debate on socialism and democracy. Until that time, socialists had been split into two broad camps on this issue, to be rather simplistic:

1. Many Marxists more or less axiomatically equated democracy with socialism. Capitalism could boast only a sham democracy; without state or popular ownership of the means of production, there could be no real democracy; liberal democracy was democracy only for the ruling class. Within this camp were Stalinists who ignored democracy because socialism, ergo democracy, had already been achieved in half of Europe and Asia. Others, such as Trotskyists or non-aligned Marxists, argued these countries were neither socialist nor democratic, but tended to agree that capitalist societies were not democratic either.

2. The other broad camp was the social democratic left which saw the liberal democratic state as the vehicle for social change and for making gains for working people. This tradition tended to downplay the Marxist critique of the social power of capital and ignored the critique of the capitalist nature of state. However the two traditions were united, as Nicos Poulantzas argued, by posing a statist solution and a statist pathway to socialism and democracy.<sup>10</sup>



In the 1960s, the writings of C.B. Macpherson began to recast the debate on socialism and democracy. Macpherson's goal was modest but innovative: to look at the different, and sometimes contradictory, meanings of liberalism and liberal democracy, and to retrieve for socialist theory one strain of liberal democratic thought. Macpherson reaffirmed the liberal democratic goal of individual development, but said that the goal of achieving one's potential was hindered by the socio-economic and political realities of a capitalist market society.<sup>11</sup>

Together, quite a number of theorists and activists – inspired in part by new social movements that stressed issues of democracy and mass participation, and, in the late 1980s, by the upheavals in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union – have recast the debate on socialism and democracy. Without getting into the differences among these thinkers, or the strengths, weaknesses, and complexity of the debate, we can lump together their work under the rubric of critical liberal democratic theory or participatory democratic theory. Among the elements in this approach that I find most useful are these: The belief that all societies have at least some degree of democracy at some level of social, economic, or political life. Thus, says Frank Cunningham, we must look at the degree of democracy of any society and not assume, *a priori*, that a certain economic system is, or is not, automatically democratic. Nonetheless, the challenge is to develop what Cunningham calls an *extensive democracy*.<sup>12</sup>

The point developed in different ways by many thinkers is that a society with an extensive democracy would be one in which democratic control permeates all social relationships: in terms of formal liberal democratic political rights and liberties; within different realms of social life – in education, the family and home, the media, religion, cultural production; and through the control of the economy, in part through public and cooperative ownership and control of the means of production and distribution (although certainly not through complete statization and bureaucratic centralization of the economy) and in part through democratic control over whatever forms of private ownership might remain.

This whole approach to the issue of democracy is an attempt to understand the complex of economic, political, and social coordinates which structure domination and control in a society. For example, the approach taken by Herbert Gintis and Samuel Bowles, inspired in part by both Gramscian and feminist analyses, seeks to understand the ways in which the economy, the family, and the state all have appropriative, distributive, political, and cultural aspects that need to be brought under democratic control.<sup>13</sup>

The possibility of developing extensive and intensive forms of democracy relies on the empowerment of the population – the word empowerment

probably being the most significant contribution of the English language to the radical vocabulary. While most writers tend to shy away from anything that seems overly prescriptive, a common feature of much of the discourse on democracy, socialism, and empowerment is a recognition of the need to develop forms of popular participation. Popular participation, through social activism and forms of direct and representative control throughout the institutions of a society, is seen as a means to tap unharnessed energies of the population, to identify human and material resources, to recognize problems as they emerge, and to mobilize the population to find solutions, whether at a workplace, school, neighbourhood, region, or beyond. While popular participation has been a theme with deep roots in the progressive tradition, the failure of state socialism and the limits of state social democracy, have given new urgency to this theme. Democratic participation was a means, said Macpherson, to turn people from political consumers into political producers.<sup>14</sup>

But what if everyone cannot participate equally? What if among the economically oppressed, the existing social structures of inequality and oppression have selectively shaped the nature and structure of oppression?

As we have seen, the unevenness of power in a society is reproduced as differences within any neighbourhood or workplace. Even when some sort of participatory institutions exist, to the extent these institutions reflect the overall divisions and contradictions of a society, these institutions do not automatically challenge deeply-embedded hierarchies of power and control.

This suggests that in any participatory institution there will be differences, large or small, in the nature and type of participation of particular individuals and groups. These differences are based not only on individual capacities, talents, or efforts. They are based on the systemic forms of power and hierarchy which exist within a given community. If new forms of popular participation continue to marginalize the voice of women or certain racial groups or peasants or the young, then we would have to question the extent to which these institutions are truly 'popular.'

The greater are these inequalities, the less real is the actual participation. The greater are these inequalities, the less is the capacity of a given institution to act as a means of empowerment. The less it can act as a means of participation and empowerment, the less it will be able to confront fundamental inequalities of social power.

In as much as critical liberal democratic theory problematized the issue of economic inequality and differential access to the means of political power, it began to challenge both the theoretical and the structural limits of mainstream liberal democratic theory. It did, however, largely ignore these issues of unequal participation based on sex. Although this is an important oversight, it is one that can be addressed within its own theoretical framework.

After all, the aim of this body of theory is to redress inequalities of social power and social voice. The analysis and solutions presented by critical liberal democratic theory/participatory democratic theory are able to address those aspects of differential participation having to do with various forms of inequality or unevenness of power among the oppressed or exploited.

If the goal of a radical, participatory liberal democracy is to develop the social, intellectual, and productive possibilities of all, if it is to be a means of human liberation, then we don't have to go far to see that so long as one group has its capacities limited by being born into one half of humanity rather than the other, then this is not a society of full human liberation. It is consistent with such theory that democratic and participatory bodies address the issues of full participation. Women's equality within such bodies is a requirement if these institutions are to do their basic emancipatory and participatory job. The possibility of such participation hinges on women's equality throughout social and economic structures, the equalization of household responsibilities so women are able to participate, the de-privileging of the particular skills or capacities that men have excelled in, and conscious programmes to ensure equal participation by women and men.

In reverse, incremental changes in the participation of women can challenge men and can shift other responsibilities. For example, a woman in the small city of Bayamo in the eastern part of Cuba told me of the results of her increased participation in various community and trade union bodies. She went to her husband and said he'd have to take more responsibility around the house. He was reluctant and used the excuse of not knowing how to cook or do this or that. She pushed him and within a few months he was showing considerable pride at his new-found skills. A half a year later she heard him arguing with his brother-in-law about how he should be doing his share of the housework. His inlaw refused but the husband persisted and finally the brother-in-law broke down and agreed to do some of the cleaning. Similarly, in the Costa Rican example cited at the beginning, the increased role of women as leaders and militants within the neighbourhood organizations has led to increased prestige and self-esteem for women.

### **Patriarchy, Power, and Differential Participation**

Equality, though, is not enough. Equality equalizes the chances for participation and individual development. But, narrowly defined, equality doesn't necessarily address the rules of the game. A woman can become Prime Minister or the head of a trade union or corporation – and this may affect certain policies

– but her role won't likely touch the underlying structures and assumptions of that organization or system.

Thus the second aspect of differential participation is that participatory and democratic structures reflect not only the inequality between men and women (or other social groups) but also the centuries-old outcome of that inequality. Patriarchal societies split those values that came to be associated with women and those associated with men. Of these, the outlook and beliefs of men have become hegemonic, reflecting men's overall social power. The conceptions that frame the exercise of power are themselves rooted in a particular structure of oppression. Certain conceptions of power that have been championed by men become part of the common sense assumptions of a society, the way things are done. Not only would a certain view of power infect the hegemonic social institutions, but without a conscious challenge to the exercise of patriarchal power, it will infect counter-hegemonic institutions as well. Let me very briefly address this, the second, aspect of differential participation.

Although we might be creating new structures for the redistribution and exercise of power, we are developing structures that in their very conception will be based on a conception of power we are all familiar with. Power, at least in the way we understand it in developed societies, is shaped by uneven human and social relationships. We think we cannot have power unless we have control either over someone, over our own unruly emotions, or over certain material resources. Power, in this conception, is based on control and domination. It is based on our ability to exploit differences within human relationships; power is a measure of those differences. To have power means to have a greater control over resources or a greater control over other people or oneself than does someone else. Power becomes the capacity to dominate others, ourselves, and the world around us.

Of course there are alternate ways to understand power; there are other ways that we experience it. Power could be thought of as a positive connection with nature and the world around us; as a fluid understanding of our capacities, abilities and limitations; as a sense of what we can achieve and how we can positively influence and live in harmony with the social and natural world around us. There is the power to meet our basic needs as humans, power to fight injustice and oppression, the power of muscles and brain, the power of love. All men and women, to a greater or lesser extent, experience these other meanings of power. Whatever are our individual limitations, we are all complex and diverse human beings.

In spite of these diverse ways to experience power, I believe that the dominant conception of power in our world is a capacity to dominate and

control. It is a definition of power that has emerged over thousands of years in societies where a series of divisions have been important bases of social organization: divisions based on the control by certain minority classes over economic resources and politics, control of men over women, and, in some cases, control by one ethnic, colour or religious grouping over others. It is only logical that human beings within these societies learn to experience their own power as their inborn or learned capacity to succeed within such a world.<sup>15</sup>

This has important implications for the concept of differential participation. The uneven capacities of men and women to be participants and leaders in democratic and participatory institutions is not only a result of sexism and inequality in the narrow sense. It is also the result of the different values that men and women have internalized as they have created their gendered self-identities. If men are dominant within these societies they will have greater resources, but just as importantly, they will have a greater stake in achieving and experiencing a certain type of power. Power as control is equated with the hegemonic conceptions of masculinity – however different masculinity is defined among different classes, national, or colour groupings.<sup>16</sup> Achieving and experiencing this type of power becomes a confirmation of one's manhood.

By learning the rules to become 'real men' (however our own social grouping defines such a thing) and by going through the prolonged social and psychological process of creating one's masculinity, many men derive a built-in advantage as social actors because they come to embrace, identify with, and celebrate the type of social actor and social action most highly valued in a given, male-dominated society. Whether it is expressed through the power of words, force of personality, or physical domination, they embrace a certain definition of power. In turn they create social institutions which embody this notion of power within which the next generation of men and women are shaped. Because men embody a certain definition of power, they are more likely than women to have the personal attributes and outlook necessary to succeed in the social institutions men have created.

Our social institutions, both more democratic and less democratic, participatory or not, will, to a greater or lesser extent, embody the conception of power that is dominant in a given society. It is not simply that there exists a hegemonic understanding of power, but that this is part of the basis for the way we conceive of and develop our democratic and participatory bodies. The structure and function of these bodies are themselves a particular discourse on power and its exercise.

For example, dominant views of social mobilization reflect this discourse on the exercise of power. Many experiments of more or less radical social change have included elements of popular mobilization. In most con-

ceptions, a radical government or political militants see their role as educators and mobilizers who attempt to draw into action the mass of the population. Leaders know that to counter the power of the national and international status quo and the weight of tradition, the energy of the population must be directed towards supporting the new measures being promoted by the government. People are exhorted to work harder and to participate in everything from demonstrations to voluntary work projects.

This type of mobilization can have a positive impact on the process of change, but it remains, essentially, a process in which an enlightened and paternalistic leadership mobilizes a population to follow the well-meaning plans of that leadership. What is lacking, is a process in which relations of power are shifted between leadership and led. What is lacking – or at least is kept tightly controlled – is a practice of mobilization in which people are given the tools and the resources to take control and power into their own hands. The population remains political consumers – albeit of a beneficial and often enlightened and popular system – rather than political producers. The result of this is a limitation of the possibilities of social transformation, a huge reduction in the possibility to mobilize the creative energies that lie dormant in the mass of the population. The result is also that as circumstances change – for example, as an economic crisis intensifies or as foreign destabilization or war takes its toll – it becomes increasingly hard to mobilize the population behind a government because people's doubts increase and energies wane. Faith in a government, however popular and well-meaning, can not last forever.

These problems results from many factors, but one of the most important is an essentially paternalistic conception and style of leadership, an approach that sees the exercise of political, economic, or social power as something that can be (and, in some conceptions, should be) in the hands of a skilled technocracy, a powerful bureaucracy, or a trusted political directorate.<sup>17</sup>

What impact does all this have on the differential participation of men and women in participatory bodies? The overall result, as indicated above, is that men more than women come to embody the definitions of power most prized in a society. This not only allows them greater access to positions of leadership, but it gives them a greater personal stake in becoming militants and leaders: after all if a certain definition of power is equated with masculinity, then social leadership in itself can become a confirmation of ones male power.

Beyond this I am still finding it difficult to be concrete on the impact of a certain definition of power on differential participation. This is an area where more research and thinking needs to be done. But it might explain the particu-

lar rhythms to women's participation within processes of social mobilization. Magaly Pineda points to a 'higher presence of women in certain violent actions in acute moments of a crisis or in pre-revolutionary situations (such as in the last years of the Somoza dictatorship or in April 1984 in the Dominican Republic) but a subsequent reduction of women's presence in the organizational structures that grow out of these actions.'

As with the majority of men, women's participation peaks in periods of extreme social conflict. More particularly, argues Pineda, women seem to participate when 'there doesn't exist any possibility of mediation between civil society and the state.' Perhaps the change in participation is, in part, because women see mediation as a principle means of eliminating conflicts unless all else fails.<sup>18</sup>

In other words, if women haven't fully embraced or identified with the hegemonic definition of power in patriarchal societies, their interest and identification with certain political bodies and activities may well be limited. Such things may be important to these women, but might seem one step removed from the lived experiences of women and their own social knowledge that might well be based more on mediation and cooperation than on domination and control.<sup>19</sup>

Coupled with this is the outcome of the first aspect of differential participation. Pineda suggests that the structures of participation 'are not sufficiently flexible to accommodate the possibility of women's participation, or that the structures fail to express women's interests, or simply that the roles assigned to women – in particular the care of children and housework – make it impossible for them to sustain their participation.'<sup>20</sup>

These issues of power, and the structures we create for the exercise of power, have implications for other instances of differential participation. For example, although youth may play a prominent role in periods of intense social mobilization, participatory bodies often privilege older people. The lower participation of youth was noted in the Cuban study cited above and also in the study of Community Councils and community-based economic organizations in Jamaica.<sup>21</sup> Young people, by definition, can not have the same power as adults if power is understood as control over material and human resources. The same is true of other oppressed or exploited groups.

## **Men and Differential Participation**

Let me conclude with a brief comment on men and differential participation: The problem of differential participation is not just a women's problem. Differential participation is a description of the different character, dynamics, and possibilities of men's and women's participation within bodies of political,

economic, and social decision-making. It is also a description of the way that these bodies have embodied a definition of power that is rooted within the values of a male dominated society.

As I have argued elsewhere,<sup>22</sup> the values and structures of men's power have been oppressive not only to women and destructive to the planet, but have been detrimental to men themselves. Men have, I believe, contradictory experiences of power. The very ways that men have defined our power and privileges come with a price to men. That price is an alienation from many of our human capacities and possibilities as we try to fit into the straightjacket of hegemonic forms of masculinity. Until recently in male-dominated societies, the powers and privilege of men outweighed the price, or at least made the price feel acceptable. You might have to die in the metaphorical or real battles of life, but what glory and rewards you would reap in the meantime. But with the rise of modern feminism the fulcrum has shifted, certain powers and privileges have been diminished in some societies, and men are increasingly aware of the costs to men of men's power. Even without self-consciousness of the problem, we could argue that if the hegemonic forms of masculinity include an alienation from our own capacities and possibilities, then the liberal democratic vision of full and free human development is not being fulfilled. This doesn't mean there is one natural form of human freedom and development, but simply that a vast range of possibilities are shut down for men who must squeeze themselves into the tight pants of masculinity. The developmental objective of liberalism has its gender dimension not only for women but for men.

Men, like women, are affected by the two aspects of differential participation. By privileging 'high' and prestigious positions of state, economic and social power we tend to distance ourselves from the demands of community, children, and domestic life that form so much of the pleasures, difficulties, and texture of human life. By the styles that we use to participate – developing forms based on competition, one-up-manship, and the star system, whether in state bodies, political parties, academia, or popular organizations – we reinforce the competitive, hierarchical, success-oriented, performance-oriented values of class and patriarchal society. We reinforce and validate the characteristics of masculinity that are, simultaneously the source of our power and of our own pain and alienation as men.

By the way we have come to define power, we set up a situation where most men can't have actual power, something even more true for women, even though men within an given class or social group tend to have power over women of the same group. But because men equate the exercise of a



certain type of power with masculinity, to lack power is to be inadequate as a man. The way that we have defined power becomes a source of unconscious insecurity and inner tension. It is the source of performance and success anxieties that distort men's lives at work, in politics, on the streets, and at home. Men direct these anxieties at women and children in their lives, at other men, and at themselves, as seen in the unconscious doubts or even self-hate, the alcoholism, workaholism, and ulcers, that are part of the lives of many men.

To the extent that participatory and democratic bodies do not break from the hierarchical, competitive forms of the exercise of power, they are not only less functional as participatory mechanisms but they work against the empowerment of the women and men who are supposed to benefit in the first place.

In conclusion, if differential participation is a reality of all existing democratic and participatory institutions, then it is a reality that is in need of change. We are able to address the problem of differential participation partially through an extension of the theoretical and practical frameworks of critical liberal democracy/participatory democracy to include sex and other determinants of inequality. Just as important, though, is to challenge the received conceptions, and institutions, of power. Taken together, this provides a means to reach down to the roots of social disempowerment. It is a step towards developing an extensive and participatory democracy with a true, liberatory potential.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The Costa Rican example is drawn from a November 1990 visit to La Nazeno along with Silvia Lara of the Centro de Estudios para la Acción Social. The Cuban example is from a November 1988 visit to the community and from Haroldo Dilla and Armando Fernández Soriano, 'Las elecciones municipales en Cuba: un estudio de caso', Working paper on Organizaciones de Poder Comunal y Democracia Popular en America Central y el Caribe, Centro de Estudios Sobre America, 1990. The Haitian example is from discussions with Rony and Luc Smarth in Port-au-Prince.

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<sup>2</sup> I developed the notion of 'differential participation' in conversation with Magaly Pineda, Director of the Centro de Investigación para la Acción Femininina (CIPAF) in Santo Domingo. In November 1988 we co-authored a working paper, 'Methodological Issues and Research Questions for Studying Differential Participation,' Working Paper on Organizations of Community Power and Grass-Roots Democracy in Central America and the Caribbean, CERLAC, 1988. Some formulations in this present article are taken from my sections of that working paper. I thank Magaly for her

contribution to the development of this idea and permission to draw from our working paper. References to her sections of that document are cited in footnotes.

<sup>3</sup> Percentages of women delegates to provincial assemblies and the National Assembly are higher (30.8 per cent and 33.9 per cent respectively as of 1986.) This is the result of conscious policies of affirmative action for women. Such policies can work at this level because these elections are indirect, that is voting is by the municipal assembly and the provincial assembly respectively. Electoral statistics from Asamblea Nacional del Poder Popular, 'Información mínima sobre los procesos electorales en los Organos del Poder Popular,' Ciudad Habana, Junio de 1987. This comment is from a discussion with Haroldo Dilla. See also Haroldo Dilla and Armando Fernández Soriano, *op. cit.*

<sup>4</sup> Discussions with César Pérez of the Instituto Tecnológico de Santo Domingo and leaders of various social movements. Santo Domingo, February 1991.

<sup>5</sup> Dilla and Fernández, *op.cit.*, 30-31, my translation.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>7</sup> Discussions with community members and with Silvia Lara, San José.

<sup>8</sup> Veronica Schild, 'The Hidden Politics of Neighbourhood Organizations: Women and Local Level Participation in the Poblaciones of Chiles,' elsewhere in this volume.

<sup>9</sup>This and the following few paragraphs developed in discussion with Magaly Pineda.

<sup>10</sup>We can add that both were united by other factors: One was a faith in the capacity to turn a capitalist mode of production into a socialist mode of production by a simple change of ownership (and, in some versions, control) without addressing the technology or what I call the social-ecosystem that emerged with capitalist industry. Linked to this was a rationalist, scientific belief in finding technological fixes to human problems. The other common element was, as I argue below, an acceptance of the conception of power hegemonic within patriarchal societies. On Poulantzas, see his article, "Towards a Democratic socialism," *New Left Review* 109 (May-June 1978):75-87.

<sup>11</sup>Among Macpherson's works on the subject see his *Democratic Theory* (Oxford University Press 1973), and his own excellent summary of his thinking, *The Life and Times of Liberal Democracy* (Oxford University Press 1977).

<sup>12</sup> Frank Cunningham, *Democratic Theory and Socialism*, Cambridge University Press, 1977.

<sup>13</sup> In their excellent book, *Democracy and Capitalism* (Basic Books, 1986) Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis have written of "a mosaic of domination." This term is inspired by the debates emerging out of a Gramscian position and by the theoretical contribution of modern feminism.

<sup>14</sup> Macpherson, 1977. Participation, of course, is a handy and rather innocuous term that can mean anything to anyone. Over the past two decades it has become part of the bland language of international aidmanship. Definitions of participation have a hard time twinning the notion of participation with actual control and empowerment. Many conceptions of participation ignore what is for me the key question: the issue is

not simply whether or not certain groups participate, but *whether the mass of the population has the means to define the terms and nature of their participation.*

One of many sources of confusion in the debates on participation is that participation-as-empowerment is both a goal of change and a method of change. As a *goal*, popular participation ultimately refers to the organization of society in which there no longer exists a monopoly over the means of political, economic, and social power by a particular class, sex, race, social strata, or a bureaucratic elite. As a *method of change*, participation is a means to develop the voice and organizational capacity of those previously excluded. It is a means for the majority of the population to express their needs and to contribute directly to the solving of social problems.

<sup>15</sup> This and the two previous paragraphs on power are based on passages from Michael Kaufman, *Cracking the Armor: Power, Pain, and the Lives of Men* (Toronto: Viking Canada, 1993) and from Michael Kaufman, "Men, Feminism, and Men's Contradictory Experiences of Power," in Harry Brod and Michael Kaufman, editors, *Theorizing Masculinities* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1994) pp: 142-163.

<sup>16</sup> Current research on men and masculinity starts with a concern raised within the feminist literature and is speaking of different masculinities. Within these different masculinities, one can think of hegemonic versions of masculinity, to use Bob Connell's phrase. See R. W. Connell, *Gender and Power*, Stanford University Press, 1987. See also Harry Brod and Michael Kaufman, eds. *Theorizing Masculinities*, op. cit.

<sup>17</sup> I have written about the themes of the past few paragraphs in my book *Jamaica Under Manley: Dilemmas of Socialism and Democracy* (London: Zed Books, 1985). See especially the concluding two chapters.

<sup>18</sup> From Pineda's section of Michael Kaufman and Magaly Pineda, "Issues and Research Questions for Studying Differential Participation," Working Paper on Organizations of Community Power and Grass-Roots Democracy in Central America and the Caribbean, CERLAC, 1988.

<sup>19</sup>Such things are not a biological imperative, nor absolute qualities of all women vs. all men. To the extent they exist they are tendencies relating to the power relationships, the psychological realities and the lived experiences of many women in male dominated societies. I do not believe that females are naturally more peaceful or peace loving than males.

<sup>20</sup> Pineda, op. cit.

<sup>21</sup> In his study of Walkerswood Community Development Foundation, a participatory body open to all members of this small community, Ian Boxill notes that young people complain that "not enough consideration is given to their ideas and views." Ian Boxill, "Case Studies of Walkerswood Community Development Foundation and Augustown Community Council," Working paper on Organizations of Community Power and Grass-Roots Democracy in Central America and the Caribbean, Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of the West Indies, Mona, 1988.

<sup>22</sup>Michael Kaufman, *Cracking the Armor: Power, Pain and the Lives of Men*, op. cit.; "The Construction of Masculinity and the Triad of Men's Violence", in *Beyond Patriarchy: Essays by Men on Pleasure, Power and Change* (Oxford University Press 1987); and "Men, Feminism, and Men's Contradictory Experiences of Power."