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Liberal vs Liberating Empowerment: Conceptualising Women's Empowerment from a Latin American Feminist Perspective¹

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The term 'women's empowerment' is viewed with a certain amount of distrust by feminists in Latin America. There has been some ambiguity surrounding the term in the region and in some cases it has been appropriated to legitimise actions that may not actually empower. This paper reflects on feminist conceptualisations of empowerment and how the process is believed to unfold. It outlines two basic approaches to conceptualising empowerment: 'liberal' and 'liberating' empowerment. It argues that 'liberal' empowerment depoliticises the process by taking the 'power' out of the equation, whilst 'liberating' empowerment keeps power as the central issue. The latter approach is consistent with the Latin American tradition of collective action and, in conclusion, the paper contends that empowerment in its 'liberating' form has been at work in the region since at least the late 1970s.

1. Introduction

Since the early 1980s, feminists in Latin America have been involved in a range of different programmes and activities aimed at promoting women's empowerment, but have yet to produce much in terms of frameworks to analyse this process at work. Tracing and reflecting upon the advancements of feminist activism throughout the region has been an important focus for analysis (Alvarez 1997; Alvarez *et al.* 2002; Lavrin 1998; Stephen 1997; Sternbach *et al.* 1992; Craske 2000; Razavi 2000). However, little thinking has gone into depicting how the flow of power/empowerment has travelled back and forth between individuals, groups and institutions, and thus towards linking major gains at the macro-institutional level with real changes in the lives of women in different social contexts. As such, feminist thinking in the region is still lacking in analysis of the linkages – as well discontinuities – between individual agency, collective action and structural transformation, and how these operate in processes of women's empowerment and the eradication of patriarchal domination.

Of course, one must always exercise caution when generalising about Latin America; it comprises more than twenty countries significantly diverse in social, economic, political and cultural terms and historical traditions (Lavrin 1998). Nevertheless, it is a continent known for its long history of 'resistance and dissent' and an equally 'vibrant history of political, revolutionary and social movements' (Code 2003: 289; see also Escobar and Alvarez 1992). It also has a long and distinctive practice of activism and action that takes a radical perspective on empowerment, arising not only out of the strength of social movements in the region, but also from the influence of leftist thinkers such as Paulo Freire, and even the progressive wing of the Catholic



church. Considering the region's long history of women's activism in this context, a discussion of Latin American conceptualisations of women's empowerment should produce some useful insights.

Although the term 'empowerment' is still considered a new and foreign term in both Portuguese (*'empoderamento'*) and in Spanish (*'empoderamiento'*), it has been widely employed throughout Latin America.² Like in other places, however, it is used by a wide range of social actors with significantly different ideological and political positions to denote an array of different meanings. As Srilatha Batliwala comments (1994: 1): 'It is one of the most loosely-used terms in the development lexicon, meaning different things to different people – or, more dangerously, all things to all people.' As a consequence, there is a lot of mistrust in relation to the term 'empowerment', particularly on the part of Latin American feminists, as it has been appropriated by mainstream agencies and organisations, as well as by national and local governments, to legitimise policies and practices that, from a feminist perspective, are far from being really empowering for women.³

Formulating a framework to investigate processes of women's empowerment at play in Latin America clearly requires clarification of what is meant by 'empowerment'. In this paper, I want to reflect upon feminist conceptualisations of women's empowerment and how this process is believed to unfold, in view of Latin American experiences. In so doing, I will be speaking from the perspective of a Brazilian feminist engaged in activism and practice as well as in 'academic feminism' for nearly three decades. That is to say, I will attempt to analyse a praxis in which I myself have been involved (Durham 1986: 26). Moreover, I am aware that, as Teresa de Lauretis (1986: 4) reminds us, '(...) there is no real boundary between feminism and what is external to it; no boundary separates or insulates feminism from other social practices or makes it impervious to the institutions of civil

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society'. This means that just as feminist-coined concepts, such as 'gender' for instance, have been appropriated and re-signified in development discourse, so too development agendas and concepts have permeated feminist thinking about women's empowerment, making it difficult to draw the line between the two.⁴

Of course, feminisms come in all different brands (the denominations are many), as do feminist perspectives regarding women's empowerment. By the same token, there is no consensus in development discourse and praxis on the meaning of 'empowerment' and interpretations can be inconsistent even within the same agency or organisation (Alsop *et al.* 2006; Oakley 2001). Despite this diversity, it is possible to distinguish two basic approaches to conceptualising women's empowerment. The first, which I identify here as the 'liberal empowerment' approach, regards women's empowerment as an instrument for development priorities, be they the eradication of poverty or the building of democracy.⁵ Consistent with liberal ideals, the focus in this approach is on individual growth, but in an atomistic way, that is, the notion of the rational action of social actors based on individual interests (Romano 2002). Moreover, as I will argue later, it is an approach which de-politicises the process of empowerment by taking 'power' out of the equation. Instead, the focus is on technical and instrumental aspects which can supposedly be 'taught' in special training courses, for example.

In contrast, in the other approach – which I shall here term 'liberating empowerment' – power relations are the central issue. Women's empowerment is perceived as desirable both on 'intrinsic grounds' (Kabeer 1999), as the process by which women conquer autonomy or self-determination, as well as instrumentally for the eradication of patriarchy. Thus empowerment is simultaneously an instrument for social transformation and an end in and of itself, as it entails women's liberation from the chains of



gender oppression. Thus, though feminists also aspire to end poverty, wars, and build democratic states, in this feminist perspective the major objective of women's empowerment is to question, destabilise and eventually transform the gender order of patriarchal domination. Such an approach is consistent with a focus on women's organising and collective action, while also valuing women's empowerment as individuals. This is precisely how feminists in Latin America conceptualise empowerment (León 1997), even if not always explicitly employing the term in their discourse.

2. Feminisms, Power and Women's Empowerment

A notion of 'power' is central to conceptualisations of empowerment. However, notions of power vary considerably and are usually not explicitly outlined. Understandings of power and empowerment come from very different movements and traditions, being appropriated and re-signified by agencies and organisations that do not necessarily have the interests of these movements at heart (Oxaal and Baden 1997: 1). Besides, even within these different movements and traditions, notions of power have changed significantly over time. This is not surprising since power has been one of the most contested concepts in social and political theory. Two basic positions mark this ongoing debate. Whereas some authors have defended the notion of *power-over* as expressed by Max Weber, that is, as the probability that a person may achieve personal ends despite possible resistance, others emphasise the idea of *power-to*, long proposed by Thomas Hobbes who regarded power as a person's 'present means (...) to obtain some future apparent Good' (in Allen 2005: 1).

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Tracing the development of notions of power within feminist thinking, Joyce Outshoorn (1987) has identified both of these notions. However, she has argued that, originally, 'power was not the main line of approach in theorising about the position of women' (Outshoorn 1987: 25). In liberal feminist thinking, for example, women were perceived as 'lagging behind men', as a disadvantaged 'minority group', but not necessarily 'powerless'. For Outshoorn, the notion of women as oppressed is associated with radical feminist thinking, and particularly with the concept of 'patriarchy'. It was with this concept that women's oppression began to be regarded as 'structurally encoded in institutions and laws' (Outshoorn 1987: 27), and not merely a matter of individual attitudes and behaviour. At the same time, however, consciousness-raising groups brought personal relationships into focus which suggested 'the power of individual men over individual women', and as such, of power 'as something that individual actors possess'.

Outshoorn (1987: 27–8) argues that this 'dominant paradigm of oppression (...), with at its core women as victims, dominated and powerless and its mirror-image of men as powerful agents', though standing strong in feminist thinking for nearly a decade, began disintegrating by the end of the 1970s. According to her, a number of factors contributed to that effect, most notably, changes in dominant notions of 'power'. She stresses, in particular, the shift in emphasis that took place from notions of 'power over' to 'power to', that is, to a notion of 'enabling power'. For Outshoorn, this shift at a theoretical level brought two distinct responses. In radical feminist approaches, it became a means of breaking with the uni-dimensional view of structural determination, by adding the idea of 'resistance' to oppression, as proposed by Foucault (1978), for whom 'resistance' was the inevitable companion to power. According to Outshoorn (1987: 28), however, this in



turn led to a radical feminist tendency to dichotomise history by means of reducing women's experiences and behaviour to either/or categories: either resist or revolt. A different response took place in progressive political circles, building on the idea of power as something one could possess, more specifically, on the notion that if 'men had power, so women should try to obtain it too, in order to change society' (Outshoorn 1987: 28). This notion was later incorporated by non-leftist actors: 'Power became something you could learn to operate; a popular topic for the latest offshoot of the feminist version of the personal growth industry, assertiveness training' (1987: 29).

Amy Allen's (1999; 2005) analysis of feminist perspectives on power follows similar lines. She identifies three major approaches. The first she labels the 'power as resource' approach, and attributes to liberal feminist thinking. In this perspective, power is regarded as a positive social good that is unequally distributed amongst men and women. Thus, the goal of liberal feminist action is to redistribute this resource so that women will have power equal to men (1999: 8). Following Young (1990), Allen notes that this approach falls short in addressing the question of power for women, in: (a) treating power as a thing one possesses, instead of viewing it as a relation; (b) being dyadic and atomistic, thus failing to shed light on the broader, social, institutional and structural contexts that shape individual relations of power – that is, being 'blind' to the structural features of domination; (c) conceiving power statically, as a pattern of distribution, as something crystallised rather than as a process, as interaction, as action; and (d) in viewing domination as concentrated in the hands of few, whereas in contemporary societies, power is 'widely dispersed and diffused'. Nonetheless, Young (1990: 32–3) recognises that 'social relations are tightly defined by domination and oppression'. In this sense, therefore, power is a relation of domination, a 'power-over relation'.⁶



This 'power-over' perspective corresponds to the second major approach to power in feminist theory which Allen names 'power as domination'. In contrast to Outshoorn (1987) and Young (1990), however, Allen recognises four distinct perspectives within this approach: (a) 'phenomenological'; (b) 'radical'; (c) 'socialist feminist'; and (d) 'post-structuralist'. Among the latter are many who have found inspiration in Foucault's understandings of power. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss Foucault's analysis of power and its relevance to feminist theory at length, it is important to bring up some major points that have found echo in feminist thinking and analysis. The most important is precisely the centrality of power in Foucault's thinking and his notion of power as a 'force relation' that circulates in all instances of life in society because 'it comes from everywhere' (Foucault 1978: 93). Coupled with his view of 'micro-powers' – of power flowing all through social life – Foucault's analysis brings support to the notion that 'the personal is political' put forth by 'second wave Western feminism' (Mosedale 2003: 7). Likewise, Foucault's notion of power as a productive force, as well as his discussions of 'disciplinary power', have been fundamental to feminist analysis of the internalisation of patriarchal ideology by women and the creation of 'docile – feminine – bodies'.

Yet, Foucault's views on power have also been the focus of critical feminist analysis. Nancy Hartsock (1987a), for example, has strongly criticised Foucault's 'positionality' in his analysis. She argues that he discusses power from the perspective of the 'colonizer', which means that he cannot formulate a theory of power of use to women. For her, he does not address the structural relations of inequality and domination from the perspective of the dominated. Hartsock claims (in which I agree) that, as feminists, we need to conceptualise power from the perspective of women; we need a theory of power



for women. In so doing, we need to view power as a capacity or ability, specifically, the capacity to empower or transform oneself and others. We need to view power as 'power to' – a perspective which Wartenberg (1990) and others have translated as 'transformative power'.⁷

According to Hartsock (1987b), this understanding of power is 'energy and competence rather than dominance', an understanding which finds Hannah Arendt, who focused on community and collective empowerment, as precursor. Mary Parker Follett's (in Allen 2005) distinction between power-over and power-with seems to be based on such a similar notion. For her, 'power with' is a collective ability that is a function of relationships of reciprocity between members of a group. Hartsock, similarly, sees analysing power as capacity or as 'empowerment' as a feminist theory of power because it points in more liberatory directions. As she states:

We must, then, distinguish between theories of power about women – theories which may include the subjugation of women as yet another variable to be considered; and theories of power for women – theories which begin from the experience and point of view of the dominated. Such theories would give attention not only to the ways women are dominated, but also to their capacities, abilities, and strengths. In particular, such a theory would use these capacities as guides for a potential transformation of power relations – that is, for the empowerment of women as a group, not simply as women. One might make similar cases for other marginalized groups (Hartsock 1987b: 99).

This notion of 'power as empowerment' represents the third major feminist approach to power recognised by Amy Allen (2005, 1999), and one which she argues has

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developed as a result of the shortcomings of the 'power as resource' and 'power as domination' approaches in dealing with the power women are able to exercise even in a society dominated by a patriarchal order. In her words:

Feminists who conceptualize power as empowerment do of course acknowledge that, in patriarchal societies, men are in a position of dominance over women; but they choose to focus on a different understanding of power: power as the ability to empower and transform oneself, others, and the world (Allen 1999: 18).

Feminists share the view that empowerment is a process by which people begin 'making decisions on matters which are important in their lives and being able to carry them out' (Mosedale 2005: 244). Most also agree that to be empowered 'one must have been disempowered' as women have as a group, and that 'empowerment cannot be bestowed by a third party', although it is possible to act as 'facilitator' to this process. Indeed, Srilatha Batliwala (1994: 131) proposes that women's empowerment involves challenging patriarchal relations, which in turn requires that women first 'recognize the ideology that legitimizes male domination and understand how it perpetuates their oppression.' She further notes that this process of change does not necessarily 'begin spontaneously from the condition of subjugation'. It can be 'externally induced'. As she claims: 'Women must be convinced of their innate right to equality, dignity and justice' (1994: 132). Here, then, women's organisations play a fundamental role in bringing women together for their 'mutual empowerment'.⁸

Along with other feminists from the South (León 2001, for instance), Batliwala claims that the concept of 'empowerment' thus conceived is a contribution from so-called Third World Feminists, emerging as part their



attempts to articulate feminist thinking with the principles of popular education, as spelled out in Paulo Freire's 'pedagogy of the oppressed' (Batliwala 1994: 127). They also recognise the contribution of Gramsci's thinking, particularly in relation to the importance of devising participatory mechanisms for the construction of more equitable and non-exploitative institutions. Yet, other feminists from the South (for instance, Bruera and González 2006: 69) ascertain that the term was first used in the 1960s in the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, and was appropriated by feminists in the 1980s. However, this conceptualisation of empowerment is also in line with the basic notions of the consciousness-raising groups of second wave Western feminisms starting in the mid-1960s, which provided form and content to the political-pedagogical work developed by popular educators (Sardenberg 2006).

For Batliwala (1994: 128), although the concept of empowerment has these roots, it was better articulated only in the mid-1980s, particularly by feminists linked to DAWN.⁹ Of special note was the platform document, 'Development, Crises, and Alternative Visions', by Gita Sen and Caren Grown (1987), prepared and distributed by DAWN at workshops in which close to 15,000 women participated at the NGO Forum of the 2nd World Conference on Women in Nairobi. In this work, which consisted of a 'South feminist critique of three decades of development', the authors also formulated alternative proposals for change, bringing forth a vision of women's empowerment based on collective action. They stressed that the road to women's empowerment had to be paved through structural transformation, through actions that promoted radical changes in the institutions of patriarchal domination. More importantly, they have emphasised that women's empowerment must be thought of and acted upon not only in terms of gender inequalities, but also in terms of inequalities of class, race, ethnicity and other



social determinants among women, as well as of the unequal positions of North and South in the global arena.

Batliwala (1993: 10) has provided a good summary of the 'essential elements of the women's empowerment process' from the perspective of feminists from the South, as follows:

- Empowerment is a process, though the result of the process may also be termed empowerment; it is an all-embracing process, because it must address all structures of power.
- The process must begin in the mind, by changing women's consciousness. However, power and rights have to be demanded by the powerless and oppressed, and this does not necessarily spring spontaneously from the conditions of subjugation, which means that the process of empowerment must be induced or stimulated by external forces.
- Empowerment confers decision-making rights on each individual, education being central to the process of empowerment – but an education that seeks to build a critical consciousness, analytical thinking, and the knowledge and skills to act for change.
- The process of empowerment must occur collectively; it should begin by creating a separate 'time and space' for women to collectively and critically re-examine their lives, develop a new consciousness, and organize and act for change.
- Empowerment is a spiral – not a cycle – which leads to greater and greater changes; this spiral transforms every person involved: the individual (including the change agent), the collective, and the environment.



- Thus empowerment is not merely a change of consciousness but a visible manifestation of that change which the world around is forced to acknowledge; it means making informed choices within an expanding framework of information, knowledge and analysis of available options.
- The struggle to gain access and control of resources is integral to the empowerment process.
- The empowerment process must tackle both the condition and position of women in society.
- Women's empowerment must become a political force if it is to transform society at large; indeed, only mass movements and organizations of poor women (and men) can bring about the fulfilment of women's 'practical' and 'strategic' needs, and change both the condition and position of women.
- The process of empowerment should also generate new notions of power itself.

I will come back to these visions of women's empowerment shortly. For the moment, suffice it to say that DAWN's document, later published as a book, gained great popularity – and not only among feminists from the South. The book popularised the term 'empowerment', which led to its eventual appropriation – or misappropriation – by bilateral agencies and governments. But as I hope to demonstrate, the notion of empowerment these agencies propagated differs considerably from its original meaning in feminist thinking. There are ambivalences, contradictions and paradoxes in the uses of the concept, as it is often used as a substitute for integration, participation, identity, development and



planning and hardly ever with reference to its emancipating origins (León 1997).

In a challenging article, Ann Ferguson (2004) asks: 'Can development create empowerment and women's liberation?' She observes that 'as a general goal, empowerment has been described as a political and a material process which increases individual and group power, self-reliance and strength' (2004: 1). However, she argues, 'there are two ways to define empowerment'. The first, here associated with 'liberal empowerment', defines it as a process individuals engage in to have access to resources so as to achieve outcomes in their self-interest. For this, 'economic, legal and personal changes would be sufficient for individuals to become empowered, and such a process does not require the political organization of collectives in which such individuals are located.' The second way of thinking about empowerment is, 'more influenced by empowerment as a goal of radical social movements' and 'emphasizes the increased material and personal power that comes about when groups of people organize themselves to challenge the status quo through some kind of self-organization of the group' (2004: 1). This understanding of empowerment, here termed 'liberating empowerment', is a perspective shared by most Latin American feminists who address issues of power/empowerment.



3. Liberal Empowerment

The debate on empowerment is closely related to the debate within development which is polarised between those who defend a process of globalisation linked to the demands of the market, and critics of this perspective who believe that 'another world is possible' (Romano 2002: 9). The former advocate what we term here 'liberal empowerment'.

Although 'liberal' has been often used in the United States to mean 'progressive', in this work I stand by the traditional meaning of the term based on the philosophical belief of individual liberty and of equality among all human beings despite cultural and social differences, stemming from their ability to reason and pursue their individual interests. Liberal feminists claim equality and equal opportunities for women, sustaining that women are also rational beings, though not able to exercise their rationality because of social and cultural constraints.¹⁰ This form of 'liberalism' is not only associated with a political theory centred on notions of individual liberty, individual rights, and equal opportunity – notions to which most feminists rightly agree – but also with neo-classical economics and its views and policies regarding the demands of the market for structural adjustment, privatisation, downsizing of the state and all of its consequences, vigorously criticised by Latin American and other feminists from the South.

Elaborating on the intersections of feminist theoretical frameworks and development frameworks, Connelly *et al.* (2000) noted that liberal feminist thinking has characteristically underlined much of development discourse and practice, particularly as espoused by bilateral agencies. This thinking is also consistent with the major framework founding most development programmes, that of liberal neo-classical economics in combination with 'modernization theory'. They write:

Although the expression *modernization theory* may no longer be in vogue, the spirit of the analysis, drawing on neoclassical free-market economics, is alive and well. The economic analysis of development that focuses on an unfettered, free global market now dominates economic policy in much of the North and South (Connelly *et al.* 2000: 55).

Tracing development thinking since the 1930s, they observe that the notion of development has been historically identified with theories of 'modernisation' and 'Westernisation', such that it has been traditionally regarded as a 'linear process whereby backward, tradition-bound peoples would slough off their historic impediments and embrace modern (that is Western) institutions, technologies, and values'. The major issue addressed in development thinking was devising ways for the poor, 'traditional' economies to go through the transition to modernity in the fastest way possible, development aid being a means by which, with the help of Western development specialists, these economies would 'take off'. The focus was precisely on economic issues in the belief that a boost to the economy would eventually 'trickle down' to society at large.

Of course, these perspectives largely ignored women. This fact was brought to attention by Esther Boserup's (1970) *Women's Role in Economic Development*, which elaborates a liberal feminist critique of development. Boserup argued that women's productive roles tended to be ignored and challenged the notion that development benefits would 'naturally' trickle down to women. Her critique found echo among other women working in development agencies and international agencies. In the United States, where women's movements were gaining momentum in the early 1970s, they were able to influence USAID policies by pressuring for the passage of the Percy





Amendment of 1973, which ‘required gender-sensitive social impact studies for all development projects, with the aim of helping to integrate women into the national economies of their countries’ (Connelly *et al.* 2000: 56). This kind of thinking was also influential in agencies and organisations linked to the United Nations. In 1975, the UN launched the Decade for Women with a conference in Mexico City, where the World Plan of Action for Women was formulated and approved.

This plan aimed to integrate women in development, an approach that has become known as ‘WID’, and which was fundamentally based on a liberal feminist perspective (Kabeer 1994; Razavi and Miller 1995). The WID approach sought to extend equal opportunities in development for women, by overcoming social and cultural barriers through reform and providing equal access to women in education and training. In general, as Kalpana Wilson (2004) notes, WID-oriented initiatives ‘focused on women’s education, training, and access to technology which would make them more productive and improve their access to the market. In practice this often meant handicrafts and small-scale income generating projects.’ As such, the WID approach ignored the structures of patriarchal dominance that underlined inequalities between women and men, as well as class, race, ethnicity and other social determinants responsible for inequalities among women.

Although the WID perspective did bring relevant contributions to the field of gender and development – for instance, it made evident the need for improvements on statistical data on women and provided a checklist for ensuring women’s status in societies (Connelly *et al.* 2000) – its shortcomings were many (Kabeer 1994; Razavi and Miller 1995). Importantly, the WID perspective did not question the underlying assumptions of the model of development into which it deemed to integrate women. As elaborated by Kabeer (1994: 20):

‘The WID perspective did not question the underlying assumptions of the model of development into which it deemed to integrate women’



It was not the mainstream model of modernization that was under attack, but the fact that women had not benefited from it. It was not the market solution per se that had failed women, but planners and employers – and sometimes women themselves – whose irrational prejudices and misplaced assumptions led to discriminatory outcomes. The problem, therefore, was to ensure that the benefits of modernization reached women (...).

During the Decade for Women (1975–85), feminist and women’s movements emerged throughout the world independently of WID efforts. They gained strength in the South through women organising at the grassroots level around a number of issues, but with the empowerment of women as an ultimate goal, even if this was not spelled out precisely in these terms. Thus it was not surprising that the critique of the WID approach came more strongly from feminists in the South, as formulated in the DAWN document, though this critique also built on new developments in feminist theorising in the North which emphasised the social construction of gender and the intersectionality of gender, race, and class, thus departing fundamentally from liberal feminist thinking. By 1995, when the 4th World Conference for Women took place in Beijing, a new development discourse for women was being formulated, using the terms of Gender and Development (GAD) and women’s empowerment.

The Beijing Platform of Action, approved during the 4th World Conference, incorporated this new perspective, as well as a discourse on women’s empowerment. This had a widespread effect on the development ‘machinery’, as bilateral agencies and other organisations were to follow, elaborating on the adoption of these perspectives. By 2005, for example, ‘more than 1,800 projects in the World Bank’s lending portfolio mentioned empowerment in their project



documentation' (Alsop *et al.* 2006: 1). Indeed, a notion of women's empowerment – even a progressive one, based on the considerations of Kabeer (1999), for instance – figures in documents elaborated by the World Bank, showing an effort to incorporate the new thinking into the Bank's policies.¹¹ However, a study of the World Bank and its influence on women and gender relations conducted by Idoe Zabala (2006) has shown that the Bank has profound structural limits in pursuing gender equity and women's empowerment. As Zabala explains:

These structural limits have two aspects that can be differentiated. On the one hand, the economic vision promoted by the institution, and that constitutes the nuclei of its theoretical thinking, does not favour these objectives and, on the other hand, its internal organization and functioning is equally unfavourable. The existence of these structural limitations mark the possibilities and incoherences presented by the institution in working with gender issues. (2006: 31, my translation from the original in Spanish).

A major problem is that concepts and approaches cannot be straightforwardly transplanted from one conceptual framework into another with radically different processes and goals without suffering changes of meaning on the way. Unless they significantly change their founding models, therefore, development agencies merely adopt the term 'empowerment' and not the approach it originally entailed. In other words, transplanted to the liberal framework of modernisation theory, the notion of empowerment elaborated by feminists from the South could not survive as a *transformative*, revolutionary concept. Instead, what is observed is its use in a process of *transformism*, as explained by Jorge Romano:

'Unless they significantly change their founding models, therefore, development agencies merely adopt the term "empowerment" and not the approach it originally entailed'



...the empowerment evoked by banks and multilateral and bilateral development agencies, by different governments, and also by NGOs, has often been used primarily as an instrument to legitimize them to continue doing, in essence, what they have always done – but now with a new name: empowerment. Or it is used to control, within the parameters they themselves established, the potential for change originally embodied in these innovative categories and proposals. A typical situation of transformism (*gatopardismo*): to appropriate and distort the new, to guarantee the continuity of dominant practices; adapting to the new times, changing 'everything' so as to change nothing. (Romano 2002: 10, my translation from the original in Portuguese).

Thus despite emerging in feminist thinking as a critique of liberal notions of power, the concept of 'empowerment' has been appropriated in this fashion in development discourse, legitimising practices that have little to do with the original concept developed by feminists from the South.

Analysing this appropriation from a Foucauldian perspective, Ann Ferguson (2004: 7) argues that it implies the creation of a new development rationale. As she observes, it is no longer 'acceptable to describe the Third World clients/recipients of the training or enabling practices called empowerment practices as 'illiterate', 'disenfranchised', 'backward' or 'exploited'. On the contrary, it is now important to describe them as: "rational economic agents", 'global citizens', potential 'entrepreneurs'. Development should then 'empower' them so that they can 'act as good entrepreneurs, wage earners, and consumers, that is, as proper 'subjects/objects' of development.'

Obviously, this notion of 'liberal' empowerment actually fosters 'empowerment without power' in that it



allows no space for changes in the existing power relations, in the structures of domination that are responsible for exclusion, poverty, and disempowerment in the first place (Romano 2002). This results in diluted empowerment ('decaff' empowerment), as in the World Bank approach: it focuses on access to information, inclusion and participation, accountability and local organisational capacity, but it does not discuss why some groups are excluded. Jorge Romano's (2002) critique of this notion of empowerment draws attention to two problems: the super-politicisation and the atomisation of empowerment. These are two diverging tendencies that present equally dangerous risks in the popularisation and generalisation of empowerment. In the first case, there is an overemphasis in the collective aspects of empowerment, with a neglect of individual elements. In the latter case characteristic of liberal empowerment perspectives, are the tendencies to depoliticise and fragment situations of domination created by the advancement of neoliberalism and the valorisation of individuality.

One consequence of ignoring these structures is the notion that empowerment is essentially a 'neutral' process, or that it is possible to have 'empowerment without conflicts'.¹² This is based on the view that empowerment is an 'apolitical' process; that the redistribution of resources can proceed without conflicts, or that the emerging conflicts can be 'technically resolved'. The 'harmonic model of partnership', that creates and maintains an illusion of consensus amongst stakeholders is an important part of the World Bank hegemonic project (see Brock *et al.* 2001: 21), and is an example of this perspective. However, empowerment is not a technique to achieve progress without conflicts. If empowerment means changes in relations of domination, it cannot be neutral, and it will entail the surfacing of conflicts. Further, in the liberal notion of empowerment, it is conceptualised as a 'gift', or as

'If empowerment means changes in relations of domination, it cannot be neutral, and it will entail the surfacing of conflicts'



something that can be 'donated' or 'distributed'. The major focus is on greater access to external resources, goods and services as a means of empowerment, and a narrow view of participation which ignores the role of group organising and the building of self-esteem and trust as integral parts of the process. Empowerment can thus be viewed as a technique to learn in special courses, reducing the social and political dimensions of empowerment to questions of method: to 'empowerment methodology' kits one can buy and sell. It is no longer based on the exchange of experiences and collective reflection upon them for the purpose of change.

As a rule, the empowerment promoted by bilateral agencies and development banks is based on a notion of the rational action of actors towards individual interests. The focus is on changing individuals, even when working on group organising. This is not to say that the individual is not important. On the contrary, when changes in the consciousness of domination are catalysed in a group process, it is always a personal and individual experience. However, as León (2001: 97) observes, it is necessary to distinguish this notion from an individualist view of the process:

One of the fundamental contradictions in the uses of the term 'empowerment' is expressed in the debate between individual and collective empowerment. For those who use the concept in the individual perspective, emphasizing cognitive processes, empowerment is tied to the meaning that individuals confer to themselves. It takes the sense of individual control, self-control. It is 'doing things by oneself', 'achieving success without the help of others'. This is an individualist view that gives priority to independent and autonomous actors, with a sense of self-control, and ignores the links between power



structures and the everyday practices of individuals and groups, besides disconnecting people from their wider social, political, and historical contexts, and from what solidarity, cooperation and being concerned for the other represent. (My translation from the original in Spanish).

Despite these individualist parameters of empowerment, a number of projects and programmes in Latin America claim that they have been successful in 'empowering' women.¹³ For example, a study conducted by Ckagnazaroff *et al.* (2006) among NGOs working with poor women in the city of Belo Horizonte, Brazil, shows that by offering training in professional skills (sewing, handicrafts, etc.), along with discussions concerning women's constitutional rights, violence against women, sexual and reproductive rights, etc., some positive results have been obtained. There was a boost in women's self-esteem, they began to learn more about women's rights and to denounce domestic violence. Although this is an 'add-on' means to women's empowerment, it brings women together to discuss problems that they experience in similar ways, thus creating spaces that could lead to consciousness-raising and collective action in the direction of 'liberating empowerment'.

4. 'Liberating Empowerment'

In her discussion on feminist views on power, Amy Allen (1999) recalls Edward Said's suggestion that, when we think about power, perhaps it should be wise to begin 'by asking the beginning questions, why imagine power in the first place, and what is the relationship between one's motive for imagining power and the image one ends up with' (in Allen 1999: 1). For Said, conceptions of power are directly related

'For feminists of all walks (liberal, socialist, radical, etc.), however, the empowerment of women is a goal in itself'



to the kind of interest we have in theorising about power, and hence significantly distinct conceptualisations of power are offered. We could suggest that the same applies to how we conceptualise 'empowerment'. Indeed, we should ask: why should women be empowered? What kinds of interests and goals are behind our theorising and work towards women's empowerment?

In mainstream development discourse, it seems clear that the empowerment of women is seen primarily as an instrument in poverty reduction and other development goals. For feminists of all walks (liberal, socialist, radical, etc.), however, the empowerment of women is a goal in itself. A number of feminists sustain the notion, proposed by Kabeer (1999: 435), that empowerment is the process 'by which those who have been denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire such an ability'. For Kabeer, this ability, in turn, rests on three distinct yet interrelated dimensions: (a) 'resources', pertaining to the existing pre-conditions; (b) 'agency', defined as 'power to', or as people's capacity to define and pursue their strategic choices despite possible opposition; and (c) 'achievements', the outcomes of one's exercise of their 'power to' capacity. Yet, Kabeer warns us that the 'conditions of choice' as well as the 'consequences of choice' are always shaped by context, and thus do not necessarily have 'transformatory significance' – that is, there is variation in 'the extent to which the outcomes resulting from women exercising their choices have the potential to challenge and destabilise social inequalities or merely express or reproduce these inequalities' (Kabeer 1999: 461).

Although I agree with Kabeer that at the individual level we may think of empowerment in those general terms, they are, in fact, too general. They do not allow us to discriminate between different kinds of interventions aimed at enhancing women's resources – i.e. between those that make a few women richer, and those that genuinely



reduce inequality. They also do not make it possible for us to distinguish between uses of agency for eradicating patriarchy or for sustaining it, and thus obscure clear insights into the transformatory significance of women's agency. Perhaps because these issues are not clarified, a pared away version of Kabeer's model has been appropriated by the World Bank to support their efforts to transform poor women into poor entrepreneurs. Unsurprisingly, in that process Kabeer's emphases are muted, or indeed lost altogether. Significantly, Kabeer strongly emphasises that in order to bring transformative changes, women's empowerment depends on collective solidarity and action. In her own words:

In a context where cultural values constrain women's ability to make strategic life choices, structural inequalities cannot be addressed by individuals alone. (...). Individual women can, and do, act against the norm, but their impact on the situation of women in general is likely to remain limited and they may have to pay a high price for their autonomy. The project of women's empowerment is dependent on collective solidarity in the public arena as well as individual assertiveness in the private. Women's organizations and social movements in particular have an important role to play in creating the conditions for change and in reducing the costs for the individual (Kabeer 1999: 457).

In a later paper, Kabeer (2005: 14) herself does take these considerations into greater account, qualifying the exercise of 'agency' in which feminists are interested as: '... transformative forms of agency that do not simply address immediate inequalities but are used to initiate longer-term processes of change in the structures of patriarchy' (2005: 16). In accordance with this perspective, therefore, we must think how to conceptualise an empowerment that works

'We must think how to conceptualise an empowerment that works towards women's liberation'



towards women's liberation, beginning not only with individual women, but with women in collective struggles for transformation.

Kate Young's (1993: 157) concept of 'transformatory potential' helps to build the connections between processes of collective action and individual agency, as follows:

The crucial element in transformatory thinking is the need to transform women's position in such a way that the advance will be sustained. Equally important is that women should themselves feel that they have been the agents of the transformation, that they have won this new space for action themselves. But it is also important that they realise that each step taken in the direction of gaining greater control over their lives, will throw up other needs, other contradictions to be resolved in turn... The assumption behind transformatory potential is that the process of women working together and solving problems on a trial and error basis, of learning by doing and also of learning to identify allies and forging alliances when needed, will lead to empowerment, both collective and individual.

It is also helpful to conceptualise 'liberating empowerment' along the lines outlined by the DAWN feminists and other feminists in the South. Malena De Montis, for example, considers empowerment to be the 'process through which women become conscious of their personal, private and public subordination, of their rights, and of the need to organize to transform the situation and establish new power relations among people' (2006: 3, my translation from the original in Spanish). De Montis heads an organisation in Nicaragua that provides microcredit to poor women, a strategy highly regarded in mainstream development discourse and practice. Yet, in contrast to many projects of this kind, she strongly relies on



‘consciousness raising’ workshops among the participant groups of women as a means not only of fostering women’s self-esteem, but also of opening the ‘front door to the sensitization and organization of women towards their personal, economic, social and political empowerment’ (2006: 18, my translation from the original in Spanish).

Decades ago, Kathie Sarachild (1973: 144), a member of New York Radical Women, a feminist group active throughout the late 1960s and into the 1970s that introduced ‘consciousness-raising’ in the feminist movement, spoke of this strategy as a ‘radical weapon’, or as a tool for ‘getting to the roots of problems in society’. By starting with pooling and then reflecting upon their own experiences as women in a sexist society, they collectively produced insights into the ‘most radical truths about the situation of women in order to take radical action’ (1973: 48). Translating Sarachild’s considerations into more contemporary discourse, we may say that consciousness-raising contributes to the process of ‘deconstruction of interiorised subordination’ (Bruera and Gonzalez 2006: 70), that is crucial to the process of ‘liberating empowerment’. As delineated in a leaflet produced by the Chicago Women’s Liberation Union distributed in 1971:

Consciousness-raising groups are the backbone of the Women’s Liberation Movement. All over the country women are meeting regularly to share experiences each has always thought were ‘my own problems’. A lot of women are upset by remarks men make to us on the street, for instance, but we think other women handle the situation much better than we do, or just aren’t bothered as much. Through consciousness-raising we begin to understand ourselves and other women by looking at situations like this in our own lives. We see that ‘personal problems shared by so many others – not being able to get out of the house often enough,

‘Consciousness-raising promotes the development of the critical capacity that can launch collective action to bring change’



becoming exhausted from taking care of the children all day, perhaps feeling trapped – are really ‘Political’ problems. Understanding them is the first step toward dealing with them collectively, whether in forming a day care center, exploring job possibilities, or planning the best strategy for getting our husbands to help with the housework (CWLW 1971).

Consciousness-raising promotes the development of the critical capacity that can launch collective action to bring change. This is consonant with Stromquist’s (2002: 32) observations regarding group participation and collective identity being mutually reinforcing: ‘a person must first become part of some collective group to develop a collective identity; but, developing a sense of collective identity also leads women to mobilize’. This process involves the development of ‘power with’, a notion implicit in ‘consciousness-raising’ as a means of ‘empowerment’ and thus as a political strategy for change.

Sara Evans (1979) suggests that this process leads to the development of an ‘insurgent collective identity’ which is a prerequisite for women’s liberation. Evans’ ideas regarding requirements for building this identity are summarised by Sarah Mosedale (2005: 250–1) as follows. The process involves:

- social spaces where people can develop an independent sense of worth as opposed to their usual status as second-class or inferior citizens;
- role models – seeing people breaking out of patterns of passivity;
- an ideology that explains the sources of oppression, justifies revolt, and imagines a qualitatively different future;



- a threat to the newfound sense of self which forces the individual to confront inherited cultural definitions;
- a network through which a new interpretation can spread, activating a social movement.

The notion that liberation empowerment implies a process of conscientisation raises questions not only concerning the sociopolitical dimensions of the phenomenon, but also regarding the psychological processes at play. It becomes important to understand 'how individuals come to understand the political dimensions of their personal problems and act accordingly' (Carr 2003: 9). In this regard, some authors, such as Charles Kieffer (1984), for example, have been quite influential in elaborating a developmental approach to empowerment. However, this perspective depicts empowerment as a linear process that does not take into account the constant interplay of action and reflection – that is, of 'praxis' (Carr 2003: 9). As Batliwala (1994: 132) rightly points out, the process of empowerment does not follow a linear course, instead, it unrolls in a *spiral* form, as the individuals involved act upon '...changing consciousness, identifying areas to target for change, planning strategies, acting for change, and analyzing action and outcomes, which leads into higher levels of consciousness and more finely honed and better executed strategies.'

Needless to say, this process does not unravel without conflict. On the contrary, as Romano (2002: 18) emphasises, empowerment is both a relational as well as a conflicting and contentious process. It is relational because it always involves 'links with other actors', and the power relations in which a given person is involved. Furthermore, the empowerment process is about changes in the structure of these relations, at individual as well as group levels, and thus cannot proceed without conflict.

'Indeed, conflict and coalition must be considered as part of the process of liberating empowerment, particularly when thinking in terms of "women's empowerment"'



Indeed, conflict and coalition must be considered as part of the process of liberating empowerment, particularly when thinking in terms of 'women's empowerment'. This point is implicitly raised by Ann Ferguson (2004: 2) in questioning precisely the possibility of 'women's empowerment', as follows:

What are the philosophical presuppositions of empowerment as a political goal? First, it assumes individuals can develop increased *power with* others as well as individual capacities to do things by a process of consciousness-raising within a group. This implies that individuals share common interests with those others in the group, for example, either to better meet their human needs or to promote the acknowledgement of their human rights as a rationale to change existing social and legal structures. But if the political goal of empowering women assumes women have common interests, do race, ethnic, class, sexual and national differences between women challenge this presupposition, hence vitiating women's empowerment as a general political goal?

Ferguson emphasises that if we consider these different sources of social oppression as intersecting each other rather than being 'merely additive', then it becomes impossible to separate them; one cannot detach gender identity from other bases of identity (and interests), such as class and race. This means that we cannot talk about women having common political interests, a notion that empties the women's movement of its social base. Ferguson also finds the suggestion that we should then assume a 'strategic essentialism' in thinking of women as a social group as questionable. She asks: 'can we assume women as a social group have common interests?' (2004: 2).

Yet, as Ferguson further observes, we can redefine



interests by thinking in terms of ‘formal interests’ and ‘content interests’, along the lines proposed by Jónasdóttir who takes a historical approach to this concept (in Ferguson 2004). Putting it simply, ‘formal interests’ pertain to certain principles and interests that all members of a given broad social group agree upon, whereas ‘content interests’ refers to the specific ways in which they would apply to differently situated segments in the broader group. As Ferguson (2004: 2) explains:

An example of a formal common interest that women share could be the interest in reproductive rights that are acknowledged and defended by the state in which they live. Claiming that women have a common formal interest in reproductive rights does not imply that they all need or desire to exercise reproductive rights (for example, pro-life women may desire to prohibit the reproductive right to abortion, both for themselves and others). It also does not imply that their social class or racial/ethnic position gives them the same material resources to achieve the goal of reproductive choice (so, the Hyde Amendment creates a material limitation on poor women’s access to abortions by denying funding for them through government welfare and health entitlements). What it does imply, however, is that all women have a minimally common social location as citizens of the nation states of the world, through legal differentiation by gender and other means, such as a structured sexual division of labor. Thus, in spite of racial, ethnic, class, sexual and national differences, it would benefit all women to have access to reproductive choice because of this common social location.

Ferguson further argues that these formal interests may be fostered by broader social justice coalitions seeking

‘Liberating empowerment will only be possible if one approaches the issues from a perspective that foregrounds intersectionality and begins from the standpoint of the women located in the most disadvantaged intersections’



‘democratic control over crucial material and non-material resources for other dispossessed social subjects, including men’. She concludes her argument by stating that there are two conditions for the emergence of a liberating empowerment process. The first is the existence of an ‘indigenous social movement’, or one that ‘involves some form of participatory democracy which gives it legitimacy to those it claims to speak for’. The second is the existence of means for the negotiation of conflicts of interest between individuals and groups in the movement, particularly through coalitions of solidarity (Ferguson 2004: 8).

Clearly, then, differences and inequalities among women must be considered, for some individuals may have power over others in a given group on the basis of class, race, etc., such that ‘empowerment’ may benefit some at the expense of others (Ferguson 2004). In such circumstances, liberating empowerment will only be possible if one approaches the issues from a perspective that foregrounds intersectionality and begins from the *standpoint* of the women located in the most disadvantaged intersections.¹⁴ This was precisely the strategy at play in the formulation of the *Feminist Political Platform* presented by Brazilian feminists to presidential candidates in the 2002 elections, and again during the formulation of the basic principles for the 2004 and 2007 *Action Plans for Women* (Sardenberg 2005).



5. Conclusion: Practicing Liberating Empowerment in Latin America

Magdalena León (2001: 30–31) has argued that Latin American feminists were not keen to discuss issues of power, because they (we) could only think of the question in terms of a ‘power over’ model. It was only after the *Encuentro Feminista Latinoamericano y del Caribe* held in México City in 1987, that they (we) began to recognise the possibility of other forms and models of power and thus consider processes of women’s empowerment. I contend that, however, despite the absence of the term ‘empowerment’ in Latin American feminist discourse until then – and in spite of a certain discomfort and enduring mistrust in feminist circles of the discourse of ‘women’s empowerment’ – ‘liberating empowerment’ has been at work in the region since at least the late 1970s, when the first ‘action and reflection’ women’s groups were created (Lavrin 1998). Moreover, building on a feminist critique of Freire’s ‘pedagogy of the oppressed’, and negotiating coalitions among different movements, several of these groups developed into organisations offering special programmes geared to creating the conditions for the empowerment of women of all different standings and regions (see, for example, Thayer 2000).

Indeed, several initiatives in that order have been at work in Brazil; for example, those carried out by SOS *Gender & Citizenship Institute*, in the state of Pernambuco (Thayer 2000), *Rede Mulher* (Women’s Network) and *Coletivo Feminista de Saúde* (Feminist Health Collective) São Paulo (Oliveira 1999) and, more recently, by the *Casa da Mulher do Nordeste* (Northeastern Women’s Centre) through its programme on ‘Women and Democracy’

‘Strong coalitions have been articulated within and between Latin American countries, in order to advocate and promote change in favour of women’

(*Mulher & Democracia*). This programme has focused on women elected to city councils and as mayors, offering them special training to exercise their mandates, sensitising them as well to work towards issues of women’s interest. Similar training programmes were also offered to women community leaders, a segment of urban centres that has also figured as a ‘target group’ for the programmes developed by the feminist NGO *Themis*, in training women from poor communities as ‘Popular Legal Promoters’ (PLPs or *Promotoras Legais Populares*).¹⁵

A variety of such programmes, developed by feminist NGOs, can be found all over Latin America. They have fostered – as well as fed into – continent-wide coalitions, among which we may cite: CLADEM – a network of women lawyers and other activists promoting women’s sexual and reproductive rights and the struggle against domestic violence;¹⁶ the Feminist Articulation MARCOSUL (*Articulação Feminista Marcosul*); and the World March of Women (*Marcha Mundial de Mulheres*). The two latter ones, in particular, have been expressively active in the World Social Forum (Conway 2007), especially those held in Latin America.

In fact, along with the *Encuentros Feministas Latinoamericanos y del Caribe* (Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Encounters), the World Social Forum events held in Porto Alegre and Colombia can offer a glimpse of the heterogeneity of feminism and women’s movements in the region, both in terms of ‘intersectionalities’ as well as women’s content interests (Sternbach *et al.* 1992). They also suggest that, despite the differences and inequalities among participating women, strong coalitions have been articulated within and between Latin American countries, in order to advocate and promote change in favour of women. I would contend that this process of negotiating conflicts and articulating coalitions has also been deeply empowering to the women involved – and empowering in a liberating way.





This approach to women's empowerment has certainly resulted in institutional changes regarding gender relations, such as the new legislation and 'machinery' to combat domestic violence now in place in several Latin American countries (CLADEM/UNIFEM 2003). These gains are relevant to all women, regardless of their particular standing. In contrast, liberal empowerment approaches have only benefited a handful of women, and even then in a very individualistic manner. It is no wonder that Latin American feminists have not only been critical of 'decaff' empowerment approaches, but continue to invest their efforts in programmes that promote 'consciousness raising' and define the eradication of the immense social inequalities among women as a major goal of women's empowerment.

Notes

- 1 Paper prepared for presentation to the Conference: Reclaiming Feminism – Gender and Neo-Liberalism, Institute of Development Studies (IDS), Brighton, UK, 9-10 July 2007. A previous version of this paper was presented at the Pathways of Women's Empowerment Research Programme Consortium Inception Workshop, Luxor, Egypt, September 2006.
- 2 The term 'empoderamento' is still not included in Brazilian dictionaries. According to Leon (1997), however, 'empoderamiento' appeared in early Spanish dictionaries then fell out of usage. In Brazil, sometimes the term 'empowerment' is translated as 'fortalecimento' which literally means 'strengthening'.
- 3 For example, a major dam construction project in the State of Bahia, supported by the World Bank, was supposed to 'empower' all the local population, but



women, who cultivated produce for sale in gardens on the margins of the former lake in the area, became 'disempowered' in the construction process, as they lost their rights of access to their gardens and thus to their means of economic support, becoming financially dependent on their partners. See also comments on how civil society organisations in Brazil view the World Bank, for example, 'Do Confronto à Colaboração', <http://www.bancomundial.org.br/index.php/content/view/8.html>.

- 4 As to the mis/uses of 'gender', see Cornwall *et al.* 2007, among others.
- 5 As expressed in the following declaration attributed to President Bush: 'There's no doubt in my mind, that empowering women in the new democracies will make those democracies better countries and help lay the foundation of peace for generations to come', <http://www.usinfo.state.gov/sa/Archive/2006/Mar/07-586333.html>.
- 6 This is different from the 'power-over' understanding of male domination of radical feminists (such as MacKinnon (2007), Pateman (1988)) which remains 'dyadic'.
- 7 Other feminists agree. Jean Barker Miller (2003), for instance, speaks of power as the 'capacity to produce a change'. This capacity is viewed as 'power from within' by Sarah Hoogland, or as the 'power of ability, of choice and engagement' – as 'creative power' (in Allen 2005).
- 8 On the notion of 'mutual empowerment', see Jean Barker Miller (2003).
- 9 DAWN: Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era is a network of feminists from the South. See: www.dawnnet.org



- 10 For a discussion of the different perspectives within liberal feminisms, see Baehr (2007).
- 11 See, for example, the following excerpt from a paper published by the World Bank on measuring empowerment: 'In this volume, empowerment is defined as 'the process of enhancing an individual's or group's capacity to make purposive choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes.' Using the concepts of asset-based agency and institution-based opportunity structure, the framework presented suggests that investments and interventions can empower people by focusing on the dynamic and iterative relationship between agency and structure. In short, it is hypothesised that interventions to improve agency and enhance opportunity structures can increase people's capacity to make effective choices, and that this in turn can bring about other development outcomes. (Alsop *et al.* 2006: 1).
- 12 Jo Rowlands (1996: 101) also observes that 'most frameworks for understanding power appear to be 'neutral': that is, they make no mention of how power is *actually* distributed within a society. There is no consideration of the power dynamics of gender, or of race, class or any other force of oppression.'
- 13 There is a sizeable critical literature on the instrumental use of 'empowerment' in poverty alleviation programmes. See, among others, Chant (2008) and Molyneux (2007).
- 14 Or 'busiest' intersections as per Kimberle Crenshaw's (1991) considerations.
- 15 See, for example, Themis at <http://www.themis.org.br>.
- 16 See <http://www.cladem.org.br>



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the main achievements of the process. However, the

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The liberalization of the economy has been a

double-edged sword. On the one hand, it has

allowed for the growth of the private sector and

the creation of new jobs. On the other hand, it

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