From the Kitchen to the Boardroom: reflections on power relations in gender and energy practice and policy

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Table of Contents

Abstract
Work-In-Progress
  Similarities and differences
  The family and oppression
  Practical and structural facets of oppression
  Generating and balancing power relations
  The ahaai experience
  The location of power
  What can we learn from this?
Bibliography

ABSTRACT

This paper challenges the notion that either policy or projects can of themselves improve women's access to energy. It posits that this can only be done if we adopt a less narrowly sectoral approach to energy. It suggests that women energy specialists need to espouse broader strategies which take into account gender relations operating from the kitchen to the board room.

The paper employs methods of self-reflection favoured by feminists and adult educators. Through a deconstruction of my own experiences as a white middle class mother in South Africa and a comparison with conditions experienced by a black un-waged mothers in an urban shack settlement, I attempt to analyse some of the components of the gender-incorporating-power relations that come into play in the kitchen during the processes of cooking: the authority of position or role, expertise, and the performance of tasks that generate and maintain power. Again using my own experience I posit that democratising these tasks leads to a loss of authority that makes relinquishing them difficult. The degree of difficulty may vary with heightened cognizance and/or similar authority in other identities. I suggest this is something we may all need to practice.

In a similar vein I draw attention to Bronwyn James's analysis of the process that was followed in the writing of the first post-apartheid Energy White Paper in South Africa to consider the gender-incorporating-power strategies that were used to exclude women from the boardroom during the process of policy making. I consider what inclusion in policy making might have meant for gender-incorporating power relations. Lastly I consider what lessons there are to be learned from these two quite different energy-related activities in terms of democracy, transparency and working towards changing gender-and-power relations and ultimately shifting the paradigm.

WORK-IN-PROGRESS

I am grateful for the opportunity offered by the organizers of this conference to offer something different, to think "boldly, laterally, even polemically". It seems clear to me that we are not doing terribly well in the women and energy, *gender* and energy department and that we need to think about what we are doing in some new ways. I am going to propose one. I do not offer this boldly, but tentatively, reluctant to use my own experience[1], cautious about generalizing from my own experience and forty or so observations, but suspecting, intuiting, that there is some important information here which we need to bring into the women and energy policy, projects and markets debate.

I want to explore what living as a gendered being, in this case a woman, meant, to me in South Africa in the 1990s, doing the stereo-typical woman's tasks of cooking, cleaning and feeding in a society of gendered beings. I am going to take just one of the many learning experiences I have had about myself as a partner and mother and I am going to use just one of the many domestic tasks I perform - doing the evening cooking - to explore the relations between gender and an activity involving energy. I want to get to a point where I can argue that understanding (let alone changing) the relationship between women and energy-related activities is not possible within a narrowly sectoral view of women and energy projects; that we have to look more broadly and be prepared to work in more interdisciplinary ways if we want to "change the paradigm" as Irene Tinker et al have been suggesting for years. There are three points I need to make.

The first is that I am assuming in this paper that the current paradigm of unequal resource allocation, of squandering in the North and destituteness in the South, of wealth accumulation by a few and poverty for the rest, of masculine dominance and female subservience[2] is neither good nor just and must change. However long this takes or whatever route it takes, we should begin with the goal in mind of a more just, less wasteful world. At the same time we should be mindful of our own roles in sustaining and perpetuating the current paradigms – and I use my own experience to illustrate this.

The second is that I am proposing that we take a new look at the meaning of gender in the energy sector. Thus far 'women and energy' applied to projects, policies or market institutions has meant targeting women for welfare, basic needs, and inclusion in male-dominated structures in terms of principles of equity. 'Gender and energy' has meant targeting women while taking into account what men think, usually in order to improve economic efficiency. Skutsch (1998: 948) explains the efficiency approach thus:

> Awareness that men and women have different perspectives, needs and constraints can lead to a better fit of project intervention with the 'clients' and thus greater management efficiency in terms of delivery. Gender here is being used in an instrumental sense, essentially to raise the internal rate of return of the project.

Gender and energy terminology may also imply 'empowering women'. Empowerment, supposedly an activity aimed at building capacity and self-esteem with the aim of challenging the gender status

[1] The personal is political – or is it? I return to this 80s methodology believing that experience provides a sound basis for analysis and that too little of this has been done by women in energy. Feminism argues that power and its use can be examined within personal life and, indeed, in some sense that the political *must* be examined in this way

[2] I acknowledge that this formulation of relations masks the differences between women and the ways in which differently located women can gain and exercise power and authority; including in relation to men, (and this generalisation would apply equally to relations of power between the North and the South) but this is what the paper tries to explicate

quo (Moser 1993:3-4), is too often understood in economic terms, or more baldly in the energy sector, energy-linked income-generating projects and policies.

We need to understand gender not only as the asymmetrical relations between men and women, not only as the socially constructed relations which determine to a large extent the roles we play, but as part of the way in which we experience the world. That *being gendered* plays a part in determining all our relations: between men and men, men and women, women and women and men and women and children. Being alive means being gendered. Gender doesn't just come into play between men and women designing and implementing energy projects. It is all-embracing and ever present. The inherentness, the innateness of gender does not displace other societal constructions such as race and class and age and culture (and indeed race must be acknowledged the primary principle in resource access in South Africa). Nor does it mean that I necessarily experience being a woman and relating to women and men and children in the same way that you do. But it does mean that I relate to you differently because you are an audience of women and you relate to me differently because I am not a man. Gender is a fundamental determinant of the individual in society.

To have relationships is to have gendered relations. Within this understanding we know that being gendered inheres relations of power. I look specifically within a residential domestic unit[3], my own home, in order to try and discern where some of this power lies. Why is it that older sisters are more powerful than little boys, (OK – not always) and mothers are more powerful than sons (at least for a while). The parentheses above reveal an important element in relations - that power is not absolute, it is not only physical, it is contingent, it is generated and maintained in specific ways Valentine (1999:150) argues that

> while parents superior age, size and life experience means that their power over children is literally embodied; this is not imply that children's position is necessarily a weak or passive one. Rather, children actively challenge parental performances of authority… power is mutually constituted

But just as it is mutually constituted, the power balance shifts and cannot always be maintained. Power is often exchangeable only in the contexts for which it was specifically generated (Ross 1993:192). In some instances power is generated through the performance of labour or tasks or converting others' labour into relations of dependence – I am going to explore an example of the former. I submit that we need to be more conscious of the ways in which power is an element in all our (gendered) relations, not only in deep-seated systemic and structural ways, but in more commonplace and perhaps more transient relations, between men and men, women and women, men and women and men, women and children in their every day lives.

The third point is that living as a gendered being is not a static condition. Gender is a process rather than an event (McKie *et al* 1999:27). As identities and societal mores shift so the meaning of one's gender shifts. The meaning of gender is constructed, interpreted, re-interpreted, re-constructed and mediated. Being a white middle class woman in South Africa today does not mean the same to me, or to the society, as it did twenty years ago or even ten years ago. Being a mother does not mean the same to me today as it did twenty or even ten years ago from which time I draw this experience. My consciousness has altered, the people and world around me have changed[4].

[3] 'Household' has become a problematic unit of analysis. I use this terminology to indicate that although I employ a nuclear family model, the dynamics involved are likely to apply to numerous relationships within permeable walls

[4] I debated taking an activity closer in time to the present, but stayed with this one for two reasons. One it was a powerful experience of the 'double-vision' of being a feminist entails for me (living out the complexities, ambiguities and contradictions I *know*), and two I am cogniscent of Robin Morgan's suggestion in *Going Too Far* (1977) that it is possible to conceptualise and understand changes only in retrospect

In summary: relations between people are determined in part by their gender, power constitutes an element of the relations between gendered beings and these relations are in a constant state of flux.

What has this got to do with energy? The purpose of this paper is explore some of those gender and power relations and how they change with reference to one of my roles as a woman and a mother – that of cooking for the family, a common enough practice. I want to explore with you how the power relations functioned as I observed them in my own household and compare them with observations I made in other households in which I was observing energy use. I posit that similar dynamics were operating in the observed households, and make a proposal about how we might translate this learning into designing and implementing a more broadly based conception of gendered development and policy processes What I am going attempt has some precedent in terms of comparing gendered power in home economies. In "'I'm hungry, mum': the politics of domestic budgeting" Whitehead (1981) considers relationships between men and women within home economies with very different consumption and production patterns, (direct production in rural Ghana and the purchase of wage goods in industrial Britain). Whilst the basis of production and household maintenance was very different, similar gendered inequalities in power and spending became evident in the allocation arrangements of goods, services, and income (in McKie et al 1999:13).

The rationale for my methodology is also the starting point for my discussion: If we want to do things better, and I presume we do, ancient philosophy, feminist methodology and adult education all tell us that reflecting on our own practice is a good place to start. Know thyself, is the wise command of the ancients. Understand yourself – your body and your spirit, said the consciousness-raising feminists, because it is necessary to know what you are doing and why in order to break old and destructive patterns and practices. Feminism insists that women should define and interpret our own experiences, that systems and social structures, whether concerned with the economy, the family or patriarchy can best be understood through an exploration of every day life, they are not separate from it. Find out what you know in order to build on prior learning experiences, said Paulo Freire and other adult learning specialists. Foucault (1980) considers power an integral aspect of all social relationships which can be revealed by adopting a micro-perspective which examines individual's behaviour and in everyday interaction. He argues if what you want is the elimination of power relations you cannot achieve this by repeating the mechanisms of domination. These have to be broken and he sees the role of theory not to indulge in grand narratives but to "analyse the specificity of mechanisms of power, to locate connections and extensions, to build little by little a strategic knowledge" (Foucault 1980:145). So that's where I'm going to start, by building "a little strategic knowledge" be deconstructing my own experiences as a woman who did not start out as a feminist or an energy specialist.

At 34 I had two teenage children (I was a teenage bride) and relatively new male partner. As a single parent for ten years I cooked – three veges and a protein – every night while the children were growing up and continued doing this for several years after Don and I started living together. My guilt, my socialisation, my habit – whatever. As a good mother and loving partner I did it. Come supper time I would be in the kitchen organising: chopping, peeling, monitoring the stove - cooking - and family would be popping in and out making coffee, asking about homework, ironing a shirt, feeding the pets - if I were lucky, laying the table under my directions, sitting on the kitchen counters just chatting. Sound familiar? I was in control, not always willingly, not always with the Happy Mother smile, but there, present, dominating the space, directing the operations, managing the expertise, and providing in a number of ways.

One of the things that did change when Don came into our lives was that (apart from working full-time, studying part time for a further degree, lift clubs, children's friends sleeping over, maintaining the house and garden, producing plays and costumes, etc) I became very politically active in a women's anti-apartheid organisation. I spent a great deal of my time in informal settlements, at political funerals, meetings, protests, jail (which included a trail which was strung out over nine months) and more meetings. I could do this because Don was there to look after the children. Previously I had had to take them with me wherever I went. When I first started attending meetings every Wednesday night I still managed to fulfill my motherly and wifely duties by making supper early and putting it in the oven. After a while Don and my and the children's relationship changed so that Don took over making supper on Wednesdays. I remember watching their relationships deepen because of this time they spent together without me and were dependent on each other, and feeling pleased, but simultaneously feeling guilty (or was it guilt?) about not being at home all the time. So I made sure did other things such as bake over the weekends to "make up" to them – especially as the political heat increased and we had comrade-refugees staying in our house, a duty roster for Saturday afternoon funerals and endless other tasks. I baked scones for Sunday breakfast, crunchies for the lunch boxes. The electric oven produced delicious-smelling symbols of nurturing which I thought made up for my frequent absences and provided evidence of my caring – behaving, in retrospect, not very differently to the "if you love them give them Nescafe"[5] advertisement which I abhorred. Bear with me there is a point to this.

Conditions continued to change. The children grew into teenagers. The relations between us changed. I was trying to study again. The political struggle was grim and exhausting. After eighteen years I was tired of being responsible for supper most nights of the week. One night when my youngest child had finished school I announced that I wasn't going to cook supper any more. There were four of us and four nights of the week that we needed routine: each person would be responsible for cooking and cleaning on one night (over the weekends we would fend for ourselves although I would see that the cupboards were stocked). The teenagers were mostly out on Fridays and over the weekends. It was not exactly revolutionary thinking from a feminist-in-training, not a lot to expect from nearly grown-ups and grown-ups. The reaction of the family is irrelevant (and anyway I am not a psychologist) except that after the initial surprise there was enthusiasm and acceptance.

It is *my* response to my suggestion is the issue here. My reaction to my proposal that would free me of my tasks. Having wanted and directed this change I found I couldn't implement it. I couldn't keep out of the kitchen at supper time. I watched myself being present: questioning judgments of ingredients or measures, offering advice, checking the heat of the plates or the oven, reminding of what else needed to be done. Again I am not a psychologist, I know nothing of these matters, but I didn't need a degree to perceive how difficult it was for me to give up that control of the kitchen and supper routine. I had to force myself *not* to go into the kitchen, I had to persuade myself of what I knew from Wednesday nights - that they could managed fine without me. I had to accept that *I was no longer wanted or needed at supper time*. At first I didn't know what to do with myself at that time of the day. For a while the dogs got a second walk each day as I took them to the beach to keep myself busy. Furthermore I felt other dynamics changing – I could no longer walk into the bathroom and yell "who the hell left their wet towel on the floor?" Somehow, if my son and my daughter and my partner were being responsible in the kitchen, cooking good food, cleaning up afterwards, making shopping lists etc, somehow it made it much more difficult to address them as irresponsible in other ways. I had to find more appropriate ways to communicate generally.

[5] A formulaic advertisement familiar to all. This particular one was a brand of instant coffee which a Happy Wife and Mother dispensed to the jingle if you love them give them….

I want to move now to an illegal informal settlement, Canaan, where I was involved in a women's group resisting forced removal. The members of the women's group were monitoring their energy use – paraffin, candles and wood – in an effort to determine their expenditure on domestic fuel as one of the largest expenses in their every day struggles to make ends meet. Most of these women were refugees from the townships around Durban and had fled the political violence that racked KwaZulu-Natal in the run up to the first democratic elections. They were very poor having lost all or abandoned most of their possessions. They rebuilt their lives and their houses from materials scavenged from a municipal dump which served an affluent, throw-away community on the other side of the highway from the settlement. The people who arrived at Canaan did not know each other, and because of the political suspicion and fear at the time kept largely to themselves. Most of the women were not employed, and would have fallen towards the 'bottom of the pile' category of urban society. Their time was divided between their caring for their children, doing domestic tasks and the dump. The children were out playing from early in the morning. The shacks were about nine square metres and once they had been tidied and swept there was not much to do for the rest of the morning. Washing was done when necessary if there was water. Ironing was done with paraffin irons in the afternoon. People had few clothes so these tasks didn't take more than an hour. There were 'rush hours' at the dump at about 9am and 3pm each day when the trucks would as empty their loads and the women would collect food and whatever else they could salvage.

One particular evening among many times I sat on the edge of a bed in a shack and both observed and participated in the evening routine. Food preparation began in the late afternoon or early evening and including cooking could take up to three hours. I was under instruction. I watched Gretta's demeanor change. She had a purpose. Her shoulders straightened and her voice deepened. Children were sent to collect *mfino* or greens which grew wild. When they came back I was given a plate and knife to chop the greens and the children were sent to buy a litre of paraffin. Mieliemeal was measured. Water was set to boil, salt added and then the staple. This had to be tended from time to time. Phutu is more work than porridge. On a good day onions and tomatoes might be chopped, or for a treat a can of beans or fish bought from the local spaza and opened. This evening there was thick sausage given by the neighbour who had been to her rural home and whose children Gretta had cared for in her absence. This was special treat. There was only one flame on the cooker so it would be fried quickly when the phutu was cooked. This all took a while, during which time the children ran in and out ask several times when the sausage would be cooked and if supper was ready. A school going child sat next to me and did his reading homework. Gretta's partner came in, sat on the bed turned on the radio. His legs got in Gretta's way and after a while he got and walked off again giving instructions to the children to call him at the shebeen when supper was ready. During this time the Gretta's authority was absolute. There was little space to move, and what there was she occupied with cooking activities. Her position was central both physically and to the endeavour. Space is political , the way in which space is occupied, the way in which bodies are used can tell us a lot about hierarchy, about power relations. Whether the kitchen existed in a physical built environment designated as such, or the corner of a room otherwise occupied at different times of the day, it is expert space commanding authority, importance, power. Let's not carried away by this – it is a small proportion of every day and can be upset at any time

Gretta instructed the children and me, decided when it was dark enough to light the candle, how loud the radio should be , how finely the *mfino* should be chopped, how fast the phutu should boil, and how often it should be stirred. When the sausage was spattering in the pan she gave orders for calling her partner, washing hands, and who would eat out of which container. Then she served the food deciding who should have what. The noise and excitement gave way to eating. Gretta served herself last and sat down in the corner. As she tucked into her food she suddenly looked smaller, and bent. She was quiet. The children started talking again and her partner spoke above them.

Eating was completed, the plates were cleared and stacked without her moving. Her presence and importance had diminished and continued to do so as the squabbles about clearing up and going to bed took over, her partner reprimanded the children and sent them to bed.

It was all very familiar. And although each of the forty residential units I observed was unique, and none of these were nuclear families (Gretta's and mine came closest to this model), the pattern, the ebb and flow of authority, from women to children and men, was similar. I do not want to confuse purpose or purposefulness with power unless there is some agreement that they are related, and I am still busy exploring with some of these women what they thought was going on in their households at the time, so this is work in progress. I want to start my analysis by looking at the similarities and differences between us, I then consider discourses about family and oppression, and proceed by exploring some ideas about the location of power which may be helpful when we have to think strategically about influencing policy and planning.

Similarities and differences

1. Gretta and I were both pregnant teenagers and then single mothers who received no maintenance from our children's fathers. My class and colour[6] accounted for my sound prior education and knowledge about correspondence institutions. This allowed me to complete my education and get a teaching post with afternoons and holidays with my children. Gretta had no such opportunity. She completed her primary education and then been sent as a "slave" to a relatives[7]. She was a domestic worker before she fled to Canaan where she became a "dumpacholic" and sold what she collected. Walby S (1997) suggests that women's lives are increasingly shaped by their participation in education, employment, and politics, and that the household is no longer the chief structure in determining public forms of patriarchy. On the other hand McKie et al (1999) demonstrate how significant home, family and household are to women regardless of age, social class and experience of employment. Clearly both have some validity, and it would appear that as women's options improve so they become less, but not completely, independent of their domestic identity. While the women at Canaan doubtless played many roles and had multiple identities, they did not perceive themselves as having many choices or feel powerful in their worlds. In the women's group feelings of worthlessness, powerlessness and low self-esteem were frequently articulated. These were supported with narratives of traumatic childhoods, and early and multiple unwanted pregnancies. Few received assistance financial or otherwise from their children's fathers and they felt there was little chance of improvement in their adult lives especially with the recent setback of having to flee.

2. The children's homework is mentioned in both our accounts. Standing (1999: 116-136) discusses the unspoken gendered expectations around parental input into schooling. Women, and not only lone mothers, regularly take on this task of supervision and caring - and often do it simultaneously with cooking.

3. Both of us had male partners who were relatively new to the household. Neither was particularly oppressive as an individual. Disadvantaged though I was compared with my school cohort, I had been exposed to the ideas of the women's movement and Don and I had internalised, albeit imperfectly, some of the changing gender discourse. Davis (1991:82) points out that this is very important to a common awareness and negotiations in the household. Previously Foucault (1980) had emphasised the way in which power is exercised through the

[6] As a participant in the ongoing debates about representivity, research and who may speak for whom, I want to strongly acknowledge the differences between us, for these are, after all, what provided me with great choices and Gretta with few.

[7] Gretta's story is recorded in *No space to plant and other stories by the women of Canaan*

use of discursive practices (ways of thinking and talking about topics) and suggested observing the manner in which individuals may draw on particular discourses to advance their position in negotiations. Delsing (1991:135) builds on this to propose that gender ideology is "a disciplinary discourse running parallel to and reinforcing state power." She continues with an argument important to this paper:

> [D]isciplinary discourses are based on norms or natural rules. Gender ideology is saturated with such natural rules for women, in their roles of mothers, sexual partners and housekeepers. An important feature of the gender discourse …is its assimilation by the actors involved. Both women and men internalize the discourse. Feminists are slowly but surely uncovering this mechanism and directing their theory and practice towards its dissolution.

This paper is a contribution to uncovering the mechanism and must propose the usefulness of ongoing consciousness raising techniques and education. Gretta and her partner had had far less opportunity to participate in such critical discussions. The women's group held at Canaan once a week in the afternoons in order to prepare women to serve on the committee fighting evictions, was the first such organisation Gretta had belonged to. I was able to go out and become active in a women's anti-apartheid because Don [8]moved in and was prepared to take over child/teenager minding and some domestic tasks[9]. We speak frequently of women's difficulties and choices in participating in "community activities". Here was an experience in my own life of the life-changing opportunity offered by shared child-minding. Support from my partner enabled me to do what I considered ethically and politically correct in an organisation which 'grew me' considerably. There was no-one else who could have taken responsibility for my children when I put myself safety at risk. Do we build mutual caring and growth into our energy projects when we design them? When Gretta's partner went off to the shebeen while she cooked, he was not displaying gross chauvinism, rather he was responding to the fact that there was, literally and figuratively, no space for him in the shack. No role and no usefulness.

4. Gretta and I both used food and meals as a focus for and a practical channel for providing caring as described by Gregory (1999:60-75). There are direct parallels between they way I baked scones etc and a description given to me be a group of women which included Gretta: *The women said "I had no money so I cooked bread today." Bread is made with a small packet of flour, salt, a raising agent (sour milk, yeast or beer) and water, mixed together and boiled in a strong plastic bag in a pot of water over a paraffin flame for more than an hour and using at least a litre of paraffin. The combined cost of the ingredients and paraffin amount to twice the price of a loaf of bread – even one bought at an inflated price at a spaza shop. When asked "why do you make bread?" the responses indicated that cost was not the first consideration " The bread we make is so nice, W. It is so nice if a woman makes bread and it's not too much work. First you mix the dough, then you have to wait for a l-o-n-g- time for it to rise if you use yeast. Then you have to find one or two packets that don't have holes. You put the well-risen dough inside and tie it up securely so it doesn't get wet and it gets crusty. Then you boil it on the stove for an hour until it smells good. When it's ready it's all hot and steamy and smells*

[8] The local shorthand, 'braaivleis, rugby sunny skies and chevrolet' captures the essence of the stereo-typical baggage carried by white middle class South African males. The latter, more erudite but just as stero-typical phrase, has connotations of swaggering privilege, power, aggression, dismissiveness and dominance. There is much work to be done in unpacking these. Albie Sachs (1990) has said that patriarchy is "one of the few profoundly non-racial institutions" in South Africa, but research on South African masculinities is in its infancy, and clearly is as complex and necessary as trying to disaggregate South African feminisms

[9] Ramazanoglu's (1989:9) comment "there are plenty of men who think that they have reconstructed themselves as the 'new man' on the basis of a little extra help with the shopping and childcare" has a certain resonance here

good and the children will just say "Ooooh, ma, you've made bread," and eat the whole thing and go to sleep without asking for more" (Annecke 1992:94)

5. There was an ebb and flow of authority and power between the women and men and children in both households. Sometimes one was more visibly assertive than another. Sometimes we realize intuitively rather than analytically what we do and have to do to ensure our importance, reap the rewards and withdraw. This is why it is very important that women and men negotiate development projects at the local level so that some of these negotiations become self-conscious and we can be more strategic about our actions.

The family and oppression

The initial feminist literature posited 'the family' as a fundamental site of women's oppression, and as such saw it playing a central role in the development and continuance of perpetuation of subordination. Many women, and in particular, many third world women have rejected this universality and have asked repeatedly not be to treated as helpless or victims or, in Mohanty's (1988) words, "as benighted, overburdened beasts, helplessly entangled in the tentacles of regressive third world patriarchy". The strength of the alliances between women and men in national liberation struggles and the bonds of 'motherism' are understood to contribute to resisting oppression of any kind (Fester 1997:46) but particularly post-colonial intervention and domination.

Many of the same women do not reject the general theory altogether (that the family is a site of oppression), but they reject that part of it which suggests that *their* family life must change. When we say that the structure, 'the family' must change, but interpret this as having no implications for changing the experience of family life - as I did - this seems to indicate that there is a dichotomy between 'structure' and 'experience' which we need to explore (Stanley and Wise 1993:76). It seems to me that there are two ways we can go from here. The first is to go beyond 'experience' into the more abstract and structural, the second is to go back to the experience - and try and work out why women think their family is different from 'the family'. This is the avenue I have chosen here[10]. It is not family life as such that gives rise to women's oppression, but the oppressive features of production systems, patriarchal sexuality, men's control of reproduction, and a variety of ideologies and beliefs which give rise to male-dominated families that are oppressive. If my family *per se* is not oppressive yet I am not emancipated within it (I wanted to change the routine, and so did Gretta), what is going on? Let's explore what is oppressive in relation to cooking first and then look at what was not.

A number of questions could be asked about everyday experience of 'the family'- which I have concentrated into questions about cooking - for example: Is cooking oppressive for all women? Are all aspects oppressive or only some (is wood collection oppressive)? Is it always oppressive or only intermittently? If it is not always oppressive what conditions make it not so? Thereafter we'll look at what choices are women making (however restricted these are) and ask whether Do women derive any advantage from performing this activity?

[10] To talk of the family, or the household, or capitalism, or men as the reasons for women's oppression may be true but doesn't tell us the mechanisms, the experiences, the behaviours, the looks, the conversations involved (Stanley and Wise 1993:165). I believe that direct experience underlies all behaviours and actions, and we need to know, in detail, how all facets of the oppression of women occur, how they collude in this and why. In justifying of the examination of my own experience, Stanley and Wise (1993:177) say it best: "vulnerability isn't all altruism …self-interest is also involved". The self-interest is, of course, seeing the political project of gender and energy further debated.

Practical and structural facets of oppression

Clearly the experience of cooking is not in itself equally oppressive for all women. In fact cooking is seen by many women of all ages as a safe, fulfilling and an appropriate function. A well-known busy and professional woman Devi Rajab finds the nightly cooking routine "therapeutic" (pers comm). But she cooks by choice, is able to buy the ingredients and has a helper to clear up. I found the continual expectations and responsibility for thinking about "what's for supper, mum?" stifling. Gretta said not having enough food was the worst part. We can conclude that not all aspects of cooking are oppressive, but a lack of choice and assistance may be. In particular a lack of choice about whether to cook and a lack of choice about food and fuel. At bottom structural poverty rather than labour caused the greatest stress. With regard to other aspects, time and energy were the most burdensome part of my experience – and it only took me about an hour. Where the staple takes up to three hours to cook there is obviously a great deal more time and energy invested. The Canaan women were more patient than I was, and said that they did not mind, because if necessary they could other things at the same time. For rural women the time and energy required for the collection of wood and water collection the most arduous tasks (Annecke 1998). Cooking under these conditions, of fuel and food scarcity is likely to be depressing if not oppressive, but if either of these are relieved, even temporarily, the activity takes on different shades of meaning. Most of the poor women said they enjoyed cooking if it were for a celebration or a special occasion demonstrating that under certain conditions women can identify the pleasure or advantage they derive from performing this activity.

Generating and balancing power relations

What other advantages can be gleaned? We set such store by understanding decision-making process in the energy sector - what choices, however constrained, are women making? Do women derive any advantage from performing this activity? After years of repetition I experienced cooking as a chore, as an irksome task I had had enough of, and only when I relinquished the activity did I perceive its function in my identity and position of authority in the household. My collusion in the system granted me not only fulfillment of my desire to nurture but a certain authority, status and legitimacy.

At the time there were two alternative stoves being promoted in the Canaan settlement by NGO groups. The one was the wonderbox: a straw or newspaper-lined box that operated as a slow cooker – along similar principles to a thermos flask, the other was an energy saving stove with a chimney that could be lit using bits of paper and cardboard and twigs rather than wood and was useful for fast cooking such as boiling water. Neither proved to be popular and the well-intentioned distributors were surprised – although an audience of women and energy specialist will not be (Kammen 1995). Women were carrying unwieldy loads of wood back from the dump and scrounging in the nearby bushes for more, so why weren't they interested in these free gifts? One of the NGO workers suggested that women, especially poor and under-educated women were simply averse to change and new technology. But this was not so. In another area I was working in women changed the rhythm of their days and cooking routines in order to assist with "the war effort". Men, and in particular young men and boys, were required to patrol the area at night to warn of impending attacks by the rival political party[11]. They had to meet in designated areas in the early evening and this meant that they had to eat early. In order to accommodate this, waged women got up early to cook so they had only to re-heat supper when they got home, or used hot-boxes so that the supper was ready when they home. Unwaged women cooked early in the afternoon, As soon as the danger was over the women returned to their old patterns of cooking.

[11] This was an ANC-aligned area wary of Inkatha attacks, but I believe similar processes were under way in Inkatha areas

My decision, as many interventions, had unforeseen consequences. Changing the relations in one sphere, relinquishing control in one specific and important area had upset the dynamic in others. I had altered the relations between us and had to understand and accept that there was a different locus of power operating and mine had diminished. This was interesting to me rather than catastrophic, there were other spheres of my life that I wanted to get on with; other identities I wanted to surface. The reason that I supplied so much personal detail at the beginning of the paper is to support my claim that I had (have) multiple identities. I may have various insecurities and crises of confidence in those identities, but if my power in one capacity diminished, there was the possibility of my re-asserting it somewhere else one. While my identity as a mother was primary, there were other areas of my life where I was useful and, to some degree, in control or powerful. But I should not understate my initial reaction when I realised what was happening. In terms of current models of systems thinking it is quite sensible to anticipate that if one system alters even slightly, that this will have a ripple affect on others – that my experience of relinquishing power in the kitchen would affect my authority in other areas was perhaps something that I should have anticipated, but the fact is that I did not. Cooking provided the time and space for not only being the provider of food, directing the family routines and discussions, but for generating and maintaining power in a specific way - through the performance of tasks which made other people dependent on me. Being wanted, needed, useful an expert or authority constitutes an important facet of identity – perhaps if it is the only time of the day when you are an authority it assumes greater importance that if there are other roles which offer opportunities for self-affirmation. On the other hand Duindam's (1999:43-59) study of fathers shows that they benefit from the caring and nurturing role they have chosen and the women's strong part in offering them the opportunity and ensuring this happened, the implication being that we as women should offer men this opportunity. When I altered this my position in the family altered and I had to find other means of creating power or accept the new equilibrium. The women were not incapable of change, but the change did not suit them. Using my own experience I posit that democratising these tasks leads to a loss of authority that makes relinquishing them difficult. The degree of difficulty may vary with heightened cognizance and/or similar authority in other identities. Energy projects, even when aimed at income generation, need to offer women more than the diminishment of their primary power relations and can do this, step by step through strategic knowledge and changing the discourse.

The need to understand our own exertions of power was further brought home to me when I asked several women: "how would you react if your husband suddenly became a feminist?" or alternatively "what would your reaction be if the government passed a law enforcing communal childcare?" [12] The response which immediately concretized my intuition and offered me insight was: " Haai! I wouldn't trust him."

The ahaai experience

Haai! I wouldn't trust him. Isn't that how we think? Haai! I wouldn't trust Don and the kids to do supper properly, and if they did, then I wouldn't trust them to still honour me because I would have relinquished a hold over them – some power. Haai! Men don't trust women to write policy and do planning – and if they do patronisingly give us a chance, who is to say we'd still respect them in the morning when we discovered we could do it ourselves? Haai! The northern planners and funders don't trust us women energy experts of the south to know what we want for ourselves, because if they do and we do things our way, they might lose their power and control over us.

[12] I owe this idea to Joan Meyer's "Power and love: conflicting conceptual schema"

One of the reasons that we have been unsuccessful in incorporating women in policies is that we try and draw distinct casual relations between women and energy by focusing on women's roles and attempting to ameliorate or enhance these. We remain, in our research and implementation, at the level of description – often excellent, insightful description but which does not provide an understanding of how the situation might change. The solutions offered are to address the visible symptom: if women have too many things to contend with let's find a solution to each one: Carrying firewood too far? Here is a donkey – and the freed up time permits income generating activities. Reduced protein intake because kidney beans take too long to cook and there's a lack of wood? Use gas. People eating refined junk food from street vendors rather than high fibre home cooked meals? – supply them with sufficient fuel.

In reality we know that energy is a necessary but not sufficient conditions for development, and the really necessary condition is a re-distribution of power and resources – a change of development paradigm - but this is too difficult so we just go on applying band-aid. One of the strategies we use to determine power relations in households in to understand decision-making processes. Our findings are not generalisable, and it's an area where northern funders may be keen to understand (who owns the seedling and who buys the stove) but are not willing to change once they understand. But how about using this strategy to begin unpacking power relations and why things continue as they do among ourselves? Who commands the power and does not trust enough to share it, and who does? An analysis of decision making will be better understood if it includes hierarchical position and culture as well as race, class, gender, age etc. The concept and practise of power is key here, and an adequate feminist model of power would have to acknowledge that power can be a potentially positive and enabling force but also that sharing it requires degree of trust and negotiation .

The location of power

Unfortunately there is little agreement among feminists on a theory of power; where power is vested or located or how it may be shifted and shared, but here are three views which I think may assist us. Firstly Aafke Komter (1991:55-9) distinguishes between manifest power (which surfaces in attempts to change), latent power (when the needs and wishes of the more dominant are anticipated) and invisible power mechanisms (those social and psychological propensities which keep us captive). These three categories could be used in an analysis of gender relations and how they may be manifest in energy policy and project planning. [Interactive exercise on how this might work]

Caroline Ramazanoglu (1989:9) suggests that if we want to live in an egalitarian society then the "interconnected bases of power" have to be changed. Power lies in:

1. the way in which systems of production are organized;
2. the ways in which sexuality and gender are socially constructed;
3. the ways in which reproduction is organised;
4. the ways in which social differences (such as those of race or caste) become ranked;
5. the ideological legitimation of the relationships to which these forms of power give rise ….

Changing the power dynamics, even in an energy project, would require attention to the interconnectedness of these, that is working inter-sectorally as well as across disciplinary boundaries.

Riet Delsing on the other hand (1991:129-149) brings a Foucauldian analysis to bear on the Chilean women's movement and uses his conceptual tools to consider various dimensions of power in a way which could be usefully practised by energy experts. For our purposes Foucault identifies two locations of power, *sovereign power* which is the practice of domination based on techniques

of subjugation, and *disciplinary power* exercised through mechanisms of surveillance and disciplinary discourses. To break through these power relations we need to understand how power is operating and create alternative power mechanisms. To understand how power operates we have adopted his relational approach to power, and adopted a micro-perspective to examine particular household processes and intimate relations from the standpoint of the women involved, but acknowledging this is not the full picture. Secondly, by adopting a dynamic processual view of the exercise of power, that is as something people, including women, actively employ rather than simply possess, the potential to exercise power is understood perceived as available to all members of a household (or project). Thirdly, hierarchical status categories, such as male/female or funder/recipient are identified as needing special attention and I shall come back to this. As a result, each member in the power and gender relationship is portrayed as an active agent.

Foucault's work has been severely criticized for neglecting the structural inequalities which underlie gender and other social relations. Feminists such as Braidotti (1986) and Davis et al (1991) consider that he over emphasised the role of individuals as agents and did not pay sufficient attention to the influence of enduring social divisions such as gender and age on interactions between individuals. These criticisms draw our attention to the complexity of analysing power relations and all the dimensions incurred. However Foucault's emphasis on agency allows us to view power as negotiable rather than fixed in social structures of dominance. What we need is a conception of power which enables us to link agency to structured relations involving domination and subordination and which at the same time allows us to re-instate women as agents without blaming them for social inequities – work has to be done by and with all agents involved.

What can we learn from this?

If we could change the social relations of subordination and domination at the micro-perspective what difference would this make? It is a mistake to equate social change with institutional change. History is littered with examples of institutional change – as we in South Africa have learned to our bitter experience – which have not led to revolutionary social change, in the sense of profoundly affecting people's everyday lives (Stanley and Wise 1993:73). But it is this experience, more than any other, which should teach us that taking over the state apparatus is self-defeating because it means taking over the very system that we want to abolish. We have seen how easily previously radical women and men take on thatcherite identities when they assume positions of power. So I am not suggesting that the resolution of individual problems or women and energy projects or even gendered energy can lead to political solutions, Foucault (1980) maintains that no profound changes will take place in society unless the power mechanisms (such as gender discourses) that run parallel to sovereign power are changed as well, so we have got to look to, understand, and analyse the micro-interactions throughout the system. By doing this we can establish the direct connections between gender-incorporating-power relations operating from the kitchen to the boardroom. To explore this in the energy sector I draw your attention to Bronwyn Jame's analysis of the process of writing the first post-apartheid Energy White Paper in South Africa.

James provides a path-breaking analysis of the way in which race, gender and power operated in one of the institutions (the Energy and Development Research Centre) which played a critical role in the writing of the new energy policy, and how women, despite their efforts to organize, were systematically squeezed out of the final writing process by men of higher status both in the EDRC in the Department of Minerals and Energy. Of course this analysis of the behaviour and interaction between individuals (the power relations) differs from an analysis of household relations in that loving relationships are vehicles of love and power a the same time, whereas by the end of the white paper process there was little love lost between the primary protagonists, male and female at EDRC.

James'attention to the shifting and differing positions throughout the process provides valuable indicators of how power relations can be examined and understood. Comparisons with the relations in the Canaan study can be drawn in terms of the disciplinary discourses of trust and competence. The male hierarchy simply did not trust women's ability to produce policy on anything other than domestic use of energy. And in doing so ensured that women continued to lack the expertise and experience in the petroleum and electricity sector that would alter the balance in expertise. Initially men also lacked this competence but they were given the opportunity to acquire it while women were not. James highlights the need to know the content of the sector, but I have a feeling women would have done a better job of writing a holistic energy policy, integrating the sub-sectors and ensuring empowerment of the previously disadvantaged community not only through the establishment of black-owned petroleum companies (which changes only the colour of power relations), but also through engaging the agency of the majority of domestic users and eventually shifting the paradigm.

As it happened we still have to find alternative power mechanisms. Up until recently women have not been represented in the energy sector or, worse still, have been represented by women who have little knowledge of gender issues, who want to fit in to the hegemonic paradigm and not rock the boat (or the cradle). It will be interesting to see what difference the appointment of Minister Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka and her personal assistant Gertrude Fester to gender policies and relations in the Ministry. The large funding organisations generally have sound gender policies in place, but they are seldom implemented. One could ask what the problem is with the people doing the implementing, but this is the wrong place to start. As Gillian Hart (in Crush 1989:31) has argued the neglect of power and politics results in an almost exclusive focus on commercialisation and technology as the main sources of (rural) change which cannot, for the reasons argued above, succeed. This is where the perpetuation of dominant orders happens. If the gender policies were implemented at international, national and local level we would be a great deal closer to an egalitarian society. At the moment this remains Utopian. However you will be heartened to remember that we are doing precisely what Foucault recommended in order to contribute to changing the relations of power and eventually the paradigm. He argues that to create alternative mechanisms of power we need to investigate both historically and in the present, how concrete mechanisms of power function (such as has been attempted here) and we should construct strategies such a power networks which are anti-disciplinarian and non-coercive. This is precisely what networks such as Energia can achieve if it works horizontally (*not* hierarchically), democratically and pays careful attention to individual agency and local conditions. This also means those of us in positions of power, as mothers, lovers, researchers, funders or workers, should not insist of maintaining our authority. We have to be willing to listen more and do less, trusting in the ability of those less powerful to be competent.

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