

IDS Bulletin

Transforming Development Knowledge

Volume 47 | Number 5 | November 2016

POWER, POVERTY AND INEQUALITY

Editors Marjoke Oosterom
and Patta Scott-Villiers



Notes on Contributors	iii
Introduction: Power, Poverty and Inequality Patta Scott-Villiers and Marjoke Oosterom	1
Inequality, Power and Participation – Revisiting the Links John Gaventa and Bruno Martorano	11
Why Invisible Power and Structural Violence Persist in the Water Domain Lyla Mehta	31
Inclusion as an Agenda for Transformative and Sustainable Change: Addressing Invisible Power through Reflective Practice Jo Howard with Violeta Vajda	43
Intersectionality: A Key for Men to Break Out of the Patriarchal Prison? Jerker Edström with Satish Kumar Singh and Thea Shahrokh	57
Towards a Pedagogy for the Powerful Andrea Cornwall	75
<u>Why Citizens Don't Engage – Power, Poverty and Civic Habitus</u> <u>Jethro Pettit</u>	89
Power and Empowerment Meet Resistance: A Critical, Action-Oriented Review of the Literature Rosie McGee	103
Power in Practice: Bringing Understandings and Analysis of Power into Development Action in Oxfam Jo Rowlands	119
Glossary	131

Why Citizens Don't Engage – Power, Poverty and *Civic Habitus**

Jethro Pettit

Abstract Poor people have been recast by development agencies from 'beneficiaries' to 'engaged citizens' – yet the assumptions behind many democracy and accountability programmes remain simplistic. Power defines and constrains citizen engagement, which takes place against a backdrop of complex histories of exclusion, discrimination and violence. Poor people's access to income, services or benefits can rely on patronage relations which they may be wisely reluctant to challenge. Citizen engagement is thus shaped by *civic habitus*: the tacit collusion with socialised norms of power. This article draws on a study of civil society strengthening work by Swedish organisations and their partners around the world which illustrates the challenges posed by political cultures of passivity and questions the logic behind much human rights and democracy programming. The article offers useful frameworks for understanding how power affects citizen engagement and the formation of *civic habitus*, and explores the implications of this for more transformative approaches to citizen engagement.

Keywords: power, democracy, accountability, citizenship, discrimination, *civic habitus*, passivity, human rights, democracy.

1 Introduction

People living in poverty have been gradually re-cast, in the eyes of development agencies, from passive recipients of aid to citizens who should demand better government and public services (Gaventa and Barrett 2010). 'Beneficiaries' are now 'engaged citizens', but the thinking behind many democracy and governance programmes remains simplistic. Citizens and states are seen as demand- and supply-side actors who must learn to perform their roles more effectively to achieve accountability. More informed citizens must voice their concerns while state actors consult and respond to feedback. This liberal democratic ideal underpins the social contract of Western democracy and its promotion around the world; but a closer look at how power defines and constrains citizen engagement raises fundamental questions about this logic.

People who are marginalised and who live in poverty decide whether and how to be 'civic' against the backdrop of complex histories of

© 2016 The Author. *IDS Bulletin* © Institute of Development Studies | DOI: 10.19088/1968-2016.169



This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non Commercial 4.0 International licence, which permits downloading and sharing provided the original authors and source are credited – but the work is not used for commercial purposes. <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/legalcode>

The *IDS Bulletin* is published by Institute of Development Studies, Library Road, Brighton BN1 9RE, UK

This article is part of *IDS Bulletin* Vol. 47 No. 5 November 2016: 'Power, Poverty and Inequality'; the Introduction is also recommended reading.

exclusion, discrimination and violence. Their survival and access to income, services or benefits often hinges on patronage relations which, if challenged, could cause them to lose what little they have and risk further exclusion. People don't simply 'choose' to become active as citizens – they assess the 'costs and consequences' of their choices (Kabeer 2001). Their actions as citizens are also shaped by embodied and socialised norms, more than reasoned calculation. Past encounters with oppression can constrain their options, as intimate and psychosocial experiences of exclusion limit their agency and induce compliance with power. Citizen engagement is shaped by what I would call *civic habitus* (after Bourdieu 1980): the tacit, rational collusion with socialised norms of power in order to survive and evade harm.

Scholars have long debated the operation of power in the public sphere: asking for example what produces a 'culture of silence' and oppression (Freire 1970); how 'willing compliance to domination' is secured via ideological manipulation (Lukes 1974: 10); why 'quiescence' can often prevail over 'rebellion' (Gaventa 1980); how everyday acts of resistance may be disguised as submission (Scott 1985, 1992); how institutions manifest 'disciplinary power' without coercion (Foucault 1991); how freedom is enabled or constrained by 'networks of social boundaries' (Hayward 2000); and how social dispositions become 'habitus' (Bourdieu 1980). These theories of power, while contested and often in tension, are vital to consider in any effort to understand or promote 'engaged citizenship'. The politics of voice and accountability cannot be explained as a political economy of competing interests without looking at how power is actually working 'below the waterline' (Pettit and Mejia Acosta 2014).

Civic habitus – defined here as the tacit and embodied collusion of citizens with forms of power pervading in the public sphere – raises questions about how active citizenship can best be stimulated. Better understanding is needed about how people's lived experiences of exclusion, trauma and survival affect their expressions of agency as citizens. This article draws on evidence from a study of civil society strengthening efforts by Swedish civil society organisations (CSOs) and their partners in Asia, Africa and Latin America which illustrates the particular challenges to citizens posed by political cultures of passivity and compliance. The study identifies barriers to citizen engagement and questions the logic behind much human rights, democracy and citizenship programming. Multiple dimensions of poverty, exclusion and power point to the need for more creative and transformative approaches to citizen engagement.

The article first shares the results of an inquiry into the multiple dimensions of poverty and exclusion, based on the Swedish civil society study (Pettit *et al.* 2015) which found that people living in poverty often collude with power rather than engaging as citizens to challenge it. Section 3 offers a conceptual framework for understanding how power affects citizen engagement in the public sphere, and how *civic*

habitus is created. Section 4 explores the implications of this for more transformative approaches to citizen engagement, with a focus on alternative methods of learning that can transform *civic habitus*.

2 Reality check: multiple dimensions of poverty and exclusion¹

Poverty is usually defined by international aid programmes as a deficit – a lack of income, economic opportunity, assets, resources, access to education or health, etc. Development initiatives then aim to fulfil this deficit. The empowerment of people in poverty is often conceived in liberal terms as a process by which individuals can gain the resources, knowledge, opportunities and capacities they need to overcome their poverty or exclusion. Rights-based approaches go further, recognising structural and legal barriers, and the need to tackle vested interests and unjust laws. However, human rights are still posed as being in deficit, requiring awareness of them on the part of rights-holders and legal fulfilment by duty-bearers. Such liberal notions of citizenship, rights and obligations do not always consider the ways in which power excludes and shapes people's innate dispositions to uphold or resist those conditions (Sardenberg 2009).

Much development research shows that people experience poverty and marginalisation not as a collection of isolated, unconnected problems to overcome, such as how to obtain income, food, housing, health, education, security, etc. Such challenges are often defined 'from above' and as 'sectors' of intervention that neatly map onto aid priorities. In reality, poverty is experienced as a complex interaction of forces and barriers that defines the options available to people and shapes what they feel they can do to secure their needs and rights. A two-year research project looked at people's lived experiences of poverty and exclusion, and how this affects their engagement with civil society and public life. The study evaluated Sweden's strategy for strengthening civil society in developing countries through CSOs and their partners in Nicaragua, Pakistan and Uganda (Pettit *et al.* 2015). It found that people's day-to-day experiences of the multiple and intersecting dimensions of poverty and exclusion limits their agency and will to engage as citizens.

Using the Reality Check Approach (RCA),² teams of researchers in each country lived with households in marginalised communities for between three and five days, returning to stay with the same families a year later. Nine rural and urban sites were identified, three in each country. Our research team sought to better understand people's day-to-day realities, their perceptions of changes taking place, their own strategies for improving their living conditions, and whether and how they engaged with civil society and government. To reduce informant biases, the communities and families were not direct beneficiaries identified by organisations, but were purposively sampled. We also sought out the views and experiences of a range of actors in the communities beyond our host families. No questionnaires or interviews were conducted; rather we lived with people, listened, observed, conversed informally and shared in daily activities. In a further stage of research we explored the

activities and theories of change of civil society and other actors at the local and national levels, and compared these with people's realities. Our methodology was ethnographic and social constructivist, in contrast with more conventional evaluation methods (for details see Pettit *et al.* 2015).

The main challenges people faced varied by location and population groups, and included patterns of discrimination based on gender, age, ethnicity and disability; insecure access to land, employment, income and markets; violation of labour rights; vulnerability to climate-related disasters (drought and flooding); poor education and health services, and gender-based violence. We tried to understand people's survival strategies, and their perceptions and means of engaging (or not) as citizens at different levels. This included examining relationships within communities, formal and informal collective action, and people's expectations of and relations with local authorities, public service providers and civil society.

Evidence from all nine sites highlighted people's experiences of multiple dimensions of poverty and exclusion, and how these converged to pose both *external* constraints on the options they felt were available to them, and *internalised* constraints to do with their agency as citizens. The external forces were apparent in people's perceptions of their shrinking prospects for livelihoods and employment; an increasingly monetised world in which basic needs and services could only be met with cash; an increasingly commercialised public sector where health, education and other services must be paid for; a growing pressure to migrate in search of alternative sources of income; weakening familial, community and associational bonds; various forms of stigma and discrimination; and psychological stress and trauma.

These dimensions were often experienced by the individuals and families as a complex and intersecting web, which in turn contributed to *internalised* constraints to their agency observed in the form of stress, depression, despair and low self-esteem. Many people showed signs of undiagnosed and untreated trauma and mental illness generated by these multiple conditions, in addition to more overt domestic and/or political violence. This stress and trauma affected their ability to participate meaningfully in civil society or democratic politics because their agency and sense of options had been physically and psychologically constrained.

Our Reality Check visits exposed intimate and emotional dimensions of poverty and exclusion often missed by more conventional research focused on material or legal deficits. These psychosocial aspects became important as we tried to understand how people viewed and experienced civil society, participation and human rights. We observed that norms and identities that prescribe one's status and agency according to gender, sexuality, age, disability, class, race and ethnicity were socialised and reinforced through practices of *tacit compliance with power*. This included the perpetuation of patterns of patriarchy, patronage and clientelism, which further constrained people's expression of agency as citizens.

The relationships of power and patronage we observed call into question liberal expectations that better informed citizens will engage with government and duty-bearers to secure their rights. People's lived experiences often dissuaded them from making any such claims, as the fear of being ostracised and suffering reprisals put them at risk of losing what little access they had to services or assistance. In Uganda, as services became less reliable and accessible, people did not demand as much from government because their expectations had been lowered and there was little incentive to mobilise. Instead, they struggled to find resources to pay for private services, begged relatives and friends for welfare, and relied on patronage from traditional or political leaders (Scott-Villiers *et al.* 2015).

Compliance with patron–client relations as a means of securing basic needs was also observed in Nicaragua. Traditional and political leaders used their access to public or collective resources to dispense patronage and create dependencies by poor families. In the Atlantic Coast region, indigenous communities had gained autonomy over their land and natural resources. Yet individual families' rights to access and sell timber and other natural resources – which they relied upon to educate their children or to pay for urgent health care – was dispensed through patronage by local indigenous leaders. Some families had preferential access to these resources, but everyone 'benefited' just enough, stood a chance of benefiting, or were worried about losing everything if they objected, so the system itself was not challenged.

In all three countries we observed a clear difference between people's *awareness* of their rights and entitlements, and their *expectations* that participating as citizens would help them achieve their rights. In Pakistan and Uganda, ideals of citizen participation and of transparent and accountable government were familiar to people, but they had little real expectation of fulfilment. Many saw government decentralisation, for example, not as the democratic advance that was promised but as a decentralisation of unfair practices of discrimination, non-transparency and unaccountability from the central to the local level.

Given the dominance of patronage and poor people's reliance on it for survival, practices of participation, transparency and accountability tended to be performed in ways that complied with patron–client politics, rather than with liberal democratic ideals. At best, they were put into practice in ways that were a hybrid of both sets of norms, sometimes leading to contradictory outcomes. We found instances in which communities and CSOs were effectively combating these conditions by mobilising citizens to realise their rights, but many others where social mobilisation tended to reproduce existing patterns of patronage, dependency and discrimination. People had very low expectations that government would bring positive change, and in some cases the same applied to expectations of CSOs in general. Benefits from government or CSOs were often seen as gifts rather than entitlements.

Despite these perceptions of limited opportunities for change, we observed quite sophisticated strategies for survival. These included hard work, education, migration and organisation. Yet most of those we met were not 'engaged citizens' who took part in government or civil society to secure rights. Instead, they demonstrated 'rational passivity' towards state, voluntary and other actors, while conforming to the *status quo* of dependency and clientelist relationships.

As we tried to understand the presence or absence of citizen agency and people's participation in shaping the 'vibrant and pluralistic civil society' nobly aspired to by the Swedish strategy (Sida 2009), we found on the whole that psychological stresses and vulnerabilities, combined with high sensitivity to risks of challenging power and patronage, lead to passivity and compliance. Citizen agency was constrained not by lack of awareness or information, but lack of an enabling environment and reward for action, well-grounded fears of repercussion, and tacit acceptance of the way things are. In sum, the psychosocial effects of poverty and exclusion constrained people's ability to participate in civic and political life.

3 Power, passivity and *civic habitus*

The foregoing research findings demonstrate what citizen engagement is typically 'up against': the complex forces and experiences that constrain the civic agency of people living in poverty. These challenges point to the need for deeper theoretical understanding of power, passivity and compliance. This section explores theories of power that point the way toward alternative strategies of citizen engagement. The 'rational passivity' we observed can be explained as the learned behaviour and dispositions of 'political culture' which 'shapes what people expect of their political system, what they see as possibilities for their own action, and what rights and responsibilities the various actors are perceived to have' (Merrifield 2001: 7).

Many thinkers have tried to understand how political culture is shaped and transformed, beyond utility-driven notions of political economy, and to identify more precisely what leads people to conform with, resist or reimagine socialised dispositions of power. Here I review some of the ideas and debates about these informal and less visible dimensions of power, drawing on ideas from political sociology, social theory and neurobiology to understand compliance with power (what I'll call *civic habitus*) and its implications for citizen engagement.

3.1 Invisible power

How power works in the domain of politics and citizen participation has been widely disputed, perhaps most famously by Stephen Lukes (1974) who argued that the exercise of power is not always observable or marked by coercion or conflict. Responding to debates about who wins or loses in political decision-making, Lukes distinguishes three 'dimensions' of power, and argues that the first dimension (who prevails in observable conflicts and moments of decision-making) and the second (how power operates behind the scenes through the 'mobilisation

of bias’) only partly explain how the ‘willing consent to domination’ is secured. The third and most insidious dimension of power, for Lukes, is the ideological shaping of people’s beliefs and expectations, such that some conflicts never need to arise.

This ‘radical view’ of a third dimension of power tends to focus on the *deliberate* efforts of powerful actors to manipulate beliefs via ideology, education, religion, the media, etc. and is therefore an intentional ‘power over’. Gaventa, inspired by Lukes, goes further in his articulation of ‘a third form of power, in which conflict is more invisible, through internalisation of powerlessness, or through dominating ideologies, values and forms of behaviour’ (Gaventa 2006: 29). This definition of ‘invisible power’ (also well articulated by VeneKlasen and Miller 2002) is not limited to intentional acts of domination, but can arise through self-reproducing processes in which all actors are conditioned by social and ideological norms, such as patriarchy.

3.2 Boundaries

Juxtaposed with this political sociology of power, and contesting it in academic debates, are broader sociological theories of power inspired by Foucault, Bourdieu and others. Hayward (1998, 2000) for example, draws on Foucault to challenge Lukes’s ‘third face of power’ for its implicit assumption that power is held and wielded by actors – which she thinks obscures the effects of structure and discourse. She argues for ‘de-facing power’ and shifts attention from the power behaviour of actors to the ‘networks of social boundaries’ which affect *all* actors:

Power’s mechanisms are best conceived, not as instruments powerful agents use to prevent the powerless from acting freely, but rather as social boundaries that, together, define fields of action for all actors. Power defines fields of possibility. It facilitates and constrains social action (Hayward 1998: 12).

Hayward doesn’t separate agency and structure but (like Foucault) sees them as mutually reproduced through social norms, identities and knowledge. Understanding and changing power thus becomes a task of recognising the social constraints to freedom, and people’s differential abilities to influence these constraints (*ibid.*: 20). From this we can infer that taking action as a citizen involves gaining capacities for identifying and redefining social boundaries. Many boundaries are only partly visible, in the form of ‘laws, rules, symbols, norms, customs, social identities, and standards which constrain and enable’ (Hayward 2000: 30). These forces can be so subconscious and habituated that people don’t necessarily know whether they are reproducing or resisting power through their actions.

3.3 Habitus

The idea of social boundaries helps to explain the presence and effects of power, but how are such limits internalised? Bourdieu’s concepts of *habitus* and *field* suggest that we experience power in our bodies as well as our thoughts (1980). Power is a cultural and symbolic creation, constantly reaffirmed through an interplay of agency and structure. This happens

through the relationship between *habitus* – the practical, learned and subjective habits or dispositions that shape our behaviour, and *field* – the norms, standards and structures that prevail in a given environment. *Habitus* is neither a result of free will, nor is it determined by structures, but arises from interplay between them over time: dispositions are shaped by past events and structures, and at the same time shape current practices and structures, and even condition our very perceptions of these (Bourdieu 1984: 174). Such dispositions are created and reproduced not in a rational or intentional way but more unconsciously.

How does this explain passivity and compliance in civic and public life? Is *civic habitus* simply determined, or can it be shaped through conscious will and agency? When faced with the norms of a field we don't stop and 'reason through our actions based on an objective assessment of the outcomes' (Bourdieu 1980: 54), as rational choice and liberal theory would suggest. Rather, over time, we internalise 'objective conditions' of these structures in a subconscious and embodied way, as *habitus*, which regenerates structures. We tend to avoid doing or saying things that don't make practical 'common sense' within the confines of the field, and rationalise our behaviour around what is allowed or not allowed. While a rational and objectivist approach would assume that we can experiment with *all* possible actions and outcomes, *habitus* gives 'disproportionate weight to early experiences' that have shaped our rationality (*ibid.*), so we are innately constrained by our own history. Bourdieu illustrates this with the unsettling image of a train moving along while laying its own tracks ahead of itself.

Habitus is akin to Foucault's explanation of our physical embodiment of social conventions. The 'disciplinary power' of institutions such as schools and prisons need not rely upon coercion or punishment to make us behave as expected: we discipline ourselves, subjugating our bodies to what's considered acceptable (Foucault 1991). Foucault doesn't insist on there being some prior ideology or discourse *leading* to determined actions: embodied experience can come first and actually *create* the 'discursive practices' or 'bodies of knowledge' that define what is normal or deviant (*ibid.*). The body is thus central to the (re)production of power. This poses a challenge to rational-objectivist notions of cognition, agency and choice – where thought precedes and determines action – and casts doubt on liberal notions of citizen engagement.

More than a set of rules we follow, *habitus* is the full internalisation of social experience; it is the process by which normative responses are *physically inscribed in our bodies*. Bourdieu is not often cited for this aspect of his thinking, as it is easier to grasp the idea that *habitus* reflects cultural and ideological 'beliefs' in the symbolic realm. Yet it is through *habitus* that social relations are actually 'turned into muscular patterns and bodily automatisms... a way of bearing one's body, presenting it to others, moving it, making space for it, which gives the body its social physiognomy' or 'bodily hexis' (Bourdieu 1984: 474). The body thus works as a 'memory-jogger' with its 'complexes of gestures, postures and words... which have only to be slipped into, like a theatrical costume,

to awaken, by the evocative power of bodily mimesis, a universe of ready-made feelings and experiences' (*ibid.*). This 'bodily hexis' is akin to what neuroscientists have since called 'enactive' or 'embodied' cognition (Varela, Thompson and Rosch 1991), casting very similar doubts about Cartesian and objectivist notions of reason (Damasio 2006).

3.4 Embodied cognition

Boundaries and *habitus* work well together as a theory for understanding power and passive compliance, but they are *sociological* concepts for behaviour that is also *psychological* and *physiological*. To make practical use of these ideas, we need to know more about *how it is* that people learn to conform to boundaries and dispositions, and *what can be done*, if anything, to change this. If power is embodied, what does this mean for approaches to citizen engagement that emphasise rational modes of cognition? What are the limits of analytical forms of learning about citizen rights if large parts of our speech and behaviour are derived not from reason but from our experiential and habituated 'logic of practice' (Bourdieu 1980)? Can we use our senses and bodies more intentionally to unlearn and transform our *civic habitus*?

Invisible power, habitus, boundaries, discipline and other related explanations of power are consistent with notions of 'embodied cognition' from neurobiology (Varela *et al.* 1991; Damasio 2000, 2006), neurolinguistics (Johnson 1987; Lakoff and Johnson 1999), artificial intelligence (Clark 2008), psychology and neuro-philosophy (Gallagher 2005; Thompson 2007).³ There has been a growing convergence of science and philosophy around the idea of the 'embodied' or 'enactive' consciousness, challenging Enlightenment binaries of mind vs body and reason vs feeling. Neurological perspectives on the somatic internalisation of experience invite the possibility of using multidimensional, affective and embodied approaches to citizen empowerment and engagement. Here space permits only a brief exploration drawing on one of these neuro-philosophical perspectives.

Contrary to objectivist models of cognition, we don't rationally plan our actions after evaluating and choosing from available options. Rather, we perceive, respond and improvise in a highly flexible way according to context and history; we are '*situated* agents, continually coming up with what to do...' (Varela 1999: 55). In studies of visual perception and action, Varela and his colleagues reject the 'computationalist tradition' in cognitive science, which assumes that sensory data is gathered and processed by a controlling centre somewhere in the mind, which then responds to an 'internal representation' of reality upon which it can act (*ibid.*: 54). The latest brain imaging techniques are unable to detect any such 'machine-like' processes of assembling and responding to sensory input, or any real 'centre' of cognition; instead, there are complex multidirectional networks of activity and feedback loops through which a coherent world emerges (*ibid.*: 49). Our mind neither 'recovers' an objective outer world (realism), nor 'projects' an inner construct of the world (idealism), but instead functions via a process of 'mutual specification' which enables us to 'enact a world' (Varela *et al.* 1991: 172, 151).

This fascinating proposal sheds light on the possible workings of *habitus* – not surprising as both Varela and Bourdieu were influenced by Merleau-Ponty's studies of visual perception (1962). A social theory of how we embody and reproduce power (via *habitus*) is here supported by a neurobiological account of 'enactive cognition'. Both theories effectively reject the prevailing dualisms in Western philosophy of mind vs body, objective vs subjective, agency vs structure, inner vs outer, and perceiver vs environment. This 'turn' in cognitive science doesn't deny human agency, but it challenges long-held assumptions about individual autonomy, rationality and learning in Western thought.

Civic habitus can thus be understood as arising from a combination of the internalised beliefs of *invisible power* (Lukes 1974; Gaventa 2006), the *networks of social boundaries* that enable and constrain freedom (Hayward 2000), the socialised dispositions of *habitus* (Bourdieu 1980) and processes of *embodied cognition* (Varela *et al.* 1991). These concepts help to explain why so often 'political socialisation operates below the radar screen' (Merrifield 2001: 10), and each concept illuminates a particular facet of citizen compliance with power in the public sphere. There is a risk of seeing *civic habitus* as a kind of determinism – which is why many are drawn to the idea that power is always perpetrated or resisted by actors. But *civic habitus* invites a deeper examination of the psychosocial processes of disempowerment. And it poses a challenge for those who wish to promote engaged citizenship: What kinds of strategies might support citizens to transform their *civic habitus*?

4 Conclusion: a transformative approach to citizen engagement

Civic habitus suggests that our bodies understand and enact power in ways that our conscious and analytical minds do not necessarily grasp. We have somatic and emotional reflexes that serve as living maps of our past encounters with norms of power, leading us to reproduce and comply with structures of domination. This creates a challenge for promoting citizenship, where many programmes operate on the logic of citizen education, popular communication, voice, mobilisation, and the spaces, mechanisms and technologies for transparency and accountability. While such activities can be very important, the theory of change behind them is often one of objective realism and individual autonomy – where better access to information and knowledge will produce citizen engagement. There is a somewhat blind faith in rational cognition and the expectation that voice and agency will automatically follow from it.

Underlying these approaches to engagement is a Cartesian notion of mind–body dualism in which action follows thought, and thought is the rational evaluation of costs and benefits. This view is not entirely wrong, as people do act in ways that they think will serve their interests or at least avoid harm. The 'rational passivity' we identified in the Swedish study showed that poor and marginalised people often choose to comply with power where the risks of challenging power are perceived to be high. Efforts to convince people of their 'true' interests and responsibilities as citizens will not go very far if the consequences of acting are too

harsh. As we found in the study, people were often very aware but were unwilling to act. This problem of ‘quiescence’ (Gaventa 1980) is further compounded where there is a *civic habitus* of compliance founded on a political culture of dependency and clientelism.

Traditions of critical adult learning would suggest that deeper and more transformative methods of awareness-raising are called for. These would not only expose the workings of power and discrimination (about which most poor and marginalised people are acutely aware), but reveal the filtration of this power into habituated ways of thinking and acting. Critical pedagogy aims to nurture abilities to name and challenge the workings of ‘invisible power’ (Gaventa 2006), to recognise and resist the ‘social boundaries... that define fields of action’ (Hayward 1998: 12), and to transform the subjective dispositions of *habitus* and normative structures of *field* (Bourdieu 1980). Yet there is a paradox when power also flows from *embodied cognition*. Critical pedagogy relies on rational analysis – albeit ‘critical’ reason – and a mind–body dualism is still assumed. Is the mind capable of transforming deeply embodied constructs and dispositions? Can we think our way out of invisible, habitual and embodied compliance with power?

A transformative approach to citizen engagement – one that can undo *civic habitus* – would include action learning processes that focus not only on critical reason and awareness, but would complement this with more reflexive, creative and embodied methods of learning and practice. These methods would draw on the imagination and envisioning of cultural change, and would use multidimensional methods of narrative, storytelling, visual and artistic expression, music, movement and theatre. Such creative methods can evoke more felt and experiential knowledge of the past and deeper re-imaginings of possible futures. Movement and theatre can surface and interrogate embodied experience, and engage participants in reinventing their habituated and physiological responses to power. Drawing, painting, photography, film and sculpture all offer powerfully visceral and aesthetic avenues of learning that can both enhance and transcend more conceptual and analytical methods of sense-making.

This is not a new proposal, but one that is sadly overlooked. Creative and narrative methods have been widely advocated in transformative approaches to participatory and action research (e.g. Heron and Reason 2008). Social movements have long drawn on forms of popular education and cultural expression using ‘songs, poetry and theatre’ and ‘especially local cultural forms to give voice, pass on history and engender solidarity’ (Merrifield 2001: 14–15). The theories of power reviewed here suggest that cultural action of this kind enables more than just symbolic and conceptual expressions of identity and struggle: it invites the possibility of more affective and embodied re-imaginings of power and social order, and so contributes to the transformation of *civic habitus* and political culture.

Creative and embodied approaches to learning all tap into the power of imagination, which – in keeping with notions of power and *civic habitus*

– has been considered central to processes of citizen empowerment. In contexts of socialised and internalised power, empowerment is much more likely to occur ‘when individuals and organised groups are able to imagine their world differently’ and can act upon that imagination (Eyben, Kabeer and Cornwall 2008: 6). Creativity and art feed imagination, which ‘gives us images of the possible that provide a platform for seeing the actual, and seeing the actual freshly... we can do something about creating what lies beyond it’ (Eisner 2002: 4). The power of the imagination is also recognised in creative approaches to professional development because it occupies the ‘potential space’ between past and future and offers ‘the possibility of being transformed’ (Hunt and Sampson 2006: 7).

These creative and embodied forms of learning provide *different ways of generalising from the particular* than those offered by conceptual analysis. They can hold open our lived experience of power to more immediate forms of apprehension, without jumping too quickly into abstract thinking, or allowing symbolic representations to *substitute* for embodied understanding and knowledge. This approach doesn’t reject the power of the intellect and critical consciousness, but brings them into balance with other ways of knowing, integrating them with creative expressions of our somatic encounters with power. Such approaches have the potential to transcend simplistic liberal notions of citizen engagement based on rational choice and utility and to enable more enactive and imaginative forms of citizen agency capable of transforming the socialised norms and political cultures that induce compliance with power.

Notes

* A longer version of this article appears as a chapter (Pettit 2016) in Skinner *et al.* (2016).

- 1 This section draws substantially on the Swedish civil society strategy evaluation report authored by Pettit *et al.* (2015) and the fieldwork and analysis of the country evaluation teams in Nicaragua, Pakistan and Uganda, to whom I am indebted for these findings.
- 2 See Lewis and Jupp (2012) and www.reality-check-approach.com.
- 3 Many explanations of embodiment, including those of Bourdieu and Foucault, have been influenced by the continental philosophy of phenomenology, particularly the work of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, who was one of the first to link phenomenology and sociological theory with cognitive science. Varela *et al.* (1991) are also influenced by Buddhist philosophies of consciousness.

References

- Bourdieu, P. (1984) *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, London: Routledge
- Bourdieu, P. (1980) *The Logic of Practice*, Stanford CA: Stanford University Press
- Clark, A. (2008) *Supersizing the Mind: Embodiment, Action and Cognitive Extension*, Oxford: Oxford University Press

- Damasio, A. (2006) *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain*, London: Vintage
- Damasio, A. (2000) *The Feeling of What Happens: Body, Emotion and the Making of Consciousness*, London: Vintage
- Eisner, E.W. (2002) *The Arts and the Creation of Mind*, New Haven CT and London: Yale University Press
- Eyben, R.; Kabeer, N. and Cornwall, A. (2008) *Conceptualising Empowerment and the Implications for Pro Poor Growth: A Paper for the DAC Poverty Network*, Brighton: IDS
- Foucault, M. (1991) *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of a Prison*, London: Penguin
- Freire, P. (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, New York NY: Herder & Herder
- Gallagher, S. (2005) *How the Body Shapes the Mind*, Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Gaventa, J. (2006) 'Finding the Spaces for Change: A Power Analysis', *IDS Bulletin* 37.5: 22–33, <http://bulletin.ids.ac.uk/idsbo/article/view/898> (accessed 31 August 2016)
- Gaventa, J. (1980) *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley*, Urbana and Chicago IL: University of Illinois Press
- Gaventa, J. and Barrett, G. (2010) *So What Difference does it Make? Mapping the Outcomes of Citizen Engagement*, IDS Working Paper 347, Brighton: IDS
- Hayward, C. (2000) *De-Facing Power*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Hayward, C. (1998) 'De-Facing Power', *Polity* 31.1: 1–22
- Heron, J. and Reason, P. (2008) 'Extending Epistemology within a Cooperative Inquiry', in P. Reason and H. Bradbury, *The SAGE Handbook of Action Research: Participative Inquiry and Practice*, London: Sage
- Hunt, C. and Sampson, F. (2006) *Writing: Self and Reflexivity*, London: Palgrave MacMillan
- Johnson, M. (1987) *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination and Reason*, Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press
- Kabeer, N. (2001) *Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment. Discussing Women's Empowerment: Theory and Practice*, Stockholm: Swedish International Development and Cooperation Agency (Sida)
- Lakoff, G. and Johnson, M. (1999) *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought*, New York NY: Basic Books
- Lewis, D. and Jupp, D. (2012) *Reality Check Reflection Report*, Stockholm: Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida)
- Lukes, S. (1974) *Power: A Radical View*, 2nd ed., London: Palgrave Macmillan
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1962) *The Phenomenology of Perception*, New York NY: Humanities Press
- Merrifield, J. (2001) *Learning Citizenship*, Brighton: IDS and Society for Participatory Research in Asia
- Pettit, J. (2016) 'Civic Habitus: Toward a Pedagogy for Citizen Engagement', in A. Skinner, M. Baillie Smith, E. Brown and T. Troll (eds), *Education, Learning and the Transformation of Development*, London: Routledge

- Pettit, J. and Mejía Acosta, A. (2014) 'Power Above and Below the Waterline: Bridging Political Economy and Power Analysis', *IDS Bulletin* 45.5: 9–22, <http://bulletin.ids.ac.uk/idsbo/article/view/147> (accessed 31 August 2016)
- Pettit, J.; McGee, R.; Dixon, H.; Scott-Villiers, P. and Goyder, H. (2015) *Evaluation of the Strategy for Support via Swedish Civil Society Organisations 2010–2014 – Synthesis Report*, Stockholm: Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida)
- Sardenberg, C. (2009) *Liberal vs Liberating Empowerment: Latin America*, Pathways Working Paper, Brighton: Pathways of Women's Empowerment, IDS
- Scott, J.C. (1992) *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, New Haven CT and London: Yale University Press
- Scott, J.C. (1985) *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Resistance*, New Haven CT and London: Yale University Press
- Scott-Villiers, P.; Ssewakiryanga, R.; Gohl, E. and Ahikire, J. (2015) *Evaluation of the Strategy for Support via Swedish Civil Society Organisations 2010–2014 – Uganda Report*, Stockholm: Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida)
- Sida (2009) *Strategy for Support via Swedish Civil Society Organisations 2010–2014* (UF2009/28632/UP), Stockholm: Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
- Skinner, A.; Baillie Smith, M.; Brown, E. and Troll, T. (eds) (2016) *Education, Learning and the Transformation of Development*, London: Routledge
- Thompson, E. (2007) *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology, and the Sciences of Mind*, Cambridge MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University
- Varela, F.J. (1999) *Ethical Know-How: Action, Wisdom and Cognition*, Stanford CA: Stanford University Press
- Varela, F.J.; Thompson, E. and Rosch, E. (1991) *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience*, Cambridge MA: MIT Press
- VeneKlasen, L. and Miller, V. (2002) *A New Weave of Power, People and Politics: The Action Guide for Advocacy and Citizen Participation*, Oklahoma City OK: World Neighbors