DEVELOPMENT STUDIES – PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

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Challenging the Asymmetries of Power: A Review of the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) Contribution

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Abstract Despite the fact that power has been a key concept in social and political theory for decades, within international development a focus on understanding power relationships and how they are challenged and transformed has only recently become more central. In this article, we examine how the concept of power has been used and discussed in *IDS Bulletin* articles over the last five decades, reflect on IDS contributions to the concepts and practices of power in development, and speculate on what further work might shape and inspire work in this field in the future. We argue that an explicit analysis of power was largely absent from earlier issues of the *IDS Bulletin*, or considered in narrow economic terms. However, beginning around the 1990s, the analysis of power emerged more centrally to IDS work across many fields – including gender, knowledge, participation and livelihoods – such that today, understanding how power relations shape development is considered a core part of the IDS approach.

1 Introduction

'The extreme inequalities of most developing societies tend to mean that access to political power is seriously maldistributed, notwithstanding the countervailing influence of electoral politics. In power (and therefore policy) terms, in consequence, developing democracies tend to be characterized by a powerful 'core' dominated by well-resourced elites and a powerless 'periphery' of effectively disenfranchised citizens. To the extent that this is true in any given society, there would seem to be a case that a large proportion of external 'development aid' should be aimed at counter-balancing this structural asymmetry.'
Gordon White, *IDS Bulletin*, 1995, as a footnote in an article on the democratic developmental state

In the last two decades, power and empowerment have become increasingly part of the international development lexicon – though

development aid is still far from being understood as counter-balancing the structural asymmetries of power, as Gordon White wished it to be some 20 years ago (see above quote). However, despite the fact that power has long been a key concept in social and political theory, within international development a focus on understanding power, how it works, and how power relationships are challenged and transformed has only become more central in recent years. In this article, we examine how power has been used and discussed in *IDS Bulletin* articles over the last five decades, reflect on the IDS contributions to concepts and practices of power in development, and speculate on how further work on power might shape and inspire work in this field in the future.

2 Power: from a common sense word to an analytical framework for development

A review of the *IDS Bulletin* provides an interesting intellectual history of how the concept of power has evolved over five decades within IDS, and perhaps more broadly in development studies.[1]

In an *IDS Bulletin* article of 2006, Robert Chambers observed that power is a useful word because it has a common sense rather than a difficult academic meaning (Chambers 2006). A word search of the term 'power' across the *IDS Bulletin* finds a number of examples of the 'common sense' usage. It appears some 1,675 times since the journal was first published in 1968. Over two thirds of this usage has been in the last 25 years and almost half of the usage since the year 2000. However, when we look for articles where 'power' appeared in the title (and therefore presumably as a more central concept) we see far less emphasis. Over the years, some 44 articles have carried 'power' in the title, and 28 of these (almost two thirds) have been since the turn of the century. In the early years, most of the uses of the term 'power' were in passing and mostly evoking its common sense meaning. Only in later years did the concept of power emerge as a more significant analytical lens for unpacking both the aims and the processes of international development.

The relatively slow take-up of the concern with power as a central concept in the *IDS Bulletin* (and therefore presumably in IDS work more generally) is striking when considered alongside other debates in the social sciences of the time. As a PhD student at Oxford in the early 1970s, one of the authors (John Gaventa) found debates on power to be critical topics of the day. In 1974, Steven Lukes published his influential *Power: A Radical View*, a book that shaped later thinking, especially on its 'hidden' and 'invisible' forms of power. Lukes' book also challenged behavioural views of power in American political science, with its tradition of work on community power (e.g. Dahl 1961), but though 'village studies' were important at IDS, the social science debates on how to study power at the community level are not reflected in IDS publications in this period. Also in the 1970s, Michel Foucault's important work on knowledge, discourse and power was published in France (Foucault 1977, 1979), and while this thinking also came to be reflected in streams of IDS work on knowledge, gender and

development discourse, again this was not until much later. Around the same time, Freire published his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), Simone de Beauvoir published on gender and power (1974), and Pierre Bourdieu published his work on structure, agency and habitus (1977) – all themes which are later picked up in IDS work, but not during the 1970s when they were so hotly debated in the broader social sciences.

3 A look at the early years (1968–99): moving beyond market and states

Part of the apparent disconnect with other social science debates on power may have been disciplinary, as IDS was heavily influenced by economists at the time. The first *IDS Bulletin* article to focus on power in 1976 was about the control of oil supplies by OPEC, and referred to 'producer power' as well as to 'oil power' (Maull 1976). The next article didn't come until ten years later, when an article by Brett focusing on state power and economic inefficiency also examined the role of monopoly power, this time through the creation of state marketing boards (1986). A related article by the same author the following year on 'states, markets and private power' also focused on the concentration of economic power, but also briefly extended the idea to concentrations of power in civil society – which 'can be every bit as coercive over individuals as those exercised by the state and which can also exercise a degree of influence over the state' (Brett 1987: 36).

Thus up until the late 1980s, power was very rarely a central topic in the *IDS Bulletin* – and when it was used, it was largely in reference to state and economic power, with passing reference to civil society. Around the early 1990s, however, a series of separate articles each brought power into the conversation in ways that considerably expanded its meanings and scope, and laid the groundwork for streams of thinking about power which have continued to this day.

The first of these was an article in 1989 entitled 'Survival Strategies and Power amongst the Poorest in a West Bengal Village' (Beck 1989). Arguing that development studies must focus not only on formal institutions, the author turns to a study of informal survival strategies of the poor, suggesting also that 'power relations cannot be ignored'. Building on Chambers' work, *Rural Development: Putting the Last First* (1983: 157–63), he goes on to question whether outsiders can challenge local power directly. Rather, our studies

> should find those 'gaps' or 'soft areas' in the village power structure – areas already used by the poor, that can bring benefits to them by exploiting the present system, and which, strengthened in the long term, could change the balance and structure of power (Beck 1989: 23).

Doing so, he argues, will challenge views that poor people are passive, and must be 'planned for' – 'or even make it acceptable to propose that poor people can make their own plans'.

The 1989 piece was followed by an important issue in 1993, edited by Gordon White, on the 'political analysis of markets'. Arguing for

a 'power-based' view of politics, not only a 'state-based' one, White defines political analysis

> in terms of the nature, distribution and exercise of power in the *society as a whole* [italics added], not only held by the state or market monopolies (1993: 2).

Therefore, markets also

> can be seen as complex political systems with their own specific distributions of power and diverse sets of power relations (*ibid.*).

Drawing upon Foucault's notion of capillary power, White argues that state power becomes 'saturated' in everyday market exchanges in invisible ways, requiring investigation that goes beyond 'conventional economic analysis' to understand. In the same issue, Baland and Platteau ask, 'Are economists concerned with power?' and while concluding that they are, suggest that they have tended 'to focus on the mechanisms whereby power is exerted and reproduced while paying little attention to the basic question of its origin and formation' (1993: 18).

In a very significant article in the same issue, Alison Evans extends the critique from a gender perspective, arguing that 'the institutional approach continues to analyse economic behaviour within a social power vacuum' (1993: 29). Moreover, 'by analytically separating power relationships from market relationships and power from ideology, the neoclassical approach neutralizes the political or ideological content of economic transactions' (1993: 28), which in turn has led to major 'blind-spots' when it comes to understanding the gender differences in economic rewards and behaviour within the labour market. 'After years of empirical study', Evans writes, 'we know that gender differences in resource endowment are not simply given but are themselves the product of deeply-rooted asymmetries in status and bargaining power' (1993: 25).

In 1994 another special issue of the *IDS Bulletin* extended White's view of a 'power-based view of political analysis' to an examination of information, knowledge and power. In its far-reaching Introduction, Susanna Davies, then Associate Director, speculates on the impact that 'the revolution in information and communications technology' would have for the South and for development studies (over 20 years ago!). She argues that power affects the neutrality of knowledge, shapes 'whose reality counts', and affects how information is transmitted, analysed and used. 'Thus it is less the case that knowledge is power than that the use of that knowledge is an expression of power. Conversely, the inability to use knowledge is an expression of impotence' (Davies 1994: 11). In this same issue, we find Robert Chambers' well-known essay on 'All Power Deceives', in which he shows how errors in knowing by development professionals are deeply related to underlying patterns of dominance, ego and the relationships of 'uppers' and 'lowers' (1994). Anne-Marie Goetz in the same issue also shows how structured gender biases also affect how information is shaped and used (1994).

Thus, in looking back over the early years of the *IDS Bulletin*, we find a relatively slow take-up of discussions of power initially, except in passing reference. Where it is discussed, it is largely in institutional terms referring to monopoly power. However, in a few short years from 1989–94, this approach is fundamentally questioned and the shoots emerge of what might be called an IDS approach to power, with the following characteristics:

● *a focus on the experiences and actions of the relatively powerless*, which requires looking at power from the bottom up and with a sense of the potential of people's agency, rather than a study of power in the abstract;

● a *'power-based' analysis of institutions* (not simply an institutionally-based analysis of power), and one that looks at social relationships which cut across markets, states and civil society, including gendered relationships, requiring interdisciplinary perspectives to fully understand;

● a recognition of the ways in which *knowledge production and use both contribute to and reflect power relationships.*[2]

4 The later years (2000–15): influencing development pathways and 'applied' power

Interestingly, the *IDS Bulletin* appears quieter on the theme of power during the second part of the 1990s, but then gains significant traction during the 2000s with a few key issues that place power front and centre: 'Making Rights Real: Exploring Citizenship, Participation and Accountability' (Cornwall 2002: i–x), 'Developing Rights' (Pettit and Wheeler 2005), 'Exploring Power for Change' (Eyben, Harris and Pettit 2006) and 'Negotiating Empowerment' (Cornwall and Edwards 2010). During this period, power plays a significant role in shaping both discourse and practice. On the discursive side, power as a concept is brought in as a solid analytical lens to both critically examine and influence development trends. On the practice side, an increasing interest in applied power analysis leads to new experiments with participatory research, learning and action.

While more diverse and extensive, much of this post-turn-of-the-century work on power continues to build upon and expand many of the themes which emerged in the 1989–94 period discussed earlier, as well as to refer back to the broader debates on power in the social sciences, especially the work of Lukes and Foucault. But this work is now both informed by and constitutive of a new landscape in development practice: since the early 1990s, 'participation', 'empowerment' and later on 'rights-based approaches' had gained prevalence, at least within the rhetoric if not the practice of most institutions and agencies in development.

IDS Bulletin articles of this period support the participatory, citizen-centred and rights-based approach to development while simultaneously seek to argue or guard against an understanding of participation and

empowerment that is not focused on transforming the power relations that drive inequality, poverty and marginalisation. This conceptual and political intent underpins a range of articles that problematise key themes of participation, knowledge, agency, gender, empowerment and citizen–institutions relations.

In 2004 Cornwall wrote:

> A space can be emptied or filled, permeable or sealed: it can be an opening, an invitation to speak or act… Spaces can also be voided of meaning… Thinking about participation as spatial practice highlights the relations of power and constructions of citizenship that permeate any site for public engagement (2004a: 1).

In this period, the concept of spaces became central to the IDS approach and influential in problematising participation in at least three ways: by popularising the idea that there is no neutral space but that all spaces are constituted by the power relations that go on inside them; by providing legitimacy to those development actors who were pointing at the risks of 'invited' spaces during a time where 'consultation everywhere' was promoted as the solution to the democratic deficit; and by advocating the value of 'claimed' citizen spaces and the subsequent need to nurture them or to at least not stand in their way.

The following year in an issue dedicated to the 'rise of rights' in development, the editorial notes that:

> one of the key differences between donor discourses on rights and bottom-up understandings of rights is that development actors are generally motivated on what is perceived as the 'need for development' to which rights are framed as a solution. By contrast, [social mobilisations]… are concerned with broad goals of social justice, access to economic resources, political change and empowerment (Pettit and Wheeler 2005: 3).

In the same volume, Just Associates[3] argue that rights can be packaged as another technical fix that doesn't challenge structural inequalities and sources of power (Miller, VeneKlasen and Clark 2005).

The preoccupation with definitions and framings of rights here is one example of how power dynamics 'determine definitions of what is conceived as important' (Gaventa and Cornwall 2006: 122) and what solutions are conceived as possible, for and by whom. In another example, a seminal *IDS Bulletin* on 'The Politics of Seed in Africa's Green Revolution', Scoones and Thompson (2011) demonstrate how narratives shaped by power relations and institutional interests determine which development pathways – in the form of policy or technological solutions – are given importance over others and in so doing, define winners and losers in the food and seeds system. In support of creating more space for bottom-up innovations powered by farmers' knowledge, the authors state that 'this is not a romantic

reification of the traditional, but a radical shift in doing things which bypasses and subverts the conventional approaches, so easily captured by elite forms of expertise and business interests' (2011: 17).

Building on earlier work (2006: 16) on the need to link empowerment to issues of caste and class and the unequal access of women in the power wielded by the state, as part of the 2008 issue titled 'Reclaiming Feminism: Gender and Neoliberalism', Chakravarti examines three different women's empowerment programmes in India – from the 1970s literacy campaigns to the microcredit schemes in the 2000s – to demonstrate how the meaning of empowerment has been distorted into 'individual betterment', serving the neoliberal agendas of both markets and state (Chakravarti 2008).

Multiple articles emphasise the importance of not losing sight of the power of the elites – and how such power is reproduced through unequal access to resources – as a counterweight against approaches that depoliticise empowerment through 'the assumption that one sector of society can be empowered without necessarily changing the power of other sectors or questioning the norms and values that uphold that power' (Pettit and Wheeler 2005: 6). On the other hand, work by Chambers and others argue that we must go beyond the 'power-over' view, to also understand the 'power to empower' as a win-win rather than a zero-sum process (2006).

Thus, much of the more recent work on power is concerned with more deeply interrogating the transformation of power relations in practice: simplistic dichotomies of 'win-lose', 'powerful-powerless', 'mainstream vs alternative pathways for change' are consistently challenged. Energy is instead invested in asking the right questions and deepening the inquiries on and with the actors in complex social dynamics, so as to influence the course of action. For example, some of the most recent work on agency and citizenship applies concepts of 'legitimacy' and 'social leadership' to shed light on how and why certain power relationships and governance arrangements are sustained or disrupted especially within complex and volatile contexts (McGee 2014; Tadros 2014).

Articles in this period are also many times authored with or by IDS partners and practitioners from both North and South – often as a result of larger or smaller joint research projects – demonstrating a move to applying understandings of power to specific contexts and struggles, and also a move towards co-generation of knowledge as a strategy for shifting power relations in and of itself. This move is well documented in the 2012 issue 'Action Research for Development and Social Change' (Burns 2012), which provides nuanced accounts on researching power with a view to finding entry points for change together, as well as to scale up systemic participatory inquiries that engage multiple stakeholders in analysing power relations in complex systems (see, for example, the case of systemic inquiry on climate change adaptation in Harvey, Burns and Oswald 2012).

Thus, when scanning through the proliferation of articles that are concerned with power in development after 2000 (more than two thirds of the total, as mentioned above), one encounters a diverse and rich mix of inquiries, conceptual explorations, case studies, tools and dialogues. Those evoke sometimes powerful and inspiring deep-dives in development theory and practice and other times challenges, provocations and doubts about the way forward for our understanding of power in development. If seen as more than the sum of its parts, this focus on 'applied power' has created a set of resources that in turn have arguably had an impact on how a critical mass of 'development operations think: the ideas, values, assumptions and information that shape their practice' (Kabeer 2010: 108). Specifically, these resources could be labelled as:

- *Discursive:* Elevating the transformation of power relations as a key precondition for development outcomes otherwise at risk of being understood as mere technical fixes (for example, good governance, citizen participation, climate change adaptation).

- *Analytical:* Offering typologies of power that encourage a relational understanding of power (power as diluted in social relations, as formal and informal, visible, hidden and invisible, positive and negative, power as a function of complex systems) and thus enriching the available analytical frameworks for constructing theories of change within development programmes.[4]

- *Practical:* Developing and diffusing methodologies, tools, stories, examples that support an increasing number of practitioners to develop a more power-conscious practice and explore pedagogies that focus on the transformation of power relations.[5]

While the analysis above has looked at the emergence of work on power through a focus on key articles in the *IDS Bulletin* over almost five decades, this of course gives only a partial view of how the topic of power has been taken up in IDS work. If we expand our lens further, we see other examples as well. Particularly in recent years, work by the STEPS Centre and others have demonstrated the critical importance of control over resources – land, water, climate, food – as expressions of power, as well as how dominant knowledge and discourses shape the policy debates and processes of sustainability (Leach, Scoones and Stirling 2010). Work on 'unruly politics' has challenged how power is exercised and built beyond recognisable repertoires for citizen action and organisation (Khanna *et al.* 2013). Other work on complexity and power challenges us to move away from linear understandings of how power works, while also taking a more systems-based view (Ramalingam 2013; Burns and Worsley 2015). Yet other work has focused on the power of measurement and evaluation, raising fundamental questions about who has the power to determine 'success', and whose knowledge and values these reflect (Eyben *et al.* 2015) . Work by the Centre for Rising Powers in Development has looked at how the rise of the BRICS is changing the global contours of power.

The landscape of work on power at IDS in its fiftieth year thus looks very different than in its earlier years. It can now be said that power is a core concept cutting across almost all of IDS' work, as illustrated by the IDS strategy for 2015–20 which pledges 'to challenge orthodoxies, interrogate power relations, and bring the voices and realities of people… to the heart of debate and decisions'.[6] Yet IDS is itself entangled in relationships of power, including funding and policymaking relationships, which make certain discourses, pathways and approaches more visible or legitimate than others, and which may obscure ideological choices. IDS is also itself not a unified entity but a constellation of actors and networks with different power relations, within multiple perspectives and approaches. A unified IDS lens on power would likely be neither possible nor desirable, for it is the contestations and critiques of knowledge, both externally and from within, that sustain the evolution of approaches and perspectives.

5 Afterword: looking back to look forward

Writing this article has created a reflective moment for both authors. In this final section we take a conversational approach to share our thoughts on how we have experienced this history, as well as on how IDS might approach future work on power.

Both authors have had the privilege of learning from and engaging with this rich historical trajectory at IDS on power: John as a Fellow linked to the Institute for almost 20 years, and Maro first as a student, who has gone on to reflect further upon and to apply concepts to her practice as a human rights practitioner and activist (Pantazidou 2013).

In the process of tracking the intellectual journey of 'power' within the *IDS Bulletin* we kept asking ourselves: how did these concepts and approaches to power influence us personally – and other peers – along the way? And what can we learn from the past as we move forward? What further work might be important on the horizon? As this is very much a live conversation, we have chosen to share a part of our dialogue and to invite readers to create their own answers to the same questions, and to engage in the IDS conversation going forward.

M: John, you were the one who has seen all this work evolve through time. How did you experience this journey of developing IDS' work on power?

J: When I came to IDS in the mid-1990s, I had published the book *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley* (1980), based on my earlier work in a poor community in the United States, whose history had been shaped by a large absentee mining company. I had also been highly influenced by the debates on power from the 1970s, referred to earlier. This was also a time when the wave of donor interest in 'participation in development' was rising. On the one hand it was very exciting, especially to be at a place where work on knowledge and power through Robert Chambers and

others had been so important. On the other hand, the participation discourse at the time seemed strangely devoid of references to power, unlike my own view where participation discourse had been linked to struggles for control over decisions and resources which affected the lives of marginalised groups. Other colleagues felt similarly, and over the next decade, we saw the evolution of the group of which I was a part from a focus on 'participatory learning and action' (PLA), to 'participation', more broadly, and then to 'power, participation and social change'. The publication of the 2006 special issue of the *IDS Bulletin* on power, edited by Rosalind Eyben, Colette Harris and Jethro Pettit, was a particular milestone. In the run-up to this, we held a number of reading and discussion sessions trying to locate our work on power more broadly in social and political intellectual debates on power outside of development studies – whether based on the work of Foucault, Lukes, Bourdieu or others.

J: Maro, you came to IDS after the publication of this issue in 2006. Looking back, what did you find exciting and valuable about the work on power at that time? How did it contribute to what you went on to do?

M: I joined in 2009, a couple of years after the Participation team added the word Power to its name. From day one I was well aware that a lot of conversations had been had and maybe 'intellectual battles' had been fought to have a coherent body of work that encapsulated and propelled an approach situating power relations at the heart of the participation paradigm.

In my MA at least, the field of practice was much broader than the international development enterprise. It actively encompassed issues of social activism both in the North and South partly in line with the then trend of 'reinventing development' as a global challenge. I remember being inspired by the articles in the 'New Democratic Spaces' *IDS Bulletin* special issue of 2004 (Cornwall 2004b) and also by yours and Andrea Cornwall's on 'challenging the boundaries of the possible' and using participatory action research as change strategy in itself (Gaventa and Cornwall 2006). All this served as a big intellectual support to go on and do a year of action research with migrant and refugee groups in London looking both at actor-oriented perspectives of building agency and at the role of both more and less institutional approaches to claiming rights.

If I could summarise the main influences of this work on me, and also maybe speaking on behalf of other colleagues I talked to while preparing this article, I would say that studying power at IDS was an invitation to study personal attitudes in social change spaces and also an invitation to critically examine the relationships between different strategies for shifting power relations. For example, what is the complementarity between working with invited and closed spaces or with legally-oriented and empowerment-oriented approaches to

change? What are the limits of this complementarity? I think this kind of thinking – checking who I am 'in the room'; who produces knowledge and framings, for whom and how; and testing my assumptions about why an approach will shift power (or not) is very present in my current work both for Amnesty International and on politics and social movements.

J: It has been inspiring to see how you have taken the concepts of power and continuously wrestled with how to apply them to your work on human rights and citizen action. While our concepts of power and our debates on how to analyse it continue at IDS, what I often feel is missing is the deep empirical application of these concepts to everyday life. How do relatively powerless groups themselves experience power in a changing world? How does it affect their strategies for action? How are the mechanisms of power changing through globalisation, the rise of the BRICS, extreme violence, rising inequality? One reason that this work may be absent is that is hard to fund. While donors accept that the notion of power is important, very few are willing to resource in-depth studies of how power works, including how the power of funding creates certain silences in development knowledge as well as development practice.

M: Yes, it's really important to look at what has been less discussed or somehow sidestepped – or where the power approach has not penetrated enough. I feel that the power concepts have interlocked with participation and rights at the level of building agency and power from below (lots of wonderful case studies on this!), or have been applied at the national level to unpack power relationships around certain sectors, most of the time understanding the 'nation state' as the level for change as demonstrated in White's quote at the beginning of this article. However, there seems to be less work that has applied the power concepts to formulate a critique or analysis of global power structures. For example, with the exception of some key special *IDS Bulletins*, few articles apply a deep analysis of power to 'hard' development issues – trade, health and pharmaceuticals, nutrition and food rights or on the power relationships between states and corporate and other actors.

J: I agree. For instance, my current work is on how rising economic inequalities contribute to or re-shape inequalities of power and voice. I found it very interesting to note in reviewing the *IDS Bulletin* articles, how the first debates on power were linked to an understanding of markets and economic power. I fear that in broadening our understanding of the spheres of power, we may have lost this attention to economic forces, and in particular how the huge concentration of wealth in the hands of a few – in both North and South – changes the contours of power and participation. But the IDS strategy for 2015–20 puts inequality squarely on our agenda. It also speaks strongly to IDS' role as one of interrogating and challenging power relations, both in what knowledge we produce and

share, as well as how and with whom we do so. It's still an exciting place to be!

M: I totally agree about the attention to economic power. I was struck reading in the IDS Anniversary *IDS Bulletin*, Rosalind Eyben praised the 'brilliant timing' of the 1993 fortieth issue on 'markets and states', as it helped her fight internal struggles at the Department for International Development (DFID) in a period when Thatcherite economics dominated. I think a really important question to ask is what would be 'brilliant timing' now in our power work? What concepts and analysis would be useful for today's internal and external struggles? There are two things I would add to the mix. At the risk of oversimplifying here, we can say that it was the growing wealth inequality and the blatantly cynical politics of institutions, together with the increased connectivity between citizens that sparked the last cycle of contention in 2011–12 with citizens taking to the streets and squares from Ukraine to Brazil and Greece to India. The people's response took us from 'consultation everywhere' to 'occupation everywhere', signifying a break with old representational politics like never before. This has been followed up by efforts to build new forms of representation (for example, witnessed in new political parties) but also to create new kinds of institutions and power from below. This is very present in my experience in Greece where citizens have experimented with neighbourhood assemblies, social health centres, etc. In this landscape, I would say that what is needed now is to reinvigorate concepts of spaces for power and pick up a suggestion made in the editorial of the 2006 power issue to explore more 'how power shapes citizens' constructions of state institutions' (Eyben *et al.* 2006: 10) and to re-imagine what these institutions can look like in the future.

J: To our readers, we invite your thoughts as well. What are the critical issues and possibilities for power analysis today? How can we best apply White's challenge from 20 years ago to address the 'structural asymmetries' of power?

Notes

* Maro Pantazidou is a 2011 graduate from the IDS Masters programme in Power, Participation and Social Change; John Gaventa has been a Fellow at IDS since 1996, and served as Maro's thesis supervisor. They both wish to thank colleagues who shared their reflections on IDS work on power as part of preparatory conversations for this article and in particular Richard Jolly, Melissa Leach, Andrea Cornwall, Andre Ling, Christina Kelling and Ghali 'Nou.

1 To prepare this article, we started with an electronic search for the word 'power' across all issues of the *IDS Bulletin* (1968–2015). From this search, we chose a selection which represented the evolving application of power concepts on different themes and through differing time periods, for further study. Recognising that the *IDS Bulletin* only represents a partial view of IDS' work on the theme, we then supplemented this sample with other work related to power,

particularly in the most recent period. Throughout the process, we carried out intense dialogue between ourselves, as a Fellow and former student, together developing our reflections and analysis, as well as interviews with a few Fellows and former students to gain their views.

2   The focus on knowledge was not a new theme in IDS work. An *IDS Bulletin* issue in 1979 edited by Robert Chambers had focused on indigenous knowledge and development, though not through a power lens (Chambers 1979).

3   Just Associates is a global women's rights network that has worked closely with the IDS Participation, Power and Social Change team in developing concepts for power analysis and collective action (www.justassociates.org).

4   For instance, the 'powercube' approach outlined in the 2006 special issue on power has been widely used as a tool for power analysis by practitioners around the world (Pantazidou 2012), while more recent work has continued to insist on how power analysis – with its focus on knowledge, relationships and agency can complement a more institutional political economy approach (Petitt and Mejia Acosta 2014).

5   See multiple tools on the powercube website (www.powercube.net) or the *Practical Guide to Facilitating Social Change* (Hunjan and Petitt 2011), which is based on power analysis experiences with grass-roots UK non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and networks, or the multiple videos, stories and other resources emerging from the Pathways of Women's Empowerment programme (www.pathwaysofempowerment.org).

6   www.ids.ac.uk/about-us/our-vision-and-strategy.

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