Addressing Women's Poverty at the Local, Regional, National and International Level: Creating spaces for absent voices?

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Abstract

Feminist organisations have long campaigned to highlight women's risk and experience of poverty, both in relative and absolute terms, and to attempt to find ways of working with policy makers and practitioners to address that poverty. Following the 1995 Beijing Declaration, policy makers at different levels of governance (supra-national, international, national, regional and local) have attempted to tackle women's poverty using different strategies, such as gender mainstreaming, with mixed success. The role than policy transfer (horizontally and vertically) plays in this process is as yet poorly understood, as is the role of feminist and anti-poverty organisations in the voluntary sector. Drawing on case studies of feminist and anti-poverty third sector organisations, this paper will attempt to address:

a) What role do feminist and non-feminist organisations play in affecting policy on women's poverty?

b) At what level of governance is it possible for feminist organisations to meaningfully engage with policy makers on the issue of women's poverty?

c) What types of policy innovation and policy transfer are taking place across and between governance levels in the area of women's poverty, and what role do feminist and non-feminist third sector organisations play in facilitating policy innovation and transfer?

Acknowledgements

Introduction

Addressing women's poverty has long been a concern of feminist voluntary/third sector organisations, partly in response to a feminist critique of the failure of the welfare state to respond gendered inequalities (Glendinning and Millar, 1992; Daly and Rake, 2003). Although third sector organisations have long played a part in the delivery of welfare, recently attention has turned to the role they play in relation to the state in the formation and delivery of welfare policy (Bochel and Evans, 2007). Both feminist and non-feminist organisations have attempted to work with governments and supra-national organisations to develop effective policy responses to poverty, social exclusion and inequality, but the role they play in policy development, particularly in the face of competing theoretical frameworks explicating policy development such as policy transfer (Dolowitz and Marsh, 1992) and path dependency (Beland, 2009; Pierson, 2000), has yet to be fully explored.

This paper is an attempt to begin exploring some of those questions by examining the role that third sector organisations play in the policy process concerning women's poverty at a local, regional, national and international level, by drawing on the case study of two third sector organisations concerned with poverty (one feminist, referred to

in this paper as *Scottish Women,* and one non-feminist, referred to in this paper as *Scottish Poverty*) in the different levels of governance exemplified by the devolved Scottish Parliament, the UK parliament at Westminster, and the European Union and United Nations legislature.

Gender and poverty: qualitative issues around absent voices

The relationship between gender and poverty is complex, in part because debates about the definition and nature of poverty itself are complex. Although most commentators reject an absolute definition of poverty based on subsistence needs and favour Townsend's social participation approach (Townsend, 1993), many commentators have argued for a narrow definition which retains the distinctive element of poverty as being an inability to participate in social life due to lack of resources (Nolan and Whelan, 1996, Veit-Wilson, 2004). Resources can be conceived broadly and narrowly and most commentators incorporate material resources and outcomes, or, as Ringen puts it the 'determinants of a way of life' and a 'way of life', arguing that poverty is *both* a low income *and* a low standard of living (Ringen, 1987). Other commentators have extended this analysis to incorporate Sen's 'capabilities' approach to poverty, arguing that both income and standards of living are *means* to the end of being able to function and chose to live a life which people value, rather than *ends* in themselves (Sen, 1990). This approach also allows for consideration of the interplay between individualistic circumstances and actions, and broader social structures and forces, which allows for social divisions such as gender, age, disability and race to be taken into account (Williams, 1989).

A capabilities approach has the advantage of focussing proactively on what a society would like to achieve, rather than negatively on what it would like to avoid (Nussbaum, 2000). Within the UK/Scottish focus of this case study, an overt policy focus on social *inclusion* at the Scottish level has been contrasted with a focus on social *exclusion* at Westminster, from the publication in 1999 of the policy paper *Social Justice…A Scotland Where Everyone Matters,* in contrast to the establishment of the Social Exclusion Unit and its focus on tackling "what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes,

poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown". (SEU, 2005) Although the broad policy areas were similar (eg focusing on child poverty, youth unemployment) a subsequent Scottish policy review entitled *Closing the Opportunity Gap* (Scottish Executive, 2002) specifically downplayed social justice and a broader 'capabilities' approach in favour of a more explicit focus on poverty prevention on a geo-political and individual basis.

However, as Lister (2004) and others argue, the definition of poverty is intrinsically linked to both normative frameworks and has implications for policy solutions. Therefore, a willingness (or otherwise) of policy makers to incorporate a broader capabilities approach to poverty definition is related to their willingness (or otherwise) to incorporate both broader concepts regarding the *causes* of poverty as well as *solutions* to poverty. Aspects of the inability to participate in social life may be linked to issues such as a lack of control over resources, susceptibility to violence and lack of participation in decision-making are all important elements of the risk and experience of poverty. These aspects quite clearly related to social structures and divisions, not the least gender, but one danger in adopting an overtly capabilities approach to poverty is that it can easily downplay social structures and divisions in favour of an individualistic, neo-liberal approach which focuses policy solutions on individuals and increasing opportunities (eg through education/training/work) rather than through social rights or welfare provision (Townsend, 1993; Veit-Wilson, 2004).

Concurrent with a focus on the complex nature of the definitions of poverty (and therefore with measuring poverty) is a growing awareness of the complexity of both the causes and experiences of poverty. International evidence shows that, with the exception of Sweden, women are at far greater risk of poverty than men throughout the European Union and the United States (Bradshaw and Finch, 2003; Daly and Rake, 2003). Households headed by women across Europe (particularly lone parents and single pensioners) regularly top the tables in terms of both risks and experiences of poverty (Barnes et al 2002) and gender is a key variable in both poverty and welfare responses to need at a state and supra-national level (Korpi, 2000; Naples, 1998; Jenson, 2008). Issues such as wage disparities at national and European levels and the rise in women-headed households have made women's poverty 'visible' within the UK and Scotland, and have allowed policy responses to be shaped in a way which is in line

with discourses around neo-liberalism, individualism and activation. The change of regional government in the Scottish context from the same New Labour party that held power in Westminster to the Scottish Nationalist Party in 2007 has made even more overt the overall aim of 'sustainable economic growth' than was previously the case, indicating that issues of social justice will take a subservient role in policy development. This is likely to have a profound effect on approaches to tackling women's poverty.

Making Scottish women's poverty 'visible' is a distinct aim of *Scottish Women,* as indicated from their strategic plan (reproduced with permission):

> *"[Scottish Women] works to make women's poverty and it's impact on society visible:*
>
> - *We will carry out an in-depth gender analysis of women's poverty and the issues that will affect her over her lifetime from childhood to old age.*
> - *We will act as a think tank on gendered poverty issues and respond to consultations and policy statements.*
> - *We will build partnerships and alliances with other poverty and equality groups campaigning to eradicate economic and social poverty for women and their families living in Scotland.*
>
> *……………There is more to life than the bottom line*
>
> - *The average woman working full-time is paid 14% less than a man. The pay gap is 35% less per hour for part-time workers*
> - *Less than 12% of women receive the full basic state pension based on their own contributions; A woman's average retirement income is 53% of men's*
> - *66% of Scotland's estimated 650,000 unpaid carers are women*
>
> *Women and men are so much more than workers, they make up Scottish society. As careers, providers and participants in the community they are responsible for Scotland's health, wealth and wellbeing. Unless women and men are supported to combine work and caring roles women will pay the price."*

Generally, making women's poverty visible has been only partially successful as it has relied largely on highlighting risks from known data sources: eg the risks of poverty from female-headed households. This masks the differences between different types of female-headed households, and also masks 'hidden' poverty in male-headed households (Daly, 1992; Pahl 1989). Household modelling of money management shows that the assumption of egalitarian management (ie whereby access to income to

a household is shared equally by the adults regardless of gender) is only a reality in around 20% of UK households (Vogler, 1994). Consumption – another way of measuring Ringen's 'outcomes' – differs markedly between men and women, with women more likely to spend income on food and children's items, and men on individual consumer goods, although substantial methodological problems prevent the realistic measurement of intra-household poverty in Europe (Bradshaw and Finch, 2003). There are therefore two main ways in which women's poverty is still rendered 'invisible'. The first is through, as detailed above, the poverty caused by women's placing of other's needs above their own (particularly children).

The second is related to more widespread structural issues around women's economic dependence caused by their overrepresentation in the provision of unpaid care and in low-paid jobs, which both facilitates their own dependence (on men, and on the state, for both incomes and outcomes) and correspondingly men's relative economic independence and power (Daly and Rake, 2003). It should also be noted that this dependence varies considerably across socio-economic contexts (eg with Black women being less likely to be economically dependent on men than White women, and disabled women being more likely to be economically dependent on the state than non-disabled women). It should also be noted that women's wages, even if low, are playing an increasingly important role at keeping households out of poverty (Rake, 2000), thus further obscuring gendered-divisions in poverty. Even with a move away from a male-breadwinner of work and welfare (with its normative and ideological support for women's economic dependence), many women still lack the capacity to chose to live a life which people value by virtue of constraints placed upon their access to, and control of, resources. These constraints include a reliance on the discretion of partners who control resources, a lack of rights and obligations and ties to children's welfare (Walby, 1990), and an expectation that women will manage the day-to-day reality of poverty and debt in households as part of their responsibilities for ensuring family welfare (Yeandle et al, 2003).

There is therefore a tension between an individualistic focus on poverty, which measures an individual's access to the resources needed for social participation, and a social and structural approach which takes into account issues of power and participation within households and across social divisions. This translates into a tension

for feminist anti-poverty campaigners between focussing on increasing opportunities for individual women and attempting to tackle wide-scale social structures which contribute to women's poverty. *Scottish Women* carried out a series of focus groups with women of all backgrounds in order to ascertain their views in women's inequality (and thus to provide themselves with a grassroots basis for their campaigns). The following extract from their report is reproduced with permission:

> *"Because the majority of the work that is undertaken in the social reproductive system is done within families and therefore for free it does not pass through the marketplace and is not counted and therefore has not work. The parts of the social reproductive system that do pass through the marketplace (paid childcare, professional nursing and caring for example) are poorly paid. When the market economy and the social reproductive economy cross through things like paid maternity leave these nominal payments are understood to be a cost and therefore a loss to the market. Using this model it means that human care and human wellbeing do not have a value and therefore do not count (both literally and figuratively) because they are a cost and loss to the system. The value base of our economic system means that the wellbeing of members of our society and the caring that needs to be undertaken to ensure the mental and physical wellbeing and security of its members means nothing."* (Women Thinking Equality Report, *Scottish Women,* 2009)

In contrast, the strategic report from *Scottish Poverty* takes a stance on poverty that links the individual with a capabilities approach which incorporates an understanding of the materialistic or structural roots of poverty and inequality, but does not make mention of gendered social divisions:

> *"Poverty is fundamentally about a lack of income, but is also about what that lack of income implies: the inability to access a diet that provides for good health, or to secure decent housing, or to be able to take full advantages of the opportunities of education, living a shorter life and working longer hours. And whilst poverty is about living with the effects of material disadvantage, it is also relates to aspects which are non-material – the inability to participate fully in society, to being treated as less or second class, to experiencing discrimination and stigma. We believe that the fundamental*

drivers of poverty are structural rather than individual, and that in seeking solutions to poverty we must focus on addressing structural causes rather than perceived personal failings." (Strategic Report, *Scottish Poverty,* 2009)

This understanding of the materialistic and structural roots of women's oppression, and the relationship between production in the social economic sphere and women's poverty reflects a sophisticated and complex debate (Walby, 1990; Williams, 1989). A further complexity is the issue of poverty of time as a resource. In contemporary 'cash rich/time poor' families, women are often able to replace their social reproductive labour through the purchase of services (eg childcare, cleaning) from lower paid workers (usually, but not always, also women) (Yeandle, 2003). However, in 'cash poor/time rich' households the converse is also true: it is largely women who increase their workload and absorb the time-costs of poverty, converting time into standards of living that benefit the family (Floro, 1995). Time is a resource that can unlock access to social participation, and lack of time (particularly when coupled with lack of material resources) can act as a significant barrier to social participation. The 1995 Beijing Convention has set a framework for measuring poverty that should include a dimension of the valuation of time not spent in the market economy: however, operationalising this in the measurement of poverty has proved problematic (Bryson, 2007). Nevertheless, a gender-aware capabilities approach to poverty must recognise that resources do not simply constitute income, and that access to resources also incorporates issues concerning power and control over them that may be hidden from a simplistic measure of income and expenditure.

Feminist scholars have long claimed that women's voices are largely 'absent' in the understanding of social and economic processes, pointing out that even Foucoult's seminal work on gender was largely concerned with issues of 'public' power and not the issues of controlling access to resources and power in the 'private' sphere of the social reproductive economy (Walby, 1990). Women's experiences of poverty (particularly women's qualitative experiences of poverty) have also been largely absent from a policy discourse within the UK and Scottish context, and this has had profound implications for the way in which feminist anti-poverty campaigners have been able to 'frame' claims for women in the policy process.

Engendering politics and policy: local, regional, national and international policy forums

The issue of devolution and the creation of new levels and forms of governance provides an interesting opportunity to examine the ways in which policy formation and implementation around women's poverty might change. In 1997 the New Labour government was elected in the UK with a clear policy objective of devolving political power to the regions of Scotland and Wales (although not, interestingly, to England). An expectation that different forms of social policy will emerge from the devolution of statutory powers can run counter to theories of policy development that emphasis path dependency (Pierson, 2000; Korpi 2001) and policy transfer (Dolowitz and Marsh, 1992), but the political opportunities opened up by the structural changes inherent in devolution can create new policy networks and allow for the formulation and testing of new policy concepts. Such was the expectation of devolution from the Westminster government in the UK to the Scottish government in 1999. Certainly the first First Minister in the devolved Scottish Parliament saw this as an opportunity to make tackling social exclusion a Scottish priority:

> "This Government is determined to take action to tackle social exclusion, and to develop policies which will promote a more inclusive, cohesive and ultimately sustainable society" (quoted in The Herald, 3rd February, 1998)

Much effort has been expended post-devolution in ascertaining whether a distinctive 'Scottish' set of social policies has emerged, particularly around the issues of poverty, social justice and inequality (see for example Mooney and Scott, 2005), with commentators divided on whether Scotland has taken the opportunity to develop its perceived social democratic differences (for example, with clear policy divergence from the UK with respect to free university education pre-dating devolution), is tied irrevocably to UK policy directions by virtue of its limited tax-raising powers (see Keating, 2002; Parry, 2002) or is developing a neo-liberal 'economic imperative' framework for policy development that is dictated more by global social, economic and political contexts than by devolution (Mooney and Scott, 2005). Kingdon (1984) has discussed the ways in which the policy process incorporates three elements: the existence of 'policy problems', the advocacy of policy solutions amongst key 'policy

entrepreneurs' and a 'window of opportunity' through large or small systemic events that give rise to the development of new policies. Political devolution in Scotland has given rise to all three elements with regards to women's poverty, and thus represents an interesting case study in the development of policy in this area.

Firstly, the issue of poverty and inequality *per se* have become a distinctive Scottish policy platform. Indeed, many of the campaigns around devolution and the need for a 'yes' vote in the referendum hinged around the need to develop 'Scottish solutions' to Scottish social divisions. A 1998 Press Release from the Westminster-based Scottish Office claimed that:

> *"We have a proud tradition in Scotland of working to tackle social division. We have developed innovative responses to social problems, many of which are now being promoted within the UK as models of good practice…in the not too distant future we will have a Scottish Parliament, which will give us the opportunity to develop Scottish solutions to Scottish needs."*

Women's poverty and gender inequality have also become part of the Scottish policy 'problem' platform, with policy makers asserting in 2003 that:

> *"Inequality between women and men is both a widespread and persistent feature of contemporary Scottish society…in general women today still have less access to income and other material resources, less time that is their own, less political power and have a 1 in 5 chance of experiencing domestic abuse in their lives"* (Strategic Group on Women, 2003: 6).

Secondly, a potential new stream of 'policy entrepreneurs' have come to power following the political and structural changes encapsulated in the devolution process. In 2003, 54% of Labour seats and 39% of seats overall in the Scottish parliament went to women (Durose and Gains, 2007), as compared to 18% of seats at Westminster (similar rises in women's representation in formal politics can be found in the Welsh Assemby, London Assembly and in other localised and regional assemblies). Whilst women's increased political representation does not necessarily lead *per se* to an increased policy focus on women's issues, evidence from the Scottish parliament does suggest that women Scottish politicians do see themselves as 'feminising politics' (Lovenduski, 2005): that is, acting for women, taking on women's concerns, and making a difference to women's lives (Mackay, forthcoming). McKay and Gillespie assert that "the new political structures and processes have established transparent mechanisms to ensure

that women's voices across Scotland continue to be heard" (McKay and Gillespie, 2005; 115).

Thirdly, a 'window of opportunity' has been created both through the creation of the Scottish Parliament itself, and through pressure to implement 'gender mainstreaming' policy devices coming from a UK and European level. The establishment of the Scottish Women's Budget Group has led to a framework for the development of gender-sensitive policy initiatives, although to date has not yet provided concrete examples of shifts in policy priorities that can be argued to be gender-aware (Breitenbach, 2003). Collective action by feminist 'policy entrepreneurs' both inside and outside the Scottish Parliament has led to the formation of new policy networks, including both the organisations included as case studies in this paper, has proved to be a 'useful example for the UK to follow', (McKay and Gillespie, 2005: 128) and feminist activists have certainly engaged with the new political structures in an attempt to instigate changes, for example through the work of the Scottish Women's Budget Group. However, the evidence that this had led to demonstrable policy gains or outcomes for women has not yet been forthcoming – equality considerations were evident in the 2004-5 budget, but there has yet to be convincing evidence that policy has been feminised using Lovenduski's (2001) definition of 'making a difference to women's lives'.

At a national (UK) level, one 'window of opportunity' to instigate feminist policy change on the issue of women's poverty was the election in 1997 of a New Labour government after eighteen years of a Conservative administration notable, despite having a prominent female leader in Margaret Thatcher, for its lack of feminist ambition and an overtly neo-liberal agenda which saw poverty as the result of individual failure rather that social and economic structures (Wolf, 1994). A coalition of feminist campaigners both inside and outside the Labour party was successful in its attempt to create All Women Shortlists in the Labour Party prior to the 1997 election (Lovecy, 2007), which resulted in a historic 101 female Labour MPs entering the Westminster parliament in 1997. Russell (2005) has argued that this iconic feminisation of the image of the party has resulted in the an association with progress on women's issues that is not necessarily matched in practice. The Minister for Women claimed in 2005 that the post-1997 New Labour government was 'the most feminist Government in our history' (quoted in The Times, 5th December, 2005), which is in contrast to Coote's (2000) assertion that women's issues have never formed a key part of New Labour's ideological or policy programme: as a political party dominated by trade unions, the

Labour party itself is perceived as mobilising itself in the case of class, not gender, inequalities (Perrigo, 1999; Bright, 2005). Nevertheless, the increased representation of women offers an opportunity to create a 'critical mass' within the context of an institutional framework which enables women to change the culture of a party or legislature (Dahlerup, 1988; Yoder, 1991).

Childs (2004) has found that female Labour MPs at Westminster do perceive themselves as 'acting for women' (echoing McKay's findings in the Scottish parliament), particularly in policy areas such as childcare and healthcare. Nevertheless, these potential new 'policy entrepreneurs' face significant constraints in engaging with the state, particularly if they see themselves as overtly feminist actors (Chappell, 2004). In the case of the UK and the Westminster parliament, the 'core executive' (ie those organisations and procedures which co-ordinate central government activity, cf Rhodes, 1997) remains male-dominated, despite the appointment of prominent feminist ministers. One analysis of attempts to translate feminist goals into policy points to the importance of women's 'policy machineries' (McBride Stetson and Mazur, 1995), particularly in overcoming male-dominated ideologies and policy structures. These could include women's ministries or women's policy units, which are particularly successful in achieving 'state feminism' in social democratic regimes and neo-liberal regimes where feminist organisations have a strong influence over a range of policy areas (Hafner and Pollack, 2002). At the Westminster level, the women's policy machinery has been organised through organisations such as the Women's National Commission and the Equal Opportunities Commission, as well as within the newly-elected New Labour government the Women's Unit (which changed its name in 2001 to the 'Women and Equality Unit) – given the remit to scrutinise legislation to promote sexual equality and female-friendly policies (Squires and Wickham-Jones, 2004). The Unit has disseminated guidance on equal pay, work-life balance and women in public life, but does not have a clear departmental 'home', and does not appear to have credibility amongst senior civil servants or ministers (Durose and Gains, 2007). Moreover, the Equal Opportunities Commission has now been subsumed at a national level to a wider Human Rights Commission, incorporating a focus on wider equalities issues including race and disability, with a similar reorganisation at the Scottish level. There is therefore no powerful or cohesive women's policy machinery at a Westminster level to engage with an overtly feminist policy agenda.

The results of this lack of an overt feminist focus in ideology and structures on the part of the New Labour administration in Westminster is clear from an analysis of the policy outcomes of its first ten years in power (Annesley et al, 2007). The most significant achievements have been for working mothers: the full-time gender pay gap has narrowed to 83% from 73% in 1997, enhanced maternity leave provision has increased job security and tenure, and targeted tax relief and increased childcare places have made working full-time easier for many women, particularly well-paid women. A push towards activation policies that encourage lone parents to work rather than be dependent upon the state for their income have resulted in increasing numbers of women in full-time work. However, the UK still lags behind other European countries with regards to equal pay, and the pay-gap for low-paid part-time women has not closed significantly, remaining at around 62% of men's earnings (Grimshaw, 2007). Moreover, such gains as there have been for women have been achieved under the policy aims of tackling *child* poverty, not women's poverty, as a result of policy networks and coalitions such as the Child Poverty Action Group and national family interest groups (Lister, 2006). Coates and Oettinger (2007) argue that UK policies designed to increase mothers' participation in the labour market have been advocated on economic grounds, to increase the tax base and reduce social security spending, rather than addressing women's poverty and inequality on social justice or feminist grounds. Indeed, the policy outcomes for women outside the paid world of work have been notably poorer, with full-time mothers, carers and older women suffering from New Labour's focus on the 'worker-citizen' at the expense of the 'carer-citizen' (Rummery, 2007), including a refusal to raise non-working benefit levels significantly. In summary, the Westminster New Labour government have been happy to take on board issues of women's equality only in so far as they coincide with other overarching policy aims, particularly the economic and ideological imperative to increase women's labour market participation. The lack of an ideological commitment to women's equality coupled with a failure to develop and engage with a significant and powerful women's policy machinery has given no window of opportunity for feminist policy entrepreneurs, either inside or outside of government, to engage successfully in the development of a policy focus on women's poverty on social justice grounds.

At the supra-national level of policy-making, the European Union and the European Parliament do offer some opportunities (as well as the inevitable constraints) to feminist policy development in the issue of women's poverty. In a much more overt way than is

evident in the Scottish or UK-level legislature, the EU has adopted gender mainstreaming as a policy approach, which it interprets as involving the

> *"organisation, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels and at all stages, by the actors normally involved in policy-making"*
> (Council of Europe, 1998: 13)

This policy focus was in part a response to the pressure to show a commitment to action following the 1995 Beijing World conference on Women at which resolutions were passed binding all United Nations member states to introducing gender mainstreaming into their policy machineries. Daly (2005) has noted that member states, particularly in the EU, have adopted "some of the components of gender mainstreaming, especially tools or techniques, often in the absence of an overall framework" (Daly, 2005: 436). Her comparative review of gender mainstreaming across several EU states concluded that only Sweden pursued a systematic 'engendering' of policy on the grounds of social justice and gender equality: all other states linked gender inequalities in some way to other structural inequalities and the drive to 'modernize' welfare systems (usually through activation policies and the reduction of state-mandated cash/benefits transfers). Rubery (2008) notes that gender mainstreaming in the EU has made significant progress in areas of equal pay (where EU members have theoretically been committed to equal pay for equal work since Article 119 of the 1957 Treaty of Rome), particularly in cases where neo-liberal economic and welfare reforms have encouraged activation and labour market participation policies, but have had less success in wider social areas. Certainly a broader feminist 'capabilities' approach to tackling women's poverty as outlined above, which would involve a recognition of the complexity of the structural causes of poverty including risks associated with power, violence and lack of control over resources, has not featured highly in EU member states' presentation of their policies and practices for review under gender mainstreaming audits, partly because member states have been given a large degree of discretion in setting their own targets for review (Jenson, 2008). Rubery points out that:

> *" A gender equal society might be regarded, say by Finland, as based on equal and full-time participation by men and women, but the Netherlands might regard a society based on one-and-a-half earners per family as the goal. Few member states have considered changes in male behaviour to be part of their goal of a more gender equal society"* (Rubery, 2008: 249)

These 'contested visions' of routes to gender equality means that models of gender mainstreaming can be divided into those which advocate 'sameness', or equal opportunities, and those which advocate 'difference', or special treatment for women (Rees, 1998; Squires, 1999). As Walby (2005) notes, the 'equality/difference' debate is not new within feminist scholarship itself, nor within how to address gender inequalities such as women's poverty through the welfare state (Fraser, 1990; Bacchi, 1999; Sevenhuijsen, 1998, Orloff et al, 1999), and it is interesting to note that the EU's definition of gender equality incorporates a 'difference' perspective:

> *"Gender equality is not synonymous with sameness, with establishing men, their life style and conditions as the norm…Gender equality means accepting and valuing equally the differences between women and men and the diverse roles they play in society"* (Council of Europe, 1998: 8)

It is perhaps in recognition of the strengths of a diversity-approach to gender equality and women's poverty that resonates with the overtly feminist aims of *Scottish Women*, and gave that organisation the opportunity to engage with policy makers at a European level. As organisational members of the European Women's Lobby, *Scottish Women* used its status as a recognised second-tier third-sector organisation to not only participate in policy networks operating within the European parliament on women's poverty and equality issues, but also on related issues that formed part of a broader capabilities approach to poverty such as violence against women and women's access to political power. It also used these networks to inform policy both upwards (reporting to the United Nations Committee on Economic, Cultural and Social Rights) and downwards (being part of a joint EU/UN campaign to place pressure on the UK government in Westminster to address the gender pay gap, poor pension provision for women and violence against women as part of a broader strategy to tackle women's inequality and poverty). It also saw itself as having diverse organisational links and interests outwards, with other third sector and state sector groups concerned with linked social divisions affecting the risk and experience of poverty, such as race, disability and age, linking itself with Black and Ethnic Minority groups and older people's groups in campaigns around Black women's and older women's poverty.

In contrast, *Scottish Poverty* sought to influence policy *only* around anti-poverty policy at a European and UK level, through participating in policy networks such as the European Anti-poverty Network and the UK Coalition Against Poverty. Although it participated in a

series of campaigns designed to raise awareness of poverty issues (including the issue of poor people's lack of social and political participation, and facilitating the participation in policy networks of people and groups with direct experience of poverty), none of these campaigns had an overtly gender-aware focus, and none were linked to wider structural and socio-economic issues concerning poverty and gender, such as violence, power and lack of control over resources. It saw its role as an organisation as one which engaged with lobbying around certain issues rather than reporting to and engaging directly with policy makers and wider policy networks. Although there was a recognition in the organisation's aims and ethos of a wider capabilities approach to poverty definition and measurement, there was no corresponding recognition of the social divisions of the risks and experiences of poverty (such as gender, race, disability and age), and correspondingly, no formal links with policy networks concerned with these wider social divisions.

Framing Claims from Grassroots to Global: an issue of gender, or poverty?

One concept that can be usefully drawn from an analysis of comparative social movements is that of *strategic framing:* the way in which actors in social movements (such as feminist movements and anti-poverty organisations) pursue normative change in a variety of institutional contexts (Smith et al, 1997). Actors outside of the state apparatus of policy making need to find institutional incentives to shape their claims in such a way which enables them to engage in alliance building to gain access to key wider policy advocacy coalitions. These claims need to resonate with the established policy concerns, ideologies and norms of actors who are inside the state apparatus of policy making (particularly key members of the legislature and civil service), in order to facilitate the framing of social problems, coalitions with policy entrepreneurs, and to take advantage of windows of opportunity for policy development which take place (Kingdon, 1994). Therefore, in order to become part of a successful policy advocacy coalition, it is important for organisations such as *Scottish Women* and *Scottish Poverty* to establish whether it is possible to frame their claims in terms which resonate with the dominant political ideologies and discourses of those people and organisations in a position to affect the design, development and implementation of policy. It is therefore interesting

that Lovecy (2007) notes that in the period prior to its 1997 Westminster election win, the Labour party underwent a significant series of changes in its ideology and structures. On the one hand, it instigated overtly feminist projects to increase the substantive representation of women in the party by drawing up All Women Shortlists in key 'winnable' seats (resulting in the aforementioned substantial increase in Labour women elected to the Westminster parliament in 1997). However, in a departure from previous ideological commitments, it moved away from a manifesto commitment to a 'fairer Britain' towards one based on 'building a strong economy': a significant change of focus that heralded a shift from left-wing social democratic commitments to equality and wealth redistribution towards neo-liberal ideologies that favoured working with the market towards economic growth along, placing the 'New' Labour party alongside with other 'Third Way' regimes (notably Germany, France and the USA) (Hudson et al, 2008). Mooney and Scott (2005) have noted a similar shift in Scotland, mirroring New Labour's ideological shifts in the UK as a whole, with a commitment to economic growth rather than social justice made more concrete with the change in government in Scotland in 2007 to the Scottish Nationalist Party (Burchardt and Holder, 2009).

This places both *Scottish Women* and *Scottish Poverty* in a difficult position. Both their regional and national governments have made significant ideological moves *away* from an overt commitment to tackling poverty and inequality *per se,* let alone women's poverty in particular. This should, in theory, reduce the opportunities for both organisations to find key committed policy actors and entrepreneurs within the machinery of government with whom to build and sustain policy networks and coalitions in order to affect the development and implementation of policy designed to tackle poverty. However, there are three key features which appear to be acting as opportunities for policy development that work in favour of a focus on *gendered* poverty, which would indicate that an overtly feminist focus on the issue of *gender,* poverty and inequality might lead to more successful policy outcomes than a focus on *poverty* and inequality per se. Firstly, as Walby (2002) and others have pointed out:

> *"Feminism is being re-shaped by its increased articulation through a global discourse of human rights and an increased focus on state interventions. There is an increase in the use of rhetoric that women's rights are human rights as framing and justification of feminist action, simultaneous with a turn of feminist activity away from autonomous separatist groups towards their mainstreaming within civil society and the state"* (Walby, 2002: 533)

In other words, feminist activists and organisations such as *Scottish Women* have taken key opportunities to forge alliances across governance levels and sectors: across civil society with other third sector organisations concerned with social, political and economic inequality; making connections between grassroots activities (such as training and campaigning on equalities issues with local governments, community activist groups and the private sector), regional and national campaigning, networking and lobbying (through policy networks and advocacy coalitions involving state and third sector actors); and through supra-national policy networks at the European and United Nations level which in turn enable advocacy coalitions across sectors and governance levels to be brokered and sustained in ways which sometimes lead to effective policy change. In doing so, the fact that feminism is a remarkably broad ideological and political church works in their favour: regardless of political, social or economic context, feminists from a broad range of ideological persuasions find allies around key issues and campaigns. For example, equal pay campaigns find supporters amongst neo-liberal, conservative feminists in market-driven political systems such as the USA, as well as socialist feminists in social democratic political systems such as Sweden. Moreover, linking grassroots to global campaigns enables feminist third sector organisations to operationalise social and political networks wherever they will prove most effective: with relatively impoverished and disempowered local communities as well as with high-profile policy 'elites' such as feminist (or feminist-sympathetic) cabinet ministers in government.

Secondly, a recognition of and commitment to the complexities of a feminist capabilities approach to poverty means that feminist third sector organisations can engage in policy networks and advocacy coalitions across a range of issues and still be directly or indirectly attempting to tackle women's poverty. For example, *Scottish Women* carries out work at a local, regional, national and international level on issues such as women's access to political power, violence against women, gender pay gaps, access to work and childcare and other related areas, all of which it argues contribute to women's risk and experience of poverty. Moreover, it is possible to 'frame' these different claims in different ways to appeal to, and create allies with, different types of policy actor. For example, addressing the gender pay gap can be argued for on the 'business case' of economic competitiveness as well as on the 'social justice' case of gender equality, depending on the political and ideological norms and commitments of the policy actor in question. Similarly, increasing women's access to work can be argued for on a neo-

liberal, activation agenda as well as on a social democratic equalities agenda, and on the basis of economic prosperity or social justice, depending again on the political ideology and normative framework of the policy actors with the power to shape policy development and implementation that you need to convince. For example, arguments linking child welfare outcomes to women's experiences of domestic violence have provided policy activists in Scotland with a platform to push through legislative change on violence against women which would not have been possible had it been seen as a purely 'feminist' campaign on a 'women's' issue, and similar arguments have been used in the UK Westminster parliament to link children's poverty with outcomes for women (Lister, 2006).

Thirdly, there is increasing evidence of a kind of 'feminist policy transfer' (Dolowitz and Marsh, 1992) taking place across supra-national, national and regional governments around the issue of gender mainstreaming. From the 1995 Beijing Convention to the 1998 Council of Europe declaration, both the UK and Scottish governments have had to show some kind of commitment to gender mainstreaming in policy development and implementation. Whilst the usefulness of gender mainstreaming as a feminist policy tool at different governance levels remains debatable due to the substantial variations in its interpretation and practice (Jenson, 2008; Hainard and Verschuz, 2001; Shaw, 2000; Walby 2005; Daly 2005), it nevertheless provides an ideological and pragmatic platform from which to shape the discourse of policy making and implementation. This platform provides the potential to open up 'windows of opportunity' for feminist policy entrepreneurs inside and outside the state machinery of governance to instigate normative and substantive policy change to address women's poverty. Of course, the opportunities for policy development may be highly constrained by other contextual variables, such as path dependency (Pierson, 2000), limited capacity to act on the part of key policy actors and the failure to mobilise policy networks effectively, but the institutional and normative framework of gender mainstreaming remains a potentially powerful tool for feminist policy actors.

Finally, it should of course be noted that non-feminist third sector organisations such as *Scottish Poverty* also make explicit links between grassroots work (such as training and development work with community organisations and local authorities) and regional, national and supra-national campaigning, lobbying and networking around poverty issues. Their strategic plan makes an overt commitment to allowing the 'absent voices' of people with direct experience of poverty to be heard in various policy platforms:

"The voices of those with experience of poverty are too rarely heard in debates about solutions to poverty and inequality. We believe that people with experience of poverty should be involved in all aspects of our work, from the policy positions [Scottish Poverty] promotes to the campaigns we are involved in. We work to ensure that time and resources are available to ensure that these voices are heard. In our own work we will continue to strive to ensure that those with direct experience of poverty are involved in the development and implementation of our activities.

We also undertake work to develop more open and participatory forms of policy development are created. Our primary focus is on the Scottish level, but we will also seek changes that ensure that people are able to have their voices heard at the local level. We also work to embed more participatory approaches at both UK and European levels."

However, even though organisations such as *Scottish Poverty* do show a commitment to a capabilities approach to poverty, and as a second-tier third sector organisation rely for their legitimacy on organisational membership from a large range of organisations concerned with poverty and inequalities, arguably the overt political and ideological shift at both a Scottish and UK level away from a class-based commitment to tackling poverty and inequality on a social justice basis mitigates fairly strongly against the development of powerful policy networks and advocacy coalitions. A narrow focus on *poverty* limits the potential for coalitions around related issues, and restricts the type of actors interested in building such coalitions to those whose ideological and political commitments do not necessarily adapt easily across different social, political and economic contexts. Certainly *Scottish Poverty* have never campaigned on issues concerning violence against women, political representation of poor people or women, or control over resources in family contexts, and their organisational members are almost all left-wing community groups or local authorities. Whilst their literature recognises the links between social differences such as disability and age and risks of poverty, they do not appear to have an overtly feminist understanding of structure, agency, power and inequality. Whilst feminist third sector organisations appear able to incorporate issues of structural inequality and difference, anti-poverty organisations do not appear to incorporate feminist concerns as easily.

Conclusions: creating spaces for absent voices?

As this paper is only based on the first stages of an ongoing project looking at the role that feminist and non-feminist third sector organisations play in policy development and implementation, several questions remain unanswered. Although it is clear that there is some potential for feminist policy entrepreneurs to form policy networks around women's inequality and poverty, how successful are these networks in developing and implementing policy change? In order to successfully address women's poverty as a policy issue and create spaces for the absent voices of women, the issue for feminist policy activists is whether to focus on *gender*, rather than *poverty*. In what way do feminist claims need to be framed in order to resonate with powerful policy actors, and how far does the framing of these claims take feminist third sector organisations away from their core objectives? Is it possible to translate a complex feminist understanding of a capabilities approach to poverty into definite policy frameworks with demonstrable positive outcomes for women? And there is clearly some potential for the development of effective policy networks at the supra-national level, but how successful are these networks at empowering feminist policy actors inside and outside of the state machinery of governance? There are clearly many voices which are 'absent' from the policy process, not least the voices of people who have direct experience of poverty: does creating space for women's voices enable space to be created for other disempowered voices too?

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