
Spatialising participatory approaches: the contribution of geography to a mature debate

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Abstract. This paper explores the contribution that geographers can make to debates about the nature and utility of participatory approaches. It argues for a constructive reconciliation between these approaches and the growing poststructural critique of participation. Through an examination of the similarities and entanglements between power and empowerment it highlights the centrality of geographical issues to understanding how participation works and how its resources might be distanced beyond the arenas of participatory projects to produce empowering effects elsewhere.

Introduction

Interest in participatory approaches is rising rapidly in geography. Pain (2004) notes that, while many geographers have been slow to enter this area of debate, there are sound reasons for further engagement [and colleagues have responded with the formation of a new working group PyGyWG (2005) and multiple sessions at the 2006 Royal Geographical Society with Institute of British Geographers conference]. Participatory research is well suited to social geography and to the local scale at which much qualitative fieldwork is conducted. Its many innovative techniques can revitalise geographical methodology and offer new opportunities for the perspectives of the marginalised to emerge. Participatory approaches also aspire to a broader notion of ethical research than the conventional wisdom of ‘do no harm’: by creating new spaces for critical engagement beyond the academy, they facilitate arenas in which participants and researchers can collaboratively generate knowledge and informed action. Pain suggests that geographers have also contributed to the development of participatory approaches in ways that help temper its more idealised, localised, and poorly theorised tendencies. The question that remains unaddressed in Pain’s review, and to which the newly formed PyGyWG must turn, is: what are the specifically *geographical* contributions that our discipline can make to broader debates on participation? I have been struggling with this question for some time (Kesby, 1999a)⁽¹⁾ and, while it has been important to encourage geographers to recognise the benefits of participatory approaches (Kesby, 2000a; 2000b; Kesby et al, 2005), the most exciting challenge lies precisely in showing what geographers might contribute to the retheorisation of participation more generally. Having argued the case outside the discipline (Kesby, 2005), the time is ripe to engage a geographical audience, for, while debates on participation are by now mature, there is a growing interest in space (Cornwall, 2002; 2004a; 2004b; Jones and SPEECH, 2001) and recent volumes on participation are replete with references to spatiality (Hickey and Mohan, 2004a). Geographers helped initiate this debate and we are well placed to drive the discussion forward.

⁽¹⁾ Versions of this working paper were presented at the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex in 1999, the IBG and AAG in 2000, the conference *Participation: From Tyranny to Transformation*, University of Manchester, February 27–28, 2003, the IGU in Glasgow 2004, and AAG 2005.

However, geographers' enthusiasm for participatory approaches comes at a time when participation has already moved from the alternative margin to the 'World Bank mainstream' and advocates are increasingly unsure of their utility (Williams, 2004a). Indeed, despite Kapoor's assertion that participation is *de rigueur*, the 'trendiest' activity (at least among academics) is the withering critique of participation (eg Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Kapoor, 2005). Thus, a second and equally important question is whether geographers can make a contribution to the debate whilst remaining positive about participatory approaches in the light of the poststructuralist critique. To this end, my interest has been twofold: to pursue a coherent and positive reconciliation between participatory approaches and poststructuralist perspectives; and to explore the spatial dimensions of participation and empowerment.

The conventional view of participatory approaches (which sees them as a radical alternative) holds that they circumvent or reverse prevailing power relations in research and development (Chambers, 1994; 1997; Kapoor, 2002). If we are committed to the philosophy of participation (not just its innovative techniques) we must abandon assumptions about our 'expert' status, recognise the expertise and contribution of participants, and make research and development reciprocal. Extraction of data and imposition of initiatives must give way to a sharing of research products and benefits and the mutual determination of development goals. Research and development must be with, and bring real benefits to participants and ought to facilitate empowerment in ways that enable participants to develop solutions in their own lives (Chambers, 1994; 1997; Cornwall and Jewkes, 1995; Guijit and Shah, 1998; Hagey, 1997; Leurs, 1996).

My purpose is not to dispute that participation is a radical or alternative approach, but to challenge the idea that such approaches circumvent power. I offer a poststructuralist perspective on participation inspired by Foucault's concepts of knowledge/power (see Foucault, [1975] 1977, page 194; [1976] 1978, pages 92–102), governmentality, and biopower (Clayton 2000a; 2000b; Foucault, [1979] 1991; [1981] 1988). Such a perspective suggests that, even when participation is 'done properly', 'deeply', and is driven by participants themselves, it will nevertheless always already constitute a form of power (Kesby, 1999a; 2005). In their editorial for the book *Participation: The New Tyranny?* Cooke and Kothari (2001) pursue a similar line but do so in a way that makes poststructural analysis and participatory approaches seem inherently antagonistic. They suggest that advocates of participation are deluded in believing that they circumvent power or enable empowerment, because for them participation is full of authority and domination and little different to other externally imposed forms of research and development. They conclude that *because* participation is a form of power it can only be resisted (Kapoor, 2005; Kothari, 2001).

By comparison (and like Cameron and Gibson, 2005), in this paper I suggest that it is possible to reconcile participatory approaches and poststructuralism. Certainly participation must be recognised as a form of power but, if poststructural analysis is pushed to its limits, participation can also be seen as resource for human agency that facilitates reflection and social transformation. I remain hopeful that a more theoretically informed participatory practice can release researchers from continually rehearsing the finite limits of knowledge and offer opportunities to collaboratively negotiate partial meanings and practical action in fieldwork praxis (Kesby, 1999a). However, if empowerment is to be distanced and reperformed beyond the arenas of intervention themselves, then the spatial dimensions of participation need to be more fully explored.

My thinking emerges from the experience of researching the impacts of the Stepping Stones HIV initiative in rural Zimbabwe. This programme was originally conceived by ActionAid for use in Uganda (Strategies for Hope, 2006; Welbourn, 1995) but is now

used globally by a wide variety of community based organisations. This externally conceived initiative recruits participants into a curriculum of eighteen, three-hour sessions that address alcohol abuse, money, household decision making, and adolescence as they affect HIV risk. Utilising a session manual, video (where possible), and a variety of participatory techniques, trained facilitators help age/sex peer groups engage and discuss experiences around sexual health. Several of the encounters involve assertiveness training and 'rehearsal for reality' and give participants the opportunity to address stigmatising attitudes and high-risk situations within the safety of project space. In turn, I have recruited exparticipants and nonparticipants in Stepping Stones into my own brief, high-intensity programmes of follow-up research. Using similar peer-groups and 'mixed' sessions, and a variety of diagramming, focus-group, and drama techniques, I have engaged participants in discussion about sexual behaviour, social relationships, and understandings of the Stepping Stones programme and its effects on their lives.

Compared with the vast and diverse field of participatory approaches, my experience is obviously particular. Moreover, both of the cases I know best fall short of the 'ideal' or 'highest levels' of participation to which advocates might aspire [for example, they were externally conceived—but see also Cameron and Gibson (2005)—and, in my own case, had limited action outputs]. As a result, some might suggest that my argument is specific to the (increasingly common) 'shallow' use (or even 'abuse') of participatory approaches (eg see Cornwall and Jewkes, 1995; Hagey, 1997; Lather, 1991; Mayoux, 1995; Smith and Blanc, 1997). Nevertheless, I believe that my argument has more utility than either the generalisation that, if 'done properly', participation can succeed, or that 'as a form of power' participation can only be opposed. Though the theoretical development of a specific empirical case this paper explores how participation actually works, why even 'deep' participation sometimes fails, and how empowerment might be made more sustainable.

Participatory powers and empowerments

Participatory power effects

Conventional understandings of participation imagine power as a *commodity*, which in most other forms of research and development is concentrated in the hands of experts but which in participatory approaches is redistributed among participants. By comparison, a poststructural approach understands power as an *effect*: an action, behaviour, or imagination brought into being in a specific context as a result of the interplay of various communicative and material *resources*. Those said to 'hold' power are simply better positioned to successfully manipulate resources in order to produce effects among others. Power is not a resource, and resources in themselves do not constitute power because they may be squandered and thus fail to produce desired effects (Allen, 2003).

In the case of participation, the resources in question consist in various discourses and practices like equity, collective action, respect, self-reflection, role play, diagramming, etc as well as the growing consensus around the utility and legitimacy of participatory approaches. But what are the power *effects* of participation? The answer to this question is complex, not least because the same resources can produce quite different results depending on how they are combined and deployed (see Foucault, [1976] 1978, page 101). Clearly, practice is heterogeneous, and when institutions like governments and the World Bank deploy participation [or 'empowerment' (see Nagar and Swarr, 2004)] they do not desire the same effects as when radical academics or activist nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) use similar resources. Governments and the World Bank seek to effect legitimacy for neoliberal development blueprints

and, by forging ‘chains of equivalence’ between participation and other discursive resources (like partnership, accountability, good governance, ownership, and transparency), fundamentally change their meaning (Cornwall and Brock, 2005). However, even when deployed by radicals, not all the power effects of participation are intentional while others are difficult to acknowledge.

Participation: The New Tyranny (Cooke and Kothari, 2001) focuses on what might be called the ‘negative’ power effects of participation. Researchers and developers themselves feel many of these. First, the prevailing consensus can impose a self-censorship on methodological choice since nonparticipatory approaches seem less legitimate (Cleaver, 2001; Henkel and Stirrat, 2001). Second, although the rationale of participation is to empower the other, the increasing professionalisation of the approach effects a reauthorisation of experts (Kapoor, 2005; Kothari, 2005) and provides them with extremely effective resources with which to enrol others into their ‘projects’ (in all senses). Third, whether or not those experts have been co-opted by international financial institutions, one of those ‘projects’ is ‘development’. This metanarrative is itself a resource which, along with the microtechnologies of facilitation, enables advocates to control the production of knowledge even whilst believing themselves to be the benign arbiters of a neutral process (Cook, 2004; Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Hailey, 2001; Kapoor, 2005; Kothari, 2005; Nagar and Swarr, 2004).

Among participants, meanwhile, the very act of inclusion in a participatory process is already an effect as it constitutes them *as* ‘participants’ and signals their acceptance of their need to be ‘researched’ or ‘developed’ (see Henkel and Stirrat, 2001; Kothari, 2005). Perversely (given stated objectives), marginalisation of some or all participants may result if the priorities of dominant locals or external facilitators emerge as the views of ‘the community’, ‘legitimately generated’ through a participatory process (Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Kapoor, 2005; Mohan, 2001). Where participatory mechanisms are seen as benign and inclusive, the inability of some to participate or mobilise effectively the resources of participation may be overlooked while the nonparticipation of others may be seen as irrational and illegitimate (Cleaver, 2001; Kothari, 2001; 2005). Moreover, despite their reputation for being ‘relaxed’ and ‘neutral’, participatory techniques are laden with Western ways of knowing, and this shapes and frames the knowledge produced and the actions facilitated (Henkel and Stirrat, 2001; Kothari, 2001; 2005; Mohan, 2001). Nevertheless, participatory approaches can also produce undue privileging of ‘local’ knowledge that dissuades facilitators from offering insights from ‘outside’ (Cameron and Gibson, 2005).

My own focus has been to consider how participation effects *governance* (see Clayton 2000a; 2000b; Foucault [1979] 1991; [1981] 1988). This is perhaps particularly obvious in the specific case I have studied (Kesby et al, 2002) because the Stepping Stones programme explicitly encourages participants to inspect and then govern their most intimate behaviours in order to combat HIV transmission in their communities. Yet governance is a more general feature of participatory approaches—perhaps an essential effect for participation to work at all. If research and development workers are to operate in heterogeneous communities and enable socially unequal agents to participate with equivalence while discussing complex and controversial issues, it is a practical necessity that facilitators delineate the possibilities for behaviour. Thus facilitators deploy the metanarrative resources of ‘equality’, ‘democracy’, and ‘participation’, and the microtechnologies of peer groups, brainstorming, physical and social ‘levelling’, ‘handing over the pen’, etc which effect the constitution of a new subjectivity. Participants are encouraged to reconstitute themselves as equal to their peers, as part of a collective, and as self-reflective agents engaged in a rolling process of critical self-analysis and regulation.

The modalities of power...

These effects of participation are certainly power, but are they (or are they only) domination? *The New Tyranny* version of poststructuralism slips too easily between power and domination as if they were the same thing. Allen (2003) helps sharpen our analysis by suggesting that we contemplate power's various *modalities* and how they produce effects in quite different ways. To this end, Allen identifies six general modes within the category (or 'guise') of 'power over' others: *domination*—which imposes a form of conduct and forces compliance; *coercion*—which threatens (and must be able to deliver) force to ensure compliance; *authority*—which requires recognition and needs to be conceded not imposed; *manipulation*—which moulds the actions of others while concealing the intent; *inducement*—which promises advantage to people prepared to bring themselves into line; and *seduction*—which arouses desire through suggestion, enticement, and the exploitation of existing attitudes. The first two are blatant forms of power, the second two subtle, and the last two are modest: and this, suggests Allen, makes a difference. So, for example, while coercion is costly to resist, authority can be more easily disrupted if compliance and recognition are withdrawn. Similarly, seduction trades on the notion of choice and so can be rejected. Finally, Allen argues that modalities of power move back and forth, overlap or reinforce each other. So, for example, when manipulation is exposed it may mutate into coercion.

Allen's interplaying modalities of power might enable a more subtle empirical analysis of the 'negative' power effects of participatory approaches. It might be possible to identify: domination when facilitators use ground rules to impose a form of conduct on participants, or when techniques impose a particular mode of representation on local knowledge (see Kothari, 2001); indirect coercion, where interventions offer the only available hope against the threat of poverty; inducement and seduction where access to resources, skills, and benefits are promised, and aspirations tapped to ensure recruitment; manipulation, where researchers use peer researchers to circumvent communities' distrust of academics (eg Cameron and Gibson, 2005), or where facilitators draw men into addressing difficult gender issues via seemingly innocuous topics [*Stepping Stones* author Alice Welbourn (1995) calls this 'facipulation'—personal communication, June 2003]. Finally, authority will often play and produce effects in participatory projects: considerable differences in status will often mean that participants defer (at least initially) to the expertise of researchers, facilitators, and sponsors and concede authority to them even if they do not claim it. Such authority will overlap and facilitate other modalities, making participants more willing to submit to seduction, inducement, manipulation, etc, and to accept externally imposed priorities like sexual health when they face many more immediate problems.

... and empowerment

Notwithstanding the identification of these modalities, my experience of the positive impacts of the Stepping Stones programme (for example, better partner communication, reductions in domestic abuse, and improved care for those living with AIDS—see Kesby et al, 2002; Welbourn, 1998) make me want to dispute the binary logic which suggests that resistance is the only possible response to the identification of power effects within participatory approaches. Here again, Allen's (2003) work is useful because it identifies two further modalities of power, this time under the guise of 'associational power' or 'power with' others: *negotiation*—which can take place between agents who have different resources at their disposal, contains no obligation to comply, and is directed towards identifying and achieving common ends; and *persuasion*—which requires an atmosphere of reciprocity and equality and uses strength of argument to produce an effect. Furthermore, he reworks authority as

authority among (not over)—which is again conceded but is based on the recognition that authoritative agents acknowledge their own uncertainty in the face of complexity.

Allen is reaching for a better understanding of *empowerment* [a term many geographers seem embarrassed to use or simply ignore (see Johnston et al, 2000; McDowell and Sharp, 1999; Sharp et al, 2000)] but unfortunately it “remains to one side of [his] deliberations”, which focus on the modalities of ‘power over’ (Allen, 2003, page 196). This situation reflects a more general failure among theorists to reconcile the modernist notion of empowerment with poststructuralism: a tension that lies at the heart of current divisions over the status and utility of participatory approaches. Interestingly, those who criticise participation also want to talk of ‘empowerment’ (Kothari, 2001, page 152), yet what it is eludes them because their negative reading of power and its ubiquity puts them in an impossible situation: yearning for a power-free form of knowledge and action yet feeling that any practical attempt to generate empowerment is already drenched in and polluted by power (see Sharp et al, 2000). Consequently, ‘resistance’ is evoked but there is rarely clarity about how it might be catalysed or organised (see Kapoor, 2005; Kothari, 2001).

Allen’s (2003) ‘associational modes’ bring us closer to a resolution of the theoretical tension between empowerment and poststructuralism, but they are “[held back by the] language of ‘power over’” (Allen, 2003, page 196) even more than he realises and are impeded by a conventional focus on what differentiates empowerment from power. While Allen might not conceive empowerment as a commodity to be attained, held, and possessed, or agree that participation works by redistributing power among the many (see Kabeer, 1999; Rappaport, 1987), he would concur with advocates of participation that empowerment is an “altogether different guise of power” which, rather than being a hierarchical, vertical, dominating, and exploitative mode of power *over* others, is reciprocal, lateral, accountable, and facilitating mode of power *with* others (Allen, 1999; 2003, pages 5, 53, 58, 197; see also Batliwala, 1994; Chambers, 1994; 1997; Maguire, 1987; Stein, 1997; Wallerstein, 1992). Furthermore, he casts ‘power over’ as a negative, constraining force that bends and crushes our free will, closes down possibilities, and makes us act in ways we otherwise would not, whereas empowerment is a positive, enabling force for self-development and the creation of a common will (Allen, 2003, pages 5, 53, 95, 123). These distinctions well express the different political goals of empowerment, but do not tell us enough about how empowerment actually works. Moreover, Allen seems dangerously close a conventional reliance on an autonomous agent to throw off false consciousness, attain enlightenment, and seize hold of empowerment (see Batliwala, 1994; Baylies and Bujra, 1995; Chambers, 1994; Crawley, 1998; Friedmann, 1992; Hagey, 1997; Lather, 1991; Rappaport, 1987; Stein, 1997; Wallerstein, 1992).

The similarities between power and empowerment

In order to get beyond the impasse of having either to claim that empowerment is impossible because power is everywhere (Kothari, 2001), or to dispute that power is everywhere in order to make room for empowerment (Allen, 2003, pages 178–179), a clearer understanding of agency and how it is constituted is required. This should not overemphasise the production of performances through discourse (see Nelson’s 1999, critique of Butler, 1990; 1993) or their active instantiation or improvisation by agents (see Thrift, 2000a; 2000b; Thrift and Dewsbury, 2000). Agents’ performances are historically and contextually embedded ‘citational chains’ that draw on established repertoires in order to ‘make sense’ and achieve their effects (see Cleaver, 2004; Pratt, 2000). This process is often habitual and beyond self-scrutiny but, even when it is self-reflexive, consciousness is forever contextually situated (Cleaver, 2004; Kesby, 2005).

Thus, improvisation must *always* 'include a vast archive' and performativity is *always* in some way 'scripted' (compare Thrift, 2000b). Nevertheless, people can draw on a vast array of resources in myriad logical and/or contradictory combinations. Hence, agency can be said to be dynamic, strategic, and capable of producing hybridity and the ontologically new yet, at the same time, something that is socially constructed, partial, situated, and achieved through available resources.

A second means to circumvent the impasse is to stop focusing on how to differentiate power from empowerment and to start thinking about how power and empowerment are alike. After all, power is never merely constraining and is productive even when causing people to conceive of themselves as powerless in the face of domination. Similarly, empowerment also closes down possibilities (of acting at other's expense), constrains (the ability to exert power over others), and causes people to behave in ways they would not otherwise (finding a voice and acting assertively). Power and empowerment are not, therefore, 'altogether different'. Indeed, empowerment ought not to be thought of as the release of an authentic freewill crushed by power but, rather, as the social production of agency and consciousness in a new 'associational' guise (see also Cameron and Gibson, 2005). Empowerment should be reconceptualised as an *effect* of the deployment of various resources. From this perspective, certain arrangements of discourse, technology, and social relations can institute forms of governance that enable people to forge a *common will* and work *with* others via *negotiation* and *persuasion*. Such governance is a power effect, but if there really is no escape from power there can be no way to resist, destabilise, or outmanoeuvre the most pernicious power effects in society *except* via the orchestration of alternative resources and powers. Power and resistance are entangled, and resistance involves power (see Sharp et al, 2000). People are extraordinarily inventive (Thrift, 2000a) but often lack the resources to actually resist power (see Katz, 2004). People need resources on which to draw in order to constitute an agency capable of transforming existing power relations (see Cameron and Gibson, 2005; Clegg, 1989; Nelson, 1999) and, despite all their flaws and situated partiality, participatory approaches offer *one* such resource and do so in ways that can valorise equity, encourage self-efficacy, and even contemplate the limits and situatedness of knowledge. The fact that participatory technologies are often not 'indigenous' (Mohan, 2001) is perhaps less important in our hybrid, global world than whether people think they are analytically useful and provide valuable leverage in the various struggles they face in their everyday lives (see Sylvester, 1995).

If we stop trying to purify and isolate empowerment and, instead, imagine its effects and modalities as overlapping and entangled with those of power, a far less polarised and more constructive critique of participation becomes possible. We can identify and attempt to moderate instances of domination whilst acknowledging parallel instances of empowerment. For example, the domination and governance effected by a facilitator's ground rules might simultaneously effect associational interactions like negotiation between socially unequal parties; an NGO's authority *over* might, with time, transform into authority *among* a community; a researcher's manipulation of a discussion might result in an opportunity for negotiation and persuasion that helps reconstitute gender relations; a participant's resistance to participation might be explored as a means to identify inadequacies in a programme.

What has been lost in this formulation is the certainty that participation is a privileged and power-free mode of research and development. It must now be seen [like feminism (see Rose, 1993, page 160)] as a partial, situated, and contestable work in progress subject to future challenge and transformation; giving participation's long internal critique a useful poststructural theoretical edge. What has been

gained is the realisation that it is necessary and legitimate to deploy forms of governance such as participation as a means to outflank more oppressive and less self-reflexive forms of power: giving the poststructural critique of participation a practical political edge.

Hence I feel optimistic about the radical potential of the participatory interventions I know best. These deploy role play and ‘rehearsal for reality’ that enable participants to dramatise and deconstruct everyday HIV-risk situations and try out alternative ways of dealing with them (Kesby et al, 2002: see also Strategies for Hope, 2006). I agree that such performances are ‘contrived’, ‘front stage’ presentations for, and scripted by, intervening agents (Kapoor, 2005; Kothari, 2001). However, the key point is not that some ‘more authentic’ performance exists on an unobserved ‘backstage’, but whether such playacting causes participants to consider that *all* social relations (such as gender, sexuality, race) are similarly contrived and therefore can be transformed/performed differently (see Butler, 1990; 1993). Participatory performance techniques might galvanise the kind of mimetic reflection that Katz (2004) suggests is crucial to effective resistance, but which too often lies dormant in adults although it occurs naturally in child’s play.⁽²⁾ Put simply: strange behaviour in one place (the participatory arena) can lead to a questioning about what constitutes normal relations in other (for example, the domestic sphere) (Jones and SPEECH, 2001). In this way a relatively accessible participatory methodology holds the potential to render the normally impenetrable ontology, epistemology, and politics of poststructuralism meaningful to ordinary people and therefore relevant to the great life and death struggles of our times (compare Sylvester, 1999). Therefore I feel that opportunities for empowerment are offered by participatory approaches themselves, and not just by resistance to them (Kothari, 2001) or by slippages in their operation (Kapoor, 2005).

Spatialising participation and empowerment

If participatory approaches are to fulfil their potential, greater focus is needed on their *inherently* spatial dimensions. Geographers have much to contribute in this regard. Perhaps the first step is to critique existing understandings of spatiality within the participatory field.

Situating participation in context

Drawing on extensive international comparative work Cornwall (2004a; 2004b) usefully tempers the ‘one size fits all’ technocratic approach (eg Chambers, 1994; 1997) by arguing that participation should be understood as context dependent and contingent on particular local and regional setting. At the local scale, the specific sites chosen for a participatory activity can fundamentally affect its operation. After Lefebvre ([1974] 1991), Cornwall (2004a; 2004b) argues that every space has its own history. Thus participants, not just facilitators, will determine the meanings of a context. A community centre might seem the logistically obvious location for an intervention, but such sites may hold strong associations that will affect who participates and what they feel able to say; a religious site might encourage men’s participation while a purpose-made NGO forum might be labelled as a ‘women’s place’ (Jones and SPEECH, 2001). Thus, the same intervention held at different sites can produce quite different social dynamics (Cornwall, 2002).

⁽²⁾ While Katz (2004) is hostile toward Foucauldian approaches, she also argues that ordinary people need resources in order to frame their resistance (although not that resources such as historical materialism or participation are themselves partial and situated forms of knowledge/power).

At a broader scale, advocates of participation should not ‘open their tool kit’ without first considering the contingent impacts of the existing landscape of political governance, peculiarities of history and geography, and forms and locations of existing activism in any given context (Cornwall, 2004b). A key weakness in the Habermasian tradition has been the failure to realise that some contexts are less conducive to deliberative events than others (Cornwall, 2004a). Thus, where there is a history of imposed ‘community development’ or ‘empowerment programmes’, or where dependency and patronage are endemic, people may be suspicious of invitations to ‘participate’ and deliberation may be skewed by existing power relations. In the broadest terms, imminent participatory development projects must be understood within the immanent structural conditions of historical development (Bebbington, 2004; Hickey and Mohan, 2004b).

‘Invited’ versus ‘popular’ spaces: a critique

Less useful has been Cornwall’s (2002; 2004a; 2004b) notion of ‘invited’ and ‘popular’ spaces, which has had considerable impact on recent debates on the global expansion of participative forms of governance (eg see Hickey and Mohan, 2004a). Cornwall offers a taxonomy that categorises spaces of participation on the basis of how they are created, by whom, and for what purpose.

‘Invited spaces’ are always brought into being by external, resource-bearing agents (for example, supranational agencies, governments, NGOs—and, presumably, researchers). Some are rather fleeting formations opened for a particular purpose then closed again (for example, various one-off participatory research or development initiatives) whereas others are more durable (for example, participatory committees, councils, or advisory structures). Either way, people are always ‘invited’ to participate on terms framed and defined by the sponsoring agency. Invited spaces have the *potential* to reconfigure and expand democracy by broadening citizen engagement in ways that enable them to realise their rights and developed skills which can be transferred to other arenas (Cornwall, 2002). However, external control tends to domesticate them. Their radical potential is limited either because dull formalities and poorly defined modes of ‘representation’ reproduce hegemonic social relations, or because invited spaces are specifically designed to co-opt spontaneous popular participation, give people a stake in the status quo, and render other forms of action illegitimate. People lack a real sense of ownership over the ‘provided spaces’ into which they are ‘invited’ and, when they also lack real influence, both official and lay participants soon lose interest in them. ‘Popular spaces’ by comparison, emerge more organically out of a common set of concerns or identifications. They are characterised by the very fact that ‘people at the margin’ have ‘chosen, fashioned, and claimed’ those spaces themselves and so have a genuine affiliation with them which can give them added durability. Like their invited counterparts, some popular spaces are more permanent and institutionalised (for example, the various arenas of civil society groups) whereas others are one-off transient spaces (for example, of demonstration and protest) (Cornwall, 2002; 2004a; 2004b). This analysis does not cause Cornwall (long a proponent of participatory approaches) to entirely dismiss the many new invited participatory forums in favour of popular spaces. Rather, she suggests that ‘invited spaces’ be redesigned and that ordinary people undergo popular education and assertiveness training in ‘popular sites’ before then entering the ‘invited spaces’ of participatory governance on something like an equal footing, possessing the capacities necessary to use them effectively.

By this means Cornwall believes she has rehabilitated the participatory research methodologies “so derided by the proponents of the *Tyranny* critique” (2004b, page 86). I disagree. This taxonomy is based on the kind of binary logic so roundly criticised in *The New Tyranny* (see Kothari, 2001; Mohan, 2001) and, notwithstanding caveats that

popular spaces can sometimes be exclusionary and serve conservative agendas, and that backstage spaces can never be ‘completely insulated from the effects of power’, the overall impression is that popular spaces constitute more authentic and radical sites compared with the domesticated invited spaces provided by external agents (see Cornwall, 2002; 2004b, pages 82, 87). Moreover, the clarity of the taxonomy belies the confusion over the role of participatory approaches and those who advocate them. Classic participatory action research (PAR) would seem to fall into the jaded field of ‘invited spaces’, and yet the use of PAR methodologies is advocated within arenas of redesigned participatory governance. Similarly, external interference in ‘popular space’ is discouraged and yet projects of popular education, consciousness raising, and learning about rights and policies are anticipated there. It is unclear whether advocates of PAR methodologies would play a role in this. Perhaps Cornwall implies that methodologies could be voluntarily adopted by popular movements rather than imposed by external agents. If so, then she continues to see participation as a neutral technology (see Cleaver, 2001), refuses the insights of the poststructural critique, and attempts the kind of self-effacement that Kapoor (2005) so strongly criticises.

I also disagree with the attempt to differentiate and divide empowerment and power in and through geographical space. Popular spaces cannot be distanced from power and governance whether or not participation is one of the resources deployed there. As Sharp et al (2000) argue, resistance is entangled with authority and domination. The most radical of popular spaces can be galvanised/dominated by hierarchal [or patriarchal (Routledge, 2003)] vanguards and debate there can be curtailed by the desire to ‘speak with one voice’ and ‘hold the party line’. Even feminist radical discourse can have domineering race, class, and sexual tendencies (Chouinard and Grant, 1995; Frankenberg, 1993; Mohanty, 1992). These entanglements mean that resistance requires power to make it effective (Sharp et al, 2000). While ‘the margin’ might afford radical perspectives (see hooks, 1990; Rose, 1993), these must be mobilised and framed via something like the resources of participation [or feminism (see Desbiens, 1999), or historical materialism (see Katz, 2004), or religion (see Nagar and Swarr, 2004), etc] for an agency capable of instigating social transformation to be constituted. That agency will be a power effect of the specific resources that helped formulate it. Hence the modalities *and spaces* of power and empowerment become entangled. Thus, it is possible that the governance effected by participatory approaches in some ‘invited’ spaces could enable interactions that are *at least* as radical and democratic as those possible in many so called ‘popular’ spaces. It seems to me, therefore, that ‘invited’ and ‘popular’ spaces are as similar as they are different: both are sociospatial arenas constructed through, and perpetuating, particular regimes of power and governance. Their radical or conservative effects on agency can only be gleaned via detailed empirical investigation, not a general taxonomy.

Arenas of participation and empowerment as a performance in space

A more coherent theorisation of spaces of participation is needed—one that recognises that the technologies, social relations, and *arenas* of participation are interdependent and that the modalities and *spaces* of power and *empowerment* are entangled. The first step is to reconceptualise empowerment in spatial terms. Although ‘expansion’ has long been a goal/means of empowerment [for example, women must break out of constraining spaces, occupying existing or creating new spaces for action (see Cornwall, 2002)], empowerment itself has been conceived of primarily in temporal terms (Kesby, 1999a). Typically, transparently conscious agents are imagined to undergo a linear process of ‘self-discovery’, ‘awakening consciousness’, politicisation, and ‘enlightenment’ on the way to achieving empowerment (eg see Batliwala, 1994; Baylies and Bujra, 1995;

Chambers, 1994; Crawley, 1998; Friedmann, 1992; Hagey, 1997; Lather, 1991; Rappaport, 1987; Stein, 1997; Wallerstein, 1992). These conventional understandings need a spatial reworking, and this can be facilitated by once again thinking about empowerment's similarities to power. So, while geographies of *empowerment* remain rather 'lost' in the accounts of Allen (2003) and Foucault ([1976] 1980; [1982] 1984, page 252),⁽³⁾ both are very clear that 'power over' is always already spatial.⁽⁴⁾ I propose that 'power with' [like all social relations (see Lefebvre [1974] 1991)] also needs to be conceived of as embedded in space as well as time.

If we reconceptualise empowerment along poststructural lines as an *effect* resulting from the deployment of resources such as those associated with participatory approaches, then several things follow. Effects are unstable and, to achieve the appearance of permanence, require constant reproduction via the deployment and evocation of their constituent resources. Thus, empowerment is best understood as a continuous performance (see Butler, 1990; 1993)—not something that can be indefinitely 'achieved'. While material spaces may elude Butler's account (Thrift and Dewsbury, 2000), it seems clear that the performance of empowered agency will require a context conducive to its constitution: that is spaces in and through which the resources that effect empowerment are deployed. This is a crucial aspect of how participatory approaches actually work.⁽⁵⁾ Wherever they occur (whether beneath a tree or in a community hall) and whatever their origin ('invited' or 'popular'), participatory approaches open up sociospatial arenas governed by a set of discourses and practices quite unlike those that order everyday spaces and agency (Kesby, 1999a; 2005). Within these arenas, local frameworks that normally position individuals are circumented by the deployment of resources such as 'free speech', 'peer equality', 'collaboration', 'facilitation,' etc, which enable the discussion of controversial issues, mediation of disputes, and the contribution of people whose voices would normally be marginalised. We might say that these are 'paradoxical spaces' (Rose, 1993) which open within existing society, but which offer a safe arena 'beyond' locally dominant powers, and from which it is possible to reflect upon and contest everyday society and space [except that they are concretely in the here-and-now, not some distant/utopian future/zone—see Desbien's (1999) critique of Rose]. Paradoxically, while constituting a 'free space' they are themselves products of power. However, this is also why they are concretely achievable, not simply philosophically desirable: opened and managed via authority, domination, manipulation, seduction, etc, paradoxically, participatory arenas also enable forms of governance that encourage negotiation and persuasion among participants and facilitators. When the context is one structured by gender and generational hierarchies, and the focus for deliberation is HIV/AIDS, the creation of these carefully governed arenas is a very positive occurrence.

Nevertheless, equitable ground rules and sensitive facilitation cannot entirely remove inequalities between participants (Kesby, 1999a). People enter participatory arenas differentially equipped; for example, male elders are experienced in public speaking and negotiation and may also employ *genres* of speech that reproduce existing power relations (Cornwall, 2004b; Jones and SPEECH, 2001; Kapoor, 2005).

⁽³⁾ Alan admits as much (2003, page 197) whereas Foucault discusses resistance rather than empowerment. Moreover, Foucault's posthumous *Of Other Spaces* ([1967] 1986) is less a manifesto on spaces of resistance (compare Cornwall, 2002; Jones and SPEECH, 2001) than a slightly incoherent prelude to his later works on power (see Kesby, 2005).

⁽⁴⁾ Foucault's *explicit* acknowledgement of the importance of space was of course belated.

⁽⁵⁾ In an otherwise excellent poststructural analysis of participation, Cameron and Gibson (2005) neglect the spatial and perpetuate an emphasis on "powerful *moments*:" in participatory processes (page 320, my emphasis).

Thus, while advocates of participation have often imagined that participatory approaches constitute something like an ‘ideal speech situation’ (see Habermas, 1984; Kapoor, 2002), this is unrealistic (Cornwall, 2002; 2004b; Kesby, 1999a). Moreover, while the resources of participation may help to suspend local social relations within participatory arenas, preventing direct domination by local elites, these locations are not entirely ‘beyond’ the untransformed everyday spaces/relations that surround and press in on them (Kapoor, 2005; Kesby, 1999a; 2005). The absent presence of spaces/relations constituted via quite different resources aids the distancing of indigenous hierarchies over participatory space by causing people to fear the consequences later and elsewhere of speaking freely there and then. Spatially embedding participation in this way can help explain why it is that participatory resources often fail to precipitate empowering effects: for example, when women and youth decline opportunities to voice their opinions, while elites mobilise participatory technologies to reauthorise existing social relations (see Cooke and Kothari, 2001). A second paradox of participatory spaces is, therefore, that empowered performances within participatory arenas can be curtailed by relations constituted/constituting elsewhere.

Distancing the resources that effect empowerment

While questions about what limits participation within spaces of participation are very important, the customary focus on ‘deepening participation getting conditions right *within*’ these fora has been at the expense of thinking more about how empowering effects can be distanced beyond the carefully controlled arenas in which key participatory resources are deployed. In my own area of research this is *the* crucial issue. After all, men, women, and youths may be able to talk openly about HIV in project space, but it is in the power-drenched space of the bedroom that life-saving decisionmaking and empowered agency must be effective.⁽⁶⁾

A theoretical perspective informed by Allen (2003), Butler (1990; 1993), Foucault ([1976] 1978, page 95; [1979] 1991; [1981] 1988), and Lefebvre ([1974] 1991) would not see as unproblematic the suggestion that skills developed in participatory space can simply be carried into other domains (see Cornwall, 2002; 2004a). Rather, it would recognise that consciousness, agency, and behaviour are sociospatially relational, and would anticipate that the social relations of participation may have little purchase outside the sites that give them meaning. It might expect that where there is empowerment there will be resistance, and that the *where* of empowerment is a weak point at which resistance to it can be applied. It is perhaps an everyday experience that some settings make us feel that we can ‘speak freely’ while others make us feel that it is ‘not our place to speak’ or that we must ‘act properly’. For those exiting a participatory space this might prove an extreme experience: arenas constituted and governed by quite different forms of power may not be at all conducive to the reperformance of empowered agency. Thus, where projects seemingly fail to produce sustainable effects this may not only be because a *period* of participation did not *last long enough* but also because the *environment* of participation did not *extend far enough* (Kesby, 1999a; 2005).

Empirical evidence confirms these concerns: in Zimbabwe cultural resources that simultaneously construct space and gender (Kesby, 1999b) are readily available to anyone wishing to reincorporate ex-Stepping Stones participants into domestic frameworks. Even without the strategic instantiation of existing social relations by conservative agents, spatial arrangements carry latent meanings that subconsciously inform people (particularly women and youths) of their ‘proper place’ in society

⁽⁶⁾ ‘Bedroom’ is shorthand: respondents report many locations for sexual activity (young people especially reported hurried outdoor encounters in ‘the bush’) and that coercion of women is common (Kesby, 2000a; Kesby et al, 2002; 2006).

(see Moore, 1986). For example, it is very difficult for an 'outsider' wife to negotiate safer sex within her husband's home (Kesby, 2000a). Consequently, forms of empowered behaviour already shaped by what was possible in the paradoxical spaces of participation become further hybridised when performed in the absence of facilitators and many of the other resources of participation. When faced with male resistance in domestic space, communication techniques that increase women's assertiveness when practiced in the participatory arena mutated into a more acceptable/workable 'rediscovery of traditional respectful language'. While this polite, nonargumentative mode of speech between men and women helped improve relationships and reduce domestic violence, it did not significantly increase women's ability to negotiate safer sex (Kesby et al, 2002). Nagar and Swarr (2004) note similar domestic and social reincorporation despite patriarchy and feudalism being explicit topics of the empowerment projects they studied, and add that exparticipants were also reincorporated into broader state and capitalist relations never addressed in the government-promoted projects.

The debate about the *effects* of participation needs therefore to contemplate at least two moments/spaces of social interaction: one in which an external agency with authority among a community facilitates the empowered performances of participants; and one in which exparticipants attempt, using the modest powers of persuasion, negotiation, seduction, inducement, and manipulation, to recruit other nonparticipants into helping distanciate the resources and forms of self-governance that effected empowerment within participatory space. In situations where the second moment/space is given insufficient recognition or proves difficult to instantiate, participatory projects tend to generate isolated islands of empowerment. Examples might be an Edinburgh arts project for women with HIV/AIDS (Rose, 1997) and a Leeds gardening project for people with mental health problems (see Parr, 2007) which offer temporary refuge from everyday stigma and prejudices to which people may periodically retreat. Another might be an Indian NGO residential school that offers the only conducive space for a lesbian couple to cultivate their relationship in an otherwise hostile society (see Nagar and Swarr, 2004; Swarr and Nagar, 2003).

In the many instances in which participatory interventions *do* succeed in 'pushing out on' everyday arenas (Jones and SPEECH, 2001), advocates need to explore the spatial dimensions of this second moment of empowerment. We need to identify which resources have been successfully redeployed, normalised, and distanciated beyond the participatory arena, enabling agents to repeatedly mobilise them to effect their empowerment elsewhere. We must identify how wider geographical settings have been reworked to make them conducive to the stable reperformance of empowered forms of agency. For example, in Jones and SPEECH's (2001) Indian case study, women have successfully redeployed the discursive resource 'women discussing development' (initiated in participatory spaces and subsequently accepted as 'good for the community') in ways that destabilise negative notions of 'gossip' (previously invoked to isolate, silence, and immobilise women in public space) and enable women to expand their everyday geographies and social networks by going about 'discussing development'. Parr (2007) meanwhile, discusses a second gardening project aimed at improving neglected public spaces rather than creating a private space of solace. Crucially, as participants transformed Glasgow's urban environment, they simultaneously transformed social relations around mental health: people once perceived as abject, strange, and a burden become familiar, 'included', and understood as having something to contribute to society.⁽⁷⁾

⁽⁷⁾ Nevertheless, Parr also critiques the policy of 'inclusion' and its disbenefits for participants and stresses the advantages of secluded gardening for people who still require 'asylum'.

Similarly, Nagar (2000) shows how grassroots feminist theatre in Chitrakoot, India, helped rescale understandings of domestic violence and remake public space as an arena in which such violence is visible and contestable.

In the field of HIV/AIDS it has proved consistently difficult for people to transfer lessons learned in the safety of awareness seminars into the arenas in which risky sex takes place. Brown's (1995) work showed that the public nature of some American gay men's sexual practice offered particular opportunities for health interventions within the very venues of highest risk (for example, supplying condoms, counselling, and testing in gay clubs and bathhouses). By effectively distancing key material and discursive resources, these initiatives effected the governance of 'safe sex' across a wider social terrain, reconstituted key social/spatial arenas, and enabled empowered performances within once-dangerous environments. The work of South Africa's Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), which engages in and links government policy forums, the courts, the media, public demonstrations, transnational advocacy networks, and grassroots awareness campaigns (Robins and von Lieres, 2004), achieves something similar. It is not simply that TAC participants have entered and gained experience of 'different domains of association' (see Cornwall, 2004a), but that TAC has managed to deploy, circulate, and normalise within these arenas discourses about health rights and citizenship that reconstitute them as spaces more supportive of people living with HIV/AIDS.

Thus, while I have argued the case for the distancing of participatory resources primarily via discussion of individual projects in specific locations, this does not mean that my arguments are limited to the local scale. I agree with Williams (2004a; 2004b) that advocates of participation must expand their imagination beyond discrete projects that seek transformation at the community scale and develop participatory interventions that are linked with broader struggles for social justice. This will entail an open-ended and ongoing process of engagement which we cannot entirely control, but which might open up new spaces for political action, enable the poor to influence the sites where policy is made, and democratise the state and market (Kapoor, 2005; Williams, 2004a). Nevertheless, this activity will fundamentally involve the deployment and distancing of resources within and across critical social arenas in ways that transform sociospatial relations and enable the sustained performance of empowered political agency over a wide social terrain. Here Routledge's (2003) work is instructive. His 'convergence spaces' are global-scale arenas of participation that enable the performance of radical activist identities in and through antiglobalisation days of action and alternative conferences of people's movements. Routledge not only discusses the kind of broader political processes with which participatory projects might connect, but also, it seems to me, provides a study in the global distancing (via complex activist networks) of resources capable of constructing and sustaining radical alternative performances across a number of scales and domains of association. Finally, I feel that my arguments work well with those of Cornwall and Brock (2005) who advise against the abandonment of the resources of 'participation' and 'empowerment' just because they seem to have been captured by international financial institutions and other mainstream organisations. Rather, these 'buzz/fuzz' words need to be reclaimed, reworked, and redeployed by advocates within new 'chains of equivalence' that reconnect participation and empowerment with social justice, redistribution, and solidarity (Cornwall and Brock, 2005). In this way the power/empowerment effects they produce might be made to change the policy arenas in which they are deployed and the world subsequently produced.

Conclusions—a positive geographical contribution to the debate on participation

I asked whether geographers can make a specifically geographical contribution to the mature debates on participation and whether, in the light of the poststructuralist critique, they can do so while remaining enthusiastic about participation. My answers to these questions have been interconnected. I believe that a poststructural perspective helps draw out the inherently spatial dimensions of participatory approaches, and geographers clearly have much to contribute to the further retheorisation of participation as a spatially embedded phenomenon and of empowerment as an effect of the resources deployed. We can also contribute to the empirical, contextual analysis of participatory projects: something Cornwall (2004b) calls ‘ethnographies’ of participation, but which might equally be described as ‘geographies’, particularly given that the distanciation of the modest resources of participation will be a central concern. However, if we are really convinced of the importance of space to social analysis, we must find ways to make the complex tools of critical human geography accessible to ordinary people in and through participatory praxis so that *they* can identify the spatial embeddedness of powers affecting their lives, develop critical cartographies and alternative spatial representations as a resource for empowerment, explore ways to sustain alternative performances in everyday spaces, conduct ‘counter topographic’ analysis (see Katz, 2004) of the connections between distant people and places and the global in the local, and explore the politics of scale.⁽⁸⁾ These attempts to facilitate peoples’ spatial awareness must be linked to efforts to expand their spatial horizons of action via integration of participatory projects into wider political and social movements which enable multiscalar politics and build a broader political agency and active citizenship.

While the insights offered by poststructuralism are often painful, a positive reconciliation with participatory approaches *is* possible. In fact, understanding participation as enmeshed in power, rather than free from it, and thinking about what unites power and empowerment, rather than what separates them, is very helpful to the praxis of participation—not least because this helps us understand how participatory arenas actually work and how the empowering effects of participation might be distanced. However, while I agree with Kapoor (2005) and other poststructural critics that we must turn our anthropological gaze on ourselves and acknowledge self-aggrandisement, empire building, ‘I’ focus, and narcissistic pleurability in participatory approaches, it is not as if these are absent in academic critique! I see ‘complicity and desire’ in both, and critics of participation might reflect on the psychological factors and neoliberal acad-econo-mic pressures that drive their own career-enhancing demolitions of participatory approaches. Those of us privileged enough to spend time contemplating lives more dangerous than our own miss a fundamental dimension of self-reflexivity if we neglect our own potential capacity to facilitate change in those lives (Kesby, 1999a). I continue to believe that participatory approaches offer *one* practical means to extra-academic engagement. My own reading of the ubiquity of power suggests that such engagement will not simply be a messy business, disruptive of the neat ‘realities’ that participatory approaches might attempt to construct (see Kapoor, 2005): it will also be a *dirty* business because we have no alternative but to sully ourselves with power. Critiques of participation that long for purified forms of resistance are themselves out of touch with the ‘real’ entanglements between power, resistance, and empowerment. My point (compare Kapoor, 2005) is not that participation is not dangerous, but that some things are more dangerous than others (Kesby, 1999a; 2005). In a world

⁽⁸⁾ Cahill (2004) offers examples of ways to rescale experiences and distanciate empowerment through her participants’ use of provocative badges that generated conversations with nonparticipants about the shared experience of racial stereotyping.

where HIV/AIDS decimates the lives of millions, and power is omnipresent, it seems reasonable to deploy (carefully) the resources of participation in attempts to effect empowered human agency and facilitate sociospatial change.

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