

The effect of third way style ‘social development’ on women in community development.

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Abstract

New Zealand organisations that are engaged in community development practice to empower women are disadvantaged under neo-liberal and ‘third way’ style policies of the New Zealand Government. Recent research (Aimers & Walker 2008 & 2009) has shown that community development work in New Zealand has been marginalised as a result of partnering with government, due in part to a focus on the funding of service provision to meet government priorities rather than projects that respond directly to community felt needs. Community development is further disadvantaged by the universalising of social policy and inadequate mainstreaming of gender issues that has suppressed rather than advanced the place of women in community development. This article examines the effects of New Zealand’s third way style policies on women’s community development, using examples from two women’s organisations, PACIFICA and the YWCA.

Keywords: community development, women, third way, gender

Introduction

“..Underlying the neo-liberal state is a new form of citizenship denying the relevance of gender.” (Gotell 2007:128)

In its heyday of the 1970s and early 80s, community development practice in New Zealand was challenged to be inclusive of community diversity, the needs of women, Māori and people with disabilities. However by the 1990s the neo-liberal¹ state, and in particular third way style partnering² with the community and voluntary sector, has changed the sector in such a way that community development has become contested as a practice and marginal as a funding priority (Aimers & Walker, 2008 & 2009a). In this article I will examine what effects the neo-liberal state has had on women’s groups, particularly those who have eschewed the third way partnering process and its universalising influence in favour of a commitment to community development practice.

I will begin by describing the role of women in community development from the perspective of the feminist organisation, then briefly describe the changes that occurred in feminist organisations in New Zealand from the 1970s – 1990s. I will go on to explore the extent to which women are rendered invisible when viewed through the lens of the New Zealand government social policy by examining government policy documents, websites and literature related to women, women’s organisations and community development in New Zealand. Using two examples of existing women’s organisations I will analyse their status within the current neo-liberal policy environment. In my conclusion I will provide a summary of the analysis and detail how my findings challenge both women’s organisations and community development practice.

¹ In this article I use the term neo-liberalism to mean “...the political preference for market mechanisms as a means of ensuring economic and social wellbeing” (Larner 2004:4).

² Third Way is a variant of neo-liberalism which emphasises social democratic aspirations (Larner 2004). In New Zealand, third way style partnering refers to the engagement of the community sector where the state acts as the funding provider partnering with the community sector to provide services that meet the state’s definition of community wellbeing (Curtis 2003).

The influence of neo-liberalism on women's groups and community development in New Zealand

In New Zealand, community development practice has existed primarily within the community and voluntary sector. Throughout the 1980s and 90s urban territorial local authorities commonly employed community or youth workers and established neighbourhood programmes, but it was generally communities of interest that were at the forefront of community development (Aimers & Walker 2009a).

Women's groups have been active in New Zealand communities since the mid 1800s (Else 1993). While many of these early women's groups were strongly political and committed to developing community, feminist engagement with a definable community development process has been primarily through the 'for women by women' groups that grew out of the second wave of feminism in the 1970s. As these activist groups began to grow in the 1980s and early 1990s, many began to incorporate services for women run by women (Else 1993, Vanderpyl 2004). Vanderpyl (2004:281) suggests that the development of feminist based services was "...a way of moving from ideas to action" and therefore a continuation of the second wave of feminist politics. The move from ideas to action coincided with a period of dramatic policy reform in New Zealand. An increasingly complex set of social needs and a corresponding growth in the voluntary sector (in response to what were seen as government failures) prompted the state to seek a closer relationship with those voluntary organisations involved in service provision (Else 1993). As a result new funding opportunities became available at the same time as women's groups began to put ideas into action. This funding had an immediate effect with some groups as they moved from being multi-issue organisations engaged in political action to more specialised single-issue groups, as characterised by Women's Refuge and Rape Crisis. This new wave of women's organisations continued to operate with a 'women-only' approach, following what can be described as a community development model with a strong emphasis on consumer involvement and collective decision making (Else 1993, Vanerpyl 2004).

As the number of state funded groups increased the adoption of widespread economic liberalisation began to influence all aspects of government policy including those affecting the community and voluntary sector. Politically this resulted in a series of well documented transformations, variously described as moving from 'more market' to 'negotiated inclusion' and 'local partnerships' (Elizabeth and Larner 2009). Of particular significance to the development of women's groups however, has been 'the social development approach'; intended to reconcile social justice with a competitive economy. This policy provided the blueprint for contracting with the community sector by establishing a standardisation of practice for groups seeking funding. Women's organisations were affected from the onset, for example at the encouragement of the state; the Women's Refuge and Rape Crisis organisations who were both committed to a non-hierarchical way of working, formed national collectives in order to facilitate a mechanism for centralised representation and the distribution of government grants (Vanerpyl 2004).

The key elements of the social development approach were to 'build capacity' by requiring organisations to develop systems and policies to become more efficient and professional (Larner 2005, Harrington 2005). It has been argued that a by-product of the desire to 'build capacity' or professionalise the community and voluntary sector, including women's organisations, has led to an unconscious and subtle de-radicalisation of those organisations (Aimers & Walker 2009a, Vanerpyl (2004). Vanerpyl (2004:283) explains, "Rape Crisis and Women's Refuge were especially focused on fixing the effects of violence against women. They could be seen as, in effect, 'managing issues' rather than challenging and undermining patriarchal relations of oppression".

As organisations shifted to providing services through professional staff, the ability for volunteers to engage with the organisation also changed. Grey (2009) recounts the perception of a member of THAW (The Heath Alternative for Women) whose view of the organisation in the early 1980s reflected an appreciation for 'lived experience' over the power of the 'professional'. Previously members were empowered to work on their own ideas within the group, regardless of their

education or professional status. As professional staff replaced volunteers, members were no longer encouraged to develop their own projects.

While the social development approach was initiated as a way to counter the fragmentation of social services and to improve the 'capacity' of the community and voluntary sector, this strategy also split the sector into two groups; those organisations that could effectively supply health and social services to the community on behalf of the government and those that couldn't or wouldn't (Shannon & Walker 2006), women's groups were no exception. Vanerpyl (2004:283) describes the split as one of radical versus service orientation,

radical political orientation emphasised 'feminism as an internal process' which empowered women by working collectively with goals of non-hierarchy, consensus and participation. In contrast, the service orientation emphasised 'feminism as an outcome'; delivering services which empowered the individuals who used the services.

Third Way style partnering between the state and the community sector has dominated policy and funding since the late 1990s. Aimers & Walker (2008) argue that by instigating a social development approach 'community development' has been sidelined as the partnering ethos has made it increasingly difficult to see where the activities of the state stop and those of the community sector begin. For groups with their origins in activism, such as women's groups, this has resulted in a suppression of voice.

An additional challenge for women's groups in the 1980s and 1990s was the politics of identity, namely ethnicity, sexuality, (dis)ability and class (Else 1993, Vanderpyl 2004 & Grey 2009). In the New Zealand context the most significant issue to confront the many predominantly pākehā³ groups came in the form of the delicate balance of rights and responsibilities required to honour a bi-cultural partnership

³ A New Zealander of European descent (Maori Dictionary online 2010)

between Māori and non-Māori that was implicit in the Treaty of Waitangi⁴. Caucusing was a technique used to focus on internal differences but as Vanderpyl (2009: 287-288) explains this was a flawed process,

(the)feminist collective was constituted through a binary opposition of women versus men... exploration of the caucusing systems adopted by the groups illustrate the difficulties with identity politics based on a binary model or single axis of oppression. The groups struggled to develop a politics that did not render invisible or exclude other identities.

In the case of bi-culturalism⁵ this produced significant change to many organisational structures. Examples include the appointment of Māori representatives on committees and the development of parallel sister organisations such as Women's Refuge and Te Whare Pounamu, the latter were established to provide victims of family violence with a choice of either a Māori or Pākehā orientated service (Vanderbyl 2004). Given the 'personal is political' stance of the feminist organisations, working collectively was often a stressful and painful process. The energy involved in working through these issues took its toll and it is argued that, the exhaustion experienced by those facilitating the internal and external conflicts contributed to the demise of feminist activism (Grey 2009). For a number of women this exhaustion resulted in a move away from grassroots activism to what Grey describes as 'state–equality' feminism, where activists focused on advancing gender equality via the existing political processes. This was achieved by either working within government departments or externally via the submission process. The paradox for feminists was that they ended up working within the very systems they

⁴ The Treaty of Waitangi was signed in 1840 by representatives of the British Crown and about 540 Māori chiefs. This document is considered the founding document of New Zealand as a nation. There are two versions of the Treaty, one in Māori and one in English, the translation and intent of these have been the subject of considerable debate. Subsequent actions by the New Zealand government did not honour the terms of the Treaty and have been the subject of Māori protest and claims for compensation to the present day (History Group 2010).

⁵ Biculturalism refers to the relationship between Māori and Pākehā informed by the Treaty of Waitangi (History Group 2010).

had previously protested against. “Following the move toward state-equality feminism, women’s liberation activism from the mid-1990s found homes in a wide range of public arenas from national politics to local government, from universities to trade unionism and from advocacy organisations to social service provision” (Grey 2009:42). As a result, rates of public activism declined leaving political lobbying to women’s groups such as the National Council of Women, Māori Women’s Welfare League, YWCA, Women’s Refuge and Rape Crisis using governmentally sanctioned methods such as submission writing in response to government initiated consultation (Grey 2009).

One of the significant gains that could be attributed to state-equity feminism was the establishment of Ministry of Women’s Affairs (MWA) in 1984 by the Labour Government as a result of pressure from a strong women’s caucus within the Labour party, alongside external lobbying from women’s groups. The launch coincided with New Zealand embracing neo-liberalism. While the MWA sought to improve the position of women, the policies it espoused were often contradictory to the neo-liberal market philosophy that was beginning to dominate government thinking. In addition, as a policy only department the Ministry lacked efficacy as it was only able to comment on draft legislation but could never drive or sponsor new legislation (Hyman 2008).

Reflecting on the effectiveness of the MWA in its first 20 years of operation, commentators agree that against great odds the Ministry has been able to contribute to gains for New Zealand women. However the effects of the neo-liberal environment have taken their toll, on the Ministry’s feminist based approaches to work as they have adapted in order to survive (Hyman 2008, Curtin and Teghtsoonian 2007). One example of this is found in gender mainstreaming that was developed as a way of incorporating difference by mainstreaming the issues previously deemed the realm of the ‘other’. While proponents of gender mainstreaming suggest it is necessary to make all areas of government responsive to women, critics argue that in practice mainstreaming ignores the gendered process of policy development. Without careful attention to the power relations at work as

policy is developed and implemented, gender mainstreaming can result in women's issues becoming invisible or even actively suppressed as responsibility for monitoring and evaluating gender issues rests with no one (Sawer 2005, Teghtsoonian 2004, Bacchi & Eveline 2010). In 1996 the MWA replaced their "Checklist: How to analyse policies and programmes to ensure that they meet women's needs" with "The Full Picture: A framework for gender analysis", the latter being criticised for its lack of effective implementation or accountability measures (Teghtsoonian 2004).

An examination of the policy around the community sector shows that mainstreaming gender has not advanced the place of women working in community development. The Office of the Community and Voluntary Sector (OCVS) describe the sector as comprising of 'social service', 'youth' or 'culture and recreation' groups. Women, Māori, Pacific peoples, ethnic minorities, gay and lesbian, youth and older adults are all reduced to a 'cross cutting population groups' a sub sector of the main categories. While the OCVS encourages the community sector to consult with these cross cutting population groups, it warns that some of these groups may have limited resources, thereby indicating that they are on the margins of the sector (Office of the Community and Voluntary Sector 2009).

The body charged with registering non-profit organisations, the Charities Commission, has deemed that while personal advocacy can be the main focus of a charities work, political advocacy or advocacy for law change are not (Charities Commission 2010). For those groups who lobby for political change, recent attention to the role of political lobbying by groups with charitable status may force them to stand outside the community and voluntary sector. This is a very serious threat to women's groups as at the time of writing the Commission seeks to de-register the National Council of Women⁶ as a charity for that very reason (NZPA 2010).

⁶ The New Zealand National Council of Women is an umbrella group representing 46 women's groups that has been in existence since the 1880s

Another aspect of government policy that has failed to be influenced by gender mainstreaming is the decision to put children at the centre of social policy as an investment in future wellbeing for the whole of New Zealand society. While previous social policy has been criticised as putting no value on mothering or unpaid work this new combination of rationalist economic thinking and intensive mother discourse do not sit easily together (Kahu & Morgan 2007, Elizabeth and Larner 2009). As social policy revolves around the protection of the child nowhere are the many other female identities outside that of 'mother' or even the wider community needs considered in the solution.

A major barrier for women's groups who wish to challenge the neo-liberal paradigm is widespread integration of the activities and priorities of the government into the community sector via the partnering ethos associated with the third way. This isolates groups not included in the partnering process and therefore makes it difficult to find a position from which to agitate. As we have seen the Charities Commission is seeking to de-register those organisations who wish to effect political change. When combined with a sector that is dominated by community/state partnerships then terms such as 'bottom up' and 'grassroots' no longer apply (Jenkins 2005, Larner and Craig 2005). Those organisations that do opt out of the partnering process are subsequently isolated and powerless. Rather than return to a position of binary opposition, some theorists are suggesting a more subtle re-positioning of resistance in a more pluralistic way be it through new 'governmental spaces' or as an 'intersection of knowledges' (Larner & Craig 2005, Aimers & Walker 2009). Others (Grey 2009 and Jones 2009) argue that resistance could come via a return to women-only spaces, along with a focus on advocacy and activism grounded in personal experiences in order to recapture some new energy for women's groups.

The position of women's groups in current government policy

The Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) of New Zealand and Pacific Allied Women's Council Inspires Faith Ideals Concerning All (PACIFICA) are typical examples of women's organisation that have retained a membership based structure that operates at a community level to empower women. These two organisations to illustrate how women's organisations that retain a community development focus are marginalised by current government policy in New Zealand.

The YWCA (YWCA 2010) states its purpose as "helping women and girls develop into leaders who work for change in their communities, often in difficult and challenging conditions". Further "Our development philosophy emphasises *women-centred*, sustainable and participatory processes and works to achieve justice, peace, good health, human dignity, freedom and care for the environment." Their core programmes include leadership programmes for young women, campaigning against family violence (men's violence against women), promoting women's health and positive body image, ENCORE (an exercise and wellness programme for women suffering from breast cancer) as well as supporting the World YWCA advocacy programmes such as HIV Aids prevention, maternal health and the 'Power to Change' programme. While some branches offer broader community programmes such as children's holiday programmes, neighbourhood kitchen or hostel accommodation, the focus is primarily 'for women by women'. Similarly, PACIFICA works with women from the Pacific Islands, aiming to increase participation in all spheres of New Zealand society and promote understanding amongst all women. Like the YWCA they strive to provide opportunities for women, in this case specifically women from the Pacific Islands, "...to contribute effectively to the cultural, social, economic and political development of Aotearoa New Zealand... initiate and support programmes promoting the education, welfare, health and social development..." (PACIFICA 2010).

Both organisations describe themselves as women's groups. Both also describe their activities as including aspects of advocacy for law change. As neither are recognised by government bodies as legitimate descriptors or activities appropriate to the community sector both groups have little visibility in mainstream government departments other than the MWA and the Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs. By

focusing on the needs of women, both the YWCA and PACIFICA limit their ability to win government contracts. This is evidenced in the list of supporters the YWCA acknowledges are mainly philanthropic trusts, the nearest they or their branches get to government funding is funds derived from Lottery funding.

Both organisations share a similar organisational structure, with a number of local branches that come together to form a national body. While the YWCA has a more hierarchical structure of local boards, PACIFICA has a localised non-hierarchical organisational model that creates additional difficulties for government funding bodies. A PACIFICA branch member describes the structure of their organization, “Pasifica’s like a family – an extended family, we all have our own families we go home to, but Pasifica is quite a unique organisation where we can feel comfortable with each other and know that we can confide in each other.” (Anon as quoted in Aimers & Walker 2009 b: 49) There is however an unexpected advantage in that they remain independent and autonomous from the government despite lacking financial resources (Aimers & Walker 2009b). A particular strength of PACIFICA is the national networks they have created with organisations such the Māori Women’s Welfare League (Te Ropu Wahine Māori Toko I te Ora), the Pan Pacific South East Asia Women’s Association (PPSEAWA), National Advisory Committee on the Employment of Women (NACEW) and the National Council of Women (NCW). Perhaps because of this and their autonomy, PACIFICA holds a number of advisory positions that give them direct access to policy makers the Ministry of Women’s Affairs (MWA) and the Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs (MPIA).

Despite the long and significant contribution both organisations have made to the community sector their contribution is absent in a recent government commissioned history of the sector. The YWCA is one of the oldest women’s organisations in New Zealand, worthy of 39 indexed references in Else’s (1993) *‘Women Together, A History of Women’s organisation in New Zealand’*, yet there is only one reference to the YWCA, as a possible supporter of women’s sports teams, in Tennant, O’Brien and Sanders (2008) *‘The History of the Non-profit Sector in New Zealand’*

commissioned by OCVS. The OCVS website yields a further reference where the YWCA is bracketed with the YMCA in a discussion document about volunteerism. There is one entry for PACIFICA in Tennant, O'Brien and Sanders (2008), who refer to PACIFICA's adoption of a pan-pacific membership. This single reference is surprisingly meagre given their advisory status to two government Ministries. As with the YWCA, PACIFICA is more visible within the history of women's groups having been identified in nine entries in Else's (1993) *Women Together, a History of Women's organisation in New Zealand*. PACIFICA also fair slightly better on the OCVS site with three reference two of which record the participation of the President of PACIFICA as the chair of the 2007 Community and Government Sector Forum. For both organisations however, the situation does change with the Ministry of Women's Affairs where with twenty four references for the YWCA and thirty eight references for PCIFICA, perhaps reflecting their advisory status.

The contribution of the YWCA and PACIFICA are both accorded recognition in the MWA and for PACIFICA also in the MPIA. While it is questionable how influential these smaller ministries are in the overall political sphere, their presence gives some opportunity for these women's groups to access governmental spaces. However when it comes to the OCVS, the government body that facilitates the community sector relationship with government, both organisations are excluded by virtue of their women-centred focus, making it difficult for them to gain acknowledgment for their work or access to funding. This position seems to have occurred as a result of neo-liberal and third way policies that have encouraged the community sector to adapt in order to provide the state with a capable and professional pool of contractors for the provision of social services. These services have subsequently narrowed to focus on child welfare underpinned by a rationalist economic approach. Women's groups who have resisted the joining up process with government and have continued to respond to the felt needs of their communities are sidelined as a consequence. Ineffective gender mainstreaming within government has failed to highlight the needs of such groups.

Conclusion

New Zealand had an impressive record of women's involvement in their communities. However the women's groups that grew out of the second wave of feminism from the 70s into the 80s moved from a primarily activist mode to embrace service provision. In turn, the incentive provided by government funding influenced the structure and mission of women's organisations. Those organisations that sought government contracts were encouraged to move away from informal multi-issue volunteer based collectives to become professional single-issue social service providers. Neo-liberal government policies began to influence the community sector in earnest from the late 1980s – early 1990s with the introduction of contracting government social services to the sector. Contract compliance required service providers to focus on the achievement of government goals and policy rather than the goals of their members or communities. Government initiatives to build capacity amongst its contractors saw a shift to managing issues rather than challenging power relations. Contracting and capacity building also encouraged the professionalization of the community sector leading to a sidelining of those groups who operated on the basis of personal experience rather than academic and learned knowledge. In addition, challenges within the women's movement led to some members embracing state-equity feminism while moving from women-only groups into social service organisations, education and the state sector.

The widespread adoption of universalising policies that were originally designed to be inclusive to disadvantaged groups, have failed women in the community sector by erasing the very notion of a women's organisation, women have been reduced to a 'cross cutting population', resulting in the exclusion of women's groups from the government and community partnering process. The state's keystone for achieving gender equity, gender mainstreaming, has either by design or application failed women's groups leaving those that resist partnering with government on the margins of community sector networks with little access to government funding. This is evidenced in by the YWCA and PACIFICA, who are both committed to the 'for women by women' paradigm, but clearly do not fit into any of the categories listed in

the OCVS. They both risk de-registration of their charitable status if they are too political and they suffer the decline that all community development based organisations have suffered under social development policies, as their activities and volunteer based organisation structures fail to attract government funding or support.

The challenge for both women's organisations and community development is to develop new ways to bring communities together that facilitate debate. The idea of creating new spaces for dialogue could be initiated within the governmental spaces women's organisations already have access to, such as PACIFICA has with the MPIA or lobbied for as part of the OCVS. Another option is for organisations already part of the partnering process to bring their energies and attention to ways in which they can bring women's issues into focus, perhaps through providing an umbrella for existing women's organisations to have access to the OCVS networks. Whichever actions organisations choose, the solution must be achieved on multiple levels in order to remain inclusive, but not so universal that all identities are rendered invisible.

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