

Chapter 4 – Gender, planning, and epistemic injustice

Introduction

‘There is nothing about being “female” that naturally binds women. There is not even such a state as ‘being’ female, itself a highly complex category constructed in contested sexual scientific discourses and other social practices. Gender, race, or class consciousness is an achievement forced on us by the terrible historical experience of the contradictory social realities of patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism.’

Donna Haraway¹

Whilst there have been some important critiques of the way that governance practices can act to obscure women’s relative economic disadvantage and to create moral discourses that penalise women, the literature on governance has broadly neglected the issue of gender (see Lister, 2006 and Jupp, 2014 for a discussion in the context of “New Labour”). This chapter aims to redress this imbalance, by offering a feminist critique of governance. The governance literature has explored in a multitude of ways the changing relationship between state and civil society and the networks that emerge therefrom. A new wave of literature has recently been concerned with the concept of “decentering governance” to explore the agency of those that become enmeshed in governance networks (see Mckee *et al*, this volume). These authors are interested in the potentially progressive forms of agency that can be developed within the spaces or gaps opened beyond traditional forms of government and power. In theory, social justice and progressive practices may come to the fore as citizens actively challenge the status quo and seek to influence governance (see Bevir and Rhodes, 2003). In the move to governance, the state becomes one actor of many in new constellations of influence rather than the predominate centre of power. Thus spaces are offered up through the emergence of local spheres of action offering both an array of possibilities and challenges for communities. Whilst this work offers interesting opportunities to develop more nuanced accounts of power and resistance, particularly through developing the concept of resistance as the catalyst for productive alternatives, (see McKee *et al*, this volume), there has been limited exploration of

how gendered relations impact upon governance. Drawing on non-essentialist feminist epistemologies, I will suggest that the limited exploration of gender is not an oversight, but a result of the erasure and under-theorisation of female experiences within a patriarchal society (Haraway, 1991). The material I will use to explore the issue of women's inclusion in governance networks within spatial planning and development is grounded in my research and involvement with feminist organisations in this area over the last 15 years (Beebeejaun, 2016a).²

In this chapter I will draw on the work of the feminist philosopher, Iris Marion Young, to argue that the rationale for the inclusion of women within governance remains flawed. Although governance practices encourage new sets of non-traditional actors including women, critical engagement with the basis of such initiatives is vital. Whilst 'organizational pluralism, participation, and dialogue' (Bevir, 2013: 214) are welcome, citizens do not enter such spaces on an equal footing. Provisions may be made to encourage a more diverse set of actors than we might witness in traditional forms of bureaucracy, but this is only the first step in acknowledging historical forms of exclusion (see Stoler, 2010). The limitations of a politics of presence is that it can act to underplay the epistemic injustice that women face based on their gender. A politics of presence draws on the thorny issues of the assumed relationship between a group or community and their representative or delegate within a political or another decision-making arena. The role of the representative within mainstream politics is much more complex than taking a pre-determined viewpoint of the represented group and conveying it to the wider polity. 'If he [sic] is totally bound and instructed, we tend to think of him more as a tool or limb or puppet whose motivating or deciding power is elsewhere' (see Pitkin, 1967: 153). This relationship in terms of minority groups is less well theorised. One of the key claims for minority groups in politics has been that a more diverse range of elected or nominated representatives will ensure that minority group needs and viewpoints are addressed through democratic processes. I draw my understanding of this epistemic injustice from the work of Miranda Fricker, whose conceptual framework I use to cast light on the contradictory status of women and feminist concerns within planning and the challenges it poses to progressive forms of governance. I shall make the case that we must engage with epistemic injustice to reveal the exclusions that superficially inclusive policies create. My argument is not that women's inclusion within governance is unhelpful, but rather that a politics of presence means that, for marginalised groups, inclusion can only ever be a

partial step to equality goals, since it fails to engage with deeper structural factors that create forms of gender- and race-based exclusion.

Before continuing it is important to re-emphasize the complexity of gender and the lack of a universal experience. An important feminist philosophical critique has developed to challenge the universalising tendencies of the concepts of objectivity and rationality emphasising how the theorisation of these ideas have drawn upon men's position and experience, not only excluding women but rendering them as the "other" of irrationality (see Irigaray, 1985) These critiques have been important in deconstructing accounts of women's irrationality which have been deployed to exclude women from political, social, and economic forms of power and self-determination.

Donna Haraway's work has been pivotal in critiquing what she terms the 'god-trick of "infinite vision"' or universal ways of thinking. Instead, Haraway argues for more nuanced accounts of ways of seeing and representing the world that are attentive to our subject positions. 'Only those occupying the positions of the dominators are self-identical, unmarked, disembodied, unmediated, transcendent, born again' (Haraway, 1991: 193). The term "intersectionality" is also important in considering gender experiences. Intersectionality draws upon the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw, a legal scholar, who developed the term to help understand how overlapping forms of discrimination can marginalise some groups and their experience further. Crenshaw's work considers how black women's experiences were overlooked within workplace discrimination due to a limited legal understanding of the intersections between sexism and racism (see Crenshaw, 1991) and of the oversimplified nature of the gender binary (Biology and Gender Study Group, 1988; Haraway, 1991). Within this chapter I use the terms 'men' and 'women' with the caveat that gender is socially and culturally constructed. Further, feminist philosophers argue that, within current patriarchal societies, our understanding of objectivity and rationality are based on a gendered viewpoint that continues to render women as inferior (Grosz, 1994; Irigaray, 1985). 'Feminism,' argues Fricker (2007: 147), 'has long been concerned with the way in which relations of power can constrain women's ability to understand their own experience'. Within this rich conceptual context, we can better understand how measures to increase women's involvement in structures of governance and initiatives to increase their power emerge from a set of battles that have historically excluded women. These logics thus present complex

barriers to a mode of engagement with difference that prioritises forms of physical presence within decision-making structures.

Governance is often imagined, not least by those who act within it, as a set of neutral political and managerial practices that allow state functions to be continued by involving adjunct organisations outside of the formal boundaries of the state (Bevir, 2013: 9). A key dimension of neoliberalism and the rolling back of the state, governance thus decentres power. In many ways this can be welcomed, following the critique of modernist forms of state bureaucracy which ostensibly sought to impose rational and neutral forms of government upon subject, yet whose actions have been demonstrated to discriminate against women and minority groups (see Arnstein, 1969, Bevir, 2013). Yet this very decentring also draws attention to the non-neutral and different ways in which those involved in governance practice understand their role and remit, entailing (as the editors of this volume note) complex interpretative work to understand ‘the diverse sets of narratives, meanings and actions that comprise governing practices’ (Mckee et al, 2017). The question I want to pose in this paper concerns the role of gender in this act of interpretation. When we understand gender to be part of power relations, something socially and politically constructed, what narratives emerge within governance? Do the understandings within those narratives destabilise the public and private realms in meaningful ways and open possibilities for multiple social perspectives? If not, can an examination of the ways in which gender is deployed within governance networks provide insights into more effective future forms of resistance?

Why worry about women in governance?

Women’s exclusion from political life and the public realm has been a longstanding concern and significant flaw within democracy (see Wollstonecraft, 1792/ 1995). The extension of suffrage to women to different groups of women has occurred at various points in the twentieth and twenty-first century emphasising the ongoing struggles for full political recognition.

‘Women’s bodies symbolize everything opposed to political order, and yet the long and often bitterly contested process through which women have been included as citizens has been structured around women’s bodily (sexual) difference from men’

(Pateman, 1988: 4).

Theorists such as Carol Pateman challenge the ways in which the established canon of political theory have proceeded as if there were a universal subject when women have been excluded and denigrated within the construction of citizenship. These ideas of women's irrationality and unsuitability for political life can seem quaintly outmoded. But I want to gesture towards these historical debates as many assumptions persist regarding women, emotion, and rationality within political discourse and in broader debates.³

The feminist movement continues to change, partly in relation to altering historical circumstances, partly in response to challenges from within, with those raised by black feminist thought being particularly important (Collins, 1990). Nancy Fraser follows a well-worn trope in describing the history of the movement as a 'drama in three acts.' Early concerns with economic inequality and attempts to reformulate the welfare state were a critical focus of 'second-wave feminism'. Gender equity was imagined to be possible through a reconfiguration of state services that would allow women greater access to the labour market and also value unpaid labour, particularly caring roles, within the economy. Fraser sees these concerns as fading as we have moved onto a politics of recognition within the 1990s. Also termed, 'third-wave feminist' this diverse movement is associated more commonly with concerns around culture and representation. More recently, Fraser suggests, long-standing feminist concerns have '[C]onverged unwittingly with neoliberalism's critique of the nanny state, and with its increasingly cynical embrace of micro-credit and NGOs' (2013: 15). Often neglected are how racisms intersect with feminist concerns, and the specific challenges and concerns for women of colour are often neglected as white forms of feminism have tended to predominate discussions (see: Davis, 1980).

Thus varying claims and priorities are broadly grouped under the terminology of feminism and there are inherent conflicts within the movement. Nonetheless, in the face of this fragmentation, there remain stark differences between men and women's life chances. Women and girls remain highly disadvantaged within society, with the United Nations Gender equality goals demonstrating the multiple vectors of discrimination (UN, undated). Women and girls lack adequate representation in formal politics and this contributes to the continuing under-appreciation of the discriminations they face. The prevalence of gendered

violence is an indicator of how gender inequality is globally embedded (see Devries *et al.*, 2013; Robinson *et al.*, 2015; Sweet, 2016). Conversely, cities are productive sites of exploration in which coalitions can be forged to challenge social inequalities. This fragmentation gives possibilities for resistance through networks of activism and dissent. Yet the governance literature is often silent on the topic of gender. Not least because there remain problems with the ways in that gendered identities are understood and integrated into governance with the complexities insufficiently considered.

Women are under-represented in most arenas of public life especially higher levels. A growing body of work continues to question this “gender gap” in arenas including academia, formal politics, corporate board positions, senior levels of management, the judiciary, and the media (see Dahlerup, 2006; Dezsó *et al.*, 2016; Fawcett Society, 2013; Fortin-Rittberger and Rittberger, 2016; Niemi and Pitkänen, 2016). In terms of governance arrangements, few women are heads of local authorities either as Chief Executive or Leader of the Council or even Head of Health Services.

Whilst global policy initiatives addressing gender such as the UN Safer Cities programme emphasize the continuing changes needed to empower women and girls in the global South, inequalities also permeate the global North. Concerted efforts are needed to recover gender perspectives in all areas of policy-making as gendered roles may lead to different priorities or needs. An interesting example is the Dublin Statement on Water and Sustainable Development. Water’s ubiquity and universal necessity may seemingly make initiatives for its safeguarding and protection appear non-gendered. Yet principle three of four states that ‘Women play a central role in the provision, management and safeguarding of water’. The principle provides a framework for action showing that women should not only be empowered to participate but their specific needs must be taken into account in multiple policy dimensions.

A number of interrelated arguments are made for the idea that including women within governance can redress this imbalance. Firstly, there is the general argument that all sections of society should be included within governance, which relies on the idea that the urban development process is political, and that each group must be present to have its opinion heard, and thus to influence policy and development (Beall, 1996). However, other feminists

have argued that women's presence alone is insufficient to effect change, and that gender equity needs to be built into the policy-making process at a deeper level. They argue that the long-term exclusion of women has prioritised a male world view and that this has become so pervasive that more concerted efforts are required to promote a gender sensitive approach to policy-making.

One illustration of this pervasive, male-dominated world view can be seen in the World Bank's misguided suggestion that women should have greater representation in governance because they may help reduce corruption. As Goetz (2003: 1) suggests:

'Like any instrumentalist argument, the 'women are less corrupt than men' justification for bringing women into politics and public institutions [is] not just vulnerable to exposure as a myth; it puts women's engagement in the public arena on the wrong foot.'

These kinds of justification reveal fundamental flaws in thinking. As Goetz points out, women's involvement is often seen in instrumentalist ways or through notions of market efficiency. Rather than arguing for equal involvement as a fundamental human right or as necessary to redress a problematic absence, the World Bank asks what will improve for everyone if women are involved, side-lining the relational aspects of gender.

In the spatial disciplines such as urban planning and development, the rise of governance has coincided with an emphasis on increasing citizen participation in planning and development decisions. Calls to include a wider range of groups in the planning process have been made for decades (see Arnstein, 1969; Skeffington, 1969), and at the heart of these demands is the simple arguments that people deserve to have some role in the decisions that affect the places that they live in, combined with an awareness that top-down decisions have often harmed the communities that they claim to serve (see Arnstein, 1969, Betancur and Smith, 2016).

However, the rise of participative and collaborative planning has given still more emphasis to inclusion via the creation of processes and methodologies that invite and listen to a range of individuals and community groups, often grounded in the logic that such representation can capture important and irreconcilable differences of perspective and power, and is closer to the real concerns and real power imbalances within society than more universalising forms of top-down planning.

The philosopher Iris Marion Young was sceptical of the ways in which group identity became interpreted through representation. Whilst she argued for different groups to become represented more fully within the political realm, she urged caution with regard to the way that such representation was interpreted. She saw an essentialising danger in the assumption that identity was irrevocably and innately tied to a particular position, something also noted at an experiential level by Audre Lorde: 'I find I am constantly being encouraged to pluck out some one aspect of myself and present this as the meaningful whole, eclipsing or denying the other parts of self' (Lorde, 1987: 120). Instead, she articulated the concept of social perspective whereby '[D]ifferentially positioned people have different experience, history, and social knowledge derived from that positioning' (2000.p.136). Social perspective emphasizes perceived commonalities within ascribed groups based on their relative and contingent position within society rather than any inevitable and innate feelings and values: 'Perspective is one way of looking at social processes without determining what one sees' (2000: 137). The utility of this is that it allows strong tensions within and between groups to be acknowledged, while avoiding superficial representations of identity.

What Young's work does is to call into question the idea that presence alone can be a solution to the problem of difference. Simply including individuals who are different from a white, male, middle class and heterosexual perspective does not automatically mean that a process will take account of the way that social relations are replicated within governance networks. Bina Agarwal's work on environmental governance in forest conservation in India and Nepal gives an empirical example of this: her research suggests that while there are multiple benefits to women becoming part of local governance networks, including the possibilities for their different concerns to be addressed within policy, their mere presence 'in the room' with decision-makers does not necessarily lead to meaningful change. Instead, Agarwal argues, a "critical mass" of women are needed to support one other within the workings of governance, in order to speak and make their views heard. As Nepalese activist Maya Devi Khanal states:

'In mixed groups when women speak men make fun of them, so women need to learn to deal with this...When women join a [separate] group they gradually lose their fear of making fools of themselves when speaking up.'

“Good governance” that does not contain an explicit gender or equalities focus that is realised in a network is therefore open to capture and colonisation by dominant and powerful interests.

Feminist action in the built environment

Cities provide an interesting lens through which to view these questions, because power struggles within the urban environment have a gendered dimension (see Fenster, 2005; Vaiou, 1992). They are key sites of governance struggles, providing the possibility for a critical mass for community action. Since women do not share the same interests or have the same needs as men, there will be aspects of urban life that impact on them differently. During the late 1970s and early 1980s these differences were explored through feminist geography and planning scholarship, in work that revealed not only the ways in which gendered roles were embedded within the fabric of cities but also the neglect of feminist concerns and the devaluation of the role of women and minorities in standard planning history (see, for example, Bondi, 1990; Hayden, 1980; McDowell, 1983; Sandercock, 1997; Spain, 1992, and others). This field of work revealed that urban space was being organised in ways that hindered the activity of many women, particularly those with childcare responsibilities or who lacked daily access to a car.

These strong critiques influence campaigns to take women’s needs into account. During the 1980s, gender became pivotal to campaigns around the multiple roles played by women in the city and the balance to be struck between economic employment and caring responsibilities. These concerns were interwoven with a second-wave feminist critique of unequal state provision, in which the concept of “gender mainstreaming” was developed to ensure assessment of the differential impacts of policies upon gender groups. For example, policy initiatives such as the production Equalities Impact Assessments (EqIA) were developed to force administrations to consider how men and women might be affected differently by policy initiatives. These EqIAs ask policy-makers to consider each policy in turn to determine the differential gendered impacts they might have. However, despite some notable successes, such as Vienna’s “fair shared city” initiatives (Irschick and Kail, 2013), these types of approach have largely slipped to the side-lines, partly because they came to be

seen as rather superficial in their analysis of power, and thus ineffective. As Wotha argues, gender mainstreaming failed to take account of the ways in which ‘deep gender biases shape the interactions between state and citizen’ (Wotha, 2013: 95). Moreover, given that many of these exercises are carried out by an individual official, and not in dialogue with others, it is difficult to see how they might meaningfully disrupt taken-for-granted assumptions around gendered difference.

Whilst there is greater awareness amongst those in the spatial professions that women have been disadvantaged by planning practice in the past, there is little consensus about the types of actions that might be effective in remedying this. The conflicting logic of representation through presence contributes to women in the built environment often being seen to be a specialist concern or interest (Berglund, 2007). The Women’s Design Service (WDS), brought together women architects, activists and academics in the UK in response to the feminist critique of cities and planning. At the heart of their concerns was the invisibility of women’s perspectives in making decisions about cities, and the need to generate collective action around the inadequacies of state provision. But rather than simply criticising the existing system, WDS sought to generate an alternative knowledge and expertise. They became recognised as an authority on women and the built environment, and developed training and advice for local authorities that challenged the gender-neutral language of design: ‘If things were designed with women in mind they would be different’, as Wendy Davis, former director of the WDS put it.⁴ Their campaigns for toilet provision, baby changing facilities, buggy spaces on public transport and crèches might seem mundane and unremarkable now, but that is partly because these campaigns were effective in bringing such issues into the mainstream. As Davis reflected in an interview I conducted with her, many of the WDS’s child-centred campaigns were effective in introducing change, where other campaigns, such as those around women’s safety in the urban environment, were less successful. WDS’s work was nonetheless radical in empowering women to develop their skills and capacity, in examining lived experiences, and in the attempt to influence planning policy.

Despite the pioneering work of the Women’s Design Service the relationship between gender and the built environment continues to shift. Many of their earlier concerns were with

ensuring that gender was taken into account through provision of certain types of services or facilities. But there were difficulties in articulating the gendered concerns they had beyond the field of policy-making. In part this was hampered by the ways in which women remain disadvantaged within the built environment being difficult to articulate and thereby link to planning concerns. Rather than challenging the established model of planning, women's needs were seen as additional or luxury enhancements to the planning lexicon. A former director of WDS noted: 'People would ask us what we did – they thought we were interior designers or product designers'. When interviewing feminist activists who had worked with WDS further about contemporary planning issues, I have found that many women have been embarrassed or apologetic about the lack of clear analytical tools for defining gendered impacts of urban form. Statements such as: "Planning is really technical...I can't answer your question of what planning should do to address women's concerns" or "I think feminism has greater priorities than planning" remain common.⁵ This may explain why gendered concerns are often reduced to a few policy initiatives, within frameworks that remain oriented towards a masculine view of the subject (Sandercock, 1997). Governance can therefore be a useful feminist tool through which to reconsider the relationship between spatial decision-making and gendered power relations. Through disrupting pre-existing ways of doing things, activists groups can find gaps in which to challenge taken-for-granted ways of knowing. WDS drew together feminist principles in a particular set of ways that argued for spatial changes within cities that are important but which did not ultimately significantly alter ways of planning.

At first glance, WDS's perspective seemed to have been incorporated into New Labour regeneration initiatives (1997-2010), in particular a shared focus on the neighbourhood as a critical spatial scale through which to understand the impact of policy interventions, especially with regard to poverty. The New Deal for Communities programme was one of the most ambitious initiatives of recent decades, aiming to tackle deprivation in the 88 most

deprived neighbourhoods in England with £2 billion of public spending. Governance was a key organizing tool in these area-based regeneration initiatives: community input was sought in order to find more holistic solutions to embedded social exclusion and physically deteriorated neighbourhoods. In particular, partnership boards were deployed, with membership rules that ensured that residents were in the majority in making decisions for their local neighbourhoods. Early government guidance prioritised increasing ethnic minority representation, but in later stages gender and disability were also a focus. In 2004 women made up 39% of board members and by the end of the programme near parity had been reached, although men were still more likely to hold leadership roles on the board (Batty *et al.*, 2010)

In some ways this pointed to a success in achieving gender balance. However, qualitative research shows that there were contradictory outcomes from these initiatives: in spite of central government's commitment to increase women's representation, a number of women reported disempowering experiences. Some felt that they were not taken as seriously as men when they spoke (Beebeejaun and Grimshaw, 2011), others that their knowledge was assumed to stem from women's greater responsibilities for home and children, or from caring characteristics (Gosling, 2008). Whilst lived experience formed an important component of understanding place within these governance structures, women and feminine knowledge were therefore still marginalised and essentialised.

Intersections with ethnic identity also revealed worrying assumptions. For example, the representativeness of Black and Minority Ethnic representatives was sometimes questioned in a way that the representativeness of white groups was not:

The BAME [Black and Minority Ethnic] reps are generally professionals, they have a certain intellect, they are a benefit to the board but they don't necessarily represent the women in [the area]. They can argue the case, they can be assertive and I guess they're women and Asian women so they have some vulnerability, but the other women on the board don't see them as representing them...

Quoted in Beebeejaun and Grimshaw, 2011: 2011

Competent, professional BAME representatives were seen as unlike the general population of the area, assumed (with problematic prejudice) to be more “submissive” or “oppressed”, whereas a similarly articulate white, male perspective was seldom questioned (see Beebeejaun and Grimshaw, 2011; Gosling 2008, Grimshaw, 2011). Other black and minority ethnic participants spoke of feeling ignored or people belittling their comments by “rolling their eyes” or other non-verbal gestures (Beebeejaun and Grimshaw, 2011). These comments echo the finding of Bina Agarwal’s work mentioned earlier and point to the way that women are disadvantaged within governance spaces. A growing body of evidence shows that they take up far less time in meetings and that this impacts the process and outcomes of decision-making (see Tessier, 2016). Furthermore, there may be something not just alienating but actually limiting and containing for some women and activists in the way that the bureaucratic structures of government are applied to local issues. As a former regeneration officer concluded:

Women de-risk the public arena with concern for their area, once structures are established traditional governance colonises the ad-hoc activist space, brings an agenda, minutes and ties.

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Even less scrutiny has been given to the quality of governance spaces since the demise of the New Labour government in 2007, despite increasing attention to community-led neighbourhood planning in the UK. The Localism agenda pursued by the Coalition and subsequent Conservative governments has increased fragmentation and decentering, in the devolution of decision-making responsibilities to local communities, yet the governance of community groups has been paid scant attention. Any group can, in theory, start to develop their own plan for the neighbourhood (HMSO, 2012). For many urban areas, a representative body called a neighbourhood forum has to be convened, with a minimum of 21 members who are non-elected. The government’s regulations on its membership are not very prescriptive and whilst applicants are advised to think about the groups living and working within the area, they are not required to have each membership group in their forum. Equalities issues are marginalised, and although groups ‘must be open to new members’ and ‘must have taken reasonable steps to secure membership from residents, business and local elected members across the neighbourhood area’ (HMSO, 2012) the government gives little detail of how this

is to be enforced or monitored, other than through the scrutiny and approval of local authorities.

The net result has been that identity and representation have become untethered from concepts of injustice. Neighbourhood planning guidance may use the term “identity characteristics” and may gesture briefly towards equalities impact assessment, but overall concern for positive difference is replaced by a bland language of equality of access and of opportunity, and a lack of disadvantage:

‘The Neighbourhood Plan contains no specific policies or proposals for any particular gender. The Neighbourhood Plan has been written to provide equal opportunity to both sexes in respect of the provision of development and access to facilities.’

‘[Neighbourhood area]: Equalities Assessment. Neither sex is disadvantaged by any of the policies and proposals in the Neighbourhood Plan; on the contrary both sexes will benefit equally from the implementation of the Neighbourhood Plan.’⁷

The gains of feminist campaigns and attempts to integrate a female perspective into planning and other forms of spatial decision making are diminished by this language. Although the assumed intent of providing communities with real opportunities to bring local knowledge and values into planning and place-making are admirable, the ongoing assessment of neighbourhood planning questions many of its underlying assumptions. Sue Brownill (2017) highlights the ways in which citizen-led neighbourhood planning is promoted as a form of democratization of planning, contrasted with ‘a distant and technical exercise carried out by ‘experts’’ (2017: 33). However, Brownill notes that neighbourhood planning is heavily reliant on planning professionals to deliver the plans. In reality there are that the principles of representativeness within neighbourhood planning are merely aspirations with few checks or balances to assure this, let alone to engage with substantive questions of power and marginalization. The logic is one of representation through presence or assumed presence, with no real engagement with the realities of disempowerment or the differential impacts of policy.

This turn towards presence as the key corrective dimension to inequalities is troubling as identity can become removed from the important structural dimensions that created unequal groupings. Decentering governance implies the possibilities of a reformulation or corrective influence upon power. Instead of rejecting governance as the inevitable result of neoliberalism, by closely considering on-the-ground accounts we can see how spaces of active resistance can be forged. Bevir and Rhodes (2016) have argued that it offers opportunities for use of the three “R”s, namely rules, rationalities, and resistance. Resistance allows countervailing accounts and sensibilities to be brought to bear on the wishes of elites in the formulation of policy. The fact that it draws on local knowledge suggests that through a closer understanding of the placed-based ‘traditions’ that subaltern actors draw upon, we can become more deeply aware of alternative possibilities and configurations of power: ‘Policies are sites of struggles not just between strategic elites, but between all kinds of actors with different views and ideals, reached against the background of different traditions’ (Bevir and Rhodes, 2016: 200). They go on to extend this frame of analysis by linking together local knowledge, performativities, and situated agency as useful analytic tools to examine local forms of action.

Resistance, then, offers the possibility of opening epistemologies to greater scrutiny, challenging elite narratives of group identity (see Fricker, 2007). It is contrasted, in Bevir and Rhodes (2016), to ‘rationalities’, the conceptual apparatus of elites that become interpreted by “street level bureaucrats.” Resistance goes beyond merely opening spaces to women and other marginalised groups, exploring the tensions at the level of the production of knowledge and authority. Yet it is not entirely apparent what might catalyze resistance in any given context, particularly given the evidence that discussions at a local level have not, in fact, produced much epistemic self-awareness amongst participants. How is the epistemic basis of authority to emerge within discussions about any given issue, given the frequency with which women report being marginalised when they attempt to participate in policy-making? Presence alone seems insufficient to bring new forms of knowledge come into being, and places a heavy burden on those who are now invited into these spaces to be champions of equality and to provide progressive dimensions to policy and debate, despite the failure of the state to address gendered and racialized forms of violence, and despite significant levels of resistance to alternative knowledges, that have often led to them being ignored by dominant groups.

Epistemic injustice

Given the problematic nature of women's exclusion and marginalisation within governance, what concepts might help us to further interpret these problems? The philosopher Miranda Fricker has developed the concept of epistemic injustice as a means to understand knowledge claims. She argues that there are two elements of epistemic injustice – firstly, testimonial injustice and secondly, hermeneutic injustice. She defines the first as occurring when a listener 'gives a deflated level of credibility to the speaker's word'. Hermeneutic injustice, on the other hand, occurs outside a specific context and consists of 'a gap in collective interpretive resources put someone at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of their social experience.' (Fricker, 2007: 1).

The idea of testimonial injustice provides an important lens through which to explore how actors can find that their ability to influence or to subvert governance is limited. At the level of gender, Fricker demonstrates how "identity power" operates both overtly and latently to cast doubt on, or minimise, a woman's voice. In the first instance a woman may say something perhaps in a meeting but be silenced by a man, for example, through a deliberately sexist or dismissive statement. In the second instance, the woman may be silent in the meeting through the 'collective conception of femininity as insufficiently rational because excessively intuitive' (2007: 14). Both experiences centre on the way that the credibility of speakers can be questioned through dominant ideas of gendered difference or competency. Importantly, these forms of injustice permeate spaces even when women's presence is invited. Access to a space does not indicate that issues of equity have been considered. Even more pernicious might be assumptions that community-led action or viewpoints are tilted towards equality in all its forms.

Fricker's second concept, that of hermeneutic injustice, relates to black feminist thought. She argues that groups that have become marginalised sometimes lack the resources to adequately understand and represent their experiences, because hermeneutic resources are skewed in favour of privileged groups who are able to universalise their experience at the expense of others. This argument strongly echoes Patricia Hill Collins's work excavating the exclusion of black women's experience from feminist knowledge. For Collins, the issue is not one of the integration of black women's experience and knowledge within the dominant white

narrative, but acknowledgement of its irreconcilable difference: 'Alternative epistemologies challenge all certified knowledge and open up the question of whether what has been taken to be true can stand the test of alternative ways of validating truth' (1990: 290). Knowledge claims are thus decentred, and made relative. Fricker argues that injustice is perpetuated when a person is undermined both as a 'knower' and as a 'practical reasoner' (2007: 137). Thus even when a person's presence has been assured, their capacity to know and thereby to be heard or to be deemed a valued participant is fatally undermined. They have been predetermined to lack credibility and capability.

Fricker's concept of epistemic injustice may help us to explore development decisions within planning. Importantly, the gendered nature of these knowledge claims does not apply solely to issues that appear overtly 'feminine' in nature, or that concern women specifically. Instead, gendered concepts have been used to mobilise support for particular actions and to disarm opposition in wider issues that affect entire communities. I want to end this paper with one example: the discussion on fracking (unconventional hydrocarbon extraction) in the US and the UK. In the course of a brief case study, I now show how gendering forms of community knowledge as 'feminine', 'irrational' and 'unscientific' has been used as a tactic to disarm opponents of this technology. Sustained opposition to fracking in Lancashire, England has been ongoing since 2011 when a mining company called Cuadrilla first applied to start exploratory work in the region. In the early stages of this community campaign, local politicians were open to dialogue with communities, and heard their concerns on a range of issues from the global (climate change and alternative green infrastructure) to the local (worries about immediate environmental degradation, and negative impacts on property prices and insurance premiums). However, as the case progressed, the industry prepared a wealth of scientific data to support its case, while national planning policy changed to recommend that shale gas sites be given approval, effectively removing power from the hands of locally elected politicians.

The logic of community engagement sought to encourage a variety of viewpoints and both the local authority and the operator, Cuadrilla, attempted to engage in a variety of consultation events. These processes ostensibly sought to create spaces for dialogue and communities initially tried to engage with them through practices of resistance, with activists rejecting Cuadrilla and fracking technologies. Yet the spaces were not demonstrably altered

through strategies of resistance, instead the rules of engagement were changed from formal public meetings into a quite sophisticated public relations exercise. Cuadrilla emerged, for a time, as the public liaison body, as the local state was described by communities as weak and “under the thumb” of government and private industry.

Communities started to more actively mobilise outside these governance spaces, creating their own arenas for debate and discussion. The resident groups felt failed by the state who had repeatedly given communities little time to comment on the extensive documentation produced as part of the planning application. At the start of the campaign, key members of resident groups when speaking at public meetings had urged for people to ‘lobby and not become direct action groups.’⁷ As time went on, the resident groups did not feel that they were being listened to by Lancashire County Council and increasingly moved toward direct action. As this occurred, the community perspective was increasingly represented as gendered. The media focused heavily on women’s greater opposition to fracking, presenting the case against as irrational, ill-informed, and even neurotic. For example, Averil MacDonald (2015), a professor of public understandings of science and chair of UK Onshore Oil and Gas, asserted:

Women think differently to men on a whole range of issues – I am sure both men and women would agree with that statement...As a mother, I would do nothing to put my family, or any other family, in harm’s way. As a scientist I study the facts and know that many of the fears are irrational... Scientific language does not resonate with them [women]. They do not engage with it. What they do connect with is the impact they think science or technology will have on them and their family.

MacDonald’s gendered distinction allows her to make a sharp division between the public, rational world of science and the socio-cultural engagement of the public, which is represented as a result of a deficiency in both knowledge and the capacity to understand (see Wynne, 1996 for a detailed critique). Women, who come to proxy for the entire community are placed outside of rational knowledge altogether, their emotional worries blinding them to the scientific ‘truth’, their domestic concerns rendering them unable to see the larger picture that is (implicitly) available to men. ‘Women think differently’, but that difference is framed

in a way that marks it as understandable, but most definitely inferior when it comes to decision-making on energy policy.

Some anti-fracking campaigners have sought to make this argument a source of resistance, arguing that greater levels of concern for children and for the earth give them a privileged insight into the harms of unconventional hydrocarbon extraction. For example, Julie Wassmer from Mothers against Fracking (Vidal, 2016) asserts:

‘Fracking is an attack on the environment and public health. It’s a battle for clean air and water, the elements of life. And women understand that. It goes to the heart of women’s role in society.’

Here, the social role of women enables them to understand the impacts of the new technology rather better than men can: instead of blinding them to ‘the facts’, their knowledge opens new insights into the interconnected biological impacts at the level of the whole ecosystem. Instead of being confined and neurotic, their view is large and holistic. As Fitzgerald notes, Wassmer’s tactic reframes a disabling narrative, in a way that mobilises resistance:

Along with scientific facts, both pro-fracking and anti-fracking groups mobilize cultural symbols and identities—motherhood, environmentalism, family farming, family values, individualism, and patriotism among them—in order to persuade the public that their views on fracking can be trusted.

Fitzgerald, 2014: 36

Similar tactics that contest the opposition of scientific rationality to feminine neuroticism are deployed by other community groups. Those that I have studied in Lancashire are roughly balanced in gender terms when it comes to membership (my research has not revealed that there are significantly more women involved in any campaign), but women have certainly been more prominent as leaders of the campaign, with some attaining national recognition both individually and in groups (the organisation “Nanas against fracking” has achieved widespread media attention, for instance). As a consequence, the opposition to fracking has tended to refer to women’s experience when stressing concerns about long-term

environmental harm and the need to protect the places we live for future generations, including their own children and grandchildren.

However, far from representing an irrational framing that departs from the evidence, many of these women draw on well-established academic definitions of terms, empirical data, and peer-reviewed evidence. An analysis of sixty spoken statements given in planning committee meetings in June 2015 revealed that objections centred on policy and emerging evidence from US communities near to fracking sites.⁸ Some speakers sought to formalise their comments to meet the knowledge demands and frames of formal planning meetings and while a number tried to frame these comments within their commitment to the local area, virtually every one endeavoured to make connections to shared frames of scientific or policy knowledge, as recognised by planning. Many people prefaced their comments with a mention of their attachment to the local area. They either spoke about their family and how long they had lived in the area or their connection to businesses or local landscapes. These concerns are often seen to be outside the remit of planning and situate place attachment as beyond the remit of planning and technology as more universal frameworks (see Beebeejaun, 2016b). Yet the ways in which anti-fracking groups have become framed as distinctively 'feminine' has ignored all these uses of knowledge, instead privileging a highly technical, expert, scientific viewpoint (Beebeejaun, 2016b).

Gender has thus become pivotal in the discrediting of whole communities as 'irrational', in order to privilege one set of epistemological claims over all others. Science and community become implacable opposed, in a problematic modernist construction that discredits the latter as simply unqualified to be heard. Even when community forms of knowledge are discussed as important components of the planning policy, they are implicitly framed as distinct from more formal and scientific knowledge, which has priority (Devine-Wright, 2005). Opposition based on ecosystem impact, intergenerational equity and the foreclosure of alternative environmental technologies therefore is couched as emotive and neurotic precisely in order to destabilise it. In the process, old ideas of women as inherently unsuited to the world of public decision-making and rational debate are upheld. The extent to which science itself remains deeply enmeshed within politics and culture (see Keller, 2009) and subservient to historically-specific paradigms (Kuhn, 1962) remain significantly underestimated.

Creating new epistemological resources

This example shows that the problem of inclusion cannot be solved simply by inviting different groups to participate in decision-making. Even when present, epistemic politics can hinder recognition of marginalised or minority groups, creating a disempowering experience. Further, there may be difficulties in understanding and exploring an experience, if hermeneutic resources are insufficient. Fricker (2007) uses the example of sexual harassment to illustrate this point: before the concept came into being there were difficulties in articulating what had happened to victims, or why exactly it was wrong. Giving a name and a concept to the occurrence does not solve it, of course, but it allows it to be discussed and interrogated as something more acknowledged and recognised. As Hill Collins (1990) argues, it also deals a blow to the male, white privilege that was for so long blind to these types of experience outside of its own viewpoint.

Epistemic injustice suggests there are real problems with our current imaginings of balanced representation. Whilst women's presence is an important dimension of representation and "good governance", there are significant gaps in understanding how the continuing devaluation of women and types of knowledge hinder such gender equity goals. I have argued that overtly feminist epistemological resources are necessary to challenge gender ignorance. The under-theorisation of what counts as knowledge and how it becomes gendered is a critical dimension. Women's knowledge in the examples shown was implicitly tied up with essentialist notions of stereotypical and damaging characteristics. It was difficult to challenge such rationalities, not least due to the lack of available epistemological resources.

These deficiencies further reinforce the importance of feminist activist networks that draw upon women's knowledge and experiences. Such spaces seek to value and nurture women's voice not merely for a politics of presence but as a means of being able to form shared language and concepts that challenge existing ways of knowing. Groups based around a feminist logic have been important in creating the epistemic resources necessary to challenge dominant narratives that devalue gendered forms of knowledge. The good news is that radical feminist campaigns are thriving: organisations such as Sisters Uncut, E15 Mothers, and Southall Black Sisters, are all actively campaigning for women's rights to be recognised, and drawing attention to practical issues that affect women, from domestic violence to the

gendered impacts of austerity. Furthermore, instead of using the language of governance, such groups are increasingly drawing upon feminist epistemologies to demand change from outside the networks of governance. Sisters Uncut, for example, was formed when women became aware of the dominance of male activists in the UK Uncut Movement, and seeks to provide a safe and non-hierarchical space where individuals who identify as women may participate and organise. They work practically with concepts of intersectionality to challenge privilege and to guide their processes and practices. These groups point towards other ways of knowing that unsettle existing hierarchies and that may provide a useful counterpoint not only to embedded ways of governing but also to epistemic forms of injustice. By bringing together women within 'safe spaces' they seek to provide an arena for testimonial justice, valuing and listening to women's perspectives. As Fricker argues, these spaces also allow women to come together to develop the language and concepts denied to them through hermeneutic injustice, leading to broader claims for acknowledgement and recognition.

Yet even campaigns for women's equality are threatened due to fiscal constraints and the vulnerability of state partnerships. As chapters in this volume demonstrate language and principles of empowerment can be co-opted into neoliberal discourses of individual responsibility decoupled from socio-economic contexts (see Matthews and Astbury, this volume; Flint, this volume). The language of equality, which can be seen within the earlier discussion of the lack of capacity of neighbourhood forums, has been used as a tool to disinvest in feminist organisations. Under the New Labour policy of community cohesion, women's refuge and groups were invited to reframe their mandate to focus less on women, and many groups either closed or are in constant struggles to secure funding. For Southall Black Sisters, a specialist provider for black and minority women survivors of domestic violence, this led to a 2008 court case where a local authority argued that there was no need for specialist services and it all organisations should be open to all women. The High Court recognised the necessity of services for the most vulnerable groups and ruled that the local authority had 'misconstrued the Race Relations Act – in particular the need for positive action and the right to retain a name which announces the specialist nature of the organisation and it misconstrued the principle of cohesion by assuming that funding specialist projects will undercut cohesion' (Southall Black Sisters, 2008). This cases reveal how policies such as

community cohesion penalises the most vulnerable, ignoring women's real trauma in this case. The language of equalities is also recast as managerial practice or cohesion is misrepresented as the equalities procedures that seek to reduce systemic discrimination through managerial practices. Diversity is marketed as an economic advantage without paying attention to the everyday injustices faced by women and minorities within these spaces.

Concluding words

Governance, itself a contested concept, operates at the intersections of the state and civil society (Bevir and Rhodes, 2003). Whilst it has been problematised through a number of perspectives in this volume, there remain important questions about the ways in which gender is ignored as an important locus of discrimination. Whilst governance has created important opportunities for active citizenship, the types of citizens that dominate these new spaces perhaps may not differ markedly in their perspectives and values from those whom staffed modernist state bureaucracies. The development of a politics of presence within governance has been insufficiently attentive to the barriers that exist within these spaces. A logic that draws upon women or any other minority group arriving with a univocal set of claims for "their group" does not engage with the ways in which marginalised groups have been devalued within historical and contemporary society. Seeing beyond these types of initiatives invites us to destabilise or question objectivity or rationality as particular types of subjectivity (see Haraway, 1991). A more meaningful engagement with governance as offering progressive potential suggests that we question more thoroughly existing epistemic resources or the rationalities of the elite (see Bevir and Rhodes, 2016). Whilst spaces may be created for different kinds of action that challenge hierarchical power, we must remain attentive to strategies that can both destabilise existing rationalities but also develop new critical thinking about oppression. It also implies a further move, a more critical stance to community insights and an acknowledgement that communities are not intrinsically "good" or progressive. More careful attention must be paid to new models of democratic governance where appropriate attention is given to thorny issues of oversight either through state or citizen-led initiatives (see Bevir, 2013)

Here, feminist perspectives provide a useful lens to consider the muddled rationales for including women and emphasize that women remain highly disadvantaged. This chapter has argued that whilst there are exciting possibilities offered through decentered forms of governance, we must remain alert to structural power inequalities. Fragmentation and decentering may provide new spaces for possibilities and alliances but exclusion or inclusion is not determined solely through a physical presence or absence. Yet in the multiplicity of new governance practices, closer investigation of practices on the ground demonstrate that concerted efforts by feminist organizations have used their presence to create new epistemic resources through creative forms of resistance. These ways of knowing and valuing difference require greater attention and provide a productive site of further exploration within decentred governance. Decentering governance is not necessarily evidence of progressive change but gesture towards the possibilities of sites of resistance and a politics that offers hope. Decentralisation therefore offers the paradoxical opportunity for mobilisation but without careful attention being paid to a gender analytic approach it risks reproducing existing gender inequalities and reinforcing regressive rationalities.

Notes

1. Donna Haraway Simians, cyborgs and women (1991): 155
2. Yasminah Beebeejaun was a member of the steering group for Making Safer Places in 2007 and since then has been a committee member of the Women's Design Service. She is a member of Sisters Uncut.
3. The notion of women's irrationality persists within a variety of fields, not just political science. For example, within the field of medicine, diseases such as endometriosis, have long been associated with "hysteria". These associations with emotion and rationality, have not only stigmatised women but contributed to an epidemic where there is a lack of medical knowledge of the disease and also a lack of informed knowledge amongst some health care providers. See: Gilmour, J.A., Huntington, A. and Wilson, H.V., 2008. The impact of endometriosis on work and social participation. *International journal of nursing practice*, 14(6), pp.443-448.
4. Interview with Wendy Davis, November 2014
5. Interviews with members of Making Safer Places Bristol, November 2014
6. Interview with former NDC officer, July 2014
7. Neighbourhood plan – equalities impact assessment. Anonymised.
8. Fieldwork has been conducted between 2012-2015 and includes semi-structured interviewees, attendance and active participation in resident groups. Attendance at public meetings and watching of development control meetings via video link (as they were closed to the general public)

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