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Exploring the Capability Approach to Conceptualize Gender Inequality and Poverty in Fiji

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This article highlights the gaps in Fiji's poverty literature, notably the persistent insensitivity to gender within mainstream approaches to poverty measurement. To address the androcentric biases in household analyses, the author suggests the capability approach as more suited to conceptualize and assess gender inequality and women's poverty within the household. This article uses the capability framework to indicate a space within which intrahousehold comparisons are made using empirical evidence from Fiji. The article explores the ways in which one could operationalize the methodologies for gender-sensitive measures of poverty, which are capable of reflecting the experiences of women and men.

KEYWORDS poverty, gender capability approach, Fiji, intra-household relations

WHY GENDER AND POVERTY: AN INTRODUCTION

There has been a great deal of discussion in recent years about growing poverty, vulnerability to poverty, and heightening inequalities between different groups in Fiji (Barr, 1993a, b; Bryant, 1993; Bureau of Statistics, 2006; Narsey, 2006, 2007; Narsey, Raikoti, & Waqavonovono, 2010; UNDP, 1996). The previous Household Income and Expenditure Surveys (HIES) in 2002–2003 and 2008–2009 including earlier studies rely on income (or expenditure) to distinguish “the poor” from the nonpoor, using a variety

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of methods to construct the income poverty line. Household income and expenditure continue to be a forerunner among previous poverty indicators in Fiji. Although I acknowledge that household income continues to dominate single-indicator measures of poverty in Fiji, this article aims to outline an alternative but complementary approach, which can help to assess the extent of differences in living standards within the household. Reliance on income as a measure of living standards assumes that it is a reliable indicator of the economic resources available to people, and that economic resources largely determine living standards at the level of the household or family, and the resources and needs of individuals within this collective unit is not considered separately. This article argues that focussing on people's income may ignore individuals' differing needs and obscures gender disparities by taking the basic unit of measurement to be the household rather than the individuals within the household. Grounded in the political imperatives of feminism, this article aims to correct the invisibility and distortion of female experience in existing poverty studies in Fiji. This entails the substantive task of making gender a fundamental category for our understanding of the social order, "to see the world from women's place in it" (Lather, 1988, p. 571).

The equal sharing assumption within the household has long been questioned, and recently the neglected gender dimensions of poverty composition and risk is given great emphasis especially by feminist writers elsewhere (see Brannen & Wilson, 1987; Buvinic, 1983; Graham, 1987; Millar & Glendinning, 1987, 1989). The fallacies of aggregation that underpin household analyses of poverty are evident in large part because they are not individualistic enough. They fail to capture the intrahousehold dynamics of resource allocation and distribution, which may depend on sociocultural relations of gender, age, kinship, race relations, and spatial distribution of resources and opportunities. The assumption that resources/incomes are pooled within a household and that all outcomes are equally shared between household members has been frequently scrutinized by feminists for its androcentric biases (see England, 1993; Evans, 1991; Folbre, 1988; Jennings & Waller, 1990). As noted by Chattier (2007) what is less clear in conventional approaches is the relationship between household-level poverty and female well-being, that is, does gender discrimination intensify or diminish with poverty? The answer to this question is not easy, as gender and poverty have not been adequately addressed in poverty research and literature in Fiji as much as ethnicity and places of residence (Bryant, 1993; Naidu, Barr, Lee, & Seniloli, 1999; Narsey, 2006; UNDP, 1996). This neglect becomes a problem for feminist analyses that argue that the household, irrespective of its location, is a key site of gender discrimination and subordination. Some manifestations of gender discrimination are very overt and easy to recognize, for example, when a young girl in a household is being denied education, nutritious food or adequate health care, where in the same household a young boy gets all of this; it is a case of clear and overt gender discrimination.

Therefore, one has to look within the family or household to see how resources are distributed before one can judge whether all the members are in poverty and what's gender got to do with poverty measurement in Fiji? Although poverty lines may not be able to penetrate the household, it is theoretically possible to generalize about the types of households to depict the extent of poverty among women. Concern about the "feminization of poverty" over time has been an important theme in Fiji's poverty research. Narsey (2007) noted that women in Fiji do 52% of the total work in the economy but receive only 27% of the total income. It has also been highlighted in the 2002–03 HIES that around 13% of households were headed by females (Narsey, 2006). The fact that the only group of women identified as vulnerable to greater risks of poverty under the auspices of the "feminisation of poverty" thesis are female heads of household is arguably a detraction from other issues such as age, ethnicity, and gender relations within the household. Another downside of the feminization of poverty thesis is that it tends to place gender in the "poverty trap" (Jackson, 1996). In other words, gender inequality becomes reduced to a function of poverty even though gender and power are distinct, albeit overlapping, forms of disadvantage (see also Jackson, 1998; Kabeer, 2003). This article argues for recognition of the gendered character of all poverty rather than feminization of poverty that only concentrates on household poverty.

Only when gender relations are factored into the poverty equation can a thorough understanding of women's impoverishment be gained. The focus of this article is to understand the structure of relationships within the household and explore how women often are poor within marriage, regardless of the level of income received by the male head of the household. Methodologically, the household model is not conducive to ask, let alone answer, the kind of feminist questions about gender, asymmetric power, and intrahousehold relations that this article seeks to generate. This resonates with di Leonardo's (1991) theoretical threads in which he argues the constructed and culturally contingent notions of gender; historical contingency; and the embeddedness of gender construction within a social and material world that crosscuts with other social divisions such as age, generation, ethnicity, and religion; and the importance of social location in perception of cultural realities (di Leonardo, pp. 27–33). It is important to know whether women experience relative poverty risks and vulnerability when issues of gender, hierarchy, and power relations are brought into the analyses of the household.

In this article gender is called upon to understand woman's poverty more than class analysis because social-class categories often ignore the multiplicity of women's positionings within contemporary social life (see Barrett, 1991, 1992). I start from women's concrete experiences, recognizing differences in economic and cultural contexts, and then locate the processes through which these experiences come into existence in wider social

relations. As Acker (2003) wrote, “The conventional approach to class analysis, which emphasises the family or household as the unit of analysis and the feminist perspective which claims the priority of the individual, stand at the opposite poles of the debate” (p. 58). Here it is argued that women are less likely to gain positions of high economic value because they are women, and this relates to the system of gender hierarchies and material inequality. Social norms regarding female exclusion, for example, reinforced through familial and conjugal relations may impose severe constraints on women’s ability to access resources and opportunities within and outside the household (Chattier, 2005). Hence, women do not directly assume the class position of their husbands, they are in different situations than their husbands within the system of patriarchal relations that constitute gendered processes of resource allocation, distribution, and ownership. Although the poverty line approaches previously used in Fiji focus on “means” such as income, this article presents Amartya Sen’s capability approach as a useful evaluative framework for a gendered understanding of poverty that shifts the unit of analysis from household to individuals and from a focus on resources themselves to command over commodities. By concentrating on the individual, the capabilities approach goes well beyond poverty lines in revealing gender dimensions of poverty and to acknowledge the fact that poverty is a multidimensional and a dynamic concept, and static profiles of income and expenditure may present only one part of the poverty picture in Fiji.

Feminist Concerns and the Capability Approach

A solution to the concerns raised above is found in a version of the capabilities approach: an approach to quality-of-life assessment pioneered by Amartya Sen (1980, 1992, 1999). This section evaluates Sen’s capability approach through a feminist lens, as an alternative framework to understanding the questions of poverty, intrahousehold relations, and gender inequality. The capability approach stipulates that an evaluation of individual or social states should focus on people’s real or substantive freedom to lead the lives that they find valuable (Sen, 1993). This real freedom is called a person’s capability. A person’s capability reflects a person’s potential well-being, or well-being freedom, in contrast to the actual well-being which she or he has realized, that is, her or his achieved well-being (Sen, 1985). This achieved well-being is made up by a number of functionings (Sen, 1985); for example, being mentally healthy, being physically healthy, being sheltered, being well fed, being educated, having a satisfying job, caring for the children and the elderly, enjoying cultural activities, and being part of the community. Therefore, capabilities are people’s potential functionings, and functionings are their beings and doings. The difference between a functioning and a capability is similar to the difference between an achievement and the freedom to achieve something, or between an outcome and an opportunity.

According to Sen (1993), resources such as income are only the means to enhance people's well-being and advantage, whereas the concern should be with what matters intrinsically and people's abilities to convert these resources into capabilities. This is a helpful move away from private consumption poverty concepts such as income measures based only on money-metric evaluations of poverty because the capability approach provides a more complete analysis that not only maps gender equalities in functionings and capabilities but also analyzes gender differentials in command over resources. Ultimately, approaches that focus on outcomes rather than processes are very blunt tools for describing gendered disadvantage, because how capabilities become functionings for women and men depends on other social identities (e.g., age and ethnicity) and on social processes such as intrahousehold relations. The capability approach is therefore attractive for gender analysis because many aspects of well-being are not secured through just income and consumption-based approaches of poverty that say little in respect to quality of life and capabilities. In addition, the capabilities approach rejects the idea that women's well-being can be subsumed under wider entities such as the household or the community, though not denying the importance of social relations and interdependence between family and community members in well-being evaluations. Perhaps this is where the capabilities approach makes the most significant inroads in embracing multidimensionality of poverty by highlighting issues of power, agency, and subjectivity in the context of intrahousehold relations and gender.

Another important strength of the capability approach is that well-being is measured for the individual across diversities. The neoclassical theory of the family underlying many poverty approaches (such as the income/consumption measure) assume that all people have the same utility functions or are influenced in the same way and to the same extent by the same personal, social, and environmental characteristics. But the capability approach acknowledges human diversity, such as race, age, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and geographical location, in evaluations of poverty, deprivation, and well-being. This characteristic of the capability approach is important for gender inequality analysis because issues of diversity will help understand intrahousehold inequalities and beyond. By conceptualizing gender inequality and intrahousehold relations in the space of functionings and capabilities, there is more scope to account for human diversity, including the diversity stemming from people's gender. These observations underline the main argument in this article that poverty is constituted by more than income, encompassing perceptual and subjective dimensions, and is perhaps more appropriately captured in the capabilities approach as a package of assets and entitlements within which the power *inter alia*, to manage expenditure, to mobilize labor and to access social and community support as vital elements in measuring gendered poverty.

The growing evidence of persistent intrafamily inequalities in the distribution of resources and tasks, and of gender differences in expenditure patterns, as well as descriptions of intrafamily interactions and decision making, indicate the need for a conceptualization of the household that takes account of multiple actors, with varying (often-conflicting) preferences and interests, and differential abilities to pursue and realize those interests (see Agarwal, 1990; Kabeer, 1991; Sen, 1990). To see whether the capability approach can accommodate such discussions on the role of domestic power imbalances, we need to revisit Sen's own reasoning on intrahousehold inequality. Sen (1990) argued, "Given other things, if the self-interest perception of one of the persons were to attach less value to his or her own well-being, then the collusive solution, if different, would be less favourable to that person, in terms of well-being" (p. 136). He noted that this overlap between women's personal and household interests preserves intrahousehold inequality. If a woman in a bargaining model perceives the welfare of other household members on par with her own, then intrahousehold distribution would tally with this interest perception. The advantages of using the capabilities approach for examining gender inequality and poverty are clear. It presents the societal context of gender bias as setting the terms of intrahousehold bargaining, because the reality of vulnerability to poverty for men and women is differentiated in legal, economic, and cultural ways. From a poverty perspective, the cooperative conflict model of the household suggests how capabilities are, or are not, converted into functionings because women and men are embedded differently in the dense social relations of marriage, parenting, and kinship. What this article argues is that women experience gendered vulnerabilities that are revealed through considering their gendered roles and relations, and that these insights should command attention in transforming poverty analysis toward a recognition of gender. Before I present empirical evidence to show gendered analysis of poverty using the capabilities framework with intrahousehold scrutiny that go beyond income per se, I would now like to provide some background to Fiji country context, research participants, and methodology.

BACKGROUND OF STUDY: COUNTRY CONTEXT, LOCATION, AND METHODOLOGY

The Fiji Islands comprise 320 islands with two major main islands, Viti Levu and Vanua Levu. The 2006 census recorded a population of 837,271 people, comprising indigenous Fijians making up to (57%) and Fiji Indians (37%), whose ancestors migrated to Fiji Islands in the late 19th and early 20th centuries during the indenture system. The remaining 6% consists of minority communities, including people of mixed ethnic origin and settlers from

various Pacific Island countries, Australia, New Zealand, China, and Europe lumped as “Others.” A major demographic shift took place in 1987 whereby the military coups created political instability encouraging large-scale emigration, particularly by Fiji Indians. Indigenous Fijians tend to be culturally homogenous, although there is some difference between and within the major geographical confederacies, particularly, between eastern and western, and upland and lowland people. Fijian culture places considerable emphasis on communal values and respect for traditional cultural norms and for chiefs, though the common religion is Christianity. On the other hand, Fiji Indian society is more culturally diverse than the indigenous Fijians as Fiji Indians originated from many different parts of the Indian subcontinent. Most belong to various Hindu denominations, but there is also a minority of Muslims and Christians of various denominations.

Although Indians were brought to Fiji during the indenture period to work on the sugarcane plantations they never owned a piece of land—they only leased the agricultural land from the indigenous Fijians. Fiji has a unique system of land ownership where the indigenous Fijians own 83% of the land on a communal basis, 7% is freehold owned privately by individuals, and 10 % is owned by the State (Prasad & Kumar, 1998, p. 46). The issue of land leases in Fiji has always been a matter of national concern because the bulk of the leases are expiring on native land and there is a pressing demand by the landowners not to renew the leases. Most landowners are native Fijians, but most lease holders are Fiji Indians; and therefore the conflict between landowners and leaseholders has an ethnic dimension that is rooted in the history of Fiji. During and after the indenture period, smallholder farming contracts were given to Indian men who were married so that the Colonial Sugar Refining (CSR) company could rely on successive generations in the provision of local labor supply for cane harvesting and mill operations. This curbed any autonomy that rural Indian women possessed as they were trapped within the confines of marriage, family, and social protocol even though their labor still contributed to the profit margins of CSR. Although CSR departed from Fiji a long time ago, the structures within the industry such as the smallholder farming contracts still remain and are still the mainstay of sugarcane production in rural areas of Fiji accommodating the ideal of nuclear family operation. Ethnographic accounts of Fiji Indian smallholder cane farming households such as Carswell’s (1998) and Shameem’s (1990) specifically address the continued contributions of women’s labor, focusing on gender relations and concepts of femininity in the control of female labor within Indian households. Thus from the smallholder farming scheme’s inception it was reliant on the notions of family that had a male head of household who ostensibly controlled the labor and resources of his family.

Selecting two rural settlements in the sugarcane belt region (Northern Vanua Levu, i.e., Labasa) was also a consequence of the researcher’s own

identification with this ethnicity and familiarity with the gender and kinship relations within the context of intrahousehold relations. First, I selected the “poorest of the poor households” using purposive sampling in two rural Indian settlements and then located women within these households who may be interested in participating in participant observation and focused conversations. My research participants were 18 Fiji Indian women (between ages 33–50) as members of male-headed households, and the reason for selecting a certain age criteria was because I wanted to see how intrahousehold relations within the family affect women occupying different kinship relationships based on age. This is rather a small sample because the primary focus of this research was to “understand” the issues of concern from the detailed study of a few information-rich cases. The data presented in this article was collected through ethnographic research undertaken during February til May 2003 and follow-up interviews in August and September 2004 as part of my doctoral studies that examined the relationship between poverty and gender in Fiji. The two settlements, with approximately 50 to 70 households, had a population following a variety of occupations. The majority were farmers and landless cane cutters. Sugarcane farming is the backbone of the village and a source of livelihood for the farmers and cane cutters.

Most of my participants were dependent on their husband, sons, or daughters for their source of livelihood and survival; and, in most cases, the husbands or sons were seasonally employed as manual cane cutters during the sugarcane crushing season. They are also households with no secure livelihood as Fiji Indian cane cutters make up the poorest social group in the Fiji economy (UNDP, 1996, p. 79). Therefore these households do not have weekly income/wages, but the head of the households (husband, son, or son-in-law) gets paid for 3 weeks; and on average these manual cane cutters earned around \$1,500 per season (i.e., 6-month season). The reasons for their low income are their low productivity and rate of pay, the declining value of their income (rising costs of living), the seasonality of the work, and most important these rural Fiji Indian cane cutters do not have any land for farming. In addition, during my fieldwork many of the sugarcane land leases for Indian tenant farmers had expired, and the land was seized by native Fijians for their own use. The expiry of sugarcane land leases meant that some of the Indian farmers had to leave their villages to reside elsewhere in main city centers. This meant that many of young Indian men in the village were out of job because the Fijian landowners were not willing to hire them as cane cutters. The changing socioeconomic conditions of the village setting also implied changing economic roles for women within poor households. Rural Indian women now had to look for jobs either in the village or in town to support the family in their daily struggles of survival. This in fact is the starting point for the capabilities approach in analyzing poverty in rural Fiji whereby the means and ends may mean different things

to different people; in particular, women and men may have very different priorities and possibilities. The next section presents findings on how gender relations play out in the complex social constraints, entitlements, and responsibilities within the household in understanding poverty using the capabilities approach.

GENDER INEQUALITIES IN CAPABILITIES AND INTRAHOUSEHOLD NEGOTIATIONS

This section uses the capability framework to indicate a space within which intrahousehold comparisons of well-being are made. The evidence on gender inequality against a selected capability listing presented here is illustrative and not meant to provide a complete assessment of gender inequality within households. Emphasis is placed on the allocations within households from the perspective of sociocultural entitlements to resource shares expressed in the norms governing “who gets what and why.” As used here, the term *entitlement* refers to the socially and culturally recognized rights of specific categories of persons to particular resource shares within the household. The concept of sociocultural entitlements to resource shares developed here is consistent with Sen’s approach (1990). I share his conviction that conflict and cooperation coexist in domestic groups and that individual self-interests are not necessarily submerged by the concern for the domestic group as a whole. My emphasis on social and cultural elements of entitlement leads directly to consideration of the way in which connotations of gender, age, and kinship generate inequality and mediate opportunities to achieve well-being among household members. This article concentrates on three capabilities including domestic work and nonmarket care, time-autonomy and leisure activities, and mobility and social relations.¹ The empirical evidence is specific to the context of this study though the capability framework could be replicated elsewhere.

Domestic Work and Nonmarket Care

Domestic household chores and taking care of dependents (especially raising children) is highly gendered: women do more nonmarket care for children as well as for the frail, the elderly, and the sick. However, the largest inequality is in household work. Is domestic work and nonmarket care an important capability? Obviously these activities are crucially important for the receivers; they affect their functionings of life and health, education and knowledge, bodily integrity and safety, paid work, social relations, and leisure activities. But how do nonmarket care and domestic work affect the caregiver— in this case the women who participated in this study?

As noted by Sen (1990), divisions between sexes in general, and specifically those within the household, may be deeply influenced by the pattern of

the gender division of work. Social arrangements regarding who does what, who gets to consume what, and who takes what decisions can be seen as responses to the combined problem of cooperation and conflict within the household. The sexual division of labor is one part of such a social arrangement, and it is important to see this in the context of poverty and capability framework. The organisation of work within the household is primarily based around the conjugal couple who negotiate tasks that are often separate but also shared. Participants generally talked about two spheres of activity, “house work” and “farm/outside work.” The husband as the head of the household delegates responsibility to his wife to organize the work women, girls, and younger boys are expected to do (Carswell, 1998). This primarily involved deciding what is “women’s work,” involving all the “house work.” In most rural Indian households there was a fairly fixed gender division of labor. For example, women work up to 15 hours a day with responsibility for work considered “domestic”: preparing food and serving; processing coconut oil, spices, and preserving; washing clothes, dishes; cleaning, carrying water; fetching firewood; providing child care and animal care; and doing vegetable gardening. Women also plant and weed in the family farm, if available. Sukh Dai’s² double shift of farm and domestic work confirmed such multiplicity of women’s tasks:

3am – 4am: wake up, wash face and hands, and then enter the kitchen to prepare breakfast

4am – 5am: clean the kitchen area, milk cows and tie herd (goats and cows) in their grazing grounds. Have little bit of breakfast, i.e., tea and roti only and leave for the farm

5.30am – 10am: have to be in the farm before dawn and work there till 10am

10.30am – 12noon: reach home, do remainder of the household chores, look after children and prepare lunch

12.30 – 3.30pm: take lunch for the male members of the family working in the farm. Work in the farm till afternoon.

4pm – 6pm: prepare dinner, bathe the kids, and wash clothes, do the remainder of cleaning and have bath last in the family when all the work has been done.

Women did most of the housework, and men either worked on their own farm or farm-related tasks on others’ farms. Women and unmarried girls would presumably only be doing work in their own family farm alongside other members of their family because of taboo relating to gender segregation.

Along with gender, kinship-based seniority plays a major role in determining tasks and responsibilities. Mothers-in-law, except when very elderly, elder sister-in-laws, and elder daughters generally have heavier responsibilities than younger women, particularly in relation to cooking and to overall supervision. However, in Muniamma's opinion, changes in gender and seniority are happening:

When I compare women's work in old days to now . . . I feel Indian women worked very hard in the farm and house . . . it takes a lot of effort for young brides today to do all this work now. My mother-in-law never helped me in housework but I help my daughter-in-laws.

With the expiry of land leases and the move toward nuclear homesteads, participants agreed that individual households responded according to their circumstances and inclinations as to who does what in the house and outside. It is expected that men do not generally participate in the daily cooking, food processing, cleaning the house, washing dishes and clothes, and providing child care. However, this needs to be further qualified by age and situation. Men may help women in some of these activities. For example, Tara's eldest son (unmarried and living with Tara) fetches water and firewood and carries the washing from the creek to the house because she feels weak and it is hard at age 81 to carry heavy loads. Similarly, Savita commented that:

My husband cooks for the family, looks after children when they are back from school . . . and does other housework too because I am busy with my tailoring deadlines. At other times he loves to cook on his own because he likes a variety of food . . . he always makes fresh curry in his meals.

In regards to child care, older children including boys may look after younger siblings, and older men and women spend a lot of time with their grandchildren.

A discussion on child care can cover a vast range of activities and theoretical perspectives, but this article focuses on two issues: family expectations of motherhood and changes in the domestic life after having children. It is interesting to go back to the wedding ceremonies and remember the emphasis put on fertility and a bride's role as a future mother. A woman's status in the family changes considerably depending on her child-bearing capacity. For example, Jai Raji said:

I am a mother of six children . . . I had to look after the children but it was good. My mother-in-law was very happy I had three sons. She allowed my husband to farm the 10-acre land. She owns the land after

my father-in-law died. When we had the farm, it was good money for us and we build a good house . . . with cement floor, corrugated iron walls and more rooms in the house now.

Santamma commented that “my mother-in-law got angry because I was not able to become a mother soon after marriage. She wanted to get another wife for my husband but I become pregnant after five years.” On a similar account, Sadhana said:

I know my mother-in-law does not like me and she did not want me to get pregnant. So she can get another wife for my husband . . . but I became pregnant with my first child after 4 months. After my first child we moved in a separate house.

The work load also increased considerably for women after their children were born. For Muniamma, even when her children were crying, she could not attend to them if she was in the middle of any task because her mother-in-law wanted the task to be completed first. It is women who predominantly take the responsibility in caring for children, which includes not only physical work but also much of the mental and emotional work that goes toward teaching children and ensuring their health and welfare.

The ideology of the gendered roles is still predominant in the organization of daily life. Empirical evidence shows that men’s primary role is breadwinner and decision maker, and women’s primary role is family care-taker (see also Narsey, 2007). Women are identified and identify themselves as the keepers of the family; they are responsible for the health, education, and well-being of their children and husbands. In this way concepts of identity influence how power and work are organized in households through gender divisions of labor. Gendered patterns of activities within the household reflect culturally defined gender roles and expectations, and my evidence suggests that the division of labor serves as a proxy for family power relations and inequalities in other capabilities as well, such as time-autonomy and leisure activities and mobility.

Time-Autonomy and Leisure Activities

The core of gender inequality is the gender division of labor, in other words, the gender division of time and responsibilities for paid employment, nonmarket work, and leisure. The allocation of time within the household is usually a collective and not an individual decision and is influenced by individual, household, and community characteristics (Agarwal, 1997; Robeyns, 2001). Feminist scholars such as Folbre (1994) have argued that the gender division of labor is unjust and generally works against women’s advantage.

Elsewhere, others have also drawn attention to gender differentials in time-use patterns, especially female concentration in unpaid household work, by arguing that a properly comprehensive measure, one incorporating valuation of household members time use, would reveal the gender inequalities starkly (Jenkins, 1991, p. 461). Also in Fiji, Narsey (2007) noted that females appear to be far more underemployed than males in “paid” activities, but they contribute substantially to unpaid household work irrespective of ethnicity and location.

As seen in my previous discussions, notices of appropriate place and the proper activities of women and men in Indian society have resulted in a clear division of labor and separate male and female “spaces,” which associate men particularly with activities “outside” the home and women with activities within it. For instance, Carswell (1998, p. 241) also noted that a differentiating characteristic of the way rural women and men’s work is organized involves the fact that much of men’s work can be clearly located and temporalized as farm work. She further noted that men finished harvesting or working on the farm for the day and then relaxed in the evenings while women continued on into the night processing and cooking food, as well as caring for children and other household members. This is not to say that men were not involved in other tasks, but generally they had much more time to pursue leisure activities such as sport, or grog sessions.³ I also found that men’s spare-time activities are often located outside the home in places such as village store and male grog sessions during social-get-togethers at other’s place. As Savita noted, “Men like to relax with village friends by drinking grog . . . and they say because they work hard. It’s not good because they get drunk on house-money.” *Yaqona* drinking among the rural men is a very common problem in this area as discussed below.

Men on the whole have far more leisure time than women because their work hours do not have the same demarcations as women’s. For example, Savita’s husband outlined a man’s routine when he was not harvesting cane; he also stated how hard women work:

Women’s work is very hard, cane-cutting not easy life . . . man has to be up by 5 or 6 o’clock . . . reach farm around 6.30. Cut cane and load the trucks with cane. Have breakfast in the cane-fields. Reach home around midday, have lunch and rest. If no other work elsewhere . . . like weeding or planting on other’s farm then I visit my friend’s house for a grog-session . . . most afternoon and evenings.

Nonetheless, the activities of men should not be oversimplified and are dependent on age, status, and responsibilities. Some of the grog sessions in the evenings were also meetings of cane-harvesting gang committees, school committees, and religious meetings. The younger males, especially

those who were unmarried and therefore with fewer responsibilities, tended to have more time and inclination to play a game of soccer after harvesting. Religious activities such as weekly Ramayan recital and other festivals could take up several evenings a week, in addition to the usual prayer gatherings. These are attended by men and women and were very popular among Indian men in this study. Issues such as mobility and reputation discussed in the next section are relevant here, as it is much easier for males to attend different activities and walk freely at night time.

Moreover, visiting friends in the evening is a common form of relaxation among men and often involved a few drinks.⁴ It was also a cause of tension as far as husband's responsibility within the household was concerned. I found that *yaqona* has become a daily part of many rural Indian men's lives, and it is worth making a few observations here. On one hand, *yaqona* provides the sedative effect of relaxation after a day's work, and some men will drink it by themselves for this reason. As with any "substance," overindulgence has its price' and combined with late nights, grog induces people to sleep late and feel lethargic the next day. Paaruu expanded on why women do not want a lazy man who drinks grog the whole day:

My husband is a fisherman . . . when he is not fishing he spends the whole day with his friends . . . drinking yaqona, daru and smoking cigarettes. I don't like this because he does not think about us . . . especially his children. He is always lazy and does not help me in the house . . . even when I built the new house. When he's not fishing he does not find job somewhere . . . just drinks yaqona and sleeps.

This means the workload falls on other household members, especially women. Karuna notes the contrast in work routines in her experience:

I mean a woman does a lot of the work . . . like me, my day starts early and ends in the night . . . no rest during weekdays because I work as a housemaid all week . . . I do cooking early morning, and leave for work at 7 o'clock and come back 5 o'clock in afternoon . . . then I do washing, cleaning and cooking. When I have my bath, sometimes I'm too tired to eat at night and I sleep. My husband cuts cane for few hours in the morning and the rest of the time he is free . . . he grogs the whole day and goes here and there. He does not help me around the house.

It may also lead to increasing tension in the household, as grog-drinking habits become a contentious issue, particularly between wife and husband. In Labasa it is not customary to eat before a grog session so a man may want his dinner at midnight, and many of them expected their wives to get up and serve their food regardless of the hour.

Women in this study tended to work longer hours, from when they got up to the time they went to bed. I often observed that girls and women were constantly doing some form of work when it appeared they were sitting or relaxing, such as sorting through home grown rice for small stones and unhusked rice, sorting bundles of beans for sale, mending, making doilies for sale and so on. The actual number of hours women worked was taken from the time diaries five participants kept, interviews and my own participant observation; and 16 hours a day was common. There were rest times, usually after lunch in the hottest part of the day, and there were also occasions to visit neighbours and have a *pyala* (bowl) of tea. There is a clear indication among these women that their spare-time activities are an extension of domestic routines, such as cooking, sewing, and gardening, embodying a “culture of domesticity” (Pahl, 1980, 1984) in which the home is, for most women, the location and focus of leisure activities such as “do-it-yourself” repairs, decorating, and refurbishment. Also indicative of the constant nature of women’s labor is the lack of clear delineation between one task and the next, and consequently the tendency to do simultaneous tasking. This is in contrast to the work that men do that generally focuses on one thing at a time and the freedom they have in controlling their own use of time. The fact remains that asymmetry in time-autonomy and distribution of leisure activities within the household favors men.

Mobility and Social Relations

Relative to other capabilities, being mobile is an instrumental capability. But it can also be valuable in itself, because it enables movement between geographical locations. The earlier discussions have indicated that this capability has a gendered dimension. The institution of *purdah* is the lynchpin of a complex system of arrangements to ensure premarital chastity and postmarital fidelity of Indian women in this study. It minimizes their contact with men outside the immediate family by its division of the world into sexually segregated spheres. Here, the notions of honor, shame, purity, pollution, chastity, sexual repression, and the value of virginity, and *purdah*, play important roles in controlling women and regulating their sexuality. *Purdah* ideology is embodied in practices of avoidance in interaction with men, although the specification of which men and in which social contexts varies across groups and communities in Fiji. Veiling is the most visible aspect of *purdah*, but the norms vary between Muslim and Hindu communities in Fiji (see Lateef, 1987). For example, Muslim women in patrilineal societies like Fiji are expected, from soon after puberty, to veil before all men defined as outsiders (strangers, distant relatives) but usually not before near kin, close family, and friends defined as descent males. In contrast, a Hindu woman in Fiji is usually required to veil only from older male *affines* (relatives or kin). Overall, the range of men before whom women are expected to veil

themselves is narrower among Hindus than Muslims in Fiji. In this context the veil functions as a subverted symbol of female power and strength and not one of passivity and obedience. More precisely, Fiji Indian women wore veils to show that they were women (and they were different from men), but at the same time they highlighted that for them an important part of womanhood was being articulate and forthright. This section is structured around the patterns and linkages that emerged from listening to the voices of women about unequal power relations that limit women's mobility, choice, and also reinforce dependency on men.

The community norms and family pressures that continue to serve as a strong barrier to women's mobility, visibility, and autonomy are evident in this study as well. In the village settlement, the fear of gossip and of being labelled as sexually promiscuous serves as a strong deterrent to transgressing social norms and conventions. For example, Sangita stated,

At my mother's home I have so much love and care but after marriage at my in-laws I got a bad name and poverty. My father-in-law used to call me bad names . . . he said to my husband that I should not work because I am not doing usual work but maybe I had relations with other men. But despite bad names I had to work . . . when my husband got injured.

In some of these circumstances, however, earning a living may itself require breaking from socially favored or accepted notions of femininity. Participants have stated that women are looked down upon by their husbands when they take up the provisioner roles upon the failure of their husbands. It makes these women morally responsible for the well-being and survival of their family. Again, rather than pay the high social price for transgressing the norms of chastity, these women adapt their method of functioning within the social boundaries of their marriage. For instance, Karuna continues to work outside her home despite initial hesitations from her husband, and she said, "Now my husband knows that I do not have an interest in other men but I want to work for family. And my husband makes sure I work in a house as housemaid where there are more women than men." Any attempts to have contacts with male members of the community other than close family relations leaves these women open to accusations of sexual immorality.

On the other hand, forming, nurturing, and enjoying social relations are an important capability in the context of mobility. Social relations, in the limited way I am using the term, concerns two main aspects: "social networks and social support" (Robeyns, 2003, p. 79). The social networks dimension relates to the number of people in one's network, the frequency of contacts, group membership, and so forth. The social support dimension focuses on the type and amount of support that one receives.

Here I found that men had more extensive networks in the political and economic arenas, which they used to perpetuate their advantages in economic and public life. As noted earlier, men rather than women participate and hold positions in village committees (like temple and local school) and whenever a government official visits the local village it is the men who are the immediate contact points whereas women remain in the background providing hospitality services like tea, snacks, or elaborate meals.

However, I also noted that women tend to have better “informal networks and social support” (Fuhrer, Stansfeld, Chemali, & Shipley, 1999; Munch, McPherson, & Smith-Lovin, 1997) though within the “female public sphere.” For example, women in this area commented that they have been helped by other women in the village in times of their difficulty by providing them with donations of food, cash, used clothes, pots and pans, and also their emotional support. As Nirwani stated, “One woman . . . my good friend gave me a job as cane cutter when my husband left. Other women in the gang also taught me how to cut-cane.” Similarly, Sangita noted that “friendship and talks with other women helped me locate casual work in the village.” For Paaru finding solace in the company of other women at the weekly religious meetings or otherwise meant she was able to forget about her domestic problems at home and have light moments in the company of her friends. Almost all these women managed to get some kind of support and help from outside their household. For some it has been their sole effort whereas for a few it was the efforts or social standing of their husbands in the community that made such help or support possible. Furthermore, getting help from outside the household in the male public sphere was much easier for elderly participants because of their age and seniority status within the community. As Santamma stated:

I am an old woman now so I go to places and visit my family without any problem. In the village, people know me as *dai* [midwife] and give me a lot of respect. I don't have to worry about my *izzat* (*chastity*) because I am old and there is little risk when I travel to different villages.

Therefore, age is also associated with greater spatial and social freedom as postmenopausal women are no longer seen as an object of sexual desire and as such cannot bring shame upon their families by appearing in public places. All of these ideas about feminine roles coupled with differences in entitlements are another form of social construction of physical realities that perpetuate gender inequality and limit opportunities for women and their children, such as capability of education and knowledge, access to paid work, and autonomy and access to health services discussed elsewhere (see Chattier, 2008).

The Capability Approach and Poverty Measurement

In this article I examine the capability approach and how it applies in the context of individuals and families living together on unequal terms. The above analysis of intrahousehold negotiations and gender inequality explored how householders negotiated resources and opportunities and envisioned strategies. The households were internally differentiated in access, control, and allocation of resources and opportunities. Throughout this discussion, participants' experiences and comments on the intrahousehold negotiations provided glimpses of "who gets what and why," and "who does what in the house and outside." In other words, as I observed inequalities in the capability list of outcomes between men and women, it became apparent that they did not have equal opportunities in the first place. In effect, domestic power imbalances restricted opportunities for women more than men. The analysis also showed how domestic power imbalances generated inequality in achieved well-being outcomes.

In the light of the prevailing discussion, it is important to note that traditional patriarchal ideologies and sexual division of labor persist, and it sustains a gendered distribution of resources, opportunities, and social power that favor men at the expense of women. Women caught in the poverty trap are faced with conflicting choices between survival needs and their social status and acceptability within the community. As a result, we see there have been trade-offs between acceptances of religio-cultural identities and developing other capabilities that women might value, such as having freedom of mobility, undertaking paid work, and having more leisure time. My analysis so far indicates how certain cultural patterns of valuation perpetuate women's subordination through broader social structures and power asymmetries within the household. But my case studies also demonstrate that the gendered norms and practices embedded in religious and cultural traditions and identities are not reducible to, or merely expressive of, gender inequality.

Therefore, the challenge for a social evaluation of women's well-being underlying the capability approach is to register and take seriously the interpretations and evaluations of these women as agents in the context of family and intrahousehold relations. The way in which we choose to "know" and measure poverty has implications for how we deal with it. This study has been influenced by feminist theories on gender relations and the conceptualization and measurement of poverty from a gender-differentiated framework. To situate my own theoretical analysis, I took on feminist constructivist concerns while retaining a legacy from Sen's capability approach and challenged the gender blindness of conventional poverty measurement and analysis in Fiji in three ways. First, my analysis involved a shift from a focus on incomes and consumption to recognition of poverty as a multidimensional phenomenon, which, in addition to aspects of "physical deprivation," encompasses nonmaterial factors pertaining to "social deprivation" such as

mobility, social relations, domestic work, and nonmarket care. Second, it fueled the idea of breaking with the convention of using the “household” as the unit of measurement in income-based poverty profiles in favor of concentrating on individuals within domestic groupings. Third, it has stressed how poverty can be meaningfully evaluated if people’s own views on their “condition” are brought into the picture.

This gender perspective on poverty highlighted that household income cannot be equated with individual well-being. Here, the capability approach has been very influential in the context of evaluating poverty, intrahousehold relations, and gender inequality. By concentrating on qualitative case studies of rural Indian women, the capability approach allowed me to assess the well-being of individual women and their ability to be active participants in Fiji society. This study illustrated that households are neither homogenous nor autonomous groupings but rather are internally differentiated and interactive with social and economic institutions outside the household. Using the capability approach, this study highlighted that social structures and institutions can (and generally do) have important effects on rural Indian women’s capability sets, and this was further revealed in my discussions of empirical evidence. In this framework rural Indian women’s poverty is construed as “basic capability failure.”

The capability approach thus provided the philosophical foundation for a broad concept and measure of poverty and well-being in this study. The framework helped me address why there is differentiation in social and material status between Indian women and men within household and how social structures legitimate and enact such rules of allocations and distribution. This article illustrated how social constructions of gender and kinship relations were negotiated by participants’ within the household and highlighted the complexity of their socioeconomic positions. This formed a critical backdrop against which rural Indian women’s well-being and agency were evaluated. Furthermore, in adopting a feminist perspective this research has contributed to a multidimensional approach to poverty analysis and how conceptualizations of women’s well-being rest upon implicit assumptions about personhood, agency, and subjectivity. Incorporating feminist analysis with the capability approach, this research was able to analyze the gendered dynamics of poverty among different groups of people living together in a household. Gender-based barriers affect significant aspects of poor women’s lives in rural Indian settlements and undermine their ability to improve their own and their families’ well-being, though there may be still more work to be done in operationalizing the capabilities approach to better measure gendered inequalities in poverty measurement and conceptualisation that lies beyond the scope of this article. The aim of this article was that poverty is not all about lack of money, and the capabilities approach provided that evaluative framework to look at indicators that go beyond monetary and market-based indicators.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Why does it matter that gender disadvantage is so frequently represented as a problem of poor women, and that “one-size-fits-all” poverty concepts are expected to apply to understanding gender and well-being? In this article I argue that the inclusion of gender perspectives in Fiji’s poverty analysis should take place that recognize the analytical strengths of gender analysis, in particular, the separation of women and gender. In doing so, I have centred my discussion on how the capability approach can be used to study gender inequality and poverty. Hence, gender analysis and interventions need to be mainstreamed into poverty reduction policies and practice. Two possible approaches to mainstreaming gender within poverty reduction work suggest either arguing a case for inclusion on the grounds that gender identity entails poverty, or alternatively arguing that poverty is gendered, in that women and men often experience poverty in distinctive ways. In moving toward gender-sensitive, pro-poor measures of poverty, four “next steps” are worthy of consideration. First there is a need for measures of poverty to pay greater heed to the lived experiences and priorities of individuals—particularly those for whom poverty is a daily experience. When the household is the unit of analysis, it is impossible to know how poverty is distributed among the genders, and it obscures intrahousehold inequalities. Excluding from a poverty measure such an important feature may risk poverty policy analysts in failing to understand lived experiences and priorities of poor women and men. Second, taking gender seriously means not just examining intrahousehold distribution, but also assessing the selection of dimensions and indicators. Many standards of evaluation are gendered; and as discussed in this article, failure to take account of leisure time or quality, mobility, and the kind of work men and women do may disproportionately undercount women’s poverty.

Third, this article addressed some of the feminist concerns of poverty through qualitative methodologies of research by investigating what poor men and women think about poverty and especially women within the household. Here, specific gendered experiences and conceptions of poverty for women and men were presented using the evaluative space of the capabilities approach. Finally, rather than relying exclusively on large-scale surveys, there is a need to utilize more responsive and participatory forms of data collection, including qualitative techniques. Such methods are capable of producing additional data necessary to understand how poverty is experienced by women and men, and to reveal the intersection between poverty, gender, and other markers of identity, including age, and ethnicity. As a result, we may be better placed not only to measure, but also to understand the causes, realities, and consequences of poverty, and the ways in which it shapes women’s and men’s lives, choices, and chances. There has to be enduring consensus on participatory research and theoretical

support from philosophical and psychological accounts of basic needs, universal values, and human rights to address key questions surrounding the construction of a multidimensional poverty measure that is gender sensitive!

NOTES

1. In my PhD thesis I looked at a complete listing of about 11 capabilities that include physical health, shelter and environment, domestic work and nonmarket care, paid work and autonomy in household spending, time-autonomy and leisure activities, mobility and social relations, education and knowledge, bodily integrity and safety, being respected and treated with dignity and religion. Also in my 2007 work I used a similar theoretical framework but presented data on different three capabilities from the above list not under discussion in this paper though.

2. To protect the anonymity of individuals being studied, family names and place names have been changed. Confidentiality and anonymity of the participants were preserved through the use of pseudonyms that the women were requested to choose for themselves. Terms/adjectives used to portray the Indo-Fijian women throughout this article are the words used by the women to describe themselves during the conversations (though translated in English, I made sure that the meaning of the conversation and words did not lose its originality and authenticity). For this reason, these words are in quotation marks or presented as extracts.

3. Grog sessions in the context of Fiji means the drinking of *yaqona* (pronounced as Yangona) or kava is a common ceremonial and social custom. The *yaqona* ceremony has great significance in Fijian life but is now considered a social drink among the Fiji Indian community as well.

4. The drinks were *yaqona*, *daru* (locally brewed rice whiskey) or methylated spirits. These drinks are readily available and relatively cheap. Men would buy beer or what they referred to as “hot stuff” that is spirits, from town if they could afford to.

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