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# Dancing in the lion's den: women leaders in local government

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# **Dancing in the Lion's Den: Women Leaders in Local Government**

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**Thesis submitted to fulfil the requirements of Doctor of Philosophy at  
Southern Cross University**

**16 December 2008**

I, Roslyn Irwin, declare that the work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original, except as acknowledged in the text, and that the material has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university.

Signed .....

Date .....

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## Abstract

During the twentieth century, women were elected into all spheres of government and political leadership positions in increasing numbers. Still, their numbers are substantially lower than their representation in the population. The same trend is evident in local government in many countries. With few exceptions, there are now more women numerically and proportionately in local government than in state or national governments. Nevertheless, the limited research on women representatives in local government demonstrates that the environment of local government is not necessarily comfortable for women. Many more women than men leave local government voluntarily. If women who are currently practising politics inside local government leave in substantial numbers then little will change. This means that women entering it in the future will face the same environments and challenges (Freeman & Bourque 2001).

Against this background, the research study seeks to provide an explanation of how different women experience and perceive positions traditionally held by men, whether there are shared understandings and experiences that transcend the women's differences and whether they are changing the environment of local government. To investigate these questions, I employ qualitative feminist research within a framework of feminist political theory, drawing broadly on a range of feminist theory and a variety of political emphases. I interview forty-nine women leaders in local government from England, Sweden, India, the Philippines and Australia, investigating their perspectives and practice thus weighing theory with practice.

Several theoretical and practical themes emerge from these findings. The practice revealed by the interviewees is complex, ambiguous and nuanced, consistent with the feminist valuation of relationship, context and the particular. The interviewees bring a different social perspective, reflecting their situated experiences, to their work. This transforms the masculinist environment of the lion's den in significant, albeit subtle, ways. The practice of the interviewees shapes agendas and decision-making processes, changes the way representatives of both genders feel about those processes, and molds outcomes for their communities in subtle but distinct ways. In addition, many of the interviewees use their agency actively to change the practices and environment of their councils.

I conclude that the practice revealed by these interviewees is best described as a dance in a complex and alien environment, within which women make a palpable difference. This supports arguments for increasing women at the leadership level in both the administrative and political areas of local government, supported by a critical mass of women councillors. More than that, it testifies to the urgency of that task if local government – the lion's den – is to be more representative of the diverse people it purports to represent.

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## **Prelude to the Dance: Prologue**

I am not a disinterested observer of local government or women in local government. Much of my working life has been as a federal public servant and since the early 1990s as an academic. However, in 1989 I was seconded by my local council in Lismore, a regional city in New South Wales, Australia, to develop its first corporate plan. I spent a year with the council, experiencing local government for the first time, virtually from an employee's perspective and meeting all the council staff and councillors. As a keen attendee and sometimes contributor to council meetings in that year, I found the lack of diversity of the councillors (twelve Anglo-Saxon men, all over forty with most in their sixties or over) startling in a community known for its diversity.

Equally as startling were the style, content, level and sometimes absence of debate, the non-involvement of local citizens except on specific major issues in which they had an interest, the range of issues discussed, the priorities of the council and the overwhelmingly masculinist culture that seemed to pervade the council, reflected in behaviour, policy, language and decisions. No women's voices were heard, except on the rare occasions when I would present a report and answer questions or when a woman addressed the council over a particular issue. I studied politics at university, but had never considered entering formal politics, although I had been an activist for women's issues and equity in the workplace for most of my working life. However, that experience of local government galvanised me into standing for election to the council in 1991.

### **Introduction to the dance: The first election in 1991**

Attending a pre-election seminar for potential candidates, I met a number of people who were also considering standing for election to Lismore council. After the seminar, one of the women contacted me as, although she did not want to be elected, she and her husband wanted to support me and another woman who had been at the meeting in our campaigns. When we all met to discuss this, we found many shared values and interests, and decided to form two tickets, both under the name of Community Independents, reflecting our desire to represent the community's needs and our independence from political parties. Although I did not realise it at the time, this was the beginning of a journey, particularly involving connections with people who live on intentional communities, of friendships that will last for life, and of a deep and abiding interest in local government and alternative forms of democracy.

Lyn Carson and I used the slogan 'Let's open the doors – there's room for us all in City Hall', which reflected the importance we placed on an inclusive council and community consultation. Diana Roberts and Stuart White used the slogan 'A fresh approach to local issues' reflecting their emphasis on environmental sustainability. Between us we gathered together a large group of people who were prepared to work with us developing our campaigns, hand-delivering our brochures to every house in the council area and handing out how-to-vote cards for us on the day. We ran a strong and visible campaign, unlike most of the candidates who generally only handed out how-to-vote slips on the day, often not covering every booth.



To our surprise Carson (her preferred name), Diana and I were all elected, together with another three new male councillors. Carson did not stand again, but Diana served for a further two terms and I served a further 3 terms. The group of people who worked with us for our first campaign became a solid support group, assisting Diana and me in subsequent campaigns and acting as a sounding board for us if we asked.

### **In the lion's den: Experience as an elected representative**

On election Carson, Diana and I doubled the number of women representatives who had been elected in one hundred and twenty years. We were the first to be elected for eight years and went into council with a platform for change. At the first meeting, I stood unsuccessfully for mayor and we stood for committees that could not be stereotyped as 'women's business', because we thought all business was women's business. At the second meeting, we proposed a series of motions intended to make the council more accountable to the community and more inclusive of residents in the decision-making process.

These first meetings were in many ways the hallmark of our first term and Diana's and my continuing terms. Although we learnt to be strategic and tried hard to build relationships with our colleagues, we researched every report in the business papers, initiated many changes and were assertive, passionate and articulate. We found out later that a number of the male councillors disliked us intensely because we had been so active, breaking what had been a tradition of sitting, listening and taking advice from more experienced councillors, who were of course men. Despite our attempts to build relationships with our colleagues, with a few it was not possible and their dislike lingered on, coming back to haunt Diana and me in our third term.

During the following four years there were significant changes in council, many initiated by us, and some of the practices introduced in that term remain today. We reflected at times on our initial approach and questioned whether more effective relationships with our male colleagues might have been achieved in that first term had we not been so active and had such a strong agenda for change. Of course, another possibility is that if we had not taken such an active role, many of the changes might not have occurred.

At the next election Diana and I were both re-elected with our preferences helping to elect a young Greens party male councillor. Although still a generally conservative council in political leanings, there were four women representatives, four younger councillors, and a wider range of values and interests was evident. It was much more open to the community, supported community consultation on major issues, encouraged community representatives to join council committees and was more focused on the issues than the previous council had been. Whilst the four women had very different political connections, the tone of the meetings seemed to change. In the last year of the previous council we had appointed a new general manager with very different qualities, skills and values. A new type of staff followed his appointment, some women were appointed as managers and an outward-looking perspective, responsive to residents, was encouraged. With a cooperative relationship between the council and its staff, Lismore council gained a reputation within local government in NSW as a progressive and professional organisation.

During that second term, I was deputy mayor for the first two years and then mayor for a further two, the first woman to hold both these positions. I was asked by a number of my colleagues to stand for the mayor's position, as the mayor had lost their confidence. As his deputy I discussed this with him beforehand, and although he told me to nominate, he was

not pleased when I was elected either then or the following year. He barely spoke to me again and often challenged me in meetings. Although he did not stand for the next election, when for the first time the mayor was elected directly by the people, he initiated a strategy to 'get rid of those women' with a number of conservative male candidates. This was reflected in a tight preference deal between several tickets, which resulted in the election of a strongly conservative, reactionary and partial mayor. Together with five other conservative male councillors and his own casting vote he had the numbers to carry any decision. Several sitting councillors were not re-elected, the average age of the councillors was sixty-three and there were only two women on the council. Under the mayor's leadership the council returned to a traditional local government style, a number of professional staff left, including the general manager. The range of issues discussed by the council narrowed, with debate almost non-existent. The mayor died in the third year of his term and was replaced by a member of his group who, with five other councillors, continued the former mayor's direction and style. The majority group used its numbers to push through its own agenda on many issues, regardless of advice from professional staff, feedback from the community and input from the minority councillors. However, despite being in a minority, the two women and a third independent male councillor continued to research every item in the business papers, brought different items onto the agenda, different perspectives into the debates and argued for community consultation in decision-making. Community members who attended council meetings frequently asked Diana, David Tomlinson (who in many ways replaced Lyn Carson) and me how we could bear being on this council, yet thanked us for doing so. What this told us was that our presence made a difference for them!

### **Different circumstances, new opportunities**

I had taken leave from my position as a university lecturer to carry out the role of mayor, having little opportunity to look beyond the responsibilities of the position. When I was not re-elected to that position I returned to teaching at my university. Effectively marginalised on the council in terms of a capacity to influence what was happening in the community, I sought opportunities to extend my areas of interest. I gained membership on several state committees and consultancy work that related to my work as a lecturer in politics. Largely as a consequence of my experiences as a woman in local government, I focused in particular on undertaking consultancies about women in local government in other countries. Faced with the requirement for postgraduate qualifications to continue my work as a lecturer, it was a natural progression to extend my exploration of women in local government and particularly the experiences of women leaders. Thus my experience stimulated my interest in undertaking a research project that had international scope. This demonstrates how changed circumstances and experience can open unexpected doors to new and different understandings and opportunities.

# Chapter 1 - Locating the Dance: Introduction

Citizenship is divorced from daily life and becomes what Marx called a 'political lion skin' worn only occasionally and somewhat reluctantly. The political lion skin has a large mane and belonged to a male lion; it is a costume for men. When women finally win the right to don the lion skin it is exceedingly ill-fitting and therefore unbecoming. Women are expected to don the lion's skin, mane and all, or to take their place among and indistinguishable from, the new man postulated in radical democratic theory. There is no set of clothes available for a citizen who is a woman (Pateman 1989:6).

## 1.1 Introduction

In this chapter I provide the context for the research, identify the research problem, describe the significance of the research and position it as qualitative feminist research within a framework of feminist political theory. Furthermore, I situate this research within the metaphor of 'dancing in the lion's den' as poetically described by Pateman (1989:6) above, describe the non-traditional approach to the structure of the thesis, provide an outline of the following chapters and explain how they build the argument.

## 1.2 The Lion's Den: Background to the Study

This thesis is about women leaders who work within the representative system of local government. Representative government as we know it today, based on notions of political equality among citizens and the power of the people, has evolved from a system of institutions established following revolutions in England, America and France. It was not originally based on notions of classical democracy of government by the people, best exemplified by the Athenian state, and indeed was designed by people who saw democracy as a threat (Carson 1996). Over the past two hundred years there have been many changes within political systems, such as the establishment of universal suffrage, the extension of voting rights to almost all people and regular free elections. These changes have resulted in the form of representative democracy and the representative government systems that we understand today, whereby people govern indirectly through their elected representatives (Manin 1997).

In his trilogy on the impact of the information age, Manuel Castells (1997:343) describes what he sees as the 'crisis of democracy' as the nation-state loses much of its legitimacy reflected partly in reduced voter turnout at elections. Castells (1997:343) argues that added to this crisis of legitimacy is a crisis of the political system with the party system, as the main vehicle for representative government, losing its appeal and trustworthiness thereby becoming 'a bureaucratic remainder deprived of public confidence'. This he sees as due largely to competition between political parties, the advent of personalised leadership promoted through the media, unlawful financing and scandal politics. Local government has not been immune to this crisis. In countries where voting is not compulsory, voter turnout has reduced, sometimes substantially. In addition, political parties report difficulty in locating candidates, many local governments are unstable, decisions can be inconsistent and elected representatives often focus on 'nimby and one-issue reactions' rather than the

strategic direction that is seen as essential (Magnier 2006:353). As a result, there has been a spate of reform of local government in many countries, particularly western<sup>1</sup> countries, over the past two decades. Partly because of these reforms, Castells (1997:350) asserts that a 'new democratic politics' is emerging leading to the 're-creation of the local state' and that local government is where 'the most powerful trends legitimizing democracy ... are taking place worldwide'. Oliver Borraz and Peter John (2004) support Castells' analysis arguing that, whilst the crises in political systems have been evident at each level of government in Europe, local government has been the focus of most reform. As local government is the level of government closest to the people, reform can then be seen as part of an attempt to strengthen democracy starting from the bottom.<sup>2</sup> Against this background of crises within contemporary democracies and reforms of local government in many countries, this thesis explores the role of women leaders in local government in Australia, England, India, the Philippines and Sweden.

### 1.2.1 Women in local government

Carole Pateman's words at the beginning of this chapter are referring to women in their roles as citizens and are particularly evocative of women as elected representatives, a role historically carried out by men and indeed in many cases by certain categories of men only, such as landowners. During the twentieth century women were elected into all spheres of government in increasing numbers, including into formal leadership positions<sup>3</sup> in some countries, yet their numbers are still substantially lower than their representation in the population.<sup>4</sup> The same trend is evident in local government in many countries, where women have been much more successful in gaining access than in state governments. There are now more women, both numerically and proportionately, in local government than in other spheres of government except in countries such as Rwanda, Sweden, Finland and the Netherlands, where women's representation in their national governments is about the same as, or higher than, their representation in local government (Council of European Municipalities and Regions, 1999; United Nations Statistics Division, 2005). Women's higher representation in local government is attributed to a number of factors. Women can more easily combine local government involvement with family, household responsibilities and employment. There are more positions available in local government and less competition, possibly because local government representatives are generally not highly paid and therefore not attractive to those seeking a fulltime political career. Also,

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<sup>1</sup> I acknowledge here that this term privileges social majorities and fails to recognise social minorities within nations (Mohanty 2003), however I choose to use it as three of the countries in this study have colonial pasts and I agree with Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003:227) that a Western/Third World distinction draws better attention to that fact.

<sup>2</sup> According to Borraz and John, the outcomes of the reforms have not met expectations as greater voter turnout has not occurred, indeed it 'continues to decline' (2004: 115). I address this issue in more depth in Chapter 5.

<sup>3</sup> In identifying 'formal leadership positions' rather than simply 'leadership positions' I am acknowledging here that leadership does not rest in a position although it is often conceived this way. I address this issue in more depth in Chapter 5, and although it might seem somewhat repetitive to make the distinction, I continue to do so as it reflects a distinction that is important to me and central to notions of leadership.

<sup>4</sup> The United Nations' 2005 statistics on women in national parliaments showed that in 2004 women's representation exceeded 40 percent in only Rwanda (49 percent) and Sweden (45 percent) {United Nations Statistics Division, 2005}. The situation in Rwanda is not accidental but comes after massive intervention from the international community, particularly UNIFEM, and is also partly reflective of the influence of local women's organizations and the huge number of men killed during, or imprisoned after, the genocide that occurred there (Paxton and Hughes, 2007: 2).

involvement in local government can be seen as a natural extension of many women's involvement in community organisations (Drage 2001).

Nevertheless, in all countries, women are substantially under-represented in local government, although this varies from country to country. In a survey of sixty-seven countries conducted in 2003, 20.9 percent of councillors were women (United Cities and Local Governments 2004). There has historically been a substantial gap in representation between Europe and other continents, however, in the past decade this gap is closing (United Cities and Local Governments 2004) and countries in Africa and Asia are now amongst the countries with the highest proportion of women as councillors. Namibian women have the highest representation with 45 percent of the local government seats at that country's 2004 election filled by women (Engendering local government 2004), followed by Sweden at 42.3 percent,<sup>5</sup> South Africa at 40 percent (Morna & Tolmay 2006), India at 38 percent, Uganda at 33 percent, Finland at 31.6 percent, New Zealand at 31.5 percent, England at 29.7 percent (Local Government Analysis and Research, 2001), Denmark at 26.9 percent and Australia at 26.3 percent. There are clusters of countries where women's representation ranges between 22-25 percent and 13-16 percent and some countries where women have much lower representation, including Greece at 6.3 percent, Thailand at less than 5 percent and Egypt at 1.6 percent (Council of European Municipalities and Regions 1999; United Cities and Local Governments 2004). Women hold between 24 percent and 45 percent of the seats due to a quota of seats being allocated to women in the South Asia countries of Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan and India<sup>6</sup> and the African countries of Uganda, Namibia and South Africa. The significance of quota systems is evident when women's representation in local government in these countries is compared to their representation in their national governments, where quota systems for women do not exist and their representation is much lower.

The proportion of women who are mayors or their equivalent is significantly lower. In 2003, 9 percent of mayors worldwide were women (United Cities and Local Governments 2004) although, again, this varies substantially from country to country. Thirty percent of mayors in England are women, however, until 2002 most functions of the English mayors were purely ceremonial<sup>7</sup> (Fenwick, Elcock & McMillan 2006) and most still rotate on an annual basis with the significant leadership position being the leader of the council.<sup>8</sup> In 2006, 8.4 percent of Leaders of the Council were women. Apart from England, Sweden has the highest proportion of women mayors at 25 percent<sup>9</sup> followed by Iceland at 17 percent,

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<sup>5</sup> After the most recent election in Sweden in 2006 the proportion of women councillors increased to 42.3 percent (Swedish Association of Local Government Authorities, 26 February 2007)

<sup>6</sup> In 1992, the 74<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Indian Constitution introduced a reservation of 33.3 percent of seats in local government for women as both elected representatives and mayors. This became effective from 1993 and different authors reference either date. I will reference the latter from here on in this thesis.

<sup>7</sup> Until 2002 the only mayoral position in England that was not purely ceremonial was that of the mayor of the City of London, however, the Local Government Act 2000 required all but the smallest local authorities to either elect a leader with an executive cabinet, to have a directly-elected mayor with a cabinet or a directly elected mayor with an appointed council manager. At the 2002 local government elections in that country 11 mayors were directly elected by the people (Fenwick, Elcock & McMillan 2006).

<sup>8</sup> The Mayor of London is an exception. This position is a powerful leadership position, which has international significance as well as a significant leadership role with the other municipal councils in the greater London area.

<sup>9</sup> In 1999 the figure for Sweden was 20 percent, but after the 2006 elections in Sweden, the proportion of women mayors increased substantially.

New Zealand, America (Tolleson-Rhinehart 2001) and the Netherlands at 16 percent and Australia at 15 percent.<sup>10</sup>

Much of the research and literature on women as elected representatives focuses on women at the national and/or state level, often as leaders<sup>11</sup> (Richter 1991; Rosenthal 1998; Roces 2000; Solheim 2000; Carroll 2001; Dodson 2001; Kathlene 2001; McGlen 2001; Thomas 2001; Tolleson-Rhinehart 2001; Thompson 2002; Paxton 2007). Despite their relatively low presence as elected representatives in most governments, the research demonstrates that, once elected, women do make a difference either in perspectives, priorities or communication styles. Nevertheless the significance of that difference is contested and the influence of other factors is highlighted. Other research suggests that the contribution of women is more significant when there is a 'critical mass' within those governments as occurs in the Nordic countries, England and New Zealand. This notion of a 'critical mass', which was introduced in 1988 by Drude Dahlerup (in Tremblay 2006), is supported by a 1992 study by the United Nations, which 'concludes that only a critical mass of 30.35 per cent of women in politics' will make a significant difference to the political culture due to the priority women give to 'the needs of other women, children, elderly, disabled and disadvantaged' (in Porter 1999, p. 85). It is also supported by a number of authors (Mansbridge 1999; Lovenduski 2001; Wilson 2004; Vickers 2006) including Jean Drage (1997) who, in her research on women leaders in government in New Zealand, points to the influence of a critical mass of women in decision-making positions in governments and legislative bodies in that country. Drage maintains that these women provide transformative leadership by redefining political priorities, placing new items on the agenda and providing new perspectives on mainstream issues. However, the notion of a critical mass is a contested concept as other authors (Childs 2004; Puwar 2004) argue that numbers alone are insufficient to make a difference and that other factors are equally, if not more, important. Other factors apart from numbers are evident in that, even where a critical mass of women elected representatives does not exist, research suggests that 'many women who have succeeded have transformed the way politics is practised and ... changed the political agenda to include issues that improve women's lives' (Drage 2001c:44). I explore the specific nature of these issues in the context of local government in Chapters 3 to 6.

As mentioned earlier, local government in many countries has been subjected to unprecedented, rapid and profound change over the last two decades in response to political, economic and social developments in their external environments (Martin 1997; Magnier 2006). Local government globally, and particularly urban local government, is now a complex, competitive and increasingly difficult environment due in large part to those reforms. The permeation of neo-liberal ideas about public services and markets has seen services and activities traditionally carried out by local government privatised, contracted out or run as public/private partnerships (Goldsmith and Larsen 2004; Bäck, Heinelt and Magnier 2006). There is now a substantial body of research and literature on local government, and much of it is on specific aspects of local government services, programs and practice with a strong focus on management (Bucek & Smith 2000; Carlee

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<sup>10</sup> By 2004, 19 percent of Australian mayors were women.

<sup>11</sup> There is a substantial body of American literature on women in state and national legislatures, however, some is very dated and I refer here to literature reflecting research over the past two decades, much of which forms the basis of chapters in an edited book by Susan Carroll (2001).

2004; Manske & Frederickson 2004; Benest 2005; Coaffee and Johnston 2005; Harris 2005; Kellar 2005; Lowell 2005; Nalbandian 2005; Owen, Moseley & Courtney 2007).

### 1.2.2 Research on local government

Although in the past there has been limited literature on elected representatives in local government, a spate of literature over the past ten years explores the impact of local government reforms either on the role of councillors or on political leadership (Bergström, Magnusson and Ramberg 2003; Goldsmith and Larsen 2004; Berg 2005; Karnik 2005; Larsen 2005; Montin 2005; Rao 2005; Alba 2006; Bäck, Heinelt and Magnier 2006; Fenwick, Elcock and McMillan 2006; Getimis 2006). For example, Steve Martin (1997:543) concludes in his research on councillors in England that many do not perceive themselves as leaders of their communities and doubt their ability ‘to communicate with and represent the interests of key sections of their local communities – particularly young people and ethnic minorities’.

Most of the recent literature focuses on political leadership in local governments in Europe, as leadership has been one of the areas of significant reform. The overwhelming majority of mayors in Europe are now elected directly by their citizens rather than by their political colleagues (Magnier 2006). A major survey of mayors undertaken in 2003 and 2004<sup>12</sup> analysed different aspects of their political leadership including their social backgrounds (Steyvers and Reynart 2006), relationships with their citizens and the consequent impact on local democracy (Haus and Sweeting 2006), as well as aspects of their leadership styles (Getimis and Hlepis 2006). The research found that the duties and responsibilities of mayors were defined differently by those who had been directly elected, reflecting their electoral support base in the community rather than in political parties (Magnier 2006). It also found that most of the mayors surveyed perceive local government reform favourably and are open to further innovation with a few exceptions. In England only two percent of councils have directly elected mayors, and England is one of three countries<sup>13</sup> where the mayors surveyed believe strongly that the need for reform has been ‘greatly exaggerated’ (Magnier 2006:357). Annick Magnier attributes this more negative assessment of the need for reform to the different and intense reforms of local government that have occurred in these three countries in the past few decades. In contrast, there are no directly elected mayors in Sweden, yet Swedish mayors in the study join those from Spain in supporting more change (Magnier 2006:357), which suggests that the mayors surveyed support direct election as those mayors have more executive power than mayors elected indirectly. Mike Goldsmith and Helge Larsen (2004) in their research on Nordic political leadership in local government throw some light on why direct election has not been pursued yet in Sweden. They assert that, unlike in England, local government reform has not had as much impact for several reasons: most of its population is still rural, so Sweden has not been as exposed to ‘the full impact of globalization;’ and the collective style of political decision-making and leadership works against the more individualistic values reflected in the New Public

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<sup>12</sup> This was a quantitative survey of 2,700 top political leaders in seventeen European countries including the UK and Sweden. The number of women in the survey is not identified but they accounted for no more than 16 percent overall of those in the sample from any of the four European regions. However, 21 percent of those from the UK and Sweden were women.

<sup>13</sup> The other two are The Netherlands and Greece.

Management (NPM) agenda (Goldsmith and Larsen 2004:121-122).<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, Tomas Bergström, Håkan Magnusson and Ulfas Ramberg (2003), in their research on leadership in local government in Sweden, question the degree to which elected representatives can be political leaders in Sweden within the context of the NPM agenda which emphasises management and administrative roles rather than political leadership.

### 1.2.3 Research on women in local government

Data on gender was collected in the comparative survey on mayors mentioned in the previous section however, there is no indication of the number or proportion of women included in the survey and gender is not a variable in any of the documented analyses. One chapter in the book addresses gender, however, its focus is predominantly on the ‘gendered pathways’ to formal leadership positions of the mayors. It also draws substantially on pre-existing gender research on different types of states as the survey was developed before a decision was made to explore gender as a separate issue (Johansson 2006:99). Gender being an afterthought arguably reflects the lack of seriousness paid to this issue. Vicki Johansson (2006:119) concludes in her chapter that there are gendered but different ‘pathways to power’ in different welfare states reflecting ‘the way that welfare states are gendered’. This is an important finding in that it confirms other research suggestive of the structural bias women face in seeking representative positions generally, as well as in local government. It also highlights the influence of different political and cultural contexts on the way political leadership is gendered, which will be explored in further depth in Chapters 4 and 5. However, as alluded to by Johansson (2006) herself, her findings might have been richer, providing new insights on the way gender impacts on the leadership of mayors, had the survey treated gender seriously.

Apart from this research, there is limited literature on women in local government, although it is a growing body of research, and some of it focuses on women managers and the different attributes they bring to their positions. For example, in a survey of local government managers in the United States, Richard Fox and Robert Schuhmann (2000) contend that women city managers are more likely than their male counterparts to incorporate citizen input, facilitate communication and encourage citizen involvement in their decision-making process. A study of local government officials in Poland argues that women more strongly favour a model of ethical reasoning characterised by a concern for social cooperation than do their male counterparts (Stewart, Siemenska & Sprinthall 1999).

Research on women elected representatives in local government suggests that women make a difference in this role either in their perspectives, the issues they place on the agenda or the way they work. It also indicates that they value their experience (Drage 1997; Honour and Barry 1998; Whip and Fletcher 1999; Suresh 2000; Tremaine 2000; Beck, 2001; Boles, 2001; Drage 2001; deSouza, 2003; Nandal 2003; Drage 2004; Irwin and Waddell 2004; Sekhon, 2006). A study of local politicians in Sweden in 1982 concludes that the presence of many women in local government ‘affect[s] the political culture’ (Hedlund 1985:101).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Goldsmith and Larsen make this assertion based on their research in regard to the four Nordic countries of Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden and they argue that outside Sweden the impact of NPM ideas has been either less than elsewhere or adapted to local environments.

<sup>15</sup> Whilst this study is now somewhat dated, it identifies also significant gender differences with 16 percent of the women interviewees having experienced some kind of discrimination, generally of ‘partly hidden, psychological techniques of domination’ (Hedlund 1985: 99).



This highlights the importance of numbers, for other more recent research suggests that putting issues on the agenda does not necessarily lead to different outcomes as, without the support of the majority of councillors, agenda items are not approved (Beck 2001). It also demonstrates that the presence of more women in the chamber increases the chances of agenda items receiving support, particularly for issues aimed at helping women (Dodson 2001). Research on elected women in local government in India reveals that women are held in high regard and seen as competent, fair and flexible in their dealings with others. It suggests that their increasing presence in local government may be bringing enhanced levels of respectability to local government in that country (Honour, Barry & Palnitkar 1998). Studies of women mayors in New Zealand by Jean Drage (1997) and Marianne Tremaine (2000) show that these women bring different perspectives and a different style of leadership to their positions, and that they influence the outcomes for their communities simply by being present.

#### **1.2.4 Still a long way to go**

Despite the increase in women's representation, the evidence suggests that there are still many challenges for women elected representatives in local government. A Swedish report on women's membership of county council and municipal council boards and committees found that the majority of those who resign from local politics are women, and that women perceive the culture of local government as conflict-oriented and often personal (Edgahr-Wettergren & Elvas 1999). In Tremaine's research (2000:249), individual mayors in New Zealand describe being ignored, attacked for recommending committee chairpersons based on skills and experience rather than on length of service, and of 'being made the scapegoat when the going gets tough'. The women mayors in this study identify the 'old boys' network' (Tremaine 2000:249) as an obstacle to changing the culture of local government. In the 2001 elections in that country, 37 percent fewer women were elected as mayors (Drage 2001), which has raised questions about the future of women leaders in local government in New Zealand. This demonstrates that the idea of a continuing increase of women into these positions in that country is by no means guaranteed, and questions are now being asked about a possible backlash against women. Janice Yoder (2001:823), in researching women in formal leadership positions in organizations, found evidence of a backlash against women and 'stepped up attempts to marginalize them' when their numbers increased. This has already been raised as an issue in local government in some European countries where women's representation in local government formal leadership positions is falling. For example, Paivi Varpasuo (1997:53) says of the situation in Finland that 'the explanation is certainly a simple one: men are striking back'. Monique Leijenaar (1997:77), speaking of the Dutch situation, provides what appears to be a different explanation, pointing to the amalgamation of smaller municipalities into larger ones and the combining of local party lists with traditional selection criteria. These work against 'the only criterion where women are equal to men – that of being well-known in their communities'. Of course, this may well amount to the same argument that Varpasuo makes. Jill Ker Conway (2001:xxii) contends that 'every time in the past that women have shown a really strong likelihood of outperforming men, a way has been found to reorganise the competition'.

An Asia Pacific study of women in urban local governments demonstrates that there are many barriers in that region to women entering local government including culture and tradition, religion, political unrest, money, workloads and lack of opportunities (Drage

2000). Once elected, many women find the environment and culture of local government aggressive and uncomfortable, with personal attacks by some men who find it difficult to cope with women (Beck 2001; Drage 2001). Australian research with women councillors by the Department for Women (2000) in New South Wales shows that many women feel isolated when they are the only, or one of only a few, women on council. It also shows that women are more often subjected to bullying and other inappropriate behaviour than are male councillors.

In summary, research on women elected representatives in local government demonstrates that they value their experiences and the opportunity to represent their communities, and that they have made a difference to local government through their presence. However, there are barriers and challenges that suggest there is a long way to go before gender equality is achieved.

### **1.3 Dancing in the Lion's Den: The Research Problem**

As mentioned in the Prologue, I am not a disinterested observer of women in local government. I have experienced elected representative life directly over the past seventeen years as a community independent councillor, deputy mayor and mayor of Lismore, a regional city in north eastern New South Wales in Australia. I have met and worked with many women in local government and observed women in their representative roles, establishing close relationships with some. The differences between the women I have met during these years are profound. Some are members of political parties; others are not. Although most women in local government in Australia are white Anglo-Saxon, it is not unusual now to meet Aboriginal women and women from diverse ethnic backgrounds. The traditional perception of women in local government in Australia as home-makers with adult children has changed radically, and contemporary women elected representatives are more likely to be younger professionals with 'extensive educational backgrounds' (Whip & Fletcher 1999). Although many describe themselves as middle-class, there are others who describe themselves as working-class in the lower income brackets (Irwin & Waddell 2000). Some are proud to call themselves feminists; others make a point of denying any feminist sympathies. Some support other women; some do not. I have seen strong, resourceful, hard-working women, some of them articulate and on their feet debating issues in council and in local government forums. Others rarely speak publicly, but often contribute significantly in less formal situations.

Despite these differences some similarities are also evident. Most of the women I have met express a preference for discussing issues, not personalities, and describe close connections with community groups and individuals in their local communities. Many demonstrate openness to the ideas and perspectives of others, and a concern about the social and environmental impacts of council decisions on their communities. Most seem to take a keen interest in the full range of council responsibilities, not just those often stereotyped as 'women's issues'. Almost without exception, they express a distinct lack of comfort with what they perceive as the dominant, masculinist culture pervading the institutions and processes of local government in Australia. Others cite personal examples of bullying, intimidatory and patronising behaviour that have coloured their experiences as elected representatives. Many, coming together with other local government women for the first time, express relief when they find their experiences are not unique to them, their council or their community. They often comment wryly about gender blindness and deafness in

local government forums. By this, they mean that when women speak it is as though they have not been seen or heard, but when a man says the same thing at a later stage his comments are acknowledged, and the idea is attributed to him rather than the woman who raised it. Similarly, when women raise their hands to be given the floor they are often ignored by the chairperson of the meeting (Irwin and Waddell 2000). This can mean women have to be loud and assertive if they want to be heard. Despite these extra challenges, many women elected representatives describe their overall experiences in local government as life changing, with personal benefits far outweighing the negatives.

In 2000, I was contracted to provide a report for the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) on the status of women in urban local government in Australia (Irwin and Waddell 2000).<sup>16</sup> As part of this report, Jane Waddell and I sent surveys to women mayors and councillors across Australia and then followed up the survey with phone interviews with the women who responded. Apart from demographic data, the range of issues explored with the women included their reasons for entering local government, whether they experienced discrimination either in the election process or during their time as elected representatives, their achievements, their perceptions of any differences they had made, as well as barriers to women wanting to enter local government. Although the respondents to the survey were not a statistically representative sample of women in local government, and the differences between the women were profound, their comments about their own experiences or their observations of other women in local government were similar. Without exception, they believed they had made a difference to their councils by being involved, and most spoke of the differences that women bring to local government.

Contracted in 2000 as a consultant to the Lady Mayors' Association of the Philippines, I worked with a group of Filipina<sup>17</sup> mayors designing a campaign, based on their experiences and ideas, to increase the number of women in local government in that country. Despite the cultural, religious and, in some cases, language differences,<sup>18</sup> I was surprised to find that we often seemed to 'talk the same language' and that there was a significant degree of head nodding and common ground. We seemed to connect as women with shared experiences and concerns in a particular context – as women in local government. These women spoke passionately about a different style of governance and different values and interests that were emerging in the Philippines with the presence of women in local

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<sup>16</sup> The countries involved in the study were Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Nepal, India and Bangladesh in South Asia; Thailand, Malaysia and the Philippines in South-East Asia and China, Vietnam, Japan, Australia and New Zealand in East Asia and the Pacific. Indonesia was involved initially however, the report could not be completed due to political instability in Indonesia at the time. At the original briefing Jean Drage from New Zealand and I argued strongly, but unsuccessfully, that having Australia and New Zealand as the only representatives from the Pacific was inappropriate as the selection of countries was driven by the interests of funding bodies with a specific focus on urban local government. When the combined report was released at the Asia Pacific Summit of Women mayors and councillors in Thailand in June 2001, women from a number of small Pacific nations including Fiji, Noumea and Tonga were present and understandably unhappy that their countries had not been included in the report. The research design was developed by staff in UNESCAP and was driven by the scope of the study and funding limitations. As the study covered thirteen countries, a survey was used although it was modified by the women from these countries at our initial briefing to incorporate open, instead of only closed, questions. Although it would have been preferable to interview the women personally, there was no funding for travel.

<sup>17</sup> Female Filipinos are called Filipinas and so when I refer to an individual woman I use Filipina and when I refer to them as mayors from their country I use the terminology of Filipino mayors.

<sup>18</sup> Most of the women spoke English fluently, which is not unusual in that country.

government, particularly in formal leadership positions. They rejected what they described as the corruption endemic in politics in their country and identified qualities including honesty, integrity and faith in God, which they saw themselves and other women bringing to local government.

In building on my personal experience in local government and my research with UNESCAP and the Filipino mayors, this study emerges from the experiences and perspectives of women elected representatives and leaders in different countries. In particular, it arises from the discomfort that so many express with what they describe as the masculinist culture in which they work, and their desire for change, with some potential for that change as they see it coming from an increased presence of women and women leaders. As a woman who worked within the limitations and constraints of a system of representative government, I wanted to engage with women leaders in local government in different countries. I wanted to explore how they perceive and carry out their roles as elected representatives, how they lead, and how their participation might impact on other women and representative democracy. I wanted to explore whether there *is* a ‘commonality across difference’ (Barrett & Phillips 1992) between women leaders in local government and if so, what this might mean for other women, for the culture, forms and processes of local government and for their communities. This influenced the selection of a qualitative feminist research methodology within a broad framework of feminist political theory. The research was conducted through semi-structured interviews with forty-nine women leaders in local government from Australia, England, India, the Philippines and Sweden. It covered a range of topics including their perspectives and experiences in regard to their roles as elected representatives, as well as their leadership.

Reflection on the literature and my personal experiences led to my selection of ‘dancing in the lion’s den’ as a metaphor, with women entering the traditionally male world of local government constituting ‘throwing off the male lion’s skin’. ‘Dancing’ constitutes the different behaviours and perspectives that women might bring to an uncomfortable, and potentially hostile, environment. To continue the use of the metaphor, the overarching research problem to address is, what exactly does it mean to be a ‘dancer’ - an elected representative who is a woman and a leader - in the ‘lion’s den’ of local government? Is there something unique to the ‘dance’ and can the dancers transform the ‘lion’s den’?

## **1.4 Significance of the Study**

This thesis is significant in four ways. First, it contributes to a deeper understanding by women, including myself, of local government as experienced by women leaders who practise within it in very different countries. It might enable them, and other women, to decide whether to continue to be, or become, involved in local government. Second, it provides insight into whether the presence of women leaders can make ‘the lion’s den’ a more inclusive and less hostile culture. If so, how might this happen, and what might that mean for women, for local government and for their communities in the future? These questions are, I believe, of particular importance at this stage in our history. Apart from what happens at a national level, there is evidence that more women than men leave local government. On a daily basis we observe conflicts between local governments and the representatives those people elect to represent them. If women who are currently practising politics inside local government leave in substantial numbers then little will change, and women entering it in the future will face the same environments and challenges that women

currently face (Freeman & Bourque 2001). Third, it compares the experience of some women leaders in local government from diverse countries in Europe and Asia and the Pacific, looking for similarities and differences. This has not been done before, perhaps because such a task is fraught with difficulty. Fourth, it weighs theory with practice from the perspectives of women working in the field, and thereby contributes to theoretical understandings of women in local government.

## **1.5 The Dance: Framing the Thesis**

The literature on women in local government has been reviewed in part in this first chapter as background to both the study and the research problem. The research addresses four different issues, namely representation, power, leadership and difference. Whilst these are all interconnected I investigate them in separate chapters, weighing particular bodies of theory with the perspectives and practice of the interviewees. The relevant literature on each of these issues is therefore interwoven with the content of each chapter. Here I outline the structure of the remainder of the thesis and the way the following chapters build the argument.

Chapter Two justifies the methodology as qualitative feminist research within a framework of feminist political theory. I explain the research problem and identify how my values and experiences inevitably influence both the methodology and selection of the research problem. I then describe the research methods used to collect and analyse the interview data, and identify some of the limitations inherent in undertaking such complex research.

Chapter Three is the first analytical chapter. Here I investigate how the interviewees perceive and practise their representative roles. Feminist debate about representation focuses in particular on whether the gender of elected representatives matters. Specifically, I focus on who the interviewees represent and how accountable they are for their representation. If gender is irrelevant to the practice of representation then the presence of more women elected representatives would arguably make little difference to local government. In this chapter I investigate this question within a framework of orthodox conceptions of representation and feminist arguments in regard to the engagement of women in formal politics. I argue that representation as revealed by the interviewees cannot be explained by separate concepts based in western experiences and ideas. Rather, representation is ambiguous, multi-layered, similar to an onion, and shaped by contexts of gender, race, culture and ideology. These are reflected in the local government institutions where representation is located. I conclude at the end of this chapter that the interviewees' practice of representation provides qualified support for feminist arguments for increased representation of women in local government.

I investigate how the interviewees perceive and exercise power in local government in Chapter Four. As Judith Squires points out, the notion of power is 'central to the debate about the nature of politics' (1999:32). In many ways, power is constitutive of representation, reflected in the ways the women perceive and practise their own representation. If there were no differences between the way women and men perceive and exercise power then an increased presence of women would, again, arguably make little difference to local government. In this chapter, I investigate this question within a framework of theories of power and scrutinise feminist arguments for engagement of women in formal politics. I argue that power as revealed by these women is ambiguous, complex and contextual. I argue further that the interviewees reflect a highly ethical

approach to the practice of power, building further support for arguments for increased representation of women, particularly women leaders, in local government. I conclude finally that power in local government is gendered and that increased presence of women leaders can and does change the culture of local government, but there are obstacles that constrain and limit the leader's capacity to do so.

The focus of Chapter Five is political leadership. In some ways, leadership is related to the issue of power investigated in Chapter Four, as power is central to understanding leadership. Unlike the topics investigated in the other three analytical chapters, with some few exceptions leadership has not been a central debate in western feminist political theory. This is possibly because leadership is often equated with power, or because leadership theory has been developed predominantly by men or because much of the literature equates leadership with management, locating it within an industrial context. However, in this chapter I argue that political leadership is a key issue for potentially transforming local government. I investigate the perspectives and experiences of the women leaders in this study within the context of mainstream and feminist conceptions of leadership. I argue that leadership as revealed by the interviewees is predominantly relational and contextual, and that the interviewees understand and practise leadership in a way that has the capacity to transform local government. Nevertheless, their capacity to do so is constrained by the different contexts – of race, culture, ideology and institutional systems – in which they operate as well as by their personal values. I argue further that the presence of more women leaders who have a commitment to transformational leadership, supported by a critical mass of women representatives in their councils, may reduce the constraints, thereby providing support for arguments for increased representation of women leaders in local government.

In Chapter Six I investigate difference, which has 'emerged as one of the central motifs in feminist analysis' (Phillips 1998:12) and is an underlying theme of this study. 'Difference' refers to both 'the weight attached to sexual difference and to the many differences between women themselves' (Phillips 1998:12). Much of the debate about difference centres on whether women can be classified as a distinct group with common attributes and whether women are different from men. These issues go to the heart of both this thesis and arguments for increased representation of women in local government. In this chapter I investigate these notions of equality and difference within the context of both feminist political theory in regard to difference and arguments for increased representation of women in local government. I identify differences and similarities between the interviewees themselves and, from their perspectives, between women and men and between men, in local government. I argue that the differences are not always problematic and, furthermore, are essential to inclusive politics. Finally, I argue that the interviewees are making a substantial difference to local government itself, providing further support to arguments for increased representation of women – and women leaders – in local government.

Chapter Seven summarises the findings and theses from these four analytical chapters in terms of their theoretical and practical significance. Continuing the metaphor, I develop a practice conception of the women's representation as a dance in a complex and alien environment. This dance is constrained and limited by context: by the diverse cultural, racial, political and institutional environments within which the women are located. I argue that there are unique elements to the 'dance' that women can, and do, bring to local

government, regardless of country. I argue further that increased representation of women - particularly women leaders - in local government is important and should be pursued. It has the capacity to change the 'lion's den', albeit slowly. However, I argue that more than presence is required if the lion's den is to become a place that is more inclusive of the diversity of the people it represents, especially women. I then outline the changes I think are required for this to happen. Finally, I propose areas for further research.

## **1.6 Limitations of the Thesis**

The research was conducted through semi-structured interviews with forty-nine women leaders in local government in five different countries and covered a range of topics. This included their perspectives and experiences in regard to why they became involved in local government, their roles as elected representatives, power in local government, their understanding and practice of leadership, the differences women bring to local government, how it feels being a woman in local government and what impact their involvement has had on their lives. One limitation could be that I am relying on the women's self-reporting and that they might say what they believe is expected of them, but by asking them to provide specific examples to elaborate their perspectives, this limitation is reduced.

During the analysis the focus of the thesis was refined to the four areas of representation, power, leadership and difference outlined in the explanation of this chapter structure, leaving a substantial number of issues and body of data that could not be included. For example, even within these four main areas, much of the richness of the interviews with the women had to be excluded, which was personally disappointing, leaving me to decide which particular examples to include. Other examples and issues will form the basis for future publications.

Whilst the thesis is located within a broad framework of feminist political theory, it draws on the experiences and perspectives of a small group of women leaders. These women work within local government systems and within different historical, cultural and political contexts. The analysis is, therefore, confined predominantly to concepts of representation, power and gender from feminist theory and of leadership and representative government from political theory as they apply to women who are elected representatives in local government. Although in places bodies of literature are mentioned which either challenge or explore these concepts in a broader context, such as deliberative or direct democracy, it is not possible to develop them in any depth within the constraints of this thesis. Furthermore, the literature on each of these bodies of theory is extensive and it has not been possible within the limitations of the thesis to include all. I have therefore drawn on the literature I find most cogent and relevant to local government.

I undertook my research in early 2001, completed my analysis of a significant body of the findings and drafted the first four chapters of the thesis by 2004. However, work commitments and changed personal circumstances seriously interfered with my capacity to complete the thesis. When I returned to it after a lengthy absence I needed to revise much of the literature and statistics. I found very little new literature on some of my areas of research therefore some of the references may appear dated but are in fact the most recent. In regard to statistics, I had earlier drawn on comprehensive statistics gathered by the Council of European Municipalities and Regions in 1999, which were then contemporary

but are now dated. Although United Cities and Local Governments<sup>19</sup> conducted a survey in 2003, I found that some of their statistics were not accurate.<sup>20</sup> I therefore approached directly the local government associations of the countries where my research was conducted and am confident that the statistics quoted for those countries are accurate. I am not as confident of the statistics for some of the other countries not researched in-depth for this thesis however, they do not affect my findings.

Finally, the purpose of this study is not to generalise from the experiences and perspectives of the interviewees to all women in local government. Rather, it provides some deeper and richer understanding of the diversity in practice that theory – and western theory in particular – does not explain, providing groundwork for future research and analysis of theory and practice in regard to women in local government.

## 1.7 Summary

This chapter provided the context for the study and identified how the research problem emerged from the literature on, and the experiences of women in, local government. The study is situated within a metaphor of ‘dancing in the lion’s den’ and reflects a qualitative feminist research methodology within a broad framework of feminist political theory. The structure of the thesis was outlined, describing and justifying the way it diverges from a conventional thesis, and provided an overview of the following chapters and explained how they build the argument of the thesis. Finally, the limitations of the study were defined.

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<sup>19</sup> The Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) and the International Union of Local Authorities (IULA) joined together to form this organisation in 2005.

<sup>20</sup> For example, according to these statistics Sweden’s proportion of women councillors and mayors had fallen significantly from 1999, which I found hard to believe. After contacting the Swedish Local Government Association and asking them whether the statistics were accurate I received their accurate statistics which showed that there had been an *increase*.



## **Chapter 2: Researching the Dance: Research Methodology and Strategies**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to justify the selection of qualitative feminist research as a methodology and the location of the research problem within a framework of feminist political theory, to outline the research methods employed and to define the limitations of those methods.

### **2.2 Research Methodology**

The methodology for this study reflects a number of factors about my personal and political experiences and understandings as well as being the most appropriate research strategy to adopt. First, as mentioned in Chapter 1, I am a politician working in a representative government system. As an older, middle-class, white western woman, my initial decision to become an elected representative in local government was not without reservation.<sup>1</sup> I recognise that representative government has significant limitations and indeed there is a substantial body of literature which critiques representative government as at best ‘indirect democracy’ (Carson and Martin 1999:40). Much of this literature proposes the replacement of representative systems with various forms of direct, deliberative or participatory democracy (Pateman 1982; Barber 1984; Cohen 1989; Benhabib 1996; Mansbridge 1999). Many feminists are dismissive of formal Western political institutions such as local government because they believe that they serve the interests of the privileged in society and thus cannot - and will not – address the needs or interests of those who are different to the mainstream cultures in their societies, particularly but not limited to those of a different race, class and sexuality (hooks 2000; Mohanty 2003).

I share many of the authors’ criticisms of representative government and have concerns about representative democracy, based both on my experience and observation of it in practice. I have seen how it can serve the interests of the privileged and can exclude meaningful citizen input. I have also observed the way its processes and cultures reflect hierarchical authority and an adversarial, competitive and often hostile approach. Furthermore, I acknowledge that many groups are not only under-represented in representative systems, but are marginalised when they work within them unless they accept, and take on, the male ‘lion’s skin’ that Pateman (1989:6) describes. Nevertheless, I agree with David Plotke (1997:19) that in a representative democracy ‘the opposite of representation is exclusion’. Moreover, I am concerned that the impact of globalisation and neoliberalism has damaged many people and I have seen the privatisation of many previously public organisations, services and spaces that is replacing the notion of citizens

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<sup>1</sup> As detailed in the Prologue, I was motivated largely by my experience of local government in 1989 when I was co-opted by Lismore Council for a year to assist them in developing their first Corporate Plan. In that time I attended every Council meeting and was amazed to see that all the Councillors were male, most were in their later years and the issues I thought were important for the community were absent from the agenda. This experience drove me to stand for election at the next election in 1991.

with that of customers. I therefore agree with Iris Marion Young's (1997:352) argument that in this contemporary world, 'political representation is both necessary and desirable' alongside active participation of citizens to address these problems. Consequently, I wished to explore local government from the perspective of women representatives within this representative system although recognising that they constitute an élite group in most countries.

Moreover, despite my reservations, I know from my experience of local government that change is possible and that local government can be more inclusive and implement more participatory forms of representative government. There are many ways of 'bringing the community in' to local government through processes such as meaningful community consultation, policy juries, community surveys and deliberative polls. There are no legislative impediments to this happening, and indeed many local governments utilise some of these processes. However, I believe that intrinsic to change is elected representatives working within the system who recognise the need for change and support a more inclusive and participatory form of representative government. This focus on the nature of representative government influences the location of the research within a framework of political theory.

Second, part of my commitment to a more inclusive and participatory form of representative local government comes from my personal understanding of the world, which is influenced strongly by my values and experiences. One of the most significant people in my life was my father, who was a quiet, gentle, loving, tolerant and compassionate man, with a strong and abiding commitment to social justice. He lived his life according to his Christian principles and treated his son and three daughters equally, encouraging us all to question, challenge and act rather than complain. As children we moved regularly to different cities in Australia and made friends with people from different countries, thus learning to accept change and difference as a normal part of life. As a young adult I worked in a variety of occupations. These included a short time as a governess in outback Queensland, where I had my first contact with Aboriginal Australians and was appalled at the injustice I saw. I also had a longer period of time working in the then Department of Immigration, meeting and working with people from different countries and was surprised to find that many of the employees within the department enjoyed exercising control over the people I thought they were there to service impartially. I returned to study as a mature-age student at LaTrobe University in 1972 studying politics and legal studies. LaTrobe University was a relatively new university at that time and the lecturers in the legal studies department encouraged a critical approach and a focus on issues of social justice, which influenced me strongly.

As a senior manager for fifteen years in a large federal government department, where much of our work involved unemployed people and people from different races, I realised the importance of developing an inclusive and equitable management style and approach to clients. Having experienced gender discrimination myself, I sought to ensure that the human resource practices and cultures of the organisation in the area where I worked took account of the different needs of employees, including women, Aboriginal Australians and people from different ethnic backgrounds and sexualities. As an elected representative in local government for seventeen years I have connected with many people from different political orientations and social backgrounds to my own.

It can be seen how these values and experiences have shaped both my belief that dualities and dichotomies such as men's inclusion and women's exclusion fail to explain the many complexities of life and differences amongst people and also my desire to seek inclusion, rather than exclusion. I therefore sought a methodology that is inclusive in recognising complexity and difference rather than one based on exclusionary either-or dichotomies and dualities, and one that pays due respect to the particular voices of women, which has been a strong focus of my work and interest over the past forty years.

Third, Squires (1999) points out that research of women in formal political institutions has generally been within the framework of orthodox political theories. As a feminist I also wanted to locate the study within a framework that includes both feminist and political theories, which have traditionally been seen as quite separate (Squires 1999). To summarise, my methodology is influenced by three factors: a personal involvement in local government; a commitment to inclusive, participatory politics; and a desire to focus on an appropriate feminist, political framework.

It can be seen how these three factors affected my choice of methodology for the study, which is qualitative feminist research within a framework of feminist political theory. I have drawn broadly on a range of feminist theory and practice and a variety of political emphases, ensuring theory triangulation (Denzin 1978:295). My claim is that feminist political theory allows me to first, interrogate the nature of representation and participation; second, challenge exclusions in favour of inclusions; and third, incorporate diverse aspects of political theory and feminist theory. Squires (1999) contends that different political theories imply different political strategies for feminists as a way of addressing gender in politics, yet I find there are elements within each that I support and some that I reject. For example, from feminist theory a *standpoint* position is reflected in exploring the perspectives and experiences of a specific group of women in a particular context. A *diversity* position is reflected in the focus on differences between the practices of women and men within local government as well as the many differences between women. A *deconstructive* position is reflected in the objective of deconstructing and reconstructing local government. From political theory, a *liberal* position is reflected by the focus on the equal rights of women working within the formal political system. A *communitarian* position is reflected in the commitment to value the context, communities and situatedness of local government and is an underlying assumption of the study. Squires (1999:137) refers to this type of approach, where individuals may find a particular perspective 'compelling in theory' but other perspectives or approaches 'important in practice' as a 'discontinuity between theory and practice'. This is reflected in the methodology I utilise, creating a sense of ambiguity that I find both acceptable and appropriate. Furthermore, ambiguity hovers in between the dualities I am seeking to avoid. Ambiguity allows for possibilities that dualities preclude.

As is always the case, epistemology and methodology dictate the study design. Mary Fonow and Judith Cook (1991:2) assert that feminist research is reflexive, which means that it emphasises attention to assumptions about gender relations and the need for self-reflexivity on the part of the researcher. They also assert that it is 'woman-centred', involving 'the deconstruction of women's lived experiences' and 'the transformation of patriarchy and the corresponding empowerment of women' (Fonow and Cook 1991:6). This study reflects those characteristics. To reiterate, the research study is reflexive as it emphasises my assumptions about gender relations and is influenced by my self-reflection

on my own experiences in, and observations of, local government. The research problem arose directly from the experiences of women elected representatives and leaders in local government and specifically addresses some of the aspects of local government that women identify as impacting negatively on women. This research problem addresses what it means to 'dance in the lion's den' and what is unique to the 'dance'.

As outlined in the previous chapter, the objectives of the research are centred on women: to provide for women a better understanding of how local government is experienced by women leaders and how they practise their representative and leadership roles; to identify what is needed to transform local government to make it more inclusive; and to contribute to a theoretical understanding of women in local government. It can be seen from these objectives that each is potentially transformative, either for individual women or for local government. Elucidating this transformative potential is crucial for understanding the nature of the 'dance'.

This study also reflects a subjectivist stance. By this I mean that I have enunciated my own class, race, political and gender assumptions and explained how my values and life experiences have influenced the design, conduct and analysis of the study. I believe that subjectivity increases the credibility of the study without jeopardising the objectivity needed for rigorous, scholarly analysis. It also allows me to appear 'as a real, historical individual with concrete, specific desires and interests' (Harding 1987:9). This epistemological stance breaks down rigid dichotomies of subjectivity and objectivity, allowing for the ambiguity that I claim is important in facilitating the inclusion of differences.

I share characteristics with the participants, although certainly not all the important characteristics of race, class and culture. I recognise that there are racial, cultural and language differences with some of the participants, however, my previous experience with Filipino mayors suggests that our shared gender and positions in local government ensure some mutual interests. The participants are in positions that require them to speak with many different people, often from a different race, class and culture and it is my experience that people in these positions generally are assertive and confident. For these reasons, despite the cultural complexity of the research, I envisage that the differences are compensated for, or limited by, our shared characteristics.

Taking due consideration of both commonalities and differences is crucial for inclusionary politics. Differences and similarities between the participants and between the participants and councillors who operate from a masculinist perspective were both assumed and comprised a primary research focus. Reflexivity is evident in the design of the research instrument, although within the limitations of needing to cover the areas of the research focus. I took care to allow the participants to respond fully to questions, often addressing questions in a different order or in different ways.

The study takes care not to exploit or distort the voices of the participants, and a number of processes were employed to minimise the potential, including not altering the participants' words except to remove duplication and words such as 'you know' and 'um'. Nevertheless, I acknowledge that in writing up the account, I remain in the more powerful position (Olesen 2000:231). Ethical concerns including privacy, consent, confidentiality and deceit were examined and are fore-grounded throughout the study.

All the factors mentioned above demonstrate that this thesis is situated within a broad-brush feminist political theory position drawing on a range of perspectives. As is clear, diversity and inclusivity are paramount.

## **2.3 Research Methods**

The research methods reflect the epistemology and methodology outlined in the previous section. The primary data collection method was participant interviewing, although this was supported by statistical information gathered through external research and from the participants themselves, ensuring a degree of methodological triangulation (Denzin 1978:295). Given the amount of data generated through the research methods, I used the qualitative research software program QSR NUDIST to assist in analysing the data and to build theory.

### **2.3.1 Locating the den: Selection of countries**

Choosing the countries to research required much thought. As I was researching on my own and can only speak English fluently, I selected countries where English is spoken at least as a common second language to minimise the potential for misunderstanding. As women leaders are the focus of the study I wanted to select countries where there are significant numbers of women in formal leadership positions yet have differences either in women's representation, local government systems or cultural and demographic factors to highlight complexity and difference. I identified five countries<sup>2</sup> that would address those sampling criteria: England, Sweden, India and the Philippines, as well as Australia.

#### **2.3.1.1 England**

England is a constitutional monarchy with a unitary structure, and local government is under the control of the national government. There are five types of local government authorities: thirty-three county councils, two hundred and thirty-eight district councils (called either District, Borough or City Councils), thirty-six metropolitan districts (called Metropolitan Borough or City Councils), forty-seven unitaries (can be called a Council, District, City or Borough Councils) and thirty-three London Boroughs (including the Corporation of London and the Greater London Authority). Council areas are divided into wards with either a single or multiple numbers of members, and the electoral system for local government is first-past-the-post whereby the candidates with the highest number of votes are elected. This system is frequently called 'winner-take-all.' Voting is not compulsory in England and although between 1979 and 1992 the average turnout was forty-three percent, this fell to thirty percent subsequently (Local Government Analysis and Research 2006). A criticism of this system is that, as the victorious candidates do not have to gain fifty percent of the vote, and as there is such a low turnout, candidates do not necessarily have the support of the majority of the voters.

England has a comparatively high proportion of councillors, mayors and leaders who are women. The proportion of women in local government reduced from a high in the 1970s and 1980s (Coote and Pattullo 1990), but started to increase again in the late 1990s (Local Government Analysis and Research 2001). In 2004 there were nineteen thousand six

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<sup>2</sup> Initially I included The Netherlands as one of the countries I wanted to include in my research however, time constraints meant I had to reduce the number of countries to five.

hundred and fifty-seven elected representatives in local government, and five thousand seven hundred and eleven (just over twenty-nine percent) were women. This has increased from nearly twenty-eight percent in 1997. Mayors in England traditionally hold a largely ceremonial role, often rotated on an annual basis, with the position of leader of the council carrying out most of the leadership roles.

Between the late 1980s and 2000 the national government introduced substantial changes to local government intended to modernise it and make it more relevant to local people, who they believed were 'insufficiently interested in their local authorities, know little about how they are run and are poorly informed by them' (Rao 2005:44). This belief appears to have been justified by the generally low turnout of around forty percent at local government elections as mentioned earlier, with the lowest of about twenty-eight percent recorded in 1998. One of the major changes was to provide new forms of political leadership, and councils were given the option of adopting a directly-elected mayor or leader with an executive cabinet, a 'directly-elected mayor with a council manager' or alternative arrangements which generally reflected the status quo (Rao 2005:45). By 2005 eighty-one percent of councils had adopted the leader/cabinet form seemingly because it was the most similar to the previous system (Rao 2005:50).<sup>3</sup>

English local government was traditionally a direct provider of services, including welfare services, although most have now been contracted out to private providers or are run as public private partnerships. Its areas of responsibility are education, housing, planning applications, strategic planning, highways, social services, libraries, leisure and recreation, waste collection, waste disposal, environmental health and revenue collection. Unitary, Metropolitan and London Borough Councils are responsible for all local authority functions whereas County Councils and District Councils divide responsibility between them, with County Councils sharing responsibility with District Councils for education, strategic planning, highways, fire, social services, libraries and waste disposal.

### **2.3.1.2 Sweden**

Similarly to England, Sweden is a constitutional monarchy and a unitary system which is divided administratively into twenty-one counties, each with a regionally elected county council, and two hundred and eighty-nine local governments. The electoral system in Sweden, including for local government, is proportional representation. Voters can only vote for political parties, and successful candidates are drawn from party lists according to their already-determined position on the list and the proportion of the vote the party receives. Voting is not compulsory in Sweden yet, unlike in England and other countries such as the United States, turnout is high. Traditionally it has been around ninety percent but has fallen over the past fifteen years to 'about eighty-one percent' (Swedish Institute 2000).

There are just over seventy-two thousand elected representatives in local government (Swedish Institute 2000). Sweden has the highest proportion of women in local government (forty-three percent) and the second highest proportion of women leaders (twenty-five percent), although their representation at the leadership level is declining. Additionally,

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<sup>3</sup> This was not the government's preferred option, as it simply replaced the leader and committee model with a leader and cabinet, which elucidates the argument made by Leach and Wilson (2002: 665) that there has been 'considerable resistance' by local government to the government's attempts to prescribe its role.

municipal councillors in Sweden are younger than those in England, Australia and the Philippines with approximately twenty-three percent being younger than forty. Women's representation in local government is lower than in the national government, where women comprise forty-seven percent of members (United Nations Statistics Division 2007) and nine of the eleven ministers in the government (Government of Sweden 2007). The Swedes attribute this comparatively high proportion of women to the 'general political consensus ... on the principles of gender equality' (Swedish Institute Facts Sheet 2000:1). As well, although Sweden now has a centre-right majority government (Government of Sweden 2007), it previously had a long history of a social democrat majority in a coalition government. It also provides parental benefits and child-care which have given both women and men the opportunity to combine work (and political representation) with parental responsibilities. Furthermore, another reason for the high representation of women is that several of the major parties, including the Social Democrats, alternate female and male candidates on their lists.

There is a strong interest in politics in Sweden, demonstrated by a traditionally high voter turnout of around ninety percent, although this reduced to eighty-one percent in 1998. Sweden is a federation with three levels of government – national, regional (County Councils) and local (Municipal Councils), all of which are recognised in the Swedish constitution. At all levels, as electors vote for a political party rather than for individuals and the method of voting is proportional, there are representatives from seven political parties.

Local government in Sweden is a direct provider of welfare services through its twenty-two County Councils and two hundred and eighty-nine Municipal Councils, which have some separate and some shared obligatory or voluntary responsibilities. Obligatory responsibilities for County Councils are health care, medical services and dental care for children and young persons aged up to twenty years, and their voluntary responsibilities are support for the cultural sector and education. Obligatory responsibilities for Municipal Councils are social welfare (care of the elderly, disabled, individual and family care), child-care, compulsory schools, upper secondary (non-compulsory) schools, planning and building, environmental and health protection, waste disposal and management, water and sewerage, rescue services, civil defence and libraries. Their voluntary responsibilities are leisure and cultural affairs, technical services, energy supply, street repairs and housing. Both levels share an obligatory responsibility for regional and local public transport (Swedish Government Offices 1998:10).

### **2.3.1.3 India**

India has a colonial past but is now a republic with a parliamentary system of government and a quasi-federal structure with a national government, twenty-eight states and seven union territories. Local governments are subject to those state governments although mandated in the Indian constitution. The local government structure is complex, with three grades of urban and three tiers of rural local governments. The urban local governments are Municipal Corporations for cities with populations of more than three hundred thousand, Municipal Councils for towns smaller than this and Nagar Panchayats for villages in transition to becoming towns. Altogether there are three thousand seven hundred and twenty-three urban local bodies (Information Centre on Local Governance in India 2009). The rural local governments are Village Panchayats at the village level, block Panchayat Samiti for about one hundred villages and a District Council for a district comprising about

one thousand villages. There are two hundred and thirty-seven thousand, three hundred and eighty-four rural bodies which have no independent funds or resources but are funded by state governments and make decisions on spending these funds (Information Centre on Local Governance in India 2009).

Mayors in Municipal Corporations have little real power as executive power is vested in the Commissioner, who is appointed by the State government. In contrast to this, in Municipal Councils the President has significant executive power and is either elected by the councillors or in some cases, directly by the voters.

The method of voting in India is first-past-the-post, and although comprehensive and historical data are not available on the number or gender of elected representatives in local government in India, it is suggested that there are over one million women (Palnitkar 2000). In the urban councils, in 2000 a third of the local government representatives (over sixty-eight thousand) were women. In regard to rural councils, in 2004 there were eight hundred and ninety thousand six hundred and twenty-three women (nearly forty-one percent), which had increased from just over thirty-one percent in 2000. India has a comparatively high proportion of women councillors and mayors in urban local government and in 2000 had the highest proportion in Asia and the Pacific. This might seem surprising considering several demographic factors: India is one of only three countries<sup>4</sup> where women comprise less than fifty percent of the population (forty-eight percent) although this varies across India, ranging from a low of forty percent to a high of fifty-one percent in different states (Palnitkar 2000). As well, whilst the literacy rate in India is fifty-two percent, for women it is thirty-nine percent and women comprise only twenty-eight percent of the labour force. However, although women have only had the right to vote since Independence in 1947, Indian women have been active publicly and politically since the nineteenth century and have been 'organising themselves to fight for their rights in different walks of life' since then (Palnitkar 2000:7). Nevertheless, the high proportion of women in local government is due almost entirely to the mandated reservation of one third of seats in local government for women (including women from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes) introduced in 1993 (Nanivadekar 2005). By comparison, women comprise less than seven percent in the state or national governments, where there is no quota reserved for women.<sup>5</sup>

In India, local government has obligatory and discretionary functions, and its obligatory functions include responsibility for planning, water supply, street lighting, primary health and education, maintenance of roads and buildings and sanitation and sewerage, maintenance and support of public hospitals, establishment and maintenance of primary schools.

#### **2.3.1.4 The Philippines**

The Philippines also has a colonial past and is now a republic with a presidential system, influenced largely by the American takeover of colonial rule from Spain in the early twentieth century. However, the Philippines has a unitary structure with three levels of

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<sup>4</sup> The other two countries are China and Rwanda with the latter resulting from support from the international community to boost women's involvement in politics, following the 1994 genocide.

<sup>5</sup> The lack of a similar quota for the state and national governments has been a contentious issue in India over the past fifteen years and several unsuccessful attempts have been made to introduce one. However, as Mehda Nanivadekar (2005:2) explains, a quota in local government posed no 'direct threat to the interests of male members of Parliament and State legislatures' whereas if introduced into these assemblies it would threaten 'their survival'.



government beneath the national government: provincial cities (136), municipalities (1,495) and barangays or villages (42,008)<sup>6</sup> which are grouped into seventeen regions on the basis of their geographical location and are guaranteed in the constitution (Department of Local Government and the Interior 2009). The constitution also created three separate political units – the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority, Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao and the Cordillera Administrative Region. Elections for these four levels of government occur simultaneously, and the method of voting is first-past-the-post. As mentioned earlier, this method of voting does not require elected representatives to receive fifty percent of the vote or indeed a specific quota as occurs under proportional representation. Apart from the usual criticism that the person elected may well not have the support of most of the people, in the Philippines it has another peculiarity that has caused significant criticism. Voters have to write the names of the candidates they want on the ballot paper themselves, and this can mean writing down anywhere between thirty-two and forty-four names (Rocamora 1998).

Since the 1980s, women have been representatives in local government in the Philippines and their numbers are steadily increasing. The Philippines in 2000 had the second highest proportion of women mayors in Asia and the Pacific (18%) with an unusual higher proportion of mayors than councillors ((16.6% or 2,102). Mayors in the Philippines are directly elected by the citizens<sup>7</sup> and are the chief executives of the council, giving the mayors considerable powers and responsibilities that mayors in England, Sweden, India and Australia do not have. However, the significant increase of women mayors that occurred in the 1998 election is credited largely to legislation enacted under Cory Aquino's government in 1987. This set a limit of three terms or nine years in the same position without a break (Domingo-Tapales 2000:13). Kinship is a significant factor in Filipino politics and many, although not all, of the mayors elected in 1998 were the wives of former mayors who had to stand down for at least one term. A small proportion of those elected were women who had held positions in Congress at the national level for three terms (Domingo-Tapales 2000:16). Both these groups of women are often referred to as 'breakers' (Domingo-Tapales 2000:14), although expectations that those who took over from their husbands would vacate those positions after one term for their husbands were not realised.

The broad responsibilities of local government are efficient service delivery, management of the environment, economic development and poverty alleviation.

### **2.3.1.5 Australia**

Similar to India and the Philippines, Australia has a colonial past, which has partly influenced its development. It is a constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary system of government based on the Westminster model, however it has a federal structure drawn from the United States comprising three levels of government – national, state and local. Local government is not recognised in the Australian constitution and, as in India, is subject to the control of six state and one territory governments. It receives funds from both the federal and state governments in the form of grants, and raises income through rates on property and various fees and charges.

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<sup>6</sup> Barangays are communal units organised around recognisable neighbourhood entities coupled with church functions. This is a Filipino term replacing the former colonial Spanish term of 'barrio' (Stevens 2006).

<sup>7</sup> Elections for the national, state and local government are held simultaneously in the Philippines.

In 2005 there were seven hundred and three local governments in Australia, and seventy-seven percent of those were in regional or rural areas (Department of Transport and Regional Services 2005)<sup>8</sup>. As local government is subject to other governments, there are seven different systems of local government in Australia<sup>9</sup>, and whilst their responsibilities are largely the same, there are significant differences in their electoral arrangements and the nature and funding of elected representatives. All local governments are elected for four year terms, but in Western Australia and Tasmania, half the council is elected every two years. The voting system in New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania is proportional representation, in Queensland and Western Australia it is first-past-the-post, and in the Northern Territory it is preferential. Even the conduct of elections is different as voting is by postal voting only in South Australia and Tasmania, and councils in Western Australia and Victoria can choose to have only postal voting. In the other states voting is by ballot supplemented by postal voting where voters are unable to attend polling booths (Department of Transport and Regional Services 2005). Leaders of the council are either mayors (generally the larger, urban or regional councils) or shire presidents (smaller rural councils). Mayors or presidents may be elected either directly by the people or by the other elected representatives. A popularly elected mayor or president normally serves for the full term of the council whilst councillor elections of a mayor or president generally occur annually.

Australia has a long history of women's involvement in local government and comparatively high and increasing representation of women, although this varies across the country. In 2005 there were about six thousand five hundred and sixty-six councillors in Australia and one thousand eight hundred and twenty-five (just under twenty-eight percent) were women<sup>10</sup>. In 2004 eighteen percent of mayors or presidents were women (Irwin 2004), but this varies from state to state, ranging from thirty percent in Victoria to ten percent in New South Wales (Irwin 2004)<sup>11</sup>. Part of the explanation for the high representation of women in Victoria is that there has been a sustained campaign to increase the number of women in local government and the state government strongly supports that goal<sup>12</sup>.

Also reflecting its colonial past, local government responsibilities in Australia are narrower than in other countries,<sup>13</sup> generally covering planning, health and building, recreation and leisure, sewerage and waste management, roads and community services. In some states, some local governments have responsibility for provision of water and some emergency services including flood mitigation and rural fire services. However, increasingly throughout Australia, local government is taking on greater responsibility for community services, cultural and economic development and security.

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<sup>8</sup> Over the past two decades there has been a significant rationalisation of local governments in several states, predominantly NSW and Victoria and this is likely to continue. In 2008 the number of local governments in Queensland was reduced through amalgamation from 157 to 73.

<sup>9</sup> There are none in the ACT.

<sup>10</sup> The number is probably slightly higher because only 683 councils provided this data.

<sup>11</sup> There was a significant reduction of women leaders in New South Wales from 15% in 2000 (Irwin 2000), and there has been no research to establish the reasons for this.

<sup>12</sup> The state government provides a tally room for women for local government elections in that state.

<sup>13</sup> Local government in Australia preceded state governments and provided basic services to property owners and included roads, garbage removal and provision of water. They were constituted under six colonial governments and when federation occurred were located in state government constitutions.

### 2.3.2 Locating the dancers: Selection of participants

In selecting participants I had to make choices about the people to include in my study and when and where to conduct the research. I made some initial choices but found that I had to modify these as I discovered new information, constantly justifying those choices and assessing their impact on the study.

Qualitative research employs sampling procedures that are 'less structured, less quantitative and less strict' than in quantitative research (Sarantakos 1993:140). As the focus of my study is women leaders in local government and I am not seeking to generalise from their experiences, I was not looking for a statistically representative sample, which would be appropriate in quantitative research. Nevertheless, I wanted to interview enough participants, both in the study as a whole and in each country, to allow for as many differences and similarities as possible to emerge and for saturation to occur. I decided that ten participants in each country, with a total of fifty would enable that to happen. I then employed a purposive sampling process within the group of women leaders whereby I selected participants I considered relevant to the research topic (Sarantakos 1993). That is, these participants were women identified as leaders in local government by individuals working within local government organisations in their countries. They hold different formal leadership positions and work in the different types of local government found in each country.

Initially I had thought the women I would interview would be mayors in municipal councils, however, it became clear as I progressed that there were differences in the systems of local government that I should not ignore. As mentioned earlier, the role of mayors varies from country to country.<sup>14</sup> For example, a mayor in England was, until 2004, very much a ceremonial position and leaders of the council and of the three major political party groups have a stronger political leadership role. In England and Sweden there are several layers of local government and it became clear that simply focusing on municipal councils would exclude women who are certainly seen as leaders in the local government arena. There were also two women who had recently been very strong leaders in local government but had moved on to positions in their national government, although still with a strong local government orientation. Although the focus remained on leaders, my assumptions about leaders changed and I selected participants from a broader group, including participants from different layers of local government and different positions. The profile of the participants is attached at Appendix 1.

Prior to contacting any participants, I gained approval from Southern Cross University's Research Ethics Committee for my data collection, including the Informed Consent for participants. My initial source of interviewees was by email contact with people who work in local government organisations in those countries. I had previously met my prime contact in India at the research meetings UNESCAP conducted for the researchers on its project mentioned in Chapter 1. Similarly I had met my prime contact for the Philippines whilst working with the Lady Mayors' Association of the Philippines on the project also mentioned in Chapter 1. In England and Sweden I located my prime contacts through the Internet. The organisations either provided me with a list of names and contact details, gave

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<sup>14</sup> In Sweden the leading position in municipal councils is the chairman of the executive committee of the municipal council which is equivalent to, and often described as, the mayor, so throughout this thesis I have used the term mayor to describe these Swedish leaders.

me the name and contact details for another person who would be able to help or agreed to identify women but suggested I contact them a month before my arrival in the country. In the case of England and Sweden I was sent lists very quickly and contacted women directly by email advising them of my research, when I would be in their country and seeking their agreement to participate (Appendix 2). My prime contacts in India and the Philippines contacted the women themselves because of 'local protocol'. I realised that they would be effectively selecting the participants, however, they were in a better position to identify women leaders in their countries so I respected their wishes. I asked them to give each woman they contacted a copy of my letter and to seek participants from as broad a range as possible. In Australia I asked the local government associations to provide me with a list of women mayors and from that list selected two women from each of the states of New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland, which have larger populations and one each from Tasmania, South Australia and the Northern Territory, sampling to ensure that both urban and rural differences were included. I approached these women directly, sending them a letter either by email or fax.

I started the interviews in England and proceeded to Sweden, India and the Philippines. As an Australian, it might have seemed more logical to start in the Philippines and work through to England. However, I wanted to start in a country with English as a first language so I could more easily identify any ambiguity or difficulty with the schedule of questions. I estimated initially that I would need to spend ten days in each overseas country to allow for distance, some further research on local government in each country and the interviews themselves. As the participants were all women with busy lives and many competing demands for their time I arranged the interview appointments at times and locations convenient to them within the ten days I had allocated for each country. In England I travelled to the participants' cities or towns and generally interviewed them in their offices. The one exception was a participant from South Somerset, who collected me from the railway station some miles away and the interview was held in her home. During the afternoon and evening she took me with her whilst she attended a Parish Council meeting and carried out some door-to-door surveying, which gave me an unusual opportunity to observe her at work.

In Sweden I travelled out of Stockholm to interview three women, one in the far north and two in the south. The rest I interviewed either at the local government or county council headquarters in Stockholm or at the apartment where I stayed in the heart of Stockholm. In India I interviewed two of the participants at the All-India Institute for Local Government in Mumbai and two in their offices. Unfortunately I could only interview four, not ten, women and a further three were interviewed later in Thailand during a conference. My contact in Manila organised for most of the Filipina participants to come to Manila while I was there, although I travelled to one province where I interviewed a further two at the office of the mayor of one of the councils. I interviewed the Australian participants by phone, at their request generally in the evening at home.

Selecting participants was messy and time-consuming, consisting of countless emails, faxes and phone-calls over a period of months starting nine weeks prior to the first interview, continuing throughout my travel and, in the case of the Indian participants, even after I returned to Australia. There were unavoidable last minute changes that had to be made in response to the needs and availability of the participants, with some dropping out and leaving me scrambling to locate and interview replacements. The participants I finally

interviewed were all seen as leaders within local government in their countries but held different positions. However, I only managed to interview eight Indian participants, and decided to include an additional Australian woman, giving me a total of forty-nine participants overall.

Using email as the primary means of contact with the English and Swedish participants was an important and enjoyable part of the process because inevitably it opened up a dialogue with the participant, which meant that there was a relationship established before the interview. Several of the participants went to great lengths to facilitate my travel to and in their areas, providing me with transport schedules, recommending accommodation and in one case offering accommodation in her home. However, email was not a reliable means of contact with some of the participants in India and the Philippines, as not all have access. Even faxes are not necessarily reliable or available. For example, one of the Filipino mayors I interviewed was proud that, due to her efforts, a landline had recently been provided to her island community.

### **2.3.3 Data collection**

The data collection methods I chose were guided generally by the methodology and scope of the study, as well as by the constraints of time, location and funding. I was seeking to explore specific experiences and perceptions of a range of women from different countries, cultures and systems of local government. This meant that the data collection methods needed to be controlled to the extent that each participant covered the specific areas being explored, yet still be sufficiently open and flexible to allow a cooperative approach, with each participant being able to speak in her own words (Reinharz 1992). As it was to be a comparative analysis, I also needed to obtain demographic information on each participant.

I did not have the opportunity to spend the prolonged period of time with participants that would be required if I were working within an ethnographic framework, so the primary means of collecting information I chose were semi-structured interviews in a face-to-face situation with all except the Australian participants. Although I would have preferred to interview each participant in a face-to-face situation, this was not possible in Australia due to travel costs. In the case of these participants I interviewed them by phone and followed the same format as the face-to-face interviews.

Semi-structured interviews are a qualitative data-collection method which differs from survey research or structured interviewing in that it includes 'free interaction between the researcher and the interviewee' (Reinharz 1992:18). It was particularly appropriate as it allowed me to explore the participants' views of their realities, to generate theory and to make full use of differences amongst the participants (Reinharz 1992). This style of interviewing was also consistent with my interest in 'avoiding control' over the participants and in 'developing a sense of connectedness' with them (Reinharz 1992:20).

To ensure that the research issues were covered by each participant, I developed a schedule of open questions (Appendix 3) on a broad range of topics related, although not necessarily directly, to representation, power, leadership and difference. In developing the question schedule, I took advice from a woman who had interviewed women in depth on a complex

research question<sup>15</sup> and I piloted the questions by phone interviews with a number of women in local government in Australia. As a result of the feedback the questions were modified. For example, I found that asking about power in local government was too broad and had to refine that question by asking for examples of power used in positive and negative ways and then asking a question about their own power. Although it would have been preferable to pilot the questions on women from different races and cultures it was not possible. However, as the questions were open and focused on the women's experiences in, and perspectives of, what is essentially their work, the potential for bias was reduced. Where it became evident that a participant had difficulty in understanding a question I was able to clarify what was intended using appropriate language. The schedule of questions was supported by a participant information sheet (Appendix 4), which allowed me to compare the participants' responses according to a number of factors including country, position and system of local government.

Each interview started with me explaining the purpose of the research and what would happen after the interview, including the participant's role in it. I then provided her with an opportunity to ask any questions about the research or me. Some participants wanted to ask questions, others did not. I then asked the participant to read and sign the Informed Consent form, which formalised what had already been explained to them in my initial contact letter and at the commencement of the interview. I also asked the participants to provide a pseudonym for me to use to protect their privacy, which is consistent with my commitment to ensure the privacy of the participants. A few did, but most said they would leave the choice of pseudonym to me. Several participants were comfortable with being quoted directly in their own names. I explained I would not do this without their express permission.

After completing the participant information sheet, I then asked the participant to tell me about her city or town. In most cases this led to a lengthy discussion covering a broad range of issues. Often the participant made comments relevant to subsequent questions, so I either did not need to ask some questions or I asked them in a different order. I also listened carefully to the participants and introduced new questions when necessary or desirable as the interview proceeded. This meant that I, the participant and the study became participant oriented (Reinharz 1992). In recognition of the participant's generosity in sharing her time and experiences with me after the interview I gave her an Australian Aboriginal coaster for her office and a bookmark from the rainforests in the area where I live.

With the participants' permission I recorded the interviews, which took between one and one and a half hours. The tapes were then sent to a woman in Australia who is experienced in transcribing, and after I returned home I checked the transcripts against the tapes. I found this a particularly useful and important part of the process. As it occurred some months after the interviews (with the exception of the Australian participants) it assisted me to re-immense myself in the research, making notes where appropriate. Each overseas participant permitted me to take her photograph and each Australian woman sent me one, so as I was checking the transcripts I had their faces in front of me. This assisted me in

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<sup>15</sup> Fran Porter, a researcher in Northern Ireland, has had substantial experience in semi-structured interviews with women and she gave me comments on both question design and interviewing based on her experiences. This helped me to clarify my question design and research approach.

identifying the participant in the case of those I had interviewed face-to-face or to put a face to the tapes of the Australian women. Hearing their voices and seeing their faces was like being there and/or talking with them again.

It seems to me that there are several benefits from a research perspective in recording an interview. The tape is there to replay whenever necessary, the researcher is not abbreviating and therefore interpreting and excluding data at the interview stage and it is possible to hear not only what the participant is saying but also how she is saying it. This provides much richer data and contexts for analysis and given the time between interviews and my checking the transcripts, it was almost essential. The significance of understanding the local government context became very apparent in this process of checking the transcripts against the tapes, as I was able to make many corrections of misunderstandings or mishearing by the woman who transcribed the tapes.

I then emailed or faxed the transcripts to the participants, asking them to make corrections and changes if they wanted to within six weeks. I did this for a number of reasons. It gave the participants an opportunity at their leisure and in their own environments to reflect on what they had said and to either add, remove or clarify comments, giving them some more control over their own information. It also minimised the chances of my misunderstanding or misinterpreting what they had said. This was time-consuming, as I had to recontact many of the participants due to timing or other problems. In some cases I did not hear back from the participants and in several cases I was not able to send the transcripts to them. Only a couple of the Indian participants had email access. Two of their fax numbers simply did not work. International phone calls are expensive and made more difficult by the different time zones and after many attempts with no answer I simply gave up. All my attempts to contact these participants through my initial contact in India were unsuccessful.

The changes made by the participants were generally editorial in nature with some participants removing 'ums' and similar expressions, but many of the participants simply said they were happy with the transcript as it was.

#### **2.3.4 Data analysis**

After the transcripts were approved or changed by the participants or attempts to receive feedback had failed I then entered the final transcripts into QSR NUD\*IST, a software program developed to assist in managing and analysing data that is relatively unstructured and not appropriate to reduce to numbers (Richards 2000).<sup>16</sup> Software programs are fast and efficient research tools. They are a matter of concern to some feminist researchers apparently because they suggest a reliance on technology rather than the data (Thompson & Barrett 1997). However, they cannot *do* the analysis and the researcher must still 'know what needs to be done and do it' (Weitzman 2000). I thought it was most appropriate in this particular context given the complexity and size of the research data (Richards 2000). If I had not used such a program the analysis would have been unwieldy and much more time-consuming. I found that NUD\*IST's facilities for coding and recoding, editing, recording of reflective notes, storage of the transcripts, and text and node searching enabled me to manage, sort, explore and compare the data with relative ease. I also found it

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<sup>16</sup> This program has now been replaced by a program called NVivo, which is simply an updated version with some additional capacity.

particularly useful for identifying emerging themes in my analysis of the data and testing them for similarities and differences on a range of demographic factors.

## 2.4 Reflection on Research Methods

By its very nature qualitative research is never straightforward and uncomplicated. The methodology, scope and focus of my research made it particularly complex and challenging for a researcher working outside her country in different cultures, whether in locating appropriate willing participants, conducting interviews, checking and verifying data or finally analysing it.

It became clear during my analysis that I underestimated the complexity of my research in including five countries with very different systems of local government, forty-nine participants, a broad interpretation of formal leadership positions in local government and a wide range of issues to explore. In particular, I underestimated the complexity – and perhaps naïveté on my part – of attempting to weigh western concepts with practice in countries with vastly different histories, cultures and values. Furthermore, whilst I was aware at the start of my research that significant reform of local government was occurring in many countries, including the introduction or extension of direct election of mayors,<sup>17</sup> I had not anticipated the potential significance of this for my research. Sweden and England are two countries among the small minority of European countries which at this stage have been slow to move towards direct election of mayors, for reasons that will emerge in Chapter 5. On reflection, including the Netherlands, which has moved strongly to implement direct election, and excluding England, would have assisted my analysis of leadership.

Moreover, I underestimated the complexity of local government in India with four different levels of local government and over one million women elected representatives. A weakness of my research is that the seven Indian women I interviewed were all involved in municipal corporations and are highly educated women from wealthy families and/or the higher castes. This ignores the perspectives and experience of significant groups of women with very different characteristics including women from rural local governments, and in particular the Panchayati Raj, Scheduled Castes (SC) and Other Backward Classes (OBC).<sup>18</sup> There is not a substantial body of literature on women in local government in India, and much of the recent literature is on the impact and effectiveness of women in the Panchayati Raj.

A further weakness is that of attempting to cover such a wide range of issues, particularly those in regard to representation, power, leadership and difference, within time-limited interviews. On reflection, I realise that there was simply not enough time to cover each in the depth I would have preferred. In any future research on women leaders I would restrict the range of issues covered, although in doing so important aspects of their lives and practice might be excluded. Otherwise I would spend much more time with the interviewees, although this is difficult to manage given the busy lives they lead.

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<sup>17</sup> This is where the citizens of a local government area who are eligible to vote elect the mayor directly rather than having the mayor elected by the members of the council, which was the traditional method in many countries.

<sup>18</sup> ‘Other Backward Classes’ account for 52 percent of India’s population. They belong to kinship groups that are entitled to certain benefits because they are considered disadvantaged, although less so than ‘scheduled castes’ (previously referred to as untouchables) and ‘scheduled tribes’ (Mrinal Pande 2000).



I also underestimated the importance of having a deep understanding of the different cultural contexts in the countries within which the women are located. Although I addressed this as well as possible by researching the literature widely to gain a better understanding, my research was limited to literature in English. In any future cross-cultural study I would seek to establish a group of researchers from each country in the study to overcome some of the limitations of language and cultural understanding. On reflection, I also underestimated the significance of the initial contact and in hindsight would have put more time and effort into locating appropriate contacts in India and taken more care in explaining to those contacts the nature of the research and the requirements of the research process.

Finally, I underestimated the time and financial costs in interviewing ten participants in each country bearing in mind distance, transport, communication infrastructure and the realities of daily life for leaders in local government. Similarly, I failed to appreciate fully the implications of different currency exchange rates. In the future I would not undertake such costly research on my own and without substantial funding.

## **2.5 Summary**

In this chapter I have justified the methodology as qualitative feminist research and the location of the research problem within a framework of feminist political theory in that it is on women, for women and arising from the experiences of women in local government in a number of countries. I have explained the research methods and how they meet the requirements of qualitative feminist research, and have provided justification for the selection of countries, participants and data collection and analysis.

## Chapter 3: The Nature of the Dance: Representing Others in Local Government

With what qualities are women entering into the political arena and public life in a world where politics has been characterized by ills such as corruption, nepotism, dishonesty, sectarianism etc? Are women coming in to endorse and fit in the system or we are coming in with human qualities such as kindness, love, sympathy, peace, reconciliation, which have been lacking all this time especially in Africa? Only when politics is played differently shall we show that society has been missing women's participation all along (Matembe in Jahan 1997:14).

### 3.1 Introduction

The women in this study are, or were until recently, leaders in local government, reaching the highest formal leadership positions in a system of representative government still dominated by men. They were elected as representatives by their constituents and as mayors, or equivalent leadership positions in local government, either by their constituents directly or by the elected members of their municipalities. They are thus arguably powerful players in formal politics at the local level as their positions enable them to influence agendas, decisions and outcomes for their communities and the culture of local government itself. However, feminists are divided on the question of whether women should seek inclusion in formal political institutions and if so, under what terms. Three of the key issues in the debate, implicit in Miria Matembe's (in Jahan 1997) quote at the beginning of this chapter, are whether the under-representation of women in our representative governments matters, whether women should pursue a strategy of seeking inclusion within them and if so, with what purpose. Whilst these issues are also fundamental to the following chapters, in this chapter I draw on representation theory and the interviewees' perspectives and practice to investigate them in local government, thus weighing theory with practice at the local level.

In the first part of the chapter, I consider conceptions of representation and their implications for strategies concerning the engagement of women in formal politics. I contrast conceptions that focus on either what is being represented or who the representatives are, with conceptions of representation as an act (Pitkin 1967, Phillips 1994a), as a 'differentiated relationship among plural actors' (Young 2000:127) and with Anne Phillips' (1995, 1996) conception of a 'politics of ideas *and* presence'. Iris Young's (2000) perspective emphasises the relational nature of representation. On the other hand, Phillips incorporates what is being represented and who the representatives are, thus reflecting inclusion and avoiding dichotomies which assume that one is more important in elected representatives than another. Next, I explore whether the perspectives and practice of the interviewees fit within a framework of these conceptions and feminist arguments for gender parity in political representatives. Finally, I explore the impact of their experience as representatives on the women leaders themselves, and hence on their capacity to represent others..

I contend that representation as revealed by the interviewees is contextual and multi-layered, similar to an onion where another layer is revealed as one is removed, reflecting the influence of different cultures, ideologies and local government systems as well as

personal values and experience. In general, the practice described by the interviewees challenges any notion of dichotomous either-or classification. It fits within Phillips' conception of representation as a politics of both ideas and presence, and also Iris Young's conception of it as a 'differentiated relationship among plural actors' who include not only the represented and other representatives but also those within the administrative organisations of local government. I contend further that the practice of the interviewees from India, the Philippines and Australia discloses the limitation of theories based either on western ideas or on politics at the national level. Also, whilst none of the representatives perceive their role as only, or indeed mostly, to represent women, I argue that in practice most of them do. This demonstrates that the gender of the representatives *does* matter, thereby lending qualified weight to feminist arguments for increased representation of women in local government on the basis of role models, justice, interests and a revitalised democracy. The relationships the interviewees develop and maintain with their constituents vary considerably, influenced by factors such as their values, ideology, race, culture and class. I argue that these relationships are differentiated and transformative for many of the women, leading to changed social perspectives which enable them to form a 'composite picture of social processes' (Young 2000:139) and represent social groups to which they do not belong. This elucidates the way that identities and interests are negotiated and constituted within politics itself (Mouffe 1996). It supports not only a strategy of displacement, whereby women seek inclusion within local government in order to transform it, but also arguments for increased representation of women and women leaders in local government. I turn now to consider conceptions of representation in more detail.

### **3.2 Political Representation**

Orthodox political theory suggests that elected representatives represent beliefs, constituencies, interests or identities (Squires 1999), which Michael Marsh and Pippa Norris (1997) describe as ideological, geographic, functional and social representation respectively. Representation of beliefs suggests a conception of representation as ideological, reflected in membership of political parties and support for contrasting political platforms through electoral campaigns (Marsh and Norris 1997). Marsh and Norris refer to this as 'representation from above' (1997:154). They contrast this with geographical representation of constituencies, where representatives 'act in ways consistent with the opinions of their citizens' with 'low levels of party discipline and minimal ideological manifestos', which they describe as 'representation from below' (1997:155). Representation of interests generates a conception of functional representation, where representatives are members of, and act as 'spokes people for, interest groups and social movements' whose members are distinct from those of political parties and constituency-dwellers (Squires 1999:203). These conceptions create an image of representation as detached and almost impersonal, with representatives involved in the political processes of developing and implementing policies and programs and making objective decisions in the best interests of those they represent. They reflect an orthodox and predominantly liberal ideology which assumes that gender and other factors such as race and class are, or should be, irrelevant thus ignoring the question of who the representatives are. In contrast to these conceptions, representation of identities or descriptive representation (Mansfield 1999) generates a conception of 'social representation' where representatives represent social groups, such as those based on gender, race and sexuality, with whom they share common

experiences, common commitments and values (Squires 1999:203). Such a conception draws attention to the composition of representative bodies.

Hanna Pitkin (1967) argues that focusing on the composition of elected bodies is irrelevant and gives undue weight to orthodox conceptions of representation. She conceives representation as meaning that representatives act 'in the interests of the represented, in a manner responsive to them' (1967:209) thus it is what the representatives do that is more important. Presumably this idea of representation means in terms of the processes of determining policy and decision-making, and whether those policies and decisions reflect the interests of the represented. Although Phillips (1994b) does not agree with Pitkin that who the representatives are is irrelevant, she supports Pitkin's argument that what representatives do is important. Actions are important, however Pitkin's conception of representation fails to acknowledge the complexity of political representation as it ignores questions about who determines the interests of the represented and how, and to which of the many competing interests, the representatives should respond. She therefore fails to address crucial issues about structures of power and the way they shape political life, which will be investigated in more depth in the next chapter. Pitkin also disregards questions of inequality as pointed out by Phillips (1996).

This notion of interests in many ways lies at the heart of feminist debate on representation. Young (2000) for example, challenges orthodox conceptions of representing interests, including those of women, as she claims that interests are 'self-referring', frequently conflict and are formed by a commitment to beliefs and values which are contestable and varied. This raises questions about whose interests are likely to be represented in systems that are never value-free (2000:134). Furthermore, Phillips (1998) argues that interests are fluid and always in the process of forming and reforming, thus not necessarily easy to identify and address. From a slightly different perspective, Virginia Sapiro (1998:168) affirms Phillips' point about the difficulty of identifying interests in political practice by pointing out that in regard to women's interests 'laws and policies need not have "women" in the title or text'. What may not seem to be in the interest of women at first glance is seen to be with a deeper and more informed reading of the issue.

Irene Diamond and Nancy Hartsock (1998:196) seek to replace the notion of interests with needs. They agree with Christian Bay that the language of interests implicitly supports the 'right of the strong to prevail in every contest' and fails to recognise that human beings have wants and needs, not necessarily interests, with women and men having many different wants and needs (Bay in Diamond and Hartsock 1981:719). Diamond and Hartsock consider that representative institutions cannot include women's needs and therefore reject a strategy of inclusion, advocating instead involvement within informal organisations and participatory, rather than representative, processes. This assumes representative institutions are incapable of change and also ignores the way that some voices are louder and others are silenced, even in participatory processes. Ultimately, some speak for others. However, Anna Jónasdóttir criticises Diamond and Hartsock's argument for different reasons as she considers their rejection of interests reflects a one-sided picture (1985:47). Jónasdóttir asserts that the notion of interests is also about agency, and the striving of individuals and groups in a community to ensure their voices are present in decisions that shape their communities. She asserts further that needs are about preferences, desires and wants that 'give strength and meaning to agency' (1985:57). Rather than focusing solely on needs or interests, Jónasdóttir considers the two as 'different layers of

social existence' and that needs should be 'mediated by interests' in a participatory democracy (1985:57). I agree with Jónasdóttir that needs and interests are not dichotomous but different layers of social existence, and that ideally, needs should be mediated by interests. Nevertheless, both are problematic if seen as the only basis for representation as neither addresses adequately the crucial question of who decides which needs or interests should be represented.

Ideological and functional representation comprise what Anne Phillips (1996) describes as 'the politics of ideas', where the focus is on what people represent, reflected in the articulation and representation of specific policies, with accountability paramount through regular elections. Phillips refers to social representation as 'the politics of presence', where the focus is on the representatives themselves, their identities and the degree of shared experience with the social groups they represent. Authenticity, rather than accountability, is privileged under this conception. Phillips (1996:142) argues that conceptions of representation as based on either ideas or presence are not only dichotomous but also subordinate one to the other and assume that ideas and interests are 'relatively unproblematic'. Rather than seeing them separately, Phillips argues that representation contains elements of both, thus constituting a politics of ideas *and* presence that acknowledges the importance of both accountability and authenticity rather than privileging one over the other.

Young (2000:127), on the other hand, argues that representation is more properly understood if it is conceived in terms of the character of the relationships between representatives and their constituents, with representatives being 'connected to constituents in determinate ways'. She maintains that there is always a separation between representatives and those they represent, so no person can 'stand for and speak as a plurality of other persons' (2000:127). Phillips (1998:142) argues that a presumption that one has to be a member of a social group 'to understand or represent that group's interest' is false, as is any assumption that all members of a group think the same. Nevertheless, Young is rightly drawing attention to these issues (which will be explored in greater depth in Chapter 6). As she points out, representative systems

... sometimes fail to be sufficiently democratic not because the representatives fail to stand for the will of the constituents, but because they have lost connection with them. In modern mass democracies it is indeed easy to sever relations between representatives and constituents and difficult to maintain them (Young 2000:128).

Young's argument is that representatives, through maintaining connection with constituents, of necessity communicate with people with different perspectives and experiences from their own. This experience of difference, maintained over time, can lead to a transformation from 'an initial self-regarding stance to a more objective appeal to justice' (2000:50). In other words, sustained contact facilitates understanding, empathy and inclusive political decision-making. Young's conception thus both emphasises the relational nature of representation and also offers the potential for change that transformational feminists see as essential and is a focus of this thesis.

These conceptions of representation lie at the heart of much feminist debate about whether women should seek gender parity in formal politics. If elected representatives claim to represent ideology or interests then the gender of the representatives may not matter at all. The representatives are simply expected to represent pre-formed and clearly articulated interests and ideas for which they are held accountable through the electoral process

(Phillips 1994a). If elected representatives claim to represent women or women's interests, then the case for gender parity in political representatives may appear to be stronger. However, questions are then raised as to the degree to which the women elected, who generally come from a narrow demographic range in terms of characteristics such as gender, age, education, class and caste, can represent the diversity of women in the community (Phillips 1998). If they cannot represent women's interests, then arguments for gender parity are conceivably weakened, although this is a contestable position which will be interrogated throughout this thesis.

These different conceptions of representation also connote different feminist strategies in regard to women's involvement in representative institutions. Acceptance of a conception of representation as functional representation suggests a strategy of inclusion whereby women seek equality within these institutions on the same terms as men. Acceptance of a conception of representation as social representation suggests either a strategy of reversal, rejecting engagement with representative institutions, or a strategy of displacement whereby women seek inclusion in representative institutions in order to transform them.

In this section I have reviewed orthodox and alternative conceptions of representation and their implications for women's engagement in formal politics. I contend that orthodox conceptions of representation assume that gender and other factors such as race and class are irrelevant, thereby reflecting a liberal ideology and portray political representation as an impersonal process. Furthermore, whilst a conception of representation as an act does foreground the actions of representatives, it fails to address important questions about power and equality. I have argued that Phillips' conception of representation as a politics of ideas and presence is inclusive of both functional and social representation, thus avoiding dichotomous classification which privileges one over the other. I have argued further that Young's (2000) conception of representation as a relationship between the representatives and those represented emphasises the relational nature of representation and offers the potential for transformation that many feminists see as essential. I turn now to investigate the perspectives and experiences of the interviewees in the context of these conceptions of representation and feminist debates concerning them, thus weighing practice with theory.

### **3.3 The Dancers' Perspectives of Representation**

The interviewees are concerned with the practicalities of their work, which they describe as having become the central and almost all-consuming preoccupation of their lives. For most, theoretical conceptions of representation are not something they have spent time thinking about as they are too busy carrying out their representative responsibilities. However, what emerge when given an opportunity to explain their representation are women 'speaking from their own historical, cultural, racial, social and institutional contexts' (Arneil 1999:206). Representation as revealed by them is therefore complex, ambiguous and sometimes seemingly contradictory. It is multi-layered and contextual, defying dichotomous classification and exposing the limitation of theories based on western ideas and an assumption of politics as a national practice.

#### **3.3.1 Representing communities**

All the women in my study perceive themselves as representing their communities although they express this in different ways. As leaders of their local governments or political party groups, it could be expected they would say this, and indeed research on

local government representatives indicates that they perceive themselves as representing their communities regardless of gender (Beck 2001). At first glance, this suggests an orthodox conception of constituency representation or representation from below, which is predictable as the interviewees are elected by voters within specific geographic constituencies although there are differences in the way their constituencies are structured.<sup>1</sup> However, whilst local government tends to project a view of a single community within a local government area, there is no single community but a diverse range of sub-communities comprised of different social and functional groups with different and competing interests, needs and priorities. The question thus arises as to how representatives might represent these diverse communities within their constituencies.

### 3.3.1.1 Representing needs

The participants in this study consistently discuss the needs, rather than the opinions, of their constituents. This supports earlier research on women in politics generally (Porter 1999:85) and would please many feminists. Others would argue that although need has a stronger moral basis than interest or opinions, it has paternalistic overtones and 'lends itself more readily to decision by experts on behalf of the need group' (Phillips 1995:73). However, the needs the interviewees perceive themselves as addressing, the language they use and their personal roles in addressing these needs vary. Difference is most evident between the women from the western countries of England, Sweden and Australia and those from India and the Philippines.

Most of the western women discuss needs in the context of planning to meet the needs of their constituents. This reflects the influence of NPM in these countries where strategic planning and policy formulation are emphasised as the prime responsibility of elected representatives. For example, an Australian woman describes the range of responsibilities she has as mayor, contrasting specifically local issues such as complaints about barking dogs and potholes with long-term policy and planning responsibilities which she sees as more important for her:

So I suppose in representing the community, it depends on the level of the issue and probably from my point of view now, it's really more about the broader, bigger picture issues than the dog that barks down the street or pot-holes. It's about doing policy that meets the needs of the community into the future and making sure that the community is comfortable with that policy (Marie).

Marie is demonstrating one of the tensions highlighted by the implementation of NPM in that whilst representatives may understand the importance of policy, residents may not, and often expect their representatives to represent their local interests. This elucidates the issue of who determines what is to be represented. An English woman expresses a similar focus on needs-based planning, using as an example a decision on the location of landfill sites (commonly referred to as municipal tips):

So if you're looking at the planning permissions in the area or you're looking at landfill sites and things like that, clearly the district needs somewhere to put its waste. But we've also to say, well in this instance, this is a problem for all these

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<sup>1</sup> In Australia, for example, local government representatives can be elected either by voters in specific electoral wards within the overall municipal area or by voters across the whole area. The former, which is common to the four other countries, provides one representative per ward which is similar to traditional constituency representation at a national and state level. The latter provides multiple representatives for the one area. These differences can either emphasise or blur orthodox conceptions of constituency representation.

people. How can we balance the needs of the district and these of the locality? And that's really very difficult when you're in control of the council (Natasha).

This emphasis on planning to meet the needs of constituents is also evident with the Swedish women as exemplified by one woman in a County Council for health. Although her constituency is regional she is elected to her position from a municipal district:

It's to work out the needs first of those who elected me in the geographic area, but you also have to think that you are elected to have responsibility for the whole County Council. So you cannot just only have the local view on what's right and wrong in politics, you have to think of what would be good for all the region (Kirsten).

These three examples draw in, although not explicitly, the role of local government bureaucrats in representation. Whilst elected members may decide on the need for a policy and ultimately approve it, the bureaucrats develop those policies and often initiate them.

In contrast to this focus on planning to meet needs, the interviewees from India and the Philippines describe basic needs they are trying to meet. This issue of basic needs arises constantly with the interviewees from these two countries. It demonstrates the different developmental trajectories between these women and the western women and the way 'women's lives are as much shaped by the "development gap" between rich and poor countries' (Vickers 2006:6). The Indian participants tend to talk about satisfying and attending to basic needs as indicated by Lina:

I guess I'm meeting people, satisfying and answering to their needs, their requirements, for the common man does not really need big things. What he needs is the basic problems. They must have adequate water supply, they must have cleaner roads and their buildings must be in good condition, the streets must be well lit, there must be schools and your public health system must work (Lina).

The Filipino mayors, as mentioned in Chapter 1, are also chief executives of their local governments and therefore have significant additional management responsibilities in regard to their councils and the services they provide. This creates different expectations of them by their constituents and perhaps explains their focus on their own actions and decisions, rather than on their councils as described by the women from the western countries:

So, in between all these activities, they come to you for medicines, for hospitalization, for tuition fees, for pencils, notebooks, uniforms, then the cultural affairs, then the sports development. You have to pay for their uniforms, for their rubber shoes, for jackets, almost everything. Food! Food! They come to you for food. Yes, the very poor ones, they come to me for food, clothing, shelter almost every day (Pat).

The basic needs Pat describes are not all necessarily met from local government funds but have to be funded from the personal funds of the mayor. This highlights the importance of independent – or, more likely, family – wealth in gaining and maintaining elected representative positions in this country (Roces 1998).<sup>2</sup> Roces argues that women gain political power in the Philippines because of their kinship and marriage connections with political men and are there predominantly to serve kinship interests (2000:118). Although this may be the case at the national and state level, not all the Filipinas in this study come from political families and they all emphasise meeting the whole community's needs.

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<sup>2</sup> The Filipinas were generous in discussing the importance of independent wealth in their elections. All except one volunteered information suggesting that campaigning for office costs between US\$40,000 and \$100,000.



Nevertheless, they certainly constitute an élite in terms of class, elaborating the concern that many feminists have with representative government institutions.

The participants' focus on constituents' needs suggests they go beyond 'the narrow egoism of interests' (Phillips 1994:72) and have 'an ethos of responsibility, that tries to enter into each person's dilemma and contextualize differences in need' (Gilligan in Phillips 1994:21). Despite this, their perspectives raise legitimate questions about how elected representatives can respond to the needs of the diverse sub-communities in all communities. This in turn raises questions about who makes the decisions and whether they can 'take that imaginative leap that takes us beyond our own situation', which Phillips (1995:199) argues people do partially if at all. These concerns are held by the interviewees themselves, as they frequently acknowledge the inherent difficulties involved. As they point out, all needs cannot be met and at the end of the day they have to balance the competing needs of groups within their communities on the basis of what *they* believe meets the broader needs of the community. As one English woman explains:

I would say to any group, whether people have voted for me or not, once I am there representing that community, then I represent that community warts and all. So I don't say, 'well you didn't go out and vote for me, so tough'. Once you are an elected representative, you represent, in my view, to the best of your ability, everybody and sometimes that's difficult (Natasha).

A Swedish woman describes the difficulty in making decisions that inevitably will not please everyone:

I think for some people that could be too hard to overcome. It takes a lot of time and you're not very much thanked for what you are doing and at some periods you have to take decisions that the people don't believe in, or that you know from your point of view that this must be the right thing for society ... Even if some people are hurt, this is what's the best for the lot of people (Lena).

Here Lena is articulating the reality for most representatives in local government: that there is rarely such a thing as a common interest and that some decisions inevitably do not represent the interests of some groups in their communities. The County Council participants in both England and Sweden, although elected by their local constituents, find the fact that they are representing the whole county rather than their municipality places more distance between them and their constituents, as described by Helena:

I think it's hard because of course I'm elected from (my town), but my work area is (my county) and I have to work in the County Council all the time with it as the conception all the time. And actually, that's hard for the people who are involved in the community to understand that I have responsibility for what happens in another town (Helena).

The only exception to the notion that they are there to represent everyone is expressed by another young Swedish woman, who acknowledges her responsibility to her constituency, but limits that to particular subgroups that reflect her party's priorities:

What I do, I think it's difficult. Of course I always try to think that I'm elected for some group of people, for the Left party ... most of the people who work on the Left party are women, often working women with a low salary, but also workers, men workers, who got a low salary too and many immigrants vote for us. And I try to think of them when I am proposing something or when I shall decide and when we are making our budget, I always try to think which is best for them (Ulla).

Here Ulla, in drawing attention to the many different sub-groups within what she sees as her constituency as well as her party's ideology, demonstrates the inadequacy of

conceptions of representation that privilege either ideology or social groups as though the two are separate. Social groups are often reflected in a political party's ideology.

These examples highlight not only the shortcomings of an orthodox conception of constituency representation but also the consideration the women give to difficult decisions. In addition, they illuminate Jónasdóttir's concerns about needs in the political context and her argument that needs have to be mediated by interests (1985), therefore highlighting the importance of having women's voices in the decision-making process. As Phillips (1994a:19) points out, 'it is in those spaces where we have to rely on representatives exercising their own judgement that it can most matter who the representatives are'.

### 3.3.1.2 Representing interests and identities

The complexity of representation is revealed further as beyond claiming to represent their communities the participants also identify particular interest groups and social groups for whom they have a special affinity or responsibility, reflecting a conception of both functional and social representation.

Forty-three of the interviewees, including all the women from India and the Philippines, identify women as a specific responsibility of their representation, either in terms of being a role model for other women or representing women's interests. One of the arguments for gender parity in formal politics is that having women politicians as role models will encourage other women to become politicians and challenge long-held assumptions about what are appropriate roles for women (Phillips 1995; 1998). Whilst recognising the value of positive role models, Phillips considers arguments for increased representation in politics on this basis as the 'least interesting' and as having 'no particular purchase on politics per se' (1998:228). This may well be so however, I suggest Phillips' position is based on a particular understanding of role models as only symbolic. It also misunderstands the effect of seeing women in representative positions on an interest in politics, which is essential for a vibrant democracy. Thirty-six of the women, particularly the mayors or leaders of the council, consider being a role model as one of their responsibilities and their descriptions challenge Phillips' (1998) argument. The women for whom they perceive themselves as role models varies, with some identifying women in general and others, particular groups of women. This perception of being a role model seems to be influenced partly by party membership and partly by cultural factors and personal values.

Four of the politically independent Australian women non-aligned to a party<sup>3</sup> perceive being role models as important given the aggressive and competitive environment all the Australian women (and many women from other countries) perceive as permeating local government. One describes how local government can be very intimidating and how part of her role is explaining the system and actively encouraging women to prepare themselves to enter local government in the future:

A woman who does become a mayor or a president, is still seen as a role model ... One woman said to me, 'how do you sit up there at an electors' meeting and put up with all the garbage that people hand out?' She said, 'I couldn't do that', and I said, 'neither could I when I got on council, but you grow into a job'. And I hope that I

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<sup>3</sup> Unlike local government in many countries and the other countries in this study, local government representatives in Australia do not necessarily represent political parties. Indeed, outside the capital cities most representatives identify as independents.

can encourage other women to grow into things and convince them that you don't know what you can do until you try (Janine).

Reflecting a concern for many women about the impact of political involvement on their families, a younger Filipina woman sees part of her role as demonstrating that it is possible to combine those responsibilities:

What I've been trying to project is 'my family's not suffering. Look, I'm a woman, I'm a mother, I'm a wife, but still I can be a leader'. So that's what I'm trying to project. So I would like to encourage more women in local governance especially (Baby).

Perhaps her perception is influenced by the availability in South and South-East Asia of others to carry out their family and domestic responsibilities (Richter 1990), as many of the women from England, Sweden and Australia perceive their roles as innately difficult to combine with having young children. This suggests cultural differences in regard to the role of extended family members and also highlights the earlier point about representatives in these countries coming from a prosperous background and being able to afford servants.

The role model revealed by the interviewees is not a passive or symbolic model as might be more likely with representatives at the state or national level who are often more remote from their communities. In contrast, this is an active role that includes advocating for women, explaining their work, and encouraging and mentoring women to enter local government and seek formal leadership positions. Therefore, as these examples demonstrate, the interviewees are using their agency to pursue what is an objective interest for all women – 'building up and controlling as sex/gender a concrete presence or attendance in this system' (Jónasdóttir 1985:53). This role model is thus more important than Phillips (1998) suggests, particularly given the structural and systemic barriers in local government that women, especially young women, face and the different cultures within which they live.

Furthermore, as Lena Wängnerud (2000) points out, since 1960, and in tandem with the increase of women representatives in the Riksdag or national parliament, surveys of voters in Sweden have demonstrated an increase amongst women voters from thirty-two to fifty-two percent who describe themselves as interested or very interested in politics. This is in contrast to a marginal increase in the interest of men voters over the same period, and although more men than women claim to be interested in politics the gap has been reduced significantly. Arguably, the presence of women in elected bodies, previously the terrain of men, works as a subtext which says that politics is about things of interest to women. I contend that an argument for increased representation of women in local government based on such an active role model does engage directly with issues of representation contrary to Phillips' (1998) assertion that it does not. Nevertheless, there are limits on the extent to which they can be role models as exemplified by one English woman who describes how her ideological values limit this capacity:

There is always this underlying problem that they think you're talking about Conservative women and so it's quite difficult I think for politicians to be neutral as regards their thinking. So I think our ability to speak and influence the up and coming generations has to be based on what they say about us, rather than us getting too close to them. It would be looked at with deep suspicion I think, maybe by their parents or by almost anybody else, who would think you may be influencing people with a particular political view (Penny).

Although so many of the women perceive part of their representation as being role models for women, others do not, reflecting again the many differences between the women.

Apart from being role models, most of the women perceive themselves as having responsibility for women for a variety of reasons. The women from India and the Philippines are more likely as a group to express a responsibility for women and issues that affect many women in a direct and personal way. These women refer frequently to issues that are not perceived in western countries as directly local government responsibilities, such as domestic violence, which is generally a policy issue for national or state governments. This lends weight to Diamond and Hartssock's (1998) contention that including women's concerns can change political life by introducing what might be seen as specifically women's concerns into political debates and priorities. Indeed, Jane Mansfield (1999:647) asserts that 'having more women in office unquestionably makes government policies more responsive to the interests of most women'. As an example, one Filipina describes a particular responsibility to address issues of domestic violence:

As a woman mayor, I think it is our responsibility particularly to look on the rights of women and rights of the children and to protect them against violence, domestic violence and against all kinds of violence, in the homes, in the communities, in the schools (Meg).

Romila Thapar (in Richter 1990:531) argues that a long struggle for independence is more likely to see women active in politics in South and South-East Asia. This is exemplified by one Indian woman who comes from a political family where both parents had a long history as freedom fighters. She explains how that influenced her interest in politics and her focus on women:

I would feel most for the women, because I thought that the women as a whole had been ignored enough and the society should have a voice as a whole, that the women should be encouraged to voice their own needs. So wherever I went, I used to tour my city practically every day, some section or the other, and I would encourage the women. The first thing I would do is to meet the women collectives, the women groups (Rita).

However, a young Swedish woman expresses a similar perspective, elucidating the influence of values and ideologies, transcending cultural boundaries, on representation:

I think more than others, women. I think in the whole world structures that women never have the same rights or the same - they never have the same access. Yes and the men, it's always what it was the norm. Yes and it's very strong and I don't think everyone can see that (Ulla).

In Australia there are few Aboriginal representatives in mainstream local government and even fewer Aboriginal women. An Australian interviewee discusses her work in trying to encourage women in this social group in particular:

I talk often to other women about getting into local government and I will be working - have started a small group - to try and get Aboriginal women into local government. We don't have any at the moment. So I do sort of feel that responsibility to make sure that women know it's a completely accessible tier of government for them (Marian).

Marian here is illuminating the point Phillips' (1998:142) makes: that it is not necessary to be 'a member of a social group ... to understand or represent that group's interests'. There are also few representatives from different ethnic backgrounds and another Australian woman from a Greek family perceives herself as having a responsibility for women, but particularly for women from ethnic backgrounds, demonstrating how the presence of women from different cultures can make a difference:

I think the women, all ethnic women in general ... My aim while I was the mayor was to really try and work for women. That's why I've started a portfolio of women. I've started it while I was the mayor and we continue with things. I wanted to try and make women, especially ethnic women that don't get involved in the decision-making, to come out and participate. I believe most of them are scared their English is not enough or they think 'what do I know?' (Stella).

On the other hand, several English and Swedish women specifically reject the notion of representing women as a group, which may well be because many western women are 'wary of speaking for women' (Phillips 1994:200). Or it may be because they are 'hesitant to become typed as a woman by frequently raising "women's issues"' (Rhode 2003:1). This appears to reflect either their ideological beliefs, reluctance to speak for women or the status of women and, in the case of Sweden, the comparatively high representation of women in formal politics:

I think that most women in this country can talk for themselves. We can discuss common problems in society and things like that and we don't have to do this specially because you are a woman. Of course you see things from a different point of view, if you are a woman. You see other things than men see, but that's a different kind (Lena).

An English woman expresses her resentment at being seen as a woman rather than as simply an elected representative:

I understand why women need to be seen and get improved equality and all of this. I understand that ... I am not somebody who champions women's causes in that way because I always believe that I have got where I've got to because I'm good, not because I'm a woman. So, a very long winded answer to your question, but I don't think - I think I'm perceived as a fighter locally, not as a woman or a man, just as me (Nicole).

This may well reflect a liberal ideology, as Nicole is a member of the Conservative Party, or perhaps what Deborah Rhode describes as queen bees who 'believe that they managed without special help' and are 'willing to serve as proof that gender is no barrier to those who are qualified' (2003:14). On the other hand it may reflect the reluctance of some women politicians to claim to represent women because they fear they will be 'defined as "woman" candidates or politicians rather than simply as candidates or politicians' (Sapiro 1998:180-181). Furthermore, whilst some women may claim not to represent women for a variety of reasons, as Sarah Childs (2003:10) points out, this does not necessarily translate into action as 'some women may act for women in a feminist way while they reject the label or fail to register feminist attitudes'.

These ambiguous and contrasting responsibilities for women that many of the interviewees describe, with none identifying women as their primary representation responsibility and some rejecting a need to represent women, would worry many feminists who wish to see women politicians representing women's interests.<sup>4</sup> At first glance it might appear to undermine arguments for increased representation of women on this basis. However, as Phillips (1994:2) argues, there is an inherent danger in 'essentialist presumptions' about women politicians 'pressing only narrowly sectional concerns'. Ruth Lister (1997:158) also supports this view, arguing that female politicians should not be expected to carry responsibilities not expected of male politicians who would be criticised for suggesting that

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<sup>4</sup> The notion of women's interests is central to my investigation of difference and will be explored further in Chapter 6.

they represented only men's interests. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, it is difficult to identify exactly what *is* in women's interests in local government as issues that at first glance may not seem to be, on deeper examination are. For example, many infrastructure issues such as roads, water and sewerage may not appear to be about women's interests but arguably are when seen in the context of both their outcomes in regard to accessibility and health and their impact on the allocation of scarce resources. The interviewees themselves may not recognise these links. Finally, as has been demonstrated clearly here, whilst some women may have interests in common they also have interests that conflict (Vickers 2006). An argument for gender parity in local government is that women will represent women's interests, and despite the points just discussed, there is evidence here that a significant number of the interviewees consider – and demonstrate – that they do attempt to do this. Nevertheless, this begs the question of whether the outcomes of their representation are successful. As Susan Beck (2001) points out, putting issues on the agenda in local government does not mean they are supported, and she concludes from research on women representatives in local government in America that their municipalities are little different to the way they would be if women were not present. Whilst I agree with Beck's point that agenda items are not always supported, I disagree with her conclusions in regard to outcomes. I suggest that this is based on a misunderstanding of the complexity of local government processes, and I elaborate further on this in Chapter 6. Nevertheless, I contend that for all these reasons mentioned above, the interviewees' perspectives provide at best qualified support for gender parity in local government on the basis of simply representing women's interests.

Demonstrating again the complexity of representation in local government, fourteen of the participants, some from each country, express special responsibilities for those who are unable to speak for themselves, although the way they express this differs, as the following examples demonstrate:

I suppose the members of the community who are least likely to be able to represent themselves (Marie, Australia).

I suppose, simply because it's a Labour council, I suppose I'm a bit more worried about people who are disadvantaged than I am about those that aren't. But that doesn't mean to say I don't listen to the wealthy residents of (her ward) – [it's] a very posh part of the Borough - so I meet them as well obviously. But you know, in terms of the priorities of the council and the priorities of the Labour Party, it is very much about helping to lift people out of their poverty (Leslie, England).

An Indian interviewee again emphasises the issue mentioned before of attending to, rather than identifying, needs:

I always stress giving more attention to people who are in need, who are dependent. They don't have a voice of their own (Neela).

One Filipina also focuses specifically on the needs of the poor, saying that she is 'really interested in uplifting the lives, especially of the poor people' (Lita). This may reflect her own values but also the fact that poverty alleviation is identified explicitly as one of the main responsibilities of local government in the Philippines.

The Swedish women express this responsibility for those who are poor or less able to speak for themselves more frequently, possibly reflecting the strong influence of the previous social democratic government in that country and its long history as a welfare state (Sinkkonen 1985). One Swedish representative in a County Council exemplifies this:

The people who have no voice, who have weakness because of illness or handicap - we have a special responsibility as elected members of the county I think. And there are many groups that are strong because of economics or education and also because they are representing a group that are paying taxes for instance. But they have channels to power, I think. And then we have to bring up the other issues that people can't express themselves (Elisebet).

An Australian woman describes her particular interest in representing people who have no voice and particularly Indigenous Australians, who comprise a very small proportion of her constituents. She perceives her responsibility for Indigenous Australians as taking leadership in addressing the legacy of past injustice and harsh government policies in Australia:

I'm also there for anybody that might be a minority as well. So I think you can't always just pander to the ones that've got the loudest voices or the biggest numbers ... I think particularly in the last few years, it's been with Aboriginal reconciliation [and] it's part of also a broader picture of us taking a role of responsible leadership in the community (Leisha).

A few of the women describe other social groups to which they belong and with whom they share experiences and values. One older Filipina mayor identifies senior citizens as having a particular focus for her:

The senior citizens, that's my favourite group. In fact I wanted an insurance policy for them to be given to each and every one of them, but no insurance company would take in to insure senior citizens, so what I did is to insure the very poorest of the poor, including their aged, as dependants (Pat).

This is a strong example of a woman bringing different perspectives to the council and using her agency to deliver different outcomes. A similar focus on the elderly is evident in a comment by an older Australian woman. Australia's population is ageing and this woman describes how she is anticipating the need for recreational facilities for the elderly in the near future:

We are having to look at getting some money to build an appropriate aged peoples' facility for meeting together and playing bowls together. It will have to be a big facility. Now, the need isn't so apparent at the moment, but it certainly will be in five years time (Molly).

Thirteen of the women from England, Sweden and Australia express a strong sense of responsibility for young people in their constituencies and concern about their virtual absence in local government in their countries. Despite the availability of significant parental benefits and child-care in Sweden, one Swedish woman alludes to the difficulties when discussing trying to encourage young women in her party to become involved in local government:

Not more than of course being a role model. And also I help them because I usually say to them, we don't have so many young people but we try to get them in. Some of them when they get children, I know how it is to work and have small children and be in politics. So then I say, don't bother. Take the child first and the work first, because it has to be, you must have some money. And then if you need some time to do that, you can come back later. And I think that is important, that you don't put too much burden on them because then they will disappear forever (Helena).

All the women allude in their interviews to the many ways in which local government systems provide barriers to women's entry and presence. An English woman acknowledges the impact that combining multiple responsibilities can have, particularly on younger

women with children, and how the local government system in England can limit access to younger women:

I think I'm very conscious of that. I think most of the women in local government, certainly on this council, in fact none of them have any child-care commitments. We had one woman who was elected in 1998 who had a young son and she gave it up after about a year. She just couldn't cope with it. I just think, look at them. And politics generally is just completely unsuited to women. Actually, the whole system is not geared towards women's needs at all (Leslie).

These women are seeking ways of increasing the number of young elected representatives, although most consider this absence is understandable as Phillips (1998b) asserts many people would, given the demands on time and the relatively low financial recompense for local government representation. An older Australian woman explains the absence of young people as due to a variety of factors including the need to have paid employment and mothering responsibilities. However, she also considers life experience, and a relatively lengthy life experience, as important qualities in elected representatives. This reflects a number of assumptions and the influence of personal characteristics and values on the way she perceives her role:

The young people I suppose are employed professionally and when I say young, I suppose I consider young to be about 40. I think by 40 women have got their kiddies at uni by then. Yeah, I think 25, 30 is a bit too young to be in council. They haven't had any life experiences (Helen).

As mentioned, Phillips (1998b) asserts that few people would consider it surprising or unfair that so few women enter formal politics given the unrepresentative groups from which representatives are drawn and the lengthy periods of time during which many women are involved in the care of young children or elderly parents. She asserts that an argument for gender parity on the basis of justice carries less weight unless being a politician is seen as just another job to which women should have equal access, or that 'structural discrimination' is also demonstrated (1998b:230). Representation is not 'just another job', and Helena's and Leslie's comments might be seen as supporting Phillips' argument that most people would accept the absence of the very young - and the very old - from formal politics as 'part of a normal and natural lifecycle' and not particularly unfair (1998b:229). If this were the case it would challenge arguments for gender parity for women in formal politics based solely on justice. However, explanations or arguments based on 'societal norms', such as those expressed by these interviewees and described by Phillips are gendered. Furthermore, they tend to ignore 'the political system's role in the maintenance of those norms' (Bourque and Grossholtz 1998:39). In a democratic polity the system should provide equality of access for all groups within it. I contend that the women's examples reflect the 'structural discrimination' that supports the justice argument for gender parity in that the systems themselves make it difficult for women with caring responsibilities to carry out representative roles.

In contrast to these interviewees, one young Swedish woman, who has been an elected representative on a County Council for over ten years, describes how it feels being a young woman with a group of people old enough to be her parents or grandparents. She rejects notions of representing women as a group and believes she has been treated particularly kindly in her party because she is young and female.<sup>5</sup> From her perspective, too much

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<sup>5</sup> When I interviewed Elena she was pregnant with her first child so had not experienced local government as a mother. She was intending to take maternity leave and would reconsider her position when that leave came to an end.



experience can be just as limiting as not enough. Her comments provide a strong argument for increased representation of young people, not just young women, in local government:

For ten years I've been the youngest one and everybody has nursed me, has carried me and pampered me, so actually I haven't experienced difficulties being a young woman in politics. It's been the other way around actually. I think there's an advantage specially to be a young girl. It's not as advantageous to be a young boy because there are a lot of young boys. There are much more boys than girls - and they think, 'oh, a young girl, we must take care of her. We won't let her leave politics' ... Of course there need to be more young women and young men also to change the way we're working. I think we need more young people, so we can have a new way of working as politicians. There's a lot of old structures that the people have. They often say I've been here for so many years and in my time we did it like this and ra ra ra (Elena).

Elena's perspective lends further weight to an argument for increased representation of women based on justice. The low presence of young women in politics in her country, compared to that of young men, is suggestive of the gendered nature of representation and the structural discrimination that Phillips (1998) argues is a necessary requirement to justify that argument. Furthermore, Elena's comment here underscores the importance of who the representatives are if existing structures are to be transformed. The perspectives of young people are particularly important in local government where so many decisions affect them directly.

Only four women identify groups that fit within the orthodox conception of representing interest groups with whom they share some values or interests. One of the main interests that politicians are suspected of representing is that of 'the big end of town' or business interests. Two women acknowledge such an influence, one being an independent English woman who is leader of the council and also a member of the business community:

Although my origins are very much standing in a residential ward ... the main focus of the council is that it's the inner business council for a business district. And because I also represent an important part of the business community, by virtue of working in a law firm, my role now is very much representing the city (Otago).

The other is an Australian woman:

I'm in business, my family have got a couple of businesses ... and my view is my involvement in local government is not to be just a personal thing, it's got to be something that I believe that other people want me to do ... and I'm on the Business Association as their delegate as well (Brenda).

One English woman describes her capacity to represent farmers' interests as an advocate:

I'm also married to a farmer and so we have - perhaps I have - more background knowledge than most on how farming impacts on the rural communities and the problems that we have with farming. So I suppose the farming community do come to me at times to ask me to act as an advocate on their behalf, because despite the fact we're an extremely rural community, I think that there are only two members who are full-time farmers as elected members (Penny).

The interviewees' perspectives of having special responsibilities for different social and interest groups within their communities reveal representation again as more complex and ambiguous than orthodox conceptions suggest. The women demonstrate aspects of constituency, functional and social representation and the perceived responsibility for those who are disadvantaged suggests that some of the women have taken that 'imaginative leap' to go beyond their own experience (Phillips 1995).

### 3.3.1.3 Representing ideologies

The interviewees who are party members perceive themselves as also representing the programs and policies put forward by their parties, and being accountable to them for their decisions and actions. One of the major criticisms of party representation is that representatives are little more than a mouthpiece for their parties and that therefore who the representatives are is irrelevant. The women in this study, however, demonstrate that representing their political parties is either of secondary importance or at least has to be balanced with the priority they give to representing their communities. This supports the orthodox conception of constituency representation as based on looser party discipline and a reduced emphasis on party policies (Marsh and Norris 1999). There are, however, significant differences from country to country in the way these women perceive the role of political parties in local government.

Party representation is mentioned by all except one of the English women and by all the Swedish women, suggesting a much closer attachment to political parties and ideological beliefs than that of the women from other countries. Indeed, throughout their interviews, most of the Swedish and English women refer frequently to their political parties and their policies or to members of other political parties, contrasting their policies and ideologies. This is hardly surprising given the dominant role political parties play in local government elections in those countries, with the overwhelming majority of councillors being representatives of political parties. Indeed electors in Sweden can only vote for parties, not individuals.<sup>6</sup> The one English woman who does not mention a political party in her discussion of representation is an independent.<sup>7</sup> English local government is controlled by the national government and after the reforms of the 1990s seems to be more an agent of that level of government (Barnett and Crowther 1998) than a separate and autonomous level of government. Local government election results are often seen as indicative of party support at the national level, and experience as party activists and organisers is important for most of the English interviewees, as exemplified by one describing how she entered local politics:

I've always been involved and I was treasurer once, secretary of the constituency and all these kinds of things and active and so I was always around in the party. It was mostly my spare time is what I did. And then, it seemed a natural progression when I was asked to be sort of involved (Natasha).

Another demonstrates the way the English women view their almost contradictory representation of both their constituencies and their parties:

You can't forget the fact that you're put there by a vote for you every four years. But you can't forget your party role either. Your party put you there ... and you must be accountable to the party, as well as to your electorate and it's not more important, because your electorate is the most important, but you mustn't forget that role either (Tosca).

The Swedish interviewees express a similar perception about their political party representation, reflecting the role of party politics in Sweden at all levels of government. One County Council representative exemplifies this dual representation responsibility:

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<sup>6</sup> Sweden's voting system is proportional representation and parties provide 'party lists' with candidates elected consequentially from the top to the bottom of the list depending on the proportion of the votes that the party gains.

<sup>7</sup> Independents comprise only ten percent of local government representatives and control four percent of the councils in England.

I am a member of the Liberal Party and that's what they know when they vote for me. So they know the ideas. But I have also declared what I would like to work with ... it is a combination between the ideas of the Liberal Party, which is a kind of ideological reason, and very concrete areas for action, for me. But it's the inhabitants and especially those who of course voted for me, but I do not know who did that (Miriam).

Another Swedish woman explains this seeming conflict in representing everyone and also representing a political party, although for her balancing these conflicts is not difficult:

When you come to local government you are more pragmatic. You have to solve problems even if it's not strictly our party's programs, so you try to find a solution that's good for the inhabitants. I think that's very much if you go to parliament of the national position, that you strictly follow your party program, but here you can be a little more practical. Here it's more focused on how to solve the problem (Lena).

As Lena demonstrates here, many decisions made by elected representatives are of local relevance therefore not covered by party programs generally targeted at national issues. However, even at the national level this raises questions of accountability. An orthodox conception of ideological representation assumes that representatives are accountable through elections in regard to political platforms articulated in election campaigns whereas no party program can cover all issues and policies. These are not pre-formed but often develop in response to changed or new circumstances, and indeed new information on a particular issue may require reconsideration of a previous position. Political issues, like political identities and interests, are constituted and negotiated at least in part within politics itself (Mouffe 1996).

Representation of political parties is mentioned less frequently by the Filipinas and Indian women. This could be due to a number of factors including the length of time women have been involved in formal politics, how they became representatives and social and cultural factors. Although most are members of political parties, they were not active in their political parties prior to seeking election. It is arguable that this lack of a long involvement may influence the Filipinas' and Indian women's perceptions of, and attachment to, the ideology of their political parties. However, other factors are probably more important. In India, although party membership is not prescribed in local government elections, it is seen as 'desirable to keep party politics away from local elections' (Arora and Prabhakar 1997:918). Nevertheless, party influence is strong as the parties 'cannot keep themselves away from local politics', reflected in their providing external support to candidates or allowing them to use their party symbols on their tickets (Arora and Prabhakar 1997:919). One of the Indian women acknowledges the difficulty for her when her party's policies, based on a collective, national platform, are inappropriate in a local constituency. Demonstrating a similar view to that of the Swedish and English women, she describes how she has to somehow balance her responsibility to her party and to her constituency and the difficulty of doing this:

You are also part of a political group, so you cannot restrict yourself only to your constituents, because what holds good for your constituency may not hold good for the next constituency, or the other constituencies. So as a political party, you have to take a common platform, which may not be accepted by your voters ... In one constituency they will be only slum dwellers; in other, they will be people who are living in a very well-developed lay-out, so their expectations and aspirations are much different from people who are living in the slums. That's where you have to really strike a balance. That's very, very difficult (Lina).

Another Indian woman demonstrates a contrasting view, explaining that she would go against party policy if she feels it is not in the best interests of her constituents:

I feel the best when, in spite of being in the minority, sometimes I project my view because it's in the larger interest of the public ... A lot of press people ask me 'aren't you scared your party will expel you?' I say, 'I don't care', because I don't think they can, they can never do it (Dana).

This is a strong example of differences between women within the same country demonstrating again the way personal values and commitments influence representation.

Only two of the Filipinas refer to their party membership directly. This might suggest that party politics is less relevant in the Philippines and supports the contention that kinship, patronage and factors such as religion, patriarchy and cultural attitudes towards the role of women are more important (Richter 1990-1991). Still, the influence of party politics is evident, demonstrated by one Filipina who stood for election as an independent three times and was only elected when she joined the political party of the dominant political family in her province:

In the north, Marcos was still strong and I had no political affiliation. I just wanted to run, but I lost by 250 votes only. I did not have money. I only had my principles. And he (the mayor she contested) was with (the family) who are the family to reckon with in the political arena in (her province). So luckily I joined the party last time because the mayor graduated, so he endorsed me to their party (Betty).

Whilst this demonstrates the party basis of politics in the Philippines, it suggests a lower level of commitment to ideological beliefs and a priority on family. It also illuminates Phillips' (1995) contention that party representation ensures those with access to money and the media will be elected.

Representing a political party does not emerge as an issue with most of the Australian interviewees as they are not members of political parties. One of the two who are is in a council where all except one of the representatives are members of her party and she does not perceive any conflict between her party membership and constituency representation. The other woman was elected as an independent but subsequently became the endorsed candidate for a political party for the following state election. In many parts of Australia party membership can be a disadvantage in local government, as reflected by this woman's belief that her chances of being re-elected as mayor in the following election are now significantly reduced.<sup>8</sup> This may well be a reflection of attitudes towards political parties at the state and national level. The existence of significant numbers of independents who do not represent political parties in local government in Australia suggests a far greater degree of autonomy for elected representatives than is apparent in the other countries, possibly reflecting the narrower range and nature of local government responsibilities that are less easy to identify as ideologically separable.

Even where the interviewees are members of political parties, their perspectives challenge assumptions about party membership and party commitment which reflect western perceptions of political life that overlook different historical and cultural contexts. The perspectives of the women from India and the Philippines suggest a more pragmatic relationship and the stronger influence of cultural factors such as kinship. I maintain that this highlights again the limitations of orthodox conceptions of representation that overlook difference, whether of values, histories, cultures and social contexts and that as a result privilege particular western values and cultures.

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<sup>8</sup> Her perception was accurate as she was not re-elected as mayor at the following election.

The women's perspectives on party representation highlight issues about accountability that would concern feminists who wish to see representatives bound more closely to party programs and policies. However, as Phillips (1994) points out, binding representatives too tightly to programs and policies would make the composition of the representatives almost irrelevant as they would be little more than messengers for their parties. The interviewees demonstrate the inability of party programs and policies to address the range of issues and activities in which they are involved. They also highlight the impossibility of providing a comprehensive platform of policies and programs to assist constituents in deciding who to choose as their representatives. This again lends weight to Phillips' (1994b:19) contention that political representatives always have a degree of autonomy, that representation is also about exercising judgement and that it is when representatives exercise their own judgement that the presence of women matters the most.

#### **3.3.1.4 Representation as a maternal role**

An issue which emerges from the participants particularly from the Philippines, but also to some extent from India, is a perspective of representation as a maternal role. This perspective is distinctly different to those described by the women from the western countries. Seven of the Filipinas perceive their representation as a maternal role, which Mina Roces (1998) identifies as common to women politicians in that country. Roces (1998:89-90) argues that many have been able to 'transform the traditional patriarchal (male) characteristics of governance' in that country by treating their constituencies as part of their extended families. She says that

The success of women in local politics could well be attributed to their application of particular gendered practices of cleanliness, orderliness, attention to detail, meticulous concern for the budget (all housekeeping skills) and extending a personal, motherly concern for their constituents.

The emphasis of the Filipinas on their representation as a mothering and caring role is apparent in the following examples:

Before I took over as municipal mayor in 1998, we were second to the last dirtiest municipality in (my province). Being a woman, a mother and a wife, I felt that it is my responsibility to spearhead the cleaning of our municipality as my priority, just as what a mother of a family would do with her home (Lita).

Taking care of your children's like taking care also of your town, your extended family. And you are more organised and you know how to manage your time and how to budget especially, because one of your roles as a family woman is to budget, so you know how to budget your money, how to prioritise (Myrna).

In the Philippines each municipality contains within it Barangays, which are parish councils organised around generally rural villages, although they can also be smaller communities within the larger towns and cities including specific slum areas. Barangays have captains and Barangay councillors, and the captains are also councillors on the municipal council. The Barangays are an important electoral base for politicians, so all the Filipinas visit their Barangays regularly. One of the Filipinas describes the depth of her knowledge and her responsibilities as a mother with people in the Barangays in her area:

As a matter of fact, when I took my oath as mayor the first time in 1992 it meant I understood that I have to take care of all of them, of all the people of my town, irrespective of whoever they are, children, old people, women or men, because I only inherited a larger family. I considered my constituents as my family and so I know almost all of them. I even know the children by names in my Barangays, because since 1992 I only stopped sleeping in the Barangays last November (Tina).

However, the younger Filipinas do not perceive their role in this way, suggesting perhaps a generational difference in that country.

As mentioned earlier, an issue that emerges consistently with the women from the Philippines and India is the expectations that constituents have of them as representatives to address all their needs and solve all their problems, not just those that are a specific responsibility of local government. One older Indian woman alludes to this when she describes how her responsibility to constituents extends to issues that are not directly related to her work as a local government representative:

Well it means so many things. If people read the Constitutional Amendment, you feel that you are born to really look after every single area of your constituents, be it women's problems, children's problems, health related problems, sanitation, lighting, streets et al. You act as a mother, I must say, of your constituents. They look up to you for solutions for every little problem that they may have, even in their own private lives. I mean that is the kind of role we initiate for ourselves because they're the kind of problems that we receive and we hear (Lina).

In describing her role as a maternal role, one of the younger Indian women equates the way she looks after her children to her capacity to look after her council and her constituents:

What I feel is that a woman who can look after a family well can look after her council well. She can look after her constituency well. If you neglect your family, see if I neglect my family, I mean my children are not given to eat, they don't have a proper bath, they are kept unclean and I go out, if I don't have an affinity to my children, how will I have an affinity to the citizens or to the people in my ward? If I have an affinity to my children I will also have an affinity to the people in my ward. If I look after my children properly, I will also look after the citizens of my ward properly (Vishakha).

The Indian women may well reflect their class and caste, for as Abhilasha Kumari and Sabina Kidwai (1996:191) explain, many of the women in Indian political parties are 'middle-class, English-educated'.<sup>9</sup> However, they could equally reflect cultural perspectives as 'Indian cultural symbols glorify the women's role as mother-goddess' (Kumari & Kidwai 1996:17). Furthermore, Vishakha's focus on the role of a mother could well reflect her ideology as she is a member of Shiv Sena which Chandra Talpade Mohanty describes as 'a Maharashtrian chauvinist, fundamentalist, fascist political organization' that is a significant political force in Mumbai and strongly supports a traditional role for women (2003:133). On the other hand, Gill Allwood and Khursheed Wadia point out that historically in India women's traditional home-making roles, including their nurturing and budget-management skills, have been used in the fight for equal rights for women as they support existing gender relations and are 'more saleable to their parties and constituents'(2004:388). The argument is that these are unique skills which will make a difference to public life generally and in particular to welfare policy and peace-making (2004:388).

This perception of representation as a maternal role would worry some western feminists as reflecting what might be seen as essentialist maternal qualities. It also concerns some Indian feminists who believe that using difference from men as the basis for an argument for women's presence in politics leads to counter-arguments that 'women are biologically unsuited to the bellicosity of political life' (Allwood & Wadia 2004:388). Nevertheless,

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<sup>9</sup> I have referred earlier to the very narrow range of women participants from India, which is explained partly by the selection process in that country and partly by the limitations of the research methods, which required the women to speak English at least as a second language.

the notion of care, which includes the care women provide for their families, is gaining support in contemporary feminist political theory and debate.<sup>10</sup> Joan Tronto asserts that the idea of care as a political concept has been excluded from orthodox politics because it is seen as 'above' politics, thus reflecting 'gendered assumptions that profoundly shape our political views' (1996:140). She argues that including care as a political concept would emphasise the importance of activities that have been seen traditionally as women's duties. Doing so would have the potential to 'change our sense of political goals and provide us with additional ways to think politically' (1996:143), as it starts from a local concern and allows 'a more open approach to the problem of otherness' (1996:146). Indeed, the focus of all the women on responding to needs can be perceived as one, although not the only, aspect of care, elucidating Tronto's argument. A perception of representation as a maternal role would lend qualified weight to an argument for increased representation of women in local government however, the idea of care as a political concept is complex, requiring more than a focus on needs and women's traditional duties. Such a focus could simply reflect women accepting the gendered structures within which they are embedded. As Porter (1999:19) points out, 'care may be merely dutiful rather than care in an ethically positive sense'.

### **3.3.1.5 Representation as differentiated relationships**

As mentioned earlier, Young conceives representation as a 'differentiated relationship among plural actors' (2000:127), and many of the interviewees' examples of their representation affirm its relational nature albeit indirectly. In discussing representation, the women focus predominantly on their relationships with their colleagues and their constituents, whereas other important, but here invisible, 'actors' in political representation are those located in local government bureaucracies. Their involvement in representation emerges more clearly in the next chapter on power. Here I draw together the different ways the interviewees maintain connections with their constituents and investigate Young's claim that it is easy in political life to sever these relationships. I then move on to explore the impact of those connections on the interviewees' social perspectives and representation.

The interviewees maintain connections with their constituents in formal and informal ways, and similarities and significant differences emerge reflecting a range of factors including culture, the level of local government in which they are representatives, access to technology, ideology, class, race and personal values. These connections occur in a variety of locations,<sup>11</sup> but three distinct ways in which they are maintained emerge from the women's interviews.

The first is serendipitous connections based on casual encounters that generally occur either through the women's membership of non-local government organisations, in their workplaces or during their attendance at a variety of functions or social activities such as

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<sup>10</sup> The idea of care as a political theory has a substantial and separate body of literature. This issue arose directly in the analysis of the data from the Filipinas and Indian women, but as the main focus of this chapter is the representation of women within orthodox conceptions of representation, I do not explore it in this thesis in any depth.

<sup>11</sup> I recognise here that representatives develop and maintain relationships with others apart from their constituents, that constituents can have access to representatives at local government meetings and that representatives are also partially accountable by what they do and how they behave in those meetings. However, there is substantial evidence that these meetings are not accessible to all constituents, for a variety of reasons and are limited in terms of generating understanding or developing relationships. For these reasons I am focusing here on the direct relationships of the women with their constituents.

sporting events or shopping. Three Swedish and two Australian women identify this type of connection as an important way of keeping in touch with their constituents. One Swedish woman describes how she always uses these serendipitous connections to seek constituents' opinions about her local government's activities:

I meet people at my ordinary work, half day, and I meet people in my grandchildren's child-care and in the school, where I meet a lot of people. I meet them at the hospital when I go there where my elder relatives are and I always try to find out what the people think about what we are doing in (her town) to serve them (Lena).

Similarly, an Australian woman sees these connections as an important part of letting her know what her constituents think and what is happening in her community:

I'm a life member and patron of goodness knows how many organisations, sporting, youth, seniors, all types and I keep in touch with them all the time. I'm often at swimming carnivals, or last weekend I had softball grand final in the morning, junior football wind-up in the evening and the next day it was the seniors' grand final in the football. So I'm very much in my own community, so I have a fair idea about what the issues are all the time and if I don't know who to contact, I ask (Frances).

These serendipitous connections are valuable and clearly help the interviewees keep in touch with some of their constituents. However, as they are not intentional on the part of the women they may cover many issues not necessarily relevant to their representation. Furthermore, they are unlikely to be with the diversity of people in the interviewees' communities. They therefore constitute an important, but limited, aspect of inclusive political connection, which Young (2000) asserts is essential to democracy and a significant factor in building and sustaining relationships that lead to changed social perspectives.

The second way of maintaining connection is intentional or purposive on the part of the representatives or their constituents and directly related to issues that are relevant to the participants' representation. Fourteen of the women, some from each country, describe how they are active in 'getting out and about' in their communities with the express purpose of connecting with their constituents on local government issues. Some of these connections are planned and more formal, occurring in locations such as local government premises, political party rooms, community centres and, in the case of the mayors, the offices provided for them by their local government. Others occur in informal settings either on the streets or in particular areas within their constituencies. A number of the English women regularly attend advice bureaux, where they meet with constituents, as explained by one English woman who sees it as similar to a doctor's surgery:

I have regular advice bureaux, which I share with my Labour colleague. I've just done one this lunch time and there's another one this evening - every Wednesday we do two advice bureaux - it's like a doctor's surgery only a councillor's surgery (Therese).

The idea of being out in the community and actively seeking residents' opinions is identified by a number of Swedish women, including this young woman who perceives seeking her constituents' views and hearing their problems as a necessary part of the democratic process:

I try to be out also at the elderly care houses and at the schools and at youth houses and like that to talk with the people and hear how they have it in their works or with living in (her town) for them and all things like that ... I think it's very important for



democracy that the people who live in the town also can talk before we make a decision in the house or in the papers or something like that (Ulla).

Several Australian women describe part of their representative role as empowering the community to be involved in the decision-making process<sup>12</sup> and institute more formal connection as part of that process. This woman describes empowerment as part of her role, acknowledging her own limitations as a decision-maker:

I try and get out and empower the community so that they're involved in the decision-making process and I think that is about representing the community. I've never professed to have all the answers or to know all the issues and so you need to be able to learn from other people and I think you need to not be afraid to ask questions of other people (Marie).

However, a number of the women suggest that connecting in a purposive way with constituents can be inherently difficult and not always possible, particularly for those representing regional constituencies or where they have other representational responsibilities. An English woman explains how both her new position as a member of the House of Lords and the rural nature of her local government constituency can make maintaining connections difficult:

It's a bit more difficult with the other places because you don't live there, so you're not involved in the day to day running of the place. The geography is that I don't have to go to them to get anywhere, so you actually have to make an effort to get out. It's not entirely satisfactory, but I don't think it would be different for anyone representing a rural community, because you can only live in one place and so it's not always so easy to really plug into the other places (Margaret).

In a similar way, a Swedish mayor in a rural town expresses disappointment at not being able to get out as much as she would like:

And then I try to meet people. I meet children and I invite people who have moved to (her town) sometimes. Every year we invite everybody who has come to (her town) during the last months. I meet them here, together with some other people and tell them about (her town). And sometimes I go out to see the elder people. I try to meet people and talk to them. I don't always, I would like to do it more than I do, but I really do it as well as I can and I think it's very important (Eline).

These two women elucidate Young's (2000) point that maintaining connections with constituents is often difficult, particularly in the context of other representational activities in which the women are involved.

The interviewees are busy, with little time to spend on their personal needs, however what emerges again is the distinct difference between the western women and those from India and the Philippines. All the interviewees from these two countries reveal a pattern of connection that is personal and constant, beginning in their homes in the early morning and continuing in other locations throughout the day and late into the night. The Filipinas have between fifteen and fifty-two Barangays in their areas, many widely-dispersed and involving substantial travel. Two of the Filipinas exemplify the pattern of connection in their country, some of which involves regular visits to the Barangays in their areas:

Every month I stay one day and one night in one Barangay. I have sixteen Barangays. I bring my doctor, my sanitary inspector, the collector, the municipal planning officer, the Minister of Agriculture, everybody. I bring them there. We go all day and in the afternoons I talk to the wives, in the evenings I talk to the

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<sup>12</sup> What they describe as empowerment is really participation in the sense of having some input to council decisions rather than empowering them to make the decisions. Nevertheless I use their words.

husbands, early mornings I talk to the senior citizens, the grandfathers and the grandmothers. I sleep with them, I sleep there (Tina).

I don't mind even I work from 6 in the morning up to 8, 10, 12 in the evening. I even go out at night. What I do at night, I go out to check the Barangay halls, make sure that people are okay, that the whole night will be peaceful. I go out and check the police station, I do that with my driver ... I go with my people who clean the streets. I tell them what to do. And my police force, we have once a week we go out, we exercise in one of the Barangays. We schedule one Barangay from the other and then after our exercise we clean the streets with the people. We walk around, we do some exercises with our chief of police and police force. For example, this week we go to this Barangay, we'll tell the Barangay captain we will be in your place as early as 5.30 in the morning and then we'll have breakfast with them. Then it's a kind of consultation also (Baby).

An Indian woman exemplifies similar communication patterns in her country:

People start coming to my house from 8 o'clock in the morning. They come and then I go down to the ward, then we have offices - I have my party offices - so I go and sit there on each alternate day and I also receive people at my residence. So morning, evening, people come to my house. I also meet them at the party office and sometimes I go for a round in my ward (Vishakha).

This elucidates how what westerners generally consider as private spaces to be protected from the intrusion of their representative responsibilities are very much part of their public domain for the Filipinas and Indian women. Most of the western women refer to receiving phone-calls at home from their constituents, often at hours that are inconvenient. Not one suggests that her constituents would simply call in person at her home, although one Australian woman describes how a particular constituent connects with her by leaving notes in her letterbox:

I've got one resident at the moment, he goes on walks and I always have to make sure I look in the letterbox and he's left a little message there for me (Leisha).

However, for the Filipinas and Indian women these close and personal connections are normal and appropriate. Part of the explanation may well be factors such as the different availability of phones and access to transport, but it is equally likely to reflect different cultural and social norms as well as the systems of patronage which are prevalent in South and South East Asia (Richter 1998). It also highlights a difference in the construction of what is 'personal' between the interviewees from India and the Philippines and those from the Western countries. Such constructions are reflective of the histories, as well as the cultural, economic and political structures that shape the women in different ways.

The third way in which the women maintain connection is through the use of technology and the media rather than personal contact. All the western women mention phone calls and letters they receive and respond to. Some mention their use of the media or local government newsletters to maintain connections.

I try to be in the press and have a good contact with the journalists so I can have them write what I want now when I want a lot of press and media. And then I have this network on the Internet that I'm sending out information to people, but they don't need to be from (her city), they can be from any place in all of Sweden, if they like (Elena, Sweden).

And so I always sort of go through the minutes and I've got a couple of pages of notes that I put in the local newsletter ... And I just sort of think well if I just put a few one liners about each subject, if people want to know any more, they'll come and ask me, or ring me up, but at least it lets them know the subjects and the issues that we've been dealing with in the last month (Janine, Australia).

I have contact with people who phone me or send me mail - there's more and more mail. And I have to answer questions from the media on some things, mostly when something's wrong. And then, of course I have my neighbours (Miriam, Sweden).

The use of information technology is particularly evident in the women from Sweden, where computers are widely available:

I also see my role to invite to dialogue for the people in the city. I'm not sure that I'm successful all the time, but I try to do that, so that's why since I came to the council it was sent over the radio. It still is. Now it's also sent over the local television, it's also sent over the Internet and you can follow it on the Internet if you want to and you can send questions to the council and it will be answered during that session. I have a page on the Internet so you can find it there on the council and then you can send questions to me and that is increasing all the time (Helena).

I always have my telephone open, I have an email conversation, on average, four letters a day which has to be responded and are responded immediately also. And I'm always with them, when asked to (Lisa).

In Sweden there are many committees in a council, each elected by the council with a chair elected by the committee members. In addition, there is an executive committee comprising the chairs of all the committees with a chair, elected by this committee's members, who is the mayor. The executive committee members are salaried and work fulltime on local government responsibilities. One Swedish woman alludes to the potential danger that Young (2000) identifies about representatives severing their connections with their constituents. Lena describes how leaders' relationships with their colleagues in the executive committees can blind them to the voices of their constituents, although she asserts that her party recognises this and tries to prevent it:

The mayor, the leader of the executive party and it's the leader of the different parties and they all meet their contemporaries in this house and they form a society for themselves. And it's very easy to be blind in that situation. Yes, it's a risk, but I think everyone here is really aware of it and they are trying to avoid it, but sometimes when you are from the other side, not from this side, you can find it (Lena).

Another Swedish woman highlights both the risk of becoming remote and the difficulty in maintaining connections with constituents in public forums, where often the dialogue between constituents and representatives can be heated and there is the danger of becoming a defender of the council, contrasting this with one-to-one connections:

I think it's a risk that you can feel more that you are a person that doesn't know what it is like outside, because you only deal with colleagues and you have no time to be in the ordinary daily life. Yes, I think it's a risk, that's the bad side. And I think when you have a dialogue with one and one, in small groups, it's rather easy to explain, but when you have big meetings, with many people, they are more angry and it's not that easy to explain. Then I become a defender of the organisation and I can't explain how to go further with promises (Elisebet).

Each type of connection seems to serve different purposes. Serendipitous and purposive connections serve primarily as a means of receiving feedback and explaining decisions. The use of technology and the media serves primarily as a means of providing constituents with information, although as Helena has demonstrated, it is possible to open them up to feedback and answering constituent questions. Many of the women utilise them all, although none of the Indian women or the Filipinas discuss the use of either phones or information technology. However, not all the women emphasise direct connections with

their constituents suggesting that other aspects of their representation are more important to them.

Young (2000) describes as ‘thin’ democracy situations where elite groups of representatives are accountable only through the electoral process. Phillips (1995) supports Young’s contention about ‘thin democracy’ and takes it further by arguing that if representatives are not accountable beyond the electoral process they are not representatives at all. Most of the interviewees demonstrate a desire to maintain connections with their constituents and to listen and respond to their opinions and needs, which is reflective of a more direct and continuing accountability than the electoral process provides as well as a commitment to inclusion. However a range of factors can work against some of them being able to maintain their connections to the desired extent. The connections the women from India and the Philippines maintain with their constituents are more personal and less reliant on technology and media coverage than those of the western women. This is explained in part by the representatives’ and constituents’ access to resources, but also reflects cultural and social norms in those countries. Although the participants demonstrate similarities and differences in their connections with their constituents, both between countries and between individual women within countries, the varying emphases the women place on these connections challenge an argument for gender parity in local government on this basis alone.

In this section I have weighed the interviewees’ perspectives on their representation with a range of conceptions of representation. As is clear from this analysis, representation as revealed by these women defies dichotomous classification. Rather it is multi-layered, similar to an onion where another layer is revealed as one layer is removed, and contextual, fitting within both Phillips’ conception of representation as a politics of ideas *and* presence and Young’s conception of representation as relational. Furthermore, the interviewees from India and the Philippines, in conceiving representation as a maternal role, demonstrate the limitations of theories based on western ideas about politics. I have argued throughout this section that the gender of the representatives in local government does matter and that many of the participants are using their agency to represent the diversity of women in their communities. I have argued further that this analysis justifies an argument for increased representation of women on the basis of providing active role models, thus arguably revitalising local politics, as well as on the grounds of justice. Whilst there is only qualified support for an argument based solely on representatives representing the interests of women, I have contended that these arguments should not be seen as separate but as interlinked. The data supports an inclusive feminist argument which recognises the interweaving of representation with the women’s whole lives and lived realities.

A question that arises from the women’s representation is whether it leads to the transformation in social perspectives that Young (2000) argues can occur, and I now turn to investigate this question.

### **3.3.2 Transforming social perspectives**

All except one of the women believe their experience as representatives in local government has changed them for the better, whether through improved knowledge, confidence, a deeper understanding about themselves or others or the capacity to communicate more easily with a wide range of people. The only exception is an English

woman, who has been in local government for sixteen years, and thinks she has become more tolerant over that period but attributes it to stage of life:

I'm much more tolerant than I was. I'm much more tolerant ... No, no, I mean other things in my life have had an effect on me. I don't think being a local government councillor has changed me as an individual. I've got more knowledge. It's probably given me some more confidence now but that's about all (Carol).

However, twenty-six of the women, some from each country, specifically mention the way in which their connections with their constituents have changed their understanding of others, particularly groups they had never had contact with before. These women consistently refer to being a better person, to being more human and having more compassion and empathy through having seen and experienced things they would otherwise never have seen or done. The following comments from a woman from each country exemplify the way these women perceive their experience has changed them, their lives and their capacity to represent others.

A Swedish woman refers to her middle-class background, which is a common comment by most of the twenty-six women revealing the élite groups that elected representatives come from:

I think I've learned more empathy. I think I've learned to understand how people can have it. I've always been capable to take care of myself and I come from a good family and things like that, but in this position you learn so much about people in need ... And I think before this, it was much easier to just judge. So I think that's made me a better person (Lena).

An Indian woman describes how her emphasis has now changed, elucidating how difficult it is to maintain a focus solely on women once elected as a representative and having to respond to the needs of the whole community:

There was a sea of change. I was a social worker, I was born in my city, I'd been there for fifty-two years, but I had not seen the city from the viewpoint and from the place from where I saw it as a mayor ... I was sensitised and I was ashamed also of how our democracies are working and how we are unable to give to the people the least that we can give. Yes, I have become more sensitive. Earlier I was only gender sensitive; now I'm people sensitive (Rita).

An older Australian woman describes how the experience has strengthened her as a person in ways that no other experience would have given her:

I think I've grown myself in knowledge, patience I would say and compassion for the community. So I think ... as a person it has been wonderful for me. It's strengthened myself as a person enormously and I'll always be grateful for the opportunity (Frances).

Similarly, one Filipina describes the depth of her change in understanding:

I have a richer understanding. Yes, yes, that is the biggest difference, because when I was with (her former employer) I never realized that people are that poor. I came to know that during the campaign, because I visited their homes, I think 92 percent of the households I visited. It gave me a shock because I was being invited by the family to enter a house and I was waiting to be guided to a door and I could not find a door, because it was just a roof. And I had to enter bending down, crawling and what met me inside really shocked me and that was the very thing that moved me to win. Because what I saw was a woman who just gave birth three days ago lying down on bamboo pieces on the ground ... and she was there with a new baby and two other kids were lying down on bamboo pieces on the ground. They don't even have a door, because it was just a roof made of nipa. And boy, I saw that sight many times as I visited (Pat).

An English woman describes how her experience with members of her constituency has made her more tolerant and understanding:

I've certainly become very much more understanding of the different ways that people live. Some of the hardships that people had which again in leafy (her county) I never was aware of. A lot more tolerant of people, a lot more understanding of how people think, of different cultures - very, very much more tolerant of all of that (Nicole).

The perspectives of these women suggest that their experience of representation and connections with their constituents have helped them to make that leap beyond the limitations of their former interests and experiences that Phillips (1995) suggests people do rarely if at all.

Young argues that many of our social perspectives are influenced very strongly by our social positions and group-defined social locations, but that they may change as we interact with different people and with the 'aspect of social reality' to which we attend (2000:138-139). Young also argues that this multiplicity of perspectives, based on different experiences with different groups of people addressing different aspects of social reality, can either produce ambiguity or a confused understanding of social life, or help us to 'form a composite picture of social processes' (2000:139). She also maintains that multiple perspectives provide people with the resources to take a distance on each perspective and communicate comfortably with people who have different perspectives that we do not share, leading to more just decisions. I contend that these twenty-six women describe changes in their understanding of their social realities related directly to their representational experience and contact with different people which inevitably influence the decisions they make and support Young's argument. It is experiences such as these that strengthen the capacity of representatives to understand and represent the interests of groups to which they do not belong. Although the other participants do not articulate such a clear description of how their experiences have changed their understandings and hence their social perspectives, they all recognise their changed knowledge and contact with a much broader range of people as a result of their representation in local government. Even though they may not recognise the impact of those changes on their social perspectives directly, I argue that it is inevitable, even if simply producing ambiguity and confusion. Furthermore, this transformation elucidates the way that identities and interests are not pre-formed or stable but negotiated and constituted within politics itself (Mouffe 1996), supporting a strategy of displacement and arguments for increased representation of women in local government.

### 3.4 Summary

In this chapter, I have weighed the women's perspectives and practice with a range of conceptions of representation. I have argued that the representation they describe resists dichotomous classification that privileges either functional or social representation. Rather, their representation is multi-layered, complex and ambiguous, reflecting the influence of different cultures, ideologies and local government systems as well as personal values and experience. Furthermore, it is contextual, interwoven with the whole lives of the women - their personal values, ideology, past experience, culture, race and class - or the 'multiplicity of identities' that Barbara Arneil (1999:214) maintains we all contain within ourselves. This representation fits within Phillips' (1998) conception of a politics of ideas *and* presence, elucidates the relational nature of representation proposed by Young (2000)

and discloses the limitation of theories based either on western ideas or on politics at the national level. Whilst none of the representatives perceives her role as only, or indeed mostly, to represent women, I have argued that in practice most of them do, and that the gender of the representatives *does* matter and does support an inclusive feminist argument for increased representation of women in local government based on role models, justice and interests. I have argued finally that the relationships the interviewees develop and maintain with their constituents are differentiated and transformative for many of the women, leading to changed social perspectives which enable them to form a 'composite picture of social processes' (Young 2000:139) and represent social groups to which they do not belong. This elucidates the way that identities and interests are negotiated and constituted within politics itself (Mouffe 1996) and supports a strategy of displacement, whereby women seek inclusion within local government in order to transform it.

## Chapter 4: The Nature of the Dance: Exercising Power in Local Government

Women's participation in politics will only be truly valued when there is a shift in traditional perceptions of power (International IDEA News 2002:3).

### 4.1 Introduction

Implicit in the above quote is a belief that notions of power are gendered and historically reside with men. These notions ignore and thereby devalue the power of women. Power is arguably one of the most important issues for feminists generally, particularly in regard to politics and political life, to which it is intrinsic (Porter 1999:81). As Squires says, it is 'central to the feminist debate about the nature of politics' (1999:32). Feminism is 'deeply concerned with issues of how power should be conceived and understood' (Yeatman 1997:144). Feminists argue that power and gender are associated in that women and men often understand and experience power differently. In this chapter, I continue the investigation of the interviewees' representation within the context of their perspectives and experience of power in local government.

In the first part of the chapter I review mainstream conceptions of power as *power over*, which I contend are masculinist reflecting the experiences and interests predominantly of men. I contrast these with feminist conceptions of power as *capacity* or *power with* and *relational* and consider their implications for arguments concerning the engagement of women in formal politics. I then investigate the interviewees' perspectives and experience of power in local government in the context of these conceptions and the debates concerning them, thereby matching practice with theory. Finally, I investigate the question of whether women and men in local government have equal access to power.

I argue that power as revealed by these women is complex and ambiguous. Although they work within environments that essentially reflect a mainstream conception of power, the interviewees perceive power as something that should be used in ways that reflect feminist conceptions of power. However, the interviewees' practice of power is inevitably shaped and constrained by context, including the social, cultural and institutional contexts in which the women are located. I argue further that the women demonstrate an ethical approach to power which is not addressed directly in mainstream conceptions of power. I contend that power in local government is gendered, although the degree of genderedness depends to some extent on its cultural and institutional contexts. I contend further that many of the women in this study are changing the gendered structure of the 'lion's den' by their presence as active and ethical agents, responsible for the consequences of their actions and prepared to be politically accountable for them. Finally, I argue that change is more likely to occur where there are women leaders in both the executive and political bodies supported by a critical mass of other women elected representatives. Regardless of the differences between the women, this provides further strong support to an argument for increased representation of women in local government.



## 4.2 Political Power

Mainstream conceptions of power reflect predominantly liberal ideologies that emphasise the individual. In these conceptions, power is ‘something that an individual, or a group, either does or does not have ... that is intimately connected with authority, domination or exploitation’ and is something one exerts over others (Gatens 1992:123). Hartsock argues that this conception of power as domination not only leads to the domination of others but also ‘domination of external nature and domination of one’s own nature’ (1996:31). She contends that this is a masculinist conception which ‘underlies the definition of both sexuality and power as domination’ (1996:31). In contrast to mainstream conceptions, feminists conceive power as energy, capacity and potential and inherently relational, enacted with others in the community, thus emphasising the collective and relational nature of power and rejecting the notion of power as domination. Although masculinist and feminist conceptions are generally presented as separate and dichotomous, there are different positions which cannot be described adequately as wholly masculinist or feminist. I therefore locate masculinist and feminist conceptions as different poles of a continuum with other conceptions located between them as it prevents the dichotomies I seek to avoid.

Whilst mainstream conceptions of power emphasise power as domination, there are different positions within them. Steven Lukes (1986) describes how legitimate power is distinguished from brute force or violence and is conceived as *power over* others where conflicts of interest exist. These conflicts are seen to exist either in decision-making where there is an observable conflict of interest, or through the ‘mobilization of bias’, where conflicts that challenge the values or interests of a decision-maker have been limited or suppressed and are therefore covert (1986:24-5). argues that conceiving power in this way is flawed because power is assumed to be about individuals achieving what they want, despite resistance by others, and carried out in situations of either overt or covert conflict. He asserts that these assumptions fail to recognise the role of collective interests and action, thus ignoring the relational aspects of power and the way that power can shape or determine preferences, preventing conflicts from arising. It is this covert conflict that Lukes sees as ‘the most effective and insidious use of power’ (1986:23). He proposes a conception of power that accepts the mainstream conception of power exercised in conflictual situations, with conflict being either overt or covert, but also acknowledges its relational aspects. Lukes argues that conflict can also be latent, existing in ‘a contradiction between the subjective interests of the person exercising power and the *real interests* of those they exclude’ (1986:23). How the real interests are determined is not clear. In recognising the relational aspects of power, Lukes’ conception is closer to the feminist end of the continuum. So too is Talcott Parson’s (1967) conception of power as the use of authoritative decisions with others to further collective goals. Parson’s (1967:297-354) conception emphasises the relational nature of power but, unlike Lukes, Parsons sees power as consensual and rejects the notion that it is associated with conflicts of interests, coercion or force.

This relational nature of power, which many feminists see as crucial to their understanding of power, is elaborated by Michel Foucault. Foucault conceives power as existing in all relationships and multi-directional rather than ‘imposed from the top of a

social hierarchy or derived from a fundamental opposition between rulers and ruled' (in Pringle and Watson 1998:205). He also conceives power as largely productive or enabling as well as repressive or disciplinary. As he explains

What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression (Foucault 1980:119).

I agree with Hartsock, however, who argues that Foucault's conception of power ignores its genderedness and the 'systematically unequal relations of power' which privilege men. She asserts that despite emphasising the relational aspects of power he 'writes from the perspective of the dominator' and that 'as power exists everywhere, ultimately it is nowhere' (1996:39-41).

Feminist theorists conceive power as energy, capacity or potential and also relational (Emmet 1953-1954; Arendt 1969; Carroll 1972; Pitkin 1972), although there are different positions within feminist theory and not all the women theorists would describe themselves as holding a feminist position. For example, Hannah Arendt would not describe herself as a feminist, however she distinguishes between power and strength, authority and violence, conceiving power as *capacity* rather than control, arising 'whenever people work together rather than when they act against others' (1969:44). Arendt emphasises the relational aspect of power and the importance of community, rejecting notions of power as domination. Hartsock asserts that for Arendt, 'power is at once the "glue" that holds community together, the means by which the community is constituted' (1996:32) and this is a position supported by many feminists. In a similar way, Dorothy Emmet emphasises the relationship of power and community and conceives power as capacity. Emmet argues that there are five different types of power and that most theorists have focused only on power as control and domination, ignoring the capacity that 'some people have of stimulating activity in others and raising their morale' (1953-1954:13-14). Pitkin (1967), drawing on Arendt, also believes that power is best thought of as *capacity to act* and although she, too, emphasises the close relationship between power and community, in contrast to Arendt she believes that an individual can act alone, not just with others. Hartsock argues that conceptions of power as energy, capacity and potential are produced by women and suggest a distinct feminist conception of power, reflecting 'systematic and significant differences in life activity experienced by men and women, leading to different world views' (1996:37). However, although she favours these conceptions over orthodox conceptions of power as domination, Hartsock argues that they also ignore the 'genderedness of power and its importance in structuring social relations' (1996:30). Iva Deutchmann (1996) challenges Hartsock's contention that these conceptions of power are either uniquely or uniformly feminist and certainly Parson's (1967) conception also emphasises capacity rather than domination. However, this does not necessarily contradict Hartsock's contention that conceptions of power as energy, capacity and potential suggest there is a distinctly feminist conception of power. Men can also be feminists and may choose to utilise a feminist perspective of power.

Other feminist theorists conceive political power as *power with*, emphasising the relational nature of power whereby democratic *power over*, in the sense of holding positions of legitimate authority and influence, is a necessary pre-requisite for the pursuit of *power to act* (Frazer and Lacey 1993; Yeatman 1997), with others ‘as co-citizens *with* whom one acts in common’ (Arendt in Hartsock 1996). Yeatman contends that some feminists tend to equate power only with domination, which is then equated with undemocratic force. Similar to Emmet, Yeatman (1997:145) argues that ‘domination can [also] work democratically to extend or even constitute the power of its subjects’. Jean Bethke Elshtain (1992:110) argues that power over and capacity conceptions of power are problematic if they are seen as dichotomous, denying ‘the complexity and richness of women’s experiences’. Like Yeatman, Elshtain distinguishes strongly between undemocratic and democratic forms of power over.

Conceptions of power as either power over, capacity or both lead to three distinct positions within feminist critique and theories of power in politics (Squires 1999). The first, typically adopted by liberal feminists, seeks inclusion within the existing power structure despite knowing that power is conceived as power over. The second aims at reversing existing power structures, which would require revaluing power not as power over but as capacity. The third position of displacement considers this ‘absolute opposition’ between power over *or* capacity as in itself problematic and thus seeks to synthesise these two conceptions (Squires 1999:45-46). Democratic forms of power over are thus accepted as a pre-requisite to power as capacity, as is inclusion within existing power structures to change them. Each of these positions leads to different strategies for feminists in regard to engagement with formal politics and in the case of this study, to arguments for increased representation of women in local government.

Elshtain (1992) contends that men have historically held institutional and political power and that women have exercised it in informal, communal spheres of life. She asserts that in modern societies the formal institutions of the state are increasingly significant, whereas the world of female power recedes and that the complementarity of these forms of power is lost. She argues that in this context women can either

... manipulate their diminished social role as mothers inside increasingly powerless families or join forces with the men, assuming masculine roles and identities and competing for power on established, institutionalized terms (Elshtain 1992:116).

Although Elshtain’s argument contains many assumptions that will be investigated in this chapter, a significant question for this study is whether women leaders in local government do simply join forces with men or whether they perceive and execute power differently. If women indeed perceive and execute power in the same way as their male counterparts, then arguably increasing women’s representation would make no difference, weakening the argument for increased representation of women in local government. If, however, they perceive and enact power differently this would lend weight to such an argument.

In this section I have explored mainstream and feminist conceptions of power as poles of a continuum and their implications for arguments for women’s engagement in formal politics. I contend that mainstream forms of *power over* assume domination and submission whether practised by women or men. I contend further that feminist

alternatives synthesise *power as capacity* and the relational *power with*, thereby transforming it. However, I turn now to investigate the perspectives and experiences of the interviewees in the context of these conceptions of power and the feminist debates concerning them, thus matching practice with theory. I also consider the implications of this investigation for arguments for increased representation of women in local government.

### **4.3 The Dancers' Perspectives of Power**

Whilst some feminist literature on power presents women as almost powerless within patriarchal societies, the women in this study have challenged that stereotype by entering the male-dominated political world of local government. They have attained formal positions perceived as being powerful, particularly as leaders of either their local governments or their political groups. Contrary to any suggestion they might be powerless, the interviewees are assertive, confident women who are generally comfortable with their positions. This might be perceived as supporting Elshtain's (1992) argument that masculinised roles, identities and institutionalised power co-opt women. However, as was demonstrated in the previous chapter, whilst the interviewees do assume representational roles that have been historically defined by men, they can also change those roles in distinctive ways. I argue that the interviewees' perspectives and experience of power suggest they are also changing the practice of power in local government despite being constrained by broader social, cultural and institutional contexts.

Hartsock (1996:38) contends that power is 'less visible to those who are in power' and, as with questions about representation, the women appeared not to have thought about power in any depth prior to their interviews, perhaps supporting Hartsock's contention. Nevertheless, it may well also suggest a rejection of contemporary understandings of power or a reluctance to be seen as interested in holding powerful positions or wanting to mask or disguise that desire (Freeman, Bourque & Shelton 2001). Furthermore, as demonstrated in other research on women in local government, '[f]or the most part, local representatives react to the issues put before them. They have little time and few resources to think out the context within which political problems are posed' (Beck 2001:65). When the interviewees are given the opportunity to discuss power in local government, what emerge again, as in the previous chapter, are women speaking from their own historical, cultural, institutional and social contexts. These contexts inevitably influence their perspectives and experiences, revealing power as complex, ambiguous and sometimes contradictory, defying any dichotomous classification.

#### **4.3.1 Power for the community**

The one similarity between all the interviewees, which they mention consistently, is their belief that power in local government should be used to achieve positive outcomes for their communities and not to pursue representatives' own interests. Although all elected representatives would probably say this, as it reflects an orthodox view of liberal democracy, it is consistent with the women's beliefs expressed in the previous chapter in regard to addressing the needs, rather than interests, of their communities. I contend that

this is suggestive of a conception of *power with* rooted in community rather than in individual rights or interests.

The women also acknowledge that power in local government is not always used to achieve positive outcomes and are highly critical of those who enact it differently. This reveals what emerges consistently as an ethical basis of their representation, which Elisabeth Porter argues 'should be inseparable' from the political for 'democratic polities' (1999:81) and yet appears to be lacking or understated in mainstream conceptions of power.

### 4.3.2 Power in decision-making

In explaining how power can achieve positive outcomes for their communities most of the women refer to decisions made by their whole councils, which is suggestive of Parson's (1967) conception of power as authoritative decision-making used to achieve collective goals and Arendt's (1969) conception of power as capacity. Their examples reflect the responsibilities allocated to local government in the different countries, the influence of political parties, strong feminist movements seeking to achieve equality, their own priorities and the different stages of representative government in the five countries under examination.

The Swedish women work within a system which has, as mentioned in the previous chapters, a long former history of a social democratic government<sup>1</sup> and a strong commitment to equality, including between the sexes. It also has a proportional system of voting, which delivers local government representatives from seven political parties, as well as a committee system with a number of boards chaired by representatives elected by their colleagues. The influence of these factors is evident in the examples provided by the Swedish women, who all emphasise a consultative approach, recognising difference and seeking agreement across ideological boundaries. One Swedish mayor exemplifies this, stressing the importance of cross-party agreement particularly where decisions have long-term implications for the community:

For instance, these plans, the plans about the schools and the child-care, we have done it together, all seven parties. But sometimes there can be some differences, but then I think it's also important that we don't always think in the same way. There must be a dynamic in politics, but I think we have it as well, but I like when it's not so much quarrel because I think quarrel costs money and we have not got that money - money and time. And I think it's a good thing if we make decisions that is very important for a very long time, then I think it's very good if we make the decision with a majority bigger than 51 percent. Then I try to get the decision so that, perhaps not everybody, but as many as it's possible like the decision (Eline).

This reflects the values of equity, consensus, cooperation and integration that a number of authors assert exist in the political culture in Nordic countries (Solheim 2000; Goldsmith and Larsen 2004; Paxton 2007).

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<sup>1</sup> Although the Social Democrat party did not have a majority in its own right it governed in coalition with other smaller parties including the Left Party, however, at the election in 2006 The Moderate Party formed a coalition with The Centre Party, The Liberal Party and the Christian Democrats which gave them a majority and hence government.

As mentioned in the second chapter, in Australia, political parties do not control local government outside the major conurbations of Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne and some large rural councils in New South Wales. Most of the interviewees from Australia are independents and their examples elucidate how they have to work cooperatively with all their councillors, who are also mostly independents, to achieve positive outcomes for their communities. This is exemplified by one Australian mayor from a rural council:

Political power, that's when you've got councillors who work well together, or predominantly work well together. I mean different ones have different views on other things and you have to appreciate that that happens. But if they're working well together to achieve a result, if you are working well with your staff as a team, there's almost nothing you can't achieve (Frances).

This statement is a strong reflection of power as relational capacity.

In England there are three major political parties. The electoral system, in contrast to Sweden, is plurality voting where only one representative is elected for each constituency. This system is the least favourable to the election of women (Henig and Henig 2001:96; Curtin 2006) and generally delivers councils controlled by one party. Most of the discussion, negotiation and decision-making occur in either committees comprised of the majority group or in party rooms, with debates in council reflecting the parties' positions. Throughout their interviews the English women demonstrate a stronger attachment to majority party decisions and less emphasis than in Sweden on working across party differences. This is exemplified by one English leader of the council in a rural area:

If I think about the areas of work that we're into at the moment, the sustainable construction, that is political power. We have a political message. We want an environmental message to go out to the general public and the developers. The housing developers just didn't, were not interested at all, so we've used our political power to actually - we held a few seminars and we've made it absolutely clear, 'you won't build here anymore then. Unless you get on board with the program you're not wanted and we will fight you and you won't build here'. And they've had to come round and in the last I suppose 18 months they've got the message that we're not going to back down. We have got a good enough majority to carry this through and therefore they've got to play ball and that's political power (Christine).

In contrast to the relational power demonstrated by Frances, this is an example of power over. However, it is democratic power over the developers as the sustainable construction Christine mentions will benefit members of the community, enabling them to make informed choices about what they want in their housing.

As indicated in the previous chapter, in India, local government is controlled by political parties with electoral systems that reflect the English model. In discussing power in local government, the Indian women, like the English women, do not emphasise cross-party negotiation, rather they highlight party distinctions and rely on majority decisions. They also tend to personalise power, which will be discussed later, as this mayor exemplifies:

I'm going to do studies of complexes and residential areas for the general public, because they don't have house, they're living in such bad conditions, so I've got this land I will use for housing for the poor people and I will improve their living standard. I want to improve their living standard. And then the whole city I want to be lighted. Full lights should be there and all the roads will be this safe roads (Jasmin).

In the Philippines, local government is also controlled by political parties. However, after independence the Philippines was controlled by an authoritarian regime between 1972-1986, with a relatively recent emergence of a democratic government. Electoral systems in the Philippines, which are widely subject to fraud (Angeles 1999), appear to be first-past-the-post. Roces asserts that the challenges for this country posed by globalisation and modernity have meant that Filipinas in politics are informed by a 'modernising project' rather than a 'feminist project' (2000:135). The different role of mayors in this country appears to be reflected in the way most of the Filipinas describe their own power rather than that of their councils. This, and perhaps the influence of a focus on modernisation, appears to be exemplified by this mayor in a rural council:

In my first term, I was able to prove that by helping one another we can do projects. We were able to build an association of Barangay captains hall, a beautiful air conditioned hall by just putting our funds together. We did not need to get the assistance of the national government or any senator for that matter. On our own we were able to build that beautiful building for the Barangay officials and for the Sanguniang Kabataan officials. And also we were able to improve our market by utilizing market collections and not resorting to borrowing. What I did was to ensure that the collection of the market goes back to the market. We deposit it in a separate account and all the collections go back to the market, improving the market, for continuous improvement of the market, using our own income (Lita).

Nevertheless, Maila Stivens (1998:8) underlines the impossibility of generalising 'about gender regimes even within the borders of a particular nation-state' in Asia. This is elucidated by one young Filipina. Like the women from Sweden and Australia, she focuses on her council and the way they make decisions together and seek community consultation, rather than on her own influence:

It's to develop the town, but we're quite a participatory governance, meaning the people will be consulted every step of the way. And our environment will be protected and managed properly and it will serve the needs of the future generations (Meg).

Critics of conceptions of power as capacity and authoritative decision-making argue that these conceptions are prescriptive, ignore or downplay the relational and conflictual aspects of power and assume that 'people behave non-violently and argue rationally, free from domination' (Squires 1999:35). As decision-making in local government is aggregative (Urbinati 2000) or as one Swedish woman (Lina) says, 'a game of greatest numbering', decisions reflect the power of those who can gain majority support. Some of the examples of positive power are suggestive of a conception of power over others and do elucidate how conceptions of power as capacity and even *power with* tend to downplay or ignore the conflicts that can exist within council decision-making.

Chantal Mouffe (1999:756) asserts that the defining characteristic of modern democracy is its 'recognition and legitimation of conflict'. She argues that politics aims to create 'unity in a context of conflict and diversity' and to domesticate hostility by seeking to 'defuse the potential antagonism that exists in human relations', particularly with the 'creation of an "us" by the determination of a "them"' (1999:754-755). In local government, where there are diverse communities, values and ideologies, conflict is not only inevitable but necessary for inclusive politics. Moreover, it is the process and basis

of decision-making in conflictual situations that leads to either positive or negative outcomes (Porter 1999). If the process of decision-making is democratic, open and inclusive, and if elected representatives work from an ethical base to meet community needs rather than individual interests, then the outcomes are more likely to be positive for their communities.

Whilst Hartsock (1996) believes that capacity conceptions add a different dimension to mainstream conceptions of *power over*, she argues that these conceptions ignore the harm that one's actions or decisions can do to others, even where decision-makers have legitimate authority. In providing examples of how power can be used in a negative way in local government, the interviewees elucidate how collective decisions of councils can reflect mainstream conceptions of both *power over* in conflictual situations and power as *capacity* leading to outcomes that do harm others. The conflicts the women identify vary and they all make it clear they are not, and would not, be involved in them. Some identify the way councillors can be influenced by people outside their councils who want something from the council for themselves or their particular interest group. This demonstrates the relational nature of power and an emphasis on individuals rather than community. Others identify well-intentioned but poor decisions that impact negatively on people in the community. One English leader of the council describes both these types of conflicts in collective decision-making:

They might jump up and down and pressurize their political group to give a particular community group funding. Or a project that was ill-conceived and came into the council, large amounts of money, only to see that project fail in due course. And often the ethnic group associated with that being labelled as incompetent. They (the council) set it up to fail in other words and basically it was a misuse of political power, which was not right (Tosca).

One Australian mayor, who believes that religion is a stronger influence than politics, provides a specific example of how a collective decision she opposed was influenced by membership of a particular religion, demonstrating again the interweaving of power with social and personal interests:

We had an application for a child-care centre that the Catholic Church put up, inappropriate spot I thought. And I actually suggested that those members of the Catholic community should declare an interest and leave, which would have meant we'd be without a quorum. No-one declared an interest and the decision got up and clearly a couple of them took offence to that, but that's life. And basically I think it was a bad decision. We've now had to put traffic lights on the junction, there's a whole range of things that have had a flow on effect that didn't need to happen. And that was done based on their religion was my view. I think that happens in a lot of councils. I think a lot of people find it very difficult to put their sectional interests aside (Marie).

Some of the conflicts underlying collective decision-making relate to different ideological perspectives and the power of political parties. For example, an English leader of the opposition, who is a member of the Conservative Party in a council controlled by a Labor/Liberal Party coalition, provides an example of how collective decisions can be gained by forcing councillors to vote for something they do not really support:



I think there are times when political parties get themselves into some difficulties, when you've got perhaps two or three people at the top of the party that believe it's okay. They take the group with them through with it and the result is not such a very clever one. I guess the Visitors' Centre is the one I've referred to earlier. I know there were people on the Liberal side that were not happy about that, but because of the whipping system they voted for it, in a way which was damaging (Nicole).

This highlights what feminists would argue is undemocratic – and unethical - politics where the process and basis of decision-making can demonstrate a lack of respect for different values and an emphasis on getting the numbers privately rather than coming to decisions through informed public debate (Porter 1999). Although many of the examples the women provide would be seen as 'just the way politics are' within an aggregative system, some highlight Hartsock's (1996) contention that collective actions and decisions can harm others. The women are highly critical of behaviours such as these because they perceive them as harmful to the best interests of the community and therefore an abuse of power.

Lukes (1986) contends that conflicts are not always overt and forty-one of the women provide examples of how latent conflicts – or abuses as the women describe them - can have negative impacts on outcomes for the community. As well as reflecting a conception of power as domination, the women's examples also demonstrate Foucault's (1980) conception of power as relational and not necessarily hierarchical. Although they focus on the behaviour of either individual mayors or councillors or groups of councillors they have observed, they also highlight the way others within and outside local government can influence councillors in negative ways through their relationships.

A significant abuse of power identified by sixteen women, some from England, India, Sweden and the Philippines, is individual councillors or mayors who use local government funds or resources for their personal benefit, although the women are quick to stress that only a few councillors do this. This is corruption, reflecting a conception of latent conflictual power, where the subjective interests of a councillor or councillors work against the needs of the community, and elucidating the way individual values and ethics shape representation and power. Seven of the Swedish women refer to it and it has been an issue that has received significant media attention in that country. These women identify specific examples such as using local government money to frequent sex clubs and wining and dining their friends, which they say mostly only men do. However, as exemplified by one woman, they argue that it is now much less likely to occur in this country because people are aware of it and steps have been taken to control it:

We had in our neighbouring town, for instance, a group of politicians who used the money of the town for private things. They visited local restaurants with a lot of wine to drink and things like that and that loss was discovered and it was much in the papers. And at the same time this happened in several towns in Sweden, I can remember it was five or six towns with the same pattern of behaviour. They were middle-aged men mostly and this is when much was written about it so everyone has tried very much not to make things that are wrong (Lena).

One of the Swedish county councillors believes that this inappropriate use of power is more likely to occur in municipal councils because municipal councillors are 'closer to the money' and to 'decisions in the community'. However, she sees this misuse of power as almost natural or normal:

It's hard to see it in any big issues, but of course people are always trying to take advantage of their position in life or getting things for themselves (Elena).

None of the Australian women and only one English woman refer to power used inappropriately in this way. This might reflect controls that have been put in place in these countries to limit this type of abuse of power or it might mean that it has not received the same media attention as in other countries. The English woman, in a similar way to the Swedish county councillor, perceives this abuse of power as an almost inevitable part of politics, which she suspects is happening but cannot identify concrete examples to confirm her suspicions:

It's not just financial gain, even sexual favours and things like that can come into it, you know. I have never seen it happen in a way that I could prove, but I'm certainly aware, I have my suspicions about it happening. But then I guess that's life isn't it and I think wherever there is power, whether there is political power or anything else, it attracts people who are like that, you know, they're on the make. And as I said before, I don't think it's widespread in any sense, but you only need one or two to make life quite difficult and it's hard to deal with (Leslie).

Meenakshi Ganguly and R. Bhagwan Singh (2001:15) describe 'graft' as a traditional part of Indian politics and this is identified by three of the Indian women. As examples, one refers to misuse of local government funds where the councillors collude with the commissioner, who is the head of the executive body, to take money intended for council projects, emphasising the relational aspects of power:

But in the council, what happens, you know, there is self interest also, a lot of self interest. Now suppose the contract has been given, they used to distribute the money among themselves, but they never dared to come to me, they knew this lady will not take money. Once even the commissioner himself had come to my house, he was trying to bribe me. When I complained against him to the Ministry and the Ministry sent an enquiry, the corrupt commissioner, he came to me and he said 'Madam, what you are doing is not possible or not possible in a political life. It's because once when you don't have money, you will not be able to contest the next election. Where will you get the funds from?' I said 'I don't want to get elected by these means. If I do work, people will vote for me without money. If I don't have money, I will not contest the election also, but I will not earn money by these ways'. (Nala).

Another provides an example of what many of the South-East Asian women describe as common practice in their countries, in which they do not participate, which is charging a fee for carrying out their responsibilities:

In the morning I used to go to court, daytime I used to attend the corporation, evening I was available and I never charged anything, any money, so not being corrupt was my biggest aspect, whereas men for every small thing they charge money (Neela).

These examples perhaps reflect the fact that in these countries the practice of vote-buying is rife (Richter 1990; Roces 1998) and candidates have to contribute significant finances themselves to fund their workers and elicit votes. Kumari and Kidwai (1998:214) assert that in India, women candidates in most parties are expected to raise their own resources by 'fair or foul' means; that this privileges women who have family wealth and works against those who 'do not, cannot, or will not, have the required connection with the underworld or black money'. In contrast to the cost of campaigning, the allowances or income for representatives and mayors are small and once elected, mayors in particular have to provide their own personal money to assist individuals in need in their

communities. As one Indian interviewee, who demonstrates how important independent wealth is in her country, explains:

When I got elected in 1992, we got an honorarium of 600 rupees and now we have an honorarium of about 1600 rupees<sup>2</sup>, which doesn't even cover our phone bills. And I think this is the worst thing that allows people, or rather makes people, get into corruption (Dana).

However, these examples reflect the ethical approach that the interviewees demonstrate in rejecting this type of behaviour, even within systems where corruption is seen as a normal part of political life. They also demonstrate the inability of western political theories to explain what occurs in countries where there are such extremes of poverty and very different cultural traditions.

Annabelle Rosell (1999) asserts that corruption is so entrenched in the Philippines that it is considered a part of life and all the Filipinas acknowledge this whilst distancing themselves from it. They maintain consistently that women in local government are not – or should not be - corrupt and have a responsibility to be honest. Suggesting that all women are not corrupt and do not employ their power in this way may reflect their own values and ethics and has overtones of essentialism. However, Roces supports the views expressed by the mayors, arguing that in the Philippines 'political interaction is gendered' and official power 'is exercised differently by the sexes', particularly in regard to resorting to violence and corruption (1998:73). Nevertheless, it is difficult to accept that all women enact their power differently to men as it perhaps ignores the difficulty of working within environments where such corrupt practices are entrenched. Furthermore, it denies examples at least at the national level of some women leaders who have been corrupt.<sup>3</sup> As one Indian woman says:

Of course you cannot isolate women from the entire system, which operates with different norms, because there are still those elements which encourage this kind of practices, evil practices so to say. So, you can only try to contain the level of corruption, because it takes the entire system to clean itself (Vishakah).

Seven of the Filipinas describe similar situations to those identified by the Indian women, where some mayors collude with staff and others outside local government to obtain money for themselves, as exemplified by one Filipina:

If you connive with your accountant, you connive with your treasurer, you connive with your budget officer, you connive with your auditor it's easy to get money. Because you can make papers, you can sign the papers, ask them to sign papers and you can get money even without a program, even without a project. And some people could do that easily. It's wrong because if you're going to ask a contractor to give you ten or twenty percent of their earnings, they're not going to deprive themselves of their profit, but they're going to cheat on the project and give it to you (Pat).

Another identifies mayors using their access to resources to benefit their selves:

For example, during ordinary days when you're there in the traffic, when you don't follow traffic rules and because you're a mayor there's some mayors who will have

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<sup>2</sup> 1600 rupees converts to roughly \$46 AUD.

<sup>3</sup> Imelda Marcos was corrupt and Gloria Macapagal Arroyo has been accused of corrupt practices in regard to elections for the national government in 2004, having twice faced impeachment. Carmela Cruz claims that 'Arroyo's moral fibre appeared to be as unreliable as her predecessor's' (2007: 87).

their bodyguards go ahead and try to cut all these blockages so that they'll just be there ahead (Baby).

As mentioned earlier, a consistent theme that emerges from the Filipinas' examples of inappropriate use of local government finances and resources is that most of them attribute it to men, but not all men. Certainly one of the arguments women in local government in the Philippines use in their campaigns is that they are not corrupt and that having more women as representatives will reduce the level of corruption in that country.<sup>4</sup> This reflects again the ethical approach that all the women emphasise.

Apart from power used to achieve vested interests and using local government money and resources inappropriately, the women identify a wide range of actions they have observed, which they perceive as abuses of power. Most relate to the behaviour of individual councillors or the process of decision-making in local government. For example, the issue mentioned earlier by one English mayor about political parties using their numbers to force a decision through is echoed by several women from England, Sweden and Australia. They believe that 'using the numbers' to bulldoze through or make decisions without proper public debate is an abuse of power. The examples of this provided by the independent Australian interviewees elucidate how it is not just political parties, but also groups with similar interests who form a majority, who can subvert proper processes. As mentioned earlier, this reflects in part the emphasis that all the interviewees place on the process of decision-making, rather than just the outcomes.

Other behaviours that some of the women identify as an abuse of power reflect their own values and beliefs about how politics should work. Some identify making decisions that are not in the best interests of the community but might improve representatives' chances of being re-elected. Others identify using a position on council simply as an avenue to political life at a higher level or seeking self-aggrandisement by keeping the focus – and media attention – on themselves. The women who describe self-aggrandisement as an abuse of power again attribute it only to men, but not to all men. This suggests that gender is most influential in the way people enact power, then personal interests and values weigh in. This is exemplified by one Australian mayor:

It's self aggrandisement. It comes in and it's mostly the men. It's always the men, looking after their position and how they're perceived with their power group and it's more of a 'look what I can do, are you watching me', more than 'this is going to be good for the community'. Like I've got some, well I love it, there's four females or three females that work with me on council. They're just wonderful. They put themselves out to do the best for the community and they don't take the bows. The men will take the bows for the work the women have done. The men will always represent their mates first and not the community. Mates, then community (Helen).

The Filipinas and Indian women identify the issue of violence, which reflects power as brute force and not legitimate authority. Roces (1998:73) maintains that one of the differences which women politicians in the Philippines, particularly those in local government, have brought to their roles is that a number of male politicians use violence

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<sup>4</sup> When I worked as a consultant with the Lady Mayors' Association of the Philippines in 2000, this point was made repeatedly.

but women do not. Most of the Filipinas mention the way that men employed ‘goons’ in the 2001 election and one Filipina, who was pregnant at the time and lost her baby, probably as a direct result of this act of violence, explains this and also the necessity for having financial resources:

In the last election, one of my leaders was brutally killed and since it's done five days before election, most probably it has political colour and it's related to the election. So, since then, almost all my leadership in all the Barangays, were paralysed because of fear, fear for their lives. It's really depressing because in 1998 I thought probably this time maybe I could change politics, I could change the system. But it's not easy. Still guns, goons and gold prevail and it was proven because it is the first time here in our own municipality in a small town where you have to kill someone just to paralyse the operations of your opponent. That is abominable (Meg).

Political violence is also overt in India, as indicated by Kumari and Kidwai (1998), who point out how men candidates have access to criminal funds and resources. This is exemplified by one Indian woman who was not re-elected at the election in 2001. She was mayor in a seat reserved for women, but that reservation was changed at that election to one reserved only for a woman from an Other Backward Caste (OBC). This meant she had to stand in a neighbouring ward not reserved for a woman, where one of the candidates was a convicted criminal who had been in prison for many years for violent crimes. She says he threatened her, her family and people who worked for her with personal violence and used ‘fake votes’, which is fairly common, to ensure she was not re-elected. Although the man was a convicted criminal, prevented from standing by election laws, despite her drawing this to the attention of the authorities they did nothing about it. This is a clear example of undemocratic power over others.

Another Indian woman, who is a member of the Congress Party, provides an example of political power being used for vested interests and political gains regardless of the damage to the community, which is another example of undemocratic power. She refers to riots in her city between Muslims and Hindus, when the majority Congress council was trying collectively to calm things down but council members of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) actively worked behind the scenes to ‘stir things up’:

Political power is always used with the political ideologies. If it is only for the developmental issues, it's good, but if it's for a vested interest, then it is very bad. It should be like that, otherwise if you go on relatives' interests, someone has a vested interest, developmental, that is very bad, very, very bad. It takes back our country. The councillors belonging to BJP they wanted disharmony, they wanted this to flare, just to show that they were not in power, they wanted to show that ‘we are serving you, look we are there’. They only used it to do that and they only used it to go to the people and say, ‘don't worry, nothing will happen, we are there’. Like that, advantage taking like that, but we knew what is happening, but we couldn't say anything (Neela).

The only other woman to mention violence is a Swedish mayor, who identifies an example of how community members can also use undemocratic power for their own purposes:

There's been some bad things going on. For example, my colleague who used to be the chairman of the executive committee. Some years ago, two years ago I think, there was a big protest of young people and they occupied a private building that was going to be rebuilt and they said that they wanted this for a place for the youth. And they had never contacted us before, so it was really the, we call it the Alternon - the far left and they were inducing young people here just to destroy something in the society. And they wanted the chairman of the executive committee<sup>5</sup> to come there, but he couldn't do that because the police said that he could not be safe. There were lots of police and everything around but they could not say to him that he was safe, because these people threw like big stones and they had a lot of weapons. And then the night after his house was put on fire. They destroyed his garage and if he hadn't woken up because of a big sound, he and his wife would have been in that fire - and that was scary (Helena).

Although they use different examples reflecting their own values and experiences, these examples of perceived - and real - abuses of power reveal how power in local government can be domination and even brute force. At the same time, they reveal the alternative ethical approach, in rejecting these abuses, that is a consistent theme with all the women. This ethical approach challenges the popular image of politicians as people who simply use power to further their own or their parties' interests. It also challenges Elshtain's (1992) argument that women politicians simply assume masculine roles and identities. However, as noted earlier, the women do not attribute these abuses only to men, or to all men, but rather to certain individuals. This demonstrates the problems when stereotypes such as 'masculine' are used and ignores the multiple identities (Arneil 1999) which exist in each person.

### 4.3.3 The dancers' positional power

In describing their own power as leaders a still more complex picture emerges, with differences evident both between women from different countries and between individual women within the same country.

One of the significant themes that emerge is the tendency of the western women to deny they have power but acknowledge their influence. Twenty-four of the western women, but only two Filipinas and one Indian woman, describe their power as influence and deny that influence is power. The reluctance of most of the western women to use the word directly suggests that they see the typical practice of power as a form of domination and do not wish to claim it for themselves. Sue Freeman and Susan Bourque (2001:9) contend that if women demonstrate a desire for power it would conflict with cultural norms about what 'normal women' are interested in. This might lead them to either deny or disguise a desire for power. Whether it is masking a desire for power or a different perspective of power is almost irrelevant. Either possibility supports Hartsock's (1996:31) contention that a conception of power as domination is essentially masculinist, underlying 'the definition of both sexuality and power as domination'. However, denial could equally reflect an understanding of power as existing in multiple relationships between people and a desire to respect the power of others and not to privilege their own. This possibility is supported by Jean Baker Miller (1991:39), who argues that 'enhancing

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<sup>5</sup> In Sweden it is the chair of the executive committee or board who is described as, and has the responsibilities of, a mayor.

one's own power is extremely difficult for women. When women even contemplate acting powerful, they fear the possibility of limiting or putting down another person'. Whilst this may be the case for western women, it might also reflect the longer history of representative institutions of government in these countries and the way the positional power of leaders is constrained officially by the responsibilities and powers of mayors and leaders mandated in legislation.

The type of influence these western women identify covers a wide range. Most of them describe how, as mayors and leaders of their councils or party groups, they have much more capacity than councillors to influence what is happening and they enjoy that influence. They refer to closer relationships with staff, access to members of state and national governments and the media, their capacity to speak on behalf of their councils and party groups and to negotiate on the council's behalf with a range of different groups and people. Their positions enable them to promote particular issues, influence council agendas and shape what is discussed and how by the council as well as the context in which it is discussed. For example, one Swedish mayor, in discussing her influence with staff and the regular meetings she has with them, exemplifies both how influence can shape the direction of the council when the staff is supportive as well as the relational nature of power. In doing so, she demonstrates her ethical approach in that she would not try to make the staff do something they do not support:

I can give direction of which way I wanted to go, but I would never dream of saying - if they have a totally different opinion, I wouldn't force them to write something which they cannot stand behind. Then I will do it in another way, I will write it myself or something like that (Helena).

An Australian mayor describes a more authoritative approach, reflecting both use of influence as domination and her preparedness to be 'tough' if she thinks it is warranted:

My policy with the staff is talk with them, consult with them and sometimes I have to say 'I know you're going to put that off, but we'll do it now'. Now I don't really have any problems there. I have an excellent staff, but if they know I'm digging my heels in, they will come to me and say, 'look you want to do this now, we think this is the best way to do it'. So I suppose really they capitulate when I get tough (Molly).

Another Australian mayor describes how, despite her lack of legislative power, she can still drive the organisation through her presence on a daily basis:

You can actually drive things fairly easily. I suppose in one respect that's power, but you know, you don't really have any. I don't really have any legislative power or backup to do a lot of things, but mainly do it through influence. If you're there on - if you're in the offices on a day to day basis - you can often see what's happening and influence things at the very beginning (Marian).

Raka Ray (1999:10) argues that the ability to influence others is 'the surest yardstick of power' and I contend that the women's examples support this argument. Despite using the softer word of influence, they might be perceived as practising Lukes' description of the 'most effective and insidious use' of power (1986:23) – that of shaping or determining preferences, thereby preventing conflict from arising. However, Lukes' (1986) assertion that shaping or determining preferences is 'insidious' suggests that this is done with intent and for malign reasons, which is contested by the women's commitment to open and full consultation and their ethical approach. They continually

express a preference for working together with their councillors or group members to achieve collective outcomes, but they are also prepared to make decisions independently when necessary and to be firm in providing direction and guiding decisions through council when it is in the community's interests. Power can be used effectively without being insidious.

The women who chair council meetings have authority to control the meeting and generally the interviewees try to do this in ways that allow for full and open discussion as indicated in the previous section. Nevertheless, local government meetings have rules governing debate and sometimes the mayors and leaders of the councils have to be directive, particularly if they wish to ensure that councillors keep to the agenda, do not attack other councillors and that all perspectives are heard within a reasonable time. This issue about the rules of debate, which many argue is reflective of a gendered structure, will be explored in the next section. However, one older Australian mayor demonstrates how, even though she has a commitment to open and full discussion and giving everyone a chance to speak, she can appear as 'autocratic', particularly when the debate is getting heated and she is asked to clarify a council policy:

Well of course, half the council looked please and half of them wanted my guts for garters. So there was a bit of shuffling and movement and I just banged the gavel and I said, 'the chairman controls the meeting'. I've had no more problems. And I thought to myself, perhaps I was wrong, but the chairman does control the meetings, even if he or she is wrong (Molly).

In contrast to most of the western women, all except two of the Filipinas directly acknowledge their power and are comfortable and confident with describing how they enact it. Roces (2000) says that Filipinos conceive power as *malakas* - strength. This is exemplified by a number of the Filipinas who use the phrase 'wielding power', reflecting how notions of power are embedded in cultural contexts. Another reason for the Filipinas' confidence is the different roles that Filipino mayors have as chief executives of the council, which gives them the capacity to act alone, supporting Pitkin's (1967) contention that power does not have to be exercised with others. They have substantial executive power including approval of investment and development projects, appointment of employees and granting of licences such as marriage licences. These different roles demonstrate the ways contexts shape power. However, Filipino mayors are not the presiding officers of the council – vice-mayors are – and mayors still have to gain the support of the council for funding projects and their plans, demonstrating how power is also relational and not necessarily hierarchical.

The examples the Filipinas provide reveal the extent of their power and how they employ it in ways that might be seen as more suggestive of a conception of *power over*. One woman describes her capacity to control the police and the street cleaners, reflecting the 'hands-on' approach that is evident in most of the Filipinas and her emphasis on building positive community relationships:

I have all the power to tell them to do this and that. I go with my people who clean the streets, I tell them what to do and my police force we have once a week we go out, we exercise in one of the Barangays. We schedule one Barangay from the other and then after our exercise we clean the streets, with the people. We walk



around, we do some exercises with our Chief of Police and police force. By letting these Barangay captains realize that the policemen are there for you to help maintain peace and order, because in the Philippines, no offence meant to the policemen, like before, they can have this negative impression with our police force (Baby).

This was an initiative of Baby's and it is hard to imagine a male mayor in the Philippines (and perhaps anywhere else) involving himself in cleaning the streets, which again exemplifies Phillips' (1995) contention that women can, through their influence, change political environments and cultures by being present, by changing the agenda and by introducing different priorities.

Another Filipina describes a range of uses reflecting both the cultural influence that Roces (2000) highlights and the way that the women can use their power to challenge injustice and support the economic needs of their communities:

You can always wield power, but it depends upon the person. I use my political power in expediting programs in helping people, like people who have been misjudged and go to prison wrongly. Then I will use my political power there. I would talk with the police, I would talk with the judges and then would expedite hearing cases in court, that is one example. Of course, political power in following up funding. Then I use my political power in helping people get jobs through my recommendation to the local companies and their sub-contractors. And then I wield my political power in insisting that these companies who came to (her municipality) would hire local labour. I am very strong in that. In fact I ask them to submit a report monthly of the list of labourers that they have, together with their addresses. If I see that they don't hire more people from my town, then they have me to reckon with (Pat).

Roces (1998:85) argues that one of the criticisms in the Philippines of female politicians, such as Cory Aquino, is that hesitancy can be interpreted as weakness. This will be considered in greater depth in the next section, however, I contend that although these mayors talk about 'wielding power' it is partly because that phrase is culturally acceptable in the Philippines and partly because it reflects the executive powers they are expected to apply. In the case of Pat in particular, who came to local government from the utility sector, where she held a senior executive position for many years, other factors are also at play. Bet Roffey (1999:393) points to research by E. V. Samonte (1990), which asserts that 'Filipina executives and business leaders still come from a highly educated minority and may exhibit more behaviours typically associated with male executives than do the majority of Filipinas'. Samonte (in Roffey 1999:393) argues that it is Filipina business leaders in finance, transport, education, utilities, banking and environmental technology enterprises who particularly demonstrate these behaviours, suggesting that 'decisiveness and task-orientation are arguably necessary conditions for effective strategic leadership' in business. I maintain that the role of the Filipinas as chief executives in local government also routinely isolates them from collective decision-making with their colleagues and locates them in the masculinist context of the bureaucracy, which shapes the way they enact power.

In contrast to this, two Filipinas describe their power in different ways. One, who came from a very poor family and married into a political family, rejects the notion of power as something that can be 'wielded' over others, thereby reflecting the value she places on connecting with her community:

We do not want elected officials or politicians to think that they are kings, that they are royalties and that the province or the municipalities are their kingdom. And public service should not be treated as a right, but it should be treated as a privilege by us who have been elected by the people - a privilege to serve. And to really understand and to look for ways in order to really address the really basic problems of the people who have less, because they are more in number than us who have it ... So I think, other politicians who will think that the local authority, the municipality or the province is their kingdom, they should go down and join the people and talk to them and ask them and let it be a participatory one, let it be a sharing, because service is not a monopoly. It should be a partnership, it should be shared, it should be a family affair (Tina).

The other Filipina refers to her power as influence, incorporating both *power over* and capacity conceptions of power and the value she attributes to being a good example for her community:

Of course, being in power, you could change people's attitude. You must be in power in order that you could influence people. Yeah, I like that and I love that, that's why I really wanted to do that, because that's the only way in the system of the Philippines people. The Filipinos really love to have good leaders who could really influence them and I am trying my best to be at my level best also and to satisfy their expectations (Betty).

Roces (2000:119) asserts that 'personality' is a factor in analysing women's political power in the Philippines and the differences between these women confirm her argument. I suggest that personality, reflecting in part personal values, is a factor in analysing both men's and women's political power regardless of country.

In contrast to the Filipinas, the Indian women in this study, like the women from the western countries, do not have executive power. All the Indian women believe that power should be enacted for the benefit of the community and, in a similar way to most of the Filipinas, describe it as power rather than influence. However, they reject the idea that they have positional power because they lack executive power, reflecting a perception of power as the ability to control people and resources. Two believe that this separation between political and executive power is appropriate and prevents elected representatives acting in a corrupt way, but three believe it is a significant factor working against the best outcomes for their communities, as exemplified by this woman who perceives herself as a puppet:

I have no authority to control the administration. I have no power to control the finances. And I am just a puppet mayor, not because I am a woman, I am a puppet mayor. I could have done much more if I were an executive mayor. I could have really given a garbage free city to the citizens, because you see if I don't have the power even to suspend worker, ordinary worker in my establishment, who will be scared of me? Actually we have no power (Rita).

Although another Indian woman reinforces this perception of mayors being puppets, she explains how she could enact influential power through her relationship with the commissioner, resembling again Foucault's (1980) conception of power as relational:

When I was the mayor, the mayor was merely a puppet. Or rather, the mayor had no executive powers. The mayor had only superficial powers, but in spite of that, because of my good relations with the commissioner, I could do a lot of things for (her city) (Vishakah).

As mentioned earlier, Stivens (1998:8) argues that it is impossible to generalise 'about gender regimes even within the borders of a particular nation-state'. The differences

between the women in each country support this argument, demonstrating again the interweaving of power with the whole lives of the women and the influence of established norms that may be more or less democratic.

These examples provide a complex and ambiguous perspective of power. Starhawk (1987:10-11) describes *power with* as:

... the power of a strong individual in a group of equals, the power not to command but to suggest and be listened to, to begin something and see it happen. The source of power-with is the willingness of others to listen to our ideas ... Power-with is more subtle, more fluid and fragile than authority. It is dependent on personal responsibility, on our own creativity and daring and on the willingness of others to respond.

All the women describe their power in ways that are suggestive of this conception of *power with*, however, it is clear that their capacity to either practise it consistently or describe it in this way is shaped by contexts including social, cultural and institutional. The clearest and most consistent examples of *power with* emerge from the Swedish interviewees, confirming how the combination of factors such as more equitable electoral systems, a comprehensive and institutionalised commitment to equality and social justice and cultural norms that welcome difference and inclusion can inform political practice in positive ways.

In this chapter, I have consistently argued that, despite the contexts and limitations within which the women operate, they reflect an ethical and active agency and a feminist conception of power. The evidence for my argument lies in their perspectives of power utilised as a resource in responding to the needs of their communities, their rejection of abusive power and their commitment to open and inclusive processes of decision-making.

Hartsock (1997:37) asserts that most conceptions of power 'fail to address directly the genderedness of power and its importance in structuring social relations'. Although some of the examples the women have given are suggestive of the gendered nature of power in local government I turn now to investigate this issue more fully.

#### **4.4 A Den Constructed by Lions for Lions**

What do I mean when I talk about a den constructed by lions for lions? Hartsock (1983:240) argues that masculinity is evident in

... the ways masculine but not feminine experience and activity replicates itself in both the hierarchical and dualist institutions of class society, in the frameworks of thought these have generated in the West and in our cultural construction of sexuality.

Georgia Duerst-Lahti and Rita Mae Kelly (1995:21-22) argue that masculinism is, like feminism, an ideology which carries underlying assumptions about how power and privilege are distributed. However, they argue that those assumptions are invisible and therefore more potent as people can participate in 'masculinist ideological arrangements without being aware of them'. Many of the women in this study describe a lack of comfort with the environment of the lion's den yet do not appear to have taken the further step of questioning why it is so, which perhaps elaborates Duerst-Lahti and Kelly's argument.

Maude Edgahr-Wettergren and Birgitta Elvas (1999:4) assert that power is distributed through the structures, rules, routines, cultures and norms of local government and if that power is not evenly distributed between women and men the organisation's design is 'not gender-neutral'. Although this is a useful way of considering power in local government, I contend that it does not address adequately the embeddedness of local government within systems imposed by national and state governments that are themselves gendered and reflect social norms and customs in the private sphere. I also maintain that a focus only on the *distribution* of power reflects a conception of power as something that one possesses, which tends to downplay the relational nature of power and the interweaving of power with the whole lives of elected representatives as revealed so far by the interviewees in this chapter.

#### **4.4.1 A subordinate system of government**

Historically, representative government systems were designed by men and arguably reflect the masculinity described by Hartsock (1983) in that they are hierarchical and based on the experiences and interests of those who designed them. The structure of local government and the powers allocated to it are determined, albeit sometimes indirectly, by both national and state governments controlled by men, as asserted by one Swedish mayor:

One thing that causes difficulties is that the whole political life and the whole structure is made by men. So political work and the organization and the time different matters take, everything is made by men, so of course it's more difficult for a woman to feel comfortable with this (Eline).

The power of the central government over local government is a particular issue raised directly by four of the English women, although it is also alluded to by many of the interviewees. The English women refer to the fact that their capacity to really address the needs of their local communities is constrained by the way their national governments decide how much money each council receives and control how most of their budgets are to be spent. This is exemplified by one English woman, who describes the unequal relationship she believes exists in that country, reflecting the centralisation of control mentioned in the previous chapter:

The really bad experience - I mean, it's a particularly UK phenomenon - is the over-dependency on central government. I think it's an unhealthy relationship in that it's like being a child of the time. You have to keep asking for things, as opposed to being able to react and be responsible for your own local area and meeting the needs and being accountable to your local electorate (Carol).

Another English woman demonstrates the extent of that control:

Much of what we do in local government is prescribed by central government. It's about 80 percent of our budget is provided by central government. Only 20 percent is from the local taxpayer and about 80 percent of our functions are not discretionary, they're statute, so it's within the 20 percent that you can make the difference (Tosca).

As well as allocating budgets and determining priorities, national and state governments also introduce policies and take actions which impact significantly on local communities and yet local governments have no formal say in the decision-making process. For example, the focus on neo-liberalism and globalisation, which all the women indicate is

impacting negatively on their local communities, is determined by national and state governments predominantly controlled by men, therefore more likely to prioritise the interests of many men in local government.

National and state governments generally determine electoral systems for local government, and these systems are not neutral but are designed to advantage some and disadvantage others. As has already been demonstrated in this chapter, electoral systems can work against women being elected, denying them access to power and reflecting the structural inequality that Phillips (1995) asserts is necessary to support an argument for gender equity in formal politics on the basis of justice. As Ruth and Simon Henig (2001:99-100) point out, electoral systems 'were not designed in a political vacuum' and their outcomes 'are likely to be those that appeal to the dominant forces in society'. They conclude that in countries like England, electoral systems are 'a means to an end, simply a proxy for the prevailing closed political culture, which by definition would aim to keep women out of politics' (Henig & Henig 2001:100). All the women in this study acknowledge the under-representation of women in local government and the general difficulty that women experience in elections. However, the only interviewees to raise electoral systems directly are from Sweden and India, where formal mechanisms exist to address gender bias.

Jennifer Curtin (2006:98) asserts that proportional representation (PR) is more favourable to the election of women than plurality or majority systems although it depends to some extent on the type of PR system and other factors including the political culture in which it is embedded and strategies by feminist organisations. As mentioned earlier, the PR system in Sweden is one of the more favourable to women as electors vote for a party, not individual candidates. Three political parties have taken steps to increase women's representation by requiring fifty percent of candidates on party lists to be women in winnable positions. Five of the Swedish women raise the role of party lists and how having fifty percent of positions on the party list has supported the election of women, as exemplified by this Swedish mayor:

My deputies, they are also women, so we have three women there. The executive committee has never had a female chairman before, but they do have now and that was a breakthrough. The council is nowadays about 50 percent women. It has really meant something because we do have a lot of good women and they know a lot of things, so it was not that that kept them away, it was the system itself (Helena).

The existence of quotas in three of the seven parties reflects the influence of ideology and a strong feminist push for equality. These were supported by both the presence of the former social democratic government committed to gender equality and the PR system. One Swedish interviewee, who is a member of the Left Party, describes how in her district women have the first three positions partly because of her personal influence in her district but how other parties generally put a man at the top of the list:

When we have six districts, it depends on the first name on the list, if it's a man or a woman. Sometimes different parties have a man in the first place and maybe they've just one candidate from the district, then they will just have men. So it's important that you have a woman at the top. Now we have so many who stand in my district that the first name is me, the second name is another woman, the third name is also a woman. So, we have three women and then it's a man (Inez).

These two examples support Curtin's (2006) argument that PR systems can result in more women being elected however, party support is also necessary. Furthermore, they both demonstrate how PR systems, together with the presence of an influential feminist woman leader and a critical mass<sup>6</sup> of women already in local government, can alter the balance, providing further support for Phillips' (1995) insistence that the presence of women makes a difference to representative government. Finally, Helena's statement that the system kept women out before the implementation of PR highlights both institutional power and the systematic bias that supports an argument for increased representation of women on the basis of justice.

Most of the Indian interviewees mention the mandated reservation of seats for women as the main reason for their election, as exemplified by this interviewee:

It was reserved for a woman. Then only I was able to fight the election, otherwise a man is dominating the social system. There are so many men, more intellectual and more intelligent than me, so there are few chances to come ahead, but because the reservation system was there I got the chance (Jasmin).

Jasmin's suggestion that men are more intellectual and intelligent, which is unlikely to be borne out in reality, elucidates Duerst-Lahti and Kelly's (1995) argument about how women can also participate, albeit unconsciously, in masculinism. Although there is a formal guarantee of gender equality in the Indian Constitution, Kumari and Kidwai (1998) assert that, apart from in the Panchayati Raj, the reservation system has done little to change the gender bias in politics as there is no commitment in practice to gender equality. The national government has not introduced a similar system for national elections, largely because it is seen as prioritising women's issues over economics, religion and tradition and because men 'are not willing to lose seats to women' (1998:211-213). I contend that the Indian interviewees in this study are, by their presence, bringing different perspectives and ways of doing things to their councils. However, unless quotas or reservation of seats are accompanied by a change in traditional perceptions of power, change is constrained and slower. As Sue Maddock (1993:349) says, 'individuals' beliefs and attitudes are slow to change' and it is only when women are firmly established in organisations, including political parties, at all levels that gender cultures are transformed. Quotas and reservation of seats can be important in changing the gender bias of electoral systems but they are not sufficient on their own (Porter 1999:85), as they fail to address adequately the dominant position of men within most party structures (Kumari and Kidwai 1998).

#### **4.4.2 Power shaped by structures**

National and state governments also determine the structure of local governments and how they operate, although these structures are not fixed. They can and do shift over time, reflecting the influence of social and cultural contexts (Frazer and Lacey 1993:10) and, I aver, the presence of women. A significant issue mentioned either directly or

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<sup>6</sup> As pointed out on p. 4, the presence of significant numbers of women alone may not make the difference that the notion of a critical mass suggests, although the focus of critical mass is generally on legislative outcomes for women. I agree that a critical mass is not sufficient on its own, and argue here and throughout the remainder of this thesis that difference and change to the institution of local government (rather than simply legislative outcomes for women) are more likely when a combination of factors is present, but that critical mass is one of those factors and therefore important.

alluded to by most of the interviewees, with the exception of the Filipinas, is the power of local government staff in implementing council decisions. One English leader of the council reveals inequalities in a system where she works as hard and long as the chief executive but without equivalent resources:

I think the system that we have now has been created either deliberately to undermine what local government can achieve realistically, or it's been designed by people who haven't a clue. And I look at somebody like the chief exec here, who's really good, I'm not critical of him. But I mean he's sort of the very high powered job, highly paid, highly supported and I'm here as an amateur, you know, with minimum support, with just as much work and demands. We go away at the end of the day and I'm exhausted and I'm sure he is too, but the two things somehow are designed in a way that I can't see it's ever going to be a satisfactory process. Because you've got your civil service or your local government bureaucracy and then you've got amateurs who come and go (Natasha).

In her comment on the short term nature of elected representation in local government, Natasha is identifying a significant constraint on change, which will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 7.

Another English leader points to how staff can fail to address issues raised by the council:

Sometimes you couldn't believe it. Nothing happens and it's like you flog away at something and just nothing happens at all. We had a council meeting last night where we had a deputation from a school down the road here, complaining about a plot of land that's been wasteland for years and it's terrible. Drug dealing goes on in there, there are rats living there - it is just foul. I can remember raising this issue like months ago. Other people have clearly raised it over the months and nothing has happened. So you know, what has to happen for something to be done about this place? Sometimes it is very frustrating that nothing can get through and at other times things do happen (Leslie).

This is a common complaint in local government. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the Indian women all believe that real power lies with the local government bureaucracy, and indeed the municipal commissioners in their councils are appointed by the state government which gives them a significant degree of autonomy<sup>7</sup> (Fahim 2006). One Indian mayor describes the extent of that power, where decisions of the council can be ignored:

During my tenure we had over 500 resolutions. We passed over 500 resolutions in the house and in the executive committee and not one was fulfilled. Not one was followed. Why? Because my Act, these Acts of State, my Act empowers the municipal commissioner. In one line it says - if a certain resolution of the house or an order of the mayor is not for the good of the city, it can be ignored (Rita).

Senior staff and particularly chief executive officers have a significant impact on the culture of the organisation. Few women progress to the most senior position in local

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<sup>7</sup> All the interviewees from India were, or had been, mayors in Municipal Corporations which are established in the largest urban centres such as Mumbai, Pune and Aligarh and in their local governments, as well as the commissioners being appointed by the state government, the mayors held office for one year only. Even in Municipal Corporations there are some differences e.g. in Kolkata, West Bengal, the municipal commissioner is subject to the supervision and control of the mayor (Fahim 2006). As in the European countries in this study and Australia, Indian local government is in transition, demonstrating further the complexity of the systems within which the interviewees work.

government bureaucracies and those in the more senior positions are generally concentrated in the community services and welfare areas.<sup>8</sup> However, when women reach the most senior position it has a significant impact on the culture of the organisation, as exemplified by some of the Filipinas who are the chief executives. Elected women leaders can also have a strong influence in breaking the hold that men have traditionally held on these senior positions. This is exemplified by one English leader who, like most mayors or leaders of the council, is involved in the selection of senior staff and has achieved change simply by applying Equal Opportunity policies:

So, you know, I think I do have a responsibility and also as the leader of a district council, I have responsibility to ensure that our Equal Opportunities policies are real and living. For a long time we had no female members of staff on the management team at all. In my first year as leader there was no female in the management team. We now have three [including the CEO and the manager of finances – 2 crucial positions] - it's 50/50 (Christine).

Although she denies this happened because she was on the panel, Christine is underestimating the power of her ethical approach and insistence on proper selection processes. As Louise Chappell (2002:180) suggests, change in government institutions requires an alignment between 'institutional and political forces'. Moreover, Christine's example underlines the way that many recruitment processes for senior staff, reflecting the norms and cultures of their organisations, are biased against the recruitment of women. The continuing relative absence of women in top positions means that the culture of most local governments arguably reflects the influence of men. Leaders can, as is evident from some of the examples, influence chief executive officers and staff through their relationships. However, where formal political leadership positions change regularly that influence is more tenuous and less likely to lead to enduring change. Structures are surprisingly resilient and can outlast temporary influence.

#### **4.4.3 Power shaped by processes**

One of the themes that emerges consistently in this study is the interviewees' preference for effective consultation and open, informed and full debate on issues. However, council meeting procedures do not make this easy and most of the interviewees, some in each country, assert that women find these procedures uncomfortable. Council meetings are formal and debates generally follow rules which in themselves arguably are gendered in that they are adversarial. Councillors speak alternately for and against propositions being debated and move amendments that might better reflect their own positions. Although this theoretically provides opportunities for different perspectives to be heard, in councils where there are large numbers of representatives it is more difficult. Some of the councils in which the interviewees are located have over one hundred, and in the case of India, over two hundred, councillors. Also, having to argue for or against particular propositions almost guarantees opposition rather than inquiry and genuine sharing of

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<sup>8</sup> Although statistics on senior positions in local government in Sweden are not provided on a gender basis, it may be that it is different as 80 percent of municipal and 81 percent of paid staff in county councils in that country are women (Swedish Government 2007: 18). Despite this, it may well be as it is in other industries in the Nordic countries where women comprise the overwhelming majority of workers yet their presence in the most senior positions is negligible (Bruce Solheim 2000).



ideas. Within this oppositional framework some councillors tend to enact individual power by dominating meetings and the interviewees attribute this tendency more to men than women. This is exemplified by one Swedish woman, who is deputy to a woman mayor:

Long, long discussions where the persons were mostly men, just get up to talk or just to show that they are there. They talk for a very long time and they are saying the same things that already have been said, but in some way they just had to make everyone know that they are there and they have something to say and that can be boring. It's awful. Women very seldom do that (Lena).

However, it is possible to modify the procedures and encourage more active participation by a broader range of people. The woman mayor at Lena's council initiated a change in meeting procedures, reducing the maximum time councillors could speak and introducing a new procedure whereby councillors could signal that they wanted to make a comment about a point made by the speaker:

We have agreed that we can have short comments for one minute and then you break the system of speakers. If one person says something, you make a special sign that you want to have a short comment and then you are allowed to do that. And that makes a very, very interesting discussion because if you had to wait for five persons to speak, ten minutes each, the point would be lost before it was your turn to say something. Now you can have a short discussion in a longer discussion (Lena).

In a similar way, one Australian mayor also explains why she is uncomfortable with meeting procedures and how she tries to change the atmosphere:

It can be a bit frustrating having to manage meetings à la local government style. It comes as a big shock to men and women, but I think particularly women. I mean I've been brought up more in group work and those sorts of areas, so it is a very formal sort of meeting more often than not and the structure that goes with it. I think that I try and sort of break down a lot of that structural stuff and try and approach it and say 'well perhaps we need a bit more of a relaxed workshop style of doing this' (Leisha).

One Indian woman, in a council with over two hundred representatives, explains how she made the atmosphere less formal, at the same time demonstrating her commitment to inclusion:

Instead of having boring speeches, hours and hours and hours long, I tried to make the house a bit lively. I used to put some jokes in between - I used not to tell jokes, but according to the situation, I used to create a joke. And then the entire house would start laughing so there was a light moment...All the 221 people, I knew their names by heart, I knew their wards by heart, so when a particular subject used to come, I used to see to it that I gave credit to that person (Vishakha).

Much of the work of local government is conducted through committees and boards, which are less formal than council meetings and it seems it is here that women leaders can have a much stronger influence on process, as exemplified by one Swedish mayor:

I think that I have a special responsibility to get all people in a board, for instance, to talk and to be listened to and even if I had been a man I think I should have had that responsibility as well, but I think that perhaps because of the fact that I am a woman, I think of it more. And I think it's very important to create an atmosphere in the room so everybody dares to talk and that people listen to each other and so people feel comfortable together and I think this is a special man/woman question, but it's important both for women and men (Eline).

The role Eline describes is more one of a facilitator of meetings rather than using her position to control and direct discussion, which Duerst-Lahti and Kelly (1995) assert is more typical of women political leaders in committees. It is also a strong example of power exercised with, rather than over, others.

#### 4.4.4 Authority, language and focus

Apart from the powers, structure and processes embedded within local government systems, other issues raised by the interviewees demonstrate how their power is shaped and constrained by the way they are treated and the authority which is given – or not given – to them by some of their colleagues and staff. Most of the interviewees raise the issue of the different authority accorded to men and women in debates, which is revealed either in the issues being discussed, in the greater weight accorded to what men say or in the way men speak. These factors can lead to women feeling frustrated and effectively reduce their power in decision-making.

One Indian woman refers to the different way men and women speak in council meetings, the difficulty women have in making their voices heard and how women are more likely to state their case and expect what they say to be judged on merit rather than trying to influence the debate through language:

See women can only speak sometimes, but men are making very much noise, they make noise in the house, they make sometimes quarrels in the house and they show their muscle power, they're shouting out. Women just place their part before the house and they keep mum when the mayor or commissioner say 'give ear, we will take a note of your points and we'll try to solve your problems', they just keep quiet. But men are different, they will think their power is more, they're powerful and they will see that their problem is solved and vote immediately. But not like women, they say, 'okay next time we'll see the matter', but the men are not like that (Vishakha).

Linda Carli (1999:81) asserts that 'women are presumed to be less competent than men' and that when men and women interact together men are 'given more opportunities to speak, overtly agree more often with men's contributions than with women's and ultimately defer more often' to men's opinions rather than women's. One Swedish woman exemplifies this in identifying how men are not only more likely to hear what other men have said but also to attribute points made to men, even when they have been made by women:

Things that I know that the women had said was referred to as what Tom said, what John said or something like that - that's the man who said the same thing later on, but it was an idea from one of the women and was never noticed (Lena).

This is an example of the gender blindness described in Chapter 1.

Another Swedish woman draws attention to the type of issues that men and women choose to discuss and prioritise, differentiating between 'hard' and 'soft' issues:

I think we put forward some other questions. You can see that very easily. The hard questions - motorways for the cars and building and constructions and so on and it's men. So you can see a split in hard questions and soft questions. And the soft questions are for the women and the hard ones are for the men and if we are strong together, then we lift it up. If you don't work very hard, if you can't get men on your side, you could say, it's very hard to get money for things because they want the motorways instead. It's very black and white in a way (Inez).

Here Inez elucidates again the way stereotypes can shape power and also the relational nature of power, highlighting the difficulty women can have in gaining support for issues that are seen as 'soft'. I will address this issue of 'softness' in more depth in Chapter 6, however I argue that the 'hard' questions involve issues of technical capacity and finance which make decision-making easy. On the other hand, those described as 'soft' always involve personal, social, environmental and community issues that are complex and difficult to resolve. It is the latter that are the truly 'hard' questions, not the former. To me, Inez is demonstrating the way women can unintentionally participate in gender stereotypes that reinforce the credibility and power of men.

A number of the interviewees allude to the way men network together and lobby each other beforehand to ensure their propositions are supported, which is another example of relational power. This is exemplified by one Australian woman:

I often think when a bloke puts up a resolution, he'll have sorted out who's going to second it, who's going to vote for it and he'll have done his lobbying beforehand. Whereas quite often the women will come along with their resolution, they won't have asked anybody to second it, they'll put their resolution up and hope that based on its merit it gets a seconder and then being able to talk to it and convince the council. That's the way it goes. A lot of the fellows do all that lobbying behind the scenes and continue to save themselves the trouble, I think (Marie).

This different way that men use power through networking and speech is also evident in the example provided by one young Swedish woman:

I think women often don't be heard, they don't scream so loud as men do. And men meet maybe at the golf club or hockey game or something like that and they talk and they say 'I need that and can we do it like that', but women don't work like that and don't meet at the same area as the men do either (Ulla).

Many of the interviewees identify specific examples of how some men either attack women, use their power to put women down or even unintentionally diminish their credibility, which Duerst-Lahti and Kelly (1995:179) argue 'reinforces men's gender power advantage'. One Australian woman explains how positional power can be used to undermine women's power by demeaning them or by not letting them speak until last:

Looking at the other women in local government around the state, they are conscientious, they do their work, they're not afraid to speak up, but I really do believe it's still very hard. And some of them complain to me. For example, one woman, she wasn't young, but she was quite attractive, and she put up her pencil to speak and her mayor, he'd come to her last of all. And then he would say, 'well perhaps we should listen to the pretty little thing at the end of the table'. Now to me, that was a real put-down and she was fit to be tied, so there's still quite a lot of that around (Molly).

Another Australian woman describes how she has been spoken to or treated in a demeaning way and how she has dealt with that when it occurs:

But other times you do have to use that [power] to say, 'well I did feel offended that you spoke that way'. And I challenge some people. Or they just expect you to do the drinks and serve and so I just hand the tray to them and say 'I think it's your turn now' (Leisha).

One issue that emerges consistently with the interviewees is that of what is perceived to be appropriate language in political debates. For many of the interviewees, politics is very personal and they do not like it, reflecting an aversion to a combative style which they attribute generally to some men. One Swedish woman demonstrates this in discussing how men can attack women directly:

There are some men who are very, very stupid and they want to, they attack them and they want to attack them and they want to use their power and so. But I also think that there are so many, many men who are not aware of, for instance, the atmosphere and what is going on. They don't think in the way that we do and they don't know that they do it (Eline).

An English woman points to the way that some men can attribute political differences between women representatives to personal qualities reflecting a stereotype about the way women behave:

One of the things I do resent is you still occasionally get little comments. If you're having a spat between two politicians who happen to be female, you still occasionally hear one of the men say 'oh now girls' or something like that, in the sense you know that you couldn't possibly disagree unless it was the girls having a spat. That irritates me profoundly, but I think some of that you just have to learn to live with (Margaret).

As Sue Rhode (2003:7) points out, 'women who take strong positions risk being stereotyped as "bitchy", "difficult" or "manly."'

Many of the interviewees comment on the way women representatives have to prove themselves, suggesting that somehow men are seen as more competent even when it is clearly not so. Indeed, some of the women in the study appear to unconsciously accept that this is the case, as was evident in the earlier example provided by Jasmin. Carli (1999:81) asserts that there is much empirical evidence to support this perception because 'the standard for what constitutes competence in men' is lower than that for women. This is exemplified by one Filipina, who asserts that failure is always attributed to a woman's gender:

If men don't succeed they say, 'oh, he's not good as a person'. They don't take it to mankind, or to the menfolk, they don't relate it to gender. But if it is women, they always relate it to gender. And if you succeed, then they're surprised. 'Oh, she succeeded and she's a woman', as though it should be something to be surprised about. But if you fail, they will never say, 'oh she failed because she wasn't prepared, she failed because of this or her educational background wasn't good'. They would always say first of all, 'ah, she is a woman'. (MJ).

One Swedish woman explains how, when she entered local government, she felt she had to prove herself, reflecting what Carli (1999:83) claims is a tendency by women to hold themselves to a higher standard than men hold themselves:

When I started there were few women in the local government and then I had a feeling that I had to be so much more clever than the men ... just because I was a woman. I had to show that I really knew what it was about and I had an opinion and I was strong (Lena).

These examples all demonstrate the gendered nature of power in local government and how it can create an environment which is not comfortable for some women. However, what is also demonstrated in this section is that women leaders can make a difference,

justifying further arguments for more women, particularly women leaders, in local government.

#### 4.4.5 Privileged access

The final issue which emerges from the interviewees is access to more powerful positions and resources which only the Swedish interviewees identify. This perhaps reflects the fact that in Sweden these issues are currently being discussed within local government (Edgar-Wettergren and Elvas 1999). One Swedish woman articulates how men are more likely to allocate tasks and committee membership to men unless women really prove themselves:

Women don't get the tasks and jobs if they don't really show how clever they are. Men easily choose men who are like them and if a woman shall be elected, she must show that she is really suitable for it (Kirsten).

Another reveals privileged access to resources in regard to men and women employees:

We're talking now very much about the fact that the men who are working with technical things with ways and roads have very good cars to go with. But our women who are working with social welfare, with elderly people, they are going home to their home in days and night and winter and so on and sometimes they have to use their own cars because there are not enough cars here for them. We are going step by step to make it better, but we are not there of course and I think talking about such matters and listing them up and daring to talk about them and work with them, I think that it's because I'm a woman (Eline).

As well as demonstrating how even access to privileged resources and positions can be gendered, Eline's comment demonstrates yet again how the presence of a woman leader can bring those inequities into the open and therefore address them.

I contend that what emerges in this section is evidence of how power in local government, reflected in structures, rules and processes has changed to some degree in response to the needs and influence of women who operate within them. Nevertheless, power in the lion's den is still gendered and can shape and constrain the power of women representatives as well as their access to resources and more privileged positions. This is demonstrated by the examples of the Swedish women in particular given their greater representation in local government and the commitment to equity in that country. However, all the women argue that the presence of women is having a significant impact on power structures, leading to modified behaviour and processes of decision-making, with some men now emulating the behaviour of women. What clearly emerge are women who are speaking and acting as women, using their agency and actively influencing and changing the lion's den, not simply joining forces with men as Elshtain (1992) suggests.

I contend further that the degree to which change has occurred reflects the broader social, cultural and political contexts within which local government is embedded. These inevitably shape and either constrain or facilitate change, supporting the point alluded to in the quote at the beginning of this chapter: that women's power in the lion's den will only be truly valued when there is a broader societal shift in understandings of power. Finally, I argue that although the issue of increased representation of women is necessary and important, perhaps the more important challenge for women in this century will be to increase the presence of women leaders both in the political and administrative bodies of local government. The interviewees demonstrate that formal leadership positions,

supported by the presence of a critical mass of women representatives *and* senior women in local government bureaucracies, provide significant opportunities to influence and change traditional power structures. Women's continuing low presence in these positions constrains the potential for change.

#### **4.5 Summary**

In this chapter, I have demonstrated the way that power in local government is relational, shaped and constrained by context. I have argued that the interviewees have an ethical conception of power, largely reflecting a feminist conception of power enacted for the benefit of the community and within relationships that are not necessarily hierarchical. This power is used both collectively with other members of the council or individually, largely through influence, except in the case of the Filipinas who have executive power. That gives them greater positional power thus enabling them to act alone but also constraining the way they use their power. Although power can be applied in local government in ways that reflect a conception of power as domination, and sometimes in ways that are violent and not indicative of legitimate authority, the women in this study are highly critical of those who use it in these ways.

I have demonstrated how power in the lion's den is gendered, privileging the experiences and interests of men and reflecting the structures and systems within which it is embedded. However, as Frazer and Lacey (1993) point out, structures are not fixed but fluid, and within these gendered structures there is clear evidence that many of the interviewees in this study are challenging existing norms and practices and changing understandings about the practice of power in the lion's den.

Finally, I have argued that the ability to effect change depends to a large extent on broader institutional and societal change and the presence of women leaders supported by a critical mass of women representatives: that, in the absence of a critical mass of women and with continued under-representation of women leaders in both the political and administrative bodies, change will be slower and constrained. Nevertheless, the change that has and can occur in local government due to the presence of women as demonstrated by the participants in this study provides strong support to arguments for gender parity in local government.

## Chapter 5: The Nature of the Dance: Political Leadership in Local Government

As women leaders assert leadership in new and unexpected ways, perhaps the cumulative effect will be greater and the gains more enduring than has been the case to date. We look forward to a future in which women leaders of all races will exercise leadership with the same ease and the same degree of respect that their male counterparts enjoy (Ker Conway in Freeman & Bourque 2001:20).

### 5.1 Introduction

Jill Ker Conway's comment in the above quote implies that there is such a thing as women's leadership distinct from mainstream understandings of leadership: that if women practise this leadership they will succeed in changing organisations rather than maintaining the status quo by trying to enact leadership in the same way men do. Leadership is often equated with power, however although power is central to leadership, the two are not the same. The notion of leadership raises concerns for some feminists and it has spawned a variety of theories that seek to explain it. People in formal leadership positions, probably better described as *headship*,<sup>1</sup> are perceived as having power yet they may not necessarily exercise leadership or, more particularly, good leadership. Similarly, many people exercise leadership in the absence of headship. The nature of leadership is central to this study as the interviewees were all selected because they have experience in formal leadership positions in local government. Furthermore, political leadership has been at the heart of local government reforms described in earlier chapters and is seen as one of the keys to revitalising democracy and to local communities surviving the challenges of neo-liberalism and globalisation (Berg and Rao 2005; Bäck, Heinelt and Magnier 2006). It is this issue of political leadership in local government, what it means to the interviewees, what it reveals about conceptions of leadership, where it is located, how it is exercised and what impact it has had on the interviewees, their organisations and potentially their communities that this chapter investigates.

In the first part of the chapter, I locate leadership as a particular aspect of relational power that focuses on the nature of the relationship between those who lead and those who follow. I describe briefly mainstream conceptions<sup>2</sup> that focus on the characteristics and behaviour of leaders in leadership positions and underemphasise the role of followers. I contrast these with alternative conceptions that emphasise leadership as an aspect of relational power and located in mutual relationships, explicitly involving leaders and followers, that seek change and are thus transformational. This comparative analysis foregrounds the capacity for the transformation feminists perceive as essential and is an underlying objective of this thesis. However, rather than treating these conceptions as separate, I locate them as a continuum with mainstream conceptions as one pole and

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<sup>1</sup> These positions are frequently referred to as leadership positions. This assumes that position holders exercise leadership whereas headship refers specifically to positional authority or power that makes no assumptions about leadership. I have referred throughout this thesis to the women as leaders and to their leadership as it is the more common term.

<sup>2</sup> There are literally thousands of publications on leadership and a multitude of theories that do not have particular relevance for political leadership so I do not include them in this thesis.

transforming leadership as the other. I argue that considering leadership as separate types emphasises the differences and denies both its complexity and the different contexts within which leadership is located. My approach thus rejects a dichotomous classification of leadership being one or another type, assumes complexity and, in being dependent on context, is consistent with the feminist valuation of context and the particular.

In the second part of the chapter, I explore the interviewees' perspectives and practice of leadership alongside relevant literature in regard to both notions of leadership and the local government systems within which the interviewees are located. I contend that the interviewees do demonstrate leadership rather than headship, and that it is relational, complex and ambiguous, shaped significantly by context supporting the conception of leadership as a continuum. I argue that the different formal leadership structures within the five countries constrain the interviewees' leadership in different ways although, paradoxically, they also provide some opportunities. I argue further that despite constraints, many of the women are transforming their organisations and their political colleagues, as well as being transformed themselves, through their leadership. The findings from this chapter, particularly when drawn together with the findings from the previous two chapters, thus demonstrate the transformational potential that provides hope for the changes desired by feminists as articulated by Ker Conway (in Freeman and Bourke 2001).

## 5.2 Political Leadership

Early theorists conceived leadership as a series of qualities or traits, possessed by individuals, which equip them to be leaders. These theories are based on observation of 'great men' conceiving it as applying to a 'limited number of people whose inheritance and destiny made them leaders' (Hayes 1999:113). Trait theories have been largely dismissed, mainly because all leaders do not necessarily have the same qualities or traits. Some of the traits may be characteristic of leaders, and indeed much of the current literature on political leadership still focuses on the traits or styles of particular leaders, generally male. However, whilst they may provide insights into particular leaders, they do not explain leadership, and more particularly, good leadership.

Later theorists focused on the behaviour of people in leadership positions, conceiving leadership predominantly as skills that leaders can apply, or knowledge that leaders should have, within organisations with effectiveness judged in terms of achieving organisational goals. This suggests an industrial paradigm (Rost 1991) that focuses predominantly on the leader, thus under-emphasising leadership's political and relational nature. These theories are criticised for focusing on the 'peripheries and content', rather than the essence of leadership (Rost 1991:4). I agree that such theories do reflect an industrial paradigm, however to me they reflect headship rather than leadership and are reflective of the way many people holding headship positions behave. Whilst a number of these theories suggest a more participatory and democratic relationship between leaders and followers, nevertheless they equate leadership with headship and therefore management rather than leadership. Moreover, I contend that they reflect a masculine practice of hierarchical authority in 'masculinized contexts' (Yoder 1996:815).

James MacGregor Burns (1978) was the first person to differentiate clearly between management and leadership, articulating leadership explicitly as a particular kind of



relational power exercised in relationships involving leaders and followers. According to Burns, these relationships are purposeful, focused on achieving goals either independently or together. Conflict is always present and leaders and followers always see the other as a person, not a thing or an object (Burns 1978:425,462). Burns conceives leadership as taking two forms. The first, based on exchange theory, is as an exchange of things that are valued, for example in politics it might be political promises for votes, which he describes as *transactional* leadership (1978:19). The second is as a participatory and transforming process, with leaders and followers engaging in reciprocal influence to achieve a shared outcome, which he describes as *transforming* leadership,<sup>3</sup> having the additional capacity for the leader to be transformed. Burns also introduces the dimension of morality into transforming leadership by focusing on three sets of underlying values he discerns in it. Fundamental to Burns' conception of the transforming leader is the requirement of a leader to have both a vision, which should not be watered down by consensus, and to use conflict to engage followers and 'help them reassess their own needs' (Ciulla 1998:15).

Burns' requirement of having a vision based on very strong moral values and not watering the vision down by consensus makes it a normative conception of leadership. Whilst most might agree that good leadership *should* elevate both leaders and followers morally, this is problematic for several reasons. It assumes that moral values are not contestable whereas, as Rost (1991) argues, there is no agreement on this. Questions remain as to who determines which moral values are better, why they are and what happens if followers do not want to be elevated. Furthermore, it portrays consensus as negative rather than as an inclusive process through which recognition of, and negotiation through, different values and points of view can lead to outcomes which are acceptable to most of the people concerned and still be based on moral values, albeit, a range of values. This negative portrayal suggests a lack of inclusion of others' values and a lack of preparedness on the part of a leader to be transformed when faced with competing values. It also suggests a misunderstanding of the need within democratic politics to find a balance between the many different views, particularly on 'the most volatile matters and most important issues' (Elshtain 1995:61-62). Finally, and from a practical point of view, setting such high standards could create expectations of leaders that are too high, 'requiring something close to moral perfection' and therefore discouraging individuals, and perhaps more so women, from seeking leadership positions (Ciulla 2001:314).

Nevertheless, I believe that Burns' work is most significant in distinguishing between leadership and management, locating it as a particular aspect of relational power, focusing on its nature rather than its content, introducing the centrality of ethics to good leadership and, in the case of transforming leadership, highlighting the potential for change in both leaders and followers. Furthermore, I argue that these factors make it more relevant for examination in a political context than the earlier theories I described. They reflect the expectation of professional and technical skills that those holding formal political leadership positions are not expected to have.

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<sup>3</sup> A number of authors claim that Burns described this second type of leadership as 'transforming' however in his book he refers to it both ways and generally, as I read it, distinguishes between 'transformational leadership' and 'transforming leaders'. However, as Bernard Bass (1985) later conceived leadership as 'transformational' and has written many texts on it, I will refer to Burns' conception as 'transforming' to distinguish it from Bass's.

A number of authors have drawn on Burns' conception. Bernard Bass (1985) accepts Burns' two types of leadership but introduces the concept of *laissez-faire* leadership, which is the absence of leadership. He also replaces Burns' condition of appealing to higher-order needs and values with *charisma*, which he sees as 'a necessary condition of transformational leadership' (Ciulla 1998:17) and he focuses on modal, rather than end, means. The notion of charisma is problematic as it raises ethical concerns, for history tells us that charismatic leaders can lead followers to commit highly unethical acts, such as harming and killing others. As Joanne Ciulla (1998) points out, whether charisma is the best or worst type of leadership depends on which charismatic leader you look at: a Gandhi or a Charles Manson. In later work, Bass (1998:171) distinguishes between *pseudo-transformational* and *truly transformational* leaders, arguing that the charisma of the latter is 'characterized by high moral and ethical standards'. This suggests that his conception of transformational leadership is closer to Burns' conception of the transforming leader, although it does not emphasise the capacity of the leader to change. However, one of the clearest differences between Bass's conception of leadership is that, whereas Burns is somewhat dismissive of transactional leadership, Bass asserts that the best leaders are both transformational *and* transactional (1998:175). This suggests a more inclusive approach that acknowledges the complexity of leadership and the capacity of individual leaders to move between types of leadership in response to different contexts. Nevertheless, Bass focuses predominantly on leaders transforming followers rather than mutual transformation of leaders and followers, and largely within corporate or public organisational contexts. To me this changes the basis of Burns' leadership relationships.

Joseph Rost (1991:102) also draws from Burns, defining leadership as 'an *influence relationship* among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes'. Rost sees the influence as multidirectional and non-coercive with the relationship having a number of active followers and leaders who intend changes that are substantive and transforming, but do not have to occur. Whereas Burns and Bass focus on leaders and followers having goals, Rost argues that they develop mutual purposes, and that the intended changes reflect those purposes. Rost also sees consensus as a way of negotiating through conflicts to acceptable outcomes. This therefore makes Rost's conception significantly different to Burns' transforming leadership. He has been criticised (Burns 1998 and Ciulla 1998) for eroding it by under-estimating the importance of values, ethics and morality. However, I contend that Rost's conception is ethical. This is revealed in his focus on influence, consensus, recognition of the beliefs, values and needs of followers, and the distinction between leadership and headship or holding leadership positions, with followers involved actively in partnership with leaders. Ultimately, Rost's conception seems to me to be closer to Burns' conception than Ciulla and Burns suggest, except in regard to his focus on consensus. However, whilst I acknowledge the risk of consensus, in that it can mean the 'tyranny of the majority', the notions of having different views and reaching a compromise are 'ordinary acts of democratic citizenship' (Vickers 2006:19). Furthermore, although true consensus is rarely possible (Porter 1999) its outcomes can be positive and reflect higher moral values. In addition, I contend that seeking consensus is a more inclusive approach acknowledging diversity and the reality of conflicting higher moral values. I therefore locate Rost's conception as close to the transforming end of the continuum.

Many feminists have opposed the idea of leadership, largely as a strategy to avoid power and domination (Hartsock 1998). However, as Hartsock points out, such a position seems to perceive leadership *as* power, and power only as power over another rather than as the strength, energy, force, and ability used with, and for, others and part of a process of change (Hartsock 1998:62-63). An exception is Regan and Brooks (1995:27) who, like Burns, Bass and Rost conceive leadership as an aspect of relational power. They present what they call a 'double-helix image' which they assert demonstrates 'a more equal and connected relationship' incorporating 'the best of female attributes of leadership'. This enables these attributes to be 'recognized, honored, shared and displayed' by both male and female leaders. I contend that this is the only leadership conception reviewed here that directly acknowledges the gendered nature of leadership and seeks to address it. Regan and Brooks conceive leadership, similar to Burns, Bass and Rost, as based in a network of relationships, but they also conceive it as being underpinned by the feminist attributes of collaboration, caring, courage, intuition and vision (1995:27). It is this relational dimension, as mentioned in the previous chapter, which feminists argue is crucial to their understanding of power and therefore also of leadership. However, the focus on feminist attributes is more suggestive of trait theorists, conceiving leadership predominantly as something one possesses, and of essentialism in that the attributes identified are not solely feminist attributes. Furthermore, although they argue that the five attributes are 'closely connected and built on a foundation of a firmly-held belief system' (1995:33), with the first three explicitly ethical traits, it lacks the capacity for transformation, particularly of the leader, that feminists see as essential. Nevertheless, its focus on the leadership relationship, collectivity, respect for others and vision reveal it as towards the transforming end of the continuum.

As suggested by Ker Conway (2001) at the beginning of this chapter, it is a common view that women lead differently. Burns (1998) believes women leaders are more likely to practise transforming leadership because, unlike men, they see leadership as relational rather than as power exercised over others. These are broad generalisations, however some authors (Rosener 1990; Bass and Avolio 1994; Druskat 1994; Rosener and Powell 1997) argue that research supports Burns' argument. Alice Eagly and Mary Johannesen-Schmidt (2001) contend that the practice of women is more reflective of transforming leadership although the differences between men and women holding the same formal leadership positions are not huge. Nevertheless, they acknowledge other research which demonstrates that even small differences, 'when repeated over individuals and occasions, can produce large consequences' (Martell, Land and Emrich in Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt 2001: 795). If the interviewees are indeed more likely to enact leadership closer to the transforming end of the continuum, it lends significant support to arguments for maintaining and increasing the presence of women leaders in local government, as transforming leadership does have the potential to change the lion's den. It is this capacity to transform or change, rather than maintain the status quo that is a central issue in my investigation.

In this section, I have reviewed the main conceptions of leadership and considered their implications for arguments for women's engagement in formal politics. I have argued that mainstream conceptions generally reflect an understanding of leadership as headship or management and power as power exerted over others. I argue that conceptions locating

leadership as an aspect of relational power, focusing on the nature of the relationship between leaders and followers provide the ethical dimension which, as identified in the previous chapter, Porter (1999:81) argues 'should be inseparable' from the political for 'democratic polities'. Furthermore, in locating leadership in relationships between leaders and followers who seek change, these conceptions reflect a feminist understanding of leadership as relational and emphasise the change that transformational feminists see as essential and is a key focus of this thesis. However, rather than conceiving leadership as separate and hence dichotomous, I have located it as a continuum with mainstream conceptions as one pole and transforming leadership as the other. I believe this more clearly acknowledges complexity and the capacity of leaders to move between these positions according to different contexts, thus being consistent with feminist valuation of context and the particular.

I turn now to investigate the perspectives and experience of the interviewees in the context of the literature and local government systems, weighing them with these conceptions of leadership and exploring their implications for arguments for increased representation of women in local government.

### **5.3 The Dancers' Perspectives of Leadership**

Peggy Antrobus (2000:52) maintains state institutions that reflect the 'professional-technical perspective', are resistant to change and that leaders working within them are unlikely 'to challenge the patriarchal culture to which these institutions belong'. This reflects the concerns of some feminists that even feminist women working in these institutions will be co-opted. As the interviewees have succeeded in achieving formal political leadership positions within local government, it might suggest that they accept, or are comfortable with, the existing limitations as Antrobus suggests. However, as revealed in the previous two chapters, many of the women have demonstrated that despite working within gendered institutions and structures they have changed them. I argue that the interviewees' perspectives and practices demonstrate that many of them are transformational leaders.

Nevertheless, leadership as understood and elaborated by the interviewees is complex, ambiguous and sometimes contradictory. Similar to their responses to questions about representation and power, the participants appear not to have thought deeply about leadership. This may simply reflect the fact that they are busy and more concerned with the practical tasks they need to carry out than with analysing, or reflecting on, their leadership. As Beck (2001:65) found in her research on women councillors in America, local representatives 'have little time and few resources to think out the context within which political problems are posed'. Ker Conway (2001:xxii) asserts that women generally 'have seemed a bit shy about power and leadership', and although the interviewees are, as discussed in earlier chapters, confident and comfortable with their positions, five deny they have or want a leadership role,<sup>4</sup> generally preferring to be seen as part of a team, as demonstrated by an example from each of their countries:

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<sup>4</sup> Two interviewees are from Australia and England and one is from Sweden.

I don't see myself as a leader. I've always been part of a team ... I'm much better as part of a team that contributes to a decision that is distilled through a group of people (Carol, England).

I don't see myself really as a leader. I see myself as somebody that actually works with people more so than leads (Brenda, Australia).

I didn't say 'yes' when the leader for my group became the Minister of the government in the national government, in 1992. Almost everyone thought that I should be the leader here and be the Mayor of public health. And I said, 'no, I don't take it, I don't want it'. And a lot of people couldn't understand why (Kirsten, Sweden).

This denial of leadership could mean these five women are, as Ker Conway asserts, shy about being seen as leaders, however I suggest it is more likely that they have a preference for non-hierarchical processes or are uncomfortable with what they understand as leadership, perceiving it either as a position or as dominant power over others rather than as collective processes enacted to achieve specific political objectives. Indeed in Sweden 'when politicians act like leaders they are quickly labelled bosses' (Bergström et al 2003:10), which might deter people from describing themselves as leaders.

Apart from the five who deny they are leaders, when answering the questions on leadership what emerges is ambiguous and complex. What the women describe is predominantly leadership as a particular aspect of relational power located in processes that are purposeful within their relationships with others. However, they also describe headship or the tasks expected of them in the formal leadership roles they undertake outside these relationships. This reveals their leadership as situational, confirming Paul Hersey and Kenneth Blanchard's (1993) research which found that leadership situations require either a task or a relationship orientation. It also confirms that leadership is not a continuous role but occurs in discrete incidents, and that whilst it is a relational phenomenon it is constituted by processes that are characteristic of leadership (Weaver 2000:260, 262). Furthermore, apart from being relational and situational it is also contextual, shaped and influenced by the different contexts within which the women are located.

One of the most significant influences is the different local government leadership structures in each country confirming that institutions are not value free but deliver outcomes reflecting the cultural, social and political norms and values in different polities. Poul Mouritzen and James Svava (2002:55-56) identify four different 'ideal' types of local government systems: the strong mayor form where the mayor is in control and has executive authority; the committee leader form where executive responsibilities are shared between either councillors through a committee system or the CEO; the collective form where executive responsibility lies with an executive committee of elected representatives presided over by a mayor; and the council-manager form where policy is separated from operational issues, with the CEO having executive authority and the mayor presiding over the council and having ceremonial or civic responsibilities. Whilst these are ideal types, they do highlight the major differences between leadership structures in the countries in this study. England approximates a collective form,<sup>5</sup> Sweden a committee-leader form, the

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<sup>5</sup> As outlined in Chapter 2, some smaller rural councils were allowed to retain the traditional structure of local government in England and these are more reflective of the committee leader form. Furthermore, the handful of councils that chose the

Philippines a strong mayor form, and India and Australia council-manager forms, although there are some differences between the latter two. These different leadership structures reflect the historical, cultural and political contexts within which local government is embedded as the following brief descriptions demonstrate.

The English government has been attempting to reform local government since the early 1970s (Martin 1997; Rao 2005; Berg 2006; Fenwick 2006), largely because it was seen as confusing, inefficient and incapable of attracting 'councillors of the right calibre' (Rao 2005:42). The reforms<sup>6</sup> changed local government radically with the purpose of making it more efficient and more effective. Political leadership was restructured to 'strengthen' it (Rao 2005:42) resulting predominantly in the committee-leader form described above<sup>7</sup> (Local Government Analysis and Research 2006). The leader and executive committee have significant executive responsibilities, are elected by the councillors and, as most of the councils in England are controlled by one party, comprise members from the same party as the leader. Opposition parties also have executive committees but they have no executive powers. Leaders of both the council and opposition parties as well as members of the executive committee receive allowances significantly higher than non-executive councillors which enable them to commit most of their time to local government responsibilities.

Sweden has the committee leader form (Mouritzen and Svava 2002) with leadership through committees, although it has a number of committees<sup>8</sup> overseeing specific services or areas of responsibility, and a small executive committee of usually between eleven and seventeen members.<sup>9</sup> This executive committee comprises the chairs of all the committees and is responsible for 'directing and coordinating local government activities [and] supervises other committees and municipal enterprises' (Montin 2005:118). The chair of the executive committee is elected by the majority group, often a coalition, and is the mayor, who holds 'few formal powers and functions' (Goldsmith and Larsen 2004:130). The councillors elect members of the various committees and membership of the committees is more diverse ideologically, with few councils in Sweden having a majority party (Goldsmith and Larsen 2004:129). Leaders of the party groups and members of the executive committee are now fulltime, salaried politicians dealing with strategic issues, which has seen the professionalisation of the political leadership. This was intended to provide leaders with the power to balance that of the bureaucrats (Bergström 2003; Montin 2005).

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directly elected mayor option are more reflective of the strong mayor form, and there is one English council which has the council-manager form of decision-making, but all the women I interviewed were in councils reflective of the collective form.

<sup>6</sup> Although various reforms had been discussed for decades and there had been trials of different structures in local government it was the 2000 Local Government Act that enshrined these changes in legislation.

<sup>7</sup> The leadership options councils could choose to adopt are described in Chapter 2 and although a handful of councils chose to adopt a strong mayor form, all the interviewees are located in councils that reflect the committee-leader form which has been adopted by 81% of councils (Nirmala Rao 2006).

<sup>8</sup> In some places there has been decentralisation of these responsibilities to neighbourhood committees which complicates the structure even further (Goldsmith and Larsen 2004).

<sup>9</sup> The number can be as few as five and this depends on the size of the population and therefore the number of committees.

The Indian women in this study are all located in Municipal Corporations, which are a modified version of the council-manager form. These were the first form of local government in India, initiated by the British, and still reflect the former colonial influence (Fahim 2006). The mayor is elected by the councillors and has no executive authority. Similar to the traditional British system, decisions are made in various committees with a standing committee that exercises some 'executive, supervisory, financial and personnel powers' (Fahim 2006). However, unlike in England, and similar to the system in Sweden, this committee comprises councillors from different political party groups as they are elected by the councillors 'through a system of proportional representation' (Fahim 2006). As discussed in earlier chapters, commissioners have executive power<sup>10</sup> and are appointed by, and responsible to, state governments, not the elected councils. Mayors of municipal corporations receive an allowance and are generally, as in many countries, elected for a year although this can be extended. Fahim says that given this and the power of the commissioners, mayors are 'little more than ... a figurehead'.

Local government in the Philippines also reflects its colonial past and the US influence in its leadership structure (Stevens 2006). In the Philippines, as in the US, all mayors are directly elected, are salaried and have executive power, characteristic of the strong mayor form. Unlike in the US, political parties dominate in the Philippines with elections conducted on the same day every three years for all levels of government. Mayors are restricted to three terms following reform introduced by the Aquino government in 1987, and, somewhat similar to the ceremonial mayors of the past in England, do not chair council meetings, which are chaired by the vice mayors. However, although mayors have executive power and virtually manage the daily operations of the council, expenditure on any of their projects has to be approved by the council.

Australian local government is constituted under the six state and the Northern Territory governments and its leadership structure and procedures are modelled on the traditional English system and characteristic of the council-manager form (Mouritzen and Svara 2002). In Queensland mayors are directly elected, and they - and generally the councillors - receive salaries, enabling them to work fulltime on local government responsibilities. In the other states mayors<sup>11</sup> can be either directly elected or elected by their fellow councillors, and they and the councillors receive allowances rather than salaries. In Australia mayors do not have executive authority, which is vested in the CEO. Apart from presiding at council meetings the role is largely ceremonial with civic responsibilities. Mayoral allowances are generally higher than those for councillors but are not comparable to the salaries paid in Queensland.

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<sup>10</sup> As mentioned in Chapters 1 and 2, the local government system in India is most complex with different leadership structures within the same forms of local government. For example, Kolkata has a municipal corporation, however its mayor is elected directly by constituents and has executive powers (Fahim 2006). In other forms of local government such as municipal councils, leaders (called Presidents) can be elected either by the councillors or directly by the constituents (Fahim 2006). I have been unable to find out whether these councils determine their leadership structure themselves or whether this is determined by their respective state governments. However, I imagine it is the latter as local government is subject to the authority of state governments in most federal systems (the system in India) and is often referred to as a 'creature of the state government'.

<sup>11</sup> In Australia the leadership position in many smaller rural councils is the Shire President who is the equivalent of a mayor and when I use mayor referring to an Australian interviewee it covers both these titles.

These different leadership structures shape the interviewees' leadership in different ways and provide both constraints and opportunities. The most significant way in which it has shaped their leadership is in regard to where they locate it. With the exception of some of the Filipinas, all the interviewees locate their leadership within the context of decision-making with their political colleagues. However, the groups of colleagues they identify vary. The English interviewees emphasise their relationships with either their party groups or their executive committees. In a similar way, the Swedish interviewees emphasise their relationships within the executive committees in the case of the mayors and their party groups in the case of county councillors. As noted earlier, executive committees in Sweden are much more diverse than the English committees. The Indian and Australian interviewees, on the other hand, locate their leadership with all the members of their councils, whilst the Filipinas mostly locate their leadership with the community.

This suggests that political leaders will emphasise relationships with the groups where the system locates decision-making, particularly in regard to the election of leaders. Whilst this might seem logical, decision-making bodies that do not contain all the elected representatives privilege some and exclude others and, furthermore, limit the number of potential leaders and followers in the relationship thereby narrowing the range of ideas and perspectives that might otherwise be available. In England, having an executive may lead to the increased efficiency sought in the new local government (Leach and Wilson 2002) and it can also develop the leadership skills of a larger group of elected representatives. However, it has introduced a more hierarchical political structure, 'creating different relationships between the cabinet and the party group' (Leach and Wilson 2002:680), leading to fragmentation within the elected representatives. Indeed, Martin's (1997) study of English councillors found that having front and back-bench councillors and a 'cabinet-style' approach reduces further 'the openness of policy-making processes', which Porter (1999:92) asserts is essential for inclusive politics. Many of the real decisions are made by the executive rather than in open council meetings. Whilst this could be seen as typical of many political systems, where the real decisions occur in party rooms and debate in public forums is between opposing parties, the changed structure removed many decisions from even that public scrutiny. Martin's (1997:539) study also found that most of the back bench councillors felt they had 'little, if any, real influence'.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, research in Sweden indicates that whilst having full-time paid politicians has strengthened political leadership it has also meant loss of hands on control by 'unsalaried lay politicians' (Montin 2005:121). There are other examples of the way leadership is shaped by structure which will emerge later in this chapter.

Most of the reforms of local government are driven not by local government politicians, who are rarely consulted, but by bureaucrats. Indeed Bergström et al (2003:9) assert in regard to Sweden that '[p]oliticians have been very much side-stepped in this discussion and the concept and content of political leadership have been more or less absent at the local government agenda'. I suggest that the reforms reflect a focus on efficiency rather than the requirements of a democratic polity, and also reflect the masculine practice of authority and 'masculinized contexts' (Yoder 1996:815) referred to earlier. However, as

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<sup>12</sup> The leadership structures prescribed by the 2000 Local Government Act were trialled by many councils in England during the 1990s and Martin's study researched attitudes of councillors in those councils.



pointed out in the previous chapter, structures are not immutable and can and do change in response to new and different influences, reflecting the importance of having elected representatives who use their agency to change the systems rather than maintain the status quo. I contend that, as described in earlier chapters, many of the interviewees are changing the systems and this is evident again in their leadership.

### **5.3.1 Leadership as relational processes**

The interviewees locate their leadership primarily with different groups of political colleagues, although a few locate it with the administrative staff of the council and some with the community. The two processes the interviewees describe with their colleagues are those of providing information to them and deliberating with them in regard to decision-making. I explore these processes separately as whilst both are relational, they are substantially different.

#### **5.3.1.1 Providing information**

Sharing information can reflect an ethical commitment to empowering others. Indeed as Burns (1978) and Ciulla (1998) indicate, it is an important aspect of building trust and laying the basis for informed and democratic decision-making. Some of the interviewees identify providing information to their colleagues about what they are doing and what is happening in council generally as part of their leadership. This is not necessarily easy given the wide-ranging responsibilities and activities of mayors and political leaders in local government. Furthermore, most have limited contact with many of their councillors, who are generally part-time representatives with other responsibilities apart from local government. One Australian interviewee stresses the importance to her of keeping all the councillors informed:

I keep in touch with them. I report to my fellow councillors on all my activities, all my meetings, where I've been, what the successes are and they receive an information memorandum every week on the update of the Town Centre, to let them know what is happening (Frances).

This is possible for Frances because there are only eight councillors on her council. Moreover, she is an independent and the mayor is elected by the councillors every two years, so there is a strong incentive to keep them informed. Finding out what is happening in the media can damage relationships, as alluded to by another Australian woman:

I guess we talk everything through, keep each other informed all the time of what's happening ... because I guess I'm the sort of person I don't like people to read what I'm doing through the press (Brenda).

A Swedish interviewee also identifies providing information to her party group, particularly given the part-time nature of representation by councillors:

Informing people in the early stage instead of holding back ... A lot of people think that 'oh, that's over, they don't need to know, it's not their problem'. But if you want people that are not working with politics full time, you have to make people see the whole picture (Elena).

Several of the Filipinas identify informing captains of the Barangays<sup>13</sup> in their districts as important, as demonstrated by this woman:

Well I always call a meeting. We have our regular meetings and discuss with the Barangay captains what's going on. Here is our budget, we had a national conference, this is what I did and this is what's going to happen and at present we have all these projects for this and that and I make them realize what it's going to do for my people (Baby).

This reinforces the importance of face-to-face contact identified in earlier chapters preferred by the interviewees from India and the Philippines.

Providing timely, meaningful and accurate information can help build and maintain political relationships, facilitating understanding and the trust between leaders and followers that Solomon (1999) argues is essential to all leadership but particularly transforming leadership. It also arguably reflects a commitment to sharing and accountability that are essential to democratic politics. Nevertheless, providing information is unidirectional, lacking the debate and discussion over contesting perspectives as exist in the other relational processes described by the interviewees. On the other hand, this process could reflect a transactional approach to leadership if the purpose were solely to gain acceptance and hence be re-elected subsequently (Freeman and Bourque 2001:7). However, there is nothing necessarily wrong with transactional leadership provided the other person involved is treated as a person and it is part of building a relationship (Burns 1978; Bass 1985).

### **5.3.1.2 Decision-making with colleagues**

With few exceptions, all the interviewees locate their leadership within the context of decision-making with their political colleagues. This is reflective of leadership, not headship: it is collective, there are different, often conflicting possibilities available, and it is purposeful, with that purpose being to achieve outcomes in the best interests of their communities as identified in Chapter 3. The processes they describe range from consulting in the sense of seeking others' opinions through to seeking consensus, sometimes resulting in outcomes that were unanticipated and therefore not possible before (Mansbridge in Porter 2000). In this way, the processes are thus transformational. Many similarities and differences are revealed between the women, both within and across countries, in the specific processes they emphasise, elucidating the complexity and diversity that is a constant in this thesis.

The English interviewees highlight listening to and hearing different perspectives, consulting with their colleagues and seeking consensus where possible. They also emphasise the need for providing direction or firm leadership as evident in the following examples:

I think it's fair to say that I would listen pretty much to all the arguments. I mean you have to be able to carry your group behind you, and you also though have to understand how you might play it with the other group, also with the organization itself, and the outside world, including the media and various things. I think you have to have the ability to make a good stab at assessing some of those things.

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<sup>13</sup> As mentioned before, Barangay captains are also members of a separate Barangay council and are important bases of political support in the Philippines.

Otherwise you're just constantly in sort of fire fighting mode. You're making decisions and then it falls about your ears (Margaret).

Whilst Margaret is discussing her role predominantly with her party group, she elucidates the complexity of political leadership situated within a network of leadership relationships, both within and external to the organisation. Mansbridge (1998:150) says that the skills of listening, which Margaret identifies, generally lead to better decisions and it is through active listening, as opposed to simply hearing, that other possibilities emerge. Listening is also described, together with the need for providing the direction or firmness suggested by other English interviewees, in the following example from a woman who is leader of the opposition:

Well I think that's all going down to firm leadership, and I think one of the strengths of local government is the fact that you have a leader. And now of course you have your executive, and if you're there because you believe firmly that you should be championing the cause of the community, getting people to work together, how about this, what about that, have you thought of this, why aren't we doing this - then that's got to be good, to me. It's got to be good leadership, and if you're grooming everybody with you then that has to be very positive. [I do that] by being inclusive, by bringing people with me, by listening (Nicole ).

This is a cogent example of relational and transformational leadership given Nicole's focus on both the community's interests and developing the group who work with her. The focus of these women on firmness or providing a direction might be seen as indicative of a desire to control, impatience with open-ended debate or discussion more reflective of agentic characteristics or an unethical tendency towards assertiveness and control (Eagly 2001). However, having a vision and giving direction and meaning to followers are constitutive of transformational leadership (Yoder 2001). Furthermore, as Solomon (1998:105) says, 'one cannot be a leader without being chosen, in some sense, to lead'. Having a strong commitment to a particular course of action is not unethical and is reflective of transformational leadership that seeks to 'persuade others on the merits of the issues' (Bass 1998:184).

Whilst most of the English interviewees describe their leadership as consultative but firm another demonstrates a different perspective:

The bit I lack is I'm not quite sure which way to go sometimes and that's where if someone else has got the strong view as to 'right, well, this is the way to go' and they can argue it, then I will go along with that decision. I sometimes find it hard when faced with the sort of fork in the road - which way are we going to go, which is the right way? I often have to refer to other people, seek other people's advice to say, 'now, hang on, which is the right way here, which way shall we do this?' I suppose I see a leader giving a bit more direction than I perhaps have the capacity to do (Carol).

Carli (2001:275) says that 'people typically perceive men to have higher levels of competence than women' and that women themselves can internalise that perception and consequently devalue their own effectiveness. Carol's comment about lacking the capacity to provide direction that she sees as characteristic of a leader may well be a reflection of her devaluing her effectiveness or a lack of confidence on her part. However, it also suggests an understanding of leadership as always knowing what to do and located in a position rather than as a mutual relationship involving leaders and followers with both capable of carrying out those roles at different times (Burns 1978; Bass 1985; Rost 1991). The capacity to let others lead as described by Carol is, although she is unaware of it, a

strong example of transformational leadership. Leadership does not equate to having all the answers, and leaders can also be followers who, by listening and following, can transform themselves.

All the Swedish interviewees explain their leadership in terms of decision-making through consultative processes although generally within a committee or party group. One woman who is chair of the health committee on her council and leader of her party group in a county council demonstrates some of the complexity of leading committees comprised of members from different political parties:

I think I am better at listening to others and trying to find out what is the good commonsense of the discussion in a group and try to make many people content with what we do. In my committee that I lead, we often have discussions and I try to get in all different opinions and try to make good decision-making, where most of us think that our opinion is in it. Sometimes you have different opinions and then it is very good that you make clear, here we should not try to combine our different opinions (Kirsten).

This is a clear example of relational processes and ethical decision-making whereby all those involved have a chance to have input to the decision, seeking to arrive at an outcome that is acceptable. It elucidates Porter's (1999:102) assertion that 'politics is constituted through our differences from each other and our interdependence on each other'. The desire to work towards a compromise or consensus but with exceptions is also mentioned by one Swedish participant, who as chair of a health board describes similar processes in discussions with her party group:

I have to talk to my people. You know, 'what do you feel if I do it like this, instead can we do this and can we do that, and I think that it would be good also for the party or for the next elections that we are doing things this way instead of that way'. We do it very much together. I mean, we know what's to be done and it can sometimes be difficult, because I have responsibility to give the best possible health care to the people in my region, or in the district. That can sometimes be tricky too, you know. Maybe your political ideas or your political platform says something else and then you have to choose, and in that case I can feel that my first interest is to see that these people get their health care, so to say (Miriam).

These accounts of being prepared to work towards compromise or consensus, but not on some issues, reflect in part another structural factor affecting local government in Sweden. Similar to the situation in England, the overwhelming proportion (80 percent) of councils' budgets is determined by the national government and 'related to national goals and policies regulated by law' (Montin 2005:117). These can often conflict with political parties' or one's own positions as Miriam has identified. Ciulla (1998:315) says that as well as being ethical and effective a leader has to 'act according to duty and with some notion of the greatest good or best outcome in mind'. I contend that the examples provided by these Swedish participants demonstrate that, as well as being prepared to work across difference and negotiate to acceptable outcomes wherever possible, they do act according to duty when required.

The only Swedish interviewee to describe having a vision or giving a direction to the organisation is a mayor in a rural council:

I am more and more sure that it's only when I can get several people to share my vision, if I can get important people in the organization to realize that they want to do what I want to do, then we can do it. And important people in the organization,

that is the other, the political chairmen in the different boards, and it's also very, very much, even more, the chief leaders, the employed chief leaders and the staff, the leaders in the staff (Eline).

This is an example of relational and transformational leadership based on gaining bipartisan support for a desired direction, however it also explicates again the way structures influence leadership. The mayor's dependence on support from the majority group can encourage unethical transactional leadership, with mayors making compromises not because it is the right thing to do but to retain their positions. Furthermore, Goldsmith and Larsen (2004:129) assert that local government reform in Sweden has made it 'even more difficult for the mayor to operate as a strong leader', although that begs the question of what is meant by 'strong'. This notion of a strong leader permeates much of the recent literature on local government (Mouritzen and Svava 2002; Magnier 2006) and resonates of charismatic, decisive leaders who have a vision and will deliver on it. It is reflective of a conception of leadership as power over others, the subtext seems to read 'male', and it suggests that the capacity to build relationships, negotiate across difference and achieve acceptable outcomes are not strong leadership. Contrary to the suggestion in some of the literature (Goldsmith and Larsen 2004; Montin 2005) I argue that these qualities are indeed strong leadership, albeit conceived differently. Stig Montin (2005:119) says that it is unclear in Sweden who really leads, and describes the mayor's role as a 'balancing act' in a competitive and conflictual environment between various actors within the system, including administrators (2005:124). Consequently, the priority for mayors is on negotiating to acceptable outcomes and building trust between the various political leaders and groups (Montin 2005:124). I contend that Eline's example explicates the processes required to achieve these outcomes which are reflective of aspects of both transformational and transactional leadership, supporting Bass's (1998:175) argument that 'transformational leadership augments, but does not replace, transactional leadership' (Bass 1998:175).

Finally, another Swedish interviewee locates her leadership in her decision-making processes, however articulates an understanding that leadership does not mean owning outcomes. This illustrates again how interviewees from the same country emphasise different aspects of leadership, reflecting the complexity and ambiguity of the concept and the diversity of the interviewees:

My kind of leadership is that I want to invite a lot of people in, we discuss it, and then we make a decision. So decision-making and informing, so bringing people in. It doesn't seem that powerful, but it's more useful done this way. Usually I cannot say afterwards, this is my idea and I want it to be done this way, and this is mine - usually I cannot say that (Helena).

Contrary to Helena's comment that her decision-making process might not seem powerful, I suggest that it reflects a woman who recognises she does not have all the answers, is open to the perspectives of others and is sufficiently confident to let others take a leadership role. This is a strong example of relational and transformational leadership. Furthermore, it also supports Rost's (1998:105) contention that leadership is an influence relationship where there are typically a number of followers and leaders and is suggestive of the openness to change and growth that Burns (1978) asserts is reflective of transforming leaders.

Of the six Indian mayors interviewed, only two are, or have been, mayor for longer than a year, which in itself is a structure of closure. It takes time to fully understand the position,

build relationships and develop the confidence to provide the direction often expected of leaders. Nevertheless, several of the Indian participants describe the same processes as the English and Swedish participants, although influenced by the contexts in which they are located and their personal values. For example, one of the interviewees focuses on her relationship with the members of the standing committee:

Some people don't think the way I am thinking, but it's a human thing. I call them, I talk with them, and afterwards they understand what I am saying, and they are happy also. It's the same way in a family where there are four children, they have different views. A husband and wife also not goes together, so we have to adjust to all things. In this line also I think you should go by adjusting ... otherwise I will not be happy, the people will not be happy. So to make everybody happy, we have to adjust somewhere (Jasmine).

Although the language is different, what Jasmine describes is just one part of the leadership relationship. As Rost (1991:111) points out, whilst dyadic or one-on-one relationships are important, it is the total of 'all the interactions between all the leaders and followers in that relationship' that is leadership. Nevertheless, as has been seen in the two previous chapters, the interviewees from Asia prefer face-to-face and personal contact reflecting cultural norms that are rarely reflected in Western concepts.

Another Indian interviewee describes her decision-making with the leaders of all the party groups, not just her own:

When I was mayor, any decision I used to take, I used to call all the party leaders and tell them at a group leaders' meeting I used to call. Suppose I wanted to hike the price of the bus or something, that is in the hands of the mayor to agree or not to agree, or additional salaries, or to take some bitter decision. Hiking the prices is always a bitter decision or some decision that is going to affect lakhs<sup>14</sup> of people. I don't want that to be as my own decision. I knew that, based on the majority, we will be able to, because we have to just raise our hands. But what I felt that raising hand is not a correct democratic way. I thought my opponents also should know, and I should take them into confidence, that if you want to raise your hand, you raise it. But try to understand this is for the benefit. What happens then, there's not much of a tussle. ... Well informed, taken into confidence, discussion with them, importance was given to them, ego is not hurt. There were many such decisions (Neela).

This example reflects the importance Neela places on the needs of others, not just her party group, and a democratic process not reliant on majority voting. Her comment in regard to consulting on major issues highlights a point about leadership in local government dealt with in greater depth later in this chapter: that it is not possible for a leader to consult on all decisions. Like representatives generally, there are times when leaders in local government have to exercise their own judgement and, as said before, this is when having women in these positions matters most (Phillips 1995).

Reflecting the similarities that exist between some of the interviewees from different countries, several of the Indian women demonstrate having a clear idea of the direction to take but being open to others' perspectives and seeking consensus. One says that despite the limitations on the role, she was able to achieve a lot because of her decision-making process. Like Neela, she locates this with the whole council:

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<sup>14</sup> A lakh is a unit in the Indian numbering system which represents 100,000.

Most of the decisions that I took, I took all my colleagues into confidence. That was something which helped me a lot during my tenure. Even if it was the opposition, I would involve them in the decision-making, if there was an important decision to be taken. And even if I felt I was very firm about a certain stand, even then I wouldn't say it till I confirmed it with my other colleagues. ... I've been able to project my view and then make a consensus on several issues, or have taken their point of view, and maybe changed mine sometimes, when I felt that they were right (Dana).

Here is a woman demonstrating a preparedness to change which reflects an understanding of the many different perspectives individuals may bring to the discussion. It explicates Porter's (1999:101) assertion that 'dialogue permits glimpses into what possibilities exist', offering the potential for transformation of self that Burns (1978) ascribes to transforming leadership. The other Indian interviewee to discuss consensus was mayor for six years until being elected recently to the All India Congress Committee:<sup>15</sup>

I was first, more of what would I say, idealist. I'm more of a practical leader now, because I think that you have to work hard to make things change. It's not only through writing or debating that you can change things. You have to be with the people and struggle along with them to see a change. I think every politician needs to be sensitive towards people and be with them - that's the way I think, in my country. I don't know about others. I had every issue debated very well amongst the councillors. We'd take a consensus. It's a consensus, not the majority vote ... I was always quoted in the corridors of power for how I managed the house, because managing local government elected councillors is not easy. So, it was generally a democratic procedure (Rita).

This is a strong example of a commitment to democratic processes and also of the way experience can lead to change, particularly of the leader herself. Rita's comments about being with the people and struggling with them for change is reflective of transformational leadership and also of her own background, as her family were freedom fighters in the struggle for independence. Additionally, this demonstrates the way that personal values and a country's history can shape leadership. However, although Rita says there was consensus decision-making, given the huge numbers of councillors involved there must have been substantial debate and compromise because as Porter (1999:103) says, 'consensus is rarely possible' and, I contend, more difficult to achieve when working with such large numbers of people. Nevertheless, Rita's description of her leadership reflects a commitment to inclusion and negotiation for acceptable outcomes, and also a confidence and strength gained in part by being re-elected on six occasions.

The only Indian interviewee who is an independent expresses her leadership differently:

I have to bring them together. Unless they are with me I will not be able to pass any resolutions. So, first of all I will have to convince, for any activity, I will have to take them into confidence. That is the first thing. Without their co-operation I will not be able to do anything. For taking them into confidence, for bringing them with me, I would have to appeal to the people, to convince their corporators to be co-operative with me. And that we can do. Then I'll have to be co-operative and both chairmen also will have to be co-operative. If I'm doing a good work, the chairmen should co-operate with me (Nala).

Although perhaps expressing a personal preference to working consultatively, Nala is illustrating one of the difficulties independent mayors and leaders face without members of

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<sup>15</sup> This is the central decision-making assembly of the Indian National Congress Party, comprised of members elected from State-level Pradesh Congress Committees, with up to a thousand members.

a political party to support them. As alluded to here, her support base is the community who elected her, however in practice she has to work with the councillors and chairs to gain their support for any recommendations she makes to the council. This might well encourage unethical transactional leadership.

Finally, another Indian woman says that in council she makes all her decisions herself, including when she was mayor:

I take my own decisions, because ten people have ten views, then the more people you ask for views, they have different opinions, and then you are yourself confused. So, instead of asking ten peoples, if you feel a particular decision of yours is going to be helpful, go ahead with it (Vishakha).

Vishakha's statement is suggestive of a lack of openness to, and respect for, others' perspectives or a lack of comfort with complexity or perhaps a certain conviction in her own capacity to make decisions. It may well be the latter according to research which shows that European mayors, regardless of the way they are elected, 'consistently perceive themselves as the most influential person in local matters' (Magnier 2006:354) and perhaps mayors in other countries have the same perception. Furthermore, Ganguly-Scrase (2000:86) says that 'women in government in India are powerful and influential, and enjoy the privileges and benefits of their class position'. This is confirmed by Santosh Nandal (2003:126), who says that women who have 'emerged significantly into political prominence ... are "economically well off" and ... belong to the upper strata of society'. All the participants from India could be described in this way, and such privileges can result in less tolerance of difference. However, at least one other explanation is possible. Richter (1990/1991:536) says that in India 'tolerance of dissent, willingness to compromise [and] insistence on democratic procedures are seen as the result of timidity rather than courage, weakness rather than strength'. Vishakha could well be exemplifying the influence of cultural norms and the way they work as structures of closure on leadership. Nevertheless, her perspective highlights again the differences that emerge between interviewees from the same country and the influence of personal values.

In contrast to the other countries in this study, only three of the Filipinas locate their leadership with their political colleagues, and in doing so demonstrate a determination to reach outcomes they want rather than ones that are more inclusive of others' perspectives. Research suggests that directly elected mayors are 'more inclined to exercise a strong political control in order to achieve visible results that might increase his [sic] chances of re-election' (Berg 2005:7), and the Filipinas' examples seem to support this. However, there are differences between the processes the three women describe. For example, one explains her leadership in the following way:

I like to make decisions after consultations. I am a very consultative person, although I have my own, but I reserve that at the back of my mind. Then I consult with people. Then I weigh things, but if what I have reserved is the right one, then I insist on that (Pat).

This reflects an openness to others' perspectives, the vision or direction that interviewees from other countries have described, and the determination not to seek consensus or change position if the outcome is not right, which for Pat means right for the community. Pat came to local government from senior management in the power industry, which is unusual in a country where most women in positions such as these have 'links to



politically prominent male relatives' (Richter 1990/1991:526),<sup>16</sup> and she ascribes her consultative approach to her experience in that industry. Her words are reflective of relational leadership, however she describes a different process when she needs the council to approve her projects:

I ask the council to meet with me when I have a project in mind. Before I ask them to make a resolution, I discuss the project, the pros and cons, the advantages and the disadvantages, and I listen to them. And if they're a little bit difficult, then I leave it that way. Next time, I ask them to dinner. Then we discuss the project again, until I win them over to my side. In the first two terms that I had, I had only two members of the council with me. Others are opponents, but I was able to win them over to my side towards the end of my term because of their involvement in my planning stage. I don't dictate. I don't impose any project on them. I always discuss it with them, get their consent, their consensus, and then that's the time when I ask them, 'alright, I want this'. (Pat).

Whilst this approach is reflective of relational and transformational leadership, it could be suggestive of what Bass (1998:186) describes as pseudo-transformational leadership, whereby leaders 'manipulate arguments about political choices with a twist that achieves the desired response' rather than trying to 'persuade others on the merits of the issue'. Furthermore, trying to persuade people by wining and dining them might be seen as unethical transactional leadership. However, Pat could equally be seen as trying to humanise a system which is in many ways quite closed, or demonstrating 'the "feminine" values, attitudes and behaviours' still expected of women leaders in this country (Roffey 1999:393). Furthermore, as Ciulla (2001:318) points out, 'reciprocal transactions are one way of building relationships' and it is the purpose of the transaction that makes it ethical or unethical. In seeking to achieve what is good for her community, Pat does not reflect self-interest. As Bass (1998:175) argues, all leaders need to be transactional at times to build and maintain relationships, and being both transactional and transformational is 'the best of leadership'. Finally, Pat's leadership processes reveal the way structures can provide opportunities and influence leadership in that personal contact is facilitated by having only eleven people to negotiate with. Such an approach would be difficult in councils with large numbers of councillors.

Whilst two other Filipinas locate their leadership at least partly with their political colleagues, what is revealed is very different to the leadership described by Pat. For example, one<sup>17</sup> explains her leadership as being part of a team, similar to the way a number of interviewees from other countries perceive it:

In my team, it's not mine alone. It's for all of us. And maybe they appreciated that and that's why nobody contested me, nobody ran against me. There are times when I have to make my own decision like when I know that my decision is going to be a better result for them. Then I tell them, I explain to them why I make that decision. And I think nobody thought that it was not for the benefit of my constituents.

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<sup>16</sup> Elsewhere in her interview Pat confides that she came from a lower middle-class family in a poor community and her parents were teachers. Furthermore, she was approached by the Catholic Church and persuaded to run for mayor and was a reluctant contender until she started visiting the constituents and saw the extreme poverty many were living in which affected her deeply and made her determined to win.

<sup>17</sup> Liz is one of the 'breakers' mentioned in Chapter 2 who became mayor when her husband, who had been mayor for three terms, had to stand down for at least one term. Liz admitted she was under significant pressure from her husband not to stand at the next election and that she would find it difficult to stand again although she really wanted to.

Myself is always the last. Maybe because I've seen that it's better that they will be part of this so I'm not the only one to blame (Liz).

Liz does not elaborate her team process and focuses more on informing her colleagues of decisions she has made alone which, as discussed earlier in this chapter, lacks the mutuality of dialogue. However, her allusion to involving her colleagues in her decision-making process could be seen as suggestive of unethical leadership in that her motivation appears to be self-interest. Her involvement in politics is through her relationship to 'a politically prominent male relative' exemplifying what is still typical of women in powerful political positions in this country (Richter 1990/1991:526). Nevertheless, in conversation, she is often quite tentative. Having executive power can, as asserted earlier, work as a structure of closure influencing leadership as it focuses her attention on the staff and community and reduces her need to build the more collegial relationships described by the interviewees from other countries.

The other Filipina to discuss her relationship with political colleagues has held many elective positions and like Pat is one of the small number of women who come to political positions in this country without having a political husband or relative. Furthermore, she is a teacher and businesswoman owning three colleges in Manila, with independent wealth and extensive experience outside local government:

You must have that strong political will to do things which you think is really hard, but you have to push through because people depend on you as their leader ... Since most of them come from a party, then we always have a dialogue. What I found out ... is that they depend on me, so whatever I say, they follow. I say I would like to have this kind of project for our plaza, or for this thing, they always agree with me because of educational background, or they don't have any idea how to run the town. Since they were used to the past administration, when nothing was done, so they depend on my capacity to lead. Whatever I say, whatever I suggest, they just follow (Myrna).

Myrna's leadership as described by her is relational and, similar to Pat, reflects the determination to achieve outcomes she desires that is typical of directly elected mayors (Berg 2005), although it appears she does not meet much resistance, which suggests there is little dialogue or existence of diverse perspectives. This is suggestive of pseudo-transformational leadership in that Myrna does not appear to have a high regard for her political colleagues nor does she contemplate the possibility that she might learn from others' perspectives (Bass 1998).

All the Australian interviewees locate their leadership with their political colleagues, and generally with *all* their colleagues. This reflects several structural issues. As mentioned earlier, with the exception of Queensland,<sup>18</sup> Australian mayors generally, but not always, are full-time whereas councillors are part-time and have other commitments. Furthermore, as mentioned in earlier chapters, political parties rarely dominate councils in Australia outside the greater Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane conurbations. Thus the party allegiance evident in England and Sweden is not necessarily as evident.<sup>19</sup> The processes the interviewees describe with their colleagues are similar to those described by other

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<sup>18</sup> In Queensland, mayors and councillors in most of the larger towns are expected to work full-time and receive a salary.

<sup>19</sup> Although political party membership is not necessarily overt in many councils in Australia in that the overwhelming majority of candidates stand as independents outside the conurbations mentioned, this does not mean that councillors are politically independent. They may well be members of political parties but do not stand as endorsed candidates.

participants, confirming leadership as relational. Five are directly elected mayors, and the leadership they describe emphasises different aspects of transactional, transformational and transforming leadership as the following two examples demonstrate. One woman demonstrates what other interviewees have described in seeking consensus, being prepared to listen and change her mind if convinced by the discussion, but also being quite determined to implement outcomes:

I guess my preferred style of leadership is by consensus. I try and sort of gather as many opinions as I possibly can about issues, and I like to listen to all sides of the debate. If I have a particular idea about something and somebody can come up with alternative viewpoints that I think have got some merit, I'm prepared to look at that, work through those issues, and if they're right, change my viewpoint. But I suppose once we've decided on something, then I'm reasonably single minded in terms of then making sure that it actually happens (Marie).

This is an example of leadership that seeks to provide direction to others but is also open to transformation of self given better alternatives (Bass 1998). It also highlights the way leadership is embedded in relationships and moves between leaders and followers rather than being located in a position (Burns 1978; Weaver 2000).

In contrast to the leadership described by Marie, another interviewee describes her leadership as consultation, although only with some of the councillors:

I think this is a fault on my part. I tend to consult with the more experienced aldermen because they will really know, some of them even have a broader knowledge than I would have of the way we can go on many things. I consult with my Deputy Mayor a lot. The newer aldermen, I'm happy to listen to their concerns and then say, 'well perhaps we can't move on that one' ... The more experienced aldermen, I'll talk to them, but then I do go to the newer aldermen, because they may be more in contact with the community than I am in certain things, because accessibility is a very important part of local government, and a newer alderman might be more open to things in the community than older, more experienced aldermen.... But I would say there are some aldermen who are fairly new and who are one issue people, or even though elected to council, they're fairly much against council. I don't go out of my way to discuss it with them (Molly).

Whilst Molly demonstrates self-reflection here in acknowledging her partial consultation as a 'weakness', similar to Jasmine from India, what Molly describes is not leadership but dyadic, one-on-one relationships that are only part of the overall leadership relationship (Rost 1991). It also suggests a lack of openness to different needs and interests in regard to the way she relates to new councillors who may have different perspectives to her own. On the other hand, as none of the councillors are fulltime and Molly has to go out of her way to approach them outside council meetings, the environment itself is not amenable to transformational leadership. Leadership is a relationship that requires at least 'time, determination, conviction, and skill' (Burns 1978:429).

One of the findings in this thesis is the many differences between women from the same country as exemplified by another Australian interviewee:

It may be that some of them agree, some of them disagree with a course of action, even if it's been a resolution of council. So you need to work through that very carefully to make sure that you don't get them totally off side, and you need to bring everybody, because everybody's thought process and sort of intellect, it might be just reading, absorbing, what they're reading in front of them. Some people can do it easily. Others find it difficult and take longer time. I think one of the most important things is to all arrive at the same place at the same time. So you've got to

be very mindful that you might need to spend extra time with some councillors, get other questions answered for them, go back and speak to them again about particular things so that they're comfortable, that they've got all the right information at the right time. It's a bit of a juggling I guess (Frances).

This is an example of a commitment to identifying and addressing the different needs of councillors, and bringing them along with her which is reflective of the 'individualized consideration' of transformational leaders that can move individuals to 'go beyond their self-interests for the good of the collective' (Bass 1998:186).

### 5.3.1.3 Developing followers

Several of the English interviewees describe leadership processes reflective of aspects of transformational leadership in that they promote the personal growth of members of their party group. As has been seen earlier in this chapter, Nicole seeks to groom everyone with her, which is another way of describing that process. A further example demonstrates that, despite the emphasis on executive groups, a leader still has relationships with back-benchers in their party groups:

One of our councillors, I talked her into going on to do some work for the Local Government Association ... I think she will be a leader of the future. She's really good, and needs bringing on. So, I rang her up and said 'Clare, do you fancy going off to do some work for the LGA? They've asked me to do it but I haven't got the time to put in to doing this and it's an important piece of work'. 'Oh, what's it involve?' she said, so I told her what it involved, and she said, 'well, do you think I could do it?' And I said, 'you're the perfect person for the job because they really need somebody who is new to the council, who's got no preconceived ideas about what the past was, because it's about the new structures'. And there I've got a new member, an up and coming member of my team, who is going to be really, really useful (Christine).

Leaders of the council have access to a wide range of networks and opportunities not generally available to all councillors, and this is an example of how structures of opportunity can influence leadership (Burns 1978). It is also a strong example of transforming leadership that helps 'to elevate followers' needs for achievement and self-actualization' (Bass 1998:171). As Hayes (1999:118) says, 'an effective leader recognizes the positive attributes and interests of his or her people and then builds on these strengths'. Furthermore, it is a powerful example of inclusivity and sharing of what might be seen as leadership roles, supporting Rost's (1991) assertion that there is usually more than one leader in any group, with followers being active, not passive. That Christine sees a benefit to her and her party in this process suggests a transactional approach as well in her leadership, supporting Bass' (1998:175) assertion that 'the best of leadership is both transformational and transactional'.

Another interviewee describes her leadership in a different way:

My job is to identify what the councillors are like, and build to their strength, and try and build on their weaknesses as well. So I've identified where the councillors' strengths are, and I've then put them into those jobs and even though we don't have portfolios, I very much give councillors work that they can feel that they are worthwhile and give them ideas and send them off to do them and pull them together. My leadership to them would be very much an empowerment leadership (Barbara).

This commitment to developing followers is a powerful example of a transforming leader who knows her colleagues well, can identify strengths and areas for improvement and

provides opportunities for them to grow. It elaborates Burns' assertion that transforming leaders 'help to elevate followers' needs for achievement and self-actualization' (in Bass 1998:171). This is in contrast to 'pseudo-transformational' leaders who prefer to maintain distance between themselves and their followers, thus trying to elevate their own status (Bass 1998:185). Ciulla (1998:83) asserts that many leaders who talk about empowering people 'lead in autocratic ways' and are not interested in changing the 'power relationship that they have with their followers' but this is clearly not the case with Barbara as will be reinforced later in this chapter. The close relationship Barbara has with her colleagues and her capacity to help them develop their leadership is influenced strongly by the local government structure. Her council is in Queensland and she and the eight councillors (four of whom are women) are all fulltime representatives receiving a salary and therefore working at the council every day. This enables regular contact and deeper relationships, similar to the Swedish councils where the executives are also salaried, fulltime positions, and is another example of how structures can provide opportunities that influence leadership (Burns 1978).

#### **5.3.1.4 Consulting with staff**

One of the contentious issues in local government is the relationship between politicians and administrators, which has been discussed in the previous chapter on power. A number of the interviewees perceive staff as having more power than elected representatives. In a sense, this issue goes to the heart of local democracy, raising questions about who makes decisions and whether unelected officials are accountable to citizens. As Carlos Alba and Carmen Navarro (2006:287) point out, Western democracies followed the Weberian tradition of having a 'clear separation' between politicians and administrators, with decision- or policy-making the responsibility of politicians and implementing those decisions the responsibility of administrators. This tradition reflected a concern that without such a separation, administration of public affairs could be corrupted or politicised by interference from political party organisations (Alba and Navarro 2006:287). It is this model with its formal separation of political and operational responsibilities and its emphasis on professional management that is enshrined in New Public Management. This, as discussed in earlier chapters, has influenced local government in England and Australia. A sporting metaphor commonly used to convey these differing responsibilities in local government is that 'politicians steer and administrators row'.

Mouritzen and Svava (2002:288) conclude from research carried out late last century with CEOs in fourteen countries that 'top administrators are partners in leadership with the mayor and other leading politicians [and that they have] a complementary relationship'. Throughout their interviews the participants do mention staff and, apart from some interviewees' perceptions of their having too much power, often what is revealed is a close working relationship between the mayors and leaders with staff and CEOs.<sup>20</sup> This is reflective of the complementary relationship that Mouritzen and Svava describe, and such a relationship is essential for leaders in local government to be effective. As Alba and Navarro (2006:287) point out, the hardest part of the task for elected representatives in

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<sup>20</sup> I use CEO rather than executive to describe the position at the top of the administrative body as in the Philippines the mayor has executive authority.

local government is to develop policies, and to ensure they, and their priorities, are implemented. For this to happen they have to 'rely on the collaboration of the experts – the professional staff'. However, the 'partnership in leadership' (Mouritzen and Svava 2002:288) is not generally evident in the descriptions the interviewees provide of their leadership. Only eight mention staff in this context and of those, only two mention CEOs. Mouritzen and Svava's (2006) finding reflects the perspectives of CEOs, and Alba and Navarro (2006) report a similar finding of a partnership in leadership from the perspectives of mayors. However, what Alba and Navarro also found is that CEOs appear to be more comfortable with accepting this partnership than do mayors. This may well reflect a criticism Jean-Claude Thoenig (in Mouritzen and Svava 2002:xi) has of local government politicians: that they perceive the world as 'subdivided into two categories [and] only one matters – politics'. On the other hand, holding formal leadership positions in local government structures that distinguish between the political and the administrative may well work as a structure of closure influencing them to understand leadership as political leadership effected predominantly in relationships with their political colleagues or, in the case of the Filipinas, with the community. Whilst Mouritzen and Svava (2002) argue that CEOs provide leadership in the community, this raises questions about how appointed people are accountable to those they see themselves as leading.

All the eight interviewees who mention the staff or CEO in describing their leadership are Australian except for one Swedish mayor. The Australian women generally refer to staff as part of a team, as is demonstrated by the following example from a directly elected mayor who acknowledges her greater influence with staff:

I think we've put a great emphasis on team work, staff and elected members. I've always had a fairly good relationship even as an elected member with the managers, or directors as we call them now, but I think they sort of most probably pay a bit more attention than if you're an elected member. I've had to do a formal memo on some things, and very much the elected members are my ones to look after like the paid staff is the CEO. But we quite often have informal chats ourselves about different staff, different elected members, and what we think might be the better way to approach a situation (Leisha).

Leisha's description of her responsibility for councillors and the CEO's responsibility for staff reflects the separation between the political and operational discussed earlier. I contend this can focus the interviewees, particularly those from the Western countries, on their leadership relationships with political colleagues. Furthermore, informal chats may assist in building and maintaining relationships in the same way that providing information to colleagues can. However, although what Leisha describes may reflect a close working relationship with the CEO, it is a dyadic relationship that is only part of leadership.

Another Australian woman describes a similar relationship with the CEO although it is suggestive of a more authoritative role on her part:

I have a good relationship with the CEO. I mean at times he drives me nuts, and I'm sure there are times when I drive him nuts, but we do at least have a fairly good relationship and fortunately neither of us holds a grudge, because there have been times when I've said, 'Frank you've got to fix this'. He will ring me up and say 'this has happened, I'm going to do this, what do you think?' He uses me as a sounding board, and if I say, 'no Frank, you can't do that', then we'll have a discussion about it, and decide what we are going to do (Janine).

One of the findings of Mouritzen and Svava (2002:258) from their research on CEOs and Alba and Navarro's (2006) research with European mayors is that there is 'an interdependency and reciprocal influence' between CEOs and mayors, and Janine's description of her relationship with the CEO seems to support that finding. Whilst this appears to be a more robust relationship where conflicts are explored and decisions made together it is, similar to Leisha's description, also suggestive of a dyadic relationship rather than leadership.

The only Swedish mayor to mention staff describes a different relationship:

I meet them quite often, I talk to them, I tell them what we want and they of course tell me what they want. I am also working quite a lot with discussions on which are our different roles, what am I supposed to decide and what they are supposed to decide, and I also have these discussions with other political persons because many people in the organization are not quite sure who is supposed to do what. And I think respect for our different roles and our different capacity is so very important, because we have clever people with great capacity in the organization, employed, and it's so important to get them to feel that they are free to use their capacity, but that they cannot use it just as they want themselves. They have to know what we, from the political side, want them to do, and then I think the communication with me is very, very important (Eline).

This is a strong example of relational leadership built on respect and consideration of others' feelings that acknowledges differences and resolves conflicts through dialogue. It also elaborates how, despite formal separation between political and administrative responsibilities, the two are interdependent and have reciprocal influence (Mouritzen and Svava 2002; Alba and Navarro 2006). Furthermore, it perhaps explains Bergström's (2003:7) comment that political and administrative leadership are 'intertwined' and why it is unclear to many people in Sweden who really governs (Montin 2005). Nevertheless, Eline's description is suggestive of a belief that staff are there, ultimately, to carry out 'the political will of the elected representatives', which weakens the notion of joint leadership and supports Alba and Navarro's (2006:296) research, which found that most of the mayors surveyed hold this view. This suggests that Thoenig's (2002) critique discussed earlier may well be accurate, however voters elect people to represent them and administrators should carry out the will of the politicians if representative democracy is to mean anything. Indeed, in Sweden all administrators are formally subordinate to the politicians who 'can choose at any time to remove the delegation' (Montin 2005:128), although this rarely happens and the mayor and CEO generally work closely together as reflected here. In Swedish local government, as well as a CEO there are a number of administrative managers responsible for budgets and staff for different services/areas of operation. The CEO services the executive committee and has overall coordinating responsibility but no authority in regard to the administrative managers who are responsible to the politicians (Montin 2005:118). It is this group of professionals to whom Eline is referring, highlighting again the differences between local government systems and formal leadership structures.

Eline continues to explain how her relationship with staff can cause problems for her with her political colleagues:

There are for instance some difficulties. In Sweden people are always discussing the roles between political persons and professionals, and many politicians think that the professionals have too much power. And for me, there are difficulties when

other politicians here in [her city] think that I give the professionals too much power, and I am very convinced that it is very important to get them to feel quite free in their work. Some politicians don't realize that really, and it's almost a question of strength and your own capacity. If you are unsure as a politician, if you don't know really, then you get a little scared when you meet a professional person who knows so much more. And then you are not capable to meet them, and then they get angry and say 'They decide too much. I want to decide' (Eline).

Here Eline elaborates the tension between elected representatives and administrators, the blurring between these two responsibilities in practice and the balancing act referred to earlier that mayors in Sweden need to negotiate. Leadership as revealed by these women is not only complex but also difficult in practice (Ciulla 1998).

### **5.3.1.5 Leadership in the community**

Although many of the interviewees provide examples in Chapter 3 of how they keep connections with their constituents only five, all from the Philippines except one from England, locate their leadership in the community. Research of mayors in other countries who are also directly elected, suggests that this form of election in local government 'intervenes strongly' in what mayors see as their responsibilities and their relationships with their political colleagues (Magnier 2006:371). Indeed, that only three of the Filipinas locate their leadership with their political colleagues is perhaps indicative of this. Such a form of election provides a certainty in regard to length of tenure, and the support base for mayors is constituents rather than political parties or fellow councillors. Magnier (2006) argues that these factors encourage mayors to have a stronger role with the community, acting more as ombudsmen between residents and the council, implementing projects and having a strong involvement in administrative activity relating to residents. This demonstrates again the way that formal rules and procedures work as structures of closure and opportunity for leadership (Burns 1978). What might be a structure of closure in regard to relationships with political colleagues may be a structure of opportunity in regard to relationships with the community.

Whilst Magnier's (2006) argument was based on research with European mayors, it is likely that the situation would be similar wherever mayors are directly elected, and the following example from a Filipina demonstrates the involvement in administrative activity identified by Magnier:

I am a very patient person, but I also tell them that it doesn't mean to say that you can abuse me, that things just have to be done the way it should be done. And I mentioned to you earlier I think about the dismantling of illegal fish cages. They asked me for an extension, which I listened to. They asked me again for another, and I listened too, but for another extension I was very firm and I said 'no more'. And they still insisted and I said 'I am sorry'. You just have to be firm, but you have to give them also the chance that you listen to them, but after listening to them, enough is enough, and this time we really just have to dismantle it, and I had it dismantled. Because if you show them that you're a wimp, you'll never get things done (MJ).

MJ is mayor of a coastal council and is describing the practice of throwing gelignite into illegal fish cages to stun fish enabling the fishermen to collect them from the surface. This practice causes significant environmental damage and MJ is determined to stop the practice. Another mayor who has been mayor for eight years demonstrates a similar direct involvement in administrative matters:



I consult other people. I listen to what they're saying and I weigh things, like who will benefit more if I do this. ...For example, there are ambulant vendors outside [the market place], so we control them in fairness to the owners who are inside the market place, who are paying for their stalls. But we have to have some compassionate decision sometimes, and it is through negotiations also. Two times a week the stall owners are amenable that these vendors will be selling things - this is our market days, Saturdays and Sundays. But Mondays to Fridays, they're not allowed. At first, these ambulant vendors were mad at me, but later on I am happy to say it, everybody's happy. And during holidays, of course I will have to negotiate with the legitimate vendors if they will let them stay there during the Christmas season to New Year. It's just a matter of reaching out to them and talking to them - communicating (Neneng).

Both are examples of women prepared to make decisions they believe are right and fair, which are end values (Burns 1978), but consulting with others and taking into account the competing needs of different groups of people. Whilst this therefore has aspects of transformational leadership in that there is discussion and the needs of others are considered, there is no evidence that the relationship is reciprocal and there is no shared purpose (Freeman and Bourque 2001). I contend that these two examples are reflective of headship rather than leadership in that whilst the interviewees prefer a consultative approach, they take a more autocratic approach when involved in carrying out administrative responsibilities. What is revealed again here is the way structures influence leadership and the inability of single conceptions to explain it, thus supporting my model of leadership as a continuum.

Another Filipina describes a different leadership process with the community:

Every year we do a survey ... to identify the top ten problems of a certain Barangay, or community. And after the survey, we conduct a Barangay assembly. We show it to the people. 'According to the survey these are your top basic needs. Is this true, or not?' And then from there, there would be an interrelation, a consultation. 'Okay, since these are your problems, how do you think we will be able to solve them?' They will suggest, then we will also take note of it, and we in the Municipality Development Council<sup>21</sup> ... will then be planning, according to the Barangay assemblies that they've conducted in all the Barangays, beside the selected projects. We ask the engineer 'are these feasible?' and then we define it (Meg).

In contrast to the other two Filipinas this is a clear example of relational leadership revealing a commitment to consultation with, if not direct participation by, citizens. This suggests similarities between directly elected mayors regardless of country. Haus and Sweeting (2006) in their research on European mayors found that directly elected mayors are much more in favour of direct participation than are other mayors, and Getimis and Hlepas (2006) found that they spend much more time with citizens. Nevertheless, what is also revealed in these examples from the Filipinas is the many differences that exist between participants from the same country, highlighting the complexity of leadership and the influence not only of context and structures but also personal values.

The only other woman to mention the community when describing her leadership is the mayor from England who, as identified in the previous chapter, was prepared to negotiate

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<sup>21</sup> This Council is composed of all the Barangay captains and a member of the municipal councillors, and four members of the NGOs (Meg).

with developers to gain their support in implementing the council's vision for sustainable dwelling construction but to refuse to let them build in the council area if they were not prepared to support this. Here, she explains her process in gaining the community support she sees as essential for success:

So, I guess the way I see my role is in actually leading the public in terms of areas where they haven't thought of going to. For example the sustainable construction that we're working on at the moment is something that when you talk to the general public they've no idea about it. But when you put it in terms of 'well, when you go and buy a fridge you are told which fridge is the better energy rating so it's less expensive to run. When you buy a new house, nobody tells you how much it costs to run. They'll tell you what council tax band you're in, but never tell you how much it's going to cost you in electric and gas and everything each year. Don't you think you have a right to know that? And don't you think you have a right to have one that costs less to run?' And then, when you explain it in those terms, well of course that's what they want, so it's about looking at opportunities and leading those opportunities for the public that you represent (Christine).

This is a powerful example of transforming leadership that seeks to persuade followers of what is right and good (Bass 1998). Whilst there is an element of manipulation in the way Christine emphasises the positive aspects of the strategy, sometimes transformational leaders need to be instrumental if they judge that the outcome is for the common good (Bass 1998). It would be a concern, reflecting pseudo-transformational and unethical leadership, if it were habitual, whereas I contend that Christine consistently elaborates transformational and transforming leadership. This partly explains her re-election nine times by her colleagues. Ultimately transformational leadership is, as Bass (1998:187) asserts, 'in the eyes of the followers'.

#### **5.3.1.6 Leadership reflected in representation and power**

Apart from the interviewees' direct responses to the question on leadership, their leadership is revealed more fully by drawing on my analysis of their responses in regard to their practice of representation and power in Chapters 3 and 4. Although the interviewees may not have recognised it, representation and power are inextricably linked with leadership and, as discussed in the introduction to this chapter, power is central to it. In regard to representation, the interviewees' focus on needs rather than interests and their maintaining connections with, rather than distance from, their constituents is reflective of transformational leadership. These factors have led to many of them having the multiplicity of social perspectives that engenders a focus on individualised needs, openness to others' perspectives and preparedness to negotiate across difference, all of which are reflective of transformational leadership as described earlier in this chapter. Similarly, in regard to power, the women have an ethical conception of power effected largely through influence for the benefit of their communities and within relationships that are not necessarily hierarchical. This ethical practice of power and its location in relationships where leaders and followers are both active, and leaders themselves can change, is also reflective of transformational leadership. These factors thus support the findings elaborated in this chapter.

In this section, the leadership of the interviewees is revealed through relationships with different groups either in their councils or in the community, supporting both Burns' location of leadership as an aspect of relational power and the feminist conception of leadership as relational. I contend that the processes many of the women describe and the

findings from the previous two chapters reveal an ethical approach to leadership and demonstrate aspects of transformational and transforming leadership that feminists see as essential and is an underlying objective of this thesis. Transformation is reflected in the way they provide direction to followers, negotiate across difference to acceptable outcomes, assist the development of followers or change their own positions after hearing the perspectives of others, becoming followers themselves. I contend further that what is also demonstrated in this section is the influence on their leadership of the formal leadership structures within which the women are located, supporting the feminist contention that 'organisations are not rational, neutral bodies but living and breathing microcosms of the societies that house them and the people who inhabit them' (Rao 2000:75). These can work as structures of both opportunity and closure, and reflect the different historical, cultural and political contexts within which local government is embedded. Nevertheless, I maintain that a number of the women's examples demonstrate that personal values also influence leadership and can mediate the influence of leadership structures, confirming the interweaving of an individual's whole life experiences and many selves with their practice. I argue that all these findings showcase the complexity and ambiguity of leadership in local government and furthermore, in elaborating aspects of a number of different leadership conceptions, support my model of leadership as a continuum, rejecting notions of leadership conceived separately.

### **5.3.2 Independent decision-making**

Leaders in local government have a variety of often conflicting responsibilities with demands placed on them by others to make decisions. As demonstrated throughout this thesis, the interviewees are busy women who, like many others in formal leadership positions, despite preferring to consult with their political colleagues do not always have time to do this (Gergen 2005). However, one Australian interviewee explicitly denies she makes any decisions on behalf of the council:

I make no decisions without the council being on board. They are kept fully informed on every single issue that comes into my office. Nobody will get decisions straight away across my desk. Never. I'll call the councillors in. It doesn't always have to be formal. It is a collective and I am only the mayor. I have no greater vote, I have no greater anything. The only thing by our Local Government Act that I'm entitled to do is to have reasonable help and advice from my staff, which the councillors are not entitled to, but I have encouraged the CEO to allow the councillors to talk to staff so they can learn, so they are actually going to become very well rounded councillors (Barbara).

In the previous section Barbara describes her leadership as empowerment, and I contend that this further example reflects the collectivity and development of others that Burns (1978) and Rost (1991) consider essential to transformational and transforming leadership. This also elaborates again how structures influence leadership as such an active role by councillors in decision-making on a daily basis is possible only because of the small number of councillors and their fulltime, salaried positions. Collective decision-making on every issue as described by Barbara would be unworkable in most councils.

One of the situations two of the interviewees from England and one Filipina describe as limiting their preferred leadership process is where time precludes it:

Quite often you would be faced with having to make a decision where your instinct was, well I would like to be able to talk to Fred, Gladys, Arthur and somebody, but two of them were out of the country, and one was on holiday, and you'd only got till the next day, so you spoke to one of them. There often are times, not on big strategic issues, but on day to day things where you sometimes think, well I've had to make the decision quickly, and oddly enough my experience seldom was that it meant you made the wrong decision (Margaret, England).

If Lyn rings me up and asks me for an instant decision on something, I'll give it to her, and then I will write to the group and say, 'look I was asked by the CEO whether we would agree to this, and I have agreed to it, but these are the reasons I've agreed to it', and this is what I do (Nicole, England).

During emergency situations, specially when there are floods - the town's a flood prone town - so you use it without consulting them, do what is needed, emergency (Meg, the Philippines).

These examples support Gergen's (2005) statement that at times leaders need to be decisive. Furthermore, whilst the interviewees prefer to consult, they do – and arguably have to - distinguish between routine or crisis decisions they make alone, reflective more of headship, and strategic decisions as articulated by Margaret. Deliberation is important when there are complex and important decisions to be made with different potential solutions and when those involved have conflicting interests (Yukl in Weaver 2000:257; Hersey and Blanchford 2005). Where these conditions do not exist, when there is only one solution, then deliberation is not only unnecessary but can be counter-productive and alienate those involved. This demonstrates again the point made a number of times: that leaders do have to exercise their own judgement and in this decision-making the gender of the leader arguably matters most.

Other interviewees describe a number of situations, including time, where it is either not possible or necessary to consult, or where it is inappropriate to consult for various reasons including the focus in local government on the leader, the headship responsibilities that only a leader can exercise and where the issues are contentious and agreement cannot be reached. As Nicole says,

When you know you've got people on one side and people on this side, and you're never going to reach agreement, then you have to come down and say, 'this is the way it is going to be'. [Also] there are times when I have to take decisions without consulting and doing all those nice things that you want to do, and not being afraid of standing by the decision you've taken (Nicole).

Highlighting a different perspective, this Swedish participant demonstrates the influence and power of other levels of government on leadership and of NPM when she distinguishes between decisions that are appropriate for politicians to make and those that are not:

In some matters I can say this is not a political matter, I have to deal with this. We have some obligations. We have some issues to deal with that we have to do because of legislation and then there's no point in personal discussion. Of course, there will be some matters that you have to take decisions on that you have no time to discuss with others (Elisebet).

Once again these examples reflect the interviewees' understanding of leadership as not only relational but occurring in different situations requiring different orientations and hence contextual. Furthermore, illuminated here are women who are confident about making decisions alone when, for a variety of reasons, deliberation is either not possible or

not appropriate. Nevertheless, several of the women acknowledge that there are always risks involved in independent decision-making as demonstrated by the following two examples:

You have to choose when you act like that and when you don't. If you just make your own decisions without having an interaction with others, maybe you can be isolated and then have problems later to get their support when you need it. Then you have to be strategic and think about when can I do this without discussing it and involving others (Kirsten, Sweden).

Margaret explains it somewhat differently although nevertheless they both appreciate the risks involved:

What then sometimes happens is you have the job of defence to do with your own colleagues, saying 'why didn't you consult wider? Why didn't anybody tell me about it?' And I think communication in that sense is always a problem for a leader because, as I used to say to the group, 'you can't expect me to consult you on everything. You have no idea how much crosses my desk in the course of a day. Deciding what I talk to you about and what I don't is terribly difficult. It's all about the art of the possible and you have to trust me. At the end of the year you have to make a judgment about whether I got it horribly right or horribly wrong, and if it's horribly wrong, then you have another leader, but while I'm here, you have to trust me to do some of this stuff' (Margaret, England).

What is revealed in these two examples, and indeed reflected in the other examples in this section, is that making decisions independently is not an habitual practice but a conscious choice made recognising the potential damage of such decision-making. One of the Australian interviewees, in describing her leadership, reinforces Margaret's comments about the difficulty of deciding what to consult on:

There are times when you have to make the decision, and actually being president sometimes is lonely. You do try to take people with you and persuade them as to why you think you should be doing this. I mean I try not to just tell people what to do. As I said, I try to do it by consensus, but it doesn't always work (Janine).

It is when decisions have to be or are made independently that the importance of relational processes such as those identified previously is revealed, as they make it easier for followers to decide to give leaders the trust that 'makes leadership possible' (Solomon 1998:104). Where there is no trust, or when trust has been lost or worn thin, leadership is unlikely to be effective (Ciulla 2001).

I contend that what is confirmed in this section is the ambiguity and complexity of leadership in local government, reflecting again the influence of leadership structures and responsibilities and the different contexts within which it is located. Furthermore, what is revealed here are the similarities and differences that exist between the women both across, and within, the countries in this study as well as once again the influence on leadership of personal values. I now move on to the final section in this chapter, which considers briefly some examples of what I have termed leadership failures.

### **5.3.3 Leadership failures**

Ciulla (2001:319) argues that 'failures and regret are key ways in which we learn moral lessons in life' and that it is through failures that we learn to appreciate the complexity of leadership and value those leaders who do it well. Whilst this was not something I actively pursued in my interviews with these leaders, many of the interviewees express regret that,

in a variety of situations they cannot always follow the relational processes they prefer as is demonstrated by some of the examples in the previous two sections. However, two Australian interviewees describe situations where leadership fails because of issues to do with the individuals involved:

There are times when probably you don't do it as well as you might. Sometimes it's difficult to communicate with people who are reluctant to reciprocate [or] work with people when you know they're actively working behind your back ... I guess sometimes, even with the best will in the world, communities and individuals or groups in the community have a very vocal stand on issues that you can't support, and so you tend perhaps to retreat. Well not retreat but not be able to achieve what you want to achieve, because of the sheer inability of people to see where you're trying to guide it (Jennifer).

In Marie's case, she explains that:

We've got Pentridge, and it's a big development, and we have to deal not only with the applicants, there's Vicroads, there's heritage issues. It's going to be very nice, and obviously it's also going to create more traffic and we tried to sort that out. We had a public meeting, but people do not understand, and people from across the road are complaining. We tried to consult and we tried to be open and we tried to take everybody's concern on board, but you can't make everybody happy at the end of the day. You just do the best you can (Maria).

These examples highlight some of the many challenges for leadership in local government. Despite the best intentions and a commitment to relational and ethical processes, leadership can fail partly as a result of the complex 'biological, social, cognitive, and affective processes' (Burns 1978:147) within which leadership is embedded. For example, it is not possible to work across difference and negotiate to acceptable outcomes unless the commitment is mutual. Furthermore, as is evident in Maria's example, which involves the redevelopment of a former prison site, where issues involve competing values and interests it may be that there is no outcome acceptable to all. These realities highlight the problem in Burns' notion of elevating followers to higher levels in his conception of transforming leaders. Nevertheless, some situations are even less conducive to simply reaching an acceptable outcome. Effective transformational leadership requires environments and processes that are amenable to it (Yoder 2001) and public meetings, at least in Australia, are not such environments.

Jennifer, in recognising that she does not always consult as well as she would like, demonstrates self-reflection and the regret that has perhaps contributed to the transformation to the better person she believes she has become through her experience as a mayor, supporting Ciulla's (2001) argument. Failures in leadership of the kind she mentions also demonstrate that transforming leadership as conceived by Burns (1978) remains an ideal to which we might all aspire, and which we might enact either partially or most of the time. Perhaps it is as Ciulla (2001:313) says: 'the ethical problems of leadership stem from the fact that leaders are carved from "the warped wood of humanity"'.

## 5.4 Summary

In this chapter I have demonstrated that the interviewees practise leadership as a particular aspect of relational power, reflecting the feminist conception of leadership as relational. Rather than leadership conceived separately, what the women describe is reflective of my

model of leadership as a continuum demonstrating aspects of transactional, transformational and even transforming leadership in different contexts. The interviewees also enact headship, which is required of them by their formal positions. This demonstrates both the ambiguity and complexity of leadership in local government and the way it is influenced by the contexts and structures within which it is embedded. Moreover, I have demonstrated that, whether in regard to headship or leadership, most of the interviewees have an ethical approach to their practice.

In summary, this chapter demonstrates that political leadership is difficult, ambiguous and complex and that transforming leadership as articulated by Burns (1978) in its totality is normative and remains an ideal. However, when all the threads from this and the previous two chapters are drawn together, although the interviewees lead differently depending on context, many of them have demonstrated leadership that is closer to the transforming pole of my proposed leadership continuum. This explicates the transformation feminists see as essential and adds further strong support to arguments for increased representation of women and women leaders in local government. The presence of women in the political sphere does make a difference (Phillips 1995).

## Chapter 6 – The Nature of the Dance: Women in Local Government

An individual is never only or fully a woman (Jakobsen 1998:5).

### 6.1 Introduction

Janet Jakobsen's (1998) above quote speaks to one of the central debates in feminist political theory - the nature of gender and how to address it (Fraser 1997). It evokes arguments about the engagement of women in formal politics and, in the case of this study, increased representation of women and women leaders in local government. The debate centres on notions of equality and difference: the degree to which women are different from men; whether men and women are, or should be, equal; and whether women can be classified as a distinct group with common attributes, given their membership of many other social groups. These groups include at least those based on race, ethnicity, class and sexuality as alluded to by Jakobsen (1998). Gender is fundamental to this study, as is the related question of whether the presence of women as representatives and leaders makes a difference to local government. These have been addressed partially in the three preceding chapters, however, in this final chapter of my analysis, I foreground gender and its capacity to transform the lion's den of local government. I do so by investigating these questions within the context of relevant literature, feminist political theory and the interviewees' perspectives and practice.

In the first part of the chapter, I review conceptions of equality and difference as these lie at the heart of both the debate on gender and this thesis. Equality, as well as respect for, and inclusion of, difference are important, not only for women but arguably for all who live in representative democracies. However, feminists are divided over whether equality means being the same as, and difference means being inferior to, men. These two conceptions are dichotomous suggesting that women are either one or the other. Diversity feminists, on the other hand, argue that these conceptions fail to recognise either the masculinist nature of political institutions or the many differences between women. They also argue that the assumptions underlying equality and difference present a false dichotomy. These conceptions of difference lead to different strategies in regard to women's involvement in formal political institutions. I contend that a reconstructive diversity conception of difference as relational, contextual and in transition eschews the dichotomies I seek to avoid. I argue that a strategy of displacement, whereby women seek inclusion in political institutions in order to change them, proffers the transformation that feminists consider fundamental for inclusive politics. It is also an objective of this thesis.

Next, I explore the interviewees' perspectives and experience in the context of these conceptions of gender, the debate concerning them and arguments for gender parity in local government. What emerges from this analysis reflects a diversity conception of difference, with similarities and differences apparent between the interviewees themselves, between women and men, and between men. I contend that the similarities and differences between the women reflect their different life experiences, reflecting historical and cultural



contexts and personal values. These are then fostered by the relationships the interviewees form and maintain as local government representatives and are shaped largely by the specific local government contexts in which they are located. This supports Young's (1998:408) contention that individuals are influenced by their 'situated experience and perception of social relations'. It also supports Mouffe's (1996) argument that identities are constituted and negotiated within politics itself. The interviewees perceived the question on difference as meaning between women and men, although some similarities also emerge. These too reflect the different life experiences of the representatives and the specific local government contexts in which they work. However, what is revealed does not reflect a benign, pluralist notion of difference. Some of the differences arguably are not problematic but necessary for inclusive politics. Others work against inclusive politics, serving to control or exclude. All reveal the influence of the masculinist environment of local government. Nevertheless, I argue that the presence of these women in local government makes a difference in diverse and sometimes unexpected ways, with many of them actively transforming the den and influencing outcomes for their communities. It thus challenges arguments that either women entering political institutions become the same as men or that they are somehow inferior to men. What is reflected is closer to what Rita Felski (1007:19) describes as 'difference within sameness and a sameness within difference'. This analysis provides further support to arguments for increased representation of women and women leaders in local government.

Finally, I move on to investigate how the interviewees feel being women in local government. I contend that despite the many benefits of their representation to them and their communities, some of the interviewees describe particular challenges about political life as a woman who is a leader in local government. These illuminate why many women choose to leave, and perhaps not stand for election to local government. I argue that this attests to the imperative of the inclusion of more, and a wider range of, women in local government.

As has been demonstrated throughout this thesis, many of the interviewees have made a palpable difference to their councils and communities, as well as their selves. This has the potential to transform local government so that it is more representative of the communities it serves, and delivers outcomes more responsive to the diverse needs within its communities, including those of women. I conclude that such a transformation is only likely to occur when there are significant numbers of women leaders in local government supported by a significant number of women councillors. However, these changes may well be transitory unless there are concomitant changes in the broader society that affirm the value of women's contribution to, and inclusion in, representative political institutions. I turn now to review conceptions of equality and difference before moving on to my analysis of how these conceptions weigh with the practice of the participants.

## **6.2 Equality and Difference**

As pointed out in the introduction to this chapter, the nature of gender and how to address it has been, and continues to be, one of the central debates in feminism. The debate arises from three conceptions of the weight to be given to gender – equality, difference and diversity. These support different strategies in regard to feminist involvement in political institutions and lead to different expectations of women representatives in those

institutions. Some feminists locate these conceptions chronologically as tied to three waves of feminism, some locate them geographically, representing either Anglo-American or French and Italian feminism and others locate them as having occurred within second-wave feminism (Squires 1999:115). Squires (1999:116) asserts that locating these conceptions in these ways is 'overly schematic' and suggests that it is equally possible, and perhaps preferable, to see equality and difference as 'an ever present and unresolved oscillation between binary opposites, the deconstruction of which is essential'.

Equality feminists perceive that the oppression of all women is based on sexism and that the way of redressing its impact is to remove it as a consideration. They therefore argue that gender should be irrelevant politically, and seek equal rights for women and men. Despite the obvious physiological differences between women and men, equality feminists perceive the notion of women as being different from men equates to women being of lesser value or inferior to men, which is inseparable from sexism and hence damaging to women (Fraser 1997). In other words, this conception rests on an assumption that difference means inequality, which is contestable. Equality theorists support a strategy of inclusion or pursuing engagement in political institutions, whereby women participate on the same terms and in the same numbers as men (Lovenduski 2005:29), seeking to transcend gender difference (Squires 1999). Whilst I support a strategy of seeking inclusion in political institutions, the notion of transcending gender differences is naïve as it ignores the way political institutions privilege and reflect the experiences and interests of those who established them, as was demonstrated in Chapter 4. The equality conception has been widely criticised. For example, feminists who support a difference conception argue that equality is not gender neutral but is defined by males and hence is androcentric. Furthermore, they argue that political institutions are not only patriarchal but that seeking inclusion in existing political institutions as currently constituted would mean that women representatives become 'political men' and indistinguishable from male representatives (Lovenduski 2005:30). In other words, difference feminists assume that equality means sameness which therefore devalues what is feminine and ultimately reproduces sexism (Fraser 1997:100). Apart from this contestable assumption, the implication that women in political institutions are necessarily co-opted by men also denies women's agency, reflecting a perspective of women as almost powerless.

In contrast to equality feminists, difference feminists argue that not only are women and men different, but those differences should be celebrated and valued. Although some difference feminists simply argue that difference means of equivalent value, others argue that some feminine qualities, such as being either nurturing or peace-loving, are morally superior to those of men. I contend that this latter perspective is essentialist, and ignores the evidence that some women can be violent and hostile and that some men are not. Nevertheless, difference feminists agree that women share 'a common gender identity' and have suffered a 'common harm' because their identity has been depreciated (Fraser 1997:100). From a political perspective, difference feminists support a strategy of reversal whereby political institutions are transformed so that they embody female values. Thus the implication of a difference perspective is that if sufficient women enter political institutions they will 'change the nature and practice of politics' (Lovenduski 2005:30). This conception has been widely criticised, and perhaps even more so than the equality conception. It is argued that the notion of a common gender identity denies the multiplicity

of differences that exist between women themselves, including their embeddedness within different and intersecting social groups such as class, race, caste, religion, ethnicity and sexuality (Dean 1997; Fraser 1997; Young 1998; Porter 1999). As has been reinforced consistently throughout this thesis, each woman has a multiplicity of selves within herself (Arneil 1999:214) with none necessarily fixed and some potentially contradictory as suggested in Jakobsen's (1998) quote at the beginning of this chapter. Furthermore, as Phillips (1998:11) points out, a focus on the differences between women and men can project a 'sentimentalized vision of women's place or role'. Indeed, equality feminists perceive the difference perspective as dangerous in that it assumes all women are the same, thus reinforcing 'existing gender hierarchies' (Fraser 1997:101) and leading to inequality.

Whilst both the equality and difference conceptions highlight important issues for feminists, they can be seen as a dichotomy or binary opposites creating what Martha Minow and Mary Shanley (1991:20) refer to as 'the dilemma of difference' whereby the 'stigma of difference may be recreated both by ignoring and by focusing on it'. Diversity feminists seek to go beyond this dichotomy, and there have been two main approaches, one instigated by political events rather than feminist debate (Squires 1999). Women of colour and lesbians were the first to challenge both the equality and difference conceptions (Squires 1999). Their approach rejects the assumption underlying the equality conception that all women experience oppression in the same way, pointing to the many different forms of oppression that exist for different women at different times and in different cultures and contexts. Furthermore, Young (1988:276) draws attention to the fact that there are different forms of oppression and that 'for every group there is a group that is *privileged* in relation to that group'. This means that women as a group 'can be both oppressed and oppressors simultaneously' (Vickers 2006:14).

However, these feminists are even more critical of the assumption underlying the difference conception of a single woman's voice, arguing that a focus on gender ignores, and hence devalues, other important cultural differences such as race, ethnicity, class and sexuality. Finally, they argue that a focus on gender privileges the experiences of educated, white, middle-class, heterosexual Western women (hooks 1984), thus ignoring the many differences among women. Recognising these multiple differences led to the growth of identity politics, which Fraser (1997:103) refers to as 'multiculturalism', whereby many groups seek recognition of their own distinctive identities, with gender simply one amongst the many different characteristics of an individual's identity. This diversity approach is important not only in highlighting multiple differences that both the equality and difference conceptions ignore but also in focusing on the way differences can translate into outcomes that are unjust and need to be addressed.

On the other hand, identity politics in its pure form is also criticised by feminists on a number of grounds. It has led to fragmentation within feminism (Butler 1998:277) and 'divisions and splinterings' within women's movements (Benhabib 1999:354), almost paralysing them in terms of addressing issues collectively. Many of the inequities shared, albeit differentially, by women as a group across cultures and contexts have been neglected (Hill and Chappell 2006:2) leading, perhaps inadvertently, to maintenance of the status quo in regard to political power. This plays into the hands of those men who do not want either to share power with, or accept the presence of women in political institutions.

Identity politics also tends to 'encourage separatism, intolerance and chauvinism, patriarchalism and authoritarianism' (Fraser 2000:107). Indeed, in many parts of the world difference has been the basis of violence inflicted on some by others. As a result, in some countries (e.g. Rwanda, India and Northern Ireland) women now work to depoliticise difference and seek common ground (Porter 2000; Tripp 2000). Finally, it has been argued that identity politics 'denies the complexity of people's lives, the multiplicity of their identifications and the cross-pulls of their various affiliations' (Fraser 2000:112). Like the conceptions it criticises, an identity conception is also essentialist as it 'assumes that what unites a group is 'intrinsic to it' and 'transcends history, culture and geography' (Lloyd 2005:36). Being lesbian or homosexual, for example, has significantly different experiences and outcomes depending on where and when it is lived.

Other diversity feminists, who Fraser (1997:104) describes as 'anti-essentialists', seek to deconstruct the equality/difference dichotomy which they perceive as discursively constructed. These feminists reject the underlying assumption that equality means gender-sameness and that difference means sexual difference and hence inequality. Instead, they argue that the equality versus difference debate establishes a binary opposition which offers a false choice to feminists of endorsing either equality or difference, thus hiding 'the interdependence of the two terms' (Scott 1997:761). Equality does not mean sameness but rather assumes differences that should be respected equally (Squires 1999). However, there is significant debate about whether equal treatment means equality of opportunity or of outcome, whether 'the norms of equivalence are neutral' and who sets the criteria for equivalence (Squires 1999:129).

Deconstructive diversity feminists also reject the binary opposition of female and male implicit in the difference conception and focus on the many differences within, as well as between, gender groups. Indeed, they are sceptical about the notion of any claim to a group identity. Whilst this conception is helpful in challenging dualistic assumptions and elaborating the complexity of difference, a weakness in simply taking a deconstructive approach is that, as Fraser (2000) points out, sexism cannot be dismantled in this way. Furthermore, such a conception fails to distinguish between identity claims that either maintain or challenge existing power structures and relations. It therefore evades 'crucial political questions' about social justice and redistribution of resources (Fraser 1997:105). Yet other diversity feminists take a reconstructive approach, conceiving difference and identities as relational, contextual, complex and always in the process of changing (Young 1990; Chodorow 1997; Felski 1997; Fraser 1997). These feminists acknowledge that whilst there are differences between women and men, some of which should be celebrated, there are also commonalities, with differences not being inherently problematic. Similar to difference feminists, diversity feminists accept that political institutions are patriarchal and not gender neutral, and would also seek to transform them, supporting a strategy of displacement. However, diversity feminists who take a deconstructive approach are more likely to eschew engagement with political institutions whereas those who take a reconstructive approach are more likely to support engagement in order to transform them (Squires 1999).

As Squires (1999:132) points out, the equality, difference and diversity conceptions are 'archetypal' and now rarely supported in the pure form in regard to political practice.

Many feminists recognise the contribution of the diversity perspective in theory however consider the equality and difference perspectives important in practice. Although equality is often criticised as ‘mere male-defined reformism’, for many feminists it is more than ever relevant given the ‘continuing and vast disparities in the global distribution of power and resources’ (Felski 1997:18). As Joni Lovenduski (2000:30) points out, the dilemma in political practice is that ‘[e]quality is needed if difference is to be compensated and difference must be recognized if equality is to be achieved’. In contrast to the critics, hooks (1997:486) believes that while some feminists think unity between women is no longer possible given women’s differences, ‘[a]bandoning the idea of Sisterhood as an expression of political solidarity weakens and diminishes feminist movement’. Benhabib (1999:354) argues that there is now a ‘renewed respect for the moral and political legacy of universalism out of which the women’s movement grew’, particularly in the current historical period when neo-liberalism has encouraged a ‘reassertion of individual over collective interests’ (Hill 2006:2). Furthermore, in arguing for inclusive politics, Porter (1999:91) asserts that ‘[t]he quest for public recognition of collective identities underlies a fundamental demand for “equality of respect,” the ethical basis for full inclusion’. These and other transformational feminists therefore support the engagement of women with political institutions in order to transform them.

Although transforming political institutions is a difficult task, and perhaps at best a ‘work in progress’ (Lovenduski 2005:45), without at least the presence of different voices, particularly those of different women, nothing is likely to change (Phillips 1995). I contend that a reconstructive diversity conception of difference as relational, contextual and in transition eschews the dichotomies I seek to avoid. I argue that a strategy of displacement, whereby women seek inclusion in political institutions in order to change them, proffers the transformation that feminists consider fundamental for inclusive politics and is an objective of this thesis. These also most clearly speak to the reality of political life.

In this section, I have outlined the three main conceptions of the nature of gender and how to address it politically. Each raises different and important questions for feminists and for women who seek engagement in political institutions. However, I turn now to investigate these conceptions of equality and difference alongside relevant literature and feminist debates concerning them in the context of the perspectives and experience of the interviewees, thus balancing practice with theory. I also consider the implications of this investigation for arguments for increased representation of women in local government.

### **6.3 The Dancers’ Perspectives of Difference**

Difference is accentuated in this thesis, reflected in the research design with its focus on women leaders in local government from two European and three Asia-Pacific countries, each with a different history, culture and local government system. Unsurprisingly therefore, what have emerged throughout are women who are similar to, and different from, both each other and men in local government. They are political actors in the same way that some men are, as they have entered a political world, albeit one designed and historically populated by men. Furthermore, they have a commitment to, and interest in, local government and their communities. As identified in earlier chapters, almost without

exception the interviewees are confident and strong, active in their representative work and proud of being women leaders in a political world. This explodes 'misogynist assumptions that present women as so very different from men; as apolitical, sentimental, [and] incapable of rising from the particularities of their family and neighbourhood to the generalities of the public sphere' (Phillips 1998:11). The findings also challenge the notion that women are necessarily co-opted by men in political institutions. They demonstrate clearly that many of the participants use their agency to effect change rather than maintain the status quo. Moreover, it is also evident, for example from their claims in Chapter 4 about the gendered environment of the local government systems in which they are located, that some interviewees *do* share some common political experiences, although these are experienced differentially depending on history, culture and local government structure.

Nevertheless, what have also emerged are the many different selves contained within each woman as stated by Arneil (1999). This supports Young's (1988:273) contention that although individuals are part of a social group, and in this case the group of women, they are also members of other social groups, including those based on class, race, culture and specific interests. Thus, members of social groups are 'not unified ... but multiple, heterogeneous, and sometimes perhaps incoherent' (Young 1988:273). The interviewees' differences are shaped largely by personal values, different cultural and social contexts, and the different political structures within which they are each located. The similarities and differences between the women, even within their countries, elaborate Young's (1988) argument. They also support the claim by Lisa Hill and Louise Chappell (2006:2) that gender interests do not preclude cultural and general human interests. They can, and do, co-exist.

In this section, first I explore difference as described by the participants in response to the question of whether they think women make a difference to local government. In contrast to their responses to the questions investigated in the previous three chapters, the participants had no hesitation in responding to this question. All except one Swedish interviewee believe they do, perhaps supporting Judith Butler's (1998:276) assertion that 'the notion of a generally-shared conception of "women" ... has been ... difficult to displace'. Or perhaps it exemplifies Linda Zerilli's (1998:450) statement that individuals in their daily lives make judgements about gender 'in a flash without thinking'. Some feminists are concerned that '[f]ocusing on the differences between women and men can lend itself to a sentimentalized vision of women's place or role' (Phillips 1998:11).

Nevertheless, the participants perceive 'difference to local government' as meaning predominantly between women and men. This is not surprising, as men, regardless of any other differences between them, comprise the majority in all local governments. The interviewees identify a range of differences in the way women and men carry out their representative roles in local government. However, they also acknowledge some similarities between women and some men, and differences between women. In their examples, several women also demonstrate differences within their selves. All this reflects a diversity conception of difference and rejects any notion of essentialism. Furthermore, the examples the interviewees provide demonstrate clearly that they are not the political men some feminists fear. Rather, many of them are using their agency as women to make

local government a more inclusive place. This justifies arguments for increased representation of women and women leaders in local government on the basis that presence matters.

Second, I explore briefly some of the interviewees' responses to the question on what it feels like being a woman in local government. All the interviewees see their experience as worthwhile and rewarding, and this has been addressed to some extent already in Chapter 3. However, despite the many benefits of their representation to them and their communities, some of the interviewees describe particular challenges about political life in local government. It is these I focus on in this chapter. They extend existing research on why many women choose to leave, and perhaps not seek election to, local government. However, rather than supporting a strategy of eschewing local government, these examples instead speak to the pressing need to support increased presence of women and women leaders in local government. This will enhance the potential for the necessary transformation to more inclusive politics.

I turn now to explore in more detail the interviewees' responses to the first question on whether women make a difference to local government.

### **6.3.1 Women making a difference**

Without exception, the interviewees express an interest in increasing women's representation in local government, as they consider this would provide the potential or impetus for further change. This supports Jill Vickers' (2006:24) contention that all women do have an interest in increasing women's presence in decision-making bodies, as it is only then that the voices of 'all kinds of women' can be heard. Even the one interviewee who does not think women necessarily make a difference to local government supports having more, and a wider range of, women representatives in local government, confirming Vickers' contention:

It's not different to what you see in other parts of society, and you can feel the same things when you are in politics. I think it's the mix which is interesting. You should have both, and people with very different backgrounds, like young and old ones. So, it's the mix actually. You've got women and women I think (Miriam).

In arguing for a broader mix of representatives, and particularly those from different backgrounds, Miriam mentions some different demographic characteristics of women representatives in local government, although she elides class and racial differences. This reflects the concern many feminists have about political representatives being an élite group and therefore unable to make 'that leap of imagination that takes us beyond our own situation' (Phillips 1994b:199). Although elected representatives generally, and those in this study, do comprise élite groups, as has been shown in previous chapters some of the interviewees do make that leap.

However, if indeed women in her country make no discernible difference to local government as Miriam suggests, this could be a result of the strong presence of women in local government in Sweden over many years, with men's attitudes and behaviour possibly converging with those of women (Childs 2003). On the other hand, as Bruce Solheim (2000) points out, and has been mentioned in earlier chapters, the political culture in Sweden values equality. Thus, Miriam may believe that drawing attention to differences

between the genders is unacceptable within that culture. Nevertheless, despite the political culture valuing equality, other research identifies distinct, albeit perhaps subtle, differences between women and men in their representative roles in local government in Sweden (Hedlund 1985; Sinkkonen 1985; Fürst 1999). Furthermore, there are significant differences in the outcomes for women in the broader society in Sweden that would be known to women who are involved in politics.<sup>1</sup> These differences illustrate how ‘valuing equality’ does not necessarily translate into equal outcomes, and I shall discuss this further later in this chapter. I suggest, therefore, that Miriam has an equality conception of difference, seeing it as sexist and hence denying it. This could be an ideological position reflected in her lengthy membership of the Folkpartiet Liberalema or Liberal party.

Apart from Miriam, the interviewees identify a number of differences they believe women make to local government. Most consider these arise from life experiences acquired as a result of having domestic responsibilities and being mothers and also carers of older relatives. Some feminists would be concerned that this could be suggestive of essentialism, ignoring specificity and repressing the many differences between women (Fraser 2000; Lloyd 2005). Indeed, it might seem to be ignoring the experience of women who do not have those responsibilities and men who do. Nevertheless, typically these responsibilities lie with women (Young 1988:282; Willis and Natalier 2006:39), although not all women. Furthermore, the degree and nature of the interviewees’ involvement is different depending on context and other factors such as sexuality, class and culture. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, some of the interviewees are quick to acknowledge exceptions in regard to both genders.

Some of the differences the participants describe are not necessarily problematic. Indeed, they are beneficial to the institutions of their local governments and the communities they serve, as they draw in different perspectives and behaviours to the decision-making process. On the other hand, some differences are problematic as they work against inclusive politics, serving to exclude. Still, both reveal the influence of the masculinist culture within local government, which in itself constitutes difference. Some reveal personal characteristics that often emerge in political contexts.

As mentioned in the introduction, the interviewees’ responses reveal similarities and differences between women, between men, and between women and men in local government. However, all their responses relate to their roles and relationships within local government. This reveals gender difference as both relational and contextual. The differences are of two kinds which, although they are intertwined, I explore separately. The first is the perspectives the interviewees have on a wide range of issues, which translate into different priorities and outcomes for their communities. The second is the way women and men behave in local government contexts. This can have an impact both on political processes within their councils and the way their constituents perceive local government. What is revealed by the interviewees thus belies the idea that all women who enter patriarchal political institutions become the ‘political men’ that equality feminists

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<sup>1</sup> Solheim (2000) points out that across Scandinavia, including in Sweden, despite the political culture, the situation of women in the workforce is much the same as in other countries, with women over-represented in service industries and under-represented in management in the private sector. Furthermore, they, too, carry out most unpaid labour.



fear will follow if gender is highlighted (Lovenduski 2005:30). I move on now to explore the interviewees' comments in regard to different perspectives and their influence on priorities and outcomes.

### **6.3.1.1 Social perspectives constituting difference**

Lovenduski (2005:19) defines women's perspectives as 'women's views on all political concerns', not just issues specifically relevant to women's interests. I support this definition, as it more closely reflects the realities of local government. It also rejects the essentialist notion of 'women's interests', which is limiting, as I have argued in Chapter 3. Furthermore, many local government issues may not appear to represent 'women's interests' at first glance, but do when considered in terms of their outcomes. As Sapiro (1998:168) says in regard to national politics, 'laws and policies need not have "women" in the title or text'. This is the case, too, with local government policies and decisions. Lovenduski's (2005) definition resonates in this thesis, as the diversity of issues the interviewees discuss has been apparent throughout. It is also evident in the interviewees' responses to this question.

Whilst Lovenduski defines perspectives, Young (2000) contributes significantly to an understanding of the role of perspectives by elaborating on how they are formed and their impact on conclusions people reach on issues. She argues that people who are 'differently positioned' in social group structures 'have different experience, history, and social knowledge'. This she describes as a 'social perspective' (2000:136), comprising the questions, experience and assumptions that form the basis of reasoning rather than the conclusions people draw. Young argues further that people in the same social group can draw quite different conclusions from their reasoning about an issue due to their different experience, interests and goals (2000:137). Her arguments are borne out by the examples the interviewees provide.

Apart from Miriam, the participants all believe that women bring a different perspective to local government. This lends qualified support to some research in regard to women and politics generally (Kathlene 2001; Lovenduski 2003), and in regard to women and local government (Hedlund 1985; Pande 2000; Beck 2001; Boles 2001; Tolleson-Rhinehart 2001; Childs 2003). Whilst this might suggest similarity between the interviewees across countries, differences due to culture and context are revealed in the examples they use. This elaborates Young's (2000) explanation of how women positioned within the same social group have different experiences, interests and goals. As she says, individuals 'act in situation, in relation to the meanings, practices and structural conditions and their interactions'. I contend that Young's (2000) social perspectives are revealed in the language and examples the interviewees use. For example, a Swedish participant contrasts the different understandings that women and men bring to their consideration of issues:

It makes a difference because women see things from another direction than men do. They see different things and they understand things that men have not even thought of (Lena).

In a similar way, an Australian woman describes this difference as a broader perspective:

I think a female is, and I'm not saying that men aren't, but I think a female is much more laterally thinking. I mean, they look at a much broader perspective. The man

looks ahead, and I think the woman sort of pauses and looks to the right and the left and picks up on all those innuendoes in the community (Frances).

An English leader of a Conservative opposition gives an example of what she sees as a woman's capacity to work across difference for a common goal that men in her council cannot understand:

There's a girl who may come flying in in a minute who's Labor from a London Borough, and we work together on the culture thing. We're chalk and cheese. I mean I grew up in a big posh house in (her rural town). She grew up in a tiny house in London. We couldn't have had two different backgrounds, but we get on really well because we really understand what the agenda is. She's helped me enormously, and I think I've helped her, in understanding different perspectives. Women can do that in a way that I don't think men do. And the men here can't understand why we've actually got quite a strong alliance. They can't handle it really. They find it odd, which I think is daft, because I think it's a strength (Nicole).

This is a strong example of how situated experience shapes perspectives, elaborating the contextual nature of difference. Moreover, it demonstrates that difference is variable rather than fixed. Nicole also offers insight here into the way representatives in local government network with representatives on other councils on diverse issues confronting local government. That two very different women can form an alliance and work together on a project in the interests of their communities illuminates what Nira Yuval-Davis (1997:126) describes as 'coalition politics'. In this coalition, differences are recognised and respected, and the focus is on what is to be achieved, not on any differences. Nicole's example is also evocative of what Judith Butler (1998:289) describes as an 'open coalition' where identities are 'alternately instituted and relinquished according to the purposes at hand'. Furthermore, this exemplifies how a person can be public-spirited, taking a 'critical distance from their own immediate desires and gut-reactions to discuss public proposals' (Young 1998:409). As Nicole demonstrates, this is always more likely when confronted with perspectives different to one's own.

Some of the interviewees refer specifically to the experience of women due to their positions in the social structure. For example, an Indian interviewee refers to the way women understand issues concerning water and sewerage because of their direct experience of the impact of these issues on women in particular:

A very different perspective, because we look at the problem from all angles, because what happens is faced by women in general. Whether it is badly managed schools or ... inadequate or untimely water supply, the person who takes the brunt is the women, because they are the ones who are affected by these kind of things ... There could be a problem relating to the sanitation, or public conveniences. Who is affected most are the women who would have to bare themselves on the road (Lina).

Another Indian mayor identifies how her experience helps her to understand some of her constituents:

There are times when battered women come to our offices complaining about their husbands, drunken husbands. I as a woman can understand what the lady must be going through. Or if she has any marital discord with her husband, then I can understand because I try to place myself in her shoes ... what I would feel if I was in her shoes. In India when a woman gets married, she has to adjust to her in-laws, her brother-in-law, sister-in-law, mother-in-law, father-in-law, and she has to adjust, she has no choice. So a woman has an inborn quality of patience and adjustment [that] helps her even in the government (Vishakha).

Although Vishakha here is suggesting that patience is an inborn quality of women, she contradicts this in her acknowledgement that women have to 'adjust' to their husbands' families. Perhaps this reflects 'the spirit of endurance and suffering embodied in the mother' that was lauded by Gandhi (Kumar 2000:2). Vishakha is alluding here to domestic violence, which she mentions several times in her interview. This possibly reflects her involvement in the women's movement in Mumbai where domestic violence has been a high priority. This is in contrast to some parts of the movement in other cities in India (Kalpagam 2000:650).

An Australian participant also refers to the different perspective women often have due to the different responsibilities they have as women:

I think women do have ... a different perspective often to men. [It comes from] different life experiences, having kids, being involved in the community in general a lot more than men are, though not always, and at different places. Down at the preschool, and at the play group, and forays into the shopping centres and all those sorts of things that women tend to do a lot more than men (Marian).

Marian is demonstrating here a point I made earlier, which is that whilst most of the interviewees believe that women in local government have different perspectives to men on local government issues, and different life experiences, they also acknowledge exceptions. Furthermore, Marian is implicitly acknowledging that on some issues – perhaps many – women and some men have similar experiences and perspectives. As Phillips (1998:12) points out, 'we may not be as different as we have been encouraged to believe'.

Another Swedish interviewee believes women are changing local government because of their situated experience:

I think in small steps, not in a revolutionary way, but in small steps. Because when men and women are dealing together with the same issue, you have more aspects on the issue because we have different experiences, and also we are dealing with different matters in our daily lives (Elisebet).

In referring to change occurring in 'small steps' Elisebet is acknowledging at the same time the possibility of change, the difficult task for women in institutions embedded in a masculinist culture, and the importance of different social perspectives in effecting change. Similarly, an English interviewee considers that women and men have different perspectives and she thinks the presence of women creates a better balance:

Men and women have certain things - their perceptions and their thoughts and their ideas are sometimes different, not on everything. And I think it creates balance if women are represented (Natasha).

MJ from the Philippines also believes the presence of women makes a difference, referring to a comment by the Governor of her state (who is her husband) on the difference women make to local government:

We have made a difference here. You heard the Governor himself say that the approaches of women are entirely different from the approaches of men. And perhaps this is where their eyes are now being opened to different areas which they never considered important, and we on our part learn from them that the things that we didn't consider important, we now know is important (MJ).

As has been mentioned before, MJ is an example of the pathway to politics through male relatives that is typical in the Philippines (Roces 1998). Here, she highlights the way not

all differences are problematic, and arguably some are essential for inclusive politics. A broader perspective is drawn into the decision-making, and both men and women are learning from each other. Furthermore, the Governor's comment tends to support Kathlene's (2001:43) assertion that 'gendered attitudinal orientations can ... influence people who have different attitudes'.

This perception of a different women's perspective supports Beck's (2001) research on women councillors in America, mentioned in Chapter 3. Beck found that there are differences between men and women in regard to how they work and what they prioritise. However, Beck concludes that the municipalities where the women are located are little different to the way they would be if women were not present. The latter finding is not borne out by this study, as has been demonstrated in previous chapters. Moreover, a number of the interviewees describe specific instances in response to this question demonstrating the way different social perspectives can impact directly and significantly on outcomes for communities. For example, an Australian mayor, in a council with five women councillors (forty-two percent of the council) speaks of the different approaches men and women have in regard to a range of local government issues in Australia:

I think you look at issues differently. Men look at it sort of fairly front on at a technical issue. They perhaps don't look at how it affects a family or the children or the elderly. It can be the direction of a road or path or access to get somewhere. They look at it primarily from a technical aspect, where a woman looks at it from access, whether it fits in with the overall ethos of that community, whether it's an environmental issue or a park land. I think they're much more likely to want to keep the trees and make sure there's a shelter shade over the swings, where a man wouldn't perhaps think about that, and would most likely clear the block and roll on the lawn, and put a playground in the middle of it. I'm not saying that's across the board, but I mean that's a most extreme example that I could use. And I mean it's interesting too because some men councillors have all those sensitivities as well, but I'm just using it at the broadest context, where I think you look at it from a different angle. You may still get to the end result, but you'll come from two different positions on it (Frances).

Similarly, an English mayor describes a different approach to addressing a particular problem in a school, acknowledging directly the relationship between that approach and situated experience:

Women bring different experiences to the table. There are subtleties of how things are done that I think women challenge. For example, we got some additional resources from government and we were talking about where we were going to target them. We have a school that fails very badly, and it's one specific community. Rather than sticking the money into more teachers, more school time, we're going to try and put the money into more benefit support, more one parent support, more educational psychologist support, try and motivate the families to motivate the children. Now, I think that's a very woman's perspective. I think the straight male answer is to stick more teachers into the school. So I do think women bring a different perspective on things and it's about life experience really, and women have - many women have - a very different life experience to men (Carol).

Both Frances and Carol acknowledge that not all women have the same approach, and Frances acknowledges that some men do. Still, I contend that what is revealed here by both these examples goes to the heart of difference in local government, demonstrating how the presence of women can make a difference. From a community perspective, the outcome might appear the same whether or not women were present in the decision-making as Beck (2001) asserts. In Frances' town, the council provides roads, footpaths, parks and a library.

In Carol's town, council directs funds to schools. However, difference is evident in the processes of decision-making, or what Carol refers to as challenging 'the subtleties of how things are done'. That can impact on communities in significant, albeit subtle, ways. In local government, whilst formal decisions are generally made in the public arena they are often preceded by informal discussions with relevant staff in workshops, committees or site inspections, particularly when issues are controversial or of major significance. These informal discussions provide an opportunity for representatives to raise different questions and consider others' perspectives in ways that formal meetings do not. This enables other ideas and possibilities to emerge. As a consequence, the final staff report and recommendations often incorporate these informal discussions. Local government outcomes, therefore, can reflect the questions and assumptions arising from situated experience that have shaped these earlier discussions. The relationship between the two may not necessarily be identified by observers of formal meetings, by people in their communities or sometimes by elected representatives themselves. As Kathlene (2001:44) points out, differences 'may seem subtle' but 'the implications of these differences are profound'.

In Chapter 4, I discussed in passing the comment by Inez from Sweden that 'the soft questions are for the women and the hard ones are for the men'. I argued then that the issues described as 'soft' are in reality the difficult - and therefore hard - issues as they generally involve complexity and directly affect individuals in communities. The so-called 'hard' issues, on the other hand, generally relate to infrastructure, and involve straightforward decisions on technical and financial matters. Decisions on these issues are rarely difficult or contentious. This contrasting of men prioritising infrastructure and finance, and women prioritising services focusing on people, is also raised by some of the interviewees in their responses to this question. For example, one Australian mayor contrasts women's interest in issues to do with community services and planning with men's interest in issues to do with engineering and finances:

We look at the way a city fits around us differently to a man. We look at community services, which a man thinks is the soft touchy stuff. They seem to be more into engineering and financial services where we tend to be more into planning strategically and then community enterprises. The soft touchy feeling things that an engineer wouldn't talk about are the things that make up the quality of our lives that are important (Helen).

Whilst Helen refers to planning and community enterprises as 'soft touchy feeling things', she is describing the way men view them, not what she necessarily thinks. Also, she acknowledges that they impact significantly on the quality of life in communities. Another Australian mayor supports Helen's assessment but expresses it differently:

Maybe because of the way that we network and move around the community more and we perhaps think of things more like, don't just see a footpath. A lot of the men and the engineers see them as this super thing to construct and all that. And a lot of us sort of see people who can't afford to have cars or people in wheelchairs, or women and men these days pushing the pusher along. So I think it's putting more of what we call now the triple bottom line accounting these days, so thinking more of the social and environmental consequences of things (Leisha).

A similar difference is raised by MJ from the Philippines:

Men tend to go always for infrastructure, they want to build, build and build. The women want to work on persons, more on how to help other persons, so if we can

combine this, then you can have infrastructure, both physical infrastructure, and also the human resource development of people (MJ).

The point that MJ and the interviewees raise illustrates again why some of the differences between women and men – and indeed between women and between men – are important to local government and the communities it serves. In the absence of diverse voices in decision-making, some issues are prioritised to the exclusion or detriment of others. On the other hand, the presence of diverse perspectives extends and enhances outcomes for communities. As Porter (1999:101) points out, '[d]ialogue permits glimpses into what possibilities exist' that would otherwise not be considered in decision-making. This reinforces yet again that the presence of women in local government matters.

Nevertheless, the suggestion that women in local government are only interested in issues directly related to services and people, and men are not, is a stereotype. Many men in local government are interested in such issues, and many women are interested in infrastructure, albeit coming from a different perspective as expressed earlier by Frances. For example, Inez, who is leader of the Opposition and a member of the Left party in Sweden, demonstrates what many women in local government choose to do:

The election before when we were in majority, I asked for instance to have the responsibility for real estate, and for the streets, and for traffic. Because I think if you want to change it, if you think they have made wrong decisions, and you want to change it to another way, you also have to take that step, and put yourself in charge of it, and change it. You know how it has been, how this is, and what we want as women, what kind of living and houses and surroundings. We want to live in our surroundings and if you want to do something about it, you have to say, 'well I don't want this man to be there, I want a woman to be there, and we want it like this'. I think sometimes that I don't have to think so much about the social questions. It's my former work, and I don't have to think so much about small children, because we have a lot of women. We put them forward. If I forget them they let me know. But if you want to change really, you have to take the step forward to the other parties in a way. Otherwise you never can talk about equality (Inez).

This is a strong example of a woman who values equality, reflecting points made earlier about Sweden and about women who are active and prepared to use their agency to change the institution of local government to better reflect the needs of women. Inez, and the women she describes here, are strong women and not the 'political men' that some difference feminists assume happens when women engage with political institutions. Inez exemplifies Young's (2000:102) assertion that a person's identity is made 'by the way that she deals with and acts in relation to other social group positions, amongst other things'. However, Inez is also acknowledging that many women in local government would choose this option by saying that she puts women forward for committees dealing with child-care, and that the women let her know if she does not. Indeed, Inez was also involved initially in committees dealing with what have traditionally been seen as issues concerning women. It was only after a substantial period of time in local government that she took the approach indicated in her example. This bears testament to the necessity of retaining women in local government, as experience constitutes a deeper understanding both of what needs to happen and how to accomplish it. As Freeman and Bourque (2001:17) point out, 'if substantial numbers [of women] decide to abandon traditional institutions, the pressure for structural change will diminish and successive generations of women will have to start anew'.

The interviewees' examples of what women and men prioritise or are interested in support concerns of some feminists that difference can be seen as unequal in political institutions. Indeed, I suggest that the interviewees are reflecting 'cultural codes of masculinity and femininity' (Mackay 2004:111) and the different value ascribed to activities prioritised often, although not always, by men. Perhaps it is the case, as Sue Tolleson-Rhinehart (2001) found in her research, that gendered expectations rather than differences can influence decisions by women. An Australian mayor provides a more explicit example of how this can happen:

Women realize straight away their lack of knowledge and they are the ones that say we want meeting procedure development, we want professional development, and I encourage all of them to go to engineering conferences, all sorts of things ... And we say to ourselves, of course men would understand financial statements, men would understand building approvals. Then we say 'well look, we'll put the women on the child health committee' which once again can be a put down (Molly).

As has emerged several times through this study, women can participate albeit unconsciously in restricting opportunities for other women. Making decisions based on assumptions about a woman's interests might be seen as a minor issue and a natural choice to make. However, as Molly herself admits, it is a form of oppression in that it narrows the opportunities for women. This elaborates Young's (1988 in Vickers 2006:14) assertion that women can be both oppressors and oppressed. It also reveals differences women can experience within themselves. On the one hand, Molly implicitly recognises the importance of broad experience for women in local government, yet on the other hand demonstrates that she, too, makes decisions that limit a woman's opportunities.

In a similar way, a Swedish interviewee, who is chair of the health committee, says differences between women and men are evident in the membership of various council committees:

Women have experiences of caring, taking care of older parents and their other experiences in the social area that they bring into the politics. You can see that in the traffic Board. Most of the members are men. In the health care Board and the local health care district Boards a lot of the members are women. It's not so strange. They try to put those questions on the agenda more than men do (Kirsten).

Another Swedish woman, who is vice president of her party group and also a county councillor, confirms Kirsten's perception. Elena contrasts the membership of a male-dominated committee with that of a committee dominated by women:

I can see the difference between the two main Boards that we have in the county. One that's very much male, which is [the one for]...infrastructure, they have economy, they own the hospitals. And the female Board is where we look for the needs of the people and try to please them and take care of people and things like that (Elena).

However, in contrast to the Swedish interviewees who believe women make a difference to local government Lisa, who is leader of the opposition Christian Democrats, has a different perspective which is much more qualified:

Maybe in such case when it comes to thinking a little bit further, when it comes to social care or the care of children, or their well-being, because we have taken more responsibility for the family. That's the only thing that men haven't reached yet, I will put it that way. Many men have done that – they might not have been able to have the possibility because the women haven't let them take the responsibility of the family, but they're on the track (Lisa).

Lisa seems here to be somewhat dismissive of the notion that women do make a difference. She also appears not to be a supporter of women as there is an element in her words of blaming women for men not taking responsibility for children. I suggest this reflects the ideological position of the Christian Democrats as well as her own values. Nonetheless, Lisa demonstrates again one of the many differences between interviewees from the same country that have been revealed throughout this thesis.

In this section, I have demonstrated the relationship between the situated life experiences of the interviewees as reflected in their perspectives on local government issues. I argue that what is revealed here supports a diversity conception of difference as well as its relational and contextual nature. There are some similarities, and multiple differences, albeit experienced differently, between the interviewees, both within and across countries, between women and men, between men, and even within women themselves.

The interviewees' examples provide strong evidence of the way situated life experience contributes to a more inclusive politics. It also influences the outcomes for communities in ways that are not always understood by those outside local government. There is a suggestion here of unequal value attributed to issues many women prioritise, as equality feminists fear. This provides a glimpse of the way the masculinist environment of local government itself constitutes difference. Nonetheless, I contend that overall, what is revealed in this section does support arguments for increasing the presence of women in local government. It elucidates how differences, albeit subtle, are not necessarily problematic, and how presence can lead to improved outcomes for the communities local government serves. I turn now to explore the different behaviour the interviewees attribute to men and women in local government.

### **6.3.1.2 Diverse behaviour in the den**

The women from the Western countries and India all comment on their observation of women and men in local government council and committee meetings. In contrast, none of the Filipinas do, focusing instead on their own actions or relationships with staff and their constituents. As mentioned in earlier chapters, Filipino mayors are directly elected and the chief executive officers of their councils. They do not chair council meetings and generally attend when it is necessary to gain support for their projects. This difference between the Filipinas and the other interviewees has emerged as significant throughout this thesis, reflecting the contextual nature of difference (Moore 2000:1131), the influence of situated experience and the way that local government structures constitute difference. In this section, first I explore differences in behaviour in council meetings as described by the other interviewees, and then differences interviewees from each country identify in regard to relationships with their communities.

Many of the participants believe there is a difference in the way women manage local government meetings. For example, one of the Filipinas suggests that women are more likely to seek agreement or consensus due directly to their situated experience:

I think it will because we have particular characteristics. Like I told you about our care for women and children, which women can best express, although some male mayors also do. I think we're not prone to use guns, we're not prone to be violent, so we're more understanding. So I think maybe we can best put two different sides,



not in a confrontational way, but to be mediators, to come up with a consensus.  
(Meg)

Several also draw attention to the impact on those involved of the different way women manage meetings. For example, a Swedish interviewee contrasts the behaviour she has seen between two committees, one dominated and run by men and the other dominated and run by women:

On the male Board, the shorter the meeting is the better it is, because a short meeting and a lot of decisions, that is very good. And in the other Board where I am with a lot of women, we tend to overdraw our time limits all the time. And we have discussion, we have information and we have questions, and everybody talks. And in the male Board, there's only the majority leader and the minority leader who talk and they have these propositions put against each other's, and yes, no, no, yes, and they're confrontational and much more strict by the book. I think that the decisions don't change actually, but the feeling you have about the decisions I think is different. When people come from the more male Board they all feel frustrated and angry, and 'oh why did you do it like that?' and things like that. I don't hear that with the more female Board. Even if the decision doesn't go my way I've talked about them and I think you're much more committed afterwards. There are a lot more frustrations after the other Board (Elena).

Elena's reference to confrontational dialogue in the male-dominated committee exemplifies the way local government structures influence processes and outcomes, and therefore constitute difference. In the committee run by men she is reflecting the formal debating rules mentioned in Chapter 4, where councillors speak alternately for and against propositions being debated. I argued in that chapter that the rules of debate encourage confrontation rather than cooperation, and prioritise efficiency over inclusion. I contend that these reflect the masculinist nature of local government, elaborating Fiona Mackay's (2004:111) argument that 'the masculine ideal is standard and underpins institutional structures and practices'. As the rules were developed by Westerners, I suggest that they also reflect predominantly 'white and male spaces' (Puwar 2004:77). Research on women in political institutions reveals that many are uncomfortable with the rules of debate because they formalise confrontation and emphasise difference. As Mackay (2004:111) suggests, the 'dominant masculinities are presented as common-sense, ostensibly gender-neutral norms, conventions and practices'. In reality, they reflect the preferred style of many men. Although committee meetings are not bound by the same rules, and are often less formal, the chair of the meeting decides on the process to follow. This is exemplified by Elena's comment on the different ways the two committees operate. However, what is also inferred from Elena's example of how people feel after their meetings is that at least some men are not happy either with the formal debating rules. This, again, demonstrates that whilst there are differences between women and men, there are some similarities. It also demonstrates how masculinist practices can impact negatively on men who do not conform to those norms.

Similar to Elena, an English mayor believes that women make a difference to local government meetings in how people feel after decisions:

Women do it in a much more listening sense, so that even if people feel aggrieved or a decision goes opposite to them, they've been heard ... I don't know whether it's just a reflection of men and bureaucracies. Bureaucracies find it hard to listen, and I think it's one of the functions of councillors to try and get bureaucracies to listen. If they've been heard, I think it's terribly important, and I think women are

bringing about a bigger cultural change in terms of listening and hearing people. And it's affecting men massively here (Carol).

Elena and Carol both illustrate how, although decisions may be the same, the process of decision-making has a different and significant impact on those present. As Mansbridge (1998:155) points out, '[a] fairly small difference in experience can become a large difference in self-image and social perception', and thus in the way the individuals involved feel about outcomes. This could explain in part why some observers who focus on outcomes rather than process believe there are few if any differences between women and men in local government. In her research, Beck (2001) does assert that there are differences between women and men councillors in regard to process and priorities, but not to outcomes. Similar to the examples in this study, Beck says the women in her study demonstrate 'a politics that stresses cooperation, empathy and openness over manipulation, efficiency and exclusion' (2001:64). She concludes that these women act *as*, rather than *for*, women, and that this could have a significant impact on governance (2001:65). I contend that this is borne out by Elena's and Carol's examples. In saying that their towns are little different to the way they would be if women were not involved, perhaps Beck and her interviewees misunderstand the relationship between process and outcomes in local government, or are looking only at outcomes of the decision-making process. Process is crucial in political decision-making. It can be either inclusive or exclusive, leading to very different outcomes in the way people feel.

Another Swedish interviewee thinks that women and young people have made a difference to local government and that this is made possible only by the presence of 'enough' women:

I think the process has been changed because of women and also, as I said, because of the young people, but young people and women have, in many respects, the same thoughts about things. I think it's because the women are there and also that there are enough women, that they're more than just a few. A few women don't change things. And then, when you look at individuals, there are more similarities between some women and some men because you can be a woman that is very autocratic. And you can also have some men on individual level that are very similar to women and are more consultative. But I think when you see many groups of men and women, then there are some differences (Elisebet).

Elisebet's comments elucidate a number of issues in regard to difference and the capacity to transform the institution of local government. Similarity and difference between women and men are evident in her acknowledgement that some men are more like women and some women are autocratic, but that more typically, there are differences between the two genders. Similar to Elena and Carol, Elisebet demonstrates here both the relational and contextual nature of difference, as well as the influence of personal values. Furthermore, her claim that there need to be enough women, such as exist in Sweden, in order to change local government supports the notion of critical mass, which is a widely held, although contested, feminist position about women in political institutions (Mansbridge 1999; Porter 1999; Lovenduski 2001; Wilson 2004; Vickers 2006). Much of the contestation focuses on legislatures at the state and national levels and their legislative outcomes for women. I support Elisebet's position, as I believe a critical mass of women in local government is one factor that can increase the potential for change of that political institution, making the lion's den more comfortable for women. However, as Nirmala

Puwar (2004:77) asserts, the 'mere presence' of women is insufficient to change 'the white masculine' political styles and practices. Puwar says that a complete 'overhaul of the political imagination' is required, so that differences are respected and valued equally. This is a point I make in Chapter 4, where I acknowledge that other factors are also important. The examples provided by the Swedish interviewees, contrasting the styles of women and men, tend to support Puwar's (2004) assertion.

Nevertheless, even a few women *can* make a difference. Indeed, interviewees from each of the other countries in this study have demonstrated that they can effect change, albeit sometimes subtle, without a critical mass of women in their councils. Furthermore, as Lovenduski (2005) points out, when no women are present in assemblies it is possible for those assemblies to disguise their masculine nature. The presence of even one woman can expose and disrupt masculinist practices and procedures (Lovenduski 2005:28) as has been shown by some of the interviewees. I contend that these are the necessary first steps in any process of change.

The notion that women tend to be more collaborative and co-operative resonates with most of the interviewees in this study, as is evident from some of the previous examples. This could well reflect the masculine and feminine codes of appropriate conduct in political institutions, whereby both women and men know how they are expected to behave. In her study of women and men mayors in America, who are directly elected by their communities, Sue Tolleson-Rhinehart (2001:163) found that 'the men looked more like women' in the way they behave. She suggests that their direct relationship with the community requires 'feminine orientations', and concludes that, as mentioned earlier, '[g]endered expectations are more influential than any measurable differences' (2001:163). This confirms the point made several times in this chapter: political structures constitute both similarity and difference.

As has been shown earlier in this chapter, these attributes of collaboration and cooperation are evident in the examples the interviewees describe, and they lead to positive outcomes for their councils and communities. Furthermore, some of the interviewees acknowledge exceptions with both genders, rejecting any essentialist notion. For example, an English leader in a Labour controlled council explains how her male predecessor had a number of qualities attributed traditionally to women:

My predecessor was a consensus politician as well, but not afraid to lead from the front. He did try and take people with him, but he did bump into, from time to time, this sort of young male, eyeball to eyeball type, confrontation stuff, not usually from his point of view, but people would challenge him. Since I became leader, I've noticed a sort of launching away of some of that macho stuff. It's quite interesting that really, I suppose ... Certainly I'm not a threat, I'm an older woman as well. I'm not a threat to some of the men in the way that [he] was (Tosca).

This demonstrates that, whilst there are differences between women and men in local government, there are also similarities between the way some women and men behave. It illustrates the influence of personal values that has emerged throughout this thesis and the way gender - and perhaps age - can sometimes work to the advantage of women in political institutions. Not being seen as a threat can change the way men relate to a leader when she is a woman, although this may well reflect the different value placed on women and men. It also demonstrates the way men who do not conform to the masculine norm can

be treated differently in the same way that women can be. Still, regardless of whether these approaches reflect feminine or masculine codes of conduct or gendered expectations, inclusive politics requires equal respect for differences, reflected partly in the type of behaviour the interviewees attribute typically to women. Approaches such as these should be valued and typical of both women and men in assemblies that purport to be democratic. I agree with Bruce Baum (2004:1096) that they reflect ‘arguably human values that should be cultivated in both men and women’.

Whilst most of the interviewees perceive differences in regard to process, some believe that the presence of women in their councils has made a difference to the tone of their meetings. For example, an Australian participant suggests that women are less likely to impose their personal presence on meetings, alluding also to the difference in process:

I don't think it's that 'oh you can't swear because there's a lady present'. I mean I think we can swear along with the best of them, but you don't use that. You don't perhaps use your bulk and your big voice and banging the table. I think you try ... and make things more facilitative and get equal speaking times for people and not get people to feel they're bullied into something (Leisha).

The notion that men in Australian councils are more aggressive is shared by a number of the other Australian interviewees and has been identified in other research on women in local government in Australia (Irwin & Waddell 2000). For example, another Australian participant infers that men in her council behave aggressively in debates when discussing the difference women make:

They're less aggressive, they're calmer and I think they can get things better done and get the best out of people in a different way than a male one who will yell or scream and get angry (Maria).

However, rather than being a particularly Australian characteristic, a Swedish participant also infers that men are more inclined towards conflict and are more personal in the way they debate issues:

I can see in the debates maybe that women are different to men. I think we are more understanding for each other, and we're not stuck hard on each other. That's more a male thing I think. Women tend to discuss the issues more than other things and we're not seeking this conflict as much as males do. Of course, I think it's fun when you have a conflict and you have a real debate and things like that. But I don't think that I have ever heard two women in the debate that are mean to each other personally, but I've often heard males that are mean to each other personally or mean to females (Elena).

It may well be the case that some men in local government do use forceful behaviour and language. Many of the images people receive through the media on a regular basis are of politicians behaving aggressively in their state and national assemblies. Such behaviour at a local level may be seen as ‘just the way politics is’, encouraging some individuals to emulate it. Lovenduski (2005:52-53) asserts that many public organisations have ‘institutionalized the presence of particular masculinities’ that emphasise forceful behaviour. She asserts further that this ‘empowers and advantages “certain men” over all (or almost all) women and some men’. I suggest this is borne out by the interviewees’ examples.

In contrast to examples of men behaving aggressively, several Indian participants believe that the presence of women has a benign effect on the behaviour of men in their assemblies. For example, one mayor suggests that the language in meetings changes:

Hah, local government what happens is that women talk more politely, they use more parliamentary words. The men take care that a woman is listening too, so they don't use any raw words, their language is soft like a gentleman and there's a good atmosphere between man and woman (Neela).

Another expresses the same opinion, contrasting the way men behave now with the way they were before women were present in large numbers:

Being a woman changes the total scenario at the corporation. I believe initially there used to be a lot of fights and quarrels in the general body meeting and each one mud-slinging on the other and giving bad words to the other, amongst men. But the scene has totally changed, totally changed ... because there's so many women around they have to behave themselves, they have to stick to certain standards and ethics (Dana).

Whilst it might suggest that men's behaviour has been modified due to the fairly recent presence of women in local government in India, this is not something perceived only by these Indian interviewees. An English participant also supports Dana's and Neela's perception:

I think it's a civilizing influence in a way on an all male domain that could so easily be a boys' club. And I think it does make a change, and people talk (Natasha).

On the other hand, other interviewees claim that women are more emotional than men in their debating, demonstrating the many diversities that have emerged between them. For example, similar to a number of the participants, one Swedish mayor says that women need to adapt their style if they want to convince men to support their arguments:

They're more emotional in their way of describing things. Men are more rational in describing what happens. If you shall talk with a man and convince him, you must, as a woman, try to not speak in an emotional way, but put rational arguments to convince. I think that's what you learn after some years (Kirsten).

Another Swedish mayor thinks that women in her council are confrontational because they are frustrated by their experience of inequality. Eline suggests they need to be 'cool fighters' if they want to gain the support of the men:

I think that many women, they are so frustrated, so they get into confrontations between men and women. And I think it's so difficult for many women to talk about equality, because they talk about it as a fighter or a loser, and it's so difficult to talk about it in a way so men want to listen to them. And I think that it's so important with these talks about men and women in an aspect that we are both winners if we do this better together ... And so perhaps I should try to tell the woman to be a fighter, but a quite cool fighter because if you get into this sort of job and don't work with the men, then they work against you, and then you can't do anything (Eline).

An Australian mayor has a similar perspective to Kirsten and Eline suggesting that women have to learn a different technique if they want to convince men:

I think that's one thing that women have got to learn in local government very, very early on about how to debate that's acceptable to the fellows in that council. Because, if it's just sort of female logic, you're probably not going to be very satisfied for a long time. But you've just got to learn how to do it if it's in a male

dominated council that's sort of acceptable for the men staff and the men councillors in that council - and they'll be different for different ones - but still to get what you're wanting to achieve (Frances).

Frances goes on to say that if women are emotional they're seen by men as 'nagging' or 'difficult'. The suggestion by Kirsten, Eline and Frances that women need to adapt their style to one that meets men's needs illuminates the concern many feminists have about women entering political institutions. It suggests the only way women can gain the support of men within the institution is through using the same style of language that men use. The implication of this might be that women become the same as political men. However, I contend that these three examples demonstrate instead the way some of the interviewees 'have developed approaches that effectively combine masculine and feminine traits' as Rhode (2003:7) suggests many women leaders do. It does not mean they are the same as men, for whilst there might be some similarities, as has been demonstrated in previous examples, there are also many differences. Furthermore, as Frances comments here, there is no one way acceptable to all men, which demonstrates the differences that also exist between men. Perhaps a better way of describing difference in a practical sense is, as Felski (1997:19) suggests, 'difference within sameness and a sameness within difference'.

Nevertheless, it should not be necessary for women to adapt their style. That some may feel they have to illuminates the way institutional structures and practices constitute difference, valuing some styles more than others. As Duerst-Lahti and Kelly (1995:5) assert, 'masculinism is considered the norm', and this privileges both masculinism and most men in institutional relations. It also illustrates the way that women can internalise stereotypes about appropriate language that 'become self-fulfilling prophecies' as Rhode (2003:9) suggests. Still, in contrast to Kirsten's and Frances' assertion that women should not be emotional in their debates, an Australian mayor considers women on her council are emotional, but sees this as positive, not negative:

When they're passionate about something, they come across a lot better than the men. The men are very cold. It's the way men think of things and see things (Barbara).

Once again, as Barbara demonstrates, despite any similarities, the differences between the women are profound. Whereas some women may choose to adapt their language, others do not.

Throughout this thesis, examples have been raised by interviewees from each country about their relationships with their communities. However, as was evident in Chapter 3, they maintain those relationships in very different ways, reflecting the cultures, history and local government systems within which they are located. A significant difference between the Western interviewees and those from India and the Philippines has emerged already in that, in contrast to the Westerners, these interviewees demonstrate connections with their constituents that are more personal and constant. This difference is also evident in their responses to this question. For example, one of the Filipinas says that when women mayors visit their Barangays they immerse themselves in it, and that this is quite different to the behaviour of the men:

When you visit an area, the first thing that you ask the mother, or anybody who is there at home is, 'how's the family? Are you doing alright?' A male executive would say, 'we'll have something to drink', and they would stay in the corner store or in somebody else's house, and maybe share drinking. Whereas a lady mayor like

myself will go around and ask, 'how's your livelihood? What is it that you need for the kids?' So that is already a lot of difference and the immersion in the community is very different. When you go there, you really immerse yourself in the community, try to know how they are, what their needs are, rather than a man who just passes through (Pat).

In a similar way, one of the Indian interviewees describes her approach when her city was flooded:

Even if we do not succeed, we try to handle a difficult situation or a problem. You see, there were flash floods in my city and a population of about 100,000 was affected. Everybody would tell me, 'all the officials are working, why do you need to go into knee deep water, dirty water?' But you know for 15 days I was in the boat. I was walking. Later on I even got skin disease because I was moving in filth, but I went to whichever possible colony I could visit. I used to go inside the homes, then with a lot of medicines and other things and tried to do relief work. This was not the job of the mayor ... I think had there been a male mayor he would never have done this (Rita).

Rita's parents were both actively involved in the fight for independence and throughout her interview she demonstrated her commitment to social justice and human rights. She, like Pat, is directly elected by her constituents, which is unusual at this level of local government in India. It may well be that, as both women claim, men would not behave in the same way, but neither might other women mayors. The differences the two women identify may well be reflecting the external focus of executive mayors as discussed in earlier chapters, and hence the way structures can constitute difference. However, I suggest that they are more likely to reflect the personal values of the individuals concerned.

The same influence of personal values is evident in the example provided by an English mayor:

As leader of the council I do the staff inductions, I have a slot to tell them about members. And I say to them, 'there's a lady with a benefit problem. Her husband had dropped dead and she'd become a widow, and she'd got a lot of problems and difficulties she was going through, and there was a mistake made with her benefit. Now, it wasn't a deliberate mistake, anybody would have made the same mistake, but what it effectively meant was that she was going to have to pay back a thousand pounds worth of benefit. She couldn't afford it, she'd got no money, she didn't know which way to turn, and she felt suicidal. She rang me up, and I got a review of her benefit case. We looked at the figures, it was clear then to see how the mistake had happened. She could not possibly have known about that mistake, and therefore the benefit wasn't reclaimable, in my view. We went through the appeal process, thankfully the officers agreed, they could see how the mistake was made. She had her benefits cut short, but she didn't have to repay all the backdated. We got home, she went to get out of my car, and she just touched my hand and said 'you'll never know the difference you've made in my life' and walked out of my car door – I've never seen her again. If you can make a difference to somebody like that, then my time on this earth is worthwhile (Christine).

Whilst Christine tells new staff at council that this is an example of how members behave, again, I suggest that other councillors would not have the same approach.

In contrast to focusing on their specific actions, a number of the interviewees give examples of how their constituents perceive the council with a woman as mayor. For example, a Filipina who had just resigned from being mayor says her constituents found her different, and were more open with her than they were with her husband, who had been the previous mayor:

You can see that they appreciate the difference because they are more open now. When my husband was the mayor before I didn't see the people going to my husband, but when I was the mayor, all the people, the children, the senior citizens, they were so happy, and they told me it's different and ... they wanted me to stay (Liz).

Liz is one of the 'breakers' referred to earlier and although she wanted to stand for office again, she could not resist the pressure from her husband, who wanted to be mayor again. This is a strong example of the influence of cultural expectations on decisions that some of the interviewees make.

An English leader also finds that people in her constituency are more open with her than they would be with a man:

I think we are more consensual by and large. I do think we can often sit and talk with people without setting up aggression, which is hugely important, particularly in the world that I move in - international finance, which is very male dominated. I think often people talk to me and tell me more than they would do if I was a male, and you learn a lot more. They relax, I mean they let their defences down (Otago).

Similar to Liz, most of the Australian interviewees claim that people in their communities remark on the difference that having a woman as mayor makes. One who, like Liz, had just stood down as mayor gave an example of comments made to her at a meeting to acknowledge the role of volunteers in her community:

I attended a volunteers' morning tea on Saturday with 500 people and it was just after I'd stepped down as mayor, and the number of people who came to me, both men and women, and said 'you know, you brought a different approach to the job' and they could even see that (Jennifer).

Another says she receives similar comments on a regular basis:

A lot of people in town say to me, 'it's nice to have a woman at the top' and I think what they mean by that is, they identify a different style of leadership with a woman than perhaps with a man (Marian).

These diverse examples of some similarities and differences in local government demonstrate again Young's argument that members of social groups are 'not unified ... but multiple, heterogeneous, and sometimes perhaps incoherent' (Young 1988:273). There is no suggestion that these differences are essentialist for either gender, with differences revealed between women and men, between women and between men. At the same time many of the interviewees perceive similarities between women and some men. Furthermore, similarities are evident between women, even across countries. This confirms again the relational and contextual nature of difference, and the influence of culture and personal values.

In this section, I have demonstrated that there are similarities and differences between women both within and across countries, and even within some of the interviewees themselves. I have also demonstrated that the women perceive differences between women and men as well as between different men. This therefore reflects a diversity conception of difference. Some of the differences the participants describe can be seen as contributing to a more inclusive politics and thus not necessarily problematic. Yet others reflect either the masculinist culture of local government or particular personalities that can be problematic for some women, and can exclude or limit the contribution women make to local government. Both illuminate how the masculinist structure and practices of local



government, even in Sweden where equality is valued, can and do constitute some of the differences that have emerged.

Nevertheless, as has been demonstrated consistently throughout this thesis, despite the masculinist environment within which they work, many of the interviewees do not become political men. Rather, they introduce different perspectives and processes that result in different outcomes for their communities and can lead to change, albeit subtle, in local government. I contend that what has been revealed demonstrates that many of the interviewees use their agency as women, and that this does make a difference.

### **6.3.1.3 Dancing in the lion's den: The price of the dance**

In the interviews I asked the interviewees to give me examples of what they had, and had not, enjoyed in local government. I also asked whether they had changed as a result of that experience and what being a woman in local government felt like. Almost without exception, the interviewees say they have enjoyed their experience and have changed for the better due to it. Many of their examples have been drawn on elsewhere in my analysis in the previous three chapters as they speak also to issues to do with representation, power and leadership. For that reason, I do not explore them here.

However, when responding to the question on what it feels like being a woman in local government, some of the interviewees from England, Sweden and Australia provide examples I have not covered elsewhere of either personal hardship or discrimination as a result of being a woman leader. The few negative comments the interviewees made have been incorporated in Chapter 4. What the interviewees describe reinforces the finding in this study that the environment of local government is masculinist and privileges the experience and traditional role of men. This is reflected in its structures and practices, as well as in the behaviour of some of those involved in it, either directly or indirectly. These experiences add to earlier research on why more women than men leave local government, some after only one term (Irwin and Waddell 2000; Drage 2001). Thus, I consider them briefly here, using examples from each of their countries. I do this to pay due respect to them, and for other women in local government who have had similar experiences. I thus acknowledge the price local government can extract from some women for choosing to become involved in local government politics.

Most of the examples the participants describe relate to the heavy workload of their position and its impact on their personal lives. For example, an English leader, who is leader of a Labour-controlled council, describes the impact on her family relationships, which she considers compromised by her workload:

Oh, it feels awful. The constant guilt for not spending time with my family and friends. The constant pressure to have time. On the one hand it feels I'm doing a proper job, yet the expectations people in the community, people in parties have, of you are particularly unrealistic. I mean, people are very quick to whinge if they don't see you enough, but there is actually only one of you, and that is me ... You have no time for rest and relaxation, and all that was happening was I was just getting exhausted, and very ratty with everyone. So I've had to be very strict about managing my time, and just trying not to worry about it. It's not that I don't care, but it's 'sorry, I just can't do everything'. I'm sure that there are people who say they didn't see me at such and such or whatever, but it's just too bad, you just have to live with the criticism. I don't have children, and I've paid quite a high price personally, and I have to say I probably won't stay in politics because I'm not prepared to carry

on living this kind of life indefinitely. I can put up with that a while, but I can't do it forever, and I do actually want to see something of my family (Leslie).

As can be seen from Leslie's example, it is not just the demands of the position that have caused her problems, but also the pressures she receives from members of her political party and people in the community. Leslie is in her second term as a councillor and second year as leader. The strain of both was evident throughout her interview. A number of the interviewees from these three countries describe similar stress due to workload and unrealistic expectations. Not one of the Filipinas suggests that workload is an issue. This may be explained by their executive role, as they have staff they can delegate to. This is not the case in local government in these three countries. However, apart from the issues she mentions here, Leslie also finds negative and unacceptable what she describes as the 'double standards' that apply to women in local government. She is one of the few interviewees who has not enjoyed the experience and, as she demonstrates here, is not likely to stand for another term.

A Swedish participant's description of how she has felt in the past because of the way she has been treated by men and the expectations placed on her is similar to the way Leslie feels, although she acknowledges that she has learnt to live with it:

It's better now, it's really easier, but it was very hard. I took it all personally, but I have learnt to live with it, and know that this is the normal thing and that you have to take it. But that's not something I like, that's something that can be very - you can feel you're ready to jump off the whole thing. It feels like you get no thanks from anyone. I mean sometimes that's the feeling of political life. You know you're doing a lot of good things, but nobody will ever see it or say thank-you. So that's maybe that you can feel a kind of frustration you know (Miriam).

That Miriam has to learn this is the 'normal' situation reflects the discomfort that many women experience in local government, indeed in politics generally. They either adapt or they leave. This raises many questions about a politics that has to be endured and is still seen as 'normal'. Miriam's example illuminates the way that the culture of local government is unnatural for many women. As Susan Bourque and Jean Grossholtz (1998:23) assert, politics is defined in ways that reinforce political roles as those 'stereotyped as male'. They argue that women who enter political institutions are not very different to men in those institutions (1996:39). Whilst this study has revealed that there are similarities between women and men, it does not support their argument that there are few differences.

Other examples the interviewees raise in their responses to this question relate to the way the interviewees are treated, either by their fellow councillors or by others in the community. For example, one Australian mayor describes how, before she became mayor, she was offended by the language used by some of the men on an inspection of roads in her area:

Being a woman sometimes isn't easy. I can remember one instance on a road inspection. I was the only woman on the bus ... and the works supervisor was a bit bumptious and sort of prone to sexist remarks and jokes that were slightly blue. I felt very uncomfortable and I spoke to the president afterwards, and said 'I don't think this was necessary'. And he said 'well if you want to do anything about it, you'll have to do it yourself'. So at the end of the next council meeting, I got up and said 'I just want to say that I felt very uncomfortable on the roads inspection and wonder how some of you would have felt if your wives or daughters had been

present'. And that's all I said. The funny thing was, they all thought I was talking about someone else, not them. Anyway, one of the guys went home and told his wife what I'd said and her comment was 'well that's what she gets for getting into a man's world' (Janine).

Coarseness is, as Chappell (2002:177) points out, one of the skills, together with toughness and loudness that is necessary for survival in political institutions. Indeed, the comment by one of the wives emphasises that politics is seen as the realm of men: that if a woman chooses to enter it, she almost deserves the treatment she receives. This demonstrates the criticism by Bourque and Grassholtz (1998:25) of the 'unexplained and unexamined assumption' that characteristics stereo-typed as masculine 'are the norms of political behaviour as well'. Whilst this criticism is directed at political scientists, the same can be made of some people, both within and outside local government. Chappell (2002) also says that although women can adopt those skills, and some may enjoy doing so, others may find the culture alienating. I contend the discomfort expressed by Janine has been alluded to many times in this thesis, either directly or indirectly.

A Swedish deputy mayor, who is a member of the Left Party, says that sometimes she has been either unwelcome or ignored by businessmen she has needed to talk to as part of her role:

Sometimes, but not always, and it's not often, but in some special area I think it's like that. If I talk with people who are managers or bosses or chiefs in private companies yes, I think they're not looking forward to talk with a woman always. And that maybe could be because I am from the wrong party too. I am the Left party, not the right. That's a problem too, and sometimes in the structure it's more important to listen to the other party than to you, but also it's more important to listen to the other party because they've got a man talking. It's two parts, I think (Ulla).

This is an example of how personal values and ideology can influence the way women are perceived and treated by some people. Similar treatment is remarked on by a Swedish mayor:

I felt that sometimes, but I try not to think about it ... they might pat your head or something. Yes, of course I've felt that (Helena).

Finally, an English leader describes how her responsibilities prevented her from grieving over the loss of her parents:

Until recently I had responsibility for two parents, and they've both died in the last few months, so I've looked after them at home until six months ago. And the problem is I think with this kind of life, there's no real time to grieve or take stock, and I worry about that. That's the nature of doing the job that we do. I think people regard you as a machine - public property and a machine, and it's definitely, I think, geared to the expectation that it's a man doing the job, and therefore has a wife at home to look after them (Natasha).

In a sense, Natasha's comment encapsulates why many of the interviewees find local government an uncomfortable environment. Their workloads are excessive, expectations of them are unrealistic, and they become public property. Whilst this might be the same for men in the same political positions, a significant difference is revealed in Natasha's final comment. Local government structures and processes are based on the assumption that political representatives are men with wives to care for them. This illuminates Pateman's quote at the beginning of this thesis that

... The political lion skin has a large mane and belonged to a male lion; it is a costume for men. When women finally win the right to don the lion skin it is exceedingly ill-fitting and therefore unbecoming. Women are expected to don the lion's skin, mane and all, or to take their place among and indistinguishable from, the new man postulated in radical democratic theory. There is no set of clothes available for a citizen who is a woman (1989:6).

Nevertheless, none of the interviewees, even Leslie, are suggesting that women should not become involved in local government. Rather, they are acknowledging that it is a potentially hostile environment: one that needs to be transformed so that it is more inclusive and representative of the diverse women and men who local government is there to serve. I argue that the need to design a set of clothes for a citizen who is a woman is pressing, and that, as demonstrated by these interviewees, the cost of not doing so is unacceptable. The presence of women in local government does matter.

## 6.4 Summary

In this last and final analytical chapter I have demonstrated that there are some similarities, and multiple differences, albeit experienced differently, between the interviewees both within and across countries, between women and men, between men, and even within women themselves. This supports a diversity conception of difference. I contend that the interviewees reveal their situated experience as reflected in the social perspectives (Young 2000) they bring to local government. I have also demonstrated that the similarities identified, rather than reflecting essentialism, are specific to the interviewees' work and relationships in local government. This reveals difference as relational and contextual, although also influenced by personal values.

I have argued that the differences between women and men as identified by the interviewees are not necessarily problematic. Some contribute to a more inclusive politics. Indeed, in some ways the differences can be described as 'a difference within sameness and a sameness within difference' (Felski 1997:19). However, as I have argued further, some *are* problematic in that they serve to exclude, reflecting unequal treatment of women and some men in local government. Both illuminate the way the masculinist structures and practices of local government can, and do, constitute some of the differences that have emerged. Nevertheless, as has been revealed throughout this chapter, many of the interviewees are using their agency to change the lion's den in unexpected, and sometimes surprising, ways. For many, their experience has been often uncomfortable but rewarding overall. For some, the price they have to pay for leading their communities is high. I have concluded therefore, that what is revealed in this chapter supports arguments for increasing the presence of women and women leaders in local government. Indeed, it bears testament to the necessity for that to happen if local government is to become more inclusive and representative of those it represents.

## Chapter 7 – Dancers in the Lion’s Den: Conclusions and Future Research

The dilemma is that ... if substantial numbers [of women] decide to abandon traditional institutions, the pressure for structural change will diminish and successive generations of women will have to start anew (Freeman & Bourque 2001: 17).

Even if gains are incremental and vulnerable, they are not illusory (Chappell 2002:180).

### 7.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I summarise the findings and arguments from the preceding four analytical chapters in terms of their theoretical and practical significance. I then draw together the main themes from these findings. Continuing my metaphor, I develop a practice conception of the women’s representation as a dance in a complex and alien environment. This dance is fostered and constrained by context: by the diverse cultural, racial, political and institutional environments within which the women are located. I argue that there are unique elements to the ‘dance’ that women can, and do, bring to local government, regardless of country. Nevertheless, for some women the ‘lion’s den’ is alien and the cost of the dance is high. To prevent successive generations of women having to start anew, as suggested in the above quote by Freeman and Bourque (2001:17), I argue that increased representation of women - particularly women leaders - in local government is important and should be pursued. This has the potential to change the ‘lion’s den’, albeit slowly. I argue further that change is more likely to occur when elected women are supported by the presence of more women at the most senior administrative levels in the local government bureaucracy. Some of the gains due to the presence of women may well be incremental and vulnerable, but they are significant and not illusory as Chappell (2002) attests in the other quote at the beginning of this chapter. However, I argue that more than the presence of women is required if the ‘lion’s den’ is to become a place that is inclusive of the diversity of the people it represents, especially women. Finally, I propose areas for further research.

### 7.2 Reviewing the Dance: Summary of Findings

In Chapter 3 I focused on representation, weighing the relevant theory with the perspectives and practice of the interviewees. Representation as revealed by these women cannot be explained by separate concepts based in western experiences and ideas. In practice, it is multi-layered, complex and ambiguous. Furthermore, it is both relational and contextual, revealing the interweaving of personal values, history, culture, ideology and the different local government systems in which representation is embedded. Within this complex practice, the interviewees *do* represent women, but not only women, and not just on issues that might be described narrowly as ‘women’s interests’. The practice of representation itself, and particularly the connections the interviewees develop and maintain with their constituents, are transformative for many. This enables them to represent social groups to which they do not belong, demonstrating how identities are

constituted also within politics itself. These findings provide qualified support for arguments to increase the representation of women in local government.

The interviewees' perspectives and practice of political power, balanced with theories of power, were the subject of Chapter 4. The political power the women describe does not support power conceived separately. Rather, it is relational, shaped and constrained by context, and enacted by others in the local government environment, not just by representatives. Whilst power in local government can be used to dominate and manipulate, the interviewees demonstrate an ethical practice of power exercised for the benefit of the community. Although executive power exercised by the Filipinas empowers them to act alone, it also constrains their practice as it places them at a distance from their colleagues and focuses their attention outside their councils. Despite the interviewees' ethical practice, power in local government is revealed as gendered, privileging the experiences and interests of men. Nevertheless, many of the interviewees are challenging existing norms and practices, thus changing power in the lion's den. This transformation supports arguments for increased women representatives, as the presence of these women makes a palpable difference.

Chapter 5 investigated the interviewees' leadership in the context of relevant theories. Similar to political power, leadership is revealed by the interviewees as a particular form of relational power, shaped and constrained by context. However, rather than leadership conceived separately, it fits within my model of leadership as a continuum, with the interviewees applying different aspects of headship and leadership, depending on context. Many of the women understand, and practise, leadership in a way that has the capacity to transform local government. This builds on the argument already established supporting the importance of having more women leaders. Nevertheless, the capacity of the interviewees to transform local government is constrained by the different contexts – of race, culture, ideology and institutional systems – in which they operate, and by their personal values.

In Chapter 6 I analysed the perspectives and experience of the interviewees as women in local government, assessing how they fit with conceptions of difference. What emerges reflects diversity with some similarities between, and within, the interviewees, and multiple differences, albeit experienced differentially depending on context. Furthermore, there are similarities and differences between women and men, and between men. However, these differences are not essentialist, but rather are specific to local government, revealing difference as relational and contextual, although also influenced by personal values. Some of the differences between women and men identified by the interviewees are not necessarily problematic. These bring different social perspectives and different ways of behaving into the lion's den, arguably making it more representative of its diverse communities. Others, however, reveal unequal treatment or value of women and their contributions, and thus serve to exclude. Both illuminate a masculinist structure and processes and the way that these, in themselves, constitute difference. Although all the women value their experience as women in local government, for some the personal price is high. Nevertheless, these interviewees are changing the lion's den. The differences revealed in this chapter further justify arguments for more women leaders and councillors in local government. Indeed, they attest to the necessity of this occurring if the lion's den

is to be more representative of the communities it serves, and to prevent successive generations of women entering local government having to start anew (Freeman & Bourque 2001:17).

Several theoretical and practical themes emerge from these findings. In regard to the theory framing each chapter, rather than separate conceptions reflecting dichotomous perspectives and a western orientation, the practice revealed by the interviewees is complex, ambiguous and nuanced. Moreover, it is consistent with the feminist valuation of relationship, context and the particular.

Throughout the thesis, it is evident that the interviewees all bring a different social perspective, reflecting their situated experiences, to their work. This transforms the masculinist environment of the lion's den in significant, albeit subtle, ways. Although not always visible from the outside, situated experience changes the interviewees' practice of representation, power and leadership. It shapes agendas and decision-making processes, changes the way representatives of both genders feel about those processes, and molds outcomes for their communities in subtle but distinct ways. However, many of the interviewees do more than this, demonstrating that they use their agency actively to change the practices and environment of their councils. Others have not demonstrated this in their responses to the survey questions. This is consistent with the many differences that are evident between the interviewees, within and beyond their countries, and indeed within themselves. I describe the practice revealed by these interviewees as a dance in a complex and alien environment, and I turn now to explain briefly why this conception is apt.

### **7.3 A Dance in a Complex and Alien Environment**

The interviewees in this study are, almost without exception, strong and confident and, regardless of country, value their experience of local government. It has changed their lives in positive ways through improved knowledge, heightened confidence, a deeper understanding of themselves or others, or the capacity to communicate more easily with a wide range of people. Most have completed at least one term in local government, and some, several more. Furthermore, most had been leaders of their councils for more than a year. These factors in part explain their confidence and the other changes in their lives. These might seem to call into question my practice conception.

Nevertheless, this conception is apt. The dance constitutes the different perspectives and behaviours the interviewees have brought to local government as elucidated throughout this thesis. These constitute unique elements to the dance that women can, and do, bring to local government, regardless of country. The lion's den of local government is, as described by the participants, in many ways alien for women. It is masculinist in its structure and practices, the contributions of women are often under-valued, if not ignored, and at times it can be personally affronting. This is still the case even in Sweden, which has at least acknowledged, and taken steps to address, gender inequality in local government. This elaborates Lovenduski's (2005:3) argument that political institutions are 'good at protecting their cultures and procedures'. The dance is fostered and constrained by context, and in particular by its institutional environments, demonstrating again its complexity. For example, the Filipinas' dance is fostered by their having executive power and substantial numbers of staff to support them. However, it is also constrained, as their

non-chairing of, and sporadic attendance at, council meetings encourages headship rather than leadership. As is clear from this brief explanation, the representation of these women is aptly described as a dance in a complex and alien environment.

I conclude that the dance of the interviewees justifies an increased presence of women leaders in local government, as has been argued throughout. It supports arguments based on role models, women's interests and needs, justice, and revitalising local democracy. It therefore supports a transformational feminist strategy of displacement whereby, rather than eschewing involvement in local government institutions, engagement is encouraged in order to change them. Nevertheless, the presence of substantial numbers of women leaders needs to be supported by a critical mass of a wide range of women councillors, together with more women as senior managers in local government administration. These, combined, would increase the potential for enduring transformation of the lion's den into a more inclusive space where dancing would be enjoyed and valued by all within the den. Furthermore, this is more likely to happen when the contribution of women is valued equally in the general population. Concomitant community education is also needed on the benefits of women's contribution to more representative and inclusive local politics. However, in the meantime, some of the gains due to the presence of women may well be incremental and vulnerable, but they are significant and not illusory as Chappell (2002) attests in the quote at the beginning of this chapter. Those gains should not be underestimated, and the effort of those who have achieved them needs to be honoured. I hope this thesis contributes to these gains.

Concluding my metaphor in the context of the research problem outlined in Chapter 1, described amply in the preceding four chapters is what it means to be a dancer in the lion's den of local government. Furthermore, the dancers have demonstrated that there *is* something unique to the dance, and they *are* transforming the lion's den, albeit slowly and perhaps incrementally.

#### **7.4 A New Dance? Further Research**

In Chapter 1, I detailed worthwhile, and relatively limited, qualitative research that has been undertaken into women and women leaders in local government. This study extends that research by comparing the perspectives and experience of women leaders in local government from diverse countries in Europe, Asia and the Pacific, looking for similarities and differences. It also extends theoretical understandings of representation, power, leadership and gender in local government. These have generally been researched at a national level or in other contexts.

A key finding of this research is that women do make a difference to local government, and not just in regard to different perspectives and agendas. Nevertheless, the study sample is small. What is needed is a comprehensive study on the practice of representation, power and leadership by women specific to each country to validate and extend these findings.

Another key finding is that the environment of local government is masculinist, reflected in its structures, practices and procedures. Further research into the way masculinism impacts on the diverse range of representatives located in local government would be beneficial. Furthermore, I have suggested that there is a need for more senior women in the administrative arm of local government. It would be worthwhile to research the impact of



women's leadership in both parts of the organisation on local government structures and practices.

One of the significant differences that emerged between the interviewees was that of directly elected mayors. Comparative European research (Bäck, Heinelt & Magnier 2006) identified in Chapter 1 has focused on the impact of direct election of mayors on their leadership and on their cities. Unfortunately there is no indication of the number of women included in the research, but it found that the male mayors 'look more like women' and are more focused on their communities than mayors who are not elected directly. This revealed a gap in my study in that the method of election was not considered in my research design. It would be worthwhile to research this issue in more depth, perhaps including men in the study. Australia has significant numbers of mayors elected under both systems, so it provides fertile ground for comparison.

Lastly, and returning specifically to Australia and closer to my home, local government leaders and representatives are now paid a salary in many towns in Queensland. This enables representatives to commit themselves fulltime to their representative work. Comparing the leadership and representation of salaried and non-salaried women and men, and the consequent impact on their communities, would add substantially to contemporary debates on this issue.

## **7.5 Reflection on the Dance**

One of the goals of my research was to provide a deeper understanding by women of the complex, diverse and often-undervalued work of women representatives in the political institution of local government. I contend that this thesis does achieve that goal. The perspectives and practices of the forty-nine interviewees have added a rich dimension to understandings of political representation at the local level in very different countries. They have also demonstrated that women do not have to become political men to survive in what is essentially an alien environment: they *can* be women and they *can* use their agency to effect change and make the lion's den a less alien environment for other women.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Profile of Participants

PSEUDONYM POSITION	AGE	OCCUPATION	QUALS	PARTY	ELECTED	YRS LEADER
<b>ENGLAND</b>						
Natasha Leader of Council	58	Teacher	Graduate	Conservative	1986	1
Leslie Leader of Council	40	Charity worker	Graduate	Labour	1995	2
Tosca Leader of Council	60	Lab technician	Year 12	Labour	1990	1
Nicole Leader of Opposition	40	PR/Marketing	Postgrad	Conservative	1996	4
Otago Chair of Policy, Resources C'ttee	52	Lawyer	Postgrad	Independent	1986	6
Carol Cabinet member	45	Ballet dancer, Solicitor	Graduate	Labour	1986	3
Margaret Leader of Council	43	Homemaker Local politician	Graduate	Lib/ Democrat	1991	9
Christine Leader of Council	41	Homemaker	Year 12	Lib/ Democrat	1991	9
Penny Leader Opposition	59	Homemaker	Year 12	Conservative	1984	4
Theresa Mayor/prev leader	70	Teacher	Postgrad	Labour	1970	1
<b>SWEDEN</b>						
Ulla Deputy Mayor	37	Pre-School teacher	Graduate	Left	1991	10
Eline Mayor	55	Physiotherapist	Graduate	Social Dems	1978	7
Lena Vice Chair	63	OH&S coordinator	Year 12	Social Dems	1989	11
Miriam Chair Health Board	47	Public sector exec officer	Graduate	Liberal	1985	3
Helena Mayor	55	Software writer	Year 12	Social Dems	1982	7
Elisebet County Council	49	Nurse	Technical	Social Dems	1988	7
Elena VP party group	31	Finance manager	Graduate	Conservative	1991	2
Inez Leader of Opposition	53	Careers adviser	Graduate	Left	1982	12
Kirsten Chair Health C'ttee	49	Physiotherapist	Graduate	Liberal	1976	
Lisa Party Leader	46	Management consultant	Postgrad	Christian Dems	1991	10
<b>INDIA</b>						
Dana Mayor	49	Lawyer	Graduate	Congress	1992	1
Rita Mayor	51	Professor	Postgrad	Congress	1995	6
Neela Mayor	46	Lawyer	Graduate	Congress	1992	1
Nala Mayor	42	Teacher	Graduate	Independent	1996	3
Vishakha Councillor – MLA	38	Business woman	Postgrad	Shiv Sena	1992	12
Lina Councillor	52	Lawyer	Postgrad	BJP	1997	5
Jasmine Mayor	58	Social worker and small business owner	Graduate	BJP	2000	1

## Appendix 1: Profile of Participants (cont'd).

PSEUDONYM POSITION	AGE	OCCUPATION	QUALS	PARTY	ELECTED	YEARS LEADER
<b>THE PHILIPPINES</b>						
Lita Mayor	52	Business woman	Graduate	PPC	1998	3
Baby Mayor	42	Small business owner	Graduate	PNP-Laban	1995	3
Pat Mayor	61	Public affairs manager	Postgrad	Lakas	1995	5
Meg Mayor	33	Lawyer	Graduate	Lakas	1998	3
Neneng Mayor	55	Wife of politician	Graduate	Lakas	1992	8
MJ Mayor	57	Teacher	Postgrad	Lakas	1998	3
Betty Mayor	50	Planning officer	Postgrad	Lakas	1998	3
Betty Mayor	47	Nurse, wife of politician	Graduate	Lakas	1998	3
Myrna Mayor	55	Teacher, business woman	Postgrad	Lakas	1998	3
Tina Mayor	59	Teacher then Town hostess	Graduate	PMP	1992	9
<b>AUSTRALIA</b>						
Brenda Mayor	57	Dry cleaner	Year 8	Ind	1982	2
Leisha Mayor		Comm Dev Manager	Graduate	Ind	1987	2
Molly Mayor	66	Home maker	Year 12	Ind	1989	3
Helen Mayor	50	Teacher then business woman	Diploma	Ind	1998	3
Marie Mayor	47	Nurse then practice manager	Graduate	Ind	1988	4
Jennifer Mayor	68	Librarian	Diploma	Ind	1983	4
Marian Mayor	49	Teacher	Postgrad	Ind	1994	2
Maria Mayor	46	Bank officer	Year 12	ALP	1996	1
Frances Mayor	66	Purchasing manager	Diploma	Ind	1986	7
Janine President	49	Small business owner	Year 12	Ind	1987	6
Barbara Mayor	51	Nurse then caterer	Year 10	Ind	1997	2

## Appendix 2: Informed Consent

**Name of Project:** 'Dancing in the Lion's Den: Women leaders in Local Government.

You are invited to participate in a study of the experiences of different women in leadership positions in local government. We hope to learn about how some women in different countries see their role in local government, what motivates them to enter local government, what their experiences have been and how being in local government has changed them.

### Procedures to be followed

The research will be carried out through a semi-structured interview that is intended to draw on your personal experiences in local government. The interview will take approximately 1 1/2 hours and with your permission will be recorded. The tape will then be transcribed by an independent transcriber known to the researcher. Only the researcher and the transcriber will have access to this tape, and once transcribed and entered into a qualitative data base, the tape will be secured in a locked filing cabinet at the researcher's home until the analysis is completed.

### Confidentiality of information

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. Neither the analysis nor the report will contain information that identifies you as an individual. If it is intended to quote comments of yours directly you will be provided with the details to confirm accuracy of transcription and interpretation.

### Freedom of consent

If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to discontinue participation at any time. However we would appreciate you letting us know your decision.

If you have any questions, please ask the researcher, and if you have additional questions at any time please ask Dr. Elisabeth Porter, 00 61 2 6620 3615 or [eporter@scu.edu.au](mailto:eporter@scu.edu.au) or Councillor Ros Irwin, 00 61 2 6621 5906 or [rirwin@scu.edu.au](mailto:rirwin@scu.edu.au), who will be happy to answer them. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

## INFORMED CONSENT

I have read the information on the reverse side of this form and agree to participate in this study. I am over 18 years of age.

**Name:**

**Signature:** ..... **Date:** .....

**Name of witness** (independent of the project): .....

**Signature of the witness:** ..... **Date:** .....

I certify that the terms of the form have been verbally explained to the subject, that the subject appears to understand the terms prior to signing the form, and that proper arrangements have been made for an interpreter where English is not the subject's first language. I asked the participant if she needed to discuss the project with an independent person before signing and she declined.

**Signature of the researcher:** ..... **Date:** .....

## Appendix 3: Schedule of Questions

1. Can you tell me how you came to be involved in local government?
2. How do you see your role as an elected representative?
3. Do you think you represent any particular groups in the community? Which ones?
4. Would you tell me some of the good experiences you have had in local government?
5. What are some of the things you have not enjoyed?
6. As a woman in local government, are there any particular responsibilities you feel you have?
7. Tell me about some examples of political power you have seen exercised in a negative way in local government.
8. Tell me about some examples of political power you have seen exercised in a positive way in local government.
9. What power do you see yourself having as a leader in local government?
10. As a leader in local government, how would you describe your leadership? Are you always able to be that sort of leader? What might prevent you from being like that?
11. How does it feel being a woman in local government?
12. Have you changed because of your experience in local government? If so, in what ways?
13. Has being in local government had an effect on you? What effect would that be?
14. Do you think being a woman in local government makes a difference? In what ways?
15. When you leave local government, how would you like to be remembered?
16. What message would you give to other women who might consider becoming an elected representative in local government?

## **Appendix 4: Participant Information Sheet**

**Name:**

**Pseudonym:**

**Town:**

**Country:**

**Address:**

**Contact details: Phone:**

**Fax:**

**Email:**

**Year of birth:**

**Schooling/educational level achieved:**

**Usual occupation:**

**Marital status:**

**Family responsibilities:**

**First elected:**

**Number of elections contested:**

**Party membership:**

**Current position:**

**Length of time in current position:**

**Other local government representative position/s:**

**Elected or appointed to those other positions:**