

Women, Power and Action Research

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The action research I am presenting attempts to re-validate the unique social contributions of marginalised and working women to their communities and to society-at-large, contributions which tend to be obscured if not forgotten, given meanwhile global dynamics of exclusion as they are at work in the capitalist society of Hong Kong. Adopting a *post-structuralist position*, I examine the possibilities for change in the spaces ‘between’ culture and economy; such spaces, I shall argue, offer the possibility to destabilise institutionally legitimated knowledge and the apparent common-sensical nature of our understanding of the economy, including dominant views about work, its value and the biases against women’s skills and productive capacity. The feminist critique of the underlying assumptions about ‘rational economic man’ opens up possibilities for imaginative and alternative action in the era of globalisation. Overcoming the assumed binaries within structuralist analyses and interventions based thereon, I will suggest creative transformations based on the culture of community development, the aesthetic labours of women, and representational strategies to negotiate power and contribute to a politics of recognition.

I have taken the role of an *action researcher*, as I believe in the possibilities and worth of partnership between grassroots communities and universities both to affect positive social change and to develop socially useful knowledge. The data includes interviews with six women with different residential histories in Hong Kong, who came together to revalidate and use their sewing skills in making “*the quilt of rainbow power*” to send a colourful message about the value of women’s work to their communities and to Hong Kong society at large. The discussion will illuminate how the ‘cultural action’ through a participatory research process contributes to women’s power transformation and from such an experience to sustain deeper critical understanding of the social realities to be acted upon.