

New Political Empowerment: Transcending Discourse Contestation between Caring versus Subjugation

Amin Tohari Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia

Abstract

This article focuses on political empowerment discourse between caring politics versus subjugation politics. Through a literature study on empowerment, the writer finds that the empowerment realm has been in a tension between a group that perceives it as a caring action against another group that understands it as a subjugation. Each group has been developing arguments that support their perspective on empowerment. For the group that supports empowerment as caring action, the most important thing is an achievement. They scrutinize the indicators of success and failure, best practices, lessons learned, and many others. On the other hand, the group that views empowerment as subjugation considers it is inherently oppressive. Empowerment is nothing more than a veil that covers the power interest in disciplining poor people to conform to certain standards. Therefore, it is imperative to have a more transformative paradigm to see empowerment as emancipatory politics.

Keywords

Empowerment; Hegemony; Subjugation; Caring

INTRODUCTION

This paper consists of four essential discussion sections. The first part discusses the reason why researching empowerment once again is vital. This section contains the socio-political context, which shows how empowerment has developed from just a matter of social work to become political. As a study based on a literature review, in the second part, the discussion aims to show the methods used in dissecting the selected literature

in empowerment studies. Meanwhile, the third part contains a more in-depth discussion of the empowerment trend map reflected in the studies. The fourth section discusses the design and direction of future empowerment studies that attempt to overcome the limitations of empowerment politics.

It can be said that empowerment is one of the characteristics of Indonesian politics after the New Order. It also marks a social and political transformation that puts populism at the core of politics. Populism, I mean, covers a broad range of attempts to improve the lives of others who are considered low and oppressed. Anyone who is absorbed by the discourse of populism feels they must move to advocate, protect, defend, give priority to grassroots communities,

Amin Tohari is a Ph.D. student at the Doctoral Study Program of the Political Science, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia. His research focuses on political discourse and governance. Email: amintohari@mail.ugm.ac.id.

The author is grateful to the Doctoral Study Program of the Political Science, Universitas Gadjah Mada, and anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments.

poor people, isolated tribes, indigenous people, women, and so on. Before populism was used to refer to populist political trends, the most famous term used was empowerment. Therefore, in my opinion, empowerment has a comprehensive meaning, including the tendency of populist politics.

In the discourse that was called empowerment, non-governmental organizations, international development agencies, donors, national and regional government, research institutions, companies, academics all tried to get involved in helping and defending vulnerable groups in society such as laborers, small farmers, urban poor, women, small fishermen, and indigenous peoples. Empowerment then creates various kinds of programs, institutions, knowledge, and subjects that aim to bring about a just and prosperous society. In their separate ways, they encourage the poor to have critical awareness, how people can get out of poverty, how people who are considered marginal and weak can rise and take an active role, control, and the ability to determine their own life. All of this is a matter of empowerment.

At least four conditions underlie why Indonesia's political empowerment is increasingly important, especially in the post-New Order period. First, there was a change in power architecture after the New Order, from repressive bureaucratic authoritarianism to a more open and democratic. The state is no longer the only power that controls all of the people's lives. The state is required to change itself from being served to being a public servant, from one that

must be heard to one that must listen to all the aspirations, demands, and needs of society. The state must exist in society and involve the community in the formulation and implementation of policies.

Second, civil society emerged as a counter-power against the state. During the New Order era, civil society was under state control. Still, in the post-New Order era, the community had a very open space to say anything, to demand anything. The community is encouraged to be actively involved in decision-making. Civil society is entering into political arenas that were not previously available.

Third, collective actions and social movements appeared everywhere against all things considered oppression from the New Order's residual power. They raise various issues ranging from environmental protection, recognition of identity, welfare redistribution, eradicating corruption, human rights, good governance, women's equality, agrarian reform, multiculturalism, decentralization, direct elections, and so on. The emergence of widespread protest actions was made possible by the changing relations between power groups in society. The relationship between the dominant and subordinate groups is not as closed as before.

Fourth, funding support from foreign donors enables various social groups to establish social organizations to carry out multiple issues ranging from human rights, gender, environment, governance, democracy, etc.

In the last two decades, in Indonesia, many studies have been carried out on empowerment. So far, there are generally two poles of empowerment politics. The first pole treats empowerment as a technical issue. Meanwhile, the second one shows that empowerment hides the interests of power to subjugate. The first study is called the mainstream, which World Bank and its friend's support (Narayan-Parker, 2002; Narayan-Parker, 2005; Gupta et al., 2014; Alsop, Bertelsen & Holland, 2005; Stern, Rogers & Dethier, 2005; Roy & Sideras, 2006). Meanwhile, the second one calls itself a critical study because it aims to uncover power in empowerment practices (Ferguson, 1990; James, 1999; Li, 2007; Sharma, 2008; Mynttinen, 2012; Cruikshank, 2019).

The mainstream discourse always places empowerment as merely a matter of techniques to empower the weak people. The study does not care about ideology or other issues related to politics. They believe there is no politics in empowerment. To this end, they continue to produce tools that all people worldwide can apply to make the weak more and more empowered. This main pole does not see the power imbalance inherent in empowerment practice as something that must be overcome. Empowerment is neutral territory and free of power interest.

The second study criticized the first study's tendency, especially its neglect of empowerment practices' power dimension. This second study aims to show that empowerment is not a neutral and interest-free area. For them,

empowerment is a form of power that is practiced to subjugate the weak. Empowerment is a political practice in which the power holders want to present themselves as angels who come down to save the poor's fate, save nature from damage, or protect indigenous groups' rights. This second study is more interested in talking about the resistances that arose from the practices of power. As Michel Foucault put it, "as soon as where there is a power relation, there is the possibility of resistance" (Foucault, 1978: 153). They showed how the community who were the targets of the empowerment programs were fighting in their ways. So that the implementation of the empowerment program seems to have been successful but failed. Failure and success depend on the strength of the claims and the ability to construct the argument.

On that basis, the question that guides this study is how the map of the trends in empowerment studies that reflect the politics of empowerment so far is? What are the limitations inherent in each of these schools? What perspective or way of thinking can go beyond these limitations and restore a more progressive empowerment politics?

RESEARCH METHOD

This paper is based on a literature review on empowerment. I took five main steps (Wee & Banister, 2016; Ramdhani, Ramdhani & Amin, 2014; Snyder, 2019). In the first stage, finding all sources of knowledge that explicitly and implicitly discuss empowerment issues in books, journal articles, book

chapters, research reports, and so on is done. Apart from books, most of the articles' sources were international journals, stretching from the late 1990s to 2015. Seventy-two literature materials were collected and considered the most relevant in the topic of empowerment.

The second step is to read and refine the collected material by identifying the methodology behind each text, the way of thinking that underlies the argument's flow, and the methods used in explaining the topic of study.

The third stage classifies the results of the manuscript's analysis into specific topics, taking into account the author's background, the style of description chosen, finding the prominent trends that determine the building of the argument, and how each one understands and defines empowerment.

After finding the main binding concept in the fourth stage, then connecting one text with another text with a close-knit mindset into groups that see empowerment as a matter of concern and groups that see empowerment as an issue of political subjugation projects.

The fifth stage describes the whole map of the trend of empowerment studies that converge on two big themes: empowerment as a politics of caring, considered neutral in interests, and empowerment as a subjugation project with interest requirements.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Empowerment as a Politics of Caring

All mainstream studies emphasize one thing, namely that for people to be

empowered or out of poverty, they must be included in a larger economic system, namely the market. They must be provided with capital, which means skills and credit to benefit and take advantage of the market's opportunities. There are only four main keys to empowering people, namely access to adequate information, inclusion and participation, accountability, and local organizations' capacity (Narayan-Parker, 2002: 18-22; Narayan-Parker, 2005: 8-9; Huang, 2020). It is also very firmly stated that empowerment must be carried out through five main basic approaches; (1) how the state provides essential services; (2) pro-market development; (3) improving local governance; (4) improving national governance; (5) and access to justice and legal assistance (Narayan-Parker, 2002; Narayan-Parker, 2005).

Human empowerment is the central core of the development strategy, and what is meant by empowerment is how everyone can actively and effectively participate in the economy and society (Stern, Rogers & Dethier, 2006: 199). In line with de Soto's (2000) argument about dead capital, Stern, Rogers & Dethier believe that empowerment is a matter of property rights security. Properties such as land or houses are a crucial aspect of empowerment. This property can be used as collateral for a loan for investment. In this way, one can utilize what de Soto calls dead capital. de Soto's dead capital is an asset that cannot be bought, sold, worthless, and cannot be used. For these assets to be bought, sold, valued, and exchanged, they must be formalized or legalized by

a recognized authority (state) (de Soto, 2000). Of course, all this requires an effective and regular market operation. Three key concepts are believed to be the leading spirit of empowerment: capability, inclusion, and participation (Stern, Rogers & Dethier, 2006). Capability is a concept taken from contemporary economic thinker Amartya Sen. Through this concept, Sen connects capability with freedom. The two of them complement and strengthen each other. For the capability to be maximized to its full potential, certain conditions are needed that guarantee the operation of freedom (Sen, 2000). According to Sen (2000), to encourage actualization of the capability, five instrumental freedoms must exist; (1) political freedom, (2) economic freedom, (3) social opportunities, (4) openness, and (5) security (Yonehara, 2006: 49). What is meant by human capability itself is a set of options that can be selected and reached by a person. This approach focuses more on what people can do or become, rather than what people have (Sen, 1999; Yonehara, 2006: 2; Trommlerová, Klasen & Leßmann, 2015). We can see from this formula how rational choice theory influenced Sen when he was explaining empowerment. There is no rational choice when freedom doesn't exist.

The second concept is social inclusion, which is also related to social exclusion. Inclusion and exclusion are closely related to the role of state institutions and social institutions, as well as individual behavior and the values they believe in determining

whether a person becomes part of the stream or not. In general, this concept says that barriers to participation are at the root of social exclusion, and these must be overcome (Stern, Rogers & Dethier, 2006: 104).

In this perspective, the third important thing of empowerment is participation. The concept of participation has become a necessity in the vocabulary of contemporary development. It marks a shift from grand theorization to a more empirical, inductive, and local approach (Mohan & Stokke, 2000: 204). Nevertheless, for scholars like Rondinelli, McCullough, and Johnson, what they mean by real participation is a condition that guarantees free market transactions (Rondinelli, McCullough & Johnson, 1989). This is because they reduce society to consumers' mass (Mohan & Stokke, 2000: 251).

Participation is believed to be the most appropriate form of a claim for the excluded group, but on the other hand, it is accused of maintaining a top-down approach (Narayanan, 2003). Supporters of the Structural Adjustment Program (liberal groups) also want participation. However, participation means a reduced role for the state and increased non-state actors such as companies. Even though they adopt the objective of participation to make a voice for excluded and marginalized. However, this effort has made them inevitably have to imagine a change in power relations by removing dependence between those who have and those who do not (Narayanan, 2003). Deep Narayanan, a World Bank

empowerment thinker, continues that the question is not how many people are empowered, but what are they empowered for?

Inequality of relations occurs between the empowered and the empowered and occurs within the empowered community itself, such as relations of caste, class, identity, gender, etc. Inequality of relations occurs between empowerment actors and the empowered and occurs within the empowered community itself, such as relations of caste, class, identity, gender, etc. Exclusion usually embodies social relations, and the excluded group is not aware that they are excluded. Social, cultural, and customary norms make excluded groups not interested in participation to change power relations. Opening up spaces for community participation does not automatically lead to real participation. There are many cases where participation becomes meaningless.

In a book supported by the World Bank, [Alsop, Bertelsen and Holland \(2005\)](#) emphasizes empowerment as a process of increasing people's capacity or group to make choices and turn these choices into the actions or results they want. Their empowerment imagination is in line with the empowerment concept [Stern, Rogers & Dethier \(2005\)](#) above; that is, how to build a climate that stimulates investment and growth while simultaneously empowering the poor by involving them in that growth. The key concepts they use are usually such as asset-based agency and institution-based opportunity structure. For them, empowerment must combine two things

at once, namely agency and structure. The agency they mean is the ability of a person or group of people to make choices, where a person can imagine and then determine specific options.

If we look further, what they mean about agency here is based on a rational actor ([Hedström & Swedberg, 1996](#)). The concept of the rational actor has its roots in rational choice theory. In essence, this theory wants to say that a person must decide that he considers the most rational — the most profitable for him — among several available options. Each person will choose the action that he thinks best serves his interests. The information then has an important role for a person in deciding a particular choice of action.

In rational choice theory, an action taken by a person is the result of a combination of three things, namely interest, belief, and opportunity ([Hedström & Swedberg, 1996: 128-129](#)). Rational actors are derived from the point of view of *homo economicus* ([Connor, 2009: 5-6](#)). Meanwhile, what is meant by structure is the institutional aspects, where a person is in it. What is in the structure is considered to affect its ability to transform its agency into concrete action. Roy and Sideras also use this definition. Even though people can make and determine choices, if an adequate opportunity structure does not support it, it does not significantly impact their power.

Interestingly, [Alsop, Bertelsen and Holland \(2005\)](#) reject empowerment as an effort to overcome the imbalance of power between people who have and those who do not. With this, they reject

the view of empowerment from a critical perspective that emphasizes changing power as the main basis for empowerment. According to them, this perspective is trapped in the assumption of a zero-sum game, where if power is in the hands of one party, it means the other party will lose it is power. Furthermore, empowerment must be directed to restore the balance of power.

To be able to have the ability to make and determine choices, someone needs asset support (asset endowment). Assets here mean resources that enable a person to take advantage of economic, social, and political opportunities to be more productive. These assets include psychological, information, organizational, material, social, financial assets, etc. These assets are interrelated with one another, and the opportunity structure greatly influences their accumulation and utilization. Psychological assets are equated with the concept of consciousness (Alsop, Bertelsen & Holland, 2005). Consciousness is a concept that has a specific meaning in the critical tradition. It has a spectrum of meanings different from what Alsop, Bertelsen and Holland (2005) envision as merely psychological assets. Freire introduced consciousness, which he meant as the first key step in broad social transformation (Freire, 1973; Montero, 2009).

Whereas what is meant by the opportunity structure is the institutions that shape our direct a person's behavior, it can influence the success or failure of realizing the choices they have made. These institutions are divided into two types, namely formal

institutions, and informal institutions. Formal institutions include rules, laws, regulatory frameworks that govern political processes, public services, private organizations, and of course markets (Alsop, Bertelsen & Holland, 2005), including laws, charters, statutes, general public law which is made into official law (common law), and sanctions (Jütting, 2003). Meanwhile, informal institutions include informal rules, cultural practices, value systems, norms of behavior that apply in the family or community, customary law, taboo, and traditions.

To develop an assessment framework on empowerment Alsop, Bertelsen and Holland (2005) proposed a domain and empowerment levels. There are three domains that they think should be looked at when assessing empowerment. The three domains are the state, market, and society. The state domain relates to where a person acts as a civic actor. There are three subdomains in this country's domain: the subdomain of justice, the subdomain of politics, and essential public services. The questions that concern them in the domain of the state, for example, has the political process been able to make someone have a voice; are the courts and the police independent and capable of imposing sanctions on violators; has the state made regulations and policies that are accessible and provide high-quality services to the public.

The market domain is where a person acts as an economic actor. The market domain consists of three subdomains: labor, goods, and the production and consumption of private

service subdomains. An issue of significant concern in this market domain is whether regulation and property ownership systems open up access to markets, land, employment opportunities, and credit. Meanwhile, the social domain is related to one's role as a social actor. This social domain consists of two subdomains, namely intra-family subdomains and inter-community subdomains, such as large family, ethnic groups, caste, etc. In this social domain, the point of concern is how a person or social group's agency is limited by the institutions of power that underlie the patriarchal social hierarchy or exploitative patron-client relationships (Alsop, Bertelsen & Holland, 2005: 19-21).

Apart from domain empowerment, another thing that needs to be looked at is the empowerment level. This empowerment level is divided into three levels: the macro level, the intermediary level, and the micro-level. The micro-level, which he also calls the local level, is the area of a person's daily life. Maybe this is related to where someone lives. It can be a village or hamlet. While the intermediary level is familiar territory to a person, one does not visit it every day. This area is between the national level and the village level. Meanwhile, the macro level is an area that is far from the reach of a person's life, namely the national level.

Roy and Sideras have a similar view to Alsop, Bertelsen, and Holland (2005) above. They strongly believe in the positive relationship between globalization, institutions, and empowerment. Globalization helps

countries achieve high economic growth by reforming appropriate institutions. Economic growth enables the country to create job opportunities for the poor. By reducing poverty, income creation activities are believed to empower those considered to be among the poor (Roy & Sideras, 2006: 12). Institutions are generally seen as rules or constraints that a society constructs to control or expand human interaction (North, 1990).

In essence, Roy and Sideras want to say that integrating the state into the global order is a prerequisite for growth, poverty reduction, and empowerment. For this reason, institutions must be designed in such a way as to fit the "rhythm" of the global order. Every country takes a different path in addressing globalization, especially how they reform their institutions. Latin American countries are taking a "big bang" approach in liberalizing trade by removing import barriers, while countries such as China, India, and Southeast Asia are taking a phased approach to slowly liberalizing import trade and vigorously promoting exports (Roy & Sideras, 2006: 10). Trying to answer criticism about the devastating effects of trade globalization on the severity of poverty and injustice, Roy and Sideras said that the different views of countries in terms of growth and income distribution associated with their integration into the global order are not relevant enough to say that globalization is the cause. Therefore, one cannot simply blame globalization for the problems faced by Latin American countries (Roy & Sideras, 2006: 9).

In Bangladesh, Basher's study confirmed that integrating women into the economic order increases their economic capacity and impacts non-economic activities. Basher examines the Grameen Bank case. He concluded that Grameen Bank had changed its customers from passive recipients to active agents in economic and non-economic activities. For Basher, what he saw in the Grameen Bank Bangladesh case was necessary or capital for expanding economic development (Basher, 2007: 174). Three things can be considered a prerequisite for economic development: fulfilling basic needs (life-sustenance), self-esteem, and freedom. Subsistence needs are related to the availability of basic needs such as food, housing, clothing, water, etc.

Meanwhile, self-esteem relates to a person's change from a passive recipient in the empowerment process to an active agent in social and economic activities. The freedom associated with being free from marginalization and obedience to others includes human habit, tradition, and domination (Goulet, 1971). The freedom referred to here also relates to increased opportunities and individual autonomy to make choices and take advantage of these opportunities (Basher, 2007: 174-175). The last point of Goulet's idea is in line with Sen's (2000) concept of development as freedom.

In 2014, the McKinsey Global Institute (MGI) released a study report on India with the auspicious title, "from poverty to empowerment: India's imperative for jobs, growth, and effective basic services". In the report,

the researchers said that they had created a new empowerment framework based on an economic methodology (Gupta et al., 2014: 1). They propose a new way to measure empowerment that is broader than household expenditure and income, recommend various things related to employment revitalization, meet basic public needs, increase agricultural productivity, and so on.

All of the MGI reports are in the framework of empowerment through an economic path. The provision of basic public services is only a condition to ensure that all people can enter and be involved in the national and global economic cycle. The MGI empowerment framework is no different from the World Bank framework, as illustrated by Narayan-Parker's writing (2002; 2005). To improve the status of the poor in India to move up the empowerment line, for example, MGI researchers suggest four important things that are the key to what they call inclusive reform (Gupta et al., 2014: 10-13). The four paths are to accelerate and expand job creation, increase agricultural productivity, increase budget allocations for providing basic public services, and make basic public services more effective. These are called inclusive reform scenarios. The growth of employment in the non-agricultural sector, combined with the agricultural sector's productivity, is believed to elevate around 400 million Indians to the empowerment line.

It is just like the idea of Roy and Sideras (2006), which states that integration in the global economic order

and globalization itself cannot be blamed when a country goes bankrupt or the poor's condition in that country gets worse. MGI researchers propose that India enter the world market chain by integrating domestic manufacturing into India's global supply chain to be listed in a powerful country. For this reason, a revitalization of the workforce creation engine must be pursued through reforms in six priority areas.

The six areas are; 1) accelerating the development of logistics and energy infrastructure, 2) removing all administrative barriers to business operation, 3) eliminating taxes and product distortions, 4) rationalizing the land market, 5) taking steps to make the labor market more flexible, and lastly 6) encourage the government to improve the skills of poor workers (Gupta et al., 2014: 14-16). For rural areas, increasing agricultural productivity must be done because poverty is mostly in rural areas. MGI researchers suggest agricultural sector reform through seven priority areas. The eight priority areas are; 1) expanding the role of private traders in agricultural products, 2) using technology to find lower prices, 3) rationalizing the prices of agricultural production facilities, 4) preparing funding to adopt new technologies, 5) improving farmers' access to credit, 6) reforming the land market, 7) connecting the government and the community at lower levels (Gupta et al., 2014: 16-18). Meanwhile, the government's recommended reforms include public transparency, accountability for results,

decentralization, and strengthening regulatory tools.

The following text, which is in line with the texts above, is Meagher's (2011) writing on community empowerment in Uganda. Meagher questions whether informal economic associations and networks' proliferation impacts the community's economic empowerment and political participation or creates new poverty and social chaos. In this paper, Meagher uses the concept of "social capital". Social capital is a concept introduced by Putnam (2000) and then adopted by the World Bank to advise the poor in the third world to form associations based either on lines of identity, class, religion, or whatever. Social capital wants to integrate economic activities into social activities.

The concept of social capital departs from Putnam's criticism of American society, which begins to lose social ties, social togetherness, a sense of being a community, and social cohesion (Navarro, 2002: 427). Departing from the strong communitarian tradition, Putnam proposed the concept of social capital. According to Putnam, to reach America's future, Americans must strengthen themselves again by forming associations that can help individuals deal with economic instability. Although the concept of social capital has strong social nuances, it departs from economic assumptions. The individual's ability to obtain resources will be greater when he is in a social network. Participation in community, togetherness, and organization will make a person stronger, more empowered, and more competitive. This

is achieved by increasing capital, not only economic capital but also social capital. Social capital never touches on politics and power issues, and it is not aware of the power structure that has long existed in society.

Although Meagher initially used social capital as an explanatory framework for his research, in the end, he revealed that social capital, which later became an empowerment program by forming social associations based on ethnic, religious, or class ties, did not increase the political representation of society. It has no impact on government effectiveness and is not very useful for the poor themselves, even for those who are members of these social associations, even in the context of decentralization (Meagher, 2011). Since the first time, Putnam's social capital has paid no attention to the power structure. The World Bank adopted it on the premise that when people make associations, they are together and each other helping each other to enter the market loop.

The neglect of this caring empowerment model for power relations is the target point of sharp criticism because this model has consciously perpetuated power inequality. It is not too wrong to say that empowerment has turned into a means of subjugation. The following section describes how critical arguments for this caring-style empowerment are developed as a political subject position.

Empowerment as the Politics of Subjugation

In India, Sharma (2008) uses Michel Foucault's governmentality and

technology to examine national programs for women's empowerment. Sharma shows how the program has become a tool for disciplining women. Women who are empowered in the program are not aware that they are carrying out an activity from the mainstream perspective of empowerment as a concern. The mainstream perspective referred to by Sharma is the World Bank's model of empowerment (Sharma, 2008). Like Sharma, Cruikshank (1999) also uses Foucauldian's technology of the self. Cruikshank would like to say that the Community Action Program in America is a technology of power to shape democratic liberal citizenship. A form of citizenship needed by America to practice liberal democracy. The two researchers want to emphasize that empowerment is not a neutral space but a battlefield and power relations operation (Cruikshank, 1999). In Indonesia, an influential anthropologist, Tania Murray Li, analyzes empowerment practices in rural Central Sulawesi. She criticized empowerment through conservation programs both carried out by the state and its officials and non-governmental organizations and their activists.

Li uses the theory of governmentality to dissect the problem (Li, 2007). Empowerment involves two things at once, namely governmentality and subjectivity. Without these two things, empowerment cannot perfectly work. Rose argues that subjectivity and other relationships are an arena for intensive power work (Rose, 1999). Therefore, governance is not only put

forward or imposed by those at the top, but it is also what a person does in his daily life, which seems to have nothing to do with power (Pease, 2002: 140).

These daily activities, for example, take out the trash, drive on the highway, choose clothes for appearance, choose food and meal schedules, organize daily activities, take care of children, interact with neighbors or friends, attend weddings, and so on. In this power relationship, people seem to be conditioned to believe that they do have the capacity to make decisions or make choices. A person can be regulated precisely by his freedom of choice. So, the liberal subject is in the form of a paradoxical, autonomous but regulated agency (regulated autonomy) (Ryan, 2011: 764). In the context of poverty reduction, for example, the relationship between autonomy and domination in empowerment does not appear to be contradictory but instead shows an alliance between the two (Ryan, 2011: 765; Cruikshank, 2019).

In Ireland, Ryan examines how Irish citizenship is formed from childhood. In this case, Ryan uses Foucault's technology to explain how the children's coaching program in Ireland becomes a strategy to prepare children to live in a neoliberal era. In the program, as if children were given the freedom to make their own choices, children were involved in public consultation, and they could determine what they wanted and reject what they did not want. Ryan shows how the Children's National Strategy program and the National Children's Games policy, where empowerment and citizen formation are

combined, form thinking spaces, speech spaces, and actions for children. What Ryan found was almost similar to what Cruikshank (2019) revealed when he researched the poor (Community Action Program) empowerment program in America. What Cruikshank means by 'the will to empower' is not the will of one actor or a coalition of several actors, and it is not a matter of how the ruling class or the ruling elite manipulate the masses, or they control hidden agendas, or they make some 'false consciousness. However, what is meant by 'the will to empower' is a process of forming the subject in which it involves various actors and various kinds of actions (Ryan, 2011: 766).

In Finland, Mynttinen (2012) analyzed EU-funded empowerment programs. She used project report documents as material for his analysis. Using Foucault's biopower, she saw that all empowerment projects were trying to control, organize, regulate and protect the people who were the targets of empowerment. Using various techniques, these projects aim to develop obedient, healthy, and self-governing human beings. Using various techniques, these projects aim to develop obedient, healthy, and self-governing human beings. The experts involved in these projects work to create awareness about their responsibility to manage the environment, have a deep concern for their health, and independently meet their needs to achieve prosperity. In this way, when everyone is empowered and has a high level of awareness, the community's welfare as a whole will be achieved.

James explores the jungle of meanings stored in various terms related to empowerment to uncover the power that resides in it. James uses a postmodernism approach to analyze empowerment. In contemporary development discourse, what is meant by empowerment almost always refers to or has implications such as good governance, legitimacy, and creativity in developing the private sector, economic change towards individual independence, indigenization, human-centered development, community participation, and efforts to encourage the ability of the community to help itself. At different levels, empowerment often has the same meaning as strengthening inclusiveness, transparency, and accountability. This concept means an effort to enable individuals or communities to understand their reality, environment, problems and then take the necessary steps collectively to improve these conditions (James, 1999: 18). The "world" itself includes a broad meaning in the world of politics, economy, culture, society, and ecology.

For the left-wing, inspired by postcolonial ideas, as contained in Freire's (1973) work, empowerment is intended as a method of adult education, designed to help peasants and workers (marginalized people) understand and realize the conditions of exploitation they experience in the capitalist system (James, 1999: 14). In this perspective, empowerment is positioned as the effort of every person, community, or nation to take responsibility for their future, to equip

people with capable capacities, so that they feel they have thoughts and views of the world according to them, to achieve a level of prosperity that is they want themselves.

As for the new right in America and England, empowerment means drawing power from the state and giving it to the people. In this way, people will have the authority, opportunity, space, and ability to take care of themselves. Empowerment means a reduced role for the state. At the same time, there was a trend change in company management. There is a need to make an organization more flexible, responsive, and adapt quickly to change. Therefore, every part of the organization needs to be given space for authority to make decisions and equipped to respond to change. The term empowerment later developed into a technical term in management science (James, 1999: 16-18). Empowerment in the left perspective is marked by an awareness of oppression and formulating steps to fight for equality. In contrast, for the right perspective, empowerment means a company's ability to survive during market competition. Their method is the same, making everyone feel that they have sufficient authority to make decisions.

What Webinar discovered was not much different from James's. He analyzed DFID's overseas development reports, using a Foucauldian framework of knowledge and power development discourse. Werbner noted that in the development discourse, the word 'poor' is changed to 'target group' (Gardner & Lewis, 1996). It means the people who are the objects of development, the

people excluded from the entire development process. Throughout the DFID reports, empowerment is always commensurate with terms such as 'community participation', self-determination and has its own goals. All people who are the targets of development are molded to become active agents responsible for realizing the goals they have created for themselves. This is all based on DFID's understanding that there has been a tendency for the state to become weak for the past twenty years while the private and civil society has continued to strengthen. On that basis, DFID has funded a great deal of research on good governance, human rights, and civil society.

Elyachar exposed the assumptions behind programs such as empowering small and micro enterprises through soft loans. After protests in Seattle against globalization, the World Bank director said that the World Bank was incompatible with development, which was then underway, a development mode criticized by protesters in Seattle. This statement suggests that the World Bank is on the side of the protesters. The World Bank launched large programs in small businesses, micro-enterprises, and the informal economy. If previously the informal economy was considered not as an economy, then at that time, the informal economy was the economy. Through NGOs' role in various countries, the World Bank supports small businesses with soft loans managed by these NGOs. Many people became interested in the term social capital, and they were shocked by the

ability of poor people to survive amidst the economic crisis (Elyachar, 2002). Many researchers suspect, and the World Bank later agrees, that social relationships serve as safety nets in the poor world, enabling them to survive. The important basics of community survival must be replicated and taught to all NGOs in the third world. Through social networks, the World Bank thinks that the so-called small, micro, and medium enterprises, or the informal economy, will work well. In Cairo, Egypt, this program was run massively (Elyachar, 2002). These all represent a serious attempt to create an opinion about how much banking cares for the poor worldwide. But the question is, is this reality an effort to empower poor people and vulnerable groups in society, or is it empowering money?

The author looks at the growth of many NGOs, at least in Cairo, as the Social Funds roll out. Non-state actors manage social Funds to create community independence from the state, and unconsciously, this kind of program is building liberalism (Elyachar, 2002). But on the other hand, the state itself appears as if it wants to guarantee all people's welfare. This article intends to show that the work of NGOs in Cairo seems to be on the side of the community because of rolling out funds and empowerment programs, building self-reliance, etc. But actually, NGOs are an important part of the World Bank's hand, which aims to build rescue programs for the poor caused by SAP, and the market has not been working optimally and balanced. It seems that all of these programs are

merely a form of compensation for the neoliberal economic model being implemented by the World Bank.

The explanation above shows empowerment that is getting away from politics. In the Middle East, this depoliticization can be seen from donors' reluctance to train women's campaign skills. Apart from that, none of the programs supported by donors aimed to build the collective movement. Most empowerment programs are directed at training individual skills, not groups. Donors are very excited when it comes to programs such as microcredit or small businesses. There is a possibility, according to Tadros, that this is all a form of deepening economic liberalization in the Middle East (Tadros, 2010). It seems that donors chose to agree to an empowerment program that is safe and does not appear to interfere with the semi-authoritarian regime that is still in power in the Middle East region.

In Indonesia, this critical study has begun to be done a lot. The first is, for example, in Siberut, the Mentawai Islands Regency. Darmanto and Setyowati conducted Siberut research, which was then recorded and published in October 2012. The second is long research conducted by Patrice Levang on transmigration policies in various regions in Indonesia. Levang's research was published in the Indonesian edition in December 2003. The French edition was published in 1997.

Meanwhile, the third is Tania Li's research in Central Sulawesi on various interventions for cocoa farmers. Li's research was published in the

Indonesian edition in July 2012. The English edition was published in 2007. All three studies tell the same thing; the complexity of ideas and practices of various programs and policies aimed at improving the lives of vulnerable people, carried out by smart people both through state and non-state.

As written in his final sentence, On Siberut, "all these efforts show that the Siberut people are like the Philip Anthozoa who built their corals too, over a long period, rigged ships carrying power, ideas, renewal from without - all at once build his future" (Darmanto & Setyowati, 2012: 431). Somewhat similar to Darmanto and Setyowati, at the end of his book, which is the Indonesian edition, Tania Li states "the desire to correct this has disappointed many people, because even though it directs their lives, identity, and environment, they fail to fulfill their promise to make life more prosperous" (Li, 2012).

In his book, Levang repeatedly points out that there is something wrong in capturing and defining the problem that transmigration is trying to solve. In this case, transmigration is a big project to improve human life, empower the poor, etc. Even so — maybe like other programs — transmigration continues. Some many reasons and goals were ultimately attached or entrusted to the transmigration program. But what is clear is that this program was not designed to create wealth. Levang finally concluded that the gigantic program of moving the Javanese outside of Jambal (Java, Madura, Bali) reflected a kind of physiocrats despotism. Planners and implementers know that

they cannot achieve the goals of the programs they have created. But they couldn't stop it anymore. They can do more and more attach various reasons and create so many purposes for this program.

Returning the Politics of Empowerment

Then the question is, what the weaknesses of previous studies as empowerment politics are? The weakness inherent in the dominant empowerment discourse is its inability to escape from the evaluation framework. He never went deeper into questioning empowerment itself as a politics to improve the situation. The studies confined within this evaluation framework are too busy producing knowledge that contains an assessment of why empowerment works in one place and does not work in another. This type of empowerment always performs empowerment as a "technique" to improve things. The actors define the community's problems, design solutions, and create terms to name the situation, all of which are not always understood by the target group.

The study group that called itself critical accused the above studies' tendency to be politically blind (Ferguson, 1990) or technicalization of the problem (Li, 2012). For them, eliminating the power dimension in empowerment work is a big mistake. They want to show that empowerment is politics. Most of these critical studies attempt to uncover how power works through efforts to improve life, called empowerment (Cruikshank, 1999;

Sharma, 2008; Li, 2012). These critical studies have succeeded in showing how power works through empowerment and once again confirmed how the empowerment tools are used by strong people to "paralyze" weak people. People are made as if they have their own will, but all their actions are directed or shaped according to the program.

Although empowerment results are not always by program planning, this is precisely why empowerment actors create various new tools, methods, concepts, and programs. I think this study's weakness, first, lies in its inability to get out of the domination and subordination way of thinking, where the dominant controls the subordinate, although sometimes the subordinate also opposes. Empowerment is seen as a capillary for the power of the dominant group. Empowerment is positioned as a political instrument for the dominant group. The weakness of these two critical studies is that they are too confined in microanalysis. Even though the analysis still relates to the macro context, this macro context is only presented as a context to understand the micro-processes operation. Without it, micro matters cannot be fully understood. This of course departs from the view that power is ubiquitous and micro-nature. Power is then imagined as a network of interconnectedness and therefore, according to this tradition of thought, attempts to explain power as a whole are impossible. Rather than being trapped in complexity reduction, it is

better to study the power network that operates at the micro-level.

From the other side, the two tendencies of empowerment studies mentioned above - although different in their emphasis - are both in the epistemological area. This means that neither of them can get out of the 'how' realm. The first is too busy with how to do the best or the most successful empowerment. Meanwhile, the second one is suspicious about every empowerment program by looking for how power works and operates in various empowerment programs. By understanding this, people are expected to become alert and then resist. Only that is the story.

But whether fighting was better than before, of course not always. It's just that fighting, at least, shows that subordinate groups cannot always be subdued in its various forms. This non-submission is precisely what the program itself wants because it indicates how self-reliant and autonomous the community is. The target group is also given the space to fight to show that they dare to choose what is best for themselves, which in common language is often referred to as community-based, community aspirations, local needs, grassroots voices, etc.

So, what is the politics of empowerment going forward? First of all, empowerment needs to be positioned as a forming or creating field of politics. In other words, empowerment is politics itself. Empowerment has been transformed into a world filled with various kinds of efforts that try to be the most dominant

or the closest to empowerment's meaning and purpose.

Here there is no longer any importance in the story of who subjugates whom by how and what kind of subject formation. Also, no longer question the success or failure of a program. Empowerment is a field of antagonism that continues to be interpreted by various groups. Environmental fighters, defenders of indigenous rights, poverty eradication, government, students, researchers, academics, and so on, in their respective ways, continue to create various methods, strategies, approaches, tools, concepts, etc., to become closest to the imagination about empowerment.

Empowerment shapes and at the same time is shaped by battles and crosses of various kinds of discourse. In this arena, each of them sometimes has to concoct various discourses, forge alliances, cooperate on a certain issue, or complement each other. But not infrequently, they also act face to face, quarrel, point to each other, or side by side. Sometimes these warriors also appear, triumph and then disappear, then appear again in another form, in the crossroads of issues and developing discourses. Discourses too, appearing as a counterpart to the previous discourse, developing, triumphant, collapse, rise, or be replaced by other discourses. Empowerment also shapes and is shaped by the community who is the target of the program. Submitting or fighting, accepting or rejecting, being helpless or helplessness are all part of the fight or competition to form or fill out the definition of empowerment itself.

CONCLUSION

The search for empowerment as described above by the author shows that so far, it has expanded its meaning so that anyone can adopt it. But so far, two camps are fighting to interpret empowerment. The first camp tried to identify empowerment with care so as not to let it go from politics. Empowerment is then always identified with NGO or government programs to reduce poverty, provide assistance to residents, improve job skills, or manage microcredit for the poor. As political empowerment, it seems that it has lost its fangs. At this point, empowerment politics was paralyzed.

Meanwhile, on the other hand, critical groups trying to maintain empowerment politics are trapped in other weak points. The criticism of the first school above is quite basic, but they place empowerment as an expression itself when seeing empowerment as a subjugation without realizing it. As a result, empowerment is considered irrelevant as emancipatory politics that liberates people because it has been manipulated in such a way and has become a hiding place for subjugating. This is why the many empowerment actions do not make welfare possible. Poverty, marginalization, and underdevelopment are still emerging and increasingly widespread because empowerment is a subjugation project, not liberation.

The two-empowerment politics mentioned above are both inadequate to generate progressive and transformative political elan. The new empowerment politics must be based on

two things, namely the ability of elevation and expansion. The first one brings empowerment to move from particularity to become universal (hegemonic). Meanwhile, the second one expanded empowerment by absorbing more and more various demands. Therefore, empowerment can no longer be identified in certain classes. In this way, empowerment becomes radical democratic politics because all are involved in determining empowerment and at the same time, all are united by empowerment.

REFERENCES

- Alsop, R., Bertelsen, M., & Holland, J. (2005). *Empowerment in practice: From analysis to implementation*. The World Bank. [Crossref](#) | [Google Scholar](#)
- Basher, M. A. (2007). Empowerment of microcredit participants and its spillover effects: evidence from the Grameen Bank of Bangladesh. *The Journal of Developing Areas*, 173-183. [Crossref](#) | [Google Scholar](#)
- Connor, S. (2009). Structure and Agency: a debate for community development?. *International Symposium Community Development in an Age of Uncertainty*. London. [Crossref](#) | [Google Scholar](#)
- Cruikshank, B. (1999). *The will to empower: Democratic citizens and other subjects*. Cornell University Press. [Google Scholar](#)
- Cruikshank, B. (2019). Chapter 3: The Will to Empower: Technologies of Citizenship and the War on Poverty. In *The Will to Empower* (pp. 67-86).

- Cornell University Press. [Crossref](#) | [Google Scholar](#)
- Darmanto, D., & Setyowati, A. B. (2012). *Berebut Hutan Siberut, Orang Mentawai, Kekuasaan, dan Politik Ekologi*. Jakarta: Gramedia. [Google Scholar](#)
- de Soto, H. (2000). *The Mystery of Capital; Why Capitalism Triumphs in The West and Fail Everywhere Else*. New York: Basic Book. [Google Scholar](#)
- Elyachar, J. (2002). Empowerment money: the World Bank, non-governmental organizations, and the value of culture in Egypt. *Public culture*, 14(3), 493-513. [Google Scholar](#)
- Ferguson, J. (1990). *The anti-politics machine: 'development', depoliticization and bureaucratic power in Lesotho*. CUP Archive. [Google Scholar](#)
- Foucault, M. (1978). The history of sexuality, volume one. *Trans. Robert Hurley*. London: Penguin. [Google Scholar](#)
- Freire, P. (1973). *Education for critical consciousness*. Bloomsbury Publishing. [Google Scholar](#)
- Gardner, K., & Lewis, D. (1996). *Anthropology, development and the post-modern challenge*. Pluto Press. [Google Scholar](#)
- Goulet, D. (1971). *The cruel choice; a new concept in the theory of development*. Cambridge: Center for study of development and social change. [Google Scholar](#)
- Gupta, R., Sankhe, S., Dobbs, R., Woetzel, J., Madgavkar, A., & Hasyagar, A. (2014). *From poverty to empowerment: India's imperative for jobs, growth, and effective basic services*. McKinsey Global Institute. [Google Scholar](#)
- Hedström, P., & Swedberg, R. (1996). Rational choice, empirical research, and the sociological tradition. *European sociological review*, 12(2), 127-146. [Crossref](#) | [Google Scholar](#)
- Huang, H. (2020). Learning from exploratory rural practices of the Yangtze River Delta in China: New initiatives, networks and empowerment shifts, and sustainability. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 77, 63-74. [Crossref](#) | [Google Scholar](#)
- James, W. (1999). Empowering ambiguities. *The anthropology of power: Empowerment and disempowerment in changing structures*, 13-27. [Google Scholar](#)
- Jütting, J. (2003). Institutions and development: A critical review. *Technical Paper, No. 210*, OECD Development Center. [Crossref](#) | [Google Scholar](#)
- Li, T. M. (2007). *The will to improve: Governmentality, development, and the practice of politics*. Duke University Press. [Google Scholar](#)
- Li, T. M. (2012). The will to improve: perencanaan, kekuasaan, dan pembangunan di indonesia. Marjin Kiri. [Google Scholar](#)
- Meagher, K. (2011). Informal economies and urban governance in Nigeria: popular empowerment or political exclusion?. *African Studies Review*, 54(2), 47-72. [Crossref](#) | [Google Scholar](#)
- Mohan, G., & Stokke, K. (2000). Participatory development and

- empowerment: the dangers of localism. *Third world quarterly*, 21(2), 247-268. [Crossref](#) | [Google Scholar](#)
- Montero, M. (2009). Methods for liberation: Critical consciousness in action. In *Psychology of liberation* (pp. 73-91). Springer, New York, NY. [Crossref](#) | [Google Scholar](#)
- Mynttinen, L. (2012). *Technologies of Citizenship in the Finnish EU-Funded Empowerment Projects*. Helsinki: Faculty of Social Sciences Political Science. [Crossref](#) | [Google Scholar](#)
- Narayan-Parker, D. (2002). Empowerment and Poverty Reduction—A Source Book Washington. DC: *The World Bank*. [Crossref](#) | [Google Scholar](#)
- Narayan-Parker, D. (Ed.). (2005). *Measuring empowerment: Cross-disciplinary perspectives*. World Bank Publications. [Google Scholar](#)
- Narayanan, P. (2003). Empowerment through participation: How effective is this approach?. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 2484-2486. [Crossref](#) | [Google Scholar](#)
- Navarro, V. (2002). A critique of social capital. *International Journal of Health Services*, 32(3), 423-432. [Crossref](#) | [Google Scholar](#)
- North, D. C. (1990). *Institutions, institutional change and economic performance*. Cambridge University Press. [Google Scholar](#)
- Pease, B. (2002). Rethinking empowerment: A postmodern reappraisal for emancipatory practice. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 32(2), 135-147. [Crossref](#) | [Google Scholar](#)
- Ramdhani, A., Ramdhani, M. A., & Amin, A. S. (2014). Writing a Literature Review Research Paper: A step-by-step approach. *International Journal of Basic and Applied Science*, 3(1), 47-56. [Google Scholar](#)
- Rondinelli, D. A., McCullough, J. S., & Johnson, R. W. (1989). Analysing decentralization policies in developing countries: a political-economy framework. *Development and change*, 20(1), 57-87. [Crossref](#) | [Google Scholar](#)
- Rose, N. S. (1999). *Governing the soul: The shaping of the private self* (Vol. 2). London: Free association books. [Google Scholar](#)
- Roy, K. C., & Sideras, J. (2006). *Institutions, Globalisation and Empowerment: An Overview of Issues*. Edward Elgar Publishing. [Google Scholar](#)
- Ryan, K. (2011). Governing the future: citizenship as technology, empowerment as technique. *Critical Sociology*, 37(6), 763-778. [Crossref](#) | [Google Scholar](#)
- Sen, A. (1999). *Commodities and capabilities*. OUP Catalogue. [Google Scholar](#)
- Sen, A. (2000). *Development as Freedom*. New York: Anchor Books. [Google Scholar](#)
- Sharma, A. (2008). *Logic of Empowerment; Development, Gender, and Governance in Neoliberal India*. London: University of Minnesota Press. [Google Scholar](#)
- Snyder, H. (2019). Literature review as a research methodology: An overview and guidelines. *Journal of Business*

- Research*, 104, 333-339. [Crossref](#) | [Google Scholar](#)
- Stern, N., Rogers, F. H., & Dethier, J. J. (2006). *Growth and empowerment: making development happen*. MIT Press. [Google Scholar](#)
- Tadros, M. (2010). Between the Elusive and the Illusionary: Donors' Empowerment Agendas in the Middle East in Perspective. *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 30(2), 224-237. [Crossref](#) | [Google Scholar](#)
- Trommlerová, S. K., Klasen, S., & Leßmann, O. (2015). Determinants of empowerment in a capability-based poverty approach: Evidence from The Gambia. *World Development*, 66, 1-15. [Crossref](#) | [Google Scholar](#)
- Wee, B. V., & Banister, D. (2016). How to write a literature review paper?. *Transport Reviews*, 36(2), 278-288. [Crossref](#) | [Google Scholar](#)
- Yonehara, A. M. (2006). *Human development policy: Theorizing and modeling*. USA: Indiana University. [Google Scholar](#)