A RESPONSE TO THE PAPER PRESENTED BY DES GASPER: DEEPENING DEVELOPMENT ETHICS THROUGH THE LENSES OF CARING, GENDER, AND HUMAN SECURITY.

This paper is a response to Des Gasper’s paper on “Deepening Development Ethics Through the Lenses of Caring, Gender and Human Security”.

As a Development Practitioner with several years experience of working within NGOs in Bolivia (national and international), and therefore witness to the difficulties, complexities and also shortfalls and failings of development, my response to this paper evolves from this experience and thinking over the years, of what has now become the development industry. And if Nigel Dower does not consider globalization to be a remorseless juggernaut, I in contrast consider the development industry to be one. According to Powell and Seddon (1997:3), “the development industry has now become a monstrous alliance of global corporations, a kind of juggernaut”. Some of you may consider this to be villifying development which believe me is not my intention – I am a realist (but also a moral optimist).

My comments will follow a logical sequence reflecting the various sections in Gasper’s discussion. Overall his paper is very good, the notion of deepening development ethics is urgent and it is refreshing to read that he believes this to be possible through a process of “feminization”. In his discussion he raises some very important issues such as: an increasingly globalized vulnerability; viewing globalization via a gender lens; taking the concept of human development one step further to human security; the challenges facing Development Ethics and the presentation of three complementary streams offering a social treatment of the self and its interface with ethics and politics. Far too many to cover during the space of this conference however, an obvious opportunity to explore some of them.

1- INTRODUCTION: GLOBALIZED VULNERABILITY

In his introduction, Gasper talks about an increasingly globalized, vulnerability which I tend to agree with. The World Bank, International Monetary Fund and World Trade Organisation continue to wield excessive power and authority in trade, finance and economic negotiations and agreements. Weaker economies desperately attempting to swim above troubled waters to support these imposed economic policy regimes are drowning.

Bolivia is the poorest country in South America with 6 out of 10 Bolivians considered to be poor1, with a disturbing 36.5% of the population considered to be living in extreme poverty2. Difficult environmental conditions and the general lack of employment

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1 Taking poor to signify a lack of money or material possessions such that a person is unable to meet the basic needs necessary for survival.
2 Extreme poverty is defined by the level of dissatisfaction of basic needs within families. An increased number of unmet needs required to live a basic existence situates these families in conditions of extreme poverty.
opportunities have contributed to high rates of migration, from the rural areas to the urban regions. It is estimated that 39% of Bolivians between 5-19 years old leave the rural areas for the city. The majority of these are male, and seek work in unqualified and insecure jobs such as construction, whereas young women usually find work as maids or cleaners. Some are to be found in the informal sector, working for extended family members who live in the city, but many also leave the family environment, abandon school and end up as delinquents or social outcasts. Migration at the national level has also had far-reaching social consequences. Figures for the last decade are unavailable, but during the 90s, an estimated 3.7m (out of the total population 8m) had experienced some form of migration, and 2.5m of these had emigrated abroad. Interdepartmental migration is mainly by men, seeking temporary work in the cities. This leaves rural women to head the household (an average of 26% of homes) and the implications for increased child labour become high. According to SEPAS, there is a direct correlation between increased numbers of child workers and higher rates of migration. Since it is estimated that migration is still very much on the rise, the problem of child workers is likely to be exacerbated even further. Also, in the absence of official statistics over the last couple of years we are seeing an increasingly amount of women, (predominantly) indigenous women migrating abroad usually with very little protection if any.

According to Gasper the questions raised by people in respect to tragedies which have occurred to migrant people include: are they so reckless or so ignorant? Little choice is left to people, especially impoverished people, I don’t believe people are so reckless or so ignorant and I think we need to be careful when using the term ‘ignorant’ (ignorant of what, according to whose terms?). These people are desperate. They are faced with a situation where daily living existence is so difficult, with very little hope for a better future, many are forced to risk their physical security in pursuit of economic security and gains. And where Gasper lauds the intensity of reporting and reflection, I would call for a critical reflection and question the real intentions of such media propaganda. As he says further on: “Compassion easily deforms, in circumstances of inequality, into pity and becomes experienced by receiver as contempt..........‘compassion condescends, meritocracy excludes’”.

2.- GLOBALIZATION THROUGH A GENDER LENS

Gasper discusses the persistent androcentric focus of globalization and offers writings from feminists who are helping in the construction of an alternative view based on four foundational structures within society attempting to redirect the focus from state to society. Then a characterization of globalization is offered claimed to be of historical process. These include: deterritorialization, social interconnectedness and velocity. What Gasper then asks is to whom are these characteristics related to, and to which human activities? He identifies a severe dysjunction between the North – South: a disparity of interests between those involved in the acceleration and movement of capital and those involved in maintaining the daily existence of families, farms and so forth, dividing those two categories into men and

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3 SEPAS – Episcopal and Social Pastoral Commission 2003

4 INE – Nacional Institute of Statistics
women. If we consider what is happening in Bolivia, just within the nation we can see that between 1999 and 2001 the ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor increases: the income for the 10% of the most rich increased by 11% whereas for the 10% of the poorest sector they lost nearly 1/5 of their income. Unfortunately, there are no statistics available but if we were to see the gender division of the above data I am sure that we would find that the main protagonists making up the first group would be men, whereas the majority of protagonists making up the second group would be women.

Also, when Gasper discusses how increasingly migrant labour is associated with activities involved in the maintenance of human life and therefore often goes unrecognized, unrecorded and significantly unprotected. Who are we talking about? Primarily, poor indigenous women and children.

As Gasper says, “a reproductive crisis manifests itself in anarchical patterns of unauthorized illicit and concealed movements…………therefore this crisis, has opened up a new space for ethical reflection and for debates on how to foster progressive forces for a more equitable transformation”. But what Gasper neglects to say is who needs to open up these new spaces, and with whom? This is where maybe the limitations and shortfalls of academia become evident.

3.- DEVELOPMENT ETHICS
From economism to human development to human security.

Gasper introduces a matrix outlining sources and streams in Development Ethics but also stresses some of the sources which are not included in this matrix but that considers important and significant: a feminist perspective and one that includes migration, and also proposes the need to draw more from moral philosophy, existential thought and the notion of caring as an ethic.

As much as the Human Development Approach is criticized we do need to realize that this approach often is the underlying framework for much of the work carried out by NGOs/INGOs especially those dedicated to socio-economic development, human rights, empowerment, etc. Taking this approach one step further to include ‘human security’ is also positive as it is an attempt to raise our awareness and need to address other issues and demands of a rising global vulnerability. Chambers (2004:2) says, “that for professionals committed to development, the world we wish to bring forth is linked to what we mean by development”. He also considers that the power of language is often underestimated in that it influences the trajectory of development in many ways. “Through changing the agenda; through modifying mindsets; through legitimating new actions; and through stimulating and focusing research and learning”. (2004:3)

This new vocabulary is often dismissed as jargon or rhetoric however, as Chambers (2004:4) says, “language is, however about much more than rhetoric and opportunism. It shapes and interacts with the ways we think and behave”. Therefore, if the new discourse of Human Development moves on to “human security” then it can only be regarded as an improvement, complementing and extending this current discourse.
The Challenges to Development Ethics

Gasper considers that at the level of literature and theorizing development ethics has had some significant achievements and less in the worlds of policy, education and actions. Maybe that is partially attributable to the discipline of Development Ethics (DE) being confined to the realms of an academic elite. Implementing the subject of DE in graduate studies is forward-thinking but maybe this is not enough. Gasper claims that, “what did not yet happen are the required gradual paradigm shifts at all levels, from abstract reasoning through to institutions and daily practices. He recognizes that this problem can take years (even centuries) but that it will also depend on how well the travellers on the journey converse with each other and others. Something that may assist in speeding along the journey could be more dialogue and deliberation between all actors and not just the theorists.

From a practitioner’s perspective, the debate on Development Ethics is absent form the majority of the agendas of NGOs (national and international). It also appears to be absent in the workings of bilateral and multilateral agencies. It is as much my role (and obligation) as a practitioner, as yours (the theorists) to ensure that the debate is opened and expanded to include all facets of the development debate. As Nussbaum (1998:765) claims in her discussion on public philosophy and international feminism, “I shall reflect on the contribution philosophy can make to an international feminism (could also read development), thinking both about the need practice has for theory and the need theory has for practice”. According to Gasper he considers that for the notion of human security to be more effective it does require a broadening of its methodological approach, delving into aspects behind a feminized impetus: emotional depth, studies of life spheres, the arts and humanities, caring etc. An interesting proposal, however I still consider this to be insufficient in generating a shift in paradigms, influencing actions and strategies congruent with an ethical framework for development. The gap between the praxis and the theory needs to be bridged. (MSU is to be commended on bringing these two actors together in this event).

Gasper calls for “a revival in substantial part of the agenda mapped and pursued by Denis Goulet”. I tend to agree with him. Goulet (1995:5) states that, the philosopher needs to be added to the development team, without a clear concept of the philosophy of development the team becomes a simple ‘ad hoc’ mission.

4.- THE LENS OF CARING

At this stage I would also like to commend Gasper on this last section as I feel that if we are really serious and committed to taking forward the notion of development ethics on a more profound level – then this is the starting point. He presents three complementary streams: Buddhism; the writings of Ananta Giri; and the feminist ethics of care. What is the most striking thing about these three streams is the emphasis on self-transformation. And here I would like to share these words expressed by Gandhi: “You must become the change you wish to see in the world”. (Chambers, 2004:16)
The principles of Buddhism lie in the wholesome balance of the individual self and of the social body – a reduction of importance of self; detachment from persons and material possessions; where the person is empathetic, generous, expresses equanimity and the willingness to give. Chambers (2004:1) considers that there is something crucial missing from the development debate. This ‘something’ is the need to add the personal dimension. “This implies stepping back and engaging in critical self-examination. To do better we have to examine, not just the normally defined agenda of development “out there”, but ourselves, how our ideas are formed, how we think, how we change, and what we do and do not do”.

Chambers is one of the founders of participatory appraisal techniques (PRA), where he strives for the real participation of those in marginalized and deprived situations. Two such themes which have evolved from his experiences in PRA are well-being and personal responsibility, and he has combined them and put forward the concept of responsible well-being. This concept of responsible well-being derives from the notion, that in general it is accepted that equity and sustainability are important principles in discussing the objectives of development and Chambers considers that when well-being is qualified by equity and sustainability it becomes responsible well-being. Responsible well-being (akin to much of Buddhist thought) recognizes obligations to others both those alive and future generations and to their quality of life. An underlying strength supports the word ‘responsible’ especially in proportion to wealth and power: “the wealthier and more powerful people are the greater the actual or potential impact of their actions or inactions and so the greater the scope and need for their well-being to be responsible”(2004:12). Therefore, in responsible well-being, individuals in spaces of power and wealth (including us here present in the conference) need to change. We need to confront, challenge and transform abuses of power and wealth. What is required is an introspection of self-awareness, through self-analysis and reflection in an attempt to understand attitudes and behaviour in order to engender change. Not an easy task, but I would emphasize as essential. Many of you are no doubt familiar with Freire’s work, Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Chambers (2004:13) actually calls for the “Pedagogy of the Non-Oppressed” which I find an interesting notion and definitely merits further analysis.

Gasper’s presentation of Ananta Giri’s thesis of self development only supports this. He says, “The agents of development have not given much attention to developing themselves”. I think at this point it is also pertinent to raise the importance of yet another attribute which is listening, especially to those who ‘so-called’ development is aimed at. Escobar (1995) a development analyst from the South, says, “Development was – and continues to be for the most part – a top-down, ethnocentric and technocratic approach which treated people and cultures as abstract concepts, statistical figures to be moved up and down in the charts of progress”. He also considers that the “Discourse of development is firmly entrenched in Western modernity and economy”. Schech and Haggis (2000:67) point out, that within the discourse of development it is evident that the “West is modern, civilized and enlightened and “the Rest” are traditional, barbaric and ignorant”. As I have mentioned above, that for each of us, if we are really committed to striving for an ethic in development we need to seriously and critically enter into a process of self-introspection or self-interrogation.
The final source presented is a feminist ethics of care, which offers an eclectic blend of various theories: ethnography, social, ontology and moral reflection. This rich blend allows for this type of ethics of care to be visualized on four levels: firstly as a sentiment or willingness, secondly, as a group of attributes and skills, thirdly as a practice located within society such as nurturing, looking after the sick and citizenship, and finally as part of the system which is predominantly socio-economic which Gasper considers to be confronted with risks such as paternalism and corruption. What can be gained from this focus is not confining these values only to the sphere of caring but integrating them into the concept of citizenship.

Even though a feminist involvement in the development debate is imperative we must also be cautious about the ideas and values underlying the feminist framework. As much as Western feminism has contributed to the development agenda it also falls victim as an accomplice to a certain ethnocentrism. Third world feminists have struck back at Western feminists for their ethnocentricity, “one such significant effect of the dominant “representations” of Western feminism is it’s conflation with imperialism in the ages of particular third world women”. (Mohanty, 1991:55) Therefore, without intending to denigrate the potential impact of a feminist perspective in this area I call for the need for this feminist perspective to seriously take on a transcultural approach, to consider representation from women from the South and offer a type of feminism which is not imperialistic nor homogenous.

Feminist discourse has brought forth a number of theories related to empowerment and one of these is, “The Modified Empowerment Strategy” as described by Ferguson (1998:103). This strategy is interesting as it includes a feature which, “insists on a process of self-interrogation by funded researchers and an acknowledgement of their power position in the construction of the knowledge being researched” which is similar to what many of the above writers mentioned say. This could be applicable not only to researchers but also funders, development activists, academics and so forth, in an attempt to shift the balance between the north and the south. The practice of self-interrogation will allow the destabilizing of given identities and uncover levels of unawareness.

5.- CONCLUSION:GLOBALIZED SENSIBILITY? GLOBALIZED SECURITY?

This response to Gasper’s paper in no way attempts to cover all the aspects touched on in his paper, however is an intent to highlight some of the most important issues raised and the need to continue the process of the deepening of Development Ethics through a heightened globalized sensibility, a further application of gender and a feminist ethic of care. Together with this we must encourage the introduction of complementary streams such as Buddhism and the writings of Ananta Giri, as they encourage a level of self-analysis and introspection of each and every one of us. Gasper’s paper leaves us with an incredible amount of substance to continue this analysis. I hope that this opportunity exists.

I will conclude with a short quotation by Havel (1992), “It is not that we simply seek new and better ways for managing society, the economy and the world. The point is that we should fundamentally change how we behave”.

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References


