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The Construction of Gender in Gender-Sensitive Work of International NGOs in Ghana

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Abstract

My paper focuses on gender in the context of international NGO interventions in Sub-Saharan Africa specifically Ghana. In my current PhD research, I aim to address a number of questions of which some shall be discussed in this paper such as what impact did the "gender sensitive work" of certain NGOs have in the construction of presumed changed ideas of women's roles and responsibilities? What understanding of 'women' do specific (international or European) NGOs conducting development interventions in Ghana display? My underlying assumption is that this understanding of women is often rooted in a European-enlightened context and disregards/neglects or at least treats as subsidiary more traditional views of women (within local communities they are working with). What, then, is the impact – both positive and negative - when international NGOs advocate for behaviour change within local communities that is implicitly centred in European-enlightened gender norms, which are times disconnected, at times overlapping with indigenous gender norms?

In my paper, I will investigate and discuss whether and how elements from 'traditional' and 'modern' societal domains were linked, reformulated and reworked in a post-colonial setting to create certain perceptions and understandings of gender. My research focuses on the tensions between subjective / discursive / performative construction of identity and objective / empirical / universal components of social justice around gender. It aims at identifying ways of normatively evaluating gender images while critically unpacking values that are promoted in specific contexts – often, apparently objective / universal values really serve particular interest (as the study of modernity / post-colonialism tells us). My research aims at informing meaningful development work; such work has to go back to *actually* listen and try to understand the people in local communities NGOs are working with.

Key words: Gender sensitive work, construction of identity, INGOs, Ghana, Rule of the Norm

Introduction

This study aims to investigate extant gender images and gender relations in Ghana in view of the impact of modern European/Western thinking about gender upon assumed traditional gender images and relations. The aim is to understand how and whether perceptions of the role, status and situation of women have changed in Ghana, by looking at rural and urban communities affected by INGO intervention. The study sets out to inquire what certain labels such as the "traditional" African and the "modern" European/Western/Enlightened view of women entail in these contexts. Through a critical consideration of this dichotomy the study aims to examine whether there is a reciprocity and combination of aspects that make up a variety of gender images present today and informed by historical processes in Sub-Saharan Africa specifically Ghana.

Looking at certain current and historical understandings of women's roles, their responsibilities, access to resources and powers (or lack thereof) in Ghana and investigating how the ever-flexible construction of social identity relates to INGO interventions will shed light on a specific composition of themes that has not been featured prominently so far in research on development practice linked up with Gender Studies. The research findings might be able to inform, "gender sensitive work" of INGOs that is better equipped to account for the breadth of subjective construction of social identity. By combining both extensive literary research and the adaption of certain theoretical frameworks with empirical research, this study aims to present findings that will contribute to a better understanding of the perceptions of gender images in Ghana within the context of NGO intervention.

Gender sensitive work conducted by international NGOs is often characterized by the following aims: to change behaviours and attitudes within existing gender relations that have negative repercussions on women such as the acceptance of widespread GBV. Frequently however, it is not clear or explicitly stated *towards what* change is geared in gender sensitive development programmes; more importantly it is neither clear who has the (discursive) power to decide *what* the change should look like. The final objective of gender sensitive work often seems to be the empowerment of women to ensure that they can lead better and fuller lives. Strongly believing that women have a right to equal treatment, equal opportunities as well as equal access and control over resources and entitlements (like men), I am asking *what kind* of empowerment we are talking about within gender sensitive development work. I am specifically interested in the risks of a notion of empowerment that is only loosely connected to very specific realities in local communities targeted by international NGOs.

I am thus interested in linking my research to risks of advocating behaviour and attitude change within local targeted communities that is implicitly centred in European/enlightened gender norms. The following questions are of interest to me: Apart from the profound positive impact, does intervention by international NGOs aimed at behaviour changes within gender relations bear the risks of negative repercussions especially for women as conventional power hierarchies between women and men are challenged? There seems to be some evidence (though highly selective and very preliminary) among development practitioners that immediate negative repercussions are created for women such as an increase in violence, when the power of men is challenged. A concern among development practitioners seems to be that there is too little assessment of *what the actual impact is* of development interventions aimed at behaviour and attitude change. What, then, is the impact – both positive and negative - when advocating behaviour change within local communities that is implicitly centred in European-enlightened gender norms, which are times disconnected, at times overlapping with indigenous gender norms?

Research Questions
In combination with the Development Planning Unit's (dpu) research agenda, the main research questions of this study target matters of diversity, social complexity and planned intervention.

- How do extant gender images in Ghana combine "traditional" African and "modern" European/Western/Enlightened elements as part of the complex process of subjective construction of social intersectional identity? This study will critically question the existence of such a dichotomy operating with labels such as "traditional/African" and "modern/European-Western". Instead, this research will investigate whether and how elements from traditional and modern societal domains were linked, reformulated and reworked in a post-colonial setting to create certain perceptions of gender.

- What impact did the "gender sensitive work" of certain NGOs have in the construction of presumed changed ideas of women's roles and responsibilities, their access to and control over resources? Looking at gender images in Ghana from a historical perspective (mainly from post-colonialism onwards) will help to investigate existing gender images and gender relations and assess whether and how INGO interventions have shaped these images and relations. Furthermore, this research will explore the extent to which certain INGO intervention strategies regarding gender are informed by an international global framework (accessible through international resolutions, treaties and agreements) and whether this can account for the breadth of social identity. The study will also investigate the degree, to which NGOs are tied to major donors' understanding of gender.

- Does a focus on gender present in certain NGO interventions obscure the understanding of the breadth of subjective social identities leading to compromising successful NGO intervention? What constitutes the criteria for success in development work targeting gender and who has the discursive power to establish these criteria?

Gender and Development
Three paradigms can be helpful in understanding the role and experiences of women in the context of development – the Women in Development Approach (WID), the Women and Development Approach (WAD) and the Gender and Development Approach (GAD). Due to the scope of this paper, only a brief, but nonetheless important, engagement with these paradigms is possible. It was first the WID approach and especially the work of Ester Boserup, a Danish economist that challenged the assumption that women have no role to play in production. This assumption was quite prominent within development cooperation in the 1960s and 1970s and led to sexual inequalities within development approaches, such as men receiving training (because they were associated with production for the market) and women being restrained to subsistence. In her work *Women's Role in Economic Development* (1970), Boserup points towards the negative repercussions that modernization, especially in agricultural production, can have on women's autonomy. This point was taken up by the WAD approach, which identified both the mode of production (within a capitalist system) and class inequalities as the primary reasons for subordination of women. The GAD approach in a sense went even one step further and identified patriarchy, the pervasive nature of male domination within most societies, as the root cause for domination of women by not only controlling their labour, but also their sexuality and procreation. Both the WAD and GAD approach deal with questions of the public and private domain and the positioning of the sexes within these domains and its repercussions - assigning certain groups to certain domains can have very real consequences in terms of recognition and entitlements.

When the discourse changed from talking about women to talking about gender, a main achievement was to highlight the social construction of gender roles. Gender points to the attribution of roles and expectations to women and men. It points to roles that are ascribed to women (and men) on the basis of culture, society, economic context and a variety of other factors. It is this construction of women-hood, what it means to be a woman at a specific time and in a specific setting, culture and socialisation that I am interested in within my PhD. In the present discourse on gender, there is more talk on men and masculinities and also the idea of more

than one gender is slowly taking shape within mainstream public debates. Trans and LGBT issues have been part of the feminist debate for a while now. Feminist literature presents a critical voice about a variety of issues and themes, often challenging established perspectives. In my research, I am especially interested in the post-colonial feminist discourse, which I think holds potential in terms of theoretical grounding.

In my PhD, I am interested to find answers to questions such as:
- What understandings of 'women' do specific international NGOs conducting development interventions in Ghana display? My underlying assumption is that this understanding of women is often rooted in a European-enlightened context and disregards/neglects or at least treats as subsidiary more traditional views of women (within local communities INGOs are working with).
- Do views on women (exhibited by certain INGOs) account for both presumably enlightened European ways of being a woman and traditional African ways of being a woman? Is such a distinction a useful analytical tool?
- Is the INGOs' understanding of women explicit or implicit? I assume that this definition of women is often not made explicit. Still, NGO interventions will be guided by their understanding of women in how to target women 'beneficiaries'. Often, when something is not clearly defined, it can be an indication that it is a concept that is taken for granted or seen as 'normal'. I am especially interested in these assumptions as they are often guiding principles, not questioned and people are less likely to be transparent and critical about them.
- Are women mentioned and targeted as part of 'the gender aspect' to be taken into account by INGO work? What are the implications of that? I assume that this is often the reality – to mention/target women as an especially vulnerable group. In my opinion, this holds a real danger and risk of victimizing women. It is not women *per se* that are weak, but the conditions they find themselves in. I am fully supporting the approach of many INGOs to adopt a 'gender lens' in their work, but I am posing the question what kind of implications it can have if female-hood per se is constructed as a weakness and vulnerability. Is this not exactly the view many INGOs want to combat by empowering women?

(see also Froehlich, forthcoming)

Gender Analysis and Ethnography of Aid Policy and Practice – Framing Methodology

Gender Analysis

I take my starting point in feminist literature in the last quarter of the 20th century and a key work is Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (2007;1st edition 1990). Besides fundamental questions of identity and its construction through performative acts, I am especially interested to decipher and understand how Butler links gender, and in this case mainly being a woman, to concepts such as natural and normal. In my understanding, the 'normal' holds a distinctive discursive power relegating identities within its limits, but also outside of them with severe repercussions on social, economic and political participation. I will elaborate more on this point in the chapter on my Theoretical-Analytical Framework.

Starting from feminist literature, Gender Analysis understood as "The systematic gathering and examination of information on gender differences and social relations in order to identify, understand and redress inequities based on gender" (Reeves and Baden 2000, 2) is at the methodological heart of my research. Especially Caroline Moser's work (1993, 2014) on Gender Planning and Development introduces gender analysis tools that seem to be very useful in the context of my research work. Introducing four different roles of women and men, namely reproductive, productive, community managing and constituency-based politics, Moser's gender analysis allows for an in-depth engagement assessing to what extent various roles of men and women are taken into account by specific development programmes or policies. Her work on Strategic and Practical Gender Needs (Moser 1993) points to ways of identifying and consequently changing certain statuses quo. Caren Levy (1998) offers an elaborate way of conducting gender analysis with the help of the 'web' of institutionalization (of gender) through participatory practices. All of these various analytical tools are not seen as exclusive but rather complementing each other in a meaningful way allowing to arrive at a deeper level of analysis.

The theme of Gender and Development points, I would argue, to the link between Gender and Culture and can display a strong rights perspective. An interesting voice in this debate is Sally Engle Merry, an American anthropologist. In her book chapter together with Peggy Levitt entitled *Making Women's Human Rights in the Vernacular: Navigating the Culture/Right Divide* (2011), she critically engages with the statement that Human Rights and Culture are irreconcilable. Often this statement carries a "gendered subtext" (81-82) which can be clearly seen in the case of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) "as a classic example of oppression of culture"

(81). Women are portrayed as the victims of culture, in a variety of cases and cultural contexts such as FGM, honour killings, child marriage, dowry murders, etc. Women, then, "as passive and vulnerable persons" (82) need to be rescued – often by a "masculinist state" (82). Levitt and Merry raise the point, that the international Human Rights system itself displays a trajectory that builds on "Western political theory" (83), which could be identified as an own "cultural system […] premised on ideas of human rights and universality." (83) This point resonates even stronger when one bears in mind that rights themselves are a cultural phenomenon. In Levitt and Merry's opinion, which I agree with, there exists a misrepresentation of the intersections that take place between human rights and cultural practices. An image that perceives women as being oppressed by their culture only to be saved by the weapon of human rights from their traditional context "misunderstands how rights and culture work and instead builds on imperial narratives of the civilizing process and the transformation of 'backward' society." (83) Levitt and Merry's engagement with human rights and culture in regard to women reminds us of how important it is to *actually* look at and understand the context and the specific situations. Ethnographies of Aid Policy and Practice try to understand exactly that – the situation as it *actually* is serving as one tool that can be meaningfully implemented in development cooperation.

Ethnography of Aid Policy and Practice

David Mosse's work (2004, 2005) serves as an interesting and fruitful starting point to allow for ethnography to play an important role when it comes to understanding, and consequentially assessing, Aid Policy and Practice. It is an approach that advocates going away from various documents that are produced and re-produced to uphold a narrative of success when the actual realities on the ground are far more unclear and complex. It is about observing and recording these realities on the ground.

Jean Pierre Olivier de Sardan's work (2009) focuses on "development anthropology" or "general anthropology of public space" or "anthropology of governance". His main argument can be outlined as follows: when closely studying the reality of goods and service provision, civil servants in Francophone West Africa often *neither* follow official norms (of the state or development institutions such as the World Bank or certain INGOs) *nor* cultural practices. Often analysed for the Global North, there is an implementation gap between norms and practices; this is more a reality than a problem per se. In the case of Francophone West Africa, however, Olivier de Sardan claims that this gap cannot be explained by often-stereotypical explanations of gaps between (Western) norms and (local) practices. Rather, he introduces **practical norms**, which incorporate everyday practices of civil servants. These are part of a routine, regulated and predictable and present know-how to deal with a specific system. (see also Froehlich forthcoming). To successfully conduct my fieldwork in Ghana, the author of this paper sets out to converge some of the approaches above to be equipped with a meaningful methodological toolkit, which allows for realities on the ground to be observed and recorded.

There is a whole corpus of work that I would label with 'studies on mutliple normativities' which are often analytical works based on ethnographic fieldwork. These studies, I would argue, can be very helpful in trying to assess that link between gender and what is 'normal'; between gender and what is 'allowed' and 'not allowed' as norms are often linked to regulatory frameworks. In the case of Human Rights, Koen de Feyter (2011) looks at claims made through a legal strategy and claims made through alternative strategies. In her work on legal pluralism, which seems especially relevant for my research, Giselle Corradi (2011) looks at legal pluralism or the "co-existence of more than one legal order in the same social field".

Fieldwork

The fieldwork is envisioned to take place in both rural and urban communities in Ghana exposed to INGO intervention (at least one or more depending on access). The study adopts a social constructivist approach in order to capture and explain the variety of perceptions that might be present across different communities. Semi-structured interviews and possibly questionnaires shall be used assessing the perception of gender roles in Ghana. A time period of 3-6 months is envisioned for the research stay in Ghana aiming at a sample size of about 20-30 interviews; the aim is to visit selected communities at least twice with 6 months in between. Conducting interviews in Ghana will help to assess whether and how Ghanaian women but also Ghanaian men combine ideas of 'traditional' womanhood with more 'modern' arguably more empowered ideas of the role of women. What constitutes ideas of gender in a Ghanaian setting both in rural and urban areas? Have these conceptions changed over time? Are INGOs grasping the breadth of subjective construction of social identity when targeting a shared identity group such as woman in a certain community? How do Ghanaian women themselves perceive their role? And has anything changed for them when they adopted a behaviour change advocated by INGOs? Currently, we do not have an empirically informed insight into whether some (Ghanaian) women manage to find spaces of manoeuvre while still adhering to certain traditional gender roles. The modern, Western, independent and empowered image of women is a concept that has given rise to valuable opportunities

and spaces for women that were unthinkable in the past. The idea of a 'modern empowered Western woman' is a rather recent historical development though and one that has not comprehensively fulfilled its promise of equality between women and men. For this reason, it is crucial to investigate whether Western/European ways of being a woman constitute the only possible way of being an empowered woman and which other ways are there such as those rooted in certain traditional aspects prevalent in Ghana that lead to being a valued, respected woman, able to fully participate in society.

Qualitative and Quantitative Methods

This research mainly relies on qualitative methods such as anthropological observation and semi-structured interviews. It seems to be worthwhile to triangulate some of these primary findings with carefully chosen and critically considered quantitative data, such as data produced through the SIGI index (Social Institutions and Gender Index, OECD), the Gini Coefficient (assessing economic inequality, UN) and the Global Gender Gap Index (assessing gender inequality, UN).

The Rule of the Norm, Post-Colonial Theory and the Role of NGOs – towards a Theoretical-Analytical Framework

The Rule of the Norm

At the heart of gender inequalities, which often result in women being disadvantaged, seems to lay a certain perception, understanding and assumption of what is normal, framed in a patriarchal system. How does the 'natural' become the 'natural' in different contexts? How does the 'normal' become 'normal'? How can it be made visible, challenged and subverted?

Helen Verran (1998) introduces the concept of "reciprocal co-constitution of signs and collective embodied and embedded actions in which objects come to life" (Verran 1998, 172). It is within a different context that Verran argues for such a co-constitution, namely when it comes to the universality of numbers. She tries to understand and at the same time questions (for specific situations) this universally believed norm, truth and reality. Verran's concept might be helpful in my endeavour to approach the constitution of the natural and normal. What better place to start than with basic numbers?

In her work *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler (2007, 1990) presents a "performative theory of gender acts" (xxxiv) challenging dominant understandings of gender with "subversive discontinuity" (xxxii). When we look at the link between gender and naturalness, gender and the normal, there are quite a few moments when Butler addresses this relationship, especially in the 1999 foreword to the 2007 edition of *Gender Trouble*. "Does being female constitute a 'natural fact' or a cultural performance, or is 'naturalness' constituted through discursively constrained performative acts that produce the body through and within the categories of sex?" (xxxi) The seemingly natural fact is thus rooted in ever-repeated performative acts that face specific limitations; the link between gender and what is considered to be normal or natural lies – in a way - at the core of Butler's work. As she puts it herself, "the purpose here more generally is to trace the way in which gender fables establish and circulate the misnomer of natural facts" (xxxiv). Judith Butler asks, "What other foundational categories of identity – the binary of sex, gender, and the body – can be shown as productions that create the effect of the natural, the original, the inevitable?" (xxxi), which points us to the question which concepts lend themselves to being perceived as natural and under which circumstances, which conditions?

Questions of identity and gender are firmly rooted within the context of 'culture' – a concept that generations of anthropologists have tried to untangle and there is still scope for understanding better what it actually is that we speak about when we speak of culture. Often, this varies depending on the context and who speaks. Butler works with concepts such as 'cultural intelligibility of sex and sexuality' (xxxiii) – to me, this relates to what at a certain point in time and in a discursive fashion might not be understood, thought about, even imagined, least of all socially accepted, which at times goes hand in hand with severe repercussions. The task then within the realm of representational politics, according to Butler, "is to formulate within this constituted frame a critique of the categories of identity that contemporary juridical structures engender, naturalize and immobilize." (7) "What kinds of cultural practices produce subversive discontinuity and dissonance among sex, gender, and desire and call into question their alleged relations?" (xxxii) It seems that in order to subvert cultural practices, one has to start by looking at a wide range of existing cultural practices and try to understand these first. In the context of development interventions in specific communities in Ghana, my first aim is to *understand*, to *really* understand what makes a woman a woman (and a man a man) in these communities. Bruno Latour's work (1988) can also help in this endeavour to access social reality.

Modernity and Post-Colonial Theory

Modernity is a complex and often abstract concept; it is at the same time a condition and a representation, "a way of being and a way of seeing the world; it needs specification and embedding within the local". (Cooper in Holden 2008, 23) In a colonial and post-colonial context, modernity and "associated notions of 'progress' and 'development,' was a key vocabulary item to express the possibilities and perils of social transformation and freedom from colonial rule." (Holden 2008, 24) For some modernity is connected to "developed economy, technological and industrial advancement" (Gyekye in Holden 2008, 24), for others it constitutes a "general break with all sorts of pasts". (Appadurai in Holden 2008, 24)

Development as "Westernisation and the vulgarisation (or the misrepresentation and confusion at best) of indigenous social life, traditions and cultures" rooted in "Eurocentric conceptions of progress and modernity." (Wai 2008, 78) point to a construction of a particular model of 'modernity' that serves a particular set of (colonial and later Western) interests.

The concept of tradition is as broad in possible meanings, contested and exploited as the concept of modernity to which it is often put in opposition. Projects aimed at linking tradition and modernity have been present among African intellectuals of the Gold Coast and then Ghana since the late 19th and early 20th century (see Korang, 2004). Achille Mbembe, a contemporary African intellectual, criticises that the possibility of an African modernity is often presented as the difference between authenticity and alienation; the choice presents itself between either a "traditional" African way of life or to lose this life by associating with modernity. (Mbembe in Auga 2007, 138-39) This research questions whether such a choice indeed has to be made.

African feminists past and present:

Having studied Ghanaian political history for many years, one thing that is truly striking is the absence of women in the documentation of that history. Not their actual participation – there were many women in many different functions fighting for independence, re-interpreting discourses and narratives of Africans as the 'subordinate race' and early feminists re-defining what it means to be an African woman.

There is **Ama Ata Aidoo** a Ghanaian author, poet and academic who was the first published African woman dramatist (1964 *The Dilemma of a Ghost*) whose protagonists are often women who defy the stereotypical women's roles of their time.
There is **Mabel Dove Danquah**, the first woman in the Ghanaian national Assembly (loyal to Kwame Nkrumah's CPP), editor of the Accra Evening newspaper. She was a journalist, political activist, feminist and creative writer who "dared women to break with form, to derive inspiration from the suffragists, to denounce imperialism, and to fight for their rights." (Gadzepko 2005) She also wrote a satire of George Bernhard Shaw's *The Adventures of the Black Girl in Her Search for God* (1932), which she titled *The Adventures of the Black Girl in her Search for Mr Shaw*.

National boundaries and historical periods need not limit the conversation between African feminists pasts and present and across the African SubSaharan continent. Trinidad born feminist and journalist **Claudia Jones** found herself in London as a refugee on humanitarian grounds in the 1950s who used what should later become 'intersectional analysis' – seeing the 'oppressive condition' of gender as interlinked with other aspects such as race, class, ethnicity, disability, etc. **Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie**, is a contemporary Nigerian novelist, who is outspoken about issues of gender. At a TEDxEuston talk given in the UK in 2012 (and published as a book 2 years later), she said:

> "If we do something over and over again, it becomes normal. If we see the same thing over and over again, it becomes normal. […] If we keep seeing only men as heads of corporations, it starts to seem 'natural' that only men should be heads of corporations." (Adichie 2014, 13)

Adichie also addresses the link between gender norms and cultural norms, mentioning "Some people will say a woman is subordinate to men because it's our culture. But culture is constantly changing." (45) Being raised in a specific way, sensitive for equality and diversity, is key:

> "Gender matters everywhere in the world. And I would like today to ask that we should begin to dream about and plan for a different world. A fairer world. A world of happier men and happier women who are truer to themselves. And this is how to start: we must raise our daughters differently. We must also raise our sons differently." (Adichie 2014, 25)

Chilisa and Ntseane (2010), contemporary academics, wrote about "Resisting dominant discourses: implications of indigenous, African feminist theory and methods for gender and education research" and make three aspects very clear that might be helpful in accessing social reality on the ground. Firstly, they advocate for indigenous approaches to research methodologies i.e. using traditional songs to tell narratives or amending a Focus Group Discussion to be local and context-specific. Secondly, they are keen to stress a relational identity, namely a character that is grounded in the community and transcends the individual. Thirdly, their aim is to decolonise research (which links to Ngugi Thiong'O's work on 'Decolonising the mind' in the mid 1980s); the authors advocate for other ways of theorising the complexities of gender and education, which can serve as a starting point for building alliances between indigenous and Western feminisms. (see Chilisa and Ntseane 2010)

Development (Work) and the Role of NGOs

Development is a broad, complex and highly contested issue. I start from the assumption that the narrative of development is often framed as nations developing *towards* the model of a modern Western/European nation that is portrayed as the peak of progress. (see e.g. McClintock 2004, 92) As Sachs puts it, "development's hidden agenda was nothing else than the Westernization of the world." (Sachs 2007, 4) Throughout the last decades, there have been various attempts of broadening the meaning of development, taking it further away from the modernisation discourse of the 1950s and 60s that was mainly focusing on development as economic growth. Amartya Sen (1999) is a prominent representative of these 'other voices'. For him, development is "an integrated process of expansion of substantive freedoms [and capabilities] that connect with one another." (Sen 1999, 8) The more recent debate about development since the 2000s focuses on a critique of development aid (Moyo 2009; Shikwati 2005). In her book *Dead Aid*, Moyo dismisses Western aid programmes entirely, "aid doesn't work, hasn't worked and won't work"; it is "no longer part of the potential solution, it's part of the problem – in fact aid is the problem." (Moyo 2009, 46;47). Looking at the valuable work certain international and local NGOs are conducting, such an assessment seems too harsh. Nowadays, rather than forging dependencies (one of Moyo's arguments against aid), practical development work adopted help for self-help as a widespread approach.

> "By the turn of the millennium, *participation, partnership* and *empowerment* had become central concepts in the *mainstream* development discourse (e.g., MFA/Danida, 2000; Sida, 2002; UNDP, 2003; World Bank, 2002). From constituting an alternative development approach focusing on the micro level – the people, the community, the grassroots – and mainly promoted by NGOs, participation and partnership are now central at the macro level in mainstream development policy." (Mikkelsen 2005, 56)

Critics of the participation concept view it as "a mere technical fix that leaves inequitable global and local relations of power, and with it the root causes of poverty, unchallenged" (Cornwall in Mikkelsen 2005, 55) while others point to the possibility of a new paradigm that aims at achieving self-development (Pretty and Gujit in Mikkelsen 2005, 55). Thinking about development and the role of NGOs will help to assess if the participatory approach really accounts for the breadth of individual social identities consisting of a variety of elements including gender.

Certain work that looks specifically at the intersection between women's lives and NGO intervention will be helpful for my research such as Wallace, Porter and Ralph-Bowman's article (2013) on "Aid, NGOs and the realities of women's lives: a perfect storm". Or, Hochfield's article (2007) on "Participation, Values and Implementation: Three Research Challenges in Developing Gender-Sensitive Indicators". Various articles from the 1990s and the 2000s seem to have a 'value question' at their core whether the work that NGOs are conducting is 'good' (Fisher 1997) and whether NGOs can 'make a difference' (Bebbington, Hickey and Mitlin 2008).

All this points us to the question what actually are the indicators for success when it comes to planned interventions of INGOs i.e. in local communities in Ghana and to what extent do these measurements for success overlap with the social realities, needs and ideas of the people living in these local communities? My research attempts at giving some answers to these questions.

Short bio note

Fanny was born and raised in Vienna, Austria and completed her Diploma Studies in History (BA and MA combined) at the University of Vienna, Austria focussing on Sub-Saharan post-colonial African history. She also completed a Master Programme in International Studies at Aarhus University, Denmark focusing on the theory of development (cooperation) and its implementation. She collaborated on the joint research project *Towards Good Society: Conceptualizing the Social Through the Economic from the 1930s until Today.* Fanny lived in Ethiopia for four months doing an internship at the Austrian Embassy in Addis Ababa. She moved to England

and in early 2015, she started working for Y Care International, a youth-focused NGO conducting development work in Sub-Saharan Africa. In October 2015, she started her MPhil/PhD at the dpu (UCL) and has worked until February 2016 as an Assistant Programme Officer at Plan UK focusing on delivering microfinance to adolescents, mainly young girls, in the Global South.

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[1] I am at the beginning of my PhD Research, having started with my Research Degree in October 2015.