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Performing Development: Women's NGOs, Donors, and the Postcolonial Ghanaian State

by

Saida Hodzic

DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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Medical Anthropology

in the

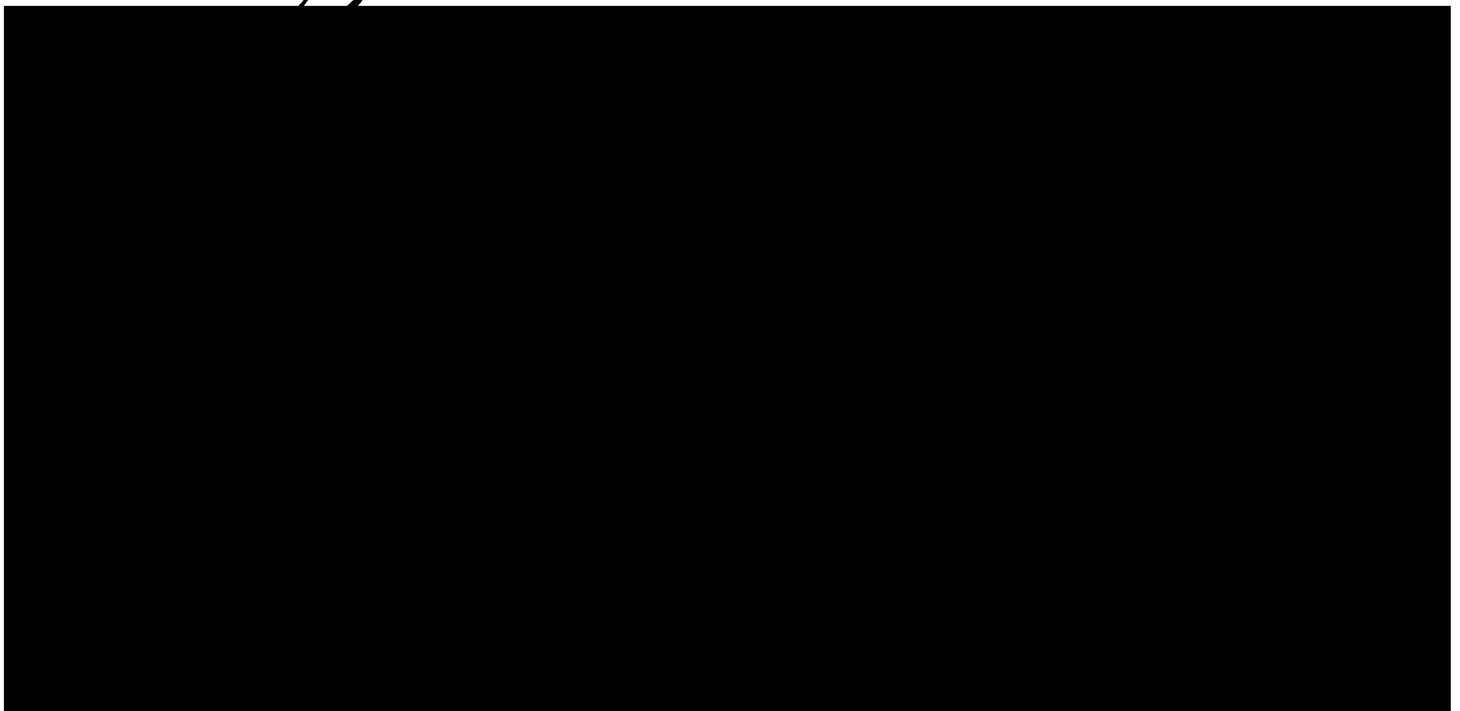
GRADUATE DIVISION

of the

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN FRANCISCO

AND

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY



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by

Saida Hodžić

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Acknowledgments are a peculiar genre, a genre that fosters normative gratitude. Many of us feel grateful, of course, but why do we all have to express it at the beginning of the dissertation – rather than, say, in letters to those we feel grateful to – and express it in the same way? This section – acknowledgments – has become the normative form.

I have struggled with having to express gratitude on demand from the time I was four and my parents told me to kiss my grandfather's hand and thus show that I was grateful for the ten thousand *dinars* he had given me for *Bajram*. I continued to struggle with normative gratitude in the first three years of graduate schools, when my vegetarian co-op (a very Berkeley community) somehow decided by consensus that we would all hold hands before dinner and thus express gratitude to the cooks and an abstract entity no one dared to name God. Call it a personal quirk or a cultural difference, but expressing gratitude to someone who is not present still unsettles me.

Expressing gratitude through acknowledgments in Ph.D. dissertations is particularly peculiar, because dissertations are rarely read, and almost never read by people we express gratitude towards. Many anthropologists express gratitude to people with whom they conducted research, but how many of those people ever see the acknowledgments? This makes me question who the ideal readers of acknowledgments are. I suspect that the readers are not the people we feel grateful to, but members of the academic community who we hope will read our work. Acknowledgments might be an act of communication between the author and the academic community, rather than

between the author and the persons named in acknowledgments. If this is the case, then expressing gratitude in acknowledgments is an act of performance meant to demonstrate something about the author, thus defining the author and creating rapport between the author and the academic reader. The persons named in acknowledgments demonstrate the author's academic and ethnographic networks and establish the author's credibility. The people we are grateful to appear secondary to this process.

Having said this, I must admit that I enjoy reading many acknowledgments. In acknowledgments, we see the personal side of authors, a side written out of many ethnographies. I still care about the person behind the author even though we are not supposed to do so (for caring about the personal is considered unsophisticated). Fiction writers in particular get upset when their readers ask them "What is autobiographical in your work, what is true?" One of my favorite writers, Aleksandar Hemon, discusses at length why this question is irrelevant. Nevertheless, I find the personal, the "real" appealing. The author is dead, I agree with Barthes and others – my text, like any other, escapes my control and intentions – but I still enjoy finding the traces of the real person and often find them in acknowledgments.

Furthermore, if I have learned one thing from Ghanaian NGOs, it is that performances matter. Performative acts are powerful tools of negotiating external demands and internal contradictions. Just because something is performed, it is no less real. Performances question the very distinction between the real or authentic on the one hand, and fake or staged on the other.

My Gratitude Goes Toward...

This dissertation is built upon lives, experiences, predicaments, and insights of people at different continents and thrives on their generosity and kindness. I am thankful to Ghanaian NGOs I studied and their directors and workers. They not only welcomed me as a researcher, but also provided stimulating comments and support. I am thankful to all the people I interviewed. They opened their hearts, told me their stories, and invited me into their lives. Due to confidentiality, these Ghanaian colleagues and interlocutors remain unnamed. These are the people to whom expressing gratitude directly is the only possible way.

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topics in this dissertation and the book and papers to come. Nita inspired me to write Chapter 4, among others.

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ABSTRACT

Saida Hodžić

This dissertation is a critical ethnography of domestic NGO efforts to empower women in the Upper East region of Ghana. Over the course of fourteen months, I participated in NGO workshops, observed their meetings with government officials and international donors, and lived in and studied rural communities. This dissertation examine how domestic NGOs produce new fields of development interventions and political spaces in the context of colonial legacies, neoliberal governance, global and regional inequalities, and the state performance of commitment to the global norm of gender equity. Through ethnography of NGO workshops, everyday discourses, and public performances, I show that culture becomes the main terrain of governmentality and of political struggles between NGOs and the government.

I analyze how, when confronted with NGO demands for domestic violence legislation, the government of Ghana frames women's advocacy as an imposition of foreign norms. The government argues that traditional authorities such as chiefs should regulate the domestic sphere. In so doing, the government, I argue, propagates a neo-traditional discourse of custom as a form of rule and advocates a return to customary law. Interestingly, the government advocates for this colonial invention to legitimize its current neoliberal vision. This poses a difficult problem for women's NGOs who oppose this vision and fashion Ghanaian women as citizens. I analyze how women's NGOs politicize the question of violence against the backdrop of their competing desires for

state protection and autonomous civil society, their production of the marginalized as the proper subjects of development, and their negotiations of global power relations and Ghana's geopolitics.

This work challenges the conviction, pervasive in the anthropology of neoliberalism, that NGOs weaken the state, and argues that analyses of power relations in development must begin with a nuanced understanding of NGO predicaments. By closely attending to the complex social effects of NGO interventions, I revise dominant portraits of NGOs as either pawns of neoliberal development or revolutionaries of the global South.

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INTRODUCTION

COMING TO QUESTIONS

The questions now central to this dissertation have emerged out of fieldwork – I went to Ghana to study one set of questions but returned with another. Many of the questions I discuss in my dissertation were first raised by Africanists in Accra, professors at the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana, Legon. In the summer of 2002, I lived on campus and established contacts with the Institute. I returned in 2003, research proposal in hand. I approached Akua Annan, a Ghanaian anthropologist of gender who told me to see two of her colleagues from northern Ghana, Emmanuel Adombila and Abdul Rahman.[1] They each read my proposals and in following conversations, commented on the questions my research raised for them.

"I like your proposal and only have one comment," professor Abdul Rahman said. "Try to understand and portray the unique harshness and hostility of the environment in northern Ghana, the poverty of the place. Consider the bigger picture and let others know about its dynamics. And look at how people treat each other – some men treat women as actual objects."

He then continued to tell me his understanding of NGOs and Ghanaian politics. "NGOs follow the money," he said. "I knew some NGOs that did work in environment, but when Ghana got a million dollars for advocacy about AIDS, they all switched to this.

---

[1] These names are pseudonyms; I consider personal communication confidential. All other personal names and names of NGOs have been changed.

They claim in their reports now that they achieved a lot, but that's not the case. And I'm not happy with their focus on advocacy," he added. "It becomes a media thing and it's stage-managed. NGOs become more interested in showing the pictures of their workshops and getting media attention than working on their cause. And their efforts are inconsistent."

He also criticized donors and the government. "There was a review by UNDP or UNFPA," he said, "that showed that 60% of project money has been spent on workshops, 20% on office expenditure, and 20% on actual project work. And the government designs all sorts of policies – Ghana's policies look great on paper. But the policies and laws hardly ever reach the ground. The financial input shows the lack of the government's commitment and resolve. The government is also inconsistent in its efforts and works sporadically."

Emmanuel Adombila was also critical of NGOs' and government's double standards. "The gender people talk about gender equality, but then they go home, and how do they treat their wives?" he asked. "People say what they believe others want them to say, so everybody talks about gender these days because that's fashionable and brings some money. But nothing changes. The other day the Vice President went to the Upper West region and condemned widow inheritance, and said the government would make it illegal. But how does he treat his own wife – isn't he just giving lip service to the gender issue? And even though he is from northern Ghana, he is a Muslim, so he doesn't understand widow inheritance; that's not something Muslims and Christians do. And

where is all this rushing to legislate going, how much of the everyday life can the government really legislate?"

Akua Annan had other kinds of comments. "In your proposal you say you want to think critically about law as a tool for social change. Lawyers don't see law as a problem, they are stuck in a legalistic mode. Culture is a problem for them. But what about economic issues? And what about the class differences between lawyers and those they legislate about? It's good you're framing this in terms of ethnicity and class." She then asked me: "So, have you talked to the Ministry of Women's Affairs like you say in your proposal?"

I responded, "Yes, but they didn't have much to say; they referred me to NCWD [the National Council on Women and Development], saying that NCWD works in communities."

"Well, at least they've accepted that NCWD is the implementing agent," Annan said, shrugging her shoulders. "Asmah [the Minister] used to obliterate this completely."

I found these comments interesting when I first heard them, but did not think that they would become the focus of my research. I considered the government policies, the reach of the state, NGO hypocrisy, the lawyers' take on culture, and the Ministry of Women's Affairs politics as background only, and not something that I would examine. I understood that NGOs provoked everyone's interests and anxieties, but I wanted to begin with a specific set of questions. My research aim was to find out how NGOs try to stop female genital cutting and thus shape rural women's subjectivities, making citizens. Because of this, I kept in mind Rahman's suggestion to contextualize my research within

Ghana's geo-politics, but filed the comments away, along with thousands of pages of field notes and materials.

Almost two years after these encounters, I looked again in this file and discovered, to my surprise, that the questions the Africanists from Legon raised had become central to my dissertation. Professor Admobila first alerted me to notice that the politics of religion are more complicated than the "Christian South" and "Muslim North" paradigm explains. In the hierarchy of Ghana's religion, Islam may come second – after Christianity – but ancestor worship is in last place, devalued as "traditional" and "backward."[2]

In the following chapters, I will write about the specificity of the North-South relations, and the ways in which NGOs replicate regional inequalities even though they are committed to empowering the marginalized. I will discuss the ways in which cosmopolitan lawyers see culture as a problem, but are actually moderate in their disapproval of tradition compared to northern NGOs for whom tradition is the intimate enemy. I will make visible the discrepancies between donors', NGOs' and government's commitments to partnership, participation, and empowerment, and their actual practices. I will analyze the struggles over laws, policies, and their importance and the debates on the reach of the state in the everyday life, focusing on the fights between women's NGOs and the Ministry of Women's Affairs.

I am beginning the dissertation with this story to acknowledge the insights that Ghanaian scholars shared with me. I take it as a good sign that the points they raised

[2] In her work on northern Ghanaian migrants, Barbara Meier has discussed these hierarchies in detail (2003).

became central to my project. I like to think that I have come to these same questions because I am writing about phenomena that matter to Ghana's culture and politics.

But I write this story for other reasons as well. This story of my first academic encounters in Ghana illustrates some of the panics and debates that NGOs provoke. Throughout this dissertation, I will argue that NGOs attract much criticism because they produce hopes and anxieties. The critiques of NGOs mirror the hopes they evoke and anxieties they engender due to their newly powerful presence and visibility. For example, in Chapter 2, we will see that the equation of NGOs with "civil society" has made NGOs subject to harsh critiques, while it has also allowed them to reposition themselves in development and politics.

Finally, this story alerts us to the larger task of ethnography. The professors who raised these points considered them worthy of conversation, but not necessarily worthy of – or suitable for – writing and scholarship. They offered these comments as common truths – things that all keen observers of Ghana know, but do not examine further. My dissertation thus performs a delicate and dangerous task of translation and transfer. By transferring these questions from the realm of common truths to the realm of ethnographic arguments, I hope to open up new conversations.

Transferring common knowledge to research questions is especially important for a study of the development industry. This industry operates in the realm of Ferguson has called "global shadows" – the doubling of "official" and hidden, unofficial forms (2006: 16). The gap between development discourses and practices is one example of such doubling. Ghanaians know this and many acknowledge it behind closed doors, but never

bring it to the public realm. This dissertation is an attempt to do just that. My purpose is not to reveal unknown truths – the story shows that the phenomenon of the shadows is widely known – but to shift the discourses of and about development through the work of ethnography.

Anthropology of NGOs

Scholars usually classify studies of NGOs in two camps: the camp of skeptics and the camp of believers. In writing about existing research on NGOs, scholars routinely divide their literature reviews into these two sections. They place believers who "report too favorably on the social movements or NGOs they study" in the first camp (Murdock 2003: 508). Believers purportedly "characterize the recent multiplication of NGOs – and of institutional backing for their work – as a 'quiet' revolution in the developing (and development) world" (Leve and Karim 2001: 54).

In the camp of skeptics, anthropologists place scholars with a "gleeful, 'trash and burn' approach to exposing the exclusionary politics of some NGO employees" (Murdock 2003: 508). Skeptics are said to "argue that the very infusion of capital into the NGO sector today must be understood as a deliberate attempt to undermine class struggles (or solidarities) by privileging alternative forms of identity such as gender and indigeneity and that it effectively produces a new form of imperialism by circumventing, and thus undermining the authority of, the state (Leve and Karim 2001: 54). Thus, skeptics are not only a little weary of NGOs, but make large claims about NGOs' relation to capital and exploitation.

I agree that much literature on NGOs – particularly armchair studies of NGOs – engages in this kind of a dichotomy. In Chapter 2, we will see how in popular understandings of NGOs and in wider academic circles, NGOs are polarized. However, next to theories of NGOs which take their "grassroots" claims for granted, or which demonize NGOs, another, subtler, kind of anthropological scholarship has recently emerged. As Leve and Karim themselves write, they do not accept "either the idealistic claim that NGOs work to protect the vulnerable and oppressed groups against the tyranny of the state and global capital, or the opposite, that NGOs are the instruments of an emergent neocolonialism" (2001: 55). Most recent anthropological literature on NGOs is rather complex. It is definitely more cynical than idealistic, but it exhibits a wide range of positions within this framework. In the rest of this chapter, I will frame my own work in response to anthropological analyses of NGOs read through the prisms of contradictions and governmentality.

Doing Good? Exploring NGO Contradictions

One trend in the anthropology of NGOs is an attempt to compare NGO self-representations and their practices. NGOs represent themselves, and are represented by others as moral actors who "do good." I got my first taste of this dynamic when NGOs questioned the purpose of my work. "What will your research do for our people?" is a question I initially received from several Ghanaian NGO workers. While this question merits a careful deliberation, I was surprised that NGOs were the ones asking it. Not only were they speaking as patrons of the "people," but by questioning "research," they

established a dichotomy between research and development. By questioning the usefulness of research, NGOs presented their own work as inherently useful.

This was confirmed in my future interactions with NGO workers - they all saw their work as unequivocally "doing good." Workers for NGOs I studied portrayed themselves as responding to the call of the marginalized, and as succeeding in this effort, understood as a heroic one. Some Ghanaian NGO workers represented their commitment to the organization in moral terms, claiming that their devotion to the pro-marginalized cause compels them to stay with the NGO. This is how a worker for the NGO Widows and Orphans Fellowship explained this to me: "Look, neither Alex nor Janet have received a salary in four months. The donors are only funding our project cost, no staff salaries. But they keep working because they are committed; they were both orphans themselves." And in my conversations and interviews with Elizabeth, she kept pointing out how she does not get any salary from her NGO, the Women's Development Center, and receives only perks, such as a car for her project.

NGOs elsewhere represent themselves in the same light. Sharma, for example, writes that functionaries of the organization she studied "saw themselves as allied with a just, legitimate, and compassionate NGO world" (2006: 72). She quotes one worker: "The salaries [we] get are not enough for survival. So the people who work in MS do so only because they have a certain devotion toward their work. You don't see that in government departments [where] people come only for the sake of their salaries" (ibid.). Thus, NGO workers represent themselves as moral agents and their work as work of saving lives. As Pigg and Adams write, "the stakes of identifying what counts as success

and what counts as failure become even higher, in part because they are articulated as matters of 'life and death' and thus become intensely morally charged" (2005: 15).

I believe that one of the main motivations for anthropologists to examine critically whether NGOs "do good" stems from a reaction to these moral claims. NGOs provoke moral panics and critical debates because they represent themselves as moral actors. Some anthropologists, such as Karim, acknowledge this: "it is both timely and necessary for such stock-taking of NGO operations to occur because of their ability to invent themselves as the saviors of the poor" (Karim 2001: 104). This is also how some scholars framed my project. For example, a Ghanaian scholar at the Institute of African Studies in Accra was excited about my project because he thought that I would be testing the validity of NGOs: "Good, good! All these NGOs saying that they empower women, but we don't know if they really do that!"

Ever since Fisher asked if NGOs actually "do good" (1997), anthropologists have explored contradictions between NGOs' moral claims and observed practices. Gill, for instance, writes that NGOs have not "done good": "The principal argument is that the NGO boom . . . has not empowered independent, grassroots organizations to represent their constituencies. Rather, NGOs have strengthened the ability of a professional middle-class to speak for impoverished groups" (1997: 146). Other scholars such as Edelman (1999) and Abramson (1999) also criticize NGOs in these terms. Crampton's new study of Ghanaian mediation NGOs asks the same question: "Are NGOs really as altruistic as they say?" (forthcoming). Karim goes a step further and writes than NGOs have actually done harm:

> Debt relations introduced through the lending policies of microcredit NGOs have resulted in new instruments of control over targeted groups, such as poor women. . . . Women, who are supposed to be the beneficiaries of NGO programs, are often victimized by NGO policies on multiple levels, from loan repayments to becoming deployed as political subjects to achieve the goals of an NGO leader (2001: 104).

The gap between NGO claims and practices is large and interesting enough that much of the anthropology of NGOs examines the resulting contradictions. Weisgrau, for example, writes: "My intention is neither to evaluate nor critique the work of specific organizations or individuals, but to make explicit some of the contradictions and conflicts that inhabit this interactive process" (1997: 3). In her work, Weisgrau criticizes the contradictions between the NGO claim that their work is "participatory" and the patronage relationships they actually form. The contradictions of "participation" have also been explored by others (Bornstein 2003, Cernea 1988); Weisgrau calls participation "one of the universal structural contradictions inherent in nongovernmental organizations" (1997: 97).

Hodgson (2001) examines other gaps and contradictions within Maasai indigenous NGOs. She argues that while these NGOs represent themselves as egalitarian, they reinforce gender, ethnic, and class inequalities. She also points to the gap between the NGOs' alleged intention to protect their "tradition" and their manipulations of the very concept of tradition in the interest of men (2001: 235 ff.). Two recent ethnographies also emphasize contradictions inherent in NGO work. Englund criticizes Malawian human rights NGOs for impeding the democratic struggles of "the poor" (2006), and

Elyachar argues that the promising technology of microcredits perpetuates informal economy, thus further dispossessing Egyptian laborers (2005).

I also examine contradictions in Ghanaian NGO worlds. In Chapter 4, I analyze the differential between the NGOs' claims about cultural legitimacy and local belonging and their simultaneous distancing from, and derision of, the local. But I also want to point out problems with this paradigm.

Murdock and Fisher have already highlighted some pitfalls of research focused on contradictions: "There is a tendency to let our own political convictions guide research and to moralize and stereotype NGOs according to often unacknowledged criteria" (Murdock 2003: 508). And, as Fisher himself pointed out, we cannot judge whether NGOs do good outside our own political leanings and our stance towards the development industry (1997).

I see other problems in addition to these. First, this framework is reactive. By organizing scholarship around a critique of NGO (self)-representations, we fall into the trap of looking for "truths" of NGO work and forego other questions. There is more to be said about NGOs than whether or not they fulfill their claims. For example, rather than stalling the question at the contradiction and only asking "Are NGOs truly doing what they say?" we can ask, "Why do NGOs live amidst contradictions?" I agree with Murdock's proposal: "Our job as researchers may not be to ask whether they [NGOs] are 'doing good,' but rather to ask what are the constraints and affordances under which they attempt to 'do good' as they define it" (2003: 508).

I see NGOs' self-representation as a discursive strategy of survival. NGOs try to live up to the image of moral actors and heroes because this enables them to secure funding. Discursively, NGO workers are not allowed to be and act like any ordinary employees. The mission of development and empowerment, in the donors' terms, is a moral one. For example, the non-profit structure of NGOs places them within harsh constraints. As Nita pointed out, donors rarely fund staff salaries. The Ghanaian public views any personal gain of NGO workers with suspicion. In popular imagination, NGOs should not make any profits, and those working for them should do so out of pure altruism. Thus, presenting themselves in moral terms works both for and against NGOs. They secure legitimacy with such self-representations, but they also remain trapped in a discourse of altruism and non-profit which makes it difficult to discuss economic obstacles to their work.

Furthermore, NGOs are full of contradictions because they must negotiate the imposition of universalistic norms. Ghanaian women's NGOs ensure their survival by making themselves intelligible through global languages of development and women's rights. In this effort to make themselves recognizable, NGOs also make claims they do not uphold. But rather than criticizing NGOs for these contradictions, we should question the conditions under which NGOs find themselves. We should criticize the fact that NGOs' must make themselves intelligible within a universal framework. I consider the appropriation, manipulation, and co-production of universalistic languages a strength of NGOs, but a strength that comes at a cost. I would like us to imagine an alternative world

in which NGOs can make themselves intelligible in languages over which form and content they have more say.

NGOs and Governmentality

Ferguson's critique of a World Bank development project as an "anti-politics machine" (1994) along with Gupta's postcolonial critique of development as "orientalism transformed into science" (1998: 37), and their later elaborations of transnational governmentality (Ferguson and Gupta 2002), have influenced a whole generation of scholarship on development and NGOs. Much of the anthropological NGO literature focuses on NGOs as agents of governmentality.[3] For example, Peterson writes: "Up until at least the World War II, the primary agency of governmentality was located in the state, in both national and international contexts. In the past couple of decades, a new agency has come on the scene: the non-governmental organization (NGO), principally an extra-statal and extra-national institution (2001: 78). In her work on NGO involvement in bioprospecting and in making of environmental treaties, such as the Convention on Biodiversity, Peterson bemoans the new role of NGOs. She argues that NGO involvement in policy-making and their collaboration with industries leaves little room for "public debate" and "alternative viewpoints" (2001: 86).

Pigg and Adams give an overview of the framework which analyzes development as a site of governmentality: "Governments and policy makers are able to identify

[3] While this literature bears the imprint of Foucault and his analyses of governmentality and power (1984, 1991), his work is rarely discussed. Instead, much of this literature relies on Ferguson's (1994), Gupta's (1998), and, less commonly, Escobar's (1995) interpretations of Foucault. As a result, the range of analyses of NGOs and governmentality is rather narrow.

humanitarian projects aimed at 'preventing death.' And while such plans do actually prevent death in a number of instances, they also make possible a new kind of governance that, due to its reliance on science, some have termed distinctly modern. A technical language of health, while seeming to be solely about the well-being of bodies, emerges as a substitute for politics and in some cases for economics as well. 'Health' and 'life' become nodes of control, dominion, and erasure; they are never straightforward road maps to humanitarian practice" (2005: 15). "Morality" is still a concern in this framework, but in a different way. The question this literature raises is not: "Are NGOs truly moral?" but "What kind of morality do NGOs propagate and shape?"

In line with the larger field of analyzing development as a site of governmentality (Pigg and Adams 2005), anthropologists studying NGOs also ask how NGOs (re)make subjects of development and tie them to neo-liberal values and aspirations. Bornstein, for example, writes: "Development makes distinctions among human beings and attempts to make new persons in the process. These discourses of development and accumulation, relational and morally charged, reconstitute previously existing ethical ground in the lives of those who do the "developing" and those who are being "developed" (2001: 60). Bornstein's ethnography of faith-based development centers on the competing discourses between the World Vision's Christian leanings and the mainstream development industry (2003).

Leve also studies NGO projects as subject-making, following a call to count empowerment programs "among the 'technologies of citizenship' that liberal democracies rely on to constitute their subjects as the kind of disciplined, productive citizens that such

states require" (2001: 109). For her, NGOs help the Nepali state and "international hierarchies" extend the exercise of power. She writes: "'Empowering people is based on remaking individuals – or encouraging individuals to remake themselves – in conformity with those ideals of personhood implicit in neoliberal thought, such as agency, autonomy, economic rationality, and public participation. The expected outcome is an individualized citizen-subject who shares the fundamental principles of the neoliberal state" (2001: 119). I see Leve's claim as an interesting hypothesis, and an important question. However, she never provides an account of how actual Nepali women responded to these subject-making technologies, beyond the fact that Nepali women did go to NGO-provided literacy classes.

I take the claims about a complete transformation of subjectivities with caution. Ghanaian NGOs are agents of governmentality, I agree. Strategies that regulate life and sexuality are one example of governmentality in Ghana. Ghana takes pride in being the third country in the world to develop a population (or family planning) policy in 1968. From the government's perspective, this policy was not successful. In many parts of the Upper East region, for example, nobody in the rural areas practiced the "modern" methods of family planning – until the 1990's. At that time, NGOs became involved in population projects, making sex a matter of regulation and planning in northern Ghana. As a result, the NGO Rural Health and Development claims to have increased the usage of modern contraceptives by from 5% to 20%. However, while northern Ghanaians embraced the technologies of family planning, they did not necessarily embrace the NGO

discourses. On the contrary, NGOs convince villagers to use family planning in terms of local persuasion, not global discourses (Hodzic 2006).

One of the reasons why scholars understand NGOs as remaking subjects is because they uncritically follow NGO claims about their empowering effects. While Leve (2001) and others scrutinize NGOs in many ways, they accept the NGO collapse of women as subjects of discourse and intervention. I believe that our analyses must differentiate between NGO claims and their actual effects. Leve acknowledges this briefly when she writes, "'The empowered woman,' *or at least the bourgeois version of her envisioned by major aid agencies working in Nepal over the past twenty years*, is defined by those forms of rationality and subjectivity that correspond to what Rose has identified as 'advanced liberal' strategies of government being promoted through international development and the work of NGOs" (2001: 109). Thus, while the NGOs Leve studied envision a new, "advanced liberal," subject, their visions may not correspond to transformations of actual women's subjectivities. Leve herself seems to recognize that the envisioned neoliberal subject of development is not necessarily a subject made.

We need to distinguish between the subjects of NGO discourses and the subjects of NGO practices. Both are valid, but different, objects of analysis. As the literature on NGO contradictions shows, NGO discourses and practices are often incongruent. I am alert to the difference between discourse and practice because in Ghana, rural women are the subjects of NGO discourses, but not subjects of NGO interventions in practice. Chapter 4 will show that the envisioned subject of development is not the subject NGOs actually produces. I will argue that NGOs work on themselves rather than on rural

women. NGO workshops function as sites of participatory learning that remake NGO workers into modern political subjects.

Misconceptions about NGOs and Consequences for Theory

Regardless of theoretical approach to NGO analysis, much scholarship on NGOs does not incorporate ethnographic analyses and theoretical discussions. Fisher raised this as a problem in 1997, claiming that theories about NGOs are based "more on faith than on fact" (1997: 441). In 2005, this still remains the case; Igoe writes, "much of what is known about NGOs is based more on what is believed about them than on empirical observations of what NGOs actually do in practice" (2005: xi).[4]

I consider ethnographic investigations of NGOs important because theories about "NGOs" seem to have little to do with Ghanaian organizations I studied. I believe that this is not because the Ghanaian situation is exceptional, but because these theories have not been built upon research (and research always entails questioning). Rather, much scholarly knowledge about NGOs is based on common truths. Since NGOs are ubiquitous, many scholars feel safe to discuss them as if we all share the same common truths. For this reason, NGOs have been discussed and judged preemptively. This has foreclosed careful questioning and careful theorizing.

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[4] I do not make quite the same distinction between "faith and fact" or "belief and empirical observation" because ethnography is also based on faith. Ethnographic writing demands that the reader have faith in the author. As ethnographers, we rarely publish our data or make it visible. (In contrast, those analyzing novels know that their readers will have access to their "data"). Instead, we publish analyses and trust that our readers will trust our word and integrity as well as have faith in our interpretations. For this reason, ethnography is always "faith-based." However, building on Fisher's and other critiques of knowledge about NGOs, I do distinguish between theories of NGOs based on common truths, and theories of NGOs based on questioning of such truths. In my case, this questioning takes place through ethnography.

In this dissertation, I will offer arguments and theories about NGOs, as well as ethnographic descriptions. I hope to avoid contributing to more knowledge production based on common truths. This is a multi- purpose ethnography. I will engage in different orders of discourses – correcting misconceptions about NGOs, challenging accepted ways of discussing them, and offering new insights about them.

Scholars and development practitioners alike discuss NGOs as if we all agree on what NGOs are. But scholars mean different things by "NGOs" – NGOs encompass "everything from multi-million-dollar organizations that operate on multiple continents to agencies that de facto represent commercial interests, grassroots alliances, and village-based religious or cultural groups" (Leve and Karim 2001: 53). Peterson calls NGOs "extra-statal and extra-national" institutions, implying that they exist outside of state sovereignty (2001: 78). Yet, this definition only applies to a small number of international NGOs, not the dozens of thousands of domestic NGOs that have emerged in the global South.

The most dominant and consequential misconception about NGOs is that NGOs are all alike, and all international. Many scholars assume that NGOs are either located in the West, or subjected to Western interests. This misconception arises out of the popular imagination in the West, as well as out of the social science interest in international NGOs. In US popular culture, NGOs are understood to be *international* organizations. For example, when a US nonprofit organization reported on NGO-government struggles in Ghana, it explained authoritatively that NGOs are "nonprofit *international* organizations made up of private citizens with the goal of managing resources or

implementing projects that bring about social change" (Institute for Global Ethics 2004). The misconception that all NGOs are international organizations is so prevalent that when reporting on a particular dispute between Ghanaian government and domestic NGOs, the Institute misrepresented Ghanaian NGOs as international.

Much scholarship about NGOs in the global South has been built on studies of international NGOs. For example, nearly a dozen theses have been written on the international NGO World Vision alone.[5] However, the worldwide boom in numbers of NGOs has been driven by domestic (also called local) organizations in countries of the global South. In Ghana, for example, several dozen international NGOs pale in comparison with the several thousand domestic NGOs. Ishkanian has written that in Armenia, 2,500 domestic NGOs – the majority of which are led by women – are registered with the government (2000); Hadiwinata estimates that there are more than 60,000 domestic NGOs in Indonesia (2003).

However, social scientists have generalized about *all* NGOs based on studies – and imaginaries – of international NGOs. This has multiple theoretical consequences. First, by assuming that NGOs are of Western origin or only promulgate Western interests, scholars discursively rob African NGOs of their agency. If we study how Western planners dominate development (e.g. Pigg 1997), we cannot but think that development practitioners from the global South have no agency.

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[5] Bornstein has studied World Vision in Zimbabwe (2001, 2003), Johnson in Tanzania (1999), McDonic in Ghana and Canada (2004), Schellert in Rwanda (2004), Haines in Canada and India (1998), Githumbi in Kenya (1996), Beyer in Malawi (2004), Krech in Sierra Leone (2003), Cochran in Panama (2003), and Binnie in Chad (2002).

Without looking at how African NGOs negotiate the neoliberal age and live in it, we are left with the assumption that they are victims, or by some accounts middlemen, of Empire. Second, if we do not examine our assumptions, our conversations become trapped in the same paradigm. I believe that we need to treat scholarly analytical tools with the same care and skepticism with which we treat the NGOs' claims about their heroism.

One of such tools is the notion that NGOs weaken the state, based on the misconception that NGOs take over state functions.

NGOs and the "Traditional" State Functions

> Some NGOs are taking over social services previously delivered by governments at the national level. Others are exerting new influences in areas traditionally covered by the state in international agencies, such as providing official development assistance and negotiating the terms of multilateral agreements. (Reich 2002: 1673)

In subsequent chapters (especially Chapters 4 and 5), I will argue that the concept of tradition is fleeting and contested, and that it emerges out of modernity. This chapter foreshadows that argument by contesting academic theories of the "traditional" role of the state and the ways in which NGOs weaken it.

According to anthropologists of development, NGOs are taking over the "traditional" role of the government. Many anthropologists assert that NGOs are doing work that in the past was done by the state and conceive of NGOs as "taking over" its functions. When discussing why states have become weaker, Ferguson asserts, "more and more of the *functions of the state* were *"outsourced"* to nongovernmental organizations

(NGOs)" (2005: 379). Leve writes that a multitude of NGOs provide development and welfare services that "previously would have been managed directly by the donor institutions or the Nepal state" (2001: 108). Others see the state as "*surrendering* key areas of governance" to NGOs and ask, "What does it mean for NGOs to take over so many services and powers *traditionally reserved* for the state?" (Leve and Karim 2001: 53, 55 emphases mine). Paley asserts that NGOs are "used to deliver services that, before structural adjustment policies, were provided by the welfare state" (2001: 2).

"NGOs are taking over the functions of the state" is a phrase that has been accepted by scholars from different disciplines as well as development practitioners. This phrase, along with some variations, resurfaces on websites, in academic journals, and development reports. Scholars writing about NGOs assert briefly (in a clause, sentence, or at most a paragraph) that states have receded their functions to NGOs, and then go on to make arguments that build on this assumption. Cambell, a development practitioner, offers a more detailed and embedded discussion:

> The increase in resources channeled through NGOs since the 1970s has been accompanied by the *roll-back of the state* under structural adjustment programmes. This has resulted in *NGOs taking over functions previously provided by the state*, most clearly seen in social welfare provision. Donors have increasingly undertaken sub-contracting relationships with NGOs, where *NGOs implement donors' social welfare agenda* directly, rather than through state institutions. This has been referred to as the 'internationalisation of public welfare.' In development work, NGOs also have a tendency to *bypass state institutions*, establishing 'parallel structures' for implementation of projects. Here, community-based organisations, or user groups, are used for implementation, rather than local government (Cambell 1996: 9).

In his take on state weakness, Cambell asserts that NGOs take over functions of the state and embeds this assertion in a web of related common truths. This linear

narrative posits that the state actually fully complied with World Bank impositions and "rolled back," that NGOs merely implement a donor agenda – rather than say, also having their own – and that NGOs bypass state institutions. These assumptions are repeated in much of literature, yet they remain unexamined. Neither Cambell nor others substantiate these claims with a historical investigation of state functions or NGO projects. It is my sense that scholars base their notion that NGOs are "taking over functions of the state" within a normative conceptualization of what the state functions *should* be. The state is imagined to have once provided services or organized development initiatives, but not shown to have actually done so. These assertions about NGOs and their relationships to the state have made me embrace a rather careful approach to analysis. Instead of using the notion that NGOs weaken states as a taken for granted fact, I believe that we need to examine it. Thus, I will ask: are NGOs taking over state functions or doing something new?

African states are seen as "weak" by some development practitioners, donor governments, and leftist scholars alike – but for different reasons. My purpose is not to take a side in this debate, but show that it operates on a false assumption. I do not accept the assertion that African states are weak and corrupt, because these only perpetuate the existing clichés. For me, whether "African states" are weak or not is an open question, since the criteria of weakness are wide-ranging, African states are diverse, and this discourse serves donor purposes I disapprove of. Thus, my purpose here is not to debate whether or not the "African state" is weak, but to make explicit that the assertion that NGOs are contributing to its alleged weakness is an unexamined assumption. This

dissertation will argue that Ghanaian NGOs have not taken over functions of the state but created new fields of interventions.

What are weak states and why are they a problem? To contextualize my argument, I will address the contemporary notion of weak states, particularly weak African states. The answer to the previous question depends on whom we listen to, which values they promote, and whose interests they have in mind.

Donor Discourses

The discourse of "weak African states" is propagated by donor governments. They do not necessarily agree what weakens the state, but assert that African states are weak. Some donors attribute the "weakness" to the centralized state structures. For them, "weak" is also a code for "not democratic enough" and "not able to govern/develop successfully." For example, the Dutch development agency names "failing states" as one of the main reasons for what it sees as "stagnating development" in Africa:

> One of the main reasons for Africa's disappointing development record is the weak performance of African states. The countries of Sub-Saharan Africa are not the product of a gradual process of nation building but the result of a colonial legacy which has divided Africa into artificial units. Consequently, population groups with different cultures are grouped together arbitrarily and in some cases this has impeded the creation of proper nation states. Many leaders of African states operate traditional patronage systems and use public funding to keep these systems alive. Governments have become a means for self-enrichment and an instrument to promote the interests of specific population groups when privileges, public funding and jobs are being handed out. Rather than focusing on the need for change, growth and development, many African governments are more committed to holding on to positions and privileges. Against this background, they too often lack the political will to seriously tackle the problems confronting the continent. Although many countries have launched processes of democratisation and administrative reform, these are still fragile and have not yet properly taken root. . . . Africa does not possess enough institutional checks and balances: its democratic institutions are still underdeveloped, separation between legislative, executive and judicial powers is often not respected, its media - despite its often considerable achievements - is under heavy pressure from government, and respect for human rights appears in many cases to be a long-term goal. Corruption and crime are endemic. Under

> such conditions, failing states can become a refuge for criminals or even terrorists, with consequences that extend beyond national frontiers. (Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2003)

Here, the Dutch use the discourse of weakness of African states to blame these states for their current social, economic, and political conditions, contained in the notion of the "lack of development successes." In the Dutch reading, weak states are synonymous with "undeveloped states." But the policy I quoted also shows that the Dutch are worried about weak states because they are afraid of them. The Dutch assume that "undeveloped" countries can give rise to terrorists and thus endanger the West as well. They believe that strong states – as defined by the world powers – can prevent the rise of terrorism. This explains one of the reasons why the notion of "weak states" has gained popularity since 9/11.

The Fund for Peace, a non-profit organization based in Washington, D.C., in a joint venture with the journal *Foreign Policy*, has tried to codify this concept in an index. They explain why the notion of the weak or failing state matters:

> "America is now threatened less by conquering states than we are by failing ones." That was the conclusion of the 2002 U.S. National Security Strategy. For a country whose foreign policy in the 20th century was dominated by the struggles against powerful states such as Germany, Japan, and the Soviet Union, the U.S. assessment is striking. Nor is the United States alone in diagnosing the problem. U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan has warned that "ignoring failed states creates problems that sometimes come back to bite us." French President Jacques Chirac has spoken of "the threat that failed states carry for the world's equilibrium." World leaders once worried about who was amassing power; now they worry about the absence of it. Failed states have made a remarkable odyssey from the periphery to the very center of global politics. During the Cold War, state failure was seen through the prism of superpower conflict and was rarely addressed as a danger in its own right. In the 1990s, "failed states" fell largely into the province of humanitarians and human rights activists, although they did begin to consume the attention of the world's sole superpower, which led interventions in Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, and Kosovo. For so-called foreign-policy realists, however, these states and the problems they posed were a distraction from weightier issues of geopolitics. Now, it seems, everybody cares. The dangerous exports of failed states—whether international terrorists, drug barons, or weapons arsenals—are the subject of endless discussion and concern. (The Fund for Peace 2005)

This rationalization shows that for world powers and donor governments, weak states are a problem because in the global, interconnected age, they can "come back to bite us." But because the world powers do not agree on what makes a state weak (the World Bank cites 30 countries as weak, the CIA 20, and the British development agency DFID 46), the American non-profit organization has created a systematic appraisal of "weak states" in the "Failed State Index." This index uses twelve demographic, economic, and political indicators to measure the propensity of states to fail. These include massive movement of refugees, uneven economic development along group lines, criminalization of the state, and intervention of other countries. I see the very creation of this index as an attempt to allay the fear of weak states by transferring discussions about them into the realm of codified and thus scientific and "rational" data.

Liberal Nervousness: Africanists and the Threat of NGOs[6]

Scholars of Africa also believe that African states are "weak," but operate on a different value system from donors. According to Ferguson, "African states today are indeed 'failing' to perform most of the tasks that they are, in the terms of almost any normative political theory, 'supposed to do'" (2006: 8). However, Africanists are not worried about the consequences of state weakness for "us." Scholarly literatures lament

[6] I borrow the term "liberal nervousness" from Wendy Brown who uses it in a different sense, describing discussions about "appropriateness of state 'intervention' in familial and sexual issues" (1992: 8) While the specific nervousness Brown describes also prevails in Ghanaian anthropological circles, I use her term here in a different sense to refer to Africanist discussions about the appropriateness of NGO interventions.

the weakening of the African states because they oppose donor domination of African governance.

Africanists also have differing criteria of state weakness and claim that the factors that make states weaker are numerous. They write that African states have been downsized by World Bank-imposed structural adjustment policies (for Ghana, see Manuh 1994 and Mikell 1997); by being governed by corporations (Reno 1997, Watts 2001) and warlords (Reno 1998); or by having strategically important territories outside of state control (Ferguson 2006). Economic collapse and militarization are the most obvious factors Africanists associate with weakening states. However, many are also focusing on NGOs as a further threat to state sovereignty.

Some scholars claim that NGOs weaken the state by luring civil servants away from the government. The much-cited work of Joseph Hanlon proclaims that NGOs offer higher salaries than African governments and thus pull government employees into the NGO sector (Hanlon 2000, see also Ferguson 2005, Bornstein 2003). The misconception that NGOs are resource-rich is based on beliefs about *international* NGOs and their relationship to the state, and the extension of these beliefs to *all* NGOs. NGOs are assumed to have large amounts of capital at their disposal. But while select international NGOs, such as World Vision studied by Bornstein (2003), may have large amounts of capital and the ability to pull civil servants out of government jobs, Ghanaian NGOs face a very different financial reality. Most domestic NGOs cannot offer their employees adequate salaries necessary for basic survival. Ghanaian NGOs cannot afford to employ workers with higher education or former government workers. This may or may not be

the case for NGOs in other African countries. But given the similarities of the development industry across the continent, I believe that domestic NGOs in Africa – which make up the bulk of NGOs worldwide – are more like Ghanaian NGOs than like international NGOs.

Other scholars claim that NGOs take over not only civil servants, but also functions of the state. Ferguson is one of the few scholars who spell out the relationship between NGOs "taking over the functions of the state" and the state's weakening:

> According to the mythology of neoliberal globalization, the reforms of Africa's "structural adjustment" were supposed to roll back oppressive and overbearing states and to liberate a newly vital "civil society." The outcome was to be a new sort of "governance" that would be both more democratic and more efficient. Instead, the best scholarship on recent African politics suggests that the "rolling back" of the state provoked or exacerbated a far-reaching political crisis. As more and more of the *functions of the state* were *"outsourced"* to nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), state capacity deteriorated rapidly. Joseph Hanlon has pointed out that this should hardly be surprising, because the higher salaries and better terms of employment offered by NGOs quickly "decapacitated" African governments by luring the best civil servants out of the government ministries. Those who remained were often paid less than subsistence salaries, with inevitable consequences. Deprived both of capable staff and economic resources, states quickly became "hollowed out." State officials then set about a "privatization plan" of their own, what Jean-Francois Bayart, Stephen Ellis, and Beatrice Hibou have called "the criminalization of the state." (Ferguson 2005: 379, references omitted)

In this narrative, the assertion that NGOs have weakened the state takes center stage, built on the claim that "functions of the state were outsourced" to NGOs. The commonly cited "traditional function" of the state that NGOs have allegedly taken over is provision of social services. In the following chapters, I will examine this assertion and argue that NGOs – when they provide social services and services commonly associated with governments – produce new fields of interventions.

I sympathize with Africanists who are worried about the postcolonial forms of donor impositions on African countries. I am also opposed to the ideology of neo-liberalism and suspicious of its promises. However, I want to suggest that scholars have associated NGOs with both neoliberalism and weakening of the state too freely. Furthermore, they have conceptualized neoliberalism as a hegemonic totality, rather than a set of contradictory processes. As a result, scholars across disciplines have produced unwarranted anxieties about NGOs.

I would like us to have different kinds of discussions about NGOs and to examine the complex relationships between NGOs, donors, and governments, which should not be subsumed under the weak state theories. But before I turn to this in Chapters 5 and 6, I will argue in Chapter 2 that NGOs have not coopted the "traditional" role of the state, but produced new fields of interventions in development.

CHAPTER 1

MAKING THE MARGINS

Bolga, Between Rocks and Sand

Strolling around the San Francisco Ferry Building after my return from Ghana, I stumbled upon a surprise: a store full of Bolga baskets. Round baskets in traditional patterns and solid greens and blues decorated the corner of this fancy shop in the middle of San Francisco's premier gourmet marketplace. "Where do you get them from?" I asked the proprietors, an entrepreneurial couple of the post-hippy generation. "We get them from a middleman, he buys them for us," they answered. This was my first sighting of Bolga baskets in the US. Since then, I've seen them everywhere – in indoor, outdoor, and online markets.

This story seems like a good place to begin this introduction to Bolga, my main fieldwork location. Bolga is a town in the Upper East Region of Ghana, near the border that Ghana shares with Burkina Faso. The official name of the town, Bolgatanga, derives from "bole" (sand) and "tanga" (rocks). There is a lot of sand in Bolga; the town borders the Sahel, the semi-arid region south of the Sahara. The sand is always there, but when harmattan winds come from the Sahara, the sand envelops the people, houses, and objects within them, covering everyone and everything with a fine film of dust. There are not many rock formations left in Bolga, but the surrounding villages remind us of how the

town acquired its name. There, large granite boulders puncture the landscape. When the sun sets, the rocks turn the color of copper and dried rose-petals, becoming indistinguishable from the surrounding mud-huts.

Bolga is far from United States, but it is also very near. In this introduction, I will show the multiple ways in which Bolga is constituted as a "remote" location. Yet, seemingly remote places are always already connected to the global. Bolga has had relationships not only with Europe and the West, but with other parts of Africa: from the Trans-Saharan trade in salt and kola nuts, the border trade in produce and cloth, and the global trade in baskets, to movements of people via diaspora and development.

The story of Bolga baskets in San Francisco hints at another larger question which this dissertation addresses: the rural women and men of the Bolga region – many of whom make these brightly colored baskets – have a precarious relationship to the nation and to the global. We will see that they are both overtly present in some ways and strangely absent in others. They have become targets of NGO development projects because they have been historically marginalized.

The Town

Bolga is a vibrant town of 50,000. In 2004, it had a post office, a hospital, regional and district administration, several banks, a large market, numerous churches and mosques, several hotels and guesthouses, one internet café, and countless NGOs. Zinc-roofed concrete houses and an occasional assembly of mud huts form dense housing

networks. The street life is abundant and lively – stores and stalls line all the roads of the town's center.

Every surrounding spare inch of land is utilized for farming rice and millet, which color the earth with many shades of green during the rainy season. The upscale houses are on the outskirts of Bolga; their flower gardens are hidden behind the fences, but satellite dishes are easily visible on the roofs. Rickety old cars, modern jeeps and SUVs, and motorcycles share the roads. Bicycles, pedestrians, and market stalls share the side-walks (where they exist). Large trucks also crowd the roadside, parked there while the "lorry park" is being rebuilt. "Polythene," the ubiquitous black plastic bags for groceries and take-home food, are strewn around the sidewalks and paths. Goats, chickens, and pigs mill around the rain gutters and cows graze in the shade.

A large market that takes place every three days is the hub of this town. People from Bolga and the surrounding regions trade vegetables, clothes, jewelry, household and farming supplies, tools, and appliances at the market. Clothes are sown, wood is cut, and furniture is made here. Women buy goods in bulk and then resell them in their villages, at small stalls on the roadside of Bolga, or in front of their houses.

Things change quickly in Bolga, and not always for the better. In 2002, when I first visited, the town had two internet cafes and a bank with an ATM machine. In 2004, that bank had closed and the nearest ATM machine was located three hours away, in Tamale, the largest town in northern Ghana. Many years ago, Bolga had a meat-processing factory, its empty buildings a reminder of one of the few state investments in northern Ghana during the post-independence drive toward industrialization.

While Bolga is seen as the backwaters of the country, isolated and disconnected from the rest of the country and the world, it is a part of global movements of goods and people. Its economy is connected to many parts of the world through labor migration, trade, and the development industry. The labor migrants from the Upper East Region are found in all of southern Ghana. Every family I met had relatives in Kumasi, Accra, and other cities in the South. They crowd the lower labor ranks, working as porters, messengers, taxi drivers, cleaners, and construction workers. The streets of Accra are full of the Frafra craftsmen, mostly young men in search of fortune, selling their Bolga baskets. In Ghana's hierarchy of labor, Frafras are visibly on the bottom. The Upper East region also supplies the rest of the country with livestock. While cattle do not survive in the southern parts of the country infested by tsetse flies, they thrive, provided drought-free seasons, in the Upper East region. The global trade also connects Bolga to the rest of the world. Bolga baskets are the most common African baskets sold in the United States and Western Europe.

The People

Most of the people who live in Bolga are Frafras. The language now called Frafra was initially transcribed and studied by Christian linguists and Ghanaian academics (see Schaefer 1974, Schaefer 1975, Niggli 2004). However, Frafra is mostly an oral language, and only a small number of Frafra speakers can read and write it.[7] At the same time, an elevated and purified version of the language is increasingly found in its written form. An

[7] Estimates of literacy in Frafra range from 1% to 5% (Ghana Statistical Service 2002).

academic dictionary and a bible in Frafra are being produced, and elementary schools in Bolga teach it to their students. Frafra has multiple dialects such as Talni, Booni, and Nabt, with surprising degrees of variation. However, Frafras themselves consider the "proper Frafra" to be the dialect spoken in Bolga which is called Gurune (also spelled as Gurene, Gruni, and Gurne).

Much important anthropological theory was woven from ethnographics of Frafra. Frafras made their entrance in anthropological literature through the work of Meyer Fortes (1936, 1945, 1949). He spent much of his life writing about the Tallensi, who understand themselves as a Frafra subgroup. Fortes' theory of "stateless societies" derives from his ethnography of the Tallensi. In the 1970s, Keith Hart studied the Frafra labor migrants in Accra and based his theory of informal economy on this research (1973).[8] Fortes is still alive in the memory of Bolga residents; they tell stories about his affinity for the region and its people.

Frafras are not the only people who live in Bolga. Members of the neighboring ethnic groups such as the Builsa, Kusasi, and Kassena, some of whom are closely related to Frafras, also live in Bolga. There are also Akan from southern Ghana, placed in Bolga in civil service positions. Bolga is also home to immigrants from other African countries. Some are new, but many of have lived there for generations. For example, the Muslim merchants who speak Hausa as a first or second language are considered Hausa.

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[8] A number of contributions in the recent ethnographic volume *Ghana's North* also focus on the Frafra (Kroeger and Meier 2003). In addition, Smith has written extensively about Frafra art and aesthetics (1982, 1986, 1987, 1989).

In 2004, the town hosted numerous other foreigners – temporary immigrants engaged in the service of development or Christianity. Cuban doctors lived and worked in Bolga, as a part of the government's effort to replace Ghanaian health professionals who have left the country[9]. Chinese contractors were constructing new buildings for the regional hospital. Japanese donors had representatives in their Bolga office. International volunteers – mostly Canadian, British, and American – worked for local NGOs and schools. European, North American, and Korean pastors and nuns served in the regional missions; many have lived in Bolga for decades and are the only foreigners fluent in Frafra.

From the Tropical Coast to the Savannah

It takes anywhere from ten to forty hours to travel the 500 miles between Accra, Ghana's capital, and Bolga. The length of the journey depends on which bus company you can afford. The northern stretch of the road is relatively new and is therefore still in a good shape. This is the only good road in northern Ghana – "because we built it!", a JICA staff once proudly told me. On this stretch of the road, the bus no longer has to swerve to dodge potholes, but it still honks impatiently at people riding bicycles and traveling by foot on the roadside, declaring the road to be its turf. The bridges over the White Volta mark the regional borders in the north of the country. One's arrival in the Upper East region is formally announced by an NGO signpost: "Action Aid Ghana Welcomes You."

[9] The brain drain of Ghanaian health professionals who move to the UK, US, or Holland, is a large problem for the country. The government has embarked on several projects to retain doctors, nurses, and pharmacists.

In the stories residents of Accra told me about northern Ghana, this area emerged as a foreign land, a land of myths and perils. Some had never traveled to any part of northern Ghana; others went once and told me about their trips – the high temperatures ("the wall I leaned against scorched my back"), bad roads, road thieves and robbers, and violent people. Northern Ghana has been the site of violence in the 1990's as well as recently. Following the national elections in 2000, a conflict over chieftaincy and political authority killed hundreds of people in the Bawku district of Upper East region.[10] Between 2002 and 2004, Tamale – the capital of the Northern region – was under a state of emergency declared after political violence erupted there. When the influential Dagomba king was murdered, violence that ensued mainly followed intra-ethnic, clan lines. Tamale is considered generally unstable and dangerous, a thoroughfare for arms trafficking from neighboring countries.

To present Ghana as an "oasis of peace," the media plays down political and other kinds of violence. This media portrayal creates a culture of fearful silence in which rumors reign; it allows the residents of Accra to naturalize the violence in the North and to consider it an essential characteristic of Northerners who "just like to fight" or who are "always fighting."[11] This adds to the many other existing stereotypes about the "primitive" and "traditional" North.

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[10] The exact number of people who were killed is unknown and likely underreported. Many Bolga residents with relatives in Bawku told me about family members who died in this war. Their stories, in contrast to the official government accounts of the violence according to which only a few dozen died, suggest that the killings were pervasive.

[11] I draw here on Taussig's elaborations of culture of fear (1992) and his analyses of terror as a mediator of colonial hegemony (1984).

There are indeed many natural, cultural, economic, and political differences between southern and northern Ghana. I will discuss some of these differences, keeping in mind that it is not "nature" which keeps the North different (i.e. poor and marginalized), but Ghana's geopolitics.

When traveling from Accra to the North, the landscape shifts. The dense forests and cocoa plantations of the hilly southern regions gradually give way to the flat and grassy savannah dotted with bushes and sparse baobab and sheanut trees. The rain only falls between May and September, leaving the land dry and the landscape the color of red dust. Northern Ghana is semi-arid – traveling further north, the land becomes drier and drier, until it reaches the Sahara and becomes a desert. The land in northern Ghana is also low in soil fertility; it developed from the granite rocks that shape its landscape.

The soil in northern Ghana does not yield much, making the lives of northern Ghanaians, the majority of whom practice subsistence agriculture, difficult. Extreme economic hardship and suffering are the rule, rather than exception. Andrew, a Ghanaian man working for UNFPA, disagreed with the prevalent explanation according to which nature causes poverty here. "Israel was also a desert, but look what they made out if it," he told me. "We too could do it."

Not only the land, but also the dwellings look different in northern Ghana. The square huts of the southern villages stand in contrast to the north's round buildings, linked together in oval compounds. These round houses are typical for the Gur-speaking region of West Africa, which begins in northern Ghana and extends as far as the Dogon country in Mali. Before colonization and the making of the modern nation-state, the

peoples of northern Ghana were culturally much closer to their neighbors from Burkina Faso and northern parts of Togo and Ivory Coast, than to the peoples of southern Ghana.

Religious affiliations follow a similar pattern. The southern parts of Ghana and its neighbors Togo and Ivory Coast are largely Christian, and the northern parts are largely Muslim. For this reason, in popular imagination, and government and donor discourses, all of northern Ghana is considered Muslim. But this perception is wrong. The Upper East region is only partially Muslim. Islam never became the main religion here. Only the kingdoms of northern Ghana, such as the Dagomba and the Mamprusi states, became largely Muslim. These kingdoms have been influenced by Islam in many ways; they have high degrees of social stratification (such as occupational castes) and centralized authorities in towns and cities. The Upper East region did not have such kingdoms in precolonial times, even though it was a part of their networks (Fortes 1945).

People of the Upper East region largely remained animist; ancestor-worship is the main religion here. While ancestor shrines located near each compound are hardly visible, the majority of the people in this region worship at them. According to the 2000 census, 46% of the population in the Upper East adheres to traditional religion. Christianity, in particular Catholicism, is the next major religion (28%), followed by Islam (22%). The Upper East region is the only region of Ghana in which traditional religion plays such an important role. This is especially true in rural areas. Of the 1 Million people who live in the Upper East region, 85% live in villages. Many of these rural men and women are animists.

Religion is tied to education and residence. Unlike Ghanaians from the South, people in the Upper East region are mostly illiterate. According to the 2000 census, 75% of people from the Upper East never went to school. Upper East is also the least urbanized region in Ghana. Only 16% of its residents (a hundred and fifty thousand people) live in towns. The residents of these towns – Bolga, Bawku, and Navrongo – are largely educated Christian or Muslim. It is difficult to come across a town dweller who went to school and believes in spirit worship.

These differences between urban and rural areas within the Upper East matter for understanding NGOs that operate in this region. All of the NGO workers have finished high school and are Christian. Most NGOs are located in Bolga, but their work is concerned with rural empowerment. Women NGOs try to empower are illiterate and animists and live in villages.[12] NGOs are thus both spatially and culturally removed from the rural women they try to empower. While the NGO projects are directed towards bridging these divides by empowering rural women, NGO discourses further inscribe the differences between NGO workers and the "rural others."

In Chapter 4, I will analyze these NGO debates and discourses of development. These debates can be read in the context of the struggle to spread modern norms, shaped not only be ideas of development and progress, but by Christianity as well. One prominent women's NGOs from Bolga, Widows and Orphans Fellowship, openly declares itself to be a Christian organization and believes that the spread of Christianity

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[12] Muslim women in Bolga have not formed NGOs, but they have their own association, titled "The Association of Muslim Women." Throughout Ghana, NGOs are mostly Christian. The Christianization of the development industry in Ghana is an interesting phenomenon that I plan to study in future.

would stop "harmful traditional practices" affecting women, such as widowhood rites of passage.

Political and Economic Marginalization

The differences between southern and northern Ghana are only in part due to the adverse climate and ecology of the savannah. They are also due to economy and politics. The process of marginalizing northern Ghana began with Ghana's first contacts with Europeans and the subsequent colonization that followed.

With the discovery of sea routes and upon the advent of European trade with West Africa, northern Ghana became doubly marginalized. The trade routes were rerouted toward Europe and the US, away other parts of Africa. The old glory of the Bolga market, market that reputedly dates back to the days of the trans-Saharan trade in gold, salt, kola nuts, and other commodities, vanished. Furthermore, rather than being a center of the trade, northern Ghana became its object when its inhabitants were enslaved. The west coast of Africa was the principal source of slaves for the New World. Portugal, Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom all built "trading posts" and castles on Ghana's coast in which they stored gold (hence Ghana's colonial name, the Gold Coast), ivory, and slaves. From these castles, these foreign powers also controlled trade and governed coastal settlements.

The Asante kingdom from southern Ghana was establishing and cementing its rule at this time (from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century) and waged wars in pursuit of territory and slaves. Its northern neighbors had to pay annual tributes in slaves.

Worst affected were the smaller northern groups, which were not organized in states. Conservative estimates of a number of northern Ghanaians who became enslaved reach 500,000 people (Der 1998).

Northern Ghana became colonized at the turn of the twentieth century. The name Frafra is a modern name, one of the many colonial inventions still present in Bolga. "Fara-fara" means "well done"; this term is still used a greeting. Having been greeted profusely by the local inhabitants, the British colonial officials named the people "Frafra," and they eventually accepted this naming. However, people now known as Frafras did not consider themselves a distinct ethnic group prior to this colonial naming.

Colonial policies made life more difficult for northern Ghana and marginalized it further. The British did not extend the same treatment to southern and northern Ghana. Thomas provides an overview of this:

> Colonial Rule in Africa in Africa commonly featured different administrative policies pursued toward different areas *within* a particular territory. In West Africa, the boundary was usually drawn between the coast, which had a long history of direct contact with Europe, and the hinterland areas, which had been annexed late in the nineteenth century and had experienced little such contact. Often the latter seem to colonial administrators to offer opportunities for controlled change for the agency of supposedly unspoiled traditional institutions. In the Protectorate of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast, this was the theory that prevailed. (Thomas 1974: 427)

As a result of their desire to control northern Ghana effectively, British officials actually halted its "development" and tried to keep it as traditional as possible (Grischow

1999, Sutton 1989). They kept boundaries on education and missionary activity, capping the numbers of students and restricting educational opportunities to sons of chiefs (Thomas 1974); used northern Ghana as a reserve of forced labor for plantations and mines in the South (Thomas 1973); and fostered "community" development barring private property (Grischow 1999). In Chapter 5, I will write more about the colonial anti-developing of northern Ghana and its relevance for contemporary struggles between NGOs and the government. Here, it suffices to say that the political and economic marginalization of Ghana has deep historical roots; it started with the European gold and slavery trade and continued through colonization.

The independent state did not reverse this British-initiated trend, but continued it. The independent state's domain have been the cities and privileged resource-rich rural areas in the South. The nation state has not considered northern Ghana, and the Upper East region in particular, to be profitable. The finances of Ghana's government have depended on exports of cocoa, pineapples, timber, and gold – all resources from the South. Much of Ghana's economy is built on land fertility and the riches found in the south of the country. In contrast, the agriculture in northern Ghana is agriculture of survival.

All parts of northern Ghana have been marginalized, – the three regions of northern Ghana are the poorest regions of the country in which the state has invested the least resources. "Average per capita incomes are 2-4 times lower than elsewhere in the country," states a report on "Bridging the North South Divide in Ghana" (Shepherd et al. 2004). Northern Ghana as a whole is on the margins of the state's priorities, but the

poverty is highest in the Upper East region, where 70% to 90% have been said to live in "severe poverty."[13]

Northern Ghana is also politically distinct from southern Ghana. Historically, the Ghanaian government has been dominated by southern Ghanaians. Except for Hilla Limann, who reigned over Ghana between 1979 and 1981, all of Ghana's presidents have been men from southern Ghana, members of the Akan (particularly the Asante) or Ewe ethnic groups.[14] Furthermore, the Upper East region does not have much political capital or strong ties to the ruling party. Most people here continue to vote for NDC the party that is now in an opposition role. "NDC gave us our independence and we are loyal to it," Bolga residents told me, referring to the government's decision to form the Upper East region as a distinct political unit in 1983.

Ethnography of Marginalization: One Journey from Accra to Bolga

On a bus journey from Accra to Bolga, I received a first taste of how the government marginalizes the Upper East region, and how Ghanaians respond to it. This story follows.

The first time the bus broke down we were still in the yard of Accra's STC (State Transport Company) bus station. "We will be back in five minutes, it's a minor repair,"

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[13] Ghanaian academics have written extensively on regional inequalities and disparities in the country (Grant and Nijman 2004, Konadu-Agyemang 2000, Songsore 2003).

[14] The political influence of southern Ghana, and the Asante in particular, is evident in the symbolism the country uses to represent itself. On its official website (www.ghana.gov.gh), the government displays only the Asante symbols called Adinkra.

the driver said. We got off the bus, sat down on the wood benches in the station's waiting room, and watched a French lesson on TV. It was nine in the morning.

Other buses came and went, better and newer than ours. Some even had air conditioning. After an hour our bus returned and we got back on. The bus left the station and turned onto the main street. However, the bus broke down again before reaching the Kwame Nkrumah Circle (named after Ghana's first president). We were a ten-minute walk away from the main bus station.

"It's just a small problem," the driver said. Some passengers probed and asked questions. "Something is wrong with the air compressor," the driver assured them, "but the mechanic will be here soon." The passengers got off the bus. Some sat on the ground, others stood around, waiting. One woman complained loudly about STC: "The terminal for the North is dusty bare ground, while everything else is paved," she said. "They give us the bad busses, just because we are going to the North," she said. Other passengers murmured in approval.

The mechanics came an hour later and fixed the problem. It was noon when we got back on the bus and on the road again. We passed through the busy Achimota neighborhood of Accra, full of cars and people. The traffic didn't stop until we left Accra and the landscape became desolate. We passed a few smaller towns with colonial architecture and bustling markets. We stopped for a break at a restaurant located in front of a SOS children's village. The outside of the children's village looked beautiful: its streets were lined with palm trees and the lawns in front of buildings were carefully manicured.

In Kumasi, the Asante capital, the STC mechanics spent another couple of hours repairing the bus. We were supposed to arrive in Bolga that same evening, but that hope was slowly vanishing. "The bus works now and you will certainly reach Bolga by six in the morning," they said. Our journey continued until Kintampo, the country's thoroughfare, where we had our next stop. We had to wait until 2 a.m. there because of the curfew in the Northern region (this curfew was established following the political violence I mentioned earlier). Some passengers slept on the bus while others sat at the market stalls. I bought *brochettes* from the Francophone food seller.

In the sleepy hours of the night, we left Kintampo. But our chances of reaching the destination were reduced yet again. After ten minutes of driving, the bus broke down again. "There is a problem with the gears," the driver said. He went back to the village and got a Togolese mechanic, who eventually fixed the problem.

After another half an hour of driving, the bus stopped for the fourth and last time. The cooling system was broken – the bus had overheated because the driver used the 2nd gear all the time. It was four in the morning. Both drivers left the bus, in search for help. One caught a ride and headed toward the North and the other one toward the South.

We were surrounded by savannah, with no village lights visible around us. I slept in the bus and at sunrise, went to sit on one of haystacks next to the roadside. Many passengers, like me, were resigned to their fate and waited for the drivers to return. Others asked passing tro-tros and shared taxis for rides, in an attempt to get away.

A Frafra woman from Bolga was sitting next to me on the hay. She was very upset with the STC. "These people, they give us an old bus. Are we not Ghanaian? They leave

us here without any food or water in sight." Others tried to calm her down, by giving her a sachet of water. One passenger had gone to a nearby village and bought 15 servings of *kenke* and a big bag of pure water sachets to share with everyone.

When the driver returned at noon, and the sun was high and scorching, he was treated like a savior. He came in a "new bus" – older than the original one, but in working condition. We continued the journey. "Let's pray," said one passenger and moved to the front of the bus where he said a prayer. The passengers followed. In this moment, they placed the faith in God rather than the government's transportation company.

We arrived in Bolga as the sun was setting. The journey had lasted over 30 hours. In the following months, I learned that good – i.e. newer and well-functioning – STC buses never travel to Bolga. Taking STC to Bolga means taking a chance. This government-owned bus company has a large fleet of buses. Many are air-conditioned, equipped with TVs and comfortable seats, but they travel only to other parts of the country, mostly in the South. Only rickety STC buses are destined for the Upper East region, even though the road between Kumasi and Bolga is one of the best roads in the country. (Private companies know this and make a profit; one sends an "executive" minivan to Bolga and never has problems attracting customers). This is just one of many ways in which the government of Ghana continues to marginalize this region.

NGOs and New Fields of Development

The marginalization of northern Ghana provides the background for contemporary NGO interventions. Ghana has experienced a rapid process of NGOization over the last

ten years. It is safe to say that NGOs matter today and that they matter in all aspects of life. In 2004, there were more than 3,000 registered NGOs in Ghana. Most emerged during the time of Ghana's political transformations. In the wake of country's official democratization in 1992, Ghanaians founded several hundred NGOs. However, the vast majority of NGOs have been founded in the years since 2000. Their numbers grew exponentially when, after nearly two decades of the Rawlings rule, a new political party was elected. After the elections, it became tangible for NGOs to work somewhat independently – i.e., without being completely subjected to the government's plans and visions.

NGOs have made northern Ghana, the Northern and the Upper East regions in particular, centers of the development industry. Local NGOs have effectively boomed here. As Shepherd et al. write, "northern Ghanaian society is mobilised for development at local level in a way which is exceptional certainly in Ghana, and perhaps more widely"(Shepherd et al. 2004: 3). Most NGOs are located in Tamale and Bolga. The sign that one sees at the entrance to Bolga symbolically shows who is invested in this town. The sign is not from the government, but rather from an NGO; it says, "Rural Help Integrated welcomes you."

One of the reasons why northern Ghana has become one the country's busiest NGO centers is because the state has not been invested in it. The Ghanaian government was has considered northern Ghana marginal to its interests. Hence, the government continued the colonial framing of the North as "traditional" and not in need of change. NGOs, on the other hand, have articulated the marginalized as their central concern. Their

interventions span poor regions of Ghana, city slums, and rural areas. Thus, many focus not only on the marginalized regions, but the specifically marginalized spaces within them. A Bolga NGO Local Health and Development, for example, trains health volunteers who offer bio-medical and public health services to rural communities that the government deemed "remote" and "inaccessible." In the next part of this chapter, I will show that NGOs have initiated new kinds of development interventions, focusing on marginalized spaces, people, and issues – all of which the government has neglected.

Marginalized People

The main focus of NGOs in Ghana are marginalized *people*. Bolga NGOs work at the "grassroots" level and orient their projects around the most vulnerable people - the marginalized. Hence, the government's and NGOs' fields of development are not only different, but opposite.

While the post-colonial state did invest in some people, it neglected those that it considered of little value. For example, the post-colonial state created new educated elites who were to run the country. The country's elite high schools and universities are all located in southern Ghana. This investment in people served the state directly. On the other hand, those people who were deemed to lack value were neglected. For example, the state has done very little to provide educational opportunities for women, especially those living in marginal spaces, such as the rural North.

Unlike the government, NGOs have made "women" the paradigmatic target of their development interventions. NGOs mobilize statistics of women's poverty and

illiteracy to obtain donor funding for development projects. Bolga's women's NGOs engage in a range of projects. They provide fellowships for girls and hold workshops in rural communities teaching the importance of "girl-child" education; give micro-credits to women farmers, traders, seamstresses, weavers; train basket weavers to produce new designs and try to create new markets for Bolga baskets; counsel victims/survivors of violence and help them navigate the government's bureaucracy; support women as political candidates and hold workshops on gender and politics; try to modernize "traditional" practices that they consider patriarchal and detrimental to gender equity; conduct "gender training" – i.e. teach businesses, governments, other NGOs, donors, and Ghanaian communities about the importance of gender equity for national development.[15]

Donors have also embraced women, and the marginalized more generally, as a development category. Ghanaian women's NGOs both profit from, and complain about this, highlighting the perils of targeting only women. For example, women's groups can access micro-credits relatively easily, while men cannot. Elizabeth, one of my main interlocutors, was highly critical of this: "We have been telling them [Western feminists in development] all along that gender is about relations, not identities. So we need to focus on both men and women." Thus, Bolga NGOs have to negotiate what they mean by "women" and "gender" with donor definitions of these terms and the resulting paradigms.

Inventive NGO directors have realized that their focus on "the marginalized" is attractive to donors. As a result, they have found ways to carve out further categories of

[15] Gender training is very popular and widespread in Ghana and NGOs approach it reflexively. A group of Ghanaian women's NGO leaders and academics have published a book analyzing the promises and perils of the gender training programs, and the resulting "gender mainstreaming" they have been a part of (Tsikata 2001).

womanhood that are both more specific and more marginalized. In Bolga, women's NGOs have articulated different kinds of marginalized women, such as "women with disabilities," "single mothers," "victims of violence," and "out-of-school girls." These frameworks allow NGOs to claim new fields of interventions as their own. This proliferation of the margins also attests to processes of NGO reformulation and transformation of their fields of development.

Marginalized Issues

NGOs have also made marginalized "issues" a field of their development interventions. This focus is also new. The Ghanaian government has focused only on social problems it considers "national" issues worthy of its attention. The phrase "a national issue" is commonly used in Ghana's media, government, and development documents. The government considers only particular "issues" – problems, concerns, and phenomena – worthy of its interest and of importance to the nation-state. Those issues pertaining to the margins of the state are automatically excluded from the government's consideration. Hence, the government has neglected issues pertaining to marginalized spaces and people.

For example, I was often told that the government of Ghana was not invested in female genital cutting because this was "not a national issue." In other words, cutting was not an issue of importance to the nation-state. This practice is only carried out by minority populations who live at the geo-political fringes of the state. Cutting occurs in marginalized spaces and affects marginalized people – minority women.

NGOs, on the other hand, articulated female genital cutting as a "development issue" and launched numerous projects trying to stop the practice. This is just one issue invisible to the government that NGOs have embraced; domestic violence and other "harmful traditions" are others.

The Marginalized as an Object of Discourse and Analysis

In this dissertation, I will analyze how NGOs continue to create discourses and interventions about harmful traditions and domestic violence. In Chapter 4, we will see how NGOs articulate specific aspects of harmful traditions and thus again proliferate the margins. Since specific knowledge of, and attachment to, the marginalized carries symbolic capital in donors' eyes, Bolga NGOs continue to specify cultural traditions as development problems. In Chapter 5, I will show how NGOs placed the previously marginalized issue of domestic violence on the center stage of the country's politics. We will see that NGOs are not working outside the government and circumventing it, but bringing those they consider marginalized to its attention. They demand that the government take more responsibility for those people it neglected in the past.

We see here already that NGOs have not taken over the development industry but created new fields of development interventions, thus adding new meanings and forms to development. Overall, this dissertation argues that NGOs have not taken over functions of the state, but that they have instead created new fields of action. We will see that scholars who claim that development is a function of the state and that NGOs have taken over this function tend to frame "development" as a homogenous field. In Chapter 2, I will show

that development is a heterogeneous field which has gone through many historical permutations, and that the government of Ghana and NGOs mean different things when they talk about it. To consider "development" a function of the state erases the field of actions – framed as both development and empowerment of the marginalized – that NGOs have created.

But before I turn these discussions, I want to point out that there are fissures between the marginalized as an empirical reality, as an object of NGO discourses, and as a field of NGO projects. Ghanaian and other NGOs have discursively produced the marginalized and collapsed these three fields. They claim that they know the realities of marginalized women, that they can talk about them authoritatively and represent them, and that their projects target these very women.

Unlike the NGOs that I studied, I believe that we must treat these as distinct but interdependent fields. NGOs discourses do not overlap with actual NGO interventions. As I have mentioned earlier, rural women are an all-too-present object of NGO discourses and debates, but they are conspicuously absent from actual processes of development exchange. Moreover, the lived experiences of women and NGO discourses about them differ. Rural women who live in the Upper East region do not agree with NGO representations of their lives and problems. Unlike NGOs, they do not consider "traditions" their main problem. Marginalization is a basis for interventions frameworks that do not correspond to women's lived experiences. In other words, rural women have little say over the kinds of development projects NGOs create on their behalf.

My ethnographic observations also clash with NGO discourse that creates the marginalized as the only subjectivity Ghanaian women inhabit. I have met, in both urban and rural areas, many powerful and resilient women who have decision-making power and agency; many NGO directors are these kinds of women. Yet, powerful or resourceful women are not represented in NGO discourses. The only "women" NGOs talk about are subjugated women, weighted down by tradition and patriarchy.

During my first trip to Bolga, an NGO worker named Mary, who would later become a good friend, first alerted me to this NGO discourse. "We see traditional culture as a largest barrier to women's development. Josephine [the NGO director] always talks about how culture is dynamic, how culture can change. We also see gender as the relationship between men and women, that's how all the women and men here see it as well." She then handed me a printout of a document she wanted me to read. "This is what things are like here," she said. The document, titled "The concept of the woman in traditional society," painted a picture of women's complete subjugation, starting with birth and ending with death. "Our patrilineal tradition or culture has generated a male-oriented society, which perceives the woman as a second-class human being unequal to her male counterpart in all aspects of life," the paper begins, and then details various instances of women's oppression.

In Chapter 4, I will dwell further on the ways in which NGOs explain women's marginalization with local culture. Here, I want to stress that "marginalization" is a discourse as much as it is a reality. As Pigg has written, "villagers are *made* marginal by a development discourse that turns them into 'targets,' discusses their lives in terms of

isolable and decontextualized 'problems' and positions itself as an authoritative system that mediates numerous local situations" (1997: 285). The Ghanaian NGO discourse is both totalizing and victimizing. Like other victimizing discourses, marginalization discursively denies these women agency, and thus, devalues them further.

This is not to say that women in the Upper East do not suffer disproportionately – I agree with NGOs that gendered forms of oppression are an important concern and a worthy field of interventions. I also acknowledge that the marginalization of women, of northern Ghana, of particular "issues" is not only a discourse, but also a reality that did not begin with development discourses. Thus, NGOs both *describe and inscribe* modern versus traditional differences. This dissertation will show the multiple histories – colonial and postcolonial – that have produced the ground on which NGOs situate themselves. In other words, NGOs intervene in a field that is a product of history, and then imprint that history with their discourses and interventions.

CHAPTER 2

READING NGOS:

BETWEEN THE HOPES AND ANXIETIES OF THE GLOBAL AGE

> *A scholar said recently that the growth of NGOs and civil society groups was "as important a development to the latter part of the 20th century" as the rise of the nation state itself had been in earlier centuries. This house is your house, too. We need your contributions and I join you in looking forward to the day when you feel even more at home here at the United Nations.*
> *Kofi Annan, the UN Secretary General*

> *I used to think that NGO stood for "Nothing Going On." But more recently, I have come to learn that the word NGO stands for "Non-Governable Organisations."*
> *Weve Buhari from Nigeria, in a BBC Africa poll*

> *The central moral challenge we face in this century is to address gender inequality in the developing world. [...] Foreigners can make a difference, but the real people who can bring about lasting change are those working within a society.*
> *Nicholas Kristoff, New York Times*

Among the many anxiety-provoking topics in and about contemporary Africa and the global South, we also find debates about nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). NGOs find themselves at the center of popular controversies because they represent the powerful development industry, industry dedicated to manufacturing hope, and because they are seen as important actors in the much lauded civil society. In this chapter, I will show how NGOs and their emergence in the global South are understood in these two frameworks.

PART I

NGOs, Development, and Post-Development

Since "development" is the dominant language of economy and politics in Ghana, NGOs learn this language and make themselves intelligible by speaking it. The framework of development offers NGOs access to global capital. For this reason, women's NGOs have to frame their work as "development work." Projects that in the United States or other countries of the global North would not be considered a part of "development," such as women's shelters, are funded and articulated as serving Ghanaian development.

The Ghanaian development industry is large and holds great sway over people's imagination. In Ghana, "development" is a positive signifier. Government officials, NGOs, and the country's chiefs all portray themselves as pro-development. I got my first taste of this listening to a successful woman running for a seat in Bolga's local government. "I have no party, my party is development," she declared proudly. At the funeral of the Dagbon king Ya-Na Yakubu Andani, both his family and government representatives took care to describe him as a "development oriented king."

Ghanaian NGOs occupy an interesting position because they fit in multiple development paradigms. They are seen as both agents of development and representatives of new social movements, post-development, and alternative development. Thus, one of the reasons why NGOs have provoked global anxieties is because the sign "NGO" is

flexible. NGOs are promoted both by the right and the left. Michael Watts and Richard Peet aptly describe this dynamic:

> It is precisely the groundswell of anti-development thinking, oppositional discourses that have as their starting point the rejection of development, of rationality, and the Western modernist project, at the moment of a purported Washington consensus and free-market triumphalism, that represent one of the striking paradoxes of the 1990s. Ironically, however, both of these discourses—whether the World Bank line or its radical alternative—look to civil society, participation, and ordinary people for their development vision for the next millennium. (quoted in Mohan and Stokke 2000: 247)

NGOs represent these "ordinary people" Watts and Peet write about. This is one of the reasons why policy-makers and scholars believe that NGOs will *reform* development and engage in it more effectively than southern governments. (We will see shortly that this belief in the power of NGOs is tied to their potential as civil society actors). Many radical and leftist scholars and practitioners, on the other hand, believe that NGOs can *revolutionize*, nor merely reform development. They include "those with explicitly Foucauldian ambitions to those that embody a visceral reaction to modernity, but also including adherents of radical democracy, post-Marxism, ecofeminism and various other positions" (Hart 2001: 654) who see NGOs as representing a bottom-up approach to a new, transformed kind of post-development. Gillian Hart explains that these scholars and practitioners "are united by antagonism to Development as a normalizing, deeply destructive discursive formation emanating from "the West"; by firm rejection of any sort of reformist tendencies; and by faith in new social movements." Many believe that NGOs can empower and mobilize marginalized people against the market and neoliberal hegemony. Appadurai, for example, claims that NGOs exist

"independently from of the actions of corporate capital and the nation-state system (and its international affiliates and guarantors)" (2000: 3).[16] He writes:

> While global capital and the system of nation-states negotiate the terms of the emergent world order, a worldwide order of institutions has emerged that bears witness to what we may call "grassroots globalization," or "globalization from below." The most easily recognisable of these institutions are NGOs (nongovernmental organizations) concerned with mobilizing highly specific local, national, and regional groups on matters of equity, access, justice, and redistribution. (Appadurai 2000: 15)

Ghanaian NGOs find themselves in the middle of these debates about reform and revolution. I see Ghanaian NGOs as straddling multiple worlds. While they are not pure representatives of either the leftist or rightist ideal-types, they have successfully responded to calls from both. NGOs have been able to turn diverging expectations to their interest. Elizabeth, one of my main interlocutors, is one of many NGO directors who articulate their work in multiple frameworks. She works with American women of color groups oriented toward social justice, identifies with a pan-African socialist movement, and articulates her projects as fitting within the World Bank-organized good governance projects. For her, these frameworks are not incompatible.

This is one of the reasons why I see Ghanaian NGOs as being an integral part of both the state and global capital, not as situated outside of them. At the same time, Ghanaian women's NGOs are the face of the Ghanaian women's movement that fights

[16] Not all post-development scholars see NGOs as such ideal-typic representatives of "grassroots globalization." Many are skeptical of the influence of NGOs and believe that NGOs will corrupt social movements (Alvarez 1998). In this paradigm, social movements are assumed as "pure" while NGOs are seen as tainted by the state and global capital.

for socially just state and global orders. I will argue that these NGOs work within the development industry and the state to bring about transformations. Unlike some international NGOs (like Amnesty International) which believe that refusing government funding leaves them untainted and clear of state interests, Ghanaian NGOs accept all funding they can get, and subvert the funders' expectations from within.

High Hopes and Disappointments

Because NGOs have inspired strong hopes on all sides, they are also subject to harsh criticisms. Having become the ground of high hopes and polarizations, speaking the language of both the left and right, and being seen as a panacea to both development and its discontents is not always to the advantage of NGOs. Voices criticizing NGOs are becoming stronger in academia, development, and among the Ghanaian public. These criticisms are predicated on the hopes that NGOs engender. Academics, governments, and the public each have a bone to pick with NGOs, characterizing them as the middlemen of Empire, donor peons, or self-interested businesses, respectively.

The popular critiques of NGOs in Africa, relying on new interpretations of the acronym "NGO," are particularly inventive. Among the names given to self-interested NGOs, we find "MONGO" – my own NGO. This term is both an ironic riff on the proliferation of acronyms describing NGOs (such as GONGOs – government organized NGOs and BONGOs - business organized NGOs) as well as a criticism of NGO directors who follow the unofficial norms of Ghanaian development and claim ownership over "their" organizations. We also come across "come 'ngo's" – a term mocking

opportunistic, short-lived NGOs which "come and go," and which are set up by social and economic entrepreneurs for their own benefit.

I believe that they very hopes about the reformist and revolutionary potential of southern NGOs have contributed not only to criticisms of NGOs, but also to NGO emergence in recent history. In the next part of this chapter, I will chart two competing stories about the emergence of NGOs through history of development and politics. One is a story that places NGOs as agents of neoliberalism, thus seeing them as a donor tool. Another is a more complex story which tracks their emergence through ethnographic and other kinds of research and frames their history within history of transformations in development theory, globalization, new North-South dynamics, and African politics.

Ghana's Neoliberalism and Civil Society

African NGOs are often understood as both agents of development and of a new neoliberal world order. This is because they have emerged in the wake of economic liberalization of Africa. Scholars who see NGOs as tightly related to neoliberal processes situate the NGO emergence within the move toward "privatization." In this view, donors have turned to NGOs to promote privatization of economies and social services. Smith-Nonini writes, "a newly emerging component of neoliberal fiscal reform in international development policy is increased reliance on non-governmental organizations (NGOs) rather than states for services" (1998: 99). Since NGOs fit well in the age of neoliberalism, many scholars believe that neoliberalism has given rise to them.

Another reason why scholars explain NGO emergence as a result of neoliberalism is because donors base their policies "around the twin poles of neo-liberal economics and liberal democratic theory" (Hulme and Edwards 1997: 4). In other words, donors see NGOs as combining the promises of transforming economies and the state order.

The northern interest in changing African polities, not only economies, resurged after the end of the Cold War. While the 1980's reforms (SAPs) focused primarily on economy and were meant to function in any regime, in the 1990's, donors started to foster democracy as a corollary to economic and social development. And since according to political liberalism, democracy necessitates a civil society, donors started funding NGOs. Mohann and Stoke offer a detailed genealogy of this idea:

> In early development economics, the interventionist state was assigned a key role in correcting market failures and ensuring economic efficiency, growth, macroeconomic stability and social development. The neoliberal counter-revolution in development theory brought a dramatic shift, as the state came to be seen as a barrier rather than a driving force in the development process. In the 1980s neoliberals strongly criticised the *dirigiste* state and promoted market liberalism as the most efficient mechanism for delivering economic and social development within a global market system. More recently there has been a shift within neoliberal development strategy from a singular emphasis on market deregulation to an additional emphasis on institutional reforms and social development. In this context, *civil society has emerged as the arena in which a host of development objectives are to be achieved.* (2000: 248)

In many African countries, NGOs stand for "civil society." Ferguson writes that across a range of institutions and discourses, "the term most often comes up in discussions of democracy, especially to refer to voluntary organizations and NGOs that seek to influence, or claim space from, the state" (2006: 90). The idea that NGOs might foster the development of civil society has far exceeded its academic origins, traveling to post-socialist struggles in Eastern Europe and the development industry in Africa. Today,

donors, African governments, and NGOs alike articulate the need for a vibrant civil society in Africa.

In Ghana, NGOs also understand themselves and are understood by others as being central actors in civil society; the terms "NGOs" and "civil society" are used as synonyms. For example, the World Bank report titled "The role of civil society in assessing public sector performance in Ghana" considers NGOs the primary representatives of civil society (Mackay and Garriba 2000). When a journalist writes, "the government of Ghana has provoked a feud with civil society organisations," she refers to the government's threat to blacklist NGOs (Govender 2004). When Kofi Adu, the director of a Ghanaian NGO network, writes about "enhancing civil society participation in government decision making," he addresses aspirations of Ghanaian NGOs (Adu 2005). Ghanaian scholars of civil society equally see this concept as synonymous with NGOs (Gyimah-Boadi 1996).

In her study of how Ghanaian NGOs use the concept of civil society, Whitfield has found that NGOs identify with this concept, but attach different meanings to it: "Some individuals associate the idea of civil society with activities that support government efforts in national development, while others associate the idea with activities that challenge the government's monopoly on development and the exclusion of sections of society" (2003: 384). Thus, NGOs use "civil society" to legitimize their existence and to secure funding. The concept of civil society is a powerful political tool. As Ferguson aptly writes, civil society "has become one of those things (like development, education, or the environment) that no reasonable person can be against

(2006: 91). I argue that Ghanaian NGOs make strategic use of this concept. While the concept of "development" allows NGOs to make claims on donors, the concept of "civil society" allows them to make claims on political space free from government domination or control. This aspect of the civil society discourse has not been studied. Instead, scholarly debates have turned to questions "Does this concept apply to Africa?" and "How is it used by donors?" Anthropologists and postcolonial theorists have critiqued the concept of civil society and its contemporary usage in African politics on different grounds. The academic debate on civil society in Africa began with a discussion of the applicability of this Western concept to the continent arguing against its usage as an "all-purpose placeholder" (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999: 3). African scholars have recently opposed the view that the concept of civil society does not apply to Africa and argued that this concept has an African genealogy (Obadare 2004).

Calhoun writes that the concept of civil society lends itself to numerous ideological appropriations (2001: 1901). Many scholars see this concept as a tool of donor countries. The common thread in current literature is a critique of donor manipulation of the positive connotation of "civil society." Mamdani (1996) critiques the idea that Africa needs to develop civil society claiming that this notion is entrenched in an evolutionary dogma: donors assume that African countries need to transition from community to society in order to become liberal democracies. Alvarez and others claim that the concept of civil society serves donors in that it legitimizes neoliberal policies and decreased state spending on social services (1998). Ferguson argues that in Africanist research, the concept of civil society "obscures more than it reveals, and indeed, that it

often serves to help legitimate a profoundly antidemocratic transnational politics" (2006: 91). Furthermore, he shows that in conventional political science and donor discourses, civil society becomes the code for what used to be called modernity, democracy, development, and progress. This happens, Ferguson argues, at a moment when African governments have been stripped of this signification (2006).[17]

I do not foreground the term civil society as an analytical category precisely because this concept has been appropriated by donor governments and policy-makers. Donors use an expansive and slippery notion of civil society: "the term is used as a code for a set of ideas related to participation, good government, human rights, privatisation and public sector reform" (Riddell and Bebbington 1995: 23). Hearn and others have studied how specific donors to Ghana, Uganda, and South Africa define the term "civil society" (Hearn 1999). Hearn shows that in these countries, donors primarily fund "formal, urban-based, professional, elite advocacy NGOs" under the banner of civil society. She writes that these NGOs "fall into a number of overlapping categories: those concerned with supporting political liberalisation, those concerned with promoting economic liberalisation, and those furthering the rights and political participation of particular socially excluded groups, such as rural women or the urban poor" (1999: 4).

Of all donors, the United States is most interested in promoting civil society (Hearn 1999, Van Rooy and Robinson 1998). The US government claims that it uses civil society to promote democracy. However, some scholars have argued that this can be "a way to disguise free-marketeering" (Van Rooy and Robinson 1998: 52). In other words,

[17] Not all African governments have been stripped of this signification; we will see later that Ghana is seen as a "beacon of progress."

USAID funds organizations it labels "civil society" to promote its neoliberal agenda in Ghana. These organizations include business associations, private businesses, and think tanks and policy institutes that promote the free market economy. Hearn writes: "in Ghana, among the CSOs most popular with donors are those promoting economic liberalism; this should be understood in the national context of an attempt to deepen adjustment reforms. These CSOs fell into two main groups: policy research institutes and business associations. The Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) stands out as the single most donor funded organisation" (1999: 22). Thus, NGOs critical of neoliberalism have difficulty sustaining themselves since donors support those organizations they consider ideological allies.

While donor agencies use the term civil society flexibly to legitimize their projects and transform Ghanaian economy and state order, it is important to keep in mind that donors are the only ones using it. Ghanaian NGOs are represented *and represent themselves* as being a major part of Ghanaian and global civil society. For many Ghanaian NGOs, civil society is a tool they use to get recognition by donors and by the government.

Academics such as Hearn (1999), Whitfield (2003), and others (see Gill 1997) question donor-funded civil society – NGOs – and see them as local instruments of donor-promoted neoliberalism. I contest this generalization about Ghanaian NGOs. Ghanaian NGOs vary in their approach to neoliberalism. Some support it fully; for example, a well-known political NGO and think tank, Ghana's Center for Democratic Development, reports on whether the government complies with its promise to lessen state control. On the fringes of the state, Bolga's Women's Development Center was a

part of the HIPC watch program that monitored whether and how the government was fulfilling donor requirements. This NGO did not oppose the neoliberal strategy, but tried to ensure that the government carried out that strategy effectively.

Moreover, just like Ghanaian NGOs make strategic use of the concept of civil society, they are also strategic in their support of neoliberalism. A few NGOs, such as the Integrated Social Development Centre and the Centre for Public Interest Law, have explicitly criticized the complete economic liberalization of Ghana and the resulting unequal terms of trade. Yet, NGOs see their situation in pragmatic terms; neoliberalism is the order of the day in Ghana and NGOs accept this. For this reason, they embrace neoliberal ideology when it suits their purposes. ISODEC representatives, and a number of other male NGO leaders, for example, work regularly for the World Bank as consultants, fully embracing its neoliberal language.

Ghanaian feminist academics are the rare voices that oppose neoliberalism consistently. Clark and Manuh have written about the suffering that the economic liberalization and state withdrawal of subsidies caused for women in southern Ghana, in particular for traders who work in the largely feminized informal economy (1991). Awumbila has also argued that the ERP has had "deleterious impact on vulnerable groups, particularly women, children, and the poor " (2001: 35). The women's coalition that produced the Women's Manifesto has criticized the government's current neoliberal policies. The Manifesto states:

Ghana's ERP achieved some measure of economic growth, infrastructural rehabilitation and some institutional reforms. However the reforms have been accompanied by labour retrenchment, decline in industrialization, informalisation of work, removal of subsidies and the institution of user fees in basic services: water, electricity, education and health. Thus after close to two decades of reforms in which various sectors of the economy have been extensively liberalized and subjected to market principles, there is widespread poverty and insecurity. Certain ecological zones and social groups such as women, children and the disabled have suffered particular forms of hardship. Women have suffered from labour retrenchments of themselves and their husbands, the removal of subsidies from agricultural inputs, the bias towards cocoa and export crop production, the neglect of the food crop sector and the removal of subsidies from social services for purposes of full-cost recovery. The expansion of the extractive sector activities, specifically surface mining and logging has resulted in environmental degradation, the loss of farmlands with adverse consequences for rural livelihoods.

The ERP failed to address poverty, create jobs, secure livelihoods and social security and improve human development. Instead, it has led to the retreat of the State from its social responsibilities. The over-dependence on foreign aid, capital and expertise has led to the loss of national initiative and capacity, the progressive loss of national sovereignty over economic decision-making and the erosion of government accountability to Ghanaian citizens. Civil society organisations have not been successful in their efforts to demand accountability from government.

The government's decision to join the HIPC initiative and the subsequent adoption of the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS) is an admission of the failure of SAP to address the deep seated problems of the economy. However, instead of rethinking the SAP, the GPRS is continuing the approach of the ERP. Biases against women, under the SAPs remain within the GPRS framework. In spite of the fact that women have been identified as one of the groups suffering disproportionately from poverty, the sectors where women are in the majority are not the priority areas and GPRS measures do not address gender issues systematically. (2004: 11-12).

The Women's Manifesto coalition has offered the most comprehensive criticism of the government's policies and proposed alternatives to it. This kind of opposition is rare in Ghana. Feminist academics are able to wage such opposition because they do not depend on donor funding. Furthermore, academic activists are in the best position to oppose the government's privatization plans and political economy because they understand and can manipulate the government's languages. For NGOs at the margins of the state, this is a more difficult issue. However, this does not mean that NGOs embrace neoliberalism either. I will show in Chapter 5 that NGO demands for provision of social and legal services are an attempt to foster a different, more socially responsible and feminist vision of the state.

NGOs and Development for the People: A Contested History

Thus, we see that Ghanaian NGOs are squarely positioned within neoliberalism and civil society; they are not products of the neoliberal agenda but its active manipulators. Thus, I will offer an alternative story of NGO emergence. This story describes a more complex genealogy of NGOs, tied less to neoliberalism and more to the larger field of globalization and its influence on the development industry.

Scholars such as Karma situate the emergence of NGOs in a broader field of global transformations and changes in the development industry: "A profound change in the global dynamics of development has occurred since the 1970's as a result of two interacting trends: the emergence and growing strength of transnationally allied civil

society organizations, and the global spread and international adoption of norms on the environment, human rights, and indigenous peoples" (Khagram 2000: 106). The globalization of activism and deterritorialization of governance helped transform development. Appadurai characterizes NGOs emergence in optimistic terms:

> I assume that we are witnessing a notable transformation in the nature of global governance in the explosive growth of nongovernmental organizations of all scales and varieties in the period since 1945, a growth fueled by the linked development of the United Nations system, the Bretton Woods institutional order, and especially the global circulation and legitimation of the discourses and politics of "human rights." Together, these developments have provided a powerful impetus to democratic claims by nonstate actors throughout the world. There is some reason to worry about whether the current framework of human rights is serving mainly as the legal and normative conscience – or the legal-bureaucratic lubricant – of a neoliberal, marketized political order. *But there is no doubt that the global spread of the discourse of human rights has provided a huge boost to local democratic formations.* In addition, the combination of this global efflorescence of nongovernmental politics with the multiple technological revolutions of the last fifty years has provided much energy to what has been called "cross-border activism" through "transnational advocacy networks" (Keck and Sikkink 1998). These networks provide new horizontal modes for articulating the deep *democratic politics of the locality, creating hitherto unpredicted groupings*: examples may be "issue-based" – focused on the environment, child labor, or AIDS – or "identity-based" – feminist, indigenous, gay, diasporic. (Appadurai 2002: 25)

Appadurai situates the emergence of NGOs in a complex nexus of internationalization of governance, the development industry, the human rights discourse, and transnationalization of activist politics. While I see NGOs in less optimistic terms, Appadurai's framework is useful for analyzing the multiple axes of NGO emergence.

In the next part of this chapter, I will offer a genealogy of NGOs with a specific focus on the history of the development industry. Broadly speaking, the history of development in post-colonial Africa is characterized by a shift from large projects aiming at national development to small projects aiming at poverty reduction. New targets of

development (people, in particular the marginalized) as well as its new agents (NGOs) have emerged during this transition.

In the past, the development industry was meant to benefit the state or the nation, conceived of as an abstract entity, not as a sum of a country's peoples. To develop meant to use technology for the most intensive use of land, to industrialize, to educate large numbers of people who would serve the state, and to transform subsistence economies into cash economies. In her historiography of Maasai development in Tanzania, one of the few ethnographic and historical accounts of development in Africa, Hodgson (2001) writes about the shift in development paradigms. In the colonial period, the British administration of Tanganyika was focused on developing the *land*. The British resettled the Maasai and redistributed their land to settlers because colonizers deemed the Maasai incapable of making the "best use" of land. "It is considered that the lands are *of more value to the territory* agriculturally that they are to the Masai as pasture," wrote the senior provincial commissioner (Quoted in Hodgson 2001: 111). Thus, in the name of the land value for the "territory," colonial government alienated the Maasai land and gave it to settlers. Thus, development was articulated as benefiting the state as a whole, but it benefited only its privileged members. The cost of "development" was born by the Maasai.[18]

With the advent of independence, the rhetoric of development and governance changed, but the object of development remained the same. The *country* (or the nation-

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[18] Colonial development was violent elsewhere as well. In Ghana, British officials forced northern Ghanaians to work on southern plantations (Sutton 1989). Moore writes about the violence of colonial development projects in Zimbabwe. In the name of "betterment," he writes, "officials forcibly removed

state) should be developed through "increased productivity in agriculture and animal husbandry" (Hodgson 2001: 153). Thus, both in colonial and post-colonial times, development was articulated as targeting the nation and serving its interests. This changed in the mid-1970s, when donors and governments started to articulate the interests of the "people":

> USAID discovered that people were part of development and started demanding that its projects contain components devoted to the 'social' development of the people involved [...] The project's goals were revised to reflect these new humanitarian concerns; rather than being designed to help the Tanzanian government, the project was now designed 'to assist the Masai People' ... (Hodgson 2001: 216).

Thus, already in 1970's, "people" emerge as the new beneficiaries of development. This shift from conceptualizing development as serving the interests of the *state* to serving the *people* is not unique to Tanzania, but characteristic for the global development industry. The contemporary missions of many development agencies reflect these changes as well. The development industry now focuses – at least in theory – on social development and sees "people" as its beneficiaries. For example, the Dutch government's priorities for Africa's development include "*investing in people*, mainly by improving reproductive health and education and combating HIV/AIDS" (Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2003).

The Ghanaian development industry experienced a similar transformation. Ghana's image as "developing" stems from colonial times. The British colonial administrator Guggisberg designed the first development plan for Ghana in the 1920's.

Africans from scattered homesteads, placing them in linear settlements spatially removed from arable and grazing zones" (2005: 83).

(This is reportedly the world's first national development plan). Under this plan – which targeted only southern Ghana – Ghanaians built roads and railways and constructed what is one of Africa's largest hospitals (Korle-bu) and one of its most prestigious schools (Achimota), both located in Accra. Since then, Ghana's political and economic strategies have unfolded in a series of seven and five-year development plans. While the development policies shifted from the early post-independence era socialist embrace of state-owned and managed farms and industries to later privatization policies, Ghana has continually lived under the sign of development.

Immediately after independence, development was articulated as serving the interests of the Ghanaian nation. The Ghanaian government and large donor agencies such as the World Bank, USAID, and DFID, focused on modernizing the economy and building infrastructure and other large-scale projects. For example, they sponsored the construction of the Akosombo dam in the 1960's, which produced Lake Volta, the largest artificial lake in the world. At the time, the dam was assumed to be in "everyone's" interest – i.e. in the interest of the nation-state. The government and donors promoted electricity as a common good which would help industrialize and modernize the country. However, with time it became clear that the dam-generated electricity was not a "common good" of Ghanaians. Much of it is exported, and only Ghana's urban areas benefit from it. In rural communities, electricity is still scarce – only half of Ghanaian households and fewer than 20% of rural households have access to it.[19] Thus, the dam did

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[19] Statistics taken from the Ghana Wind Energy Project, http://www.vita.org/prog_profile_energy_wind_gh.asp, accessed 05-03-2006.

not serve "everyone's" interests, but the interest of those deemed important for national development. The rural poor were left out.

The history of development intersects with history of social movements and activism. Development industry did not change by itself; southern NGOs have had a large part in this process. Worldwide, activists and proponents of alternative kinds of development started critiquing the dominant development paradigm. Their criticisms were often articulated around environmental issues and "big dams" such as Ghana's Akosombo dam. Khagram writes:

> For proponents, dams symbolize temples of progress and modernity, from a life controlled by nature and tradition to one in which environment is ruled by technology, and tradition by science. But a growing number of opponents see the same projects as destructive of nature and indigenous cultures, imposing unacceptable costs while rarely delivering on their ostensible benefits. (2000: 83).

Some of these costs include relocation and resettlements. Much like the Maasai were relocated in the name of national development (Hodgson 2001), worldwide, 40 million people have been displaced by big dam development projects (Khagram 2000: 85). In the 1970's and 1980's, NGOs worldwide started campaigning against this kind of development.

NGOs from the global South were able to impact the larger field of the development industry. Khagram highlights the role of Southern NGOs in opposing the mainstream development industry. "The two most well-known campaigns in India, the first to reform and the second to halt completely the World Bank-funded Sardar Sarovar-Narmada project, were spearheaded not by foreign or international NGOs, but by local

and domestic groups that eventually developed into . . . powerful social movement" (2000: 87). In response to NGO advocacy, the World Bank started using new guidelines on the environment, human rights, and indigenous peoples in the 1980's, to prevent doing harm with its projects (Khagram 2000: 98). Thus, local and domestic NGOs have contributed to the transformations – however fleeting and performative – of the development industry itself. Today, even the World Bank aims at promoting sustainable development and eliminating world poverty. The concept "sustainable development" would have been unthinkable in the early phase of post-colonial development in which economic growth was the only measure of success. NGOs advocate for this new kind of development and they have grown in strength in response to it.

Hodgson shows the recent popularity of "indigenous development" is a product of both global and local forces, not a donor imposition forced upon Africans. She acknowledges that donors promote "indigenous NGOs" to avoid "the neo-colonial taint of sponsoring local NGOs staffed and often supervised by expatriates," fulfill "interests in empowering groups perceived as historically marginalized and disenfranchised by their nation-states," and "bolster claims about the non-political nature of such interventions" (2001: 230). In other words, indigenous NGOs, such as the Maasai NGOs she writes about, do not emerge in a local vacuum; they are a product of interested global sponsorship. At the same time, she argues, Africans themselves find these NGOs appealing because they can serve their interests. She writes:

> But indigenous development has emerged simultaneously from the grassroots as well, as groups of historically marginalized people have organized themselves to demand certain cultural, political, and economic rights. . . . At once local and global, indigenous development is therefore the

product of current First World interests in empowering marginal groups and the success of certain Third World peoples in strategically essentializing their own identities to defend rights, mobilize resources, and advance seemingly progressive agendas (ibid.).

I see the emergence of Ghanaian NGOs in the same frame. They would not have emerged in such great their numbers without donor support, but donors did not create them. In Ghana, NGOs have also grown in strength as a result of political change and democratization. For these reasons, Ghanaian NGOs are not a neoliberal invention. Rather, they have emerged as a result of an assemblage of factors, including the larger framework of globalization, changes in development industry and Ghanaian politics, and transnational organizing.

Ghanaian women's NGOs have existed for over two decades. They have used the international focus on gender to their advantage, promoting their own agendas. Ghanaian women's NGOs have been a part of the transnational women's activist organizing and the international UN conferences on women. In both of these frameworks, southern NGOs have acted not only as "recipients" of development models, but as their co-producers. This is not to say that women's organizing escapes the inequalities of global power relations, but that the relationships are less polarized than we often believe.

NGOs from the global South have at times been at the forefront of global paradigms (Sharma 2006). For example, "Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era," a network of southern feminists and NGOs, has first promoted the "Gender and Development" framework. This framework, focusing on gender relations rather than women, is now widely accepted by the UN and in the global development industry. Furthermore, while scholars have only recently started to advocate for including men in

gender debates and thus "men-streaming gender" (Chant and Gutman 2005), women's NGOs in Bolga and elsewhere in Ghana have been doing this for a decade.

NGOs are not mere donor peons or the middlemen of Empire. To gain a more nuanced understanding of NGO motivations, operations, and effects, we will need to look at them from within.

PART II

The Bolga Jazz – NGOs and their Friends and Kin

NGOs in Ghana – What's in a Name?

What are NGOs? This term means different things for the Ghanaians I came to know. For some people in Bolga, this is a very inclusive term. For them, all organizations concerned with development, such as donors, INGOs, and local NGOs, fall in the general rubric of NGOs. For many women in Lungo, there is no relevant distinction between NGOs, government, or donors – they are all "people from Bolga" who hold the promise of development.

Academics mostly classify NGOs according to the type of work they do, differentiating between service-provision NGOs, advocacy NGOs, and human rights NGOs (Sandberg 2006). NGOs I studied transgressed these boundaries, which is why these classifications are not useful. For the purposes of my research, there was only one meaningful difference between NGOs: some had easy access to capital and others did not.

NGOs based in Accra are able to access more donor funds not only because of their spatial proximity to donors (most of whom are located in Accra), but also because they are socially similar to them. Accra-based NGOs employ large numbers of professionals, many of whom got their higher degrees abroad. NGOs are also closer to the national government and thus more engaged in women's rights advocacy, working for the benefit of Ghanaian women. They are trained in the global languages of development and empowerment, and have practiced their skills at domestic and international forums.

The geo-politics of the Ghanaian development industry explains why local NGOs, such as Bolga NGOs do not have the same opportunity of getting donor capital as NGOs located in Accra. Being far away from donors, both spatially and socially, makes funding acquisition a more difficult endeavor. Despite this divide, women's NGOs from Accra and Bolga collaborate within and across national borders. While women's NGOs in Accra build more formal coalitions, such as the domestic violence bill coalition, NGOs in Bolga have an informal network. The town has a steady group of organizations that work on "gender issues" and see each other at meetings and workshops.

Accra-based NGOs are aware of their advantages over other women's NGOs, dispersed throughout the country. Since Ghanaian women's NGOs are committed to empowering the marginalized, they have identified the regional marginalization of the Upper East region as a political problem. In Chapter 4, I will analyze how women's NGOs attempt to transcend the Accra-centric development paradigm, and argue that this process is full of tensions. While women's NGO open new fields of development and politics, they are in danger of replicating the centralized structures produced by the state.

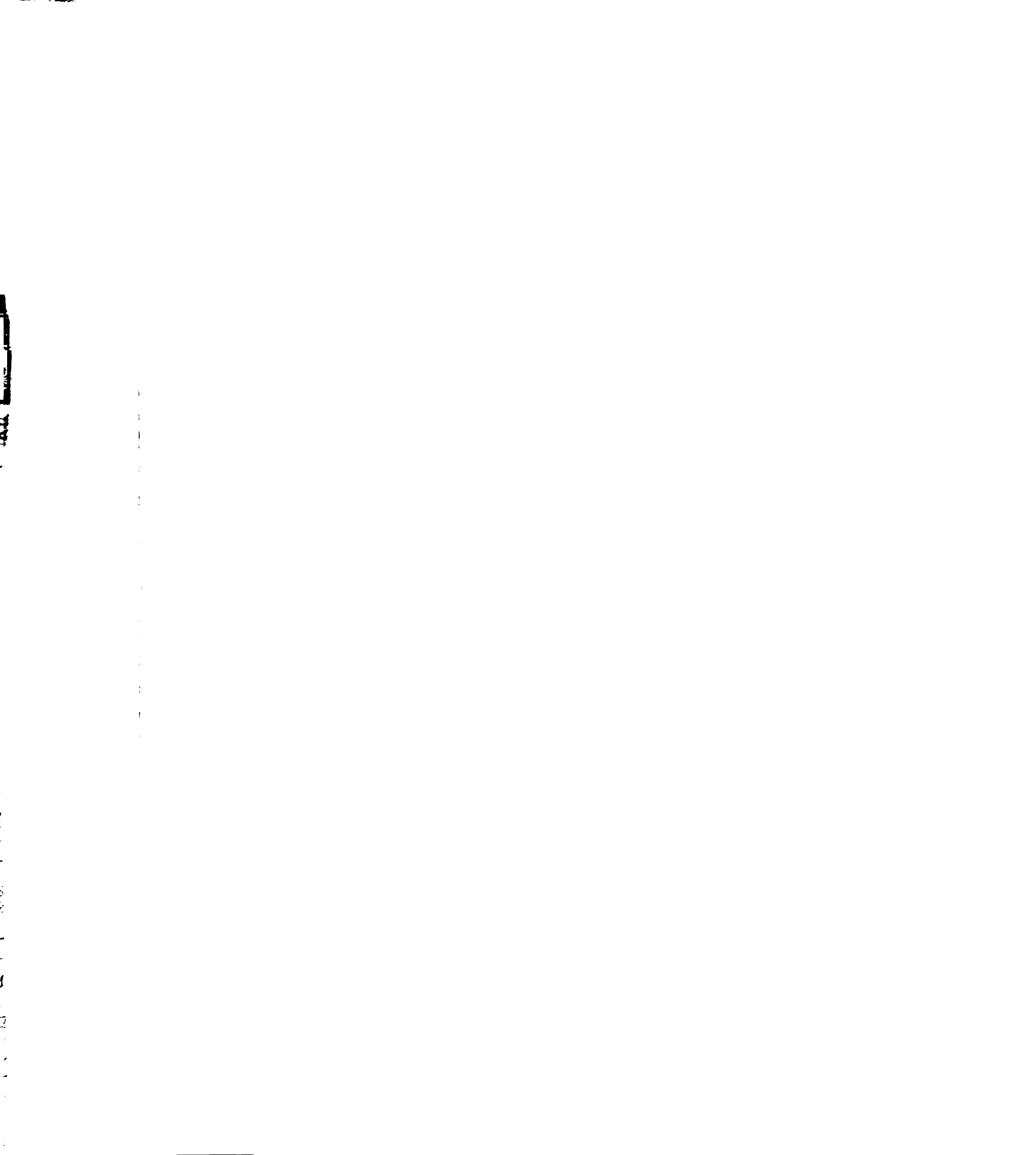
NGOs at the Margins of the State

"Local" NGOs, NGOs situated in small towns and villages, are the most prevalent NGOs in the country. The "grassroots" image endows them with legitimacy, based on their alleged cultural belonging and proximity to the "people." For example, Bolga NGOs work on issues that affect the Upper East region; their sphere of influence reaches specific villages and towns. Cumulatively, however, they influence national politics and society at large.

Many of these NGOs are based on identity politics; their founders identify with their beneficiaries and foster a sense of common identity. They work on empowering the "marginalized" because they too have experienced marginalization – as single mothers, widows, victims of violence, or token women in politics.

While Bolga NGOs have been founded and run by educated Ghanaians, such as government workers or schoolteachers, they cannot afford to employ other well-educated workers. Thus, they hire high school graduates and teach them through practice. This lack of funding is a major constraint for Bolga NGOs. One of the ways in which they negotiate this situation is by networking and "making friends."

These NGOs do not work in isolation; they form and manage networks of volunteers, donors, government officials, and "traditional" authorities. Each of these groups of persons secures funding and legitimacy for NGOs. NGOs also build on their existing social relations, such as their church connections; seeing a Catholic priest enter



an NGO is not uncommon. They also continually invest in "making new friends" and, I will argue, making fictive kin.

International Volunteers

Bolga NGOs employ volunteers who come to Ghana from other countries. Unlike people who volunteer in their own countries, those who cross borders embrace volunteering as a full-time activity. Volunteers come to Ghana to work for extended periods of time. At the time of my research, there were a dozen volunteers in Bolga, most of whom were spending two years working for Ghanaian NGOs. Unlike Peace Corps members, they were all professionals with experience in community development in their home countries. Many came from Canada, but there were also volunteers from Great Britain, the Philippines, and the Netherlands. They were mostly women.[20]

I become friends with a number of volunteers; I learned about Ghanaian development and NGOs from and with them. Nita, my housemate, spent two years in Bolga working for the NGO named Widows and Orphans Fellowship. An anthropologist by training, she had worked in community development with Canadian Native communities before arriving in Ghana. Mary was another Canadian volunteer I befriended; she spent four years working for the NGO Women's Development Center in Bolga. Mary had degrees in anthropology and international relations. Nita and Mary, like many other volunteers, were transnational subjects: Nita's family migrated to Canada

[20] Volunteers are the least paid development practitioners who come to Ghana. The global development industry is gendered. While "development experts" are commonly considered as elites, volunteers are marginalized within the mainstream and their expertise is devalued. Women predominate in

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from India, and Mary's from Europe, via Africa. Volunteers in the Bolga region have much in common. They are motivated by a strong global political consciousness and a desire to "do good." Once in Ghana, they live like "locals," trying to fit in culturally and survive on local-level stipends.

These international volunteers are an important resource for Ghanaian NGOs. They serve as mediators between the domestic NGOs and the donors. Volunteers prove especially useful as they are able to produce plans, proposals, and reports that suit the packaging and bureaucratic demands of the donor agencies Ghanaian NGOs depend on. Volunteers have effectively mastered the jargon of the development industry and are able to produce glossy reports filled with pictures, tables, evaluations, and quotations by the "people."

International volunteers thus fulfill a dual role. On the one hand, they help NGOs to play by the donors' rules of professionalism; one of the ways NGOs negotiate donor impositions is by mobilizing these volunteers. On the other hand, volunteers also tie NGOs to the languages and demands of the global development industry, making them more dependent on foreign "expertise." The expertise of volunteers is only technically free. This expertise comes at a cost as the dependence on volunteers perpetuates the notion that countries like Ghana need foreign knowledge in order to achieve their goals.

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these lower ranks of the development industry, while men are found in the positions of authority, working in the headquarters of the donor agencies.

Villagers as Volunteers

NGOs also work with another kind of volunteers – those who come from villages in which they operate. These volunteers create links between NGOs and the rural women the NGOs aim to serve. These village-based volunteers serve as translators and bookkeepers.

The notion of "volunteering" fits well with the altruism attributed to NGOs. According to the ideology of the development industry, NGOs are supposed to operate outside of capitalistic profit-making and cash economy while in actuality promoting both. Yet, Bolga NGOs are a part and parcel of the local economy. The economic scarcity in the Upper East region makes NGOs very lucrative employers. NGO workers benefit from their employment, however insecure and volatile, but so do the volunteers. All volunteers I met "work" for more than one NGO. They do not receive a salary, but receive other monetary benefits, gifts, and a possibility of upward mobility and NGO employment. Volunteering for an NGO brings an income that is nominal only from the perspective of Accra-based donors. For example, volunteers receive an equivalent of ten US dollars for attending workshops. (NGOs call this money is called "motivation"; this is a politically correct term which erases the image of actual currency passing hands). But ten US dollars is a monthly salary of a watchman for a small business in Bolga. Thus, becoming a volunteer is coveted and highly politicized. For this reason, volunteers are often members of the rural elites and come from either the chief's or the assembly man's family.

Traditional Authorities

Chiefs and other "traditional authorities" not only chose volunteers for NGOs from within their families, but work closely with NGOs in other realms as well. NGOs seek the approval of chiefs before they begin their projects and offer them gifts in exchange. Chiefs and people NGOs consider village "opinion leaders" serve to approve NGO projects and thus secure their legitimacy.

Dr. Adjei told me that the Bolga chief was very important for his NGO. "When I first opened my clinic, I made friends with the chief. He found out I liked jazz and we spent many evenings listening to my albums," he said. This friendship with the Bolga chief has not only secured the legitimacy necessary for his later controversial NGO work on family planning and female genital cutting, but has brought social capital to both of them. When Dr. Adjei received an international award in 2002, he asked the Bolga chief to accompany him to the award ceremony in New York. Many of my interlocutors have mentioned this event repeatedly, impressed by both Dr. Adjei's award and the chief's new fame.

While chiefs had a negligible political status and a limited sphere of influence in post-independence Ghana (Rathbone 2000), they have begun to thrive in the age of development and democracy. The development industry sees chiefs as legitimate people's representatives; it would be unthinkable to design development projects without consulting chiefs. Chiefs benefit more from their ties to NGOs than from their ties to the Ghanaian government. This is one of the reasons, as we will see in Chapters 5 and 6, why NGOs can count on the chiefs' support.

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Local Government Officials

NGOs also collaborate with local government officials. Generally speaking, the development industry considers the government an important "stakeholder."[21] Government agencies at the margins of the state – those working at the regional and district level – readily collaborate with NGOs. In other countries, such as Bangladesh, NGOs have liaisons with high-level government officials who rotate on "two- to three-year deputations at the NGO headquarters" (Karim 2001: 97). Ghanaian government officials of this rank, however, do not need NGOs, since the national government is sufficiently funded. But the underfunded government officials at the margins of the Ghanaian state find collaboration with NGOs appealing.

These local government officials form closely-knit networks and relationships with NGOs, resembling "interpenetration" or blending (Annis 1988: 215). Women's NGOs always invite government's gender specialists to their workshops and collaborate with them on development projects. Local government officials thus become a part of the development industry. This industry is attractive for individual government officials as much as for other Ghanaians, since it allows them access to additional economic and symbolic capital. Some government workers "have" NGOs next to their government job: Madam Agnes, e.g. was a regional director of the NCWD and also had her own NGO. Mr. Stephen, my host from Lungu worked for local government, served as a member of a

[21] This word, now ubiquitous in the development industry, stems from the business world; it is defined by the OED as "a person, company, etc., with a concern or (esp. financial) interest in ensuring the success of an organization, business, system, etc." But who is recognized as a stakeholder in the Ghanaian development industry is a controversial question. It is unclear how particular institutions such as the government or traditional authorities have become stakeholders, but other institutions concerned with development, such as the churches, have not. However, now that stakeholders have been defined and established, same institutions and same officials within them are habitually considered to fulfill this role.

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local parliament, and worked as a program coordinator for an NGO. Others serve on NGO boards, which brings them both economic and symbolic capital.

Donors

Ghanaian NGOs rely on funding from donor organizations. Donors to Ghanaian NGOs include a variety of organizations: foreign embassies, foreign governments' aid agencies (such as the US Agency for International Development or the Japanese International Cooperation Agency), international governmental organizations (such as the WHO and UN agencies), international NGOs (such as Womankind Worldwide or Action Aid), and international foundations and charities (such as the Ford Foundation or the Friedrich-Ebert Foundation).

While scholars consider international NGOs just another "kind" of NGOs, this understanding is misleading. International NGOs in Ghana function as donors – they fund Ghanaian NGO projects.[22] For this reason, I call them "donor NGOs." Action Aid Ghana is one such donor NGO that is very active in the Upper East region. They see themselves as a "partnership-based organization," and promote the discourse of equality. Their "partners" in Bolga include both women's NGOs such as Women's Development Center, Women's and Orphans Fellowship, Single Women and Mothers, as well as other kinds of organizations.

[22] Only a few international NGOs with offices in Ghana implement their own projects. Christian international NGOs in particular (such as World Vision International and Catholic Relief Services) implement their own projects rather than serving as donors to Ghanaian NGOs.

Ghana's main bilateral donors are also former colonial powers: the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Denmark. Development is important for these countries. By giving money to Ghana, feelings of colonial guilt, responsibility, and obligation are converted into a benevolent gesture. The colonial connection is very important for other countries as well. For example, the UK donates most of its money to India, Belgium to Congo, Portugal to Angola.[23] The development industry allows these countries to mediate the colonial guilt under the guise of the humanitarian gift.

Donor countries rarely acknowledge this motivation; however, they do acknowledge that development is a form of exchange by talking about it as an investment in their own future. Donor discourses and policies explain what motivates them to give and what they expect in return. They tell us that at times, donors conceptualize development as a process of exchange, not just unilateral "giving." Donor countries give economic capital because they expect benefits from it.

The main benefit donors hope for is that development will mediate the risks and vulnerabilities of the global, interconnected age. A desire for a secure world has always motivated development, but the fear of terrorism in the wake of September 11 has foregrounded it. Donor governments now articulate development as a solution to this fear.

In the last five years, donor countries have explicitly articulated their motivation to engage in development efforts based on a fear of terrorist violence and an assumption that development, conceptualized as socio-economic stability, will prevent it. We see this

[23] Data taken from www.oecd.org.statistics.

in their development policies. For example, the Dutch government explains why it cares about Africa's development:

> Neither Africa nor international community "can afford to stand by while Africa becomes increasingly marginalised and impoverished. The humanitarian tragedy being played out in many African countries is threatening to undermine both global security and the international rule of law. ... Opportunities must be seized without delay: failure to do so will cost both Africa and the international community dear. (Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2003)

The Danish government has a similar explanation. They say:

> Development assistance is an active foreign policy instrument. This applies in particular to the objective of promoting stability, security and the fight against terrorism. The Government will, therefore, increase the development assistance contribution to the fight against global terrorism as part of overall Danish anti-terrorist efforts with the aim of taking counteraction here and now against the current terrorist threat and of making a long-term effort directed at the growing recruitment and sympathy base for the new terrorism. (Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2004)

These policy excerpts tell us that donor countries make explicit links between their pledge to increase development giving in Africa and their assumption that otherwise, Africa will become a breeding ground for sympathizers of "terrorism." They see development as an economic, social, and political intervention. By giving development money, they allay their fears and reassure their populations that they can live in peace. If it were not for these emotions – the guilt, the fear, and at times, the compassion – development would not have the appeal it has today.

In Ghana, all donor agencies have their main – and often, only – offices in Accra. Their offices are hidden behind thick walls and protected by armed security guards. Donors' air-conditioned and modern offices are luxurious Western enclaves in Ghana's

capital. These offices are different from Ghanaian NGO offices, which are bustling thoroughfares. Donors' offices are slick and hum with quiet efficiency and an almost audible silence.

Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA), and Action Aid Ghana are the only donors with offices in the Upper East region. This proximity is crucial for their relationship to Ghanaian NGOs. Their presence in the Upper East region indicates their interest in engaging "the local," as a field of development interventions, as well an interest in surveilling and regulating them. JICA's proximity to Bolga NGOs thus creates conflicts. Anthropologists have identified the problems between donors and "locals" as stemming from cultural differences and gaps in cross-cultural understanding (Justice 1989). But contemporary conflicts between NGOs have more to do with power inequalities than with cultural difference. Ghanaian NGOs complain about being treated like "children" – admonished and insulted by donors. For example, Evelyn, the director of the Single Women and Mothers NGO, recalled that she refused to work with one of JICA representatives for this reason. I also watched how in a fit of anger, an NGO worker declared that JICA, Action Aid, and Tamale based German Development Service were a donor "axis of evil."

While all donor agencies are foreign, their staff members are often Ghanaian. International governmental organizations (such as UNDP) as well as international NGOs (such as Action Aid) employ mostly Ghanaian staff members. The few foreign staff members are either mobile global citizens who follow their development assignments around the world or "expatriates" – people who have made Ghana their home.

NGOs and Fictive Kin

NGOs often talk about making friends as one of the important benefits of their work. However, they not only make friendships, they also make kin. In some cases, they foster existing kinship ties by employing their family members. But more commonly, NGOs make fictive kin; they use the language of kinship to make sense of their new relationships as well as to cultivate them.

Making fictive kin is crucial for Ghanaian NGOs. Staff relationships within most NGOs are framed with kinship metaphors. The women NGO directors all have adoptive sons and daughters. These include members of their extended families they support, as well as women and men who work for their NGOs and thus become their children.

"Did one of my white daughters call me?" asked Josephine one day when she came home from work. Josephine calls all NGO workers, interns, researchers, and volunteers her "daughters." These new children accept the terminology. The Women's Network staffs call their director named Mrs. Mahama their mother or "Mom." The international volunteers also play their part. Nita called her boss Mama, and also referred to a director of another NGO as Mama Florence. Mama Florence "adopted" Nita on her first day in Bolga, telling her that she will be her daughter and instructing her in how to behave at her work place. Nita had so many mothers that she once caused confusion. At the International Women's Day march in support of the Domestic Violence Bill, Nita called out to her boss who was standing far away. Yet, when she yelled out "Mama," five women turned around and responded.

Many of my own relationships with Ghanaians became framed in kinship terms over time. I referred to my neighbors as sister Stella and sister Zeyneba. Many NGO directors were my "Aunties," but I referred to Elizabeth as "n kiima" - my sister. While she could be my mother age-wise and is a powerful and senior NGO director, we are friends, and friends are metaphorical age-mates. The various kinds of relationships to Ghanaians made me a part of a larger social world, but they also fostered a sense of intimacy.[24] In my case, the kinship metaphors *worked* in that they produced an affective relationship between my interlocutors and me.

Ghanaians use kinship terms to make sense of their relationships to new people in their lives. This is true not only for NGOs, but also for Bolga's social life more generally. By claiming them as family, Ghanaians literally "familiarize" themselves with yesterday's strangers. Kinship metaphors refer not only to a realized proximity or intimacy, but signal one's interest in a closer relationship. In other words, a kin name is an interpellation difficult to refuse. To refuse the name would mean to refuse the relationship. Likewise, accepting a kin term means accepting a new relationship.

For example, when a Canadian volunteer Alicia arrived in Bolga, she was "adopted" by her neighbor. This neighbor told Alicia that she would be her mother the first time they met, when Alicia inquired about laundry washing arrangements. The neighbor said that she would do Alicia's washing and be her mother. Alicia wouldn't pay her, the neighbor insisted, for she wouldn't pay her mother at home either. Afterwards,

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[24] In her research on witchcraft, Favret-Saada has also found that becoming "bewitched," and thus inhabiting a structural position in her informants' world, made her research possible in first place (1989). I did not become bewitched, but I became "family," in one way or another.

Alicia referred to this woman as "my Ghanaian mother." By framing their relationship on kinship terms, Alicia's neighbor initialized a closer relationship. She also signaled an interest in a more sustained relationship, a relationship built on obligations, not on a contract.

Bolga NGOs use the terminology of family to foster these kinds of relationships. Most Bolga NGOs depend on personal obligations. The kinship metaphors are crucial for survival of those NGOs whose staff struggle without steady salaries. The "familiarizing" of professional relationships enables Ghanaian NGOs to operate in the face of uncertain donor funding. Instead of salaries, NGOs offer their staff emotions and future obligations contained in the kin relations.

When a staff member calls their boss a "mother," they accept the responsibility of a daughter or son, respectively. But the director also accepts the responsibility and obligations of a mother. Most NGOs rely on this aspect of a relationship to ensure the commitment of their workers.

The workers of Women's Development Center and most other NGOs do not have firm or steady salaries. They have primary job duties, but in practice, everybody does everything. When they work on weekends, they do not get time off during the week. When there is no salary money for a month or two, they keep working anyway. So, in order to keep NGOs functioning, other bonds are fostered. And family is the first choice of a bond that goes beyond the contract.

The kinship metaphors help negotiate not only obligations, but also establish power relations. When NGO staff and their directors frame their relationships in kinship

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terms, they couch the power relations with the known, familiar terms as well. The new becomes subsumed under the old. There are entire codes of behavior that regulate the relationships between elders and youth, parents and children. Thus, when NGO workers become children and the directors become parents, the implicit rules of kinship relations and forms of power and obligation they regulate are transferred onto a new realm. So, when Josephine chastised Angela and told her: "You need to go to work, your mother needs you," Angela knew not to disobey. In other words, while NGO directors use kinship metaphors to express care for their workers, they also use these metaphors for purposes of control.

The importance of fictive kin for Ghanaian NGOs flies in the face of normative theories about what civil society *should* be like. One of defining features of civil society, according to social theorists, is its difference from family ties. What defines civil society is that it is *not* family. This civil in "civil society" means "not just good manners, but a normative order facilitating amicable or at least reliable and nonthreatening relationships *among strangers* and in general all those who were *not bound together by deep private relations like kinship*" (Calhoun 2001: 1898). Calhoun explains that the concept of civil society is predicated on the exclusion of kin-like relations. He expands: "what civil society signifies in contemporary political analysis is the organization of social life on the basis of interpersonal relationships, group formation, and systems of exchange linking people beyond the range of intimate family relations and without reliance on direction by the government" (ibid.).

Thus, like many other concepts related to NGOs, civil society is tied to a notion of purity. While the concept itself is broad and manipulable within the defined limits, it excludes notions of intimacy and family relations. Whether or not we call them "civil society organizations," we see that NGOs live on kinship – existing and fictive – and the intimacy this kinship produces. We might even extend this argument to development industry and humanitarianism more broadly. In practices of Amnesty International, we also see how activists become invested in particular persons, issues and countries, and how that emotional investment becomes a part of their identities. Bornstein has also shown in her analysis of child sponsorship that World Vision works by producing intimacy between American donors and children in Zimbabwe (2003).

In this chapter, I have shown that NGOs have emerged due to numerous historical convergences and that they thrive because they produce new and intimate relationships. The concept of civil society does not accommodate the intimacies of Ghanaian NGOs. Hence, either the concept should be revised, or it is not applicable to NGOs. My project is an attempt to argue against theories based in notions of purity. NGOs are not pure and do not correspond with an ideal-typic analytic which rests on the purity of civil society, purity of non-profits, or purity of the local. If we accept this, we might able to gain a new understanding of NGOs and the processes of globalization and development.

CHAPTER 3

HISTORIES THAT MATTER

Ghana's history cannot be neatly summarized in a chapter. Writing about history always entails a process of selection. While historians have written about a wide range of processes,[25] the term "Ghanaian history" is often equated with national history, and history of postcolonial regime changes. Histories of northern Ghana are few and rarely feature in these accounts of the nation.[26]

Here, I will offer accounts of historical processes highly relevant for my discussion of NGOs. This is not a representation of a continuous "Ghanaian history"; my accounts are like Bolga rocks – they puncture Ghana's historical landscapes.

Colonial Anxieties and Surveilled Tradition

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[25] Many histories focus on the Asante kingdom (Allman 1993, McCaskie 1995 and 2000, Berry 2001, Wilks 1993) and Kwame Nkrumah's presidency (Birmingham 1998, Busumtwi-Sam 2001). Historians have written on particular social institutions such as religion (Obeng 1996, Meyer 1999) and medicine (Patterson 1981). Numerous political histories explore the role of chieftaincy (Rathbone 2000, Berry 2001), the rise of nationalism (Morrison 1982), and ethnicity (Lentz and Nugent 2000). Class-based histories have focused on struggles of miners (Crisp 1984), cocoa farmers (Grier 1979), and economic struggles of Accra women (Robertson 1984). Another approach to gendered analysis is Allman and Tashijan's history the Asante kingdom from women's perspective (2000). A recent trend in historiography of Ghana is the analysis of the colonial encounter, which includes monographs on Ghanaian relationship with the Dutch (Van Kessel 2002); the role of the Swiss expatriates in Ghana (Lenzin 2000); the colonial railway encounters (Luntinen 1996); colonial trade in southern Ghana (Gocking 1999), and the struggles against the colonial rule there (Li 2002); colonial domination through writing (Hawkins 2002), and Ghanaian agency in maintaining their notions of the sacred (Greene 2002).

[26] Historians have published only a handful of books situated in northern Ghana: Bening (1990), Hawkins (2002), Allman and Parker (2006), Grischow (1999), Songsore (1983), and Wilks (1989); articles on history of northern Ghana include Der (1998), Thomas (1973, 1974, and 1983), Grischow (2006), Sutton (1989), and Parker (2006).

The usual story of Africa under colonial rule is the story of the civilizing mission – the mission of colonizers to "civilize" and "modernize" Africans. But this is not the only story. Scholars of Africa have shown that the colonizers were torn between their competing desires; they could not decide if they wanted Africans to be traditional or modern. On the one hand, they found African traditions "repugnant," especially when these traditions conflicted with their interests (Mamdani 1996: 80). For example, when European settlers in African colonies experienced "native" culture as a threat, and when African cultural practices offended their sensitivities, they asked the government to intervene and criminalize them:

> "The wives of a man are practically his slaves," argued Natal's governor Pine, "and the more a man has the richer he is." To draw out the practical significance of this moral crusade, the governor added: "How can an Englishman with one pair of hands compete with a native man with five to twenty slave wives?" [...] And so the commission made its most "enlightened" recommendations: that polygamy and lobolo (bridewealth) be prohibited by law. (Mamdani 1996: 91)

Thus, under the pretense of enlightening Africans and freeing African women, but with an acknowledgment of their own interests, the European settlers demanded that the government prohibit traditional forms of marriage. On the other hand, the British did not want Africans to become like Europeans too quickly, for that also threatened them. The colonial officials feared that having "the natives" at equal footing would compromise colonial rule. The British were concerned about the rise of "premature individualism" and westernization in their colonies. This was also the case with other European powers such as France and Belgium; they all "came to see the culturally civilized native as a growing

political threat" (Mamdani 1996: 92). Colonizers realized that "Westernized" Africans could jeopardize the colonial rule, rule based on racial and cultural distinctions. "The laborer, the professional, the trader, and the intellectual" started making demands on "parity of treatment and equality of civil status," demands the colonizers were not willing to fulfill (Mamdani 1996: 92).

To prevent "Westernization," the British made tradition a founding mechanism of their rule. Custom and culture became principles of governance. The British based their rule on what they deemed "customary law" in order to confine the "natives" in "their traditions." The first move of colonial officials in Africa was to create territorially segregated "tribes" based on alleged cultural belonging. "The boundaries of culture would mark the parameters of territorial administration," writes Mamdani (1996: 79). Like many other Africanists, Mamdani argues that the British invented "tribes" and "tribal political structures" where and when they needed them (1996). The British not only believed that custom "governed African conduct" (Moore 2005: 162), but created political structures in support of this belief. In other words, they made their wish and belief a reality by inventing traditions.

The creation of tribes was both an intervention in culture and an intervention in politics, aimed at cementing the British colonial rule. The British used tradition as a political tool, hoping that it would keep Africans from asserting their rights. Mamdani shows this by quoting the British governor of Tanganyika:

> If we set up merely a European form of administration, the day will come when the people of the Territory will demand that the British form of administration shall pass into their hands – we have India at our door as an object lesson. If we aim at indirect administration through the appropriate

> Native Authority –Chief or Council– founded on the people's own traditions and preserving their own tribal organization, their own laws and customs purged of anything that is "repugnant to justice and morality" we shall be building an edifice with some foundation to it, *capable of standing the shock which will inevitably come when the educated native seeks to gain the possession of the machinery of Government and to run it on Western lines ... If we treat them properly, moreover, we shall have the members of the Native Administration on our side.* (1996: 80)

In order to have more control over the chiefs, the British instituted a system of governance called indirect rule. Indirect rule, first created by the governor-general of Nigeria, Lord Lugard, incorporated chiefs into the colonial administrative structure and subordinated them to colonial officials. This governance system consisted of executive government, parliaments, and courts. Under indirect rule, chiefs became employees of the colonial state and culture became gradually codified as written law. As Chanock explains, "the flexible principles which had guided [customary processes] were now fed into a rule-honing and -using machine operating in new political circumstances" (Chanock 1998: 62).

Although putatively aimed at sharing governance, indirect rule actually allowed the British to keep Africans at bay, in the realm of surveilled tradition. Scholars of African history have criticized indirect rule and customary law as a political instrument that served the interests of colonial authorities and chiefs (Chanock 1998, Manuh 1995). Mamdani writes:

> Customary law was not about guaranteeing rights; it was about enforcing custom. Its point was not to limit power, but to enable it. The justification of power was that it was a custodian of custom in the wider context of alien domination. Against this description was the reality: customary law consolidated the noncustomary power of chiefs in the colonial administration. It did so in two ways that marked a breach from the precolonial period. For the first time, the reach of the Native Authority and the customary law it dispensed came to be all-embracing. Previously autonomous social domains like the household, age sets, and gender associations – to cite three important instances – now fell within the scope of chiefly power. At the same time – and this is the second breach with the precolonial period – any challenge to chiefly power would now have to reckon

with a wider systemic response. The Native Authority was backed up by the armed might of the modern state at the center.[27] (1996: 110)

Customary Law and Colonial Rule in Northern Ghana

The British ruled northern Ghana from the turn of the century until 1957. In the period immediately following colonization, the British demarcated "tribes" and created "traditional authorities." Thus, colonial officials invented traditional culture in the mold necessary for their rule.

> The northern administration created a series of chieftaincies and used the chiefs to provide communal (forced) labour for public works. This policy built on Northcott's belief that slave raiding had destroyed a hierarchical system of chieftaincies in the Northern Territories. Carrying this belief forward, between 1900 and 1919 the northern administration attempted to "resurrect" these chieftaincies and re-establish the north's traditional political structures. (Grischow 1999:9)

Grischow describes the British rule in northern Ghana, where the British created Native Authorities, Native Tribunals, and Native Treasuries (Grischow 1999:16). Northern Territories were governed by "customary law" and ruled by "traditional" authorities that had to report to the colonial government. The British needed the traditional authorities for many reasons: to control the vast territory inhabited only by Africans; to create "middlemen" who would ally themselves with the colonial government and thus secure their rule; and to prevent the rise of political activism and civil rights movements in the country. Grischow argues that the British supported

[27] This, at least, is the theory of customary law. Historians have shown that n practice, the law was not always codified. It was often left malleable to better serve colonial shifting interests, interpreted freely by African chiefs, and negotiated by its subjects (Shadle 1999).

traditional authorities in the North based on their failure to prevent the rise of civil society that was threatening the colonial rule in southern Ghana (1999).

In southern Ghana (then comprising the Gold Coast Colony and Ashanti Protectorate), large scale farming and mining had led to both economic and political changes: from individual accumulation and a rise in private capital, to the formation of civil society. This processes threatened the British rule, explains Grischow: "Worse yet for the colonial state, economic processes in the south became tied to the political activities of a class of educated professionals from the coast. As a corollary of development in the south, civil society thus pressed against the colonial ideas of African community" (1999:10).

While colonial officials saw southern Ghana as already too "westernized" and thus a threat, Northern Territories appeared as a "clean slate," a tabula rasa (Grischow 1999: 9). The British wanted to avoid westernization in the north at all cost. To prevent modernization and formation of civil society, the British hoped that the preservation of the "African community" would keep the North more traditional. Based on this equation of tradition and political community, the British established a system of development "along 'African lines,' that is, peasant production under communal land tenure" (Grischow 1999: 9). They hoped that traditional modes of economy and rule would keep northern Ghana from rising up.

This history of customary law and rule by traditional authorities frames my understanding of contemporary cultural politics in Ghana and the struggle between NGOs

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Making the "Women's Machinery"

> *In the wake of the Decade for Women (1975-1985) declared by the United Nations, issues of gender inequality . . . have achieved normative status in development-type programs (at least at the level of rhetoric).*
> *StaceyPigg and Vincanne Adams (2005: 13).*

The government of Ghana has followed the normative call and presented itself as "pro-women" in the international arena. Ghana has established institutions, passed progressive policies, and ratified international women's rights conventions in the name of women's advancement. According to the UN criteria, Ghana is one of a few countries in the world, and one of only three African countries (next to Namibia and Nigeria) that has fulfilled many international norms on women's equality: Ghana has a "national machinery" for women, it submits "national action plans" for the advancement of women, and it has signed and ratified CEDAW – the Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women.[28]

Ghana was at the forefront of international mobilizing about women's equality. Immediately following the first United Nations Conference on Women in 1975, Ghana established the "women's machinery" by creating the National Council on Women and Development (NCWD). This governmental institution was going to be in charge of

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[28] See United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (2004).

women's equality (later termed gender equality). The current task of NCWD is to support "government-wide mainstreaming of a gender-equality perspective in all policy areas" (CEDAW/C/GHA/3-5, p.14).

However, Ghana has a complex history of politics of gender. NCWD never became a strong advocate for women countrywide; it never received adequate resources and it faced a powerful rival organization. Ghana's First Lady Nana Rawlings established her own organization, the 31 December Women's Movement, names after the date of her husband's coup d'etat, shortly after his ascent to power in 1981. This NGO stifled the power of NCWD as Nana Rawlings promoted herself as a true representative of Ghanaian women.

Neither rural nor urban women in the Upper East region ever mentioned the 31 December Women's Movement, but this organization is alive in the historical memory of Ghanaian women's activists. The struggles between the First Lady's organization and other women's organizations are the historical precursor to the contemporary contentious character of Ghanaian gender politics. The 31 December Women's Movement was critiqued by my NGO interlocutors, and is subject to academic criticism as well. Tsikata writes, "depending on circumstances, it would present itself as a revolutionary organ, or as an NGO, or any number of things. But it had taken up all the space and stifled and constrained women's independent organising. It also controlled the national machinery for women, the National Council on Women and Development, so very few organisations were able to function at all" (In Mama et al. 2005). In other words, the 31 December Women's Movement adopted a flexible identity. It functioned as a de-facto government

institution (by supporting staff through government salaries), as an NGO (by receiving donor funding), and as a popular revolutionary organization (by enrolling hundreds of thousands of Ghanaian women as members).

In 2001, after twenty years of the Rawlings rule ended, the 31 December Women's Movement died out. The new President, John Kuffuor, established the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs (MOWAC). The new institution was meant to signify a new beginning, leaving behind the insignificant NCWD. The government now claims that "the creation of a Cabinet-level Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs in 2001 was a demonstration of political will to address the problem of women's marginalization and raise the issues of women's rights and empowerment to a higher national level"[29] and that "gender issues ... receive attention at the highest level of decision making."[30]

The old organization of the "women's machinery," NCWD, still exists, but has a different function: "The ministry performs the policymaking, planning and coordination functions," while NCWD "implements the policies, plans and the programmes to advance issues of women" (CEDAW/C/GHA/3-5, p. 14). Thus, they have a division of responsibilities: MOWAC guides the country's women's policies and NCWD implements them.

While the government uses the new Ministry as a symbol of a new start, it has problems convincing both Ghanaians and the international community that it is fully committed to gender equality. Ghana's self-representation as gender-progressive has a history of being only partially successful.

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[29] UN Session 2006, "Introductory Remarks."

Women's NGOs have supported the new government's commitment to women, but opposed the form it took. NGOs questioned the government's establishing of this Ministry. They argued that the Ministry would delegate gender equality to the margins while making it appear important. As the Ghanaian women's activist Tsikata argued, "where Ministries of Women had been set up, gender issues had become ghettoised" (In Mama et al. 2005). In other words, NGOs feared that by making MOWAC responsible for women, other government ministries would be allowed to neglect them. Mensah-Kutin writes:

> What we wanted was a constitutional mandate. We also wanted a number of organisations at different institutional locations, because the business of gender equality is not a single package - it is a multi-faceted thing. So you need an independent statutory body, but you also need a policy-making agency within government that can also reach across various ministries. Usually when you set up a ministry, you don't have the mandate to reach across other ministries. You also need independent civil society formations and so on. We were worried about the institutional vehicle that had been chosen. (In Mama et al. 2005)

Women's NGOs also questioned the President's choice of Gladys Asmah as the Minister, claiming that being a woman does not qualify one to direct a Ministry of Women's Affairs. Asmah's CV indeed shows that she had no background gender politics. A Ghanaian academic I talked to called Asmah a "disaster."

The government was somewhat more successful in convincing the UN – those further away – that it is committed to gender equality. Starting in 1995, after the 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing, UN member countries started submitting reports to the UN on their steps toward promoting gender equality regularly. Ghana was

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30 http://www.mowac.gov.gh, accessed 4-16-2005

praised for its first reports. For example, a UN document from 1999 singles out Ghana as spearheading relevant transformations in order to improve gender equality. According to this report, Ghana has promised all the right changes: ensuring "that potable water is available and accessible by 2000"; partnering with the UN Population Fund to conduct "post-Beijing outreach activities in poor urban communities"; a plan to "improve women's access to credit" – especially for "grass-roots women," and to "sensitize bank managers to extending credit to women"; "scholarship schemes for poor girls," improvement in reproductive health, a new focus on "health hazards of tobacco consumption and related risks of substance abuse and addiction of women," "awareness campaigns to change attitudes" about women's load of work; affirmative action proposals including that "40 per cent of government appointment nominees at district levels of power and decision-making must be women by 2005" and that media will have "50 per cent of women"; raising "awareness about the Platform for Action through the media"; working with women on environment issues by having "meetings with business women on waste management"; and recognition of "discriminatory traditional attitudes and customary practices" as "violations of the rights of the girl child" (E/CN.6/1999/2/Add.1).

In its national action plan, the Ghanaian government offered not only a promise to fulfill these objectives, but also "comprehensive time-bound targets and benchmarks or indicators for monitoring," for which it was commended. Thus, the government of Ghana attempted to fulfill the UN criteria by establishing institutions, making policies, submitting action plans and reports, and signing international treaties.

However, the government did not translate these commitments into actions. It did not endow either NCWD or the Ministry with significant resources. The lack of resources has tied hands of the government officials in the "machinery." "Our budget is small," the regional director of NCWD in the Upper East region told me. "I can organize one workshop per quarter, nothing else." In 2003, the total budget of the Ministry and all government agencies responsible for women and children was only one million US dollars – a negligible fraction of over one billion US dollars Ghana received in aid money.[31]

Ghana's recent reports to the UN also show that the government has fulfilled only a few of its commitments and that it has not implemented its laws and policies.[32] This did not go unnoticed. At the 2006 session between the representatives of the Ghana government and UN officials, the UN questioned the discrepancy between Ghana's lofty promises and lack of follow through. This left the new Minister of Women Affairs, Alima Mahama, in the unenviable position of having to defend the government's strategies in the international context that she actually fights against in national politics.

In contemporary UN women's politics, countries' official reports also face challenges from NGOs. A Ghanaian NGO Network for Women's Rights in Ghana compiled an alternative report on gender equality, highlighting the differences between attained goals and challenges Ghana faces (NETRIGHT 2004). We will see in the following chapters how this discrepancy between Ghana's image and the government's

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31 For the women's machinery budget, see CEDAW/C/GHA/Q/5. For the Ghanaian government's finances, see http://devdata.worldbank.org/external/CPProfile.asp?CCODE=gha&PTYPE=CP.

32 See CEDAW/C/GHA/Q/5, and CEDAW/C/GHA/Q/5/Add.1.

actual commitment to gender equality becomes a major point of contention between women's NGOs and the government.

I see the government's commitment to gender equity as yet another form of doubling. This commitment is imposed on Ghana by the UN and donor agencies, but is also desired by Ghanaian women and other activists. The government has tried to negotiate its opposition by establishing institutions and policies that appear to bring the question of gender equity from the margins to the center of the country's politics – the national government and the Cabinet. MOWAC, for example, is a symbol of the government's commitment to gender equity. However, the Ministry's small budget does not allow it to make much difference for the lives of Ghanaian women. Thus, the government negotiates its commitment through a form of doubling -- it takes responsibility for gender equity while simultaneously distancing itself from it.

Ghana's Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism is one – the newest – name for Ghana's relationship to global politics. Liberal market policies have dominated Ghana's political economy since the 1980s. Ghana's acceptance of the IMF-promoted Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) was precipitated by an unprecedented economic crisis. In the early 1980s, the price of the country's main export, cocoa, fell drastically. At the same time, the entire region was stricken by a drought. Even the country's elites remember the early 1980's as a time of hardship. My Accra host, an employee of the German embassy, often recalled this historical period: "We had nothing to eat. There were no grains, no fruits, no vegetables.

We made marmalade out of lemons. People were so thin that they got what we called the Rawlings chain." She pointed to her collarbones, explaining that many Ghanaians were so thin that their collarbones were exposed and looked like a chain around their necks.

In 1983, Ghana's president Rawlings responded to the country's economic crisis by overthrowing his earlier vision of state-controlled economy. He embraced free market reforms and the Structural Adjustment Program aimed at the pursuit of economic growth through market liberalization. In the 1980s, the country underwent an Economic Recovery Programme (ERP), aimed at short-term economic "stabilization" measures including reduction of inflation, long-term privatization, and the liberalization of economy. These reforms are still underway; Ghana is currently privatizing ownership of land, water, and electricity.

Since the 1980's, the Economic Recovery Program has given way to "Heavily Indebted Poor Country" measures, a "Poverty Reduction Strategy," and an African-initiated "New Partnership for African Development." While the goals of these programs are similar to the 1980's policies, the governing mechanisms are quite different. The initial structural adjustment program was imposed by donors as a condition for development capital. As Ferguson writes, "the promise of democracy has been held out to African publics at just the moment in history when key matters of macroeconomic policy were taken out of hands of African states" (2006: 12). This is a fitting characterization of the earlier liberalization programs. Whether or not African states have sovereignty over their political economy today is disputable. But they certainly *look like* they do, as a result of new processes of African self-governance. This, for me, is the "neo" in "neoliberal."

Unlike the SAPs which were imposed on African governments in the 1980's, neoliberal policies are hegemonic in the Gramscian sense; Ghanaian and other African governments actively consent to them. African governments either see neoliberalism in a positive way, or do their best to make it seem that way.

The "New Partnership for African Development" demonstrates this well. The African Union claims that NEPAD is "created by Africans, for Africans and implemented by Africans."[33] NEPAD was developed by five African Heads of State (presidents of Algeria, Egypt, Nigeria, Senegal, and South Africa), who were given the African Union mandate to develop "an integrated socio-economic development framework for Africa."[34] Yet, the NEPAD framework for socio-economic development expresses the same beliefs in neoliberal values of good governance and open markets as the World Bank. The official NEPAD document states: "We believe that poverty can only be effectively tackled through the promotion of: democracy, good governance, peace and security; the development of human and physical resources; gender equality; openness to international trade and investment; allocation of appropriate funds to social development and . . . new partnerships between government, the private sector, and with civil society" (NEPAD Steering Committee, p 12). NEPAD also proclaims, "Africa must first put its house in order"; in other words, that African countries have the primary responsibility for their problems (NEPAD Steering Committee, p 3). Nineteen African countries have signed onto NEPAD and accept its provisions. They thus consent to the frameworks that two decades ago would have been imposed from the outside (by the IMF or the World Bank).

33 http://www.africa-union.org/root/au/AUC/SpecialPrograms/nepad/nepad.htm.

African countries also discipline each other now. For example, members of the African Union are now accountable to one another through the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM): "The APRM is the *mutually agreed* instrument for *self-monitoring* by the participating member governments. The primary purpose of the APRM is to foster the adoption of policies, standards and practices that lead to political stability, high economic growth, sustainable development and accelerated sub-regional and continental economic integration through sharing of experiences and reinforcement of successful and best practice, including identifying deficiencies and assessing the needs for capacity building" (African Union 2002).

Ghana was the first country to submit itself to the APRM process. This process highlights the responsibility of Africans for Africa. (We also see this in the currently propagated and practiced form of peacekeeping, as African countries torn by conflicts are supposed to be watched over by *African* soldiers). In localizing responsibility for Africa's problems and confining it to the level of national governments, these new mechanisms thus perform the symbolic violence of self-discipline and self-blame.

Thus, power relations between Africa countries and the global North have changed from a top-down model to consent-based self-disciplining. This transformation is very evident in the donor-promoted language of development "partnership." In Ghana, donors and the government now work together on establishing the country's budget priorities. The new Multi-Donor Budget Support program supposedly gives the government of Ghana more sovereignty over development funds and their use. Instead of

34 http://www.nepad.org/2005/files/inbrief.php

deciding on their own how to spend development funds, many donor agencies give the capital to the Ghanaian government, in support of its budget (MDBS Secretariat 2005). As a result, the government of Ghana no longer has to accept donor impositions, but has to consent to donor demands in the process of partner consultations.

I see this hegemony as a more important result of neoliberalism than the often-cited downsizing of government and of social services. In part, I decenter the downsizing because I have not seen it in practice. There has been no "rolling back" of social services, as the government has never provided them to northern Ghanaians, or to rural women. The government did not downsize its own bureaucracy either. President Kuffuor has established an unprecedented number of ministries (26), each with its own bureaucracy. Even the "women's machinery" has been given the budget to raise its employee numbers from 182 to over 450 (CEDAW/C/GHA/3-5). But more importantly, I emphasize the hegemonic aspect of neoliberalism because the *relationship* between donors and the government is more consequential for my analyses of the "partnerships" in the triangle comprising NGOs, government, and donors, than the *impact* of neoliberalism on Ghana. I believe that ideologies of partnership promote the view that responsibility for "development" is not only shared, but primarily in the hands of those suffering from its pitfalls.

Democracy

The contemporary development industry is tied to Ghana's neoliberalism and democracy. Democracy is in itself a charged and highly politicized term – Spivak calls it

an alibi for industrial capitalism (1990). Today, Ghana is hailed as one of Africa's most successful democracies. Donors to Ghana portray it as a West African success story. In its development plan for Ghana, USAID proclaims, "Ghana remains an oasis of tranquility and hope for a democratically and economically vibrant West Africa. Civil society organizations are emerging as active participants in framing the agenda of government. Parliament's prominence as a dynamic branch of government is growing. The press is free" (USAID 2003: 7). Ghana has such reputation because it has little political violence compared to its neighbors, it pursues neoliberal economic policies, it has a successfully growing economy, and is considered democratic. Thus, has become a "donor darling" and receives more development funding than most other African countries.

The ideology of "democracy" that Ghana must uphold today is imposed by donors. For this reason, the dominant meaning of "democracy" in Ghana corresponds to neoliberal ideology. This ideology stretches "democracy" far beyond the formal character of the state to the processes of governance that donors watch closely. These include not only standard issues such as multiparty elections, free speech, and the rule of law, but also compliance with international law and collaboration with civil society which is to participate in the governance process. Ghana has to prove its commitment to democracy in various ways, including in how it treats NGOs.

But some meanings of "democracy" are not imposed by donors. We can read the history of Ghana as a history of struggles to attain forms of democratic rule. Ghanaians have pursued "democracy" understood in this way for over a hundred years, beginning with its struggles against colonialism. Ghanaians resisted colonization from its inception,

and struggles for independence reached their zenith after World War II. The early 1950's saw an attempt to grant Ghana quasi-independence, and in 1957, Ghana became independent as a result of a peaceful struggle and an agreement with the British.

Independent Ghana also has a complex history of struggles for democracy. The government of Ghana has gone through multiple historical shifts in what will soon be 50 years of its independence. These 50 years have seen many attempts to forge a new a state character and state order. Successions of coups d'etat have followed each elected government, but Ghanaians have protested against the military and authoritarian regimes.

The most recent democratic period began in 1992. This is the fourth and longest time that Ghana has been governed as a democracy. Ghanaian NGOs hold onto the notion of democracy and Ghana's progressive constitution dearly. They make claims on the government and hold it accountable to its performance of democratic principles. Thus, like many other phenomena in Ghana, democracy entails a kind of a doubling. It is at once imposed and wanted, performed and believed in, and both a tool of NGOs and their ultimate goal.

Decentralization

One of the ways that Ghana shows its commitment to democracy is through decentralization – the process of divesting authority over governance and resources from the Accra-based President and ministries. The 1992 constitution formulated the principles of decentralization, according to which "functions, powers, responsibilities and resources

are at all times transferred from the Central Government to local government units" – the 10 regions and over 130 districts (Republic of Ghana 1992: 150).

Ghana's attempt and performance of decentralization set the backdrop for the current NGO-government relationship. NGOs have emerged at the cusp of both democratization and decentralization and boomed in their wake. This historical convergence is not a mere coincidence. Ghana's focus on decentralization is closely related to the country's dependence on foreign aid and the SAPs. Decentralization was one of the many conditions the World Bank imposed on Ghana.[35] The Accra-based national government did not warmly embrace the spread of power and capital across the country. For this reason, decentralization is a process still in the making; districts are still being created and their resources negotiated and ministries are transferring their authority over capital to their "implementing agencies."

The Ministry of Health, for example, is supposed to divide its responsibilities with another branch, the Ghana Health Services. The Ministry should design health policy that the Health Service implements. The Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs (MOWAC) is supposed to design policies that the National Council on Women and Development (NCWD) implements. However, both these ministries have had yearlong conflicts with their "implementing" agents over the division of labor. The ministries have been attached to implementation.

While "implementation" sounds sterile, this is where the capital circulates. Given that the most important functions of the government used to be centralized, the ministries

35 Mohan has discussed Ghana's decentralization as "the complex displacement of political power between global, national and local levels" (1996: 75).

have difficulty accepting the prescribed division of labor. Decentralization leaves the Accra-based ministries with far fewer resources and less sovereignty over capital. And capital is a valuable resource that feeds African governments, as Bayart has argued (1993).

NGOs have criticized the ministries' reluctance to decentralize and do "their job." For example, while MOWAC's mission is to design a gender policy and thus guide the country, the Ministry operated almost the entire four years of Asmah's tenure without one. NGOs framed this as Asmah's inability to govern, arguing that she should do her job and design the gender policy. A dismissive comment, "Asmah doesn't even have a gender policy," was enough evidence for everyone that Asmah was not competent. Instead, Asmah engaged in a struggle against the violence bill and started distributing micro-credits to rural women with sponsorship from JICA. In other words, the Ministry was implementing a development project – something that officially, was the "proper" job of the NCWD.

This disagreement of what is the Minister's proper job is indicative of a larger struggle the government of Ghana faces today. Officially, the government's ministries are supposed to design policies that other government agencies implement. But Ghanaian politicians and Ministers know that will be to their advantage. Having sovereignty over "implementation" means having a say over capital. This can bring personal wealth, as well as symbolic and political capital.

Like many other politicians, Ghanaians secure their popularity and reelection through provision of services. Members of Parliament must secure funding for projects in

their constituencies if they are to be elected. The same is true for Ministers (most of whom are members of parliament). Thus, when Asmah handed out money, she was securing her political capital. NGOs saw through this and criticized Asmah. They saw her micro-credit program as a strategy of self-promotion, rather than a serious contribution to women's development. NGOs and others also criticized Asmah's choice of recipients. She gave out loans to women's groups in her own hometown and region, they claimed. (This could not be verified, as the Ministry never published the list of recipients).

The debate between women's NGOs and the Minister of Women's Affairs is indicative of a larger controversy in Ghana. The country's ministries, who used to control all resources, see their sovereignty over capital jeopardized by decentralization. Government officials on the margins, on the other hand, criticize the central government for its failures to make decentralization an empirical fact. NGOs fit squarely in this debate. They are yet another actor in the margins of Ghana which has access to capital. This provokes government's anxieties over loss of control over capital. (The government is now also trying to control remittances Ghanaians send from abroad by taxing them). On the other hand, NGOs also actively demand that the ministries do "their job" and leave implementation to decentralized agencies.

This is just one of the ways in which NGOs challenge the government and thus entice its opposition. In Chapter 5, we will see that the Ghanaian government engages in struggles with NGOs. But NGOs are only the government's surrogate enemy – government really struggles with itself.

So, why do these histories matter for the context of my dissertation? I have sketched out the history and genealogy of customary law and the links between culture and rule in Africa because in Chapter 5, I will argue that the government of Ghana is propagating a return to customary law (Chapter 5). The making the "Women's Machinery" shows us that Ghana has long histories of women's development as a part of national and international politics, performance of commitment to gender equality, as well as struggles between NGOs and government. The historical context of Ghanaian neoliberalism matters because scholars understand NGOs as agents of neoliberalism, and I will argue against that view. Finally, the histories of democratization and decentralization contextualize the current tensions NGOs provoke. The struggle between NGOs and Asmah over Asmah's job is the backdrop to the debates about the domestic violence bill.

CHAPTER 4

LET'S TALK ABOUT CULTURE:

WOMEN'S NGO WORKSHOPS

We must also understand how certain forms of difference and the languages we employ to define those supposed differences not only reinforce each other but tend to create and maintain each other.
Henry Louis Gates (1986: 15)

In this chapter I will show how Ghanaian women's NGOs engage in the discourse of culturalism. This discourse articulates "people" and their "culture" as being in the way of "development." Culturalism is usually associated with the recently discredited top-down approach to development. Domestic NGOs have successfully advocated an alternative, culturally sensitive approach. They have championed development that respects the "local": local knowledge, local culture, local priorities, and local interests. This has spurred hope in the possibility of alternative development and changed the way the development industry functions – even the World Bank now portrays itself as working "with the people" and valuing culture (Elyachar 2005).

This transformation creates an interesting paradox. While domestic NGOs derive their legitimacy from "local culture" and are seen as its representatives, they often posit "traditional culture" as the main obstacle to women's development. How do we explain this embrace of culturalist discourse by domestic NGOs? This ethnography of Ghanaian

women's NGOs will provide an answer to this question. I will show that these NGOs use culturalism as a tool to deflect responsibility from the failures of the development industry.

In Chapters 5 and 6, I will also show that this discourse is productive, despite its harmfulness. While some would argue that this discourse only mystifies structural inequalities (Farmer 2001), my larger dissertation shows that these debates also enable NGOs to make their claims on the government and negotiate political spaces.

Culturalism in Perspective

But before I turn to my ethnography of culturalism among Ghanaian NGOs, I will show how this discourse has permeated different disciplines, fields of thought, and forms of rule. Scholars, critics, policy-makers, and members of the press have been discussing culture as an obstacle to development for over a century. These debates share a conceptual premise: that culture and economic prosperity advance along same evolutionary lines.

Foundations of Development

Since the historical legacy of development discourse is often elided in scholarly analyses of development, I will first discuss how culturalism is embedded within ideas of natural progress, evolution, and colonial rule. We can trace the discourses that link culture and economic development to the very origin of the concept of development. Michael Watts outlines the evolutionary genealogy of development:

> While development came into English language in the eighteenth century with its root sense of unfolding, it was readily granted a metaphorical extension by the new biology and by ideas of evolution. Development has as a consequence rarely broken free from organicist notions of growth and from a close affinity with
> teleological views of history, science and progress in the West. By the nineteenth century the central thesis of developmentalism as a linear theory of progress rooted in Western capitalist hegemony was cast in stone (Watts 1995: 47, citations omitted).

Watts shows that the very concept of development entails the notions of progress and social evolution. Anthropology played a role in establishing this concept by joining notions of natural and social progress under the concept of development. This tool was taken up by colonizers, and after independence, by the development industry.

Colonial powers deployed the evolutionary concept of social development to legitimize their rule. They posited "historical time as a measure of cultural distance" to justify the civilizing process and enable European domination (Chakrabarty 2000: 7). Moore gives a historical example:

> Those who enjoyed the highest rung of civilization invoked both the moral duty and political rights to rule subject races. Lugard's influential Dual Mandate of the 1920's argued that imperial states had the "grave responsibility of . . . 'bringing forth' to a higher plane . . . the backward races" that were "so pathetically dependent on their guidance." Southern Rhodesia's influential 1944 Godlonton Commission similarly argued that it was whites' location in "stages of development" that gave European races not simply the right but the moral duty "to assist backward peoples to progress and for that purpose to enforce discipline without oppression (2005:159).

The colonial articulation of development, culture, and governance shows that the discourse of culturalism is always political. (In Chapters 5 and 6, I engage this question and show that NGOs reshape the century-long debate about who should govern northern Ghana – traditional customs or national laws). The British blamed African culture and traditions for slowing down development: "the Native Authorities and Africans have been

exhorted . . . to eschew such indigenous laws and customs as are likely to put a brake on political and social development" (Quoted in Hodgson 2001: 108). Colonizers also blamed culture for the already existing poverty, as demonstrated in the words of one colonial official: "because of their poor farming methods . . . the lives of the great mass of our Rhodesian natives are filled with poverty"(Quoted in Moore 2005: 80-81).[36]

While colonialism began to unravel in the 1950's, culturalism stayed. The development industry took up the mantel and continued the tradition of culturalist discourses at colonialism's end. Moreover, development officials made a science out of the relationship between culture and poverty. James Ferguson argues that development and modernization narratives combined the elements of cultural difference and historical time in order to explain global hierarchy (2006). These narratives had particularly pernicious results: they created a correlation between "culture" and "development," and established a causal relationship. According to the logic of modernization, "traditional culture" was a *cause* of "underdevelopment." Such narratives explained global inequality away: developing countries were poor because they were "traditional." In other words, the developmental narratives posited that global inequalities were "the result of the fact that some nations were farther along than others on a track to a unitary 'modernity' (2006: 177).

Development was articulated through ideas linking social evolution and cultural difference: "the organizing premise was the belief in the role of modernization as the only

36 Donald Moore argues that British colonizers not only subscribed to ideas of social evolution but racialized them. "For British rule, African cultural alterity represented a racial difference," a difference based in evolutionary terminology (2005: 159). These articulations of cultural and racial difference justified colonial development projects.

force capable of destroying archaic superstitions and relations" (Escobar 1995: 39). Development posited a correlation between culture and development: with time, cultures would "advance" and modernize, and people would simultaneously become more "developed" and have better lives.

Development now entailed the promise of transcending tradition – according to this logic, everyone would reach the same "stage of development" and modernity eventually. All societies were posited as to moving toward a universal telos which entailed not only improvements in well-being, measured in a collective standard of living, but the modernization of all facets of human subjectivity. These included the individual's habits and thoughts as well as social customs: "indigenous populations had to be 'modernized,' where modernization meant the adoption of the 'right' values, namely those held by the white minority" (Escobar 1995: 43). The values fostered by development targeted broad swatches of private and public life and included domains as disparate as liberal politics, secularism, and family planning (Ferguson 2006: 177).

The Faces of Culturalism in Academic Writing

The evolutionary notion of history and the related discourse of culturalism are not confined to the development industry. We can situate the discourse of culturalism within a larger set of scholarly debates about "transition" in Africa and in the "Third World." These debates read the Third World as a lesser version of Western modernity. Scholars of postcoloniality have shown that various disciplines construct the Third World through the notions of failure, lack, absence, and incompleteness (Chakrabarty 2000: 31f.). Mbembe

argues that scholars from multiple disciplines see Africa through such notions: "in contrast to reason in the West, myth and fable are seen as what, in such societies, denote order and time. ...In addition to being moved by the blind force of custom, these societies are seen as living under the burden of charms, spells, and prodigies" (Mbembe 2001: 4). He singles out development economics and political science for their *explicit* use of the notion of African lack: they see a lack of rational calculation and action in African actors, and are on a "quest for the causes of that lack" (Mbembe 2001: 8).[37] We find an example of culturalism in the influential and well-received work *Culture Matters*, a collection spurred by the thesis that culture is a "primary obstacle to development" (Huntington 2000: xiv). Samuel Huntington and Lawrence Harrison edited the volume in which most contributors explain differences in "stages of development" through cultural difference. Huntington sets the stage:

> In the early 1990s, I happened to come across economic data on Ghana and South Korea in the early 1960s, and I was astonished to see how similar their economies were then. These two countries had roughly comparable levels of per capita GNP; similar divisions of their economy among primary products, manufacturing, and services; and overwhelmingly primary product exports, with South Korea producing a few manufactured goods. Also, they were receiving comparable levels of economic aid. Thirty years later, South Korea had become an industrial giant with the fourteenth largest economy in the world, multinational corporations, major exports of automobiles . . . Moreover, it was on its way to the consolidation of democratic institutions. No such changes had occurred in Ghana, whose per capita GNP was now about one-fifteenth that of South Korea's. How could this extraordinary difference in development be explained? Undoubtedly, many factors played a role, but it seemed to me that culture had to be a large part of the explanation. South Koreans valued thrift, investment, hard work, education, organization, and discipline. Ghanaians had different values. In short, cultures count (2000: xiii).

37 Few scholars profess allegiance to the evolutionary notions of development and culture; anthropologists and feminists do not voice such views explicitly. Yet, Mohanty has shown that a culturalist discourse is fundamental to much feminist writing (1991). Furthermore, many anthropologists use analytics grounded in the notions of linear history or "lack," but express those in more subtle ways (e.g. Verdery 1996).

My purpose here is not to deny or refute these claims, as I see them as based on false premises.[38] I refer to these claims because they illustrate how scholars use culturalism to explain problems with development. Huntington and others consider the "right" cultural values to be the main drivers of development. For policy makers and development "experts" who accept this claim, the next step is to intervene in the field of culture. Daniel Etounga-Manguelle's essay thus proclaims that Africa needs a "cultural adjustment policy" (2000: 65). For this Cameroonian writer and a former member of the World Bank's Council of African Advisors, only "cultural adjustment" can propel Africa to development:

> The persistence and destructiveness of the economic and political crises that have stricken Africa make it necessary for us to act without delay. We must go to the heart of our morals and customs in order to eradicate the layer of mud that prevents our societies from moving into modernism. We must lead this revolution of minds . . . on our own. We must place our bets on our intelligence because Africans, if they have capable leaders, are fully able to distance themselves from the jealousy, the blind submission to the irrational, the lethargy that have been their undoing (2000: 77).

Etounga-Manguelle, who now holds workshops for Africans on how to change their culture, writes in another essay:

> The impact of culture on politics, economics and social life is far from negligible. The present multifaceted crisis which has struck our countries full force, is at once a moral, political and economic crisis. It compels us to open our eyes to certain of our practices and attitudes which undoubtedly hold us back and prevent us from marching towards modernity. These practices and attitudes lie at the heart of institutional weaknesses in Africa, and they are central to the examination of development policy management [...] An example is the frantic search by African societies for consensus. This is considered to be the sole guarantor of social peace. But it has also led us to choose less developed and non-systematic forms of social, economic and political management. These tend to rely on an oral tradition that does not facilitate the codification of

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[38] We cannot answer the question of why Ghanaians suffer from poverty by looking at Ghana alone. Development and underdevelopment are both global processes.

processes. It is not surprising, therefore, that a large part of the institutional weaknesses of organisations and their lack of efficiency in undertaking their development management responsibilities, can be attributed to cultural features in our relationships with each other. (1994, no page numbers indicated)

Thus, the discourse of culturalism has moved from an evolutionary correlation between culture and development to the argument that "African culture" *causes* the lack of development on the continent. Some scholars and policy-makers have been eager to build on Etounga-Manguelle's critique of African culture; they use his qualified "native" and expert voice for their purposes and frequently cite his essay.[39]

"Insiders" and Culturalism in Africa

That a World Bank advisor would uphold the discourse of culturalism and the evolutionary notion of development is not surprising[40]. Global powers continue to define themselves as different from the subaltern through such strategies. But it is important to note that this discourse has also found its way into Africa. While Etounga-Manguelle's essay is the most comprehensive account of culturalism and African development, other Africans framed as "insiders" have engaged in the discourse of culturalism as well.

Dorothy Hodgson cites efforts of Edward Moringe Sokoine, a former Prime Minister of Tanzania and a member of the Maasai ethnic group, to change the Maasai

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[39]Harrison, for example, writes: "At least one African has come to similar conclusions about the slow rate of progress on his continent. Daniel Etounga-Manguelle is a Cameroonian who holds a doctorate in economics and planning from the Sorbonne and who heads a prominent consulting company that operates throughout Africa. . . . he attributes Africa's poverty; authoritarianism and social injustice principally to traditional cultural values and attitudes (2000: 6). Also see Samuelson (2001), Bacevich (2002), Edgell (2003), and Nnaemeka (2003).

[40] Even though most donor organizations now distance themselves from these notions and subscribe to "cultural sensitivity" and "respect for local culture," the discourse of culturalism prevails. Crewe and Harrison have shown that development agencies continue to use culture as an obstacle to development (2005).

cultural practices. She quotes Sokoine: "I would very much like for us all to examine our customs and beliefs in order to set aside our bad customs and nurture our good ones, in light of our respect as Africans" (Hodgson 2001: 196). The cultural practices Sokoine wanted changed included food taboos (the Maasai warrior age-grade *ilmurran* were allowed to eat only meat, blood, and milk), the Maasai painting of their bodies and clothes with red ochre ("dirty, a danger to good health, ... a displeasing sight to foreign visitors"), and traditional clothing, which exposed the body (Hodgson 2001: 200).

We can only speculate why Sokoine adopted this discourse and framed Maasai cultural practices as necessary targets. But it is important to note that a famous and revered Maasai politician, a "mythic figure" spoke against the traditions of his group.[41] While his legacy among the Maasai is based on his fight for land rights, the nation at large remembers him as a modern man "who was hardly a 'real Maasai'" (Hodgson 2001: 201). Sokoine shares something with those who propagate culturalism in his wake. Like Ghanaian NGO workers, and the Zambian intellectuals the next part discusses, Sokoine was advocating a change in culture that he both belonged to and distanced himself from.

The discourse of culturalism is not only a historical artifact. James Ferguson shows how the effort of Zambian intellectuals to construct a new, Africa-positive identity, slides into a culturalist discourse. Ferguson analyzes the culturalism debate in the Zambian online magazine *Chrysalis*, a magazine dedicated to cultural change. "*Chrysalis* is the voice of a new generation of Zambians: confident, proud of their heritage and possessing the collective will and capacity to build our country to take its rightful place in

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[41] He did not speak against highly politicized practices of polygamy and female genital cutting.

the pantheon of sovereign nations," proclaimed the editors in the first magazine issue (quoted in Ferguson 2006: 121). *Chrysalis*, thus, sought to overturn the discourse of culturalism on its head: the negative will be replaced with positive, the old with new, and the shame with pride:

> The first thing we ought to point out about Chrysalis is that is fundamentally and unashamedly a Zambian magazine... For too long Zambia has been interpreted, or more accurately misrepresented, by others who never stopped to look and see, or listen and hear, the extraordinary richness of Zambianness. Simplistic views of a people and culture are bad enough in themselves. They are particularly pernicious, though, when that people begun to view themselves through that narrow lens. Chrysalis seeks to celebrate Zambia, Zambianness and all things Zambian. It is a platform to tout Zambian achievements and achievers. Chrysalis is a mirror to reflect us to ourselves. (quoted in Ferguson 2006: 121)

Chrysalis aimed to turn the discourse of culturalism on its head and thus *reverse* it. A reversal, we know, is a dangerous strategy – it always contains the threat to flip over, to go back to its previous form. That is precisely what happened. Ferguson attributes the flip to an outside influence: "their discussion of a new 'national culture' was quickly overtaken by a scandalous suggestion (made by a Zambian columnist) that the only 'culture' Zambia needed for the information age was 'the culture of the whites,' which should therefore be simply 'copied' (2006: 20). This provocation became the central debate of *Chrysalis* and soon after, the magazine ended.

I see the return to culturalism as an inherent danger of the magazine, not a result of an outside challenge. The name *Chrysalis* already suggests developmental thinking. This is how the editors explained their choice:

> [Chrysalis] seemed to capture the essence of what we felt about Zambia's place in the world, and in her own history. The chrysalis (or pupa) stage in the life-cycle of a butterfly is the seemingly

passive stage between the larva and the imago. It is an intermediate stage of development. The words "seemingly passive" are instructive. We are of the opinion that Zambia is merely in its chrysalis stage of development, and there is much going on inside the cocoon. (quoted in Ferguson 2006: 121)

Chrysalis is a beautiful metaphor that indicates a state of richness, invisible potential, and surprise. Yet, it is nonetheless a biological metaphor, a metaphor chosen for its evolutionary implications. It indicates a state on a linear scale, an "intermediate stage of development."

Second, all along the process, the Chrysalis' editors deployed the discourse of culturalism in various forms. At the heart of Zambia's problems with development are the "inside problems," for Zambia "does not have a culture," wrote the contributors early on (quoted in Ferguson 2006: 128). Furthermore, the editors bifurcated the old and the new: "Tembo argued (in keeping with the Chrysalis program) that African problems were the result of 'the continued influence of the pre-information age financial and political operators' and of an 'old African Chief culture mentality' that fostered corruption" (Ferguson 2006: 133).

The Chrysalis editors saw themselves as the new generation of saviors, free from the old constraints. They ascribed "backward culture" to the chiefs and the old generation, and saw themselves – the educated representatives of the "information age" – as the hope for Zambia. This distinction-making is performative – the "Chrysalis generation" not only saw itself as different, but also produced this difference.

It should not surprise us that the final consensus Chrysalis reached falls along the lines of developmental culturalism. These educated Zambians understood their country

and their continent in terms of "lack," "backwardness," and "failure," despite the attempt to forge a new way.

> It was generally accepted by all commentators that, as Michael Chishala put it, "Black people have failed so far to attain unto the standard of their white counterparts." This was not a matter of any essential or inborn inferiority, but a combination of cultural and circumstantial factors. In Chishala's formulation, these were: (1) a lack of self-esteem; (2) a lack of knowledge or information, and consequently a traditionalistic or backward outlook; and (3) a failure to think in bold and inventive ways. (Ferguson 2006: 139)

We will see a similar process in Ghanaian NGO workshops. I have contextualized culturalism in its different historical articulations to illuminate the backdrop against which Ghanaian discussions take place. In the following pages, I will show the face of culturalism in contemporary Ghana.

Culturalism in Ghanaian NGO Workshops

> *To add a statement to a preexisting series of statements is to perform a complicated and costly gesture.*
> *Foucault (1972: 209).*

In her pioneering ethnography of women's NGO networks, Annelise Riles criticizes NGOs for being "self-contained." She shows how NGOs from the Pacific Rim travel to the UN conferences only to learn how to participate in the drafting of new forms and documents, while leaving "women, the Pacific, the issues" behind (2001: 87). In the following ethnography, I show that NGOs do not have to travel globally to become self-

contained and neglect the communities they advocate for. I examine the ways in which Ghanaian NGO workshops enable this self-containment by focusing on culturalism.

Ghanaian NGOs produce the discourse of culturalism during their workshops. Workshops are the central focus of NGO activities. Attending, preparing, and reporting about workshops often comes at the expense of NGO project work, work in which NGOs take pride and from which they derive their legitimacy. At their workshops, NGOs spend a considerable amount of time articulating "traditional culture" as a barrier to development and empowerment. We will see this through my ethnography of a "consultative workshop on women's access to legal help in northern Ghana" and of a workshop on "gender and voter education."

The first ethnographic vignette shows the general framework of Ghanaian culturalism. It is representative of what is a "typical" workshop for Bolga's women's NGOs. During these workshops, NGOs produce nearly identical lists of "women's issues" and articulate cultural practices as causes of women's problems. The second vignette describes an unusual workshop at which the organizer attempts to frame traditional culture as an asset for development. I will show how and why the persistent discourse of culturalism thrives in spite of the elaborate effort to circumvent it.

"Let's go to Tamale!" Nita, my housemate, exclaimed as she got back from work one day in April. Nita was working for Widows and Orphans Fellowship, an NGO invited to this workshop. "LAWORI is holding a workshop on domestic violence; we should all go," she said. This was exciting news. This was my third month in Bolga and the fieldwork was slow – not much was happening at the local NGOs. This workshop

sounded particularly promising. LAWORI (Lawyers for Women's Rights) is the most prominent gender-focused NGO in Ghana. LAWORI is famous for spearheading the Domestic Violence Bill that provoked controversial political debates all over Ghana. LAWORI's advocacy was crucial for the passing of another bill that legislated equal rights of inheritance for women. LAWORI was at the time less known for its substantial work in providing legal services. Since the 1970's, LAWORI has offered much-needed free legal aid to women in southern Ghana. However, they have not worked in the North of the country; the main reason for this particular workshop was to address this lack.

The one-day LAWORI workshop took place in the fancy new Raddich hotel, dedicated to two American missionaries. The conference hall had plush red chairs and air conditioning, luxuries that most NGOs in Bolga experience only at occasions such as these. The workshop was sponsored by the Ghanaian office of the United Nations Development Program. Both the workshop location and two white SUVs parked outside announced LAWORI's skill at attracting donor capital.

LAWORI had invited NGO representatives and a number of government officials from the three Northern regions. Some workshop participants were from Tamale and Bolga and others came from Wa, the capital of the Upper West region. So that the workshop would start on time, its attendees arrived a day early. While all attendees made efforts to attend this workshop, the efforts by women from Wa were considerable. They had traveled a whole day on one of the worst roads in Ghana, an unpaved and rocky road whose jolts keep your body tight and your stomach clenched.

We gathered in the hotel's conference hall at eight o'clock on a Monday morning. Above the "high table" that elevated LAWORI representatives above the workshop's other attendees, a banner proclaimed: "LAWORI-Ghana under the National Governance Programme holds a One Day Consultative Workshop for the three Northern Regions on women's access to Justice." The workshop facilitator, Hope, introduced herself as a professor of law, the director of a major research institute, and a "church woman" active in her community. A confident and energetic woman, Hope stood out in terms of her class, background, and appearance. Hope's look presented the signs of being a "big woman": she was large, styled, and clothed in a rich and voluminous Ghanaian attire. Like the other two LAWORI representatives, she had studied law both abroad and in Ghana and had achieved considerable professional success. Other two LAWORI representatives wore urban and hip clothes; when contrasted with the invited northern women, all three appeared distinctly upper class.

Hope handed us a professional-looking workshop outline with a four-page agenda. The neatly presented workshop objectives included:

> To establish the status of legal rights, legal education and related services for women and children in the three Northern Regions; [...] identify . . . the gaps and overlaps in service delivery and potential partnerships; prioritise what services are required and develop an agenda for action on legal rights, education and related services; explore the potential for the establishment of a LAWORI office in northern Ghana – the need for such a presence, the mode of functioning and resourcing . . . ; and initiate a network of institutions/individuals and stakeholders to support work in the provision of legal education, assistance and related services.

"What can LAWORI do for northern women?" was the main question of the day. The more particular questions were why Northern women do not enjoy their legal rights; how the government and NGOs are addressing this problem; what gaps they cannot fill; and how LAWORI could help. The agenda seemed ambitious and nearly impossible to achieve in the course of one day. The LAWORI representatives nonetheless exuded confidence and efficiency from the very start of the workshop. Workshops typically did not begin until members of the press arrived with their cameras and recorders, which delayed them by a few hours. However, this LAWORI workshop began on time. "Today is consultation, rather than speeches, speechification," announced Hope. It appeared that LAWORI was interested in serious work. Susan, the LAWORI board chair, postponed what she called the "officious" part of the workshop – an hour of welcome addresses, guest speeches, and Christian and Muslim prayers – for the belated press arrival.

The first agenda item was labeled as "Situation Analysis I: The Issues: What is the status of women's and children's human rights in the three Northern Regions?" Hope divided the participants into several discussion groups and told them to identify a range of issues that affect women – from health, education, and socio-cultural issues to economics, politics, and violence.

Separated in a corner, five women and one man from my group formed a circle. We elected a group leader, a note-taker, and a "rapporteur" – as NGOs call group representatives. One by one, the group members volunteered the areas in which women

and children lacked human rights. Margaret, a young Social Welfare representative, was jotting down the emerging list of "issues"[42]:

- battering, VAW, rape

- children are deprived of education

- poverty

- malnutrition

- lack of parental care

- mutilation, FGM

- women have no rights in decision-making

- women don't own property or land

- women are seen as property of men, girls are seen as an asset

- men abandon their wives

- child labor

- women are marginalized in the job market; need men's permission to work; women have to choose between marriage and job

- forced marriage, early marriage, marriage prohibitions

- banishment into witch camps, accusations of witchcraft

[42] I place the word *issue* in quotes because this term has a particular meaning in the development industry. This term is used as a shorthand for labeling a phenomenon a social problem. It invites a prefabricated set of responses. When NGOs are asked to name "women's issues," they know both what is expected of them and how to formulate their answers. If they were asked to name "particular problems women experience in their communities," "problems that women in their communities identify as priorities," or any other *new* question, NGOs might offer different and more varied kinds of answers. But by using the term "women's issues," LAWORI and other NGOs indicate that they expect a common and preestablished set of answers.

- widowhood rites

- women's heavy workload like carrying water

- lack of access to health care: women have fewer abilities to get up and go to the clinic; women have no resources to go to the clinic

- men have extramarital affairs, AIDS danger, STDs

As group members volunteered this list, they also distanced themselves from the problems. NGO and government representatives did not frame the list as "the list of our problems." Nobody said, "we experience violence," "we suffer from poverty," "my neighbor was accused of witchcraft," or "a woman in my family had that problem." Instead, the attendees attributed all issues to "them" – rural men and women.

Hope, the facilitator, checked on us and announced that we would reconvene. Each group then presented their "findings" to the reassembled participants. In their verbal elaborations, all group representatives identified culture as the base root of all listed problems. For example, Josephine, the co-director of Bolga's Women's Development Center, did not like that health and education were framed in terms of lack of access (i.e. lack of economic capital and proximity). She rather wanted their cultural roots clarified: "The problem is not only the lack of access. Girls drop out because parents prefer boys; there is a low school performance due to gender loads: girls have higher workloads at home."

She then commented on cultural aspects of sexually transmitted diseases and the high rate of HIV/AIDS:

"They call STDs a 'women's sickness,' and tradition allows a man to have girlfriends." Josephine was concerned with proximate and local problems that identified cultural and patriarchal relations as the root of women's disempowerment.

Another group representative, who commented on the fact that "many children are deprived of nutritious food and get anemia and stunted growth," also invoked culture. She explained the cause of malnutrition in the following way:

"*They* have food *taboos*. They say if the child eats an egg, it will become a thief. And women are prohibited from eating certain foods and forced to eat others."

Thus, she claimed that women and children are deprived of food because of cultural regulations and norms. According to this reasoning, cultural taboos rather than poverty and food scarcity are the reason for malnutrition in northern Ghana.

This group representative also explained the "lack of access to health care" by referring to tradition and patriarchy:

"A man doesn't allow a woman to go to a doctor without consulting a soothsayer."

This sentence compounds two important elements of the discourse of culturalism. According to this logic, a man makes decisions for the woman, and he is traditional – he believes that soothsayers must help make difficult decisions. Simultaneously signaling "tradition" and "patriarchy," she made *"them"* rather than "access" the problem.

The only "issue" subsequently added to the above list by the reconvened group was "law and legal rights." Even this problem was explained in terms of culturalism. The group representative who raised this problem singled out "ignorance" as its cause:

"Women are ignorant about the law and about their legal rights, they are ignorant about existing support venues," she said.

Thus, the problem was not economic or political – that rural women cannot afford lawyers, or that in northern Ghana, there are only a handful of layers trained to handle domestic violence cases. Rather than confronting the complex realities of poor legal services for women, NGOs blamed women themselves. According to this logic, if these women were not so steeped in tradition and only *knew* more, they would be able to access justice.

It was not surprising that each group identified the same issues and explained them in similar ways. These were not new or unspoken problems. Previous workshops had produced similar lists of issues; NGO workers had heard and articulated them many times before.[43] This is *the* list that NGOs have agreed on; it constituted the core of the culturalism discourse on women. Each word, phrase, or acronym was a code that signaled a comprehensive culturalist way of thinking about development and rural women. "These people are ignorant" served as a master explanation for many problems.

Culturalism explains away the suffering of Ghanaian men and women. When deployed, it assigns responsibility for the lack of access to healthcare (as well as food, schools, land, jobs etc.) experienced by women in northern Ghana upon tradition and patriarchy. Yet, there are many factors that contribute to this lack that remain unspoken in

[43] The marginalized (mostly rural) women and men who receive services from NGOs do not agree with this framework. During my research in a rural community, I asked men and women to tell me what they saw as their problems and to explain their causes. Culture, tradition, ignorance, or patriarchy were never mentioned, not even when I probed and asked about it explicitly. At one occasion, however, representatives of one NGO visited one of the villages and held a discussion about culture as a problem. The NGO encountered not only the villagers' resistance to this framework, but also confusion. These villagers were not used to this framework and showed little interest in adopting it.

NGO discourses. For healthcare, these range from regional, national, and global problems. The factors include the government's failure to build enough hospitals and employ enough health workers in the three Northern Regions; the fact that Ghana has been losing unprecedented numbers of its doctors, nurses, and pharmacists to the global market; the pharmaceutical industry's lack of interest in finding adequate treatments for tropical diseases; and the extreme levels of poverty which make medicine – both traditional and Western – a luxury for northern women. But in women's NGO workshops in northern Ghana, discussions of these problems focused on culture, rather than economics, geo-politics, or power relations.

The keynote speech that followed the group presentations further cemented the culturalist discourse. Madam Agnes, a government representative and an NGO director, summarized the general agreement:

"Native cultural practices and male chauvinism are infringing on women's rights."

When she uttered this sentence, Madam Agnes was cheered. She also received approving murmur when she distanced herself and the audience from the listed problems. She made clear that violence under discussion was restricted to "natives":

"Women suffer from domestic violence, especially in the rainy season. When a woman pleads tiredness with the husband and doesn't want to have sex, the husband beats her with a hoe, with the whip."

The hoe, the whip, and the rainy season signal a rural environment, an environment of farmers. Madam Agnes reestablished that the workshop debates had rural men and women as its subjects.

What Does Culturalism Do?

The workshop did not move away from the discourse about the rural others and their problem-causing culture. After the keynote, the facilitator prolonged the discussion of "issues" by asking groups to write them on flip charts. While this first agenda item was scheduled to last less than an hour, it took the entire morning. LAWORI squeezed all the other agenda items into the remaining two hours. As a result, the announced workshop objective – a consultation about a LAWORI office in northern Ghana – received only a cursory treatment.

Given LAWORI's aura of efficiency, I was surprised when Hope extended the culturalism discourse by asking groups to list the "issues" on flip charts. Why did this super-prepared, professional NGO, an NGO seemingly bent on making most of their time, allow culturalism to take over the workshop? I received the answer to this question later in the day. At the end of the workshop, I asked the LAWORI director what her NGO would be able to do in northern Ghana. She answered,

"We decided to open an office in Tamale and employ one or two paralegals who will assist women with their legal cases."

Thus, the whole workshop was organized to answer a question that LAWORI had already answered. They consulted with the Northern "stakeholders" and "partners" after the fact. For this reason, the participants' enthusiasm for culturalism served LAWORI well. The workshop was not meant to teach LAWORI something new, since the NGO

already had its plan of action. Culturalism served to deflect attention from this prefabricated character of the "consultation."

The discourse of culturalism often serves to deflect personal and collective responsibility for the problems under discussion. Each time a speaker attributes the cause of a problem to culture, other causes fade away. That day in Tamale, the discourse of culturalism deflected responsibility from the workshop attendees: NGOs and government representatives.

NGOs are beholden to rural women, since the plight of the marginalized legitimizes the very existence of local NGOs. Yet, NGOs spend much of their time attending workshops which do virtually nothing for the rural women NGOs claim to serve.[44] Rural women are present and absent at workshops at the same time. They do not attend the workshops in person; thus, they are absent in terms of physical presence. But they are also absent in terms of their subjectivity. NGOs do not ask rural women how to promote their access to justice. NGOs talk *about* rural women without talking frequently *with* them. Since NGOs have few positive results of their development and empowerment work in rural areas, blaming traditional culture for its resistance to change serves them well. Culturalism allows NGOs to deflect their own responsibility for the social problems they discuss. Turning attention to traditional culture allows NGOs to shift the gaze away from their own shortcomings.

The discourse of culturalism not only deflects responsibility from NGOs, but also from the government. When workshops hold "traditional culture" accountable for

44 I need to clarify here that NGOs are not alone responsible for the popularity of workshops. Workshops are a donor-preferred global development technology that NGOs capitalize on.

women's problems, they shift the responsibility from the government to the people themselves. Powerful government representatives such as Madam Agnes attended this Tamale workshop. As she was a bottleneck to political clout and a representative of the state's authority, most NGOs wanted to stay on her good side. This became obvious when Josephine tried to take the government to task, and an argument erupted during which Josephine was censored.

"Mandated state agencies don't perform well," she said.

"Are the state agencies not working well because they are not empowered or because they are not functioning well?" the Social Welfare director countered. (Interestingly, she defended the government using the empowerment language promoted by NGOs).

"There are many reasons, empowerment is one of them. But we want to raise the issue here, so that it's discussed," Josephine said more diplomatically.

Madam Agnes, a senior government representative, then asserted: "The government lacks resources in most cases, but it also does a lot of work. We need to highlight that."

"And when the agencies are not functioning, it's because of lack of resources," chipped in another government official.

"I don't feel comfortable with that statement. 'The government is not empowered to work' is better, so that it does not affect their credibility," said Angelina, an NGO worker.

Then, out of the blue, Josephine started talking about an odd cultural practice, without explaining how it related to the previous discussion of government's responsibility and performance:

"There is this *to-zaba* issue. It's about endogamy. In a culture in which men cannot marry women from inside, they get girlfriends and father children. It's about the continuation of the male line. And when a family does not have male children, one daughter gets a boyfriend from within a family and gets a son with him. And the child never knows the father."

"Incest, that's incest!" murmured the participants.

"This is still going on!" Josephine continued. "We started research into this, but stopped for the lack of funding. And there are other such cultural practices. For example, during funerals, little girls – eight, six, ten year-olds – are encouraged to go and tell a man they like 'I fancy you.' And then they have sex."

This comment provoked even more head shaking. In the face of such shocking news, the attendees dropped the discussion of the government's responsibility.

We see here that Josephine's attempt to criticize the government did not find a fertile ground. Josephine was effectively censored. All other participants, both government and NGO representatives, found ways to excuse the government and offer reasons for the government's shortcomings. When Josephine saw that she was defeated, she changed the topic, returning to culturalism. With this strategy, Josephine attempted to save the government's face and distract from her previous criticism.

From Case Western to Bolga – Appreciative Inquiry on a Road Trip

Culturalism thrives even when workshop organizers attempt to discourage it. The voter education workshop organized by the Women's Development Center is a case in

point. At this atypical workshop, Elizabeth unsuccessfully attempted to circumvent culturalism with a new approach to development.

Traveling from London to Johannesburg, and over a dozen of African countries, Elizabeth attended seminars on a methodology called "appreciative inquiry." Appreciative inquiry, "a positive revolution in change," is on a vanguard of development methodology. "AI," as its practitioners call it, combines various elements of the American spirit: positive thinking, self-help, growth, possibility, and the dream of continuous self-improvement. AI has grown from one doctoral dissertation into a whole industry. In 1980s, David Cooperrider from the Case Western Reserve University School of Management coined the terminology. He elaborated the approach in his dissertation on positive organizational change in a US hospital. Since then, the approach has grown tremendously in popularity, with dozens of handbooks and dissertations written about it. It is also a profitable and widely used management tool – Cooperrider and his colleagues consult for institutions as diverse as American Express and the US government.

Elizabeth learned from this approach through a project she helped design, InterAction, which aims to create a new generation of African leaders. The British Council – the UK international organization for educational opportunities and cultural relations – sponsored the program and championed appreciative inquiry as its methodology. Through this route, "AI" arrived in Africa in 2004 and is now spreading through 19 countries including Ghana. InterAction claims to break away with the development models of the past:

The Interaction leadership programme is enabling men and women to engage the challenges that Africa faces by honouring success and learning from what has worked and is working in Africa. By recognising Africa's contributions to the world, *the deficit view of the continent can be challenged*, and hope for the future can grow. The Interaction leadership programme is designed by Africa and UK partners working with the principle articulated by the New Partnership for Africa's Development – *Africa for Africa, through collaboration*. Interaction brings people together across the continent from North to South and from East to West to network, to share and celebrate the magic of their differences. Through such exchanges, participants can challenge assumptions about themselves, their environment, and their continent. The programme encourages people to work in a way that *appreciates indigenous knowledge and differences* and to encourage their contribution to bringing transformation to the continent.[45]

Appreciation is at the core of InterAction. Instead of perpetuating the "deficit view" of the continent – the "lack" postcolonial scholars and anthropologists have criticized – InterAction builds on Africa's strengths. Instead of categorizing Africa's differences on an evolutionary scale of development that declares Africa "backward," InterAction embraces the generative power of difference. InterAction also declares its allegiance to the already-existing ideologies of partnership and respect for local knowledge. Thus, InterAction sees itself as revolutionizing development conversations and projects in and about Africa.

Elizabeth is fully convinced of appreciative inquiry and considers herself a "convert." She is now applying it in her work as a consultant and an NGO director. That Elizabeth is the person bringing this approach to Ghana is not unusual; while she is firmly

45 www.britishcouncil.org/cameroon-governance-interaction.htm, accessed 12/1/2005.

rooted in her hometown Bolga, Elizabeth is very much a global citizen. Elizabeth maintains transnational connections she made when living, working, and studying in many different countries.

Her first attempt to apply appreciative inquiry in practice was at the "Voter Education Workshop." Half a year before Ghana's national elections, two donor agencies asked Elizabeth to create a workshop platform teaching the importance of gender for national politics. She developed a Voter Education Project, aimed at improving "the participation of women and PWDs [people with disabilities] in the 2004 national elections" and "to ensure that people, and especially women and people with disabilities (PWDs), have the requisite skills to effectively encourage parliamentary candidates to address key issues of concern" (Women's Development Center 2004:3). The project's goal was ambitious: donors hoped to ensure women's participation in politics, both as voters and candidates, in the few remaining months before the national elections.

In September of 2004, two months before the elections, the first workshop took place in Bolga. Elizabeth invited twenty NGO and government representatives to teach them about gender, disability, and political participation. The workshop took place in the shady garden of the Royal Hotel on the outskirts of town. The workshop was meant to teach participants a number of skills over the course of three days. They included: how to hold candidates accountable for their promises; how to communicate demands effectively; and how to measure whether politicians are addressing them. This workshop was a "training of trainers" – it was meant to teach participants skills that they would then pass on to citizens in their home districts.

Nevertheless, despite this stated focus, participants spent much time talking about culture as a problem. During the first day and a half, discussions of "women's issues" and problems of traditions dominated the workshop. Elizabeth initially tried to solicit the attitudes of workshop attendees by fostering discussions about FGM, forced marriages, betrothals, and witchcraft accusations. But when it looked like the discourse would get unruly, she tried to change course and steer the conversation away from it.

She planed a different approach on the second day. She had invited Grace, a director of a faith-based northern NGO, to facilitate "awareness and sensitization on gender and people with disabilities issues." While the topic of "gender issues" usually leads to a list of "traditional problems," as we have seen in the Tamale workshop, Elizabeth had other hopes. Grace was trained in appreciative inquiry through the British Council and was now the Ghanaian leader of the InterAction program. Elizabeth imagined that Grace would "raise awareness about women's issues" without resorting to culturalism. Yet, to Elizabeth's dismay, Grace did not break away from the habituated discourse.

Grace's presentation on "the role of women in traditional society" took the center stage of the second workshop day. In her speech, Grace described all the trials and tribulations Ghanaian village women undergo because of their gender. Culture "creates negative attitudes towards women," she said.

"Half-alive men make decisions for women in our patrilineal society," Grace claimed and explained that women are discriminated against in all stages of life:

"A baby-girl is met with a frown and disapproval because she becomes someone else's property. Girls are denied formal education; they remain ignorant and subservient, and masculine domination continues. They are initiated into womanhood through the wild, brutal, dehumanizing activity of female genital mutilation; it is empirically proven that this is a health hazard and a murderous act. Women have no right to choose their husband. They make a choice for you: if the father has a good friend and wants to sublimate the friendship, he gives you out; if they want dowry, they give you out; they force you into marriage. And the husband treats wives like his property; he says 'I bought you and I paid.' Whether it's four cows or a hoe, he says 'I bought and paid.' And women have no rights to an outside affair: they subject women to dehumanizing purification, pouring hot water over her, with her nakedness exposed. In old age, women are accused of witchcraft and maltreated even by children who throw stones at them. Tradition does not see women fairly at all."

The participants liked Grace's presentations and pitched in with their comments. But Elizabeth was disappointed. "I'm not happy with Grace," she told me later in the day. "I've got her to be one of the Pan-African leaders and she should have used her knowledge better." Grace did not apply appreciative inquiry and positive thinking; she did not indicate cultural venues which show that women can and do participate in the public sphere.

To remedy this, Elizabeth asked the participants to discuss some of the positive aspects of culture. "Finding out positive things is difficult for everyone, but it's interesting," she claimed. She used female genital cutting as an example:

"The outcome is bad, but the ritual process is good. Your grandmother will give you a talk, teach you life skills – how to be a good woman, what it means to be a wife, how to wash your calabashes, how to be bold, how to dance. The suitors will watch."

In order to "appreciate" cutting, Elizabeth put it in context. She tried to show that she condemns the practice, but not its significance. She identified a positive value of the ritual consistent with her feminist and liberal principles.[46] Elizabeth wanted participants to try the same. She divided them into groups to identify "cultural norms and values that can promote the cause of PWDs and women." She pleaded for a positive outlook: "please remember the concept of appreciative inquiry. Let's stay positive to counteract the negative."

However, workshop participants were not able to talk about culture positively. I sat at a table with a group from Bawku. The participants were silent; nobody said anything for a long time. I looked at other tables and saw confusion in people's faces. Everyone seemed overwhelmed with the task. Since the participants did not know how to approach this new requirement to be "positive about culture," they tried to follow Elizabeth's example. She had mentioned "good things" about FGM, and they tried to find something good about it as well:

"Cultural practices used to ensure women's virginity, and now, there is nothing to keep women safe and faithful."

"They won't say you're carrying a man's organ."

46 Like many other Ghanaian – as well as African (see Mikell 1997) – feminists, Elizabeth embraces motherhood and family, at least in theory. The practice of Bolga feminists looks different; most leaders of women's NGOs in Bolga are divorced.

"And it's not bad when you're not married."

"They used to do it because of war, so that the woman stays faithful to the husband when he is gone."

When the groups got together, it became clear that everyone had experienced the same difficulty. The participants were not able to identify aspects of their culture that were positive and that could be used to help women rise to political offices. Instead, they identified "good" things about other "harmful traditions." The group members reversed the usual value scheme – everything that was bad before was now good. They stuck to the list of problems Grace identified in her speech, but reframed them, articulating control over women's sexuality and labor as positives. The patriarchy that was "bad" before was now "good."

The following arguments were put forward: puberty rites were good because they kept girls virgins; widowhood rites were good because they confirmed that women were faithful; girls were valuable property to their fathers; polygamy was good because it ensured "numbers in terms of children and family size"; uneducated girls are valuable house help for their rich relatives which "helps knit the African family together and redistributes wealth"; girls are more of an asset than boys because they start working younger ("at age five, she can fetch water") and because they can be converted into currency through dowry.

Elizabeth tried to gain some control over the development of the debate by steering the course of the conversation:

"We need to realize that responsibilities don't go with rights. Girls may have a lot of positive responsibilities but do not have the matching rights. And we need to see how those positive responsibilities can be moved from the home into the community." However, Elizabeth's demand that participants articulate the possibilities that the "northern culture" allows for offering women a larger role in public and political life remained unfulfilled. The participants were confused by her intervention.

Why was "appreciative inquiry" so difficult to put into practice here? Applying appreciative inquiry was difficult to apply in this context because it introduced yet another foreign concept. The participants were not prepared for the new rationality. Most NGO workshops have something familiar and something challenging about them. Workshops have ritualistic aspects: they are repetitive, but not the same. Prayers, keynote speeches, and discussions of the problems of culture are the rule. But workshops are also challenging. They introduce new languages and rationalities. NGOs have to keep learning new languages, concepts, and approaches in order to stay in the development game and feed what Igoe calls "the insatiable beast":

> The development apparatus is an insatiable beast, which must be constantly fed. Development practitioners, both African and Western, spend a great deal of time and energy feeding the beast. There are buzzwords to master and funding proposals to write. There are meetings and workshops to attend . . . There are projects to implement in a stipulated (almost always too short) period of time. All of these activities, and numerous others, must fall within the ambit of the development discourse de jour . . . (Igoe 2005: 297).

The constantly changing development jargon overwhelms NGOs. In 2004, the new languages northern Ghanaian NGOs were learning were how to formulate "rights-

based approaches to development" and how to move away from "service provision" to "advocacy." At these workshops, donors were yet again telling NGOs how to change their proposals, what to work on, and how to talk about it.

Usually, the difficulty of negotiating such challenges is mediated by extensive training. NGOs are given an opportunity to learn the new concepts before they have to apply them; oftentimes, workshops are exclusively devoted to teaching new concepts and methods. But appreciative inquiry came out of the blue. Elizabeth expected that it would come to workshop participants naturally. Moreover, while all new concepts are difficult to learn, appreciative inquiry was particularly daunting. It was not only a new approach, but also a completely new paradigm. Appreciative inquiry failed because it is the exact opposite of the discourse of culturalism. It builds on the concept of appreciation, which is tied to notions of respect and value. In contrast, the dominant discourse of culturalism does everything to devalue rural subjects and their culture.

Rereading the Ghanaian Culturalism

We have seen in this chapter how NGOs produce culturalist explanations of development problems. The evolutionary ideology of development creeps back into NGO discourses. NGOs posit that the rural women are "ignorant," "backward," and "traditional" – thus low on the hierarchical scale of cultural evolution. Furthermore, NGOs claim that "tradition" is the main obstacle to development. They establish a causal relationship between poverty and tradition – for NGOs, rural women are poor and subjugated because they live in traditional patriarchy. Thus, NGOs explain the rural

poverty and marginalization away with references to "their" backward culture – the culture of villagers.

Rather than ascribing the "blind force of custom" to all of Africa, or in this case Ghana, NGOs ascribe it to the rural poor. On the global scale, different disciplines create a dichotomy between the "traditional" Africa and the "modern" West. The same binary is replicated on a different scale in Ghana. NGOs create the tradition-modernity dichotomy between themselves – the urban practitioners of development – and rural women. By distancing themselves from rural women, NGO workers establish their own identities as modern women. As a habitus, the bad culture discourse defines those it attaches itself to the experts of local development: Ghanaian NGO workers and government officials.

In some instances, the discourse of culturalism has a specific purpose. We have seen in the first vignette about the Tamale workshop that culturalism serves to deflect responsibility from workshop participants and the organizations they represent. Crewe and Harrison have also argued for this understanding of culturalism: "It is a simplifying device for those who identify themselves with mainly technical issues and require a straightforward explanation of failure" (2005: 234). But this functionalist explanation does not fully account for the stubborn persistence of culturalism. The second vignette has shown that culturalism perpetuates itself and persists even when the organizers discourage it.

Another question that interests me is how NGOs reconcile their focus on empowerment of the marginalized with the culturalist discourse. I have tried to explain this paradox by showing that NGOs add "power" to the list of elements hindering

development. This consideration of power relations is a crucial difference between the NGO deployment of culturalism and culturalism in its other articulations. However, NGOs only discuss power relations at the level of "tradition" and patriarchy. For Ghanaian NGOs, to "empower" women means to rid them of patriarchy. While in some instances, NGOs claim that this patriarchy applies to all Ghanaian women, they mostly cast it as the traditional domination of men over women in rural settings.

The discourse of culturalism is not unique to Ghanaian NGOs. Pigg has shown that similar processes mark development in Nepal:

> It is not uncommon for Nepali development workers to express the attitude that the development of Nepal entails expunging from it precisely those customs that have retarded its progress – the customs of the poor. Those in positions of professional power, whether they come from urban elite backgrounds or whether they come from villages, achieve their position through their ability to know what villagers need, just like any other development expert. Not surprisingly, one of the most direct ways to exercise and communicate this authority is by contrasting expert knowledge with what villagers do and think. . . . Their authority rests on knowing villagers without aligning themselves too closely with them. (1997: 276)

This suggests that culturalism is deeply ingrained in the development industry. It is not the "traditional" culture that is difficult to change, but the discourse that articulates culture as a barrier to development and empowerment.

Conclusion

Scholars of NGOs are often disappointed with discourses such as these and other NGO "shortcomings" (Igoe 2005: xii). We could read these Ghanaian NGO workshops as disappointments to those invested in empowerment of the marginalized. Workshops take up much of NGOs' time; they do little for the marginalized; they allow donor agencies to

set agendas for NGOs; they create platforms for NGOs misrepresentations of "rural culture" and assertions about links between culture and poverty. However, we will see that these workshops also have a productive side: they enable NGO political agency. Culturalism serves as a training platform in the struggle between the Ghanaian government and NGOs over who should govern the rural North and the domestic sphere – traditional authorities or the government. This political battle over the extent of state influence and over women's citizenship and legal rights is fought on the terrain of culture. Workshops like those I described are the field at which NGOs learn how to play in the serious game of cultural politics.

In the next chapter, I will show how culture is seen in the opposite way – as "good." I will argue that the discourse of culturalism is always political and often tied to governance and rule. We will see that when Ghanaian NGOs devote their workshops to producing the discourse of culturalism, they not only position themselves in the field of development, but in the field of politics. They take a stance in a century-long debate about who should govern women and northern Ghana: customs or the state. Whether culture is depicted as evil or good, it is the ground used for debates about the place of women in Ghanaian politics and polity.

In his book, *Suffering for Territory: Race, Place, and Power in Zimbabwe*, Donald Moore traces the colonial discourse of culturalism and its articulation with racism as the basis of colonial rule (2005). Moore shows how throughout history "custom became both an instrument of administration and an object of contentious debate," invoked by parties with different interests (2005: 11). Like other colonial governments

(Chapter 3), the British colonial government in Rhodesia invoked culture to create tribes and "fix ethnic subjects in tribal territories" through indirect rule (2005: 30). In postcolonial times, chiefs held on to the power British granted to them and insisted that custom gave them authority over the now government-administered land (2005: 262).

Moore emphasizes "culture as a critical terrain of political struggle" and reminds us that the concept of hegemony is useful for understanding it: "hegemonic formations of rule both orchestrate and compel by shaping the terrain of cultural practices, educating the consent of subjects whose conduct contributes to the conditions of their own subordination. Yet precisely because hegemony is processual, contingent, and contested, it can never be total or complete (Moore 2005: 11).

This concept sheds light on the discourse of culturalism in Ghana. Like each hegemonic project, culturalism contains in itself a potential to undo itself, to become anti-hegemonic. I will argue that this process of undoing takes place in Ghana. While NGOs use culturalism to secure their positioning in the development industry and to distinguish themselves as modern, they also use it to politicize the private sphere and extend citizenship to Ghanaian women. This is the focus of my next chapter: in the relations between women's NGOs and the government, culture has become one of the main terrains of struggle. We will see that the discourse of culturalism is productive in that it allows NGOs to articulate culture as the ground of a political struggle.

CHAPTER 5

WHEN THE CHIEF'S LINGUIST TURNS NEOLIBERAL:

CULTURAL POLITICS OF GENDER

> *In many countries in Africa, gender activists are accepted as long as they focus on programmes such as credit for women, income generation projects and girls' education, and couch their struggles in terms of welfare or national development. Once they broach questions of power relations or injustices, they are accused of being elitist and influenced by foreign ideas that are alien to African culture.*
> *Dzodzi Tsikata (In Mama et al. 2005)*

In this chapter, I will analyze how culture becomes the main terrain of political struggles between NGOs and the government. I will show that because of colonial legacies and neoliberal hierarchies, politics of gender in contemporary Ghana is grounded in culture.

This chapter proceeds from ethnography to analysis. I will show that the government of Ghana, when confronted with NGO demands for domestic violence legislation, frames women's advocacy as a spread of foreign norms. We will see that, having been trained in the discourse of culturalism (discourse that articulates the linkages between culture and development), NGOs are able to hold their ground. They argue against the government's monopoly on what is Ghanaian and what foreign, and its discourse of defending "good culture."

I will embed the NGO-government struggle over the domestic violence bill in multiple layers of analysis. One of these is the colonial legacy of culture as a form of rule. The government argues that "traditional" authorities such as chiefs should regulate the domestic sphere. In so doing, the government, I argue, propagates a neo-traditional discourse of custom as a form of rule and advocates a return to customary law. Interestingly, the government uses this strategy to legitimize its pursuit of the (neo)liberal and masculinist state. I will argue that feminist NGOs triggered government opposition with the domestic violence bill because the bill challenged the distinctions between the private and the public, citizens and subjects. I will show that the government tries to manipulate history in order to fend off the NGO-feminist vision of the state.

Asmah in Bolga: An Ethnography of Political Performance

Minister Gladys Asmah arrived in Bolga with pomp and circumstance. She represented one of Ghana's youngest ministries, the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs (MOWAC).[47] Two shiny black SUVs parked at the entrance to the House of Chiefs, decorated in her honor. Asmah got out of the car and was immediately encircled by an entourage of her staff and local government and NGO officials. Inside the assembly hall, two hundred people waited for the Minister. Chiefs sat in the front rows with a row of village women behind them, all selected and invited by the local government. Dozens of students in orange-brown uniforms waited for Asmah outside, but the Minister went

[47] At this time (in April 2004), Ghana had thirty-seven Ministers, four of whom were women.

straight to the "high table" without acknowledging them. The students remained pressed against to the windows, only their eyes visible through the curtains.

Politicians from Accra do not frequent the Upper East region, and the Minister's arrival here was unusual, her first time in Bolga. So, what brought her here? Bolga was one of the regional stops on Asmah's national campaign officially labeled "in support of the domestic violence bill." In 2003 and 2004, this bill was the most controversial topic of public debate in Ghana and a ground of intense campaigns and power struggles between the government and NGOs. The Minister's arrival in Bolga meant that the government was willing to go far out of its way to prevent this bill from becoming law. So why did a domestic violence bill become such a contested terrain?

To answer this question, I will discuss two contradictions. While the Ghanaian government proclaimed its support for the domestic violence bill, it mounted a campaign against it, which was unusual both in scope and character. The government had never before conducted public surveys about proposed legislation, or sent high-ranking officials to tour the country campaigning for or against bills.

The second paradox I will try to illuminate is why the figure of the Minister of Women's Affairs, figure charged with promoting women's empowerment and gender equity in Ghana, becomes used as a weapon against women's organizing. I will argue that the domestic violence bill became the terrain at which NGOs and the government negotiated the globalization of women's rights and activism, national sovereignty, and performance of democracy.

The Background: The Domestic Violence Bill

The domestic violence bill was born out of concerted efforts of women's NGOs and other activists to draw government attention to violence against women. In the late 1990's, a convergence of two events precipitated the NGO advocacy. In 1998, 30 women were murdered in a neighborhood of Accra but the perpetrators were never convicted. The Ghanaian public was alarmed by the murders. Activists and NGOs formed a group called "Sisters Keepers" which organized a series of protests demanding from the President that the government pay attention to violence against women. When the crimes remained unsolved in 1999, protesters demanded that the Minister of the Interior step down. The government did not acquiesce to these demands, but it did create a new institution within the police service called the Women and Juvenile Unit. This unit was trained specifically to intervene in cases of violence against women. However, these units were formed only in select Ghanaian cities, which left the activists wanting and eager to organize further protests.

At the same time, in 1999, a Ghanaian NGO called Gender Studies and Human Rights Documentation Centre published results of their nationwide research on violence against women and children (Appiah and Cusack 1999). They found that women experience violence in a wide range of settings and relationships, from the domestic setting and romantic relationships to schools and workplaces. Their interviews with more than 2,000 women from different regions of Ghana revealed that a third of these women experienced physical violence, and a fifth had been forced to have sex against their will. This study shocked Ghanaians by revealing that violence against women was widely

spread and largely unreported. The results of the study have been widely circulated in Ghanaian academic and activist communities and the little red book became a common fixture on desks and bookshelves of Ghanaian NGOs.

These two events – the government's failure to address the murders and the publication of the study – set the background for the domestic violence bill. These events publicized something women's NGOs already knew: that many Ghanaian women suffer from domestic violence and need help with navigating the state's legal system. In 2004, the NGO Lawyers for Women's Rights (LAWORI) reported that 200 women sought their help each week in their Accra office. LAWORI lawyers – mostly volunteers – have provided these women with free legal counsel and court representation for more than twenty years. LAWORI and other NGOs also knew that women have been seeking help from the government's Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ). In 2002, this Commission arbitrated in 12,381 cases, over half of which (6850) were "family-related" (CHRAJ 2002: 33).

In 2000, LAWORI presented the domestic violence bill (DVB) to the public. This bill – a result of a number of years of discussions and drafting – demands that the government respond to domestic violence more systemically. The bill pulls together various laws pertaining to violence against women and children in one framework and adds new provisions. What are the novelties? The bill extends the definition of violence to physical, psychological, and economic abuse; criminalizes rape and violence in marriage; institutes protection orders and a range of dispute resolutions such as mediation, arbitration, and counseling; mandates that the government provides education

about domestic violence to all police and that the police follow up in all domestic violence cases reported to them; and secures free medical care to victims of violence.

NGOs advocating for the bill have argued that this law would address inadequacies of the current legislation. The current criminal code employs a narrower notion of violence, frames violence as being largely outside of family and marriage, and sees arrest and imprisonment as only solutions. At the same time, even these laws are hardly enforced. Police officers rarely intervene in the cases of domestic violence, and judges often encourage spouses to settle the matter outside of the legal system. The new bill would change all of this, argued and hoped women's NGOs.

NGO advocacy was based on three pillars: their local practices, international law commitments, and development discourses. They argued that the bill was necessary because it would help victims of domestic violence who are currently doubly victimized by inadequate state laws and institutions. NGOs also relied on Ghana's commitments under international law and claimed that Ghana *had to* pass this law. Ghanaian NGOs, including LAWORI and the African Women Lawyers Association argued that having signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, Ghana was obliged to reform its national laws and adopt the domestic violence bill. Finally, NGOs articulated domestic violence as an obstacle to development: "The Bill would assist the nation in quelling violence against women, which would in turn enable the country to increase its productivity. The more women are able to participate as equal partners in the

country, unimpeded by violence in their homes, the more likely that they will contribute to the country's economic development" (CDD 2005: 5).

The government at first accepted these claims; the early life of the bill provoked little controversy. LAWORI collaborated with the government and handed the bill to Parliament's Director of Legislative Drafting. When the Attorney General's office redrafted the bill based on LAWORI's proposal, NGOs understood this as a sign of the government's support for the bill. But this perception changed when in late 2002, when the Attorney General described the Bill as "radical legislation that requires closer scrutiny," called it "unrealistic," and referred to NGO advocates as "the most liberal spirits" (CDD 2002: 9). While he stated that the government would support the bill because Ghana's commitments under international law, its Constitution, and the inadequacies in both the legal and institutional regime oblige it do so, he made it clear that the bill would need to be substantially revised. Minister Asmah also distanced herself from the bill, claiming that Ministry's had nothing to do with formulating legislation (ibid.).

While NGOs continued to collaborate with the government in 2003, it became increasingly clear that the government was opposing the bill. At a "sensitisation workshop" organized by LAWORI in the summer of 2003, the silent conflict slowly became an open struggle. Asmah criticized the bill openly, saying that "definitions of domestic violence emanating from other cultures, particularly Western, European, and American notions, concepts and traditions may not necessarily be appropriate for Ghana's

circumstances."[48] Asmah portrayed herself as defending culture, which allowed her to define what is – and is not – culturally appropriate. By framing the bill as a foreign import with little cultural relevance, Asmah addressed one of the NGO vulnerabilities: NGOs drew strongly on international human rights law in drafting the bill and advocating for it, thus leaving themselves open to such attacks. The Minister argued that marital rape in particular is a foreign concept, and that using legislation in cases of domestic violence is ill-suited for Ghana: "each and every one of us has Ebusuapanyin - head of family. He and the elders who contracted the marriage should be given the opportunity to settle the dispute" (ibid.).[49]

Culture was becoming the ground of a political struggle. Kwaku Ansa-Ansare, the former Director of the Ghana Law School, provided the discourse of culturalism that became the core of the government's campaign. In a paper on domestic violence, Ansa-Asare first formulated the marital rape clause as a conceptual and epistemological problem and argued that the government should not allow *the concept* of marital rape to enter Ghana's legal system (Ansa-Asare 2003). At a 2003 government workshop, Ansa-Asare formulated the opposition to bill which the government would later adopt: he argued that the bill is a foreign imposition, a danger to Ghanaian family, that domestic

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[48] "Asmah Suggests Alternative to Marital Rape." Public Agenda. 06-02-2003. Accessed from ghanaweb.com/public_agenda/issue.php?PUBLISHED=2003-06-02&CAT=3.

[49] Asmah's usage of the Twi word *Ebusuapanyin* (more commonly spelled as *abusua panyin)* is not incidental. Twi is the language of the southern Akan majority, not a native language to all Ghanaians. While Asmah advocated for a return to "culture," she propagated cultural institutions that do not exist everywhere in Ghana. The family structures in the Upper East region are different from the Akan forms. The much celebrated figure of the "queen mother," also proposed by Asmah as a potential mediator, does not exist in northern Ghana either and is not in the process of being made either.

violence is best adjudicated privately (outside the legal system), and that traditional authorities should mediate and adjudicate domestic violence problems.[50]

In 2004, the government of Ghana launched a public campaign against the domestic violence bill. Minister Asmah announced that the bill would be presented to the public for "consultation." In other words, this would not be a top-down process in which the government educates the people, and in which the "people" are mere targets of the government's campaign. These people would not be treated as ignorant subjects who needed "education." On the contrary, the government framed this campaign as a participatory project, during which the government would learn from people about their culture and their views on domestic violence. In the age of participatory development and participatory democracy, the government devised a fitting campaign.

Ghana is not the only country in which a domestic violence bill is being debated on the grounds of culture and in which the "voice of the people" becomes appropriated. Zimbabwe's parliament is currently discussing a similar legislation. A government-controlled newspaper published an anonymous letter opposing the bill and raising problems nearly identical to Ghanaian government's opposition: "Plea to Honourable Members of Parliament and Senators: The passage of the domestic violence bill can make or break marriage as an institution in Zimbabwe. Do not rush it. Take it to the people. Present it to them in their own languages. And let them decide for themselves in a referendum because it's their future and heritage. Do not let western influence kill our

[50] Ghana News Agency. 12-18-2003. Accessed from ghanaweb.com/ghanahomepage/newsarchive/printnews.php?ID=48523.

culture."[51] The opposition framed the bill as a threat to marriage and a Western import that threatens Zimbabwean culture. This discourse was picked up by a parliament member who stated: "There are certain cultural values that shape every family which are likely to be at stake with this legislation and many families are going to break up."[52] In a follow-up, the Zimbabwean Minister of Justice proposed to "amend contentious sections that deal with jealousy and *unreasonable denial of conjugal rights*."[53]

Both in Ghana and in Zimbabwe, one of the crucial questions in the debate about the domestic violence legislation is control over women's sexuality. Do husbands have "conjugal rights?" If so, are their rights greater than the rights of women to have control over their own sexuality? And the solution in both countries is articulated as a democratic endeavor: the Zimbabwean opposition asked for a referendum on the bill and the Ghanaian government asked the "people" to volunteer their views. Yet, in the case of Ghana, this endeavor resulted in an appropriation of the "people's voice." Minister Asmah did not listen to the "people" and it did not incorporate any oppositional views on the bill. Instead, she performed "consultations" at which she told the people of Bolga what they should think about the bill.

Asmah's Campaign and NGO Responses

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[51] Accessed from kubatanablogs.net/kubatana/?p=10 on 10-18-2006.

[52] "Domestic Violence Stirs Fiery Debate." Zimbabwe Independent. October 20, 2006. Accessed from allafrica.com/stories/200610200539.html on 10-22-2006.

[53] "Domestic Violence Stirs Fiery Debate." Zimbabwe Independent. October 20, 2006. Accessed from allafrica.com/stories/200610200539.html on 10-22-2006.

I observed the campaign when Minister Asmah came to Bolga, one of her first stops, on a sweltering day in May of 2004. Asmah had announced her talk as a part of the campaign to support the bill. The media accepted this terminology – the Ghana News Agency headline describing the event in Bolga was: "Mrs. Asmah solicits support for Domestic Violence Bill."[54] Yet the talk itself made the Minister's opposition to the bill obvious. It also became clear that the campaign was not meant to consult Ghanaians but to appropriate their voices in order to remove the question of sexual rights from the legislative table.

I sat on the side of the big hall, from where I could record the Minister's speech and see her. I did not know if I would be allowed to audio-record Asmah before I arrived at the House of Chiefs. Once there, I realized that Asmah was being filmed by three different cameras – by her own crew, by the local NGO, and by the press. I was only one of the people documenting the spectacle.

I watched the performance Asmah delivered with great rhetorical skill. Given that she was advocating against the bill and against the concept of marital rape in particular, she had a formidable task: she had to deliver a critique of the bill while at the same time stating that she supported it. This meant that Asmah had to constantly speak out of both sides of her mouth, appealing to multiple conflicting interests. In her speech, Asmah positioned herself and the government she represented as both concerned with women's rights, and opposed to the onslaught of the feminist discourse. Let us listen to Minister Asmah in detail:

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54 www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/printnews.php?ID=57800, 05-14-2004.

I'm so happy to be with you. I've always wanted to come to the North and now I finally have the opportunity. The domestic violence bill – what is the government trying to do?

To develop peacefully and in freedom – development in freedom – we need to have freedom at home. So that all – mother, father, children – can develop properly. We know that if women and children develop, the whole country will develop. That's why the Ministry was set up. And I'm happy we are here.

There is a need to have a way to protect the family. We are all aware that a few years back in the capital of Accra, about 35 women lost their lives. Finally, a man was convicted for murdering eight of them. Now, there is a need to protect women and children, and of course, men, because sometimes, women also beat their husbands. But the men don't come out to say, because if they do, they are shamed. There is a need to have a law that will protect all of us, all of us (loud clapping). And that is why we are here, to think about "how do we protect every member of the family?" But we know that men are the aggressors all the time, most of the time.

Let me put it this way: a proposal has been made. This is a proposal, only a proposal. We are asking the views of everybody in the country on this proposal.

And because in Ghana, we are a country with a cultural background, we need to know: do we go a civil way of protecting the family or the criminal way of protecting the family? We have to make that choice. When you go the civil way, it means: my fathers are here my father was a chief and so I say all chiefs are my fathers –, the family heads, the queenmothers, the uncles and the mallams, imams, the churches, they're all there to counsel couples to stay in peace.

There are so many ways you can look at this, and the government is trying to get the opinion of all of you: let's come out, look at what is here, whatever you feel is acceptable to your community in Bolga. Our culture is so diverse. What happens here in the North is different from what happens in the South, in the West, in the East. So we want to hear all these views before we can put this law in place to protect every family. So we are here this afternoon to look for your input. We will have your views written and we will put them all together so that we have a law that protects everybody. You tell us, how do we protect the family? All of us, all of us must think how to protect the family. It is very crucial. If the family is going to be able develop properly and for Ghana to develop properly, we must protect everybody. It should be a human right to be protected, and it is our responsibility as the government to protect everybody. And that is why we are here.

Here is the law. You have a look at it, and if there is something you don't like, make a suggestion. And when you come to us, we will look at it, we will sit down and we will look at the opinion from the Upper East, Upper West, Northern region – every region – and then we'll put them together and fashion a law that will work for all.

Let me give you the example of Japan. They have a way of solving the problem with the protective order that the law mentions. They also have counsels, counselors so that if man and a wife are quarreling, the man will be given counsel. Particularly if you are the aggressor, you must look deep in yourself. We can also do the same. We can put it in the law. We can also do the thing. I realized if we had more counselors in the country, a lot of the problems wouldn't be here. So we've started on that already.

But my brothers and sisters, we need your input into this law, so that we can fashion a law that will fit all of us. We have the social structure, as I said earlier on: the chiefs are there, the imams are there, the mallams are there, everybody is there in the community to talk to somebody who is misbehaving – they don't need to go to the police. Because we do know, if we

go to the police, it is very difficult for women to go back into the marital home. Because in this country, marriage is not between a man and a woman. Marriage is between two families. We don't marry a person, we marry a whole family. That is why there is a need for us to find something that is acceptable to us to protect families.

In countries that have this law, there is a clause that mentions something called marital rape. It could mean that a woman can come out of bed and say that the husband has raped her. Now, do we accept it or how do we address that issue if it comes to your family? We need your views on it.

If she goes to the police and says the husband raped her? Yesterday, there was a session attended by JSS pupils; [about] two women whose husbands beat them: one decided to go to the family head and talk to him and the matter was settled. The other one went to the police and the husband was sent to prison for five years [audience gasps]. And that is why again, we need your input.

As we go around sensitizing people, talking about it, my brothers - the husbands – are correcting themselves. Because now you know that if you beat your wife, there will be law that can catch you there. They have corrected themselves. And I hope that more men will correct themselves as we go around.

If she tells you something you don't like, what do you do? If you remember the time you laid eyes on that woman and fell in love with that women, will you beat her? You won't beat her! Remember, there is a bond between the two of you. That is called love. That you look at her and you feel happy. Maybe she gave you children. And when you have a problem, you will go to the family head for them to talk to her and they will talk. And I'm sure, there will be so much peace in the home and this law will be redundant, even if we put it in place. I'm sure Ghanaians will do that, they will make this law redundant. That's what we want to achieve.

Please, let us discuss the law. Everybody must share some view on this. And if you, my brothers, say, "She's my wife, I married her. What does the government want to do in my bedroom," let's discuss this and see what we can do about that particular clause. That's the clause that many people were choking on. If you are going to give us an alternative, tell us: what shall we do with that particular clause? And then we'll be able to fashion a law that will fit everybody.

For instance, in the countries that have this particular clause, we are told that about 65% of marriages break down. That if you are going to have a hundred people that get married, 65 % will divorce. (Audience gasps.) What does that mean? In those countries that have this clause, they have a social structure that can take care of women and children who are divorced. It is the man who has to move out of the family home. The woman stays with the children.

Do we activate this? That is for you to decide. The provision has come but we need you to give input into that law. And I'm sure - the special assistant to the regional minister is on my side, and he will take what we are saying and talk to you. All of you should come out openly and share in peace. Do we want the police or other alternatives?

It is my responsibility as a Minister to caution as we go around with this bill. Because Cabinet wants the people of this country to have a law that will suit them. Not to take ideas from someone else. We are Ghanaian. We must do what we think will fit Ghanaians.

So, Madam Chairman, on that note, let us discuss the domestic violence bill. We have translated it into various languages. Unfortunately, we couldn't get your language. But we will send it. And you will have a discussion and we will have your input.

Thank you very much for listening on the domestic violence bill. I will give word to the Chairman to translate the salient points.

Asmah used a number of discursive strategies trying to convince the public that the bill was not desirable and that the marital rape concept was particularly problematic: she framed the bill as a foreign imposition, a danger to Ghanaian families, a private matter, and a matter traditional authorities should be in charge of.

Asmah talked about the marital rape clause in a highly suggestive way: "And if you, my brothers, say: 'She's my wife, I married her. What does the government want to do in my bedroom?' let's discuss this and see what we can do about that particular clause. That's the clause that many people were choking on." With these statements, the Minister virtually invited opposition to the clause. She not only told the male audience members that they should feel free to voice their opposition to the marital rape clause, but also gave them ammunition, claiming that it destroys families. In other words, the Minister offered both the problem and its justification on a silver plate. This allowed Asmah to represent herself as supporting the bill while opposing it at the same time.

The Minister claimed that the bill's provisions are foreign to Ghana and incompatible with Ghanaian society. For Asmah, the bill's foreignness was tightly linked to the alleged danger the bill presents for Ghanaian families. In her speech, the Minister equated the family-oriented social structure with Ghanaian culture. By making family and culture synonymous, the Minister framed the bill as a danger to the very essence of both. But why was the bill a danger for families? Asmah opposed Ghana to unnamed other countries in which divorces destroy families: "in the countries that have this particular clause, we are told that about 65% of marriages break down." To argue that the bill is an

attack on Ghanaian family and culture, the Minister referred to hearsay statistics and an ideal-type of "other," presumable Western/Northern countries.

Asmah presented herself and the government as valuing families and valuing Ghanaian culture. She suggested that the extended family, chiefs and other important community members should have the authority to adjudicate and negotiate in cases of domestic violence: "We have the social structure: the chiefs are there, the imams are there, everybody is there in the community to talk to somebody who is misbehaving. They should not go to the police." Instead, Asmah proposed, the family and the community should mediate in disputes. Thus, she presented the government as a double defender of Ghanaian families and its culture: while the NGO bill would destroy it, the government's alternative would make it more valuable. Asmah's solution to domestic violence – giving traditional authorities the right to arbitrate – elevates the role of the family and diminishes the role of the state. In this formulation, domestic violence becomes situated in the realm of family, tradition, and culture, not in the domain of the state. While some of the bill's opponents saw the government's Department of Social Welfare as one of the institutions responsible for arbitrating in domestic violence cases, Asmah left the government completely out of the picture.

In Bolga, the Minister also introduced some new arguments against the bill and tried to shift the terms of the debate. "What is the character of the bill?" is one of the questions the Minister introduced to frame the bill as undesirable. She misrepresented the bill as propagating a "criminal" approach to domestic violence: "Do we go a civil way of protecting the family or the criminal way of protecting the family? . . . Do we want the

police or other alternatives?" This characterization of the bill was far away from its demands. While the bill asks for police to be trained in domestic violence resolution, it only mandates that the police intervene when called for help. Furthermore, the current legislation provides arrest and imprisonment of perpetrators as the only available strategies of addressing domestic violence. The proposed bill redresses the lack of alternatives by mandating that dispute resolution be provided along with arbitration and counseling. In other words, while the current legislation is focused on the crime, the proposed bill is focused on its prevention. However, while Asmah acknowledged that mediation and counseling are beneficial, she misrepresented the bill as "the criminal way" of addressing domestic violence.

Another question Asmah used to shift the debate is "Who does the bill protect?" While the bill itself is aimed at preventing domestic violence and protecting the *victims* of this violence, the government introduced *family* as the target of the government's efforts: "All of us, all of us must think how to protect the family. It is very crucial. If the family is going to be able develop properly and for Ghana to develop properly, we must protect everybody." This difference is important. The bill itself sees the victims of violence as individuals – women, children, men – with rights based in each person. Ghanaian laws concur with this. But in the case of domestic violence, the government does not see individuals but families as bearers of rights. The Minister's hierarchy of priorities put a woman's interests second, after those of the family: "Should a case like this occur and a husband goes to jail for raping his wife, what happens to that marriage and the children? What happens to the relations between the families of the man and the woman?" With

these questions, the Minister created a dichotomy between the rights and the interests of women on the one hand, and the rest of the family on the other. According to this logic woman who asserts her rights, destroys her family. In alternative logics, such as the logic of bill itself, all members of a family torn by violence, including the perpetrators, are "victims" who need protection and support from the government.

Asmah foreclosed a discussion about a number of questions: Why do women's interests need to be opposed to the interests of the family? Is the family truly protected if perpetrators of violence are never prosecuted? But her argument that the rights of the family are more important than the rights of individuals has even larger implications about the question of women's citizenship in Ghana. The advocacy of women's NGOs is rooted in the primacy of the individual – in this case, the victim of violence. They do not reject the importance of families, but argue instead that individual comes first and that women should not be sacrificed for the alleged "harmony" of the family.

All Ghanaian laws see the individual as a bearer of rights. These laws stem from the British colonization and the Western priority of individuals versus families. Thus, one could read the government's opposition to the bill as a resistance to Western legal hegemony. Yet, why does the government of Ghana only offer resistance in the case of domestic violence and women's rights over their sexuality? Ghana has signed and ratified all major international human rights conventions and free trade treaties without voicing any opposition to Western legal hegemony. Furthermore, as I have shown in Chapter 3, the Ghanaian government has embraced World Bank-imposed liberalization laws and

[illegible]

[illegible]

policies. In other words, the government's position towards women's rights and culture differs from its general relationship to the global.

In her talk, Asmah tapped into the stereotypical fears of women as cunning and untrustworthy manipulators of legal rights. Giving women the legal right not to be raped in marriage would allow them to abuse this right, she suggested: "there is a clause that mentions something called marital rape. It could mean that a woman *can come out of bed and say* that the husband has raped her." This phrase suggests randomness in Ghanaian English. By using this phrase, the Minister portrayed the bill allowing women to accuse their husbands of rape willy-nilly and as opening the gate to indiscriminate arrests of men across the country. In her depiction, men would be vulnerable under the new law because women would abuse it. For the Minister, women were not trustworthy legal subjects but subject prone to abuse the law. In other words, women cannot be granted legal rights because men – according to Asmah, not only violent men, but all men – would suffer. Thus, according to this logic, women cannot be equal to men because they cannot be trusted not to usurp their power.

The government's opposition to the bill did not find a fertile ground in Bolga. In the question and answer period following Asmah's talk, the women and men from Bolga spoke their minds. They did not stick to the agenda Asmah set out. Thus, the "people" did not embrace the role of culture defenders Asmah tried to assign to them. Instead, their speeches far exceeded the space allotted to them; they touched on everything from the elusive economic development to the government's neglect of the Upper East region. The women who spoke criticized Asmah's distribution of agricultural machines arguing that it

would not help them much; demanded money for farm animals; and requested development projects for disabled women. They raised questions that are pertinent to their lives – many women in the Upper East region see poverty as their largest problem. They spoke forcefully; their loud and strong voices openly giving away their disappointment, bitterness, and anger at empty government promises they've received over the years.

Some men and women took up Asmah's invitation to discuss the domestic violence bill. Yet, only a few sided with her in opposing the bill. The audience was largely divided along lines of gender. The women who spoke up supported the bill and the men opposed it. Here are some of their comments:

"That question about marital rape. I want to say that should stay there, because this is not for one person, it's two way. Because if after hard work the woman wants to rest small and the man says who is she to rest, nothing good can come out of that. So what I am saying is: if we are implementing that portion of the bill, we should go ahead and do it."

"Our law is English law from the time of Henry the Fourth. This law was brought to Ghana by the English. And the law is not good for women. The law tells the husband you have right over the woman. That is really criminal. This law must go."

"In those countries where there is this law, 65% of marriages break up. I think we should rather talk to chiefs about marital problems instead of marital rape being admitted to the law."

"When you pointing a finger at someone and we no longer all come together to live peacefully as a whole unit, that's a problem."

The audience was not given much time to address Asmah. After the first round of questions and comments, Asmah gave short and defensive responses. Unable to pacify the audience, she used the platform to argue against the bill again, and then ended the "consultation" forum. Asmah's last appeal shows that gender played a central part in this performance: "A lot depends on us women. We are the keepers of the home. You see, god created the man before the woman. And everything God wanted the human being to have is in the woman. That is why you see courage in women. And if you can recognize that there will be so much peace in the home."

With this appeal, Asmah ended the forum. Since she could not make a connection with the audience based on ethnic identity, she aligned herself with Ghanaian women. At the same time, she attributed responsibility for preventing domestic violence to women, thus blaming the victims and speaking to those who oppose the feminist vision of the bill.

Asmah's visit did not become the talk of the town, but Josephine, who leads the program on violence against women for the Bolga NGO Women's Development Center,

had passionate comments when she heard from her NGO workers what happened at the forum:

"I'm glad I didn't go because I would have spoken my piece of mind on the DVB [the domestic violence bill]. It's not fine that Asmah is advocating against the bill and I don't understand why she does it. And this whole talk of the bill being a part of a "foreign culture" drives me crazy. These things happen here and we need to tell men to stop. They will not stop if they can get away with it. Most women come to our office for help after at least two years, and more likely more, even up to 10 years, of abuse and violence. And Asmah is claiming that women will abuse the bill!"

With her remarks, Josephine contrasted the supposed "foreignness" of the bill with the local relevance this bill would have in practice of her NGO working with victims of violence. But, like other activists, Josephine remained quiet and did not argue with Asmah directly. While free speech is technically guaranteed, NGOs rarely criticize the government directly. This is a result of both Ghana's turbulent history of military dictatorship and cultural norms that govern politeness in all speech, from forms of address to criticism. Ghanaians rarely criticize those in higher positions of authority directly, and when they do, they do so smoothly and skillfully. Josephine's passion and anger at Asmah, however, would have prevented her from exercising her rhetorical skill at indirect critique, which would have been below Josephine's standards of decorum. Josephine is known as a well-skilled communicator and speaker.

Women's NGOs did, however, mount a public campaign promoting the bill and arguing against the government. While the government propagated customary law

claiming that it would help secure the Ghanaian family, NGOs propagate reforms of the civil law claiming that it would help prevent domestic violence. To achieve this, they argued against the government's monopoly on what is Ghanaian and what is foreign, as well as against the government's discourse of defending "good culture."

As the government advanced its campaign against the bill, NGOs also modified their strategies. NGOs argued that there is nothing "cultural" about violence and tried to decouple the criminalization of domestic violence from the value of culture. To this end, they used their training in culturalism discourse, practiced at their workshops (Chapter 4). They also argued that violence against women is enabled by patriarchy, and that feminists are not the only Ghanaians opposed to patriarchy.

Having participated in the making of numerous lists of what counts as a cultural practice, NGOs were able to articulate their own position on what constitutes culture. They solicited support from Christian, Muslim, and traditional religious figures to argue that domestic violence is not positively sanctioned by culture. They held a forum "to bring Christian leaders from churches together" to discuss the bill. Given that many members of the coalition were deeply Christian women themselves, they were able to foster a dialogue with them. Other NGOs built on their existing relationships – created through workshops and development interventions – with local religious authorities and gained their support. Having shown their respect for "traditional authorities" such as chiefs and religious leaders, NGOs were able to solicit their support.

Through these processes, NGOs have succeeded in getting a broad base of support for the bill. Parliament members and journalists alike are now voicing opinions in support

of the bill and the marital rape clause.[55] I cannot estimate how the majority of the Ghanaian public feels about the bill. However, NGOs have been able not only to sustain their advocacy for the bill over the course of six years, but invigorate it through wider public support.

In early 2006, the Parliament of Ghana held its first reading of the domestic violence bill. The presented bill had no mention of the marital rape clause. The new Minister of Women and Children's Affairs has subsequently claimed that the sexual harassment clause also deters the bill's passage. Nothing has happened since then and the final outcome of the legislative process remains to be seen.

Colonial Legacies of Ghanaian Cultural Politics

The contemporary attempts of Ghanaian government to oppose the domestic violence bill invoke the colonial legacy of customary law. The proposition to place domestic violence within the purview of customary law is aimed not only at deflecting responsibility from the state – in line with its neoliberal vision – but at weakening women's NGOs (which see themselves as civil society) that are making demands on it. This strategy of promoting tradition to disarm civil society has a colonial legacy, rooted in over a century of political struggles fought on grounds of culture. The British colonial government supported "traditional authorities" to prevent the rise of civil society which was threatening its rule (Grischow 1999).

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[55] "Battling Domestic Violence in Rural Communities." Public Agenda. 05-8-2006. "The Domestic Violence Bill – Promoting Domestic Justice and Harmony" Ghanaian Chronicle. 05-04-2006.

The Ghanaian government's opposition to the DVB is grounded in its alleged commitment to fostering social and legal authority of "traditional" community. The government does not explicitly name its proposed solution – the reliance on arbitration by family heads and chiefs – as "customary law." But the government's arguments rely on three features of customary rule (described in Chapter 3). The first feature is that, much like the British colonial government, the current government would give chiefs "uncustomary" powers – powers they did not previously have in this form. The authority to mediate in domestic violence would be "uncustomary." Chiefs have extensively served as judges only in the Asante kingdom, where they spent considerable time arbitrating disputes (McCaskie 1998). In much of the country, however, the existence of chiefs in precolonial times is disputed. Furthermore, Cusack and Appiah have shown that traditional authorities such as chiefs and queenmothers rarely mediate in Ghanaian domestic violence disputes in contemporary Ghana (1999).

The second feature of customary law is codification of culture. The government of Ghana claims that it wants to "understand" the cultural norms regulating family, marriage, and violence, and codify them. Asmah represented her campaign as being in this spirit: she wanted to have survey and consultation-based results on the question which cultural norms guide violence within marriage. Asmah claimed that the government would use these norms as the basis of the new legislation. Making the codified cultural norms the basis for adjudication of disputes would mean creating a new customary law. Asmah, much like colonial officials, assumed that such cultural norms exist. Chanock has characterized this as the "flawed nature of the epistemological

assumption that such a law is always there, waiting to be found" (1998: vii). In actuality, colonial officials constructed norms and laws, and the Ghanaian government proposes to do the same.

The third feature of customary law is adjudication of disputes based on "traditional norms" rather than legal rights. In discussing the domestic violence bill, Asmah was not concerned with what was "right," but what was proper and suitable. Asmah claimed that the suitability of law depended on its proximity and relevance to culture. However, this claim is contestable. I will argue that the Ghanaian government was more concerned with making the law suitable to the masculinist and neoliberal state, than to Ghanaian cultures. I read the government's strategy as doubly problematic. The government's opposition to NGO advocacy is an attempt to weaken the country's NGOs and their role in national politics. At the same time, by denying its responsibility over domestic and sexual violence, the government refuses to treat victims/survivors as its subjects and citizens.

What Serves Women Best? Debates about Modernity and the Public Domain

While many scholars have criticized customary law, others see it as a potential solution for African women. Africanists have debated whether or not women became particularly disadvantaged under customary law. The customary law in Natal, South Africa, said as much: "The main elements of Native Law hinge upon a few leading principles: the subjection of the female sex to the male, and of children to their father or head of family" (McClendon 1995: 527). Under customary law, women were subject to

new regulations that included "sexuality in marriage, their right to divorce, and their labor" (Manuh 1995: 215). At the same time, women were not absolutely dominated by customary law. They were able to use some of its provisions in their interest (Manuh 1988, McKenzie 1990, Burill 2000), and to contest it in struggle with colonial officials (Hunt 1991).

The government's attempt to base law in culture may sound particularly appealing to anthropologists. Some anthropologists and historians have argued in favor of customary law (though not of this particular instantiation). "Happily," writes Takyiwaah Manuh, a prolific Ghanaian anthropologist of law and gender, Africa has vibrant "alternative institutions outside the law and the state, institutions which might provide better building blocks than those legitimated by the colonial state" (1995: 224). Her vision is "the metamorphosis of forms into the chameleon, ever-changing and adaptable, *a new customary law*, seen clearly as an "invention," of a broad swell of the population, but an invention nevertheless" (1995: 224). Here, Manuh argues for one version of "alternative modernity" (Piot 1999) – a specifically Ghanaian invention. She writes:

> The experiences of women in several African states that have recounted here demonstrate adaptability to change, engagement in discourses, agencies and knowledge that must be harnessed in any movements for change. The content of this change cannot be determined in advance but like the customary law that these women have often sought to recapture, it is flexible and adaptable. (Manuh 1995: 224)

Manuh acknowledges that customary law is an invention and a colonial legacy, but finds that a modified version of this law is the best resource for African women. In her logic, while neither civil nor customary law is truly Ghanaian, customary law has

more relevance to culture, and women have been able to make use of it. However, this argument is based on an assumed mapping of positions which places women in the corner of tradition:

> On the one hand, there are the everyday resistances of rural and poor urban women who actively manipulate the practices, rules, prohibitions and norms that collectively could be said to be their experience of customary law, as they demand access to some resource or refuse their labor for some enterprise. The evasions of parental control over marriage, through elopements and other means to avoid the payment of bridewealth, and the subversion of male control through adultery or divorce, must be seen as attempts, however muted to engage in other discourses and practices, other traditions of customary marriage and living arrangements. These are highly contested, subject to negotiation and constantly evolving. (Manuh 1995: 222-223)

For Manuh, this terrain is a clearly demarcated binary, as evidenced in the way she talks above. She imagines "rural and poor urban women" who exist outside the civil law and who instead negotiate customary law and custom itself. I argue that we need to analyze critically this alignment of "women" with "tradition" and "customary law." Ghanaian women do not exist outside civil law and the state.

Thus, in answering which law should be available to women as a resource, I would begin by looking at what Ghanaian women are already using and how it serves them. I should note that the government-propagated customary law would not "work" unless the government invested resources into it. It would not easily translate into practice as chiefs may not desire this authority – those chiefs who are concerned about domestic violence demand instead that the government assume a greater role in preventing it (Cusack 1999: 152f.). Colonial officials paid the chiefs – the government to Ghana offers them nothing. Instead, the government divests itself from the responsibility for the domestic sphere. Furthermore, the government proposes to let chiefs adjudicate in cases

of domestic violence only, not in other realms of life, and chiefs are not oblivious to this.[56]

But rather than imagining an interventionist paradigm in which "we" (those with knowledge of culture or law) decide what is best for Ghanaian women, I will try to describe how Ghanaian women use the laws available to them. As I mentioned earlier, Cusack has shown that Ghanaian women rarely use community and "traditional authorities" to negotiate their problems with violence (1999). Instead, Ghanaian women turn to government bodies and NGOs, which helps them navigate Ghana's civil laws and state provisions. Women in all of Ghana are using civil law for help with domestic violence. The legal aid office in Bolga, for example, has lines of women waiting at its doors. Better documented are the numbers of Ghanaian women who turn to the government's institution CHRAJ (Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice). As I mentioned earlier, in 2002, CHRAJ arbitrated in 6850 "family-related" cases (CHRAJ 2002: 33).

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[56] The embrace of chiefs in this instance is unusual because the government does not usually cede its authority to chiefs. Currently, the government is in the process of taking chiefly authority away by making all land private property – in the past, chiefs have held their authority by having rights over land. Historically speaking, the authority of Ghanaian chiefs sharply waned after Ghana's independence (Rathbone 2000). It has recently recovered slightly due to the chiefs' involvement in the development industry. Seen as community representatives, chiefs are considered stakeholders. But, except for a few highly educated chiefs with much symbolic capital, such as the Asantehene, village and town-level chiefs are only marginally involved in the development industry and the country's politics. Chiefs in the Upper East region depend on NGOs to draw them into development projects – as I mentioned in Chapter 2, "traditional authorities" are one group of "friends" NGOs make. For this reason, chiefs are aligned more closely with NGOs than with the government. The government's relationship with the chiefs still functions in the "bifurcated state" model described by Mamdani (1996). Ghana's democratic constitution declares that the government will not interfere with chiefs, and demands at the same time that chiefs should not interfere with the country's national politics: chiefs are prohibited from influencing national politics through the Parliament – if a chief becomes a parliament member, he must resign his chieftaincy (Republic of Ghana 1992: 168). The National House of Chiefs does not have representatives in the Parliament, which is something the chiefs desire.

The fact that women turn to CHRAJ is notable. CHRAJ was established following an era of human rights abuses by Ghana's military governments to negotiate the abuse of power by government officials or holders of public offices. It is mandated "to investigate complaints of violations of fundamental human rights and freedoms, injustice and corruption; abuse of power and unfair treatment of persons by public officers in the exercise of their duties" (CHRAJ Act 456). But women come to CHRAJ for help with domestic violence cases. In fact, most cases CHRAJ adjudicates are not about the state violence, but about family violence. When the government established CHRAJ, it did not foresee this. Thus, Ghanaian women put CHRAJ to use in a way the government did not expect. The popularity of CHRAJ is understandable – it dispenses justice through mediation and referral to courts, and unlike the regular police units (i.e., all police stations other than the specialized domestic violence units), CHRAJ does not turn victims of violence away. Ghanaian women eagerly embraced this institution as a resource.

Countrywide, women have also been turning to the police services' specialized Domestic Violence Victim Support Units (formerly known as Women and Juvenile Units) for help as well. In 2005, this unit received 13,224 requests for intervention. This is a sharp contrast to the 852 cases in 1999, the year this unit was first established and when it existed only in a few Ghanaian cities.

Women from all walks of life have turned to the government for support with domestic violence, as long as the government made this support widely available. This is not to say that customary law is irrelevant, but this does mean that there is no obvious or natural alignment between marginalized women and customary law.

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I argue against the portrayal of new laws, such as the domestic violence bill, as sheer foreign impositions. Manuh critiques feminist attempts to reform customary law, claiming that they have little relevance to local practices:

> The discourses of the modernisers [are] often rooted in discourses removed from the time and place, and [are] likely to be opposed as the introduction of "foreign" practices. While many of the reformers genuinely believe in the justice of their cause, often they fail to see that these new ideas, these new visions also embody particular ideological assumptions, and are as much inventions as the customary law they oppose (1995: 223).

While this critique does not directly apply to the Ghanaian advocacy, it is nevertheless useful to consider it. Anthropologists of legal systems in Africa have long debated the question of law reforms (Chanock 1998). In many African countries, customary law coexists with national (or civil) laws and religious laws. Customary and religious laws pertain in particular to family and marriage regulations. For example, in Ghana, a couple can get married under customary law, Islamic law, or civil law.

So, what is "foreign" in NGO advocacy? NGOs rely on CEDAW and other conventions of international law to legitimate their advocacy for the domestic violence bill. Yet, I argue that these instruments of international women's rights law are not any more "foreign" to Ghana than to Western countries. These declarations have not been crafted by the West and then exported to Ghana. The international conventions Ghanaian NGOs use are a product of global and transnational networks. Ghanaian NGOs have contributed to the form and content of these conventions and have co-produced them. While these conventions did not originate in a flat world, but in a world of well-known geo-political inequalities, it would be inadequate to attribute them solely to the West.

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Scholars have recognized that these legal instruments are often hegemonic (e.g. Tinsley 2003). But it might be time to examine just what is hegemonic and what useful about them. To consider international law hegemonic at face value means that everyone loses. We can point out, for example, that some Western governments, such as the US government, oppose CEDAW (the most pertinent UN convention on women's rights) even more than the government of Ghana. The United States has not ratified this convention (i.e. its legislature has not voted on it), while Ghana has. However, US women's organizations have instigated regional ratification. For example, women's NGOs in San Francisco have successfully advocated that the city administration bring its laws and policies into alignment with CEDAW.[57] At the same time, Bolga NGOs asked for funds to attend a conference on implementing CEDAW, in order to advocate for it in northern Ghana. Thus, "international women's rights law" is in this case not any more removed from Accra or Bolga than from Washington, DC.

Ghanaian advocacy also poses further challenges to scholarship on women and law. It is important to note that the contemporary terrain of Ghanaian advocacy is not the one Manuh and others write about. Ghanaian feminist lawyers are not focused on reforming customary law, but civil law.[58] In trying to reform civil law, they rely both on

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[57] "In San Francisco, WILD for Human Rights spearheaded the passing of the first-ever U.S. city ordinance implementing the principles underlying CEDAW. . . . As a result of these efforts, on April 13, 1998 Mayor Willie Brown and the San Francisco Board of Supervisors unanimously enacted a local ordinance (No. 128-98) instituting the principles that underlie the U.N. Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). This law requires city departments to use a gender and human rights analysis to review city policy in employment, funding allocations, and delivery of direct and indirect services." http://www.wildforhumanrights.org/ourwork/cedaw.html.

[58] One instance in which Ghanaian advocates tried to influence customary law shows that they adopted a different strategy. When NGOs tried to persuade chiefs to pass customary ordinances against ritual slavery *(trokosi)*, they turned directly to chiefs. In other words, they did not turn to the government to

their local practices – by arguing that they are improving the law as a resource that Ghanaian women already use – and international law. The domestic violence bill is not the only example. NGOs were successful in passing legislation such as "intestate law" which gives a woman the right to inherit her deceased husband's property regardless of which law united them in marriage. This was one of the ways in which feminists have tried to renegotiate Ghana's plural legal system. Thus, rather than opposing the local and the international, we need to consider that the local is already plural, and that the international is not always "removed from place."

In short, while Ghanaian feminists negotiate these multiple legal systems, Ghanaian women who are victims/survivors of violence, also use multiple resources. They turn to the state for help whenever that help is available. Ghanaian women find recourse in civil law, state institutions, and NGOs.

When the government refuses to consider domestic violence a domain of the state, it denies women their ability to make demands on it. When the Ghanaian government attempts to define marriage, and violence within marriage in particular, as a space of non-intervention, it frames the domestic space as apolitical. (Ironically, as we will see later, these government's actions contribute to politicization of this question). The government's discourse of culture and family structure thus doubly denies women the status of subjects and citizens. It prevents women who experienced sexual violence within marriage from turning to the state for support. But the government's opposition to

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legislate custom, but to chiefs themselves. Thus, NGOs did not aim at overriding customary law ("the local") with civil law (the "national"), but tried to work within the customary law itself.

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the domestic violence bill was also an attempt to restrict the political space of advocacy women's NGOs are carving out.

This power struggle is not unique to Ghana. Delegating the personal into the realm of the private is a hallmark of liberal states that feminists have long critiqued. Feminist scholars have argued that excluding the "personal" and the "private" from the political is one of the hallmarks of the state. Pateman, for example, has argued that constructing relations within the family as apolitical contributes to marginalization of women (1988). Thus, the effort of the Ghanaian government to stay outside the arbitration of domestic violence, marital rape, and other issues labeled "private" or "domestic" has a long trajectory both in and outside of Africa.

What is unique about contemporary Ghana is that the Ghanaian government combines its masculinist vision with its pursuit of neoliberalism. As I have explained in Chapter 3, Ghana's neoliberal agenda includes government withdrawal of social services and its distancing from the marginalized. While Ghana officially proclaims to be interested in the "vulnerable" (Government of Ghana 2006), its opposition to the domestic violence bill tells another story. Asmah's campaign has shown that the government only tentatively considers women to be vulnerable to violence and in need of protection.

By excluding marital rape from the bill, the government succeeded in framing sexual violence within marriage as a "domestic" matter. However, the government did not succeed in displacing the political debate about domestic violence. On the contrary, opposition to the bill has catapulted this debate to the front pages of Ghanaian

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newspapers and continues to inspire advocacy. In other words, the government's resistance to NGO advocacy helped make domestic violence a public concern. Thus, NGOs have expanded the discursive space of the "public" realm as it pertains to women, even though they did not succeed in creating the same legislative space. These NGOs have fought for a new definition of the Ghanaian state. By advocating for a state that sees victims of violence as its citizens and accepts to care for them, women's NGOs demand that the government invest into new social services and institutions. These NGOs thus envision a socially responsible state that embraces gender equality in practice, not only on paper. This clashes with the Ghanaian government's neoliberal vision which sees the creation of the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs as a completion of its fulfillment to gender equity.

"Let the Women Fight" – The Chief's Linguist?

The creation of the Ministry has allowed the government to feminize the space of politics of gender. By creating the role of the high-caliber, Cabinet-level politician "in charge of women," the rest of the Cabinet is allowed to divest itself. This was particularly pernicious in the government's campaign against the domestic violence bill.

Contrary to popular belief, Minister Asmah did not initiate the campaign against the domestic violence bill. The President himself, as the head of the Cabinet, selected Asmah, in her capacity as a Minister of Women's Affairs, to carry it out. This fact was well hidden from the public. Everyone I talked to said that Asmah was engaged in a self-motivated power struggle with NGOs. During fieldwork, I also believed what NGOs said.

They individualized the government's opposition and perceived Asmah as their enemy who was responsible for stalling the bill.[59] The larger Ghanaian public also understood the matter in this light, as a fight between women's NGOs and Minister Asmah.

However, upon my return from fieldwork, I found that the proceedings of Ghana's parliamentary debates were available online. A look inside the elusive institution revealed a more complex story. The Official Report of Parliamentary Debates reveals the origins of the government's opposition to the bill. On the 26th of January 2005, the fourth day of hearings in Ghana's newly elected Parliament, Asmah appeared in front of the appointments committee. Asmah was nominated for the post of the Minister of Fisheries and at the parliamentary hearings for her new appointment, Asmah surprised the committee by revealing that the Cabinet, and not her personally, opposed the domestic violence bill:

"On her role in the Domestic Violence Bill, she explained that *she only carried out a Cabinet directive to stay further action on it* until understanding and views of broad majority of Ghanaians were sought on its implications because, as she put it, 'the Bill is one law that goes into the bedroom of every family'" (Parliament of Ghana 2005: 16).

This is one of only a few sources that tell us that the Cabinet ordered the campaign and that Asmah was only following an order. Asmah also showed her own skill as a speaker by denying responsibility for the bill. Another source that reveals that the Cabinet authored the campaign is a Daily Graphic article "Cabinet calls for public education on bill" from April, 2004:

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[59] NGOs had also interpreted the former first lady, Nana Rawlings, as being personally responsible for hindering women's activism.

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> Cabinet has directed that more public education be carried out on the Domestic Violence Bill to sensitise the public about the bill to enable them to make suggestions. Consequently, the bill has been translated into six major local languages and disseminated to all the regions to facilitate the advocacy programmes being undertaken by the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs in the regions. . . . [Asmah] said the move had become necessary because it was important that people understood the provisions of the bill before it was passed into law so that families were not disintegrated.[60]

This article tells us that Asmah announced the Cabinet's order to launch a campaign and that she was going to carry it out. Thus, Asmah only represented the national government. The media and the government itself represented Asmah as the driving force in the campaign. This suited the government well. Asmah was chosen as the only public face of the campaign and the only visible opponent of the bill. President Kuffuor and members of the Cabinet never commented on the bill in public. This is not surprising, as the Cabinet is sworn to secrecy.[61] But it means that the Ghanaian public never found out the position held by other senior members of the government concerning the bill. This, in and of itself, is telling – while Asmah was speaking, others were allowed to be silent.

Thus, we cannot say with certainty who designed the campaign against the bill and who was actually driving the train. The one thing that is certain is that it was not Asmah alone. Behind the public face of Ghana's politics, the woman Minister was not in control. It appears – but remains uncertain – that the Cabinet ordered the campaign and orchestrated fights between NGOs and the Minister. The cabinet could then observe the fight from afar. The President and other Ministers distanced themselves from the debate

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[60] "Cabinet Calls for Public Education on Bill." Daily Graphic. 4-2-2004. Page 18.

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and let the women – Minister Asmah and women's NGOs – fight among themselves. In other words, the campaign fractured women's voices. The figure of the Minister of Women's Affairs served to undermine, rather than foster, gender equality.

Here, I want to reach far, into another Asante tradition, to shed light on women's positioning in Ghana's politics. The government's strategy of having Asmah as the public face of the campaign has a genealogy in Ghana's traditions of indirect political speech. An Asante chief (ohene) never speaks directly to his subjects. He speaks to his linguist (this how Ghanaians translate the Two term okyeame), who then interprets and performs the chief's words to the public. A Ghanaian poem depicts some of the responsibilities of the chief's linguist:

> I am okyeame
> Ohene's spokesman.
> Ohene's eminence depends upon my wisdom and eloquence.
> All contacts with ohene are made through me.
> Sitting in council,
> Ohene speaks to elders and citizens through me.
> Sitting in council,
> Elders and citizens speak to ohene through me.
> Sitting in council,
> Ohene speaks to visitors through me.
> Sitting in council,
> Visitors speak to ohene through me.
> Dr. Kofi Adu-Manyah

The role of the linguist is to amplify the chief's speech. The linguist is a person of great prestige and authority. He not only speaks the chief's words, but also advises the chief in all important matters. We could say that in the public eye of the campaign against the domestic violence bill, Asmah was positioned as the President's linguist. She

[61] www.ghana.gov.gh/living/constitution/secondschedule.php.

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interpreted and performed President's words for the public. As a Cabinet-level Minister leading a visible campaign, Asmah appeared to have political clout and prestige similar to that of the linguist.

However, the campaign also showed that Asmah was not as powerful as her public appearance suggested. I will use the metaphor of the chief's linguist to illustrate this. The chief is usually present with the linguist; the linguist never speaks alone. The prestige of the linguist derives in part from his affiliation with the chief and physical proximity to him. When the linguist translates the chief's words, we always see the chief but hear only the linguist. In the government's campaign, however, the public only saw and heard Asmah. The president was never on her side. He and other members of the Cabinet hid behind Asmah, using her as a shield behind which they could oppose the domestic violence bill and NGO advocacy.

It remains unknown whose words Asmah was speaking, her own or the Presidents. While Asmah could this to her advantage in gaining another position as a Minister, it left Ghanaian NGOs confused about their opponent. The authors of the bill remained elusive.

This gendering of political speech in contemporary Ghana speaks to the tensions inherent in the doubling of the government's identity. By having Asmah as the public face of the campaign, the government paid tribute to women and to its image as a gender progressive country. When Ghana represents itself internationally, this is the face it shows. During her 2004 campaign against the bill, Asmah was certainly one of the most visible politicians in the country. But Asmah's front-line visibility and her role as the

speaker for the government did not bring Asmah prestige or authority. She performed the role of the ventriloquist, speaking in multiple voices whose provenance remained unknown.

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CHAPTER 6

WOMEN'S NGOS AND NEW FIELDS OF POLITICS

Ghanaians had lived under a military dictatorship for quite a long time, and here we were saying that now we had a democratic dispensation. But to have a democratic system, the question of participation, and women's participation in particular, is very important. We saw that the institutionalisation of democracy needed the participation of every citizen, and therefore women's access to policymaking was very, very important.
Hamida Harrison (In Mama et al. 2005)

The people marginalized by cultural globalization often insist more fervently upon cultural essences and the right to protect cultural sovereignty. Among the areas in which these conflicts are conducted are family, gender, property, morality, and human rights. The political and cultural conflict between universalism and cultural specificity illustrates most dramatically how the cultural and political have become fused in the struggle between western and nonwestern societies. . . . Traditions were maintained, remade, and presented under circumstances of political and economic disruption and violent assault on cultural identity.
Martin Chanock (1998: x).

In this chapter, I will argue that Ghanaian women's NGOs create new fields of political debate and intervention. Contrary to accepted theories which purport that NGOs enable the government's neoliberalism, take over its functions, and make it weaker (thus allowing the government to retreat), Ghanaian NGOs demand more of the government. This ensuing battle takes place on the grounds of culture and politics of the margins. NGOs do not allow the government to stay away from the margins, but demand its acknowledgment of responsibility for the marginalized.

But before I move to this discussion, I will return to the question of "weak states" and NGOs "taking over state functions." I have shown that the government is not interested in occupying the field that NGOs have created. NGOs do not "take away" state functions in the sense that the economic and social development of marginalized people and spaces has never been a state function and that the state does not seek sovereignty over it.[68] The government leaves this aspect of development up to NGOs. As long as NGOs focus only on the marginalized, they are not a threat to the state. By allowing NGOs to claim the marginalized as their field, the government tries to divest itself from this field and focus instead at attaining economic growth and its desired "middle-income" status. But contrary to accepted theories which purport that NGOs allow the neo-liberal state to stay away from the margins, NGO interventions and their advocacy are demanding that the government of Ghana acknowledge its responsibility for the marginalized.

NGOs not only collaborate with government agencies, but also attempt to influence national politics. NGOs make the government address issues it previously neglected by advocating for new kinds of government intervention and new visions of the state. These strategies have been successful. The Ghanaian government now responds to NGOs' demands regarding issues it previously neglected. NGOs succeed in involving the government by working through, with, as well as against it. The uni-directional paradigm of NGOs taking something from the government does not represent the multiple

[68] Whether or not the state *should* have sovereignty over development interventions is a question that is outside of scope of my discussion.

directions and kinds of influences and relationships between women's NGOs and the government.

NGOs make the government redefine itself by crystallizing questions such as: What is the job of the government? What are the responsibilities of the government vs. for example, traditional authorities? Who is the government accountable to: powerful men, marginalized women, or all Ghanaians? NGOs also make the government act: in response to NGO activism in 1999, when women (and men) protested against the government's lax stance on violence against women, the government established a new police institution named "Women and Juvenile Unit" or WAJU. In response to NGO campaigns on domestic violence, the government then renamed this institution "Domestic Violence Victim Support Unit."

In response to NGOs, the government passes laws (female genital cutting law will be discussed in this chapter), as well as opposes and modifies them (the domestic violence bill). In response to NGO advocacy and women's organizing which resulted in the Women's Manifesto, the Ministry of Women's Affairs passed a gender policy in the summer of 2004.

The government also influences NGOs. In Chapter 5, I have shown how NGOs and the government propel each other to action. The government's lack of initiative on prevention of domestic violence has propelled NGOs to open shelters, offer counseling and legal aid, and design legislation. These NGO actions have provoked government opposition, including Asmah's tour in otherwise neglected parts of Ghana. And when the government framed its opposition on the grounds of culture, NGOs tried to reclaim this

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space as well. Thus, the relationship between NGOs and the government is complex. The term "weakening states" cannot account for the mutually constitutive action-reaction chains between NGOs and the government.

Marginalization and Culturalism Revisited: When Culture Doesn't Matter

In the previous chapter, I have shown that the government makes culture the ground of political struggle and positions itself as its defender. Here, I will emphasize that the government uses the discourse of "defending culture" as a flexible tool. This is one of the tools the government uses to oppose the NGO-led extensions of the public domain, or domain of state interventions. To show this, I return to the question of how cultural politics is fought over the marginalized. As we have seen in chapter 4, at workshops, government officials along with NGOs articulate culture as an obstacle to development (I call this the discourse of culturalism). The struggle over the domestic violence bill is the *only* instance in which the government promotes culture as a political good.[63] In fact, the government's panic over culture in the domestic violence bill debates stands in sharp contrast to its usual practices.

The government usually demands a reform of Ghanaian culture and sees a wide range of practices as "harmful."[64] In its constitution, the government demands that chiefs influence cultural change and "undertake an evaluation of traditional customs and usages

[63] My argument does not pertain to the government's larger framing of culture, but to instances when culture emerges as a terrain of political struggle. In other realms, such as tourism and to some extend, education, the government sponsors a range of cultural activities.

[64] Urban Ghanaians are also preoccupied with culture and see the need to reform it. "Culture is dynamic," I heard in my first week in Ghana and time and time again. In contrast, for Ghanaians living in villages, culture and its potential transformations are not important concerns.

with a view to eliminating those customs and usages that are outmoded and socially harmful," (Republic of Ghana 1992: 165). This stance is not only enshrined in the constitution, but also rearticulated in government officials public appearances. Newspapers report daily on government officials' statements about the need to reform culture. For example, under the heading "Avoid negative cultural practices – Minister advises chiefs" the Daily Graphic published the following article about a workshop in Bolga:

> Mr. Mahama Salifu, the Upper-East Regional Minister, has called on members of Bolgatanga, Nabdom, Bongo, and Tongo (BONABOTO), a civil society association, to use their enlightened positions to influence chiefs and traditional leaders to abolish all negative cultural practices in their respective areas. He pointed out that the practice of female genital mutilation, tribal marking, widowhood rites and other practices that give rise to single mothers are all inimical to the welfare of the society and should be discarded. He also requested the BONABOTO members to mount a vigorous campaign against the dissipation of money on funerals and other social activities. The regional Minister made the call when he addressed the opening of third national congress of BONABOTO in Bolgatanga in the Upper East Region. The theme for the three-day congress was "Financing Tertiary Education in the BONABOTO."[65]

In this speech, the government Minister identified "female genital mutilation, tribal marking, widowhood rites" as well as "the dissipation of money on funerals and other social activities" as harmful cultural practices.[66] These practices are harmful because they are not "modern." As the government says in its constitution (cited above), and as I have heard from a number of Ghanaians, these practices are "outmoded."

What these practices have in common is that they are rituals that clash with the government's vision of neoliberal Ghana. According to the government's logic,

[65] Daily Graphic, January 2, 2004.

Ghanaians should focus on accumulating individual wealth instead of spending money on building community. Funerals, for example, are considered the most important rite of passage in Ghana. Funerals establish the symbolic capital of the individual and his/her family, and bring together wider community. Funerals are celebrations of the individual who – even Christians concede – will take place among the ancestors; they are a symbol of one's worth and place in the world. Josephine told me proudly that she once overheard the following in passing, "When this woman dies, pleeeenty of people will come to her funeral, *pah, pah, pah, pah, pah.*" This is how Josephine explained to me her importance and value in Bolga. By referencing her future funeral, people Josephine overheard acknowledged her current status.

But funerals have become a target of the government's culturalist discourse. The government considers spending money on funerals to be unproductive and wasteful. Funerals do not fit in the crude logic of capital accumulation. Thus, the government takes funerals as a target of its discourse against culture. The government uses culturalism as a flexible tool. In Chapter 5, I have shown that the government's opposition to the domestic violence bill is built on its defense of culture and the "Ghanaian family" (which the government describes in the singular, universalistic idiom) in particular. Even though "funerals" are arguably as important of a cultural phenomenon as "family," the government frames them as harmful.

Flexible Culture, Flexible Laws

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[66] The space does not allow me to analyze the Minister's logic – that cultural practices give rise to single mothers – but this logic is a part of the prevalent Ghanaian discourse that attributes all social ills to

In the next section, I will contrast two government's responses to NGO advocacy. Comparing the legislation against female genital cutting with the domestic violence bill debate might explain why the government switches from blaming to defending culture.

In 1994, Ghana became the first African country to independently (i.e. not during colonialism) pass a law prohibiting female genital cutting. Given that legislation is largely considered a government's domain, this law is often interpreted as the government's deed. However, the government was not the main force behind this law, but rather a side actor. Women's NGOs created legislation prohibiting female genital cutting, advocated for its passage to law, and then took the government by the hand and led it through the process of enforcement.

Ghanaians in communities that have practiced female genital cutting consider it a cultural practice. Nevertheless, the cutting was criminalized swiftly. The government fully supported NGO advocacy for this legislation. The government did not protest the law's passage, or ask the Ghanaian ethnic groups practicing the cutting what they thought about the law. The government did not ask if this law would "suit" the practicing communities or if they would "own it."[67] The government was not concerned about the social and cultural consequences of criminalizing cutting. The bill sailed through the parliament in 1994.

Mr. Yahaya, a senior staff member of the Center for Muslim Families, told me in an interview that it wasn't difficult to convince the government to pass the law. They

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culture while holding women responsible for them.

[67] Minister Asmah used these terms (the law must suit communities, and communities must own it) when discussing why the domestic violence bill was objectionable.

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screened a documentary (filmed in Uganda) that shows how a baby is being circumcised. "We took the movie to the Parliament and the members of Parliament watched it. After that, there wasn't much argument. They said 'we have to pass that law.' Some of them actually could not bear sitting down to watch it; they went out. [They said] that it was too brutal, very brutal."

NGOs advocating for the bill (the Women's Network and Center for Muslim Families), were successful because they were able to involve a government agency in this project. "We worked through the National Council on Women and Development," Mr. Yahaya said. "They actually did the lobbying. And we got the community involved. They used the few women in the Parliament to actually speak for them." In other words, NGOs attracted the interest of the NCWD, which then collaborated with other branches of the government. The NGO got donor support, drafted the legislation, solicited support from NCWD and took the actual persuasive tool - the movie- to the Parliament.

This year (2006), the Parliament will discuss another bill about female genital cutting. While the current law punishes only circumcisers, the Women's Network has drafted a new and more expansive law. This law would punish anyone who in any way participated in the cutting – including entire families *and* the cut woman herself, if she went through the ritual willingly. In other words, according to the new law, a woman cannot choose to be cut, since her choice is considered a result of cultural hegemony. Despite these controversial provisions, there is no public opposition to this bill in Ghana. A number of academics and public health researchers have told me in private that they are

opposed to this law, but nobody is campaigning against it publicly. The government does not defend "culture" in this instance.

Why is it that one cultural practice – the cutting – can be criminalized without any opposition, but domestic violence – marital rape and sexual harassment in particular – incites a strong government opposition on grounds of culture? I argue that this has to do with the modernizing discourse, and power relations in Ghana's geo-politics.

The government readily condemns female genital cutting in the text of the law because most educated Ghanaians working in development or government consider cutting as a "harmful traditional practice" *par excellance*. We have seen in Chapter 4 that everybody talks about how abhorrent and primitive cutting is. Disparaging discourses about cutting as an obstacle to development resurface at Ghanaian workshops and conferences, and in private debates whenever gender and women's rights are discussed. In other words, female genital cutting is seen as the most paradigmatic example of why Ghana's traditions must be modernized.

However, I believe that this is not the only reason why the government easily condemns cutting but does not condemn domestic violence. Female genital cutting is an issue that does not concern all Ghanaians, but only those living at the fringes of the state, in the economically and politically marginalized regions. Only ethnic groups living in the Upper East and Upper West as well as pockets of the Northern region, practice the cutting (along with immigrants from these areas and other countries, people who live in slums of the southern cities). Many Ghanaians who govern the country find cutting disdainful.

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Thus, criminalizing the cutting was not a contentious task for the government. The government readily made the marginalized punishable subjects.

Unlike female genital cutting, domestic violence is everywhere in Ghana. In Asmah's words, "the Bill is one law that goes into the bedroom of every family" (Parliament of Ghana 2005: 222). NGO advocacy for the domestic violence bill and criminalization of marital rape in particular received a strong government imposition precisely because this law could have a nationwide impact. The targets of this bill are not marginalized women and men, but all Ghanaians. However, given that the perpetrators of violence are mostly men, and that feminists advocated for the bill's passage, many Ghanaian men saw themselves as primary targets of this bill.[68]

This included professional and powerful men – men otherwise protected by laws, not punished by them. The marital rape clause threatens all Ghanaians who believe that they have rights over their wives' sexuality. The sexual harassment clause specifically targets powerful and professional Ghanaians, not rural women and men who operate in the informal economy and have no legal employment protections in the first place. Thus, it was easy to legislate against female genital cutting, since practitioners of ancestor worship and in some cases Muslims are the only ones who engage in cutting. In contrast,

[68] In her speeches (e.g. in Chapter 5), Minister Asmah invited men to see themselves as targets of this bill and to oppose it. In other words, the government exploited the potential of the bill to polarize the Ghanaian public around this bill along the lines of gender. This strategy was only partially successful. While many urban Ghanaian men usually profess their support for gender equity, they turned against this bill. To counter this effect, women's NGOs solicited and received support from men, as I have mentioned in Chapter 5.

the domestic violence bill had the potential to affect anybody, and men especially felt threatened.

This is why I see the government's opposition to the domestic violence bill as being *performed* on grounds of culture. Preserving Ghanaian culture does not motivate the government to oppose the bill. The government's claims about defending culture are a smoke screen for a power struggle. The debate may be staged on the grounds of culture, but the battle is about control over women's sexuality, the government's stance toward the marginalized, the place of women and women's organizations in the public sphere, and the character of the Ghanaian state.

Performing Democracy at the Margins

I have shown in Chapter 4 that the marginalized figure as the ground of NGO discourses, and that they legitimize development projects. The marginalized serve a similar function for the government. The government framed its opposition to the violence bill as a concern for those who would be victimized by the law itself. To do this, Asmah toured the country's poorest regions, trying to appropriate the "voices of the people."

The government attempted to present itself as democratic by framing its campaign as a "consultation." After the first round of campaign – including Asmah's visit to Bolga – ended, Asmah presented the campaign as an attempt to reach out to "people:"

"The ministry had toured the Western, Brong Ahafo, Volta, Upper East and Northern regions to sensitise the people and collate their concerns on the Bill. . . . for the people to better understand the issues, give their views and support it when it was finally passed."[69] "The ministry had organised forums in [five] regions to source people's opinions and ideas."[70]

The Minister presented the campaign in this light both to the national public at large and at each campaign stop. In her talk in Bolga, for example, Asmah claimed that she was merely soliciting people's views: "We are asking the views of everybody in the country on this proposal"; "the government is trying to get the opinion of all of you"; "we want to hear all these views before we can put this law in place"; "we are here this afternoon to look for your input"; "all of you should come out openly and share in peace."

Naming this campaign a consultation was a strategic move. The government was hoping to make its campaign more palatable to NGOs with this label and to simultaneously present itself as democratic. To show that the government truly cares about the voice of the people, Asmah said that the Ministry would "collate" all views. She stressed this in her talk in Bolga: "we will have your views written and we will put them all together so that we have a law that protects everybody." However, nobody took notes on what the "people" of Bolga – the participants invited by the organizing committee – had to say. During the discussion period, the Minister's staff leaned back at the high table, with their legs stretched out and their heads tilted back, disengaged. Nobody was writing down people's views or "collating" them.

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[69] "Domestic Violence Bill Will soon Come into Being." Daily Graphic. 7-30-04. Page 28.

However, while the Ministry never actually compiled a list of people's views about the bill in the wake of her tour - however fragmented that attempt was in the first place – Asmah spoke in the name of the people. She claimed that the government is opposed to the marital rape clause and other aspects of the bill because the people of Ghana expressed concerns about them. She states, "the main concern being expressed *by the people* against the bill was the part dealing with marital rape, which was causing a lot of confusion."[71]

Thus, having conducted consultations, the government could adorn itself with the voice of the people and the legitimacy this voice provides in the age of participatory development and democracy. Nobody refuted the Minister's appropriation and manipulation of the voices of those on the margins; the "people" did not insert themselves into the public domain by writing what they thought about the bill. While Chanock has argued that marginalized people insist on cultural essences (1998: x), I have shown that it is not the Ghanaian people, but the government who does so. The government manipulates and appropriates the voices of the people for its own purposes.

The government represented itself as democratic not only to the country, but also internationally. This was important, as the Ghanaian debate about the bill has attracted attention from all corners of the globe.[72] The distances between regional capitals like

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[70] "Domestic Violence Bill Will Be Passed into Law." Daily Graphic. 10-02-04. Page 18.

[71] "Domestic Violence Bill Will soon Come into Being." Daily Graphic. 7-30-04. Page 28.

[72] Women's activists (from Afro-Caribbean and US feminists to Women Living Under Muslim Laws), African social justice organizations such as Pambazuka, international NGOs such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, academics, mainstream media, foreign governments (including the US state department), and the UN are all keenly watching the unfolding of the Domestic Violence legislation. See www.afromix.org/html/societe/femmes/index.en.html, www.feminist.org/news/newsbyte/uswirestory.asp?id=9970,

Bolga, where the government's campaign took place, and Accra on the one hand, and the distances between Accra and Addis Ababa or New York, where the government represents itself internationally, allowed the government to appropriate the voices of the people.[73] The government of Ghana keeps its image as gender progressive by managing these distances. The Minister's campaign in the far corners of the country enabled her to speak to the nation at large authoritatively. Since Bolga and other towns Asmah visited are not well connected to Accra, the distance served Asmah well. Similarly, in its presentation to the global (the African Union and the UN), the government used the distance between Ghana and these organizations to its advantage. When addressing these regional and global bodies, the government of Ghana presents itself as working *with* NGOs and as fully supporting the domestic violence bill. The government's *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper Annual Progress Report* , which Ghana provides to other African Union members as well as its international donors, offers a glimpse of this representation strategy:

> Parliament received various kinds of support from other quasi-state and non-state institutions. The National Governance Programme, the Centre for Democratic Development, The Parliamentary Center, Women's Groups and the Institute for Democratic Governance all provided capacity building support to parliament. Programmes such as Analysing the Public Budget, Gender Budgeting, Social Accountability and Understanding the Domestic Violence Bill were all organised during the year. (Government of Ghana 2006: 121)

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www.law.georgetown.edu/clinics/iwhrc/programms.html, www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2005/61572.htm, www.wluml.org/english/newsbytheme.shtml?cmd%5B54%5D=c-1-Violence%20against%20women, www.inwent.org/E+Z/content/archiv-ger/04-2005/trib_art2.html, www.pambazuka.org/en/category/16days.

[73] Headquarters of the African Union are in Addis Ababa; headquarters of the United Nations in New York.

Thus, when the government presents itself to the international community, it turns one of its most controversial political struggles into an example of NGO "support" for the government.[74] Since the African Union does not have direct contact with Ghanaian NGOs (i.e., it considers NGOs marginal to its politics), the government can use this distance to present itself as collaborating with NGOs. This collaboration is seen as a hallmark of democracy. The government's manipulation of its internal opposition and external representation allows it to manage its image. This is one way in which "democracy" functions as a multi-layered suit that can be turned inside out when circumstances demand it.

This is particularly disconcerting in light of government's manipulation of access to political space. I will show that the government fought NGOs on a turf that is not even nominally democratic. Officially, the executive government, parliament and courts rule the country and divide their powers. But, as I mentioned earlier, Asmah *promised* many times that the bill will come in front of the Parliament and be passed. However, under Ghana's constitution, only Parliament has the authority to pass laws. In the early days of the debate, Minister Asmah acknowledged as much, stating that it was not her job to deal with legislative matters (CDD 2002: 9). The government does not have the constitutional authority to take a proposed piece of legislation into its hands and keep it in limbo for years.

However, parliament members who supported the bill were not allowed to sponsor the bill and introduce it to the Ghanaian parliament. For example, Sena Akua

[74] Ghana's CEDAW report to the UN also claims that the government has collaborated with NGOs on passing the domestic violence bill (CEDAW/C/GHA 3-5).

Dansua, a parliament member (also a member the Women's Caucus and a Minority Spokesperson on Gender and Children in Parliament), has been a particularly strong supporter of the bill. Over the years, she has advocated for the bill's passage and tried to educate the public and other parliament members about its benefits. Yet, Dansua did not present the bill to the Parliament. Instead, everyone accepted that the bill is "in hands of" the Minister.

Dansua did not consider it her right to present the bill in the parliament even though the constitution sees that as a part of her job. This is because Ghana's political norms are different from the constitutional provisions and the government's self-representation. The unofficial norm is that Ghanaian legislators do not initiate laws, but pass those the government puts in front of them. Lindberg has documented the recent history of Ghana's parliament, in which he shows that the executive (i.e. the President and the Cabinet Ministers) has had control over parliament even though Ghana is formally democratic (forthcoming). He shows that since 2000, not a single law was officially sponsored by a member of Parliament; all were formally initiated by the executive. In other words, Parliament puts its stamp of approval on laws the executive government deems necessary. In the case of the domestic violence bill, NGOs initiated it, but by "adopting" it, the government gained control over its passage.

This is why the debate about the domestic violence bill did not take place in Parliament. Asmah was told to prevent it from getting there. NGOs accepted Asmah's authority. They did not contest the government's authority to add or take clauses from bills. The discrepancy between the Minister's official authority and her promise did not

surprise anyone. Ghanaians know that officially, Ghanaian parliament members are authorized to initiate bills and present them to the Parliament – that is their job – the parliament bows to the President and the country's ministers.

Ghanaian women who have advocated for the domestic violence bill – many of whom are lawyers – know and accept this difference between the country's official democracy and its shadow form. Here, women's NGOs accepted the discrepancies between the official form of Ghanaian democracy formulated in its constitution, and democracy at work. They tried to change this system while working within it rather than denouncing it completely.

The Power of Law and Language

The NGO advocacy for the domestic violence bill and the contradictions it produces teaches us something new about the importance of law as a text for both NGOs and the government.

Takyiwaah Manuh has criticized women's NGO advocacy for attributing too much power to the state. She writes:

> In the discourses of WILDAF [Women, Law and Development in Africa] groups, members both invoke the unchallenged power of law and the law as agency, enabling people, in this case, women, to achieve desired ends. Thus in their view, if the 'right' laws were to be passed and widely disseminated, and appropriate sanctions applied, many of the cases involving, for example, fathers who willfully neglect to provide for their children, would decrease. (1994: 208)

At some level, the NGO advocacy for the domestic violence bill appears to produce the same unintended effect. Bill supporters attributed a great power to law,

sometimes even arguing that the mere passage of the domestic violence bill would stop violence. For example, the leader of the women's coalition Nana Asantewaa Afedzinu argued that the bill would "save people from violence and deter perpetrators from committing such acts."[75] Others argued that this law "would regulate the attitude of the family, community and society and engender general respect for women and children."[76]

We can read these statements as instances in which women's NGOs overdetermine the power of the law. Many of the coalition's members are lawyers and it is not surprising that lawyers try to promote social and political change through legislation and have much faith in the ability of the law to transform the state and society.

This belief in the power of the law seems particularly mistaken when we consider that laws (those pertaining to women in Ghana as well as other laws) are hardly enforced. The discrepancy between the Ghanaian state on paper (including its constitution, laws, treaties, and policies), and its practices is large. Passing a law does not guarantee that the government will enforce it. The government itself acknowledges this (CEDAW/C/GHA 3-5).[77]

Current parliamentary debates reveal that even if the domestic violence bill passes, it may not be implemented. To be enforced, this law, with its important but costly provisions for social, medical, and legal support, would need a strong financial backing

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[75] "Domestic Violence Bill Will soon Come into Being." Daily Graphic. 7-30-04. Page 28.

[76] "Domestic Violence Bill Needs Support - FIDA." Accra Mail. 3-27-02.

[77] The history of the Ghanaian law against female genital cutting has also shown that laws alone do not initiate change. This law has existed for 12 years now (since 1994). However, having passed the law, the government took its hands off of it. NGOs that advocated for the law's passage took on the responsibility for ascertaining that it will be enforced. They taught the public and state employees (from police officers to judges, nurses, and teachers) about the law and created enforcement strategies. Thus, these NGOs used the law as a tool, but without much support from the government.

by the government. The new Women's Minister Alima Mahama has demanded that the Parliament give her Ministry a budget to help enforce this law once it is passed. In an early 2006 parliamentary debate, she stated:

"We need to have programmes for this – legal backing and a budget for this. And it is my hope that this year, the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs would put up a budget to support cases like this. . . . There is another problem – access to justice because of lack of courts. I will use this opportunity to call upon the District Assemblies to put up structures for courts. . . . I would pray that they use part of their common fund to ensure that courts are established throughout the country . . . so that women and children will be able to access justice" (Parliament of Ghana 2006: 45-46).

Mahama's plea shows that the budget for the domestic violence bill is far from being guaranteed. The Minister's uncertainty about the funding is so high that she has to "pray" for it.

This creates a puzzle. Why is the government vehemently opposed to the domestic violence bill if the bill will not be enforced? Why do the marital rape and sexual harassment clauses matter, why does the language of the law matter? This question leads us to larger debates about the importance of language in women's development and women's rights politics. I believe that the workshop discourses of culturalism and the NGO advocacy for the word of the law both reveal why language matters.

Language matters more than many scholars expect. Riles has shown that in UN meetings, NGO and government representatives extensively debate the wording of laws and policies (2001). She has criticized NGOs, arguing that when NGOs focus their work

on language, they distance themselves from their "real" tasks. Riles' critique hits at something important: development and women's rights discourses have lives of their own; they cannot be neatly mapped onto lived experiences and struggles of the marginalized women which NGOs claim is the case. I have shown in Chapter 4 that while rural women are on the fringes of Ghana's gender development, they are the central objects of development discourses. Their culture is a terrain of NGO debates about both modernization and government's discourse of resistance to global impositions. In making these discourses the central part of their work, NGOs emphasize speaking *about* rural women rather than speaking *with* them.

On the other hand, the NGO-government struggle shows us just how much the language of development and the language of the law matter for politics. What can and cannot be said, what can and cannot be written, is not trivial. Language matters even if the final product does not. NGOs discuss at length which "harmful traditions" and other women's rights violations will go on a flipchart and how they will be worded, even though flip charts are often thrown into office corners, never to be looked at again.

The discourses that ground women's rights in opposition to traditional culture are polyvalent. They are harmful on the one hand, but they also offer a venue for NGOs to articulate women's rights. These articulations cannot be taken for granted. Workshops have become spaces in which women's wounds and rights can be asserted. Right now, women's advocates use the discourses of culturalism as a platform because this is a safe ground of contestation. If they prevail in their struggles, they might be able to use other grounds in future.

The government also knows that language matters. The word of the law has a life of its own and matters regardless of how that law is later put to use. Thus, while the government knows that its laws are hardly enforced, it watches closely over how its laws are worded.

An example from a distant, but related field, might help us understand why the government of Ghana gives such tribute to language. I will refer to Derrida's discussion of the importance of language and legal wording with regards to racism and apartheid, to discuss the Ghanaian government's opposition to the domestic violence bill.

Derrida writes, "No tongue has ever translated this name [apartheid] – as if all the languages of the world were defending themselves, shutting their mouths against a sinister incorporation of the thing by means of the word, as if all tongues were refusing to give an equivalent, refusing to let themselves be contaminated through the contagious hospitality of the word-for-word (1986: 331). Apartheid, the Afrikaans word, has not been translated into other languages. For Derrida, these languages "refused their hospitality" to "apartheid" by never giving it their own names.

The Ghanaian government refuses its hospitality – for not so noble reasons, I argue– to the concept of marital rape. The government followed the conservative legal scholars call never to admit the concept of marital rape into Ghanaian law. Asmah acknowledged that the government feared the concept as much as it feared the work this concept would do if put into practice.

Language of the law matters because it is the ground of the government's identity. In "Racism's Last Word," Derrida argues that there is a difference between racism

legitimated by law, and racism that keeps existing despite the law. Apartheid is the last racism, he writes, "still parading itself in a political constitution. It remains the only one on the scene that dares to say its name and to present itself for what it is: a legal defiance taken on by *homo politicus*, a juridical racism and a state racism" (1986: 331). In other words, when the South African government enshrined its ideology of apartheid in law, it dared to name itself for what it is. I have argued in this dissertation that the Ghanaian government usually does not name itself for what it is. Instead, it does the opposite: it names itself for what the world wants it to be – a transformed, democratic, progressive government – but operates without transforming itself in practice.

However, NGO advocacy for the domestic violence bill altered the Ghanaian government's performative course. The domestic violence bill – and the contested clauses within the bill – have pushed the government to its limits. The government's opposition to the bill is one of a few instances in which the government refuses to name itself for what it is not. To make this refusal acceptable, the government grounds it another legitimizing discourse – the discourse of Ghanaian culture. The government does not say that it is opposed to women's equality because it tries to uphold its external image. The discourse of defending culture offers the government a venue for refusing to be named by NGOs or the international community.

Sadly, the government's only resistance to foreign impositions takes place over women's lives and bodies. The government does not resist in *language* – though it does in practice by not fully complying with them – any other UN, US, EU, World Bank, or other donor impositions. It only resists the advocacy for the bill which is not even

imposed from the "outside" but from the - globally embedded yet very Ghanaian - women's NGOs.

NGOs knew that the domestic violence bill would pass easily if they left out the marital rape clause. They also knew that the likelihood of women actually using this law to press charges against marital rape was small and that other aspects of the bill would be more enforceable. But to them, the language of the law also mattered. NGOs embraced the struggle against the government's opposition as a struggle for the identity of the Ghanaian state. This is why they have continued – to this date – to pursue their advocacy for the full language of the bill.

Derrida also writes: "there is no racism without a language. The point is not that acts of racial violence are only words, but that they have to have a word (1986: 331). The same is true for women's rights. There are no women's rights without a language; women's rights have to have a word. Ghanaian NGOs struggle for these words, and shape them at the same time.

I have tried to show that Ghanaian women's NGOs are not characterized by "their own," or "indigenous feminism" (Nnaemeka 2003), but by the way they assemble the local and the global. These NGOs do not "domesticate" global paradigms (Merry 2006), but shape the global face of feminist activism. The bricolage of the local and the global allows Ghanaian NGOs to advance their cause without uncritically embracing either cultural essences or global hegemonies.

Conclusion

Ghanaian NGOs and the government of Ghana are now struggling over the question of politics at the margins. What about women is "private" and what "public" – and thus political and open to state intervention? They struggle when NGO advocacy pushes the Ghanaian government to recognize the "marginalized" as a field of political action, and when their interventions for the marginalized have implications for the center. The government opposed the domestic violence bill because the bill had implications for all Ghanaians, not only those living on the margins.

I have shown that debates over culture and rights are central to Ghanaian politics of gender. But the actors in these debates are not the West on the one side and "Ghanaians" – imagined as a unified entity – on the other. In other words, these are not struggles between "western and nonwestern societies" (Chanock 1998: x). Rather, these debates are fought by Ghanaian men and women, activists and politicians. Both the Ghanaian government and Ghanaian NGOs ally themselves with the West. When the government distances itself from the West, it uses the discourse of "Ghanaian culture" as a rhetorical maneuver.

In campaigning against the domestic violence bill, the Ghanaian government used culture as a displacement mechanism. The discourse about "good culture," culture that must be defended, is a safe and recognizable frame for defining gender norms. For example, by asserting that women are responsible for "keeping peace in the family," the government attributed blame for violence to its victims. At the same time, the government opposed the larger role of feminist NGOs in the politics of the country.

Women's NGO advocacy for the domestic violence bill was doubly threatening: it politicized the private sphere and challenged the government's uncontested authority over the legal domain.

The government's opposition to NGO advocacy shows us a larger power struggle between NGOs and the government. The government opposes NGOs transformations and expansions of the public and the political. In other words, Ghanaian government feels threatened by NGOs, not because NGOs take something away from it, but because they place demands on it.

My dissertation thus argues that those of us concerned with the effects of neoliberalism need to recognize the complex performances of NGOs. This recognition does not serve to balance the critiques against NGOs about the "discontents of grassroots globalization" (Richards 2005) and thus set the record straight. By arguing against the notion that NGOs weaken African states, and showing that they rather create new fields of development and politics, I rather hope to enable new kinds of conversations about NGOs. The new fields Ghanaian NGOs have created are both local and global, imprinted by history and imbued with historical imaginaries, real and performed. They reveal that Ghanaian politics in both an uneven and contested terrain and a vortex of contradictory processes of globalization and neoliberalism.

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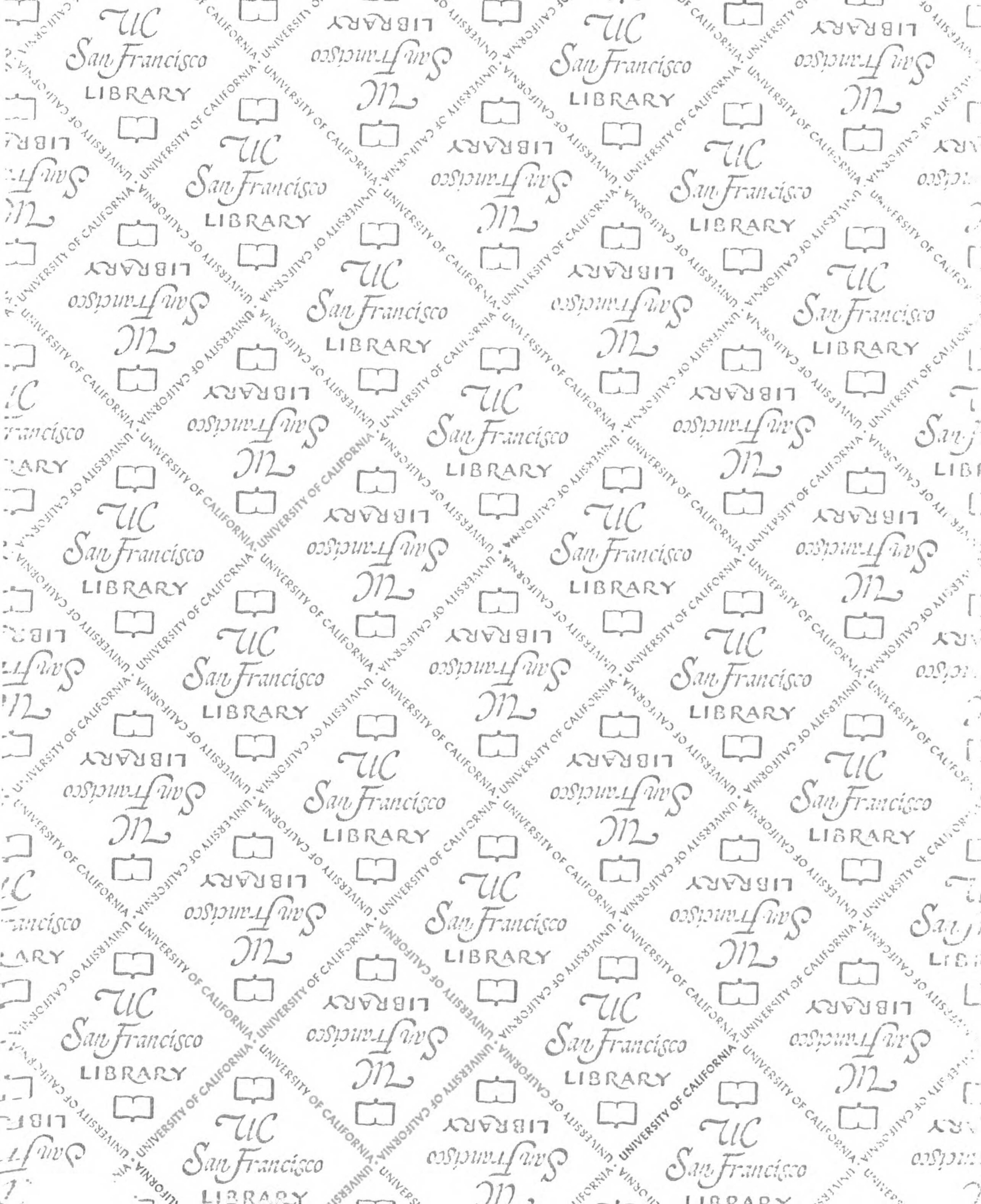

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