

# Renegotiating and Overcoming Frontiers and Constituting Crosscutting and Overlapping Social Spaces and Institutions: Conceptual and Methodological Issues in Development

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# **Working Papers in Development Sociology and Social Anthropology**

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## **Renegotiating and Overcoming Frontiers and Constituting Crosscutting and Overlapping Social Spaces and Institutions: Conceptual and Methodological Issues in Development**

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# **Renegotiating and Overcoming Frontiers and Constituting Crosscutting and Overlapping Social Spaces and Institutions: Conceptual and Methodological Issues in Development<sup>1</sup>**

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## **1. Introduction**

On the one hand, African institutions tend to be conceptualised in quite formalistic and modernistic terms — along the lines of “seeing like a state” (Scott 1998) — that distinguish between formal and informal institutions and sectors as well as social security, public and private spheres, traditional and modern forms of governance, and civil society and the state. This entails the demarcation of strict frontiers, without taking into account the interfaces generated by the crosscutting knowledge and resource transfers, the social embeddedness of institutions, the permanent renegotiation of social identities, and the enormous flexibility of structures and agency in general.

On the other hand, mainstream development institutions perceive the social cohesion of society and bad governance, including corruption, as the main obstacles to development — phenomena which are seen as indicative of the blurring of boundaries and lack of autonomy between state, economic, familial, public, and other spheres.

This paper will investigate the spheres and sectors which offer cases of empirical interest involving interfaces and crosscutting issues, ongoing institutionalisation processes largely unnoticed by development policies and research (See for example the institutions intended to “coordinate human behaviour in “Institutions for Sustainable Development”, World Development Report 2003).

On the one hand, I wish to examine how these borders are drawn and (re)negotiated. On the other, I wish to analyse the interfaces and linkages which can be assumed to exist — often hidden — yet which constitute social spaces where both disruptions and continuities take place (Long) by knowledgeable actors (Giddens). These interfaces might be studied as they relate to the transfer of knowledge and resources, the social embeddedness of institutions, entitlements, identities, and gendered structuration.

The gendered structures might serve as interfaces between:

- formal and informal institutions of social security (or finance) that crosscut boundaries of formal institutions, formally employed persons, and distances that create innovative forms of linking
- social networks, livelihoods, the cooperation between genders regarding the exchange of resources and labour, and the crossing of boundaries between different logics of economic agency — such as in the areas of reproduction and production that not taken into account when conceiving and combating poverty
- business women interacting with men who work in institutions and vice versa,

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- borders drawn as a result of recent development policies between local governance institutions and civil society organisations that can be analysed by studying social spaces of negotiating public issues or conceiving formal institutions – such as social forestry (without taking into account the diverse concepts of borders) – or informal institutions such as the rehabilitation of irrigation schemes (which are structured according to gender), etc.

- religious, male, and female groups and organisations that constitute crosscutting spaces.

This paper will include recent global debates within what can be called a social and cultural turn in development policy by looking at interfaces and interconnectedness or the redrawing of boundaries between different locations and spaces. It is assumed that there are methodological deficits that must be overcome by examining new forms of social cohesion and collective agency of society, social movements, and civil society organisations.

## **2. Shadow spheres and informalisation**

Since the publication of the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) and Keith Hart's noteworthy articles in the 1970s on the informal sector based on the examples of Kenya and Ghana, the distinction between the formal and informal sectors – a distinction that was once quite elucidating that helped to understand the many issues surrounding (under)development – has become something of a buzzword and self-evident concept which to date has not been seriously challenged or analysed with regard to the changes in relations and general transformation. To a certain extent, the concept of the informal sector has become a “black box” that is used without further analysis, usually with the (often implicit) understanding that modernisation and development would eventually cause this sector to disappear. Sometimes it is believed that formalisation policies and measures risk destroying the informal sector's basic functioning, by making it subject to taxation and state control, for example, thereby abolishing its inherent dynamics. Sometimes this sector is still considered backward and avoidable, yet on the other hand many poverty studies recognise that more and more livelihoods are guaranteed by this informal sector. It is also noted that women are its main actors, which implies that economic efficiency is much lower and promotion policies are hardly able to take hold.

Neither the constitutive character of this field for the general economy, nor the special interaction between formal and informal sector, which I suggest to address here, are the subject of serious examination. Furthermore, the processes of informalisation are not viewed as a part of ongoing transformations. To a large extent, these aspects have also been neglected in the recent debates surrounding “informal institutions” that basically refer to normal everyday social institutions existing in all societies that do not lead to processes of exclusion when not formalised (see special issue edited by Kate Meagher in: *Afrika Spectrum* 42, 3, 2007; Meagher 2007) as well as to the “political history” of the concept of “informality” as elaborated by Hart (2008). Hart highlights the “dialectic of formal and informal economy in the context of ‘development’ discourse over the last four decades” and refers to the effects of structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) as having an “informalising” effect on the economy (2008, p. 4, 7). He rightly points out the necessity of considering the “complementary potential of bureaucracy and informality” and “state/market” as applied to “division, content, negation and residue” (p. 4). He offers to expose the “positive principles organizing the informal economy” (p. 8).

Kate Meagher (2007) also blames forgetfulness when it comes to concepts of “embeddedness, social networks and the informal sector” developed in the 1960s and 1970s (p. 405), growing interest in informal institutions (as a result of “essentialist leanings”), and an apparent decrease in knowledge about their present day reality yet growing interest and “expansion of informality”. Like Hart, Meagher attributes the growth of these political and economic institutions to “economic liberalization and state failure”. The ILO (2002, cited in Meagher 2007) considers that these factors have blurred conceptual boundaries and expanded towards the very centre to reach complex sectors. This could be considered to be a process of informalisation to which I am referring, without taking empirically observed interactions into account. According to the programmes’ proponents, the downsizing of the public sector implied in Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) passes down some areas of governance to community organisations, including what Meagher paraphrases as “vibrant civil societies” (p. 406) and considers such transformations to lead to reinterpretation. Meagher laments the “retreat from institutional analysis into culturalist ... theorizing” and “older dualistic tendencies”, yet she believes a turn has taken place over the last years (p. 407) which implies that the “organizational role of informal institutions (I consider this as a contradiction) in employment generation, service provision, resource management, local governance and conflict resolution”.

To a certain degree I share in this belief, yet we cannot speak only of informal institutions – as they are indeed societal institutions – but have to examine their second-level and marginalising status (as will be shown in the case of social spaces constituted through social movements as against decentralisation, for example). The special issue edited by Meagher mainly deals with case studies of health services, water and forest management – typical fields of civil society activities that have been subject to institutionalisation for quite some time and which only now appear the focus of attention. Meagher (2007) refers to concepts that range from the evolutionary approaches of new institutional economics to the post-structuralist approaches of post-colonial theory. She omits the sociological interpretative and agency-oriented approaches such as those that appear in this essay, but correctly recognizes the innovative vs. disruptive political forces of institutional development (p. 408). However, her general classification of “modern informal institutions”, among which she includes women’s organizations, as well as the disruption of formal or informal institutions – by patrimonial networks, for example – that takes place during decentralization may be analytically convincing. She reconsiders the impossibility of avoiding dualisms when authors such as Chabal and Daloz (2006) associate informality and root normative orders of culture rather than in “the institutional structure of the Western state” (p. 410). She quotes Helmke and Levitsky (2003) who use the term “institutional disintegration” instead of “informal institutions” which might be closer to what I intend by the use of the term “informalisation”. The terms “institutional pluralism” and “blurring of boundaries” are certainly useful tools for analysis (p. 412 et seq.), as they refer to positions of intertwining of the formal and informal which in reality lead to the irrelevance of the distinction.

A further approach will possibly provide more useful insights for social analysis. James Ferguson’s work (2007, orig. 2006) “Global shadows: Africa and the world” takes up the classical conceptualisation of what are referred to as unofficial, non recognized and informal spheres characterized by “shadows” – as represented by the term “shadow economy” (primarily in the Soviet context) – which was adapted by Carolyn Nordstrom (2001) when she coined the phrase “ethnography of the shadows” that she used to refer to war and violence as

they are integrated in economic structures, and social and political regulations. Here we are speaking of the concepts of warlords and markets of violence (Elwert, etc.).

These terms refer to international networks in war zones both outside and alongside state-recognised trade (Ferguson 2007, p. 15). Shadows refer to doubling – I believe to systems of ignorance (de facto intentionally or through annihilation as construction) – as well as informal (as opposed to formal), parallel, and Western (as opposed to the African) version of modernity. Often it is a question of the “authenticity of the copy”.

Ferguson desires to reject both views – one is the transfer of institutions from the outside; the other is the African authenticity pleading for recognition. This corresponds to what I conceive as the moving of boundaries between imagined modern institutions and the informal, traditional, or non-modern world, which is usually viewed as a form of black box, that is still believed to be gradually absorbed during the process of modernisation. This strict demarcation leads to unrealistic concepts irrelevant of agency that therefore cannot guide policies. It is my opinion that this blind conception is rather harmful, as it is a view of reality only in modernistic terms, or assumes the parallel existence of these sectors which will soon disappear.

However, the real world may actually be the same as this shadow world. Ferguson offers examples of different fields:

- state privatisation (Bayart, Ellis, Hibou 1999), whereas the state is not weakened but represents an empty shell (Ferguson 2007, p. 39)
- the takeover of state social functions by international NGOs, humanitarian organisations, etc.
- secured enclaves for extraction industries (which was not the case with former multinationals)
- privatisation of violence fuelled by war and the informal economy.

Interestingly, Ferguson conceives of globalization as the fractured spaces and point to point connections that result from these global actors. He points out that the term “flows” connotes too much harmony of interaction as does the concept of “state” – civil society interaction in which state officials have become “NGOized” (“nongovernmental stated” p. 39) and perform “parallel business”. Reno (1999) discussed the existence of the “shadow state”. All told, Ferguson maintains that Africa should not be viewed as an “informal, black hole” (p. 29).

We try to connect these debates with our approach of looking at concepts of development<sup>2</sup> that are negotiated locally. Our concept of development is – in a very broad sense – social change and transformation brought about by political action, civil society, and purposeful policy intervention. Concrete approaches requiring examination are, for example, gender mainstreaming in development models, structural adjustment, the financial sector, integration of domestic and market production, agricultural policies, and poverty reduction strategies. In the following I wish to examine a few very concrete areas, such as typical issues of how to organise local development within decentralisation processes while taking into account the typical female fields of responsibility such as social and health security (in Senegal) and economic and environmental strategies (in Cameroon), etc.

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<sup>2</sup> For critique of development see e.g. Hobart ed. 1993

Generally, development theory does not deal with this kind of interactions and spheres, and these relationships are not at all addressed when studying the “impacts” of new development and social policies. For the most part, the relevant interactions are just overlooked when viewed from a modernist perspective, on the one hand, and from a paternalistic antipoverty and diffusionist perspective on the other. Transnational relations in migration, new forms of shadow economy in formerly socialist regimes, social embeddedness, interface between all of the so-called informal forms of economy and politics, etc., have only recently been discovered. They are often subsumed in an undifferentiated concept of “social” and/or “cultural capital” without explaining how this capital is generated, how it functions, and what it means for the analysis of other concepts (such as economic and human capital). The relational approach goes far beyond simply examining factors such as reactions to impact and survival strategies which are often the result of exoticisation, for it implies structurations and institutionalisations that take place in very transversal ways.

The interaction of subsistence and market economy needs to be examined with great thoroughness while taking into consideration the female economy as one field of agency that interacts with others. This corresponds to the call of critical macroeconomists (such as Elson 1995; Cagatay et al. 1995) regarding the relationship between the reproductive economy and the productive sector. One must also look at how markets assure livelihoods, the necessities of subsistence economy, how markets are sometimes segregated by gender and region, entitlements and institutions related to economic resources such as land, and forms of organisation of market actors. This would imply that development analysis must overcome the old distinctions between formal and informal sectors, the upgrading of typically female economic fields, a realistic consideration of opportunities and possibilities of liberalisation, and the reduction of bureaucratic and authoritarian modes of state governance and patrimonial structures of patron-client relations and privileges.

### **3. Transfer of solutions – institutions vs. interconnectedness**

Contrary to classically “administered innovations” – i.e. formalistic solutions (Elwert) – development should imply pluralism and diversity but in a manner that includes interactions, the constitution of spaces, and battlefields (Long 1992). There is clearly no longer any question of the transfer of knowledge and the established patterns of modernity, for example, yet the theorization of development and transformation must be based on these localisation processes in particular. However, this does not mean that we should and can examine the “impact” of liberalisation or globalisation processes in general or certain global governance and economic policies. This is often done by African scholars and women’s organisations that criticise “neoliberalism” in a general manner and attempt to define it as a global anti-force, nor should we look at the “reactions” of societies or groups even in cases whereby active coping or survival strategies (never included in economic mainstream) are envisioned. This also means that we cannot simply look at the transfer, diffusion, or travelling of concepts and institutional arrangements in different policy domains (such as gender policies, local governance, social services, etc.) without analysing the respective situations’ contexts and solutions. This forces us to introduce completely different perspectives that crosscut unquestioned analytical concepts such as formal and informal, market and subsistence, and public and private.

Often it is not a question of diffusion or the transfer of models and solutions, but when examining interconnectedness and localisation the perspective changes and takes into account the phenomena of localisation within a given societal context. This is neither impact nor resistance, nor is it some completely new or independent alternative, but has to be viewed as the agency of knowledgeable actors. The problem is not so much the transfer but rather the understanding of these global processes implying active diversity – usually combined with a sense of powerlessness, the reduction of room for manoeuvre, etc. This also applies to all development issues such as economy, poverty, decentralisation, resource protection, gender, and knowledge. Under globalisation, (usually informal) economic patterns travel and lead to the creation or destruction of (precarious) jobs and investments.

According to the interface approach, we should examine the different levels of societal structuration and interaction, the arenas where new gender relations are negotiated. I prefer this method to a dualistic approach that distinguishes between practical and strategic gender needs (as introduced by Caroline Moser in 1993). Furthermore, I believe this could be described as a “transformative” approach – to genderise another recent mainstream theory. In my view empowerment – the concept forwarded in transnational women’s policy – suggests that women can act in civil society in the first place (Grosz-Ngaté, Kolole eds. 1997). I suggest we look at changes in women’s spaces and the negotiation of boundaries of public and the private, for example, as well as new forms of organisation on the local level, particularly those in which women play an active role. This entails an examination of newly emerging gender-differentiated forms of interaction (interfaces) with regard to decentralisation, all forms of associations (including peasant organisations and NGOs), and democratisation.

#### **4. Social analysis and interactive, relational methodology**

An important feature of engendering concepts and fields is overcoming the micro-macro divide, by bringing structure and agency together. Therefore we need a dynamic, process oriented, and relational approach beginning from the perspective of social actors as well as social and cultural meaning, elaborating on processes of construction and structuring, examining changes currently taking place, and include mid-level concepts such as space, institutions through links, and interfaces. In the process a connection can be made to new institutional economics while looking at the social embeddedness of the economy, market, and other institutions, access and entitlements, the relationship between reproductive and productive sector, as well as approaches of good and/or local governance, participation, and the protection of natural resources.

The dynamic, multi-level approach to social and gender analysis suggested here can be characterized by studying dynamics regarding processes, relations, interfaces, ongoing changes, modes of transformation, actors, capacity, room for manoeuvre, and institutionalization. Levels of analysis include:

- the local level: social and production systems, logics of agency, forms of agency, fields of action, division of labour, cooperation and exchange amongst genders, access to resources and new economic opportunities, income strategies, constructs of gender, female economy as a relational concept,



- the mid- or intermediary level: relations or conflicts amongst, across households, community, communities, markets, social organisation concepts/stereotypes, discourses; institutions, gender in organisations,

- the macro level or level of society: genderising sector policies and concepts,; gender order or gender regime, gender as social construct,; negotiating new gender order: lobbying, women's movements, networking, macro-economics: productive and reproductive sector. legal and institutional framework: land tenure, personal law, inheritance; forms of organisation.

An important addition to the relational, dynamic, interactive, and multi-level approach is the concept of arena, battlefields, and generally the concept of social spaces constituted by agency. This operationalisation allows us to overcome sectoral, scale, disciplinary, and institutional distinctions and to concentrate on structuration processes, negotiating meaning, the constitution of public spheres, and, particularly, knowledge production.

Additionally, we can examine the overlapping of translocal, gendered social spaces (Lachenmann 2004b, Nageeb 2004). We have become increasingly aware of female social spaces in many societies whose boundaries are very diverse which very often shrink over the course of socio-economic changes. These spaces are defined by the division of labour, cooperation, responsibilities, productive activities, and by social institutions. It would be interesting to follow how these spaces are linked to the overall system, how difference is maintained, how women nevertheless can and do claim equity, and equality in society and the political system. One area is decentralisation (Lachenmann 2006), which at first glance seems as if it would offer advantages to women. However, it is possible that more informal spaces in which gender relations are negotiated will further discriminate against women and bring the unequal state gender constructs down to the base level over the course of formalisation.

In our approach (Lachenmann, Dannecker eds. 2008) the comparison takes place on at mid-level using mid-range theories while trying to explain the differences by means of contextualisation. The conventional standardised methodological approach must be considered outdated as a result of the real processes of interaction and the ongoing establishment of relations (the informal economy within the state, for example). We try to operationalise these ideas by applying the interface approach that includes power constellations while adding complex methods, crosscutting communities, places, levels, time, space, and social worlds such as the method of trajectory – following the actors or following the goods. In our field of research this applies directly to biographical research (and beyond), persons whose personal history and career takes place in different knowledge spaces, and the institutions and organisations we follow based on the narrative approach. We complement this method with an approach that entails agency, knowledge, authority, and meaning. Furthermore, combined with our examination at the interface, we employ a rather fruitful multi-level analysis (see Lang 2005, Berg-Schlosser 2000, for example) which can be applied in very different ranges for studying concrete interactions and following movements and discourses. Here the most interesting aspect is linking this multi-level analysis to an interface approach instead of opposing systems.

## **5. Engendering development in order to overcome boundaries in the contexts of sectors and organisations**

In most African countries, gender is still handled according to the classical “Women in Development” (WID) approach that looks at the “roles of women” and views them as housewives instead of producers. Households (representing the domestic economy) are considered to represent the private, reproductive, and consuming sector as “closed shops” or “black boxes” that function as a single unit (even if bargaining and decision-making approaches in microeconomics exist). The complex system of internal cooperation among genders, social embeddedness, and different translocal relations are not considered. The same is true of the gendered structure of the economy (Elson 1995).

This means that many opportunities and efficient economic policies are lost, and here I do not only mean the typical “access to xyz” approaches that ignore the link between the reproductive and productive sectors. This refers to “income generating activities” which seek to assist all women by means of microcredit schemes – the proponents of these projects cynically assume that women are supposedly better when it comes to repayment. I believe one of the main economic problems in Africa is the issue of how to overcome the disruption of the embedded economy caused by “modern” approaches. At the same time it becomes clear that in areas, regions, and development concepts, gender is at the forefront as it is crosscutting and close to everyday life (Marchand, Runyan eds. 2000; Molyneux, Razavi eds. 2002; Momsen 2004).

The challenge is how to analyse all development fields in a dynamic and gendered way – that is, we cannot only apply gender analysis, or even less, only consider static roles and activities. In an interface approach (Long 2001) attention should be paid to interaction between different fields, groups, institutions, co-operation (e.g. in the field of technology), brokers, flexible organisation of work, and analysis of the concrete risks of market integration. Of further interest are the social organisation of resource management and the allocation of resources in different sectors – e.g. in programmes and projects in the agricultural sphere, whereby women are often excluded but create hidden strategies which then enable them edge their way in after all and obtain access to new economic opportunities, collective forms of land tenure, and collateral for borrowing, for example.

This goes against all sorts of “women and xyz” approaches; gender analysis is not the investigation of women’s roles (usually referred to as primary relations and conceived as static and quasi-natural) or their activities. Even those issues that are often considered “women’s issues” might represent important gender specificities and concerns, but such a definition leads us to follow a dual approach as instead of a relational gender approach. Particularly relations or interface/interaction between subsistence/market, reproductive/productive sectors, inter-household relations (we know about gendered intra-household relations) – in short, the meso level – enable us to link the micro- and macro levels (gendered fields of economic activity, etc.).

## **6. Crosscutting issues in development: food security, social security, gender, and environment**

The issues of food security as a global field of governance and of livelihoods/entitlements (A. Sen) as concepts of the social economy are very relevant in Africa and can be considered

crosscutting areas (as are gender and environment). However, they clearly underline my thesis which states a lack of relational approaches. Livelihoods are very often constructed not only by means of the private and public, but also of translocal social and gender relations. Social security is made up of permanently changing systems of gifts and distribution – to a large extent upheld by women – in a manner that links formal and informal institutions (Lachenmann 1997, Steinwachs 2006 on Tanzania). New and gendered translocal livelihood systems are created by migrants. In the past, only remittances were mentioned, but interesting research is now being conducted on the empirical construction of these systems. Typically, money from young male migrants is sent to their mothers – the older women – instead of the fathers (as I observed in Senegal). However, in some cases migrants enter into agreements with local traders in order to avoid conflict within the family. In many cases, there are groups and associations that assist at the sending end in Paris or New York, for example. A typical case in point is the shared responsibility for education and health services between different family and social networks with links to family members working in the formal sector. Here I am thinking of translocal gendered relations between two (ex) co-wives in Senegal. One takes care of all their children as a reproductive housewife with the support of a formally employed husband with corresponding connections to state institutions such as schools and hospitals. The other wife works in a semi-formal job in the peasant movement where she takes care of matters in the nation's capital such as accommodation and university access. She performs a variety of so called “self-help jobs” whose compensations and per-diem amount to a salary of sorts and she establishes connections to formal state-authority structures and policies by means of her former work in the community development sector (she lost this job as a result of structural adjustments).

A very important dimension of embeddedness or formal/informal connectivity is therefore “gendered social security” or social security in the widest sense of the term – alternatively, problems of “insecurity” and sustainable livelihoods (Lachenmann 1997; Risseuw, Ganesh, eds. 1998). Women should be regarded as active providers/producers instead of passive recipients of social security who suffer the “impact” of crisis. It is important to analyse strategies such as the survival strategies which different groups of women use in their quest for security within their respective social systems and systems of production. Furthermore, it is important to examine changing social institutions and their meaning in terms of social security, the institutionalisation of patterns, modes, and strategies, the reinterpretation of institutions, and the interaction between subsistence-market, urban-rural spaces, networks, social relations, and alliances that provide both social security and shifting solidarities.

During the process of decentralisation in Senegal, we have seen (Lachenmann et al. 2007) that all the institutions introduced by the peasant movement (basically informal, or formalised in the sense of their own new organisational structures), including women groups (mostly informal be it the Groupement de Promotion Feminine [GPF] or Groupement à Intérêt Économique [GIE]), are now facing stagnation as a result of their modes generally not being accepted by the formal sphere as they do not correspond to newly introduced structures that do not cover the same broad based needs. For quite some time, these movements have taken care of “community management” (a World Bank term with no theoretical basis) since the breakdown of the development state that started with a series of droughts and introduced cereal banks, water supplies, grain mills, collective fields, resource protection, and other projects. Their logic does not correspond with either the formal development plans of the new communities or their completely privatized schemes for water, education, health. A large-

scale fundraising effort and self-help programme has been underway and is now inefficient, unused, or even illegal.

The concept of diversity can therefore possibly be recognised and analysed against the straightjacket of standardisation and universalisation. Difference remains a crucial dimension against tendencies of homogenisation which strengthen “glocal” creativities in which the global and the local come together. Gender approaches have shown that not only is diversity important as a methodological outlook against cultural relativism, but so is the gendered structure of knowledge distribution and production. We are not essentialising when we state that women have a special knowledge. We view distribution, production, and transfer of knowledge in a dynamic way with different sites of knowledge and creating knowledge systems and systems of ignorance. Thus it truly is worthwhile to look at women as knowledgeable actors and not only describe them as natural bearers of traditional knowledge in the fields of healing, biodiversity, and similar fields while at the same time complaining about their marginalisation.

Local knowledge in terms of development (Lachenmann 2004a) is negotiated through interaction, whereas interventions such as poverty alleviation and social forestry come from above. Therefore, we require a dynamic, process-oriented, relational approach to knowledge that starts from the perspective of social actors and their social meanings. The opposite would be the claim of interpretation by “tradition” – the “culture” that is supposedly the realm of insiders that would be taken for granted. For example, a Kenyan male researcher criticising a foreign female researcher who stated that women “are landless” said that in his tradition men “give land”. Gendered access to land is interesting as an institution, but nowadays the fact is that with the modernisation of property rights and projects (in this case irrigation), arrangements change and this is what remains to be investigated.

The gendered construction of the environment (Lachenmann 2001a) and the relational character of its access, entitlements, and activities are a typical field in which gender is a crosscutting issue. This construct can be analysed and directly linked to concepts of livelihood as well as rural and local development. Women would never say they have an “environmental problem”, as such issues are always linked to production and food issues (Plumwood 1993). There is a clear relationship between environmental relations and gender order in society, and changes in gender relations are very relevant for modes of environmental change (Joeke, Leach, Green eds. 1995).

A gender perspective can help introduce a sociological or social anthropological approach in terms of a relational, interactive, and agency-oriented view in order to overcome the often dualistic-systems approach of man vs. environment or natural resources (see Ngo Youmba-Batana 2007). Mainstream environmental analysis, however, has not yet incorporated these debates, and “women and environment” is still only added as a secondary subject. The same is true of “environment and economy”.

## **7. Embeddedness of the economy: typical hybridisation of different translocal forms**

In order to “engender” development policy and overcome its dualistic approaches, one of the most important benchmarks is also the transformation of gender relations in the field of economy. In ongoing transformation processes, the risk of excluding women grows as a result of de facto formalisation and privatisation. That is why I posit an informalisation process

regarding women's established social institutions. Women's security considerations, their mistrust of recommendations they should integrate into the formal economy, and the necessary follow-up regarding autonomous fields of activities must be taken into account.

We must analyse the gendered embeddedness of the economy within society (Lachenmann 1999, after Granovetter 1985) in order to carry out social and policy analysis at the meso or institutional level. This includes economic relations beyond the level of households such as structures of cooperation, alliances (e.g. with rural communities and families of origin), collective access to resources, as well as the social organisation of markets, trading, and modes of accumulation.

With regard to the interrelation between the so-called formal and informal economy – women have often concentrated either on the parallel economy far outside of the state (smuggling, etc.) or the “endogenous” economy – it is very important to examine what is happening to these female “modes of accumulation” (Geschiere, Konings 1993) with the onset of liberalisation, deregulation, and re-regulation. It appears there are no new opportunities, as old channels being used in a large scale by new speculative male ventures. New economic opportunities, which were previously offered by the Social Dimension of Adjustment Programmes and are now offered by current employment programmes (poverty programmes for “vulnerable” women), are generally directed by dynamic and young urban men. As a result, women are crowded out of their “traditional” economic fields. Examples include vegetable gardens maintained by young men instead of women, cereal trade run by male co-operatives instead of women, etc., or the marketing of women-grown products and training through development cooperation. The same effects can result from the dissolution of parastatals and marketing boards as well as from the breakdown of cash-crops produced for world markets (such as coffee and cocoa) which is accompanied by the entry of men into food crop market production (in Cameroon, for example) following the introduction of new technologies. There is no real upgrading of women's self-employment structures. A link to regional economics, management of natural resources, and other fields must be created. Poverty reduction programmes do not explicitly address the link to the mainstream economy. This means the informalisation of economic and social institutions is now taking place – as opposed to defining the “local economy” as informal.

Furthermore, economic informalisation is often recognised as is the typical participation of women in a low-earning and precarious informal sector while balancing both domestic and external economic activities. However, in terms of the World Bank's approach to highlighting the women's economic potential (contrary to empowerment goals pursued at the 1995 Women's Conference in Beijing), some have rightly pointed out that women “play a major role in both food production and marketing” but they have failed to mention the risk of women losing this important economic role when men start to enter into food crop production and marketing, as they no longer consider such classical cash-crops interesting. However, these observers do not seem to draw the methodological consequences and fail to seriously extend their data collection to the inter-household and inter-community level, for example.

An interactive approach should be considered valid for rural and agricultural activities as well as market integration in the informal sector. However, such an approach should also be relevant with regard to formal employment that cannot be understood without looking at agency, which comprises both strategies as well as the construction of gender and the gendered structuring of spaces. An example of such an approach is the research carried out by

Salma Nageeb (2001) on Sudanese markets in which women negotiate their entry, even though the public sphere is marked by strict segregation.

It is mainly a matter of deconstructing analytical concepts with regard to operational conclusions such as the concept of household (see the previous debate on the concept of household in Joekes, Kabeer eds. 1991). We know that in practically all African countries men and women maintain separate budgets, although women cannot always control their own monetary income and are required to use it more often for general family needs. As there is no uniform household welfare, women rely on extra-household cooperation and transfers (Schneider 1999, Wanzala 2000, 2001). It is important to look at special arrangements of how production and consumption units overlap and transcend the domestic unit, as is the case in polygynous families, for example, in which the economic relationships can be rather diverse.

The problem of poverty analysis (World Bank 2000) is the fact that women are labelled as “vulnerable groups”. No link is made to approaches that are oriented towards analysing societal and institutional structures and relations such as good governance, decentralisation, and empowerment, nor is there a move towards a gender analysis of structural adjustment and the links between the reproductive and productive sectors. It soon becomes clear how short-sighted the analytical approaches to poverty actually are as a result of their failure to analyse the aspects of social embeddedness and contextualisation.

In general, the analysis of multiple economic fields of activity illustrates their complex character in the areas located between reproduction and transnational trade. In terms of trade, there are hybrid forms of trade networks that move agricultural products to the capital or even abroad. There are also new and multiple forms of gendered and ethnic trading arrangements. Women are normally less conspicuous as they can marry and move from the rural areas into urban settings and other ethnic communities, and are thus much less likely to suffer from the “trader’s dilemma” (Evers) of being viewed as strangers. Here we are aware of the special patterns resulting from long-established transnational trade such as the long-distance transcontinental trade carried out by Ghanaian female traders (George Anonsem 1996). The trading networks in this (“informal” or “ethnic”) trade are clearly structured on a gender-basis – often based on women’s networks (South Africa, Schneider 1999) – but often with special arrangements in which women cooperate with men. This is the case with the migrant nephew of a Ghanaian woman trader I met in Kumasi who is formally employed in Germany and also arranges the purchase of German second-hand spare parts. Contact between suppliers and clients is often negotiated by women. Trade is organized through different phases and points of attachment, and modes of accumulation between the formal and informal sectors often pass through relationships between the genders (e.g. Nairobi, Laaser 2006).

Generally speaking, personal mobility is astonishingly high and trade is marked by the personal character of the accompanying of economic transactions. The communicative construction of translocal spaces is mainly upheld by women (Peleikis 2003 investigating migrant links between Lebanon and West Africa). In many countries women have always been very active, and this is particularly true in the areas of smuggling and other aspects of the “shadow economy” in general (in former Zaire for example, see MacGaffey 1990). It is clear that during the course of formalisation – such as during the introduction of formal cooperatives after the dissolution of marketing boards and the liberalisation of formal food trade – women are pushed out from their positions as a result of the consequent downgrading of the local economy. Roseline Achieng (2005) has shown how the new and old economic activities of displaced women are entangled in the example of the trade in used clothes and

foodstuffs in Kenya. Martin Batana (2007) describes the very interesting case of the “buyem-sellem” women in Cameroon and their complex relations and mobility between “informal” and “formal” sectors.

## **8. The interface of state and civil society: bad governance vs. privatisation of the state? Civil society as a single actor or social spaces for negotiating development and transformation?**

The term of civil society has been very useful when it comes to describing the structuring mechanisms that make public debate possible, (re)defining public issues, shaping creative and innovative changes, and illustrating the power of association and coherence, which includes integration through difference (Schlee, Horstmann eds. 2001). However, I do not consider the concept very helpful when it is viewed as one monolithic system or actor in international development jargon which is usually used to refer to non governmental organisations instead of social movement forces (which can also be viewed as third-sector organisations). Social spaces can be described as elements that constitute a non-homogeneous public sphere – a sphere that does not devise a common public interest, common good, or economic logic.

I suggest the use of the concept “social space” (Lachenmann 2004b, Nageeb 2004) in the sense that it implies relatively non-institutionalised definition that goes beyond community, place, or territorial/physical space. The concept of social space is clearly linked to agency, the production of gender specific and culturally defined meanings, and the social construction of reality and the life-world.

Ferguson (2006) and others elaborate on how in many constellations in Africa the assumed separate and autonomous sphere of the state is closely intermingled with the so-called “non governmental sector”. An interesting case in point is that of strong women – including “first ladies” (the wives of heads of state) – who are founding “their own” NGO in West Africa. For some time, and not only in the socialist era, they have represented the informal/private economy (often there is or used to be no distinction) as well as the societal connections existing outside of official state-controlled organisations. This is regardless of the channels of the flow of resources, modes of enrichment, personal appropriation of public goods, and, respectively, access to economic resources through political connections that is typical of these states.

The problem of everyday corruption can never really be fully understood – much less abolished – without looking at these linkages between the formal/informal and the legal/illegal. A sociologist colleague of mine from Nigeria publicly stated that because of “African solidarity” and the obligation of those in public bureaucracies and institutions to help their relatives, it was considered absolutely normal to give preference to one’s relatives. On the other hand the academic community in Nigeria sticks to a generalised discourse of corruption within the political sphere without questioning the mechanisms of “doing business”.

With regard to civil society in the sense that it seeks to make the state accountable, assures creative practice, and ascertains social embeddedness of the market, etc., I would like to suggest that women are much less involved in the entangled sphere between state and economy, i.e., in the predatory state, the patrimonial state that distributes mechanisms of enrichment within the state, and the constitution of patron-client relations that is also the

current form of distribution of development resources. However, as I observed in Senegal, in some cases women's projects are used as the last strategic resource of the former development state which wanted to distribute at least some money. The call for good governance does not take these structuring mechanisms into account.

Normally, the concept of "social cohesion" is used in development studies and claimed to be absent particularly in African societies (which Paul Houndjondji has described as lack of associative power that has certainly increased in the meantime). However the concept of "civil society" including "NGOs" that brings together all forms of non-state (formalised, recognised) organisational approaches is one of the major flaws in present-day approaches as this is a clear "container-concept" conceived of as an opposite to the "the state", and as a single actor or stakeholder. Often it is conceived to be the bearer of (legitimate) social knowledge. This completely blurs the view of all societal mechanisms and modes of transformation, including power structuration, currently taking place.

On the other hand, the boundaries and differences towards formal democratic institutions are completely forgotten, especially in the areas of participatory planning and research approaches in which neither social validity nor political legitimacy are a part of the process. Nevertheless, the "political" realm is often too exclusively applied to formal institutions whereas it has now become clear that the "private is political". There are now many interesting approaches we can use to examine "politics from below", "popular modes of political action", "politics of the belly" (Bayart 1993), and other modes of power structuration.

One very relevant case that I encountered illustrates the formal/informal dilemma and ongoing informalisation processes, such as formal/informal education and access to the "modern" labour market. Bambi, a young (unmarried) woman made a career in the Senegalese peasant movement and now seems to have reached her limits as she is unable to enter the formal sector of the development institutions (2004 meeting in Sine Saloum, a further encounter was reported by Nadine Sieveking). However, there are cases where people from the social movements with more formal education are able to enter the formal "NGO sector" and become presidents of formally and state-controlled women's organisations as well as transnational actors in the global "NGO world". Ndaye, whom I briefly met with her sister, the above mentioned "urban wife" and self help "professional", became one of the first (quota) women councillors in a municipality by means of (her husband's) political connections before moving on to become the president of the official Senegalese women's umbrella organisation.

In general, all community and village workers in development cooperation projects have assumed rather marginal roles, but now there is a trend towards making them private entrepreneurs that carry out studies as a part of the development plans for decentralised communities. Thus, the associative sector becomes privatised, if not informalised, as regards to mainstream society and the economy.

However, the associative sector has proven itself to be the most relevant actor that can achieve social cohesion by utilising the institutionalising concepts of self-help, food security, social security, and other approaches within a deterritorialised, translocal space that is structured through gender relations. Social and gender differences become increasingly evident with the onset of some women acting as development brokers, for example. Often women are very innovative in finding new forms of interaction with the local authorities and



administration (as in the case of various self-help forms of waste management in Mali), but the problem is generally exacerbated by decentralisation, as voluntary work and self-help, or professionalisation, as well as access to knowledge mostly concerns men. It has become clear that food security constitutes an important link between the political and economic spheres that includes social entitlements. At the same time it is necessary to look at how modes of socio-economic transformation can be enhanced within these spaces by actors in civil society as soon as a meaningful cooperation takes place within the process of decentralisation. A caring or community economy and gender-structured services are often organised by social movements and groups. At present these groups are coming into conflict with new bureaucratic forms of resource mobilisation and budgeting within the framework of decentralisation.

## **9. Decentralisation, local governance, and local development**

Empirical research (Lachenmann 2006, Lachenmann et al. 2006) provides us with a rather ambivalent picture in which newly-established female modes of organisation and “traditional” forms of political/societal representation are hampered by the ongoing formalisation of local power structures. The limited democratisation efforts involving multiparty systems, formal decentralisation, and local administration tend to exclude women and former members of self-help groups. At first glance, decentralisation appears to be favourable for women, but it might be that informal spaces in which gender relations are negotiated and local development in the process of formalisation will further discriminate against women and lower social strata while bringing unequal social structures down to the local level.

On the other hand, it seems important to pursue an institutional approach that can engender the social organisation of systems involving the use of natural resources, social networks, and the examination of the construction of gender in institutions, for example. This means introducing an intermediate level of analysis between the micro and macro levels which is necessary in order to better understand issues of decentralisation in terms of the devolution of competence and resources and democratisation as well as the problems of development and development cooperation that seeks to come to grips with new concepts of state functions, citizenship, etc.

Gender relations cut across these relationships. Access to land and to natural resources often passes through marriages and alliances that are translocal in nature and extend beyond territorialities. Women are not members of the reconstructed or “invented” “traditional community”. New state-introduced forms of participation enacted with the support of or pressure from the international donor community often do not take into account the old parallel power-structure of representation and ignore mechanisms which link female worlds and spaces with general power structures. Furthermore, many other translocal relations are ignored, such as those created by migration processes and social movements constituted in a translocal space that can influence local policies, as well as those linking “big men” to their economic privileges.

The introduction of holistic or crosscutting concepts in the wake of environmental and food crises such as security, livelihoods, and (environmental) entitlements led to a stronger focus on resource usage and the protection of the lower and middle levels of agency and social organisation. One could say that women have been discovered as community managers beyond the level of households (where gender relations usually render them dependent).

However, during environmental and socio-economic changes women tend to be marginalised when it comes to political organisation, property rights, and new regulations. It is important to look at the gendered dimensions of access and control of natural resources, property rights, and environmental knowledge. Institutional networks and arrangements are important, and these include links to resource access and usage among different levels such as the household level and the level of women's community of origin, as well as social institutions such as the translocal access to resources and reciprocity. Modern institutions lead to these links and entitlements becoming invisible. They lose their validity and do not account for new opportunities. Gendered labour is of the utmost importance when examining resource conservation and the control of new or protected resources.

Conservation measures, contrary to their original intention, exclude flexible forms of use. Slowly, however, the idea of management and integration of the population is becoming accepted. Yet there is a danger that the population will not be allowed to become (sustainable) economic actors. Processes of the monetarisation of the environment, that is, the commodification of communal natural resources, do exist. Biodiversity policies crowd out autonomous users whose original status is subsequently lost. The term "buffer zones" pertinently describes the problematic boundaries that arise from the concepts of natural reserves and various forms of forestry management that represent a compromise regarding strict separation in which the conventional usage of natural resources is deemed illegitimate. The activities that are allowed are usually strictly controlled and are generally "income-generating" activities (in Cameroon, for example, women were allowed to run a small restaurant for the tourists) that do not serve to upgrade normal economic activities.

Forms of association within social movements and self-help groups are always less formal. They contribute greatly to local infrastructure and communal caring-economy through self-help and voluntary work as well as by collecting monetary and material resources at the local level. It might be the case that along with decentralisation the power to influence the manner in which these local resources are employed increasingly dwindles given the fact that the methods of local tax and fee collection are formalised. Furthermore, the knowledge and practices of those female actors who have to some extent founded new arenas and spaces for expression and transformation in recent years might once again disappear.

In the case of Senegal it is evident that the logic of activities and organisational forms developed in times of the promotion of self-help projects by village workers from different sectors entered into contradiction with the new formal political regime. Contrary to all praise of "civil society" that should be taken seriously – thus, local initiatives which by then were relatively well established and which were not always only feasible through external NGO action were delegitimised. This was typical of the health committees which had been established on a voluntary basis (sometimes with small remuneration, as in the case of trained local midwives). The management of collective economic resources carried out by women, such as rice fields in Senegal, did not appear to be included in development planning within the local administration. Additionally, case studies show that these women's groups are not politically represented in the local council where they could participate in agreeing on new regulations. The question remains as to how women's movements and women's groups can enter into a serious debate concerning transformation within the framework of decentralisation.

However, it is true that in many cases there is a lot of confusion as most groups desperately seek financial assistance from an external NGO for a project and in this regard are entering

into a process of formalisation. These NGOs do indeed have different approaches, even if there are small differences in terms of regulation and their activities and approaches are not clearly integrated in or are any connections established to their communal development plan (as also is the case in some national policy programmes). This situation leads to stagnation and loss of initiative as people do not feel autonomous, whereas the peasant movement developed its own approaches on a variety of levels). For example, it is not clear whether the health committee has any official connection to the local government structure. Furthermore, and this is a big problem, the logic of privatisation (for village workers helping to draw up the development plan and application for project finance, for example) goes as far as to include voluntarism when calculating health centre finances.

Experience shows that while it might be interesting for women not to be forced into the straightjacket of male, communal, and state control, it is a fact that groups or cooperatives primarily made up of male members tend to be formal(ised), whereas women's groups tend to be informal(ised). In Senegal, for example, men are generally members of economic groups and women are members of women's development groups. The latter are caught up by the old experiences and culture of community development and home economics coming from the established channels. These channels are dependent on ministries of social affairs and can lose their support after change of government. Following the change of government in Senegal, some of the former official (mass-movement) organisations were still recognised, but it was not clear whether the formerly recognized unified women's groups would continue to receive support or whether several new groups would be formed in line with more liberal policies.

A female president was responsible in the case of a rehabilitation programme for rice fields funded by external cooperation, however there were at least two "competing" women representing "the women" in the village or district town. These kinds of (very important) efforts were not included in the village development plan at all. The plan also did not include such features as grain mills and cereal banks – the explanation given was that private economic endeavours were not accounted for.

This insecurity concerning officially recognized endeavours also became very clear when platforms were introduced in a dialogue form by foreign cooperating bodies that involved the protection of natural resources. These institutions referred to peasant and cattle holder conflicts and were delegitimised or found themselves in an unclear situation in which they were subject to misgovernance and a lack of sustainable recognition.

Additionally, many local NGOs are very patronising in their "participatory" approaches through which great sums of external money pass. The fatal outcome is that everywhere there are local credit systems, usually aimed at small-scale trade, that are considered ideal possibilities for women to earn additional income, while some forms of formalisation only slowly seem to take place as a result of the strengthening of the local arena. At the same time women are excluded or not encouraged to participate in activities dealing with new modes of access and the management of natural resources, increased agricultural productivity, and new economic opportunities in the local economy (such as upgrading of transformation of agricultural products), although there is a new state entity which promotes (formal) women entrepreneurs. This is even true in the spheres of activities in which women are normally active, usually within a complex structure of gender cooperation and exchange. This is also the case when it comes to women's social and political activities.

## 10. Interfaces of knowledge systems and the overcoming of boundaries

I would like to explain one misconception which states that there is a dualistic distinction between, on the one hand, expert knowledge that is considered equal to (formal) scientific knowledge and local knowledge on the other. In contrast to dualistic positions regarding requests for the transfer of “modern” knowledge as well as a profound critique of inappropriate knowledge and an occasional mystification of “traditional” knowledge, lately there have been an increasing number of discussions, theoretical attempts, and empirical studies dealing with the interaction of various knowledge systems. It is important to first note the relevance – although not as the last resort of socio-economic change and innovation – of the gendered nature of everyday knowledge and local knowledge, but also to illustrate the mutual annihilation of knowledge (Berger/Luckmann) and examine, for example, the successful social anchorage and further autonomous development of this knowledge. Knowledge is of course situated. Science must be de-constructed, and technical knowledge is based on experience and practice and must be situated to be applied.

Apart from spaces and arenas in which knowledge is negotiated, the vertical coherence and contextualisation of social systems and knowledge systems by means of interfaces and flows is of utmost importance. We have to distinguish between information that comes from the bottom up and knowledge that is passed down as “the knowledge of domination” (*Herrschaftswissen*). When speaking of “Seeing Like a State” (Scott, 1998), we analyse which and whose concepts are applied and which knowledge is taken up. Participation and local knowledge for development are two sides of the same coin and participation is self-evident when it comes to perspective, but there is no methodological validation. Local knowledge for development is negotiated through interaction, whereas interventions such as poverty alleviation and social forestry come from above.

Another example is the recent trend towards cooperating with “traditional” or local “communities” without looking at the processes of construction taking place, including even support, such as in the case of the reintroduction of “traditional rulers” (see Lang 2004 on the topic of South Africa). Tradition and culture (knowledge) are permanently reinterpreted and they must be inserted into their structural and situational context. For example, women and their supposedly traditional knowledge and position are instrumentalised in identity construction processes.

The question is whether the following will exist:

- multiple spaces and relations that create translocal and transnational arenas in which knowledge is negotiated
- or uniform knowledge platforms in which hegemonic centres control access and instrumentalise the cosmopolitan strata of women activists and academics that exists after Beijing?

As opposed to an approach that includes actors or stakeholders and their supposed specialised knowledge, I suggest adding agency and spaces that are created by movements and (epistemic) communities as well as negotiations at different interfaces and levels of society.

We should analyse how social spaces are constituted and how conceptualisation and knowledge production takes place by means of local and global networking. We must also examine how social reality is constructed and which concepts are used. It is assumed that an important feature of knowledge that is developed by activists is its ability to crosscut spheres

of scientific research, political action, and everyday life. This goes against essentialist conceptions and “grassroots”/local concepts of knowledge being applied without the additional consideration of situatedness.

Classical approaches of analysing development knowledge have shown that there is a danger of labelling as can be seen in poverty reports that include concepts of households headed by poor women, grassroots, “indigenous” women, etc. (even when these concepts are applied by the people themselves). This means that these groups are used as units of measurement in surveys and serve as targets for policies without looking at the interactions and changes of belonging in certain occasions; i.e., cohesion and structuration are not taken into account.

When administering development innovations, it is often implied that there is only one appropriate set of solutions for a problem. This means that there is no pluralism of solutions and possibilities that crosscut different fields and sectors. Therefore, the question is how (expert, professional) knowledge should be transferred and interact with local conditions while creating an enabling learning environment, i.e., one that is autonomous and promotes the agency, including reflexivity, to experiment and direct participants’ own learning processes. The idea of course is that top-down transfer prevents the further development of knowledge as well as learning, integration, and the implementation of said knowledge.

This can be illustrated very clearly in the area of innovations. As was explained in Tina Padmanabhan’s study in Northern Ghana (2002), an absolute gender-blindness prevails. For instance, this means that it is not known what kind of innovations are actually adopted, as women sometimes have to work for men in cases in which innovations to develop cash crops are introduced by formal agricultural extension services. In certain circumstances, however, women introduce innovations into their own fields, and in doing so they are able to enlarge their scope for manoeuvre and sometimes enter market production. The study clearly shows that there is a female path of learning, in the transmittal of information and knowledge creating possibilities of practice (such as the introduction of new seeds, for example).

Therefore, instead of trying to collect local knowledge or information as a static body and allowing people to participate in what has long since been defined at the international agencies’ hegemonic centres of knowledge production and application, we should instead look at the constitution of spaces where knowledge is produced and negotiated which are relevant for different practices carried out by knowledgeable actors. This raises questions of who is considered to be a legitimate carrier of development knowledge and, especially, the position of NGOs – which are often considered to be suppliers of social information and societal legitimacy in participatory processes – and national researchers and consultants regarding the epistemic community to which they belong. The problem is that their knowledge very often is not grounded in everyday practice but tends to formulate modernistic normative requirements according to localised development jargon (such as the term “grassroots”).

The arenas and institutions of learning are gendered with regard to access, structuring of social space, and types of knowledge. In all fields of society, women risk being the most excluded group. In order for women to push to change this situation, they might create their own spaces of learning and practice. Very often information is addressed to or knowledge is requested from people who are not the legitimate actors or “knowers” (Diawara 1985). This phenomenon influences the outcome of all participatory methods and is often overlooked,

such as in cases in which men are interviewed on subjects only women know about, or when women do not speak out but instead refer to authorised knowledge.

The interesting point would be to follow how social spaces are linked to the overall system and how difference is maintained. It might be that more informal spaces of negotiating local knowledge will discriminate against local carriers of knowledge when becoming more formalised and bring the constructs of the state down to the base level. As I have shown, it might be that the present decentralisation and strengthening of local government mainly means that local structures and institutions are broken up and captured from above. This process can be identified by the type of information and knowledge which is at stake.

We should examine the social relations and networks coming into existence alongside liberalising, cross-border economies that at the same time exhibit the phenomena of increasing political ethnicity that affects economic resources (on the problem of autochthony, see Geschiere, Meyer 1999), the criminalisation (warlords, trafficking in weapons, drugs, and persons) of the economy, or translocal and transnational social spaces and very diverse local anchoring of economic activities which open up completely new horizons beyond methodological nationalism (Glick-Schiller/Wimmer).

How can we further develop approaches of subsistence production with regard to securing livelihoods, regionalisation of the economy, new forms of shadow economy, new ideas of the “domestic economy” and “caring economy”, and the necessity of bringing the reproductive and productive sectors and natural resource management together? How are food-crop markets and their embeddedness in subsistence production and local/regional markets organised after marketing boards and state control have vanished? What are the links between structural adjustments and poverty reduction, food aid, and new forms of security systems?

What are the relevant fields? How do they overlap? What flows of resources exist between town and country, subsistence farming and markets, and other combinations of resource usage? What forms of interaction with the formal sector exist in the sense of “alternative modes of accumulation” (Geschiere/Konings 1993), by means of Roscas (rotating saving and credit associations) and local banks, for example? What are the ways in which not only multiple income strategies and activities, but also formal and informal fields together with production factors combine? What are the characteristics of new economic fields – such as cloth trade in West Africa – where industrial production directed by multinational firms has now completely taken over trading networks and habits, where newly recruited women work on their own account but according to a narrowly controlled sales system in which classical traders are crowded out? Who are the actors/brokers in this (partly) formalised trade in which Chinese manufacturing also plays a role?

Where are new frontiers concerning the responsibilities between state, market, and society regarding poverty reduction programmes, privatisation of state resources and services, cost recovery, decentralisation of public affairs, financial sector, (micro) credit programmes, segregation of markets – including labour markets – private enterprise, and NGOs?

It is important to study the constitution of social spaces – including different publics – where meaning is negotiated and the formal and informal meld. One could even ask whether the internet, or information technology per se, is a new form of public space where social change is negotiated (Spiegel rapport 2005). One can look at this space with regard to its gendered structure that crosscuts the dimensions of formal vs. informal and public vs. private. One could even ask whether information technology is itself a new and gendered shadow

economy, bearing in mind that women are involved in this technology in different and sometimes innovative ways. Of course we would have to study more closely whether this is an entry point to the information technology arena in a more sophisticated technological sense – perhaps in a parallel or specifically gendered manner – or whether it concerns just the service aspect of this technology. Studies have shown that women have often entered the important formal/informal sector of telephone and internet communication in Ghana and other countries (see Harcourt 1999).

Finally, when applying the sociology of knowledge, it is the structure of knowledge which is important. This means combining agency with knowledge and applying it to these new debates on knowledge management in development agencies (World Bank 1999; Evers, Kaiser, Müller 2003). At the same time, we should take up the challenge of transforming power structures by means of horizontal methods of exchanging knowledge and information. Everybody, particularly women, has access and can participate in these platforms of knowledge exchange. This might very well automatically eliminate all social differences in principle – particularly the gendered ones. This is however certainly doubtful and we must examine the social reality of the internet. From a gender point of view we can see how these arenas, spheres, and spaces are structured with regard to gender. Thus, we must examine the concepts of local knowledge such as traditional knowledge in a different, non-essentialising manner than we do today.

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