

Translations of Gender Equality in International Aid

Perspectives from Norway and Ethiopia

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SCIENTIFIC ENVIRONMENT

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

SCIENTIFIC ENVIRONMENT	I
TABLE OF CONTENTS	II
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	IV
ABSTRACT	VII
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	IX
LIST OF PUBLICATIONS	XI
1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT	2
1.2 GENDER EQUALITY – A CONTESTED CONCEPT.....	5
1.2.1 ‘Equality’ vs. ‘difference’.....	6
1.2.2 Gender complementarity.....	8
1.2.3 Exploring gender equality.....	9
1.3 GENDER EQUALITY IN NORWEGIAN AND ETHIOPIAN DEVELOPMENT POLICIES.....	10
1.4 NGOS, CIVIL SOCIETY AND DEVELOPMENT	12
1.4.1 State and civil society in Ethiopia.....	13
1.5 DEVELOPMENT AND RELIGION	14
1.6 SITUATING THE STUDY WITHIN ANTHROPOLOGY OF DEVELOPMENT	15
1.7 THEORIES OF SOCIAL CHANGE - DIFFUSION AND REINTERPRETATION	18
1.7.1 Diffusionist perspectives.....	18
1.7.2 Reinterpretation perspectives.....	20
2. OBJECTIVES.....	23
2.1 OVERALL AIM OF THE THESIS	23
2.2 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES	23
3. METHODOLOGY	25
3.1 DEVELOPMENT WORK AND LONG-TERM ETHNOGRAPHIC FIELDWORK (1999 -2006)	25
3.2 MULTI-SITED ETHNOGRAPHY – A BRIEF INTRODUCTION	29
3.3 CONSTRUCTING THE FIELD	31
3.3.1 Norwegian state policies on gender and aid.....	32
3.3.2 The Digni aid chain	33
3.3.3 The Norwegian Church Aid aid chain	34

3.4	THE RESEARCH PROCESS.....	35
3.4.1	<i>Following aid chains</i>	36
3.5	MULTI-SITED ETHNOGRAPHY – A DISCUSSION	40
3.6	METHODS.....	41
3.6.1	<i>The informants</i>	42
3.6.2	<i>The interviews</i>	44
3.6.3	<i>Access, research assistance and trust</i>	48
3.6.4	<i>Field notes, analysis and data management</i>	51
3.7	ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	53
4.	RESULTS – SYNOPSIS OF THE PAPERS	54
4.1	PAPER I	54
4.2	PAPER II.....	55
4.3	PAPER III	57
4.4	PAPER IV	58
5.	DISCUSSION.....	61
5.1	REFLEXIVITY AND THE CHALLENGE OF BEING AN INSIDER.....	61
5.1.1	<i>Reflexivity</i>	61
5.1.2	<i>From ideological populism to methodological deconstructivism</i>	64
5.2	DISCUSSION OF THE MAIN FINDINGS.....	68
5.2.1	<i>Gender equality – multiple meanings and translations</i>	69
5.2.2	<i>Translation vs. diffusion</i>	73
5.3	ACTORS’ STRATEGIES AND RESPONSES TO STRONG GENDER POLICIES	77
6.	CONCLUSION	81
7.	LIMITATIONS AND AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH	83
	REFERENCES	84
	ENDNOTES	93

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ABSTRACT

Background: Gender equality has emerged as a key issue in the global development and human rights discourse during the last three decades. Worldwide support of gender equality by a wide range of actors such as transnational organizations, civil society organizations, national governments and donor countries suggest that gender equality has been established as a global norm. This study aims to explore what happens when gender equality and gender related policies, travel between diverse localities and actors within the field of international development. The study sheds light on how differently situated actors conceptualize and translate ‘gender equality’, how they relate to, are influenced by and use gender policies, and how they strategically maneuver and navigate their way through the complex landscape that constitutes development as social practice.

Methods: This is a qualitative, study in which findings from a multi-sited research project conducted from 2010-12 constitutes the core of the empirical material. The study also draws on a conventional long-term ethnographic fieldwork conducted during 2005-6 among the Arsi Oromo of Ethiopia. With a particular focus on the relationship between Norwegian gender and aid policies and gender and development related initiatives in Ethiopia, the study combines an analysis of practices, policies and conceptions. Participant observation, semi-structured interviews and textual policy analysis were methods used in the study.

Results: The study revealed diverse meanings of gender equality in Norwegian gender policies and among differently situated actors involved in gender and development initiatives in Ethiopia. Gender equality is being translated in different and even contradictory ways, not only by experts situated in the interface between the global and the local, but by actors at all levels, including grassroots. These translations are influenced by historical, cultural, political, economic and religious factors in a given locality at a particular time. Despite the contested nature of gender equality, the study also shows that gender equality and gender policies represent a

strong set of ‘truths’. In this study two examples of strong truths or policies are scrutinized: 1) the increased political pressure on the Norwegian government’s cooperative partners to focus on gender equality, and 2) the global movement against FGM/C and its related interventions in the particular Ethiopian context.

Conclusion: The study illustrates that in spite of the existence of a global gender equality norm, gender equality is a highly contested concept that is open to multiple meanings. The open character of gender equality is the reason that the concept has been so widely diffused. Despite the volatile nature of gender equality, and the fact that the concept is being translated differently depending on the actors involved and the context in which they are embedded, this study also illustrates that gender equality norms and policies represent a set of ‘transnational truths’ that are pushed through what may be termed ‘strong policies’. While the pressure inherent in these policies could be interpreted as an example of the Western power over the ‘developing’ world, the study provides examples of how differently situated actors relate to and strategically negotiate their way around these policies, suggesting that an actor-oriented perspective better encompass the complexities and the negotiations that are played out between the different actors in development.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADAA	African Development Aid Association
AU	African Union
BN	Bistandsnemnda (Norwegian Missions in Development)
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
ECFE	Evangelical Church Fellowship Ethiopia
EECMY	Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus
EGLDAM	Ye Ethiopia Goji Limadawi Dirigitoch Aswogay Mahiber also known as the National Committee on Traditional Practices in Ethiopia
EIASC	Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council
EPRDF	The Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front
FGM/C	Female Genital Mutilation/ Cutting
GAD	Gender and Development
GTP	Growth and Transformation Plan
HTP	Harmful Traditional Practices
KMG	Kembatti Mentii Gezzima
LWF	Lutheran World Federation
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs

NCA	The Norwegian Church Aid
NGO	Non Governmental Organizations
NLM	The Norwegian Lutheran Mission
NMA	The Norwegian Mission Alliance
NMS	The Norwegian Mission Society
NORAD	The Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
NOK	Norwegian Kroner
PASDEP	Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty
RCDP	Raytu Community Development Project
SCN/E	Save the Children Norway / Ethiopia
UN	The United Nations
UNFPA	The United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	The United Nations Children's Fund
USD	US-dollars
WEGE	Women Empowerment and Gender Equality
WHO	World Health Organization
WID	Women in Development

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

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1. INTRODUCTION

Gender equality has, over the last decades, emerged as a widely accepted and unquestionable focus in the global development discourse. Following a number of world conferences on women during the 1980's and 1990's, the number of actors that are involved in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment has increased steadily, and gender equality norms have been established as an integral part of international law (Zwingel, 2012: 115). Transnational organizations such as the World Bank and the UN, a wide range of civil society organizations, national governments and donor countries all have developed gender policies and strategies to which they claim their commitment. But what happens when ideas and norms, often developed by policy makers in donor countries or in transnational organizations located in the global north, move through the conglomerate of actors and organizations that constitute the development landscape? How do the different actors relate to and translate the gender policies? And is the meaning of gender equality as cohesive as the global policy discourse suggests? With Norwegian gender and aid policies as a point of departure, these are some of the central questions explored in this study. More precisely, the project was designed with an intention of tracking and exploring the Norwegian policies from their formulation in Norway to their implementation in gender-focused development projects in Ethiopia.

In this chapter, I first give a brief introduction to the field of gender and development. This is followed by a presentation of some of the discussions concerning the concept 'gender equality' which are found within feminist and gender theory. Next, I provide a short overview of Norwegian gender and aid policies and of gender policies in the Ethiopian context. Since this study, to a great extent, has focused on the engagement of non-governmental organizations and particularly on faith-based actors, topics such as the relationship between state and civil society and development and religion are presented next. In the last section of the chapter, I situate the study in the broader theoretical framework of the anthropology of development. The 'entangled social logics approach', a framework proposed by Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan (2005) for

the study of development, is outlined. This section also includes perspectives from selected social change theories, norm-diffusion theory and translation theory. Although ideas from these theories are not included in all four papers that make up this thesis, perspectives presented in this overall framework tie together and facilitate a discussion of some of the crosscutting themes that run through the papers.

1.1 Gender and development

Since ‘women’s issues’ emerged on the international donor’s agenda in the mid-1970s, considerable attention has been given to what kinds of strategies could best serve as a tool for achieving gender equality. The first coherent approach was the so-called Women in Development (WID) strategy (see e.g. Rathgeber, 1990, Razavi and Miller, 1995b). WID was strongly influenced by Ester Boserup’s pioneering book “Women’s role in economic development” (1970) which in addition to providing a discussion of issues such as the gendered division of labor, the role of women and men in different agricultural systems, and the underreporting of women’s subsistence activities in official statistics, also contained a critique of the idea that modernization, with its focus on efficiency and technology would lead to the emancipation of women in developing countries (Benería and Sen, 1981: 279 ff., Peet and Hartwick, 2009: 254 ff.). Building on Boserup’s work, a group of American liberal feminists started to articulate a set of concerns and strategies aimed at “ (...) minimizing the disadvantages of women in the productive sector and ending discrimination against them”; concerns that were “ (...) loosely labeled ‘women in development’” (Rathgeber, 1990: 490). Shirin M. Rai concludes that “ (...) the project was to ensure that the benefits of modernization accrued to women as well as men in the Third World” (2011: 29). The emphasis was, however, not merely placed on how to ensure that women also benefitted from development; it was also stressed that the development process itself would better achieve its targets if women were included in the process.

The WID strategy was by the end of the 1980s largely viewed as flawed. The approach was criticized for its instrumental underpinnings, for prioritizing “what development needs from women over what women need from development” (Razavi and Miller, 1995b: 1), and for its tendency to focus on integrating women into established structures and institutions, while neglecting the need for changing them (True, 2003: 370). Feminist scholars also argued that the WID framework privileged “the male productive norm,” (Rai, 2011: 29) while ignoring welfare concerns (Razavi and Miller, 1995a: 9 ff.) and the role of women in reproduction (Benería and Sen, 1981: 282).

During the 1980s, Gender and Development (GAD) emerged as an alternative to WID and as a more holistic approach (Rathgeber, 1990: 493). Theoretically rooted in socialist feminism, those involved in developing this alternative framework argued for the importance of “looking at women in relation to men, and the way in which relations between these two categories are socially constructed” (Moser, 1993: 3). Gender, rather than women per se, became the main analytical category and the “lens through which to understand the dynamics of social and economic change in societies in transition” (Pearson and Jackson, 1998: 2). The shift from WID to GAD implied a move away from a focus on integrating women into development to a focus on transformation of gendered power relations (Rai, 2011: 32). GAD also differed from WID in terms of its view on the gendered division of labor. Whereas WID tended to accept the sexual division, arguing for a greater recognition of the work done by women, GAD stressed the need for redistribution of labor (Peet and Hartwick, 2009: 267).

The GAD framework has also been much debated and criticized. Part of the critique pertains to how the political and feminist ambitions inherent in the GAD framework have been altered and depoliticized as a result of gender becoming institutionalized in development policies and practice (Baden and Goetz, 1997: 3 ff.). Cornwall et.al conclude that the adoption of gender policies and approaches such as gender planning and gender mainstreaming have reduced “the political project of gender and

development (...) to a ‘technical’ fix” (2007: 6). Acknowledging that “institutionalization of gender (...) poses critical practical and political questions for feminists and theorists” Shirin M. Rai seems to suggest that the challenge posed by GAD still “remains *potentially* a powerful one” (2011: 32). Andrea Cornwall appears on the other hand to be more ambivalent, not only to how GAD has been translated into development policy and practice, but also to GAD as a conceptual framework. She states, “I have always found it difficult to relate to the frameworks and models used to think about gender in development: they fail to make sense to me conceptually, experientially and politically” (2007: 69). The slippery nature of ‘gender’ as a concept and the contrasting, contradictory and simplified uses of the term in development policy and practice have also led scholars to question whether the concept is useful at all (Baden and Goetz, 1997, Sardenberg, 2007). Some scholars and activists have argued that a focus on ‘gender’ has led to a shift away “from the focus on women, to women and men and, finally, back to men” (Baden and Goetz, 1997: 6) and to less attention on measures that might address women’s specific disadvantages (Razavi and Miller, 1995a: 41, Baden and Goetz, 1997: 6). Others, such as Andrea Cornwall, have claimed that men are missing from the picture and that gender has become “a convenient silo within which to house anything to do with women” (2007: 71). Cornwall has also pointed to the tendency to paint contrasting portraits of men and women in development policy and practice; men are portrayed as lazy, powerful and irresponsible, in contrast to the peace-loving, nurturing, caring and pregnant women (2000, 2007).

While Eva M. Rathgeber has claimed that GAD, in contrast to WID allowed for greater recognition of women as agents of change rather than as passive recipients of development assistance (1990: 494), Signe Arnfred has argued that the GAD discourse with its assumption of “universal female subordination” and “world wide patriarchy” is an example of “colonial continuities” (2004: 11). Such arguments are part of a post-colonial and transnational feminist critical tradition, which has problematized the ‘othering’ of ‘Third World’ women, often portrayed as powerless, oppressed, and as victims of violence in dire need of rescue (Parpart, 1993: 444 ff. ,

Mohanty, 1988, Kapur, 2002: 2). Muslim women are in particular depicted as in need of ‘salvation’ (Abu-Lughod, 2002). Scholars have linked this to 9/11 and to the ‘war on terror’, arguing that the victimization of Muslim women has played a role in justifying military interventions by Western powers (Kabeer et al., 2011: 3, Razack, 2004: 130). While Arnfred acknowledges that the GAD discourse also entails critical discussions and critique of such representations, she nevertheless concludes that “the overall framework of ‘othering’ remains intact” (2004: 12). This ‘othering’ is perhaps most discernable in representations of non-Western sensational and exotic practices that involves sexual aspects (Jaggar, 2005: 55). Within the human rights and development discourse, such practices often go under the label ‘harmful traditional practices’ (HTP). Female Genital Mutilation / Cutting (FGM/C),³ an issue that has been highly prioritized by the Norwegian government (discussed in paper III), is the practice which appears to have received most attention.

1.2 Gender equality – a contested concept

While the different strategies that have been at play within the field of gender and development have been widely discussed and revised, and the assumptions that underpin many of the initiatives have been criticized, ‘gender equality’, one of the main concepts in the field, appears to have been less problematized and discussed. A surprisingly large number of ‘gender and development’ publications fail to critically discuss the concept, let alone provide a definition. One may indeed conclude that gender equality is one of those “taken for granted development buzzword[s]”, an example of a concept which, according to Cornwall has “lost a clear sense of meaning” (2007: 69). The question is, however, whether gender equality can be said to have had a fixed or clear meaning in the first place. In contrast to the rather straightforward and simplistic presentation of gender equality in many policy documents, scrutiny of the academic feminist discourse in general and of equality theories in particular reveals that gender equality is indeed a highly contested concept. The fact that gender equality consists of two terms, ‘gender’ and ‘equality’, concepts which have each been subject to much discussion and debate, contributes to

the vagueness of the concept. As Malin Rönnblom has stated gender equality is indeed not “a self-evident feminist goal that we all can agree on” (2008: 114). A brief look at one of the most controversial debates in feminist theory, the relationship between ‘equality’ and ‘difference’ illustrates the ambiguous nature of the concept. The relationship between ‘equality as sameness’ and ‘equality as difference’ emerges as a central issue in two of the articles in this thesis (paper I and IV).

1.2.1 ‘Equality’ vs. ‘difference’

The issue of equality and difference is not new to feminism; throughout the history of women’s liberation there has, at times, been a focus on the right to be equal, at other times on the right to be different (Bock and James, 1992:4). However, the debate around these two concepts became increasingly heated within feminist theory from the 1970s, and was fuelled by the emergence of so-called radical feminism. A central feature of radical feminist ideology was the emphasis on the difference between men and women. However this was mostly limited to a conceptualization of difference which was seen as constructed by and limited to the social aspects of gender (Holli, 1997). Anna Maria Holli argues that, from 1980, equality itself as a concept was increasingly seen as old-fashioned and reactionary. She explains this “distaste for equality” by the fact that feminist research increasingly showed that the equality concept has “an inbuilt masculine norm which makes (it) a problematic concept for women” (1997: 133). The increased recognition of difference emerged as a critique of the liberal feminist conceptualization of equality, which was predominantly based on a presumption of sameness between men and women embedded in a male norm (Beasley, 1999).

The tendency to create dichotomies between ‘equality’ and ‘difference’ has been addressed by several scholars who have argued against the binary conception of the two concepts (Williams, 1991, Scott, 1988, Longo, 2001). Joan W. Scott argues that when these two concepts are paired dichotomously, it appears as if one should support either one or the other. She argues that “equality is not the elimination of

difference, and difference does not preclude equality” (1988:38). Similar arguments are forwarded by Holli who argues that “equality does not mean an elimination of difference, nor does the recognition of difference exclude equality” (1997:139). It has also been argued that difference is the opposite, not of inequality, but of sameness (Borchorst, 2009: 28). Hence the equality-versus-difference debate seems to be a misleading label for a debate which in fact reflects different conceptualizations of equality, namely formal versus substantial equality. Holli’s conclusion is that “formal equality has its basis in the assumption that women and men are intrinsically the same, whereas substantial equality takes into consideration the differences between the sexes” (1997:149). She proposes a relational framework for equality, where equality is situated in the intra-space between absolute sameness and absolute difference.

Including recognition of difference in the equality debate is, however, not unproblematic. Within feminist theory there has been a fear that recognition of difference would run the risk of essentialism, of reifying women’s traditional roles and justifying the inequality between the sexes (Bock and James, 1992: 3). However, failure to recognize difference leaves in its place a flawed neutrality, constructed in a manner that advances the dominant group and hinders those who are different. Martha Minow argues that “both focusing on and ignoring difference risk recreating it” and defines this as the ‘difference dilemma’ (1985: 159). A scholar who has sought to bridge the two concepts is Nancy Fraser (1994, 2005, 2007). She has proposed a theory of justice that combines a focus on recognition of difference with ideals of redistribution and representation. The evaluative standard for justice is, according to Fraser, found in what she terms *parity of participation*. She argues that all adults of a society should be able to participate and interact with each other as peers in all aspects of social life. This is also the grounding principle in Fraser’s discussion of the different ways that social policies can be used to promote gender equality. What Fraser (1994) terms the *male breadwinner model*, the *caregiver parity model*, the *universal breadwinner model* and the *universal caregiver model* are thoroughly presented and discussed as part of paper I and will not be presented in

detail here. Fraser's main idea, however, is that the abolition of the gendered division of labor is a key to gender justice. This, she argues, can only be achieved through *the universal caregiver model*, a model which aims at making women's life-pattern the norm for both men and women. In Fraser's words it induces "men to become more like most women are now – that is, people who do primary care work" (1994: 611).

1.2.2 Gender complementarity

A concept, which clearly clashes with Fraser's conception of justice and with the ideals of the universal caregiver model, is gender complementarity. Within feminist and gender theory, this is a concept that to a very limited extent has been theorized and discussed, most probably because it is often associated with religious fundamentalism and conservative gender ideologies (see e.g. Levitt and Merry, 2011: 89). In the United States gender complementarity has for example been used as an argument against same-sex marriage in political discussions (see e.g. McClain, 2006). The concept appears to have been more frequently discussed and described in studies of African societies, although references to the concept appear to be of a rather fleeting character, and many of the works fail to define or engage in a theoretical discussion of the concept. Jane Soothill for example argues that Ghanaian gender politics are dominated by an ideology of gender complementarity, and she also describes how this is reproduced by the Charismatic churches in the country (2007). A number of anthropological studies have also shown how the "principle of gender complementarity" (Sanders, 1999: 48) is not only a central feature of gender relations in many African societies, but is also a key structuring principle of the cosmological order (Moore, 1999: 16 ff., Kaare, 1999, Sanders, 2000). In her study of the Iraqw of Tanzania, Katherine Snyder (1999: 226) for example challenges the binary dichotomy between the public and the private by arguing that "rather than considering the domestic and public as opposing and asymmetrical categories, (...) the Iraqw treat them as interrelated and complementary domains". Gender complementarity is also a central concept in Todd Sanders' (2000, 1999) discussion of gender relations among the Ihanzu of Tanzania, who he claims, "(...) all agree that

men and women are different” (2000: 479). Important principles for the Ihanzu are cooperation and harmonious residual. While one may assume that gender complementarity entails an essentialistic and static conception of gender identity and gender relations, Sanders emphasizes the fluid, dynamic and unstable nature of both gender ideology and practice among the Ihanzu and warns against oversimplifications. He makes a clear distinction between ideology and practice. In an ideational context men and women are complementary and equal, but in practice the relationship between men and women is not necessarily in balance “(...) either men or women may exercise greater power, (...) either may be viewed as superior or inferior” (2000: 479). It all depends on the context, Sanders argues.

1.2.3 Exploring gender equality

While there appears to be limited discussions about what gender equality means within the gender and development field, the intricacy and ambiguity associated with gender equality is increasingly discussed in European policy studies. A number of scholars have critically assessed the various meanings of gender equality in EU policies, and there is a similar scholarship emerging in the Nordic countries (Lombardo et al., 2008, Melby et al., 2009, Magnusson et al., 2008). These studies explore the politics of gender equality, as well as the diversity of meanings of the concept itself. A few studies have also critically discussed gender equality at a conceptual level from a global perspective (Kabeer et al., 2008, Fennel and Arnot, 2008).

Emanuela Lombardo, Petra Meier and Mieke Verloo, scholars who have worked extensively on gender policies in the EU have labeled gender equality “a travelling concept” (2009: 1). They argue that

“(...) the fact that the concept of gender equality has travelled so well across a variety of borders in itself indicates that it is a concept open to contestation. It can encompass different meanings and therefore fit into a broad range of contexts, depending on how actors from these different contexts frame it”.
(2009:2)

They furthermore contend that due to the change in meaning and labeling, it is important to grasp the different connotations and to understand why and how the concept changes. They introduce four key concepts that can be used to assess how gender equality as a concept is shaped; *shrinking*, *stretching*, *fixing* and *bending* (2009: 3 ff.). *Shrinking* implies that the concept is “pinned down to specific labels that might narrow its content” (2009:4). An example may be when gender equality is limited to a focus on equal opportunities for women and men in the labor market. The opposite of shrinking is *stretching* which points to processes that broaden the concept of gender equality. One such example may be the inclusion of other inequalities in gender equality policies. Thirdly, *fixing* refers to what happens when gender equality has been enshrined in legal or political documents and is no longer perceived as a contested goal. Finally, *bending* refers to what happens when the meaning of gender equality is shaped at the expense of the goal of gender equality, for example when the main argument for gender equality becomes economic growth. In the last chapter of this thesis, two of these concepts (shrinking and bending), are drawn upon to discuss the different meanings of gender equality that have surfaced through the course of this study.

1.3 Gender equality in Norwegian and Ethiopian development policies⁴

Norway is considered to be one of the most gender equal countries in the world,⁵ and has also played an active role in pushing gender and women’s issues into the global development agenda.⁶ In 1985 the country launched its first policy on women and aid. This was followed by a long-term gender strategy in 1997. The Action Plan *Women’s Rights and Gender Equality in Development Cooperation* was launched in 2007 and was accompanied by a considerable increase in government funding. A benchmark was reached in 2008 when Norway launched the first White Paper on gender equality in development aid cooperation.⁷ In current policy documents, as well as in political discourse, the image of Norway as a world champion on gender

equality is proudly spelled out, and Norway's role in promoting gender equality in developing assistance is underscored. The policies also emphasize that Norway requires its aid partners to "demonstrate that they take women and gender equality seriously" (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2007: 7).

Ethiopia is one of Norway's aid partners, and according to the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) a country with which Norway has a long history, both in terms of "politics, bilateral assistance and missionary work".⁸ Ethiopia was ranked number 118 in the 2012 Gender Gap Index.⁹ The country has become signatory to most international conventions concerning gender equality.¹⁰ A National Policy on Women was launched in 1993. Since then, gender has been mainstreamed into a number of national policies, such as the Plan for Accelerated Sustained Development to End Poverty (PASDEP) and the more recent Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP). At a structural level a Women's Affairs machinery has gradually been developed. The Women's Affairs office was initially established under the Prime Minister's office, but was made independent in 2005 when it became the Ministry of Women, Youth and Children's Affairs.

The Norwegian government supports a number of gender-related initiatives in Ethiopia. A considerable part of the funding is channeled through civil society organizations, but the Norwegian government also supports the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). Much of the Norwegian funding in recent years has been directed towards initiatives aiming to reduce the practice of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C). Norway has, in fact, been in the forefront in prioritizing FGM/C in international development, and the abolishment of FGM/C has become an important part of the Norwegian government's action plan for women's rights and gender equality in development aid. In 2003 the Norwegian Government launched its International Action Plan for Combating Female Genital Mutilation (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2003), a strategy initially set to be effective for the period 2003-2010, but later extended to 2013. Following the launch of the FGM Action Plan in 2003,

Ethiopia, where the FGM prevalence rate is estimated to 74%, was identified as a pilot country. The Norwegian Embassy in Addis Ababa first led the work, but in 2005 an agreement was signed with Save the Children Norway (SCN) and Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) for a five-year strategic partnership program for the abandonment of FGM/C. These two organizations, whose local partners include both governmental and non-governmental organizations in Ethiopia, have since 2005 been responsible for the majority of the Norwegian funded anti-FGM interventions in Ethiopia. In 2010 Ethiopia was the country that received the highest amount of funding for FGM/C activities from the Norwegian government (see appendix 1). The Norwegian government renewed its commitment to eliminate FGM in Ethiopia in 2011, by allocating 50 million NOK to a second phase of the joint NCA/SCN program.¹¹

1.4 NGOs, civil society and development

The role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in development has been much debated. During the 1980s NGOs emerged as major actors on the development arena. NGOs not only mushroomed during this period, which came to be labeled the “NGO-decade” (Tvedt, 1998: 1); they also received increased attention and official funding. The increased interest in NGOs was partly fuelled by neoliberal economic policy agendas aimed at reducing the role of the state (Opoku-Mensah, 2007: 9). Common arguments were that NGOs were more cost-effective and efficient than state institutions (Lewis and Kanji, 2009: 17, Edwards and Hulme, 1996b: 961), had a stronger commitment towards the poor (Biggs and Neame, 1996: 43) and were important agents for democratization (Mercer, 2002) and human rights (Edwards and Hulme, 1996a: 2). They were perceived as representing a counterweight to the market and the state (Edwards and Hulme, 1996a: 2, Korten, 1987: 147 ff., Ossewaarde et al., 2008: 42). However, during the 1990s the role of NGOs, and issues such as lack of evidence of NGOs performance, accountability, representativeness and legitimacy were increasingly questioned (Tvedt, 1998, Edwards and Hulme, 1996a: 2 ff., Lister, 2003). One of the issues that was problematized was the NGOs’ increased

dependence on official aid. It was argued that this might undermine NGO autonomy and legitimacy (Atack, 1999: 857 , Edwards and Hulme, 1996a: 5, Lewis and Kanji, 2009: 175 ff.).

The relationship between NGOs and the state has also been debated in studies of what Terje Tvedt has labeled “the Norwegian aid system” (2007, 2009).¹² One of the characteristics of this system is the close cooperation between the Norwegian state, civil society organizations and research institutions. While a number of international NGOs, in order to preserve their independence and accountability, have regulations that restrict their government funding (Smillie, 1994, Wallace et al., 2006), Norwegian NGOs have not applied similar self-restrictions. From 1981 to 2002 state funding to Norwegian civil society organizations increased tremendously (Sending and Neumann, 2006)¹³ and, at present, the minimal government requirement for self-financing to Norwegian NGOs is as low as 10%. Tvedt argues that it is important to identify and understand the consequences of this high degree of financial dependency, and the subsequent obligation for Norwegian NGOs “to adapt to current policies and rhetoric” (2007: 626). The case study presented and discussed in paper II explores this relationship.

1.4.1 State and civil society in Ethiopia

Self-help groups, faith-based organizations and informal community-based structures have historically constituted an important part of associational life in Ethiopia (Sisay Alemahu Yeshanew, 2012: 370). Modern civil society organizations are of a relative recent date (Asnake Kefale and Dejene Arede, 2009: 89). During the reign of Emperor Haile Selassie (1916-1974) and during the communist Derg regime (1974-1991), the political space available for non-state actors was very limited (Sisay Alemahu Yeshanew, 2012: 372). A few relief and development NGOs existed in the country during the Derg period, especially after the catastrophic famine that hit the country in the mid-1980s. Trade unions, co-operatives and organizations that existed in the country during this time, were under the control of the government, and

functioned largely as instruments of state policy. The climate for civil society organizations changed when the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Party (EPRDF) came to power in 1991. Increased political space coupled with the general international mushrooming of NGOs, led to an explosion in the number of NGOs operating in the country (Asnake Kefale and Dejene Arede, 2009: 102). The opening up of political space was, however, later reversed as the regime moved in an increasingly authoritarian direction. This has particularly been the case following the 2005 state election. In order to control political dissent, a number of legislative and administrative measures have been taken by the government (Aalen and Tronvoll, 2009: 200). A new press law (2008) and an anti-terrorism law (2009) were first ratified and these severely impinged on the freedom of speech and association. Additionally, a new Civil Society Law was implemented in 2010, prohibiting international NGOs to engage in work related to politics, good governance and human rights (including gender equality). Local NGOs that receive more than 10 percent of their income from abroad are subject to the same restrictions. Sisay Alemahu Yeshanew argues that "while the government claims that the law facilitates the realization of the freedom of association and the role of CSOs in development processes, critics observe that it adversely affected the operation, and even the existence, of CSOs and the broader democratic space" (2012: 371). In practice, the new law appears to have forced the civil society into a much closer relationship with government bodies. 'Traditional' and religious leaders and civil society organizations, including international NGOs, have increasingly been co-opted by the government (Hagmann and Abbink, 2011).

1.5 Development and religion

Despite the fact that religious NGOs have been central actors in the development aid system since its very conception, the role of faith-based organizations has been largely neglected within development studies (Tvedt, 2006b). Western donors as well as the research community have often been ambivalent about the relationship between faith and development (Clarke and Jennings, 2008: 8, Clarke, 2007: 79). The

fact that many faith-based organizations have also been involved in proselytizing activities has fuelled the skepticism even further (Berger, 2003: 18). Religion has often been perceived as “the antithesis of development” (Clarke and Jennings, 2008: 4); as a problem to overcome in order to reach visions of development. After the turn of the millennium, religion has, however, gained increasing recognition within development theory, policy making and practice (see e.g. Deneulin and Rakodi, 2011, Ter Haar, 2011). As illustrated in paper III, the emphasis on the positive potential of religion and religious institutions and actors, which is characteristic of this new turn, seems particularly to be a trend in relation to gender related issues (Kirmani and Phillips, 2011). This is quite remarkable, since gender equality has often been contested and created controversies in the context of religious institutions. Religion has, within gender and feminist studies, often been seen as a barrier to women’s empowerment (Chowdhury, 2011: 506), and as a threat to gender equality (Phillips, 2009, Jeffreys, 2011).

1.6 Situating the study within anthropology of development

This study can be situated within the larger theoretical framework of the anthropology of development. David Lewis and David Mosse have grouped anthropology’s engagement in development into three major orientations; *instrumental*, *populist* and *deconstructivist* (2006: 2 ff.). An *instrumental* approach is associated with anthropologists who have been actively involved in development interventions and whose contribution has been to produce knowledge which is “normative/prescriptive, predictive and useable in enhancing development effectiveness” (2006: 3). *Ideological populism* refers to various participatory approaches that celebrate indigenous knowledge in an unqualified manner while “denigrating global science and top-down technology transfer” (2006: 3). This mode of engagement with anthropology in development is particularly associated with the work of Robert Chambers.¹⁴ Drawing on Olivier de Sardan (2005), Lewis and Mosse make an important distinction between *ideological* populism and *methodological*

populism. The latter refers to the “essentially anthropological stance of taking a local point of view to discover the rationale of actions”; an approach that “allows exploration of actor strategies, social relations, and the contradictions that are concealed by participatory methods” (2006: 3-4). The third mode of anthropological engagement in development is *deconstructive*. Again, an important differentiation is drawn between the ideological and the methodological. *Ideological deconstructivism* is a term used to describe theoretical approaches within anthropology of development that highlights the discursive “power of the West over the ‘developing’ world” (Mosse and Lewis, 2006: 4). Olivier de Sardan argues that such perspectives “tend to produce a caricature” and “a diabolic image” of a development world that is heavily controlled from the top (2005: 5). He proposes *methodological deconstructivism* as an alternative and more fruitful mode of engagement. Since this study draws inspiration from methodological deconstructivism, the approach is further elaborated below.

Methodological deconstructivism, what Olivier de Sardan also terms the “entangled social logics approach” (2005: 11 ff.) refers to research positions within the anthropology of development that employ an actor-oriented perspective (see e.g. Long, 1990). Scholars within this school of thought see development as a set of multi-dimensional social practices and share a commitment to investigate development empirically as a complex social phenomenon (see e.g. Apthorpe, 2011: 200). In order to capture this complexity, a “society-wide approach” (Olivier de Sardan, 2005: 27) and an “ethnography that does not overlook historical, political and socio-economic context” (Nauta, 2006: 150) is needed. According to Olivier de Sardan, a key is intensive fieldwork and comparative studies. The approach moreover requires an engagement with other disciplines, and generates an “epistemological convergence” (2005: 27); an anthropology of development which is “simultaneously a political anthropology, a sociology of organizations, and economic anthropology, a sociology of networks, an anthropology of conceptions and sense systems” (2005: 33). The entangled social logic approach does not, in other words, “propose a singular or closed theoretical system” (2005: 14). In fact, Olivier de Sardan argues that scholars within this tradition “show a common distrust of ideologies (be it scientific

or developmentalist)” (2005: 14). They reject anthropological engagements that are normative, instrumental or ideological (Olivier de Sardan, 2005: 5 ff., Mosse and Lewis, 2006: 5 ff.).

Research influenced by the entangled social logic approach is particularly centered on the interactions between the various actors in development. It is acknowledged that these actors are differently situated and belong to different life-worlds; they have diverging interests, conceptions, strategies and logics (Olivier de Sardan, 2005). The interactions between them are therefore complex and strategic (Arce and Long, 2000: 16). This requires that the relationship between policy and practice is approached “not as an instrumental and scripted translation of ideas into reality, but as a messy free-for-all in which processes are often uncontrollable and results uncertain” (Mosse and Lewis, 2006: 9). Through a combined analysis of practices, conceptions and policies, actor-oriented approaches attempt to explore the interactions between these different actors and the “arenas where (...) [these] life-worlds and discourses meet” (Long and van der Ploeg cited in Olivier de Sardan, 2005: 13). Such approaches also attempt to deconstruct each development intervention “so it is seen for what it is – an on-going, socially constructed and negotiated process” (Long and Long, 1992: 35). Since the actors are also under different constraining conditions it is essential to unveil the strategies they use “according to the room for maneuver available to them” (Olivier de Sardan, 2005: 24).

While actor-oriented approaches have been criticized for neglecting issues of power and structure (Mosse and Lewis, 2006), both Norman Long (1990: 5) and Olivier de Sardan, emphasize an integration of structural and actor perspectives. As described by Olivier de Sardan:

“The interactionist approach that I am defending here is a combination of the analysis of constraints and the analysis of actors’ strategies, of structures and of individual or collective dynamics (...) It takes into account interaction in general (social, political, economic, symbolic) between actors in a given field vying for given stakes (...) power struggles and phenomena of inequality are not ignored; quite the contrary. The emphasis is placed on ‘grassroots’ actors and the room for maneuver available to them, without brushing aside the

constraints that come to bear on them and that limit the elbow room at their disposal” (2005: 52-3).

1.7 Theories of social change - diffusion and reinterpretation

Since the ultimate goal of development policies in general, and of initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality in particular, is social change or transformation, an anthropology of development is also an anthropology of social change, or what Olivier de Sardan also terms “innovation”¹⁵ (2005: 89 ff.). In the following, two “points of view” on social change are outlined: social change as “a process of diffusion” and social change as “reinterpretation” (Olivier de Sardan, 2005: 91 ff.). Since norms (also termed social conventions) represent the “standard of appropriate behavior for actors with a given identity” (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998: 891) they play a central role in terms of social change. In order to outline social change briefly as ‘a process of diffusion’ and as ‘reinterpretation’, I shall draw on: norm diffusion theory developed within the field of international relations; Mackie’s social convention theory; and translation theory. These theoretical perspectives have particularly informed paper IV, but are also useful as part of the theoretical framework used to discuss the findings in chapter five.

1.7.1 Diffusionist perspectives

How are internationally sanctioned norms diffused and socialized, and what characterizes the processes of appropriation, adoption and translation? How do these norms become meaningful in local contexts, and who are the actors in these translation processes? These are some of the questions that have been addressed by scholars within the field of international relations (IR) (see e.g. Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998, Risse et al., 1999, Acharya, 2004) but also by anthropologists concerned with how international human rights are translated into local contexts (Merry, 2006a, Englund, 2006). Various terms have been used to describe these

processes such as localization (Acharya, 2004), internalization (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998) and vernacularization (Merry, 2006b).¹⁶

Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, who are among the leading norm-diffusion theorists within the field of international relations argue that norms evolve in a three-stage “life cycle” (1998: 895 ff.). The first stage is called “norm emergence”; a phase in which “norm entrepreneurs”; - actors who have “strong notions about appropriate or desirable behavior in their community” (1998: 896) seek to persuade a critical mass of “norm leaders” to accept a new norm. The second stage, which is termed “norm cascade”, refers to a phase characterized by broader norm acceptance. The norm leaders who were targeted during the first phase play a crucial role at this stage, as they attempt to convince others “to become norm followers” (1998: 895). These first two stages are divided by a “tipping point”; a threshold at which a critical mass of actors has adopted the norm. The third and final stage happens at the far end of the norm cascade and is when norm internalization occurs. This is when a norm is taken for granted and “no longer is a matter of broad public debate” (1998: 895).

A similar process of social change is described by Gerry Mackie (1996, 2000) in his “‘convention’ theory of female genital cutting” (2000: 253). Mackie argues that FGM/C has to be understood as “a matter of proper marriage” (2000: 254). Hence, an individual cannot give up the practice of FGM/C; unless other members from intermarrying groups do the same. Mackie predicted that if a critical mass of people in a community agreed to stop the practice and publicly declared this, it would potentially spread to other communities and lead to a shift in social conventions that would “help bring female genital mutilation to an end” (1996: 999). According to Mackie, public declarations would strengthen the decision to abandon the practice and increase the likelihood of adherence. Mackie’s theory has been widely adopted by international NGOs working on FGM in Africa, who are increasingly emphasizing public declarations as a successful strategy to end the practice. This issue is explored critically in paper III.

While the approaches to norm diffusion and social change described above have been acknowledged as containing rather dynamic accounts of processes of norm diffusion, appropriation and adaptation, they have also been criticized for their lack of attention to the dynamic *nature* of norms, to the fact that the travelling may lead to a change in the meaning of the norms themselves (Acharya, 2004, Krook and True, 2012: 106, Van Kersbergen and Verbeek, 2007). In Amitav Acharya's view, theories such as those briefly outlined above, qualify as "moral cosmopolitanism" (2004: 242), as they assume certain norms to be universal and "set[s] up an implicit dichotomy between good global or universal norms and bad regional or local norms" (2004: 243). Acharya also argues that these approaches are more concerned with "moral proselytism (...) rather than contestation", and fail to recognize "the agency role of local actors" (2004: 242). Reflecting an emerging body of literature within international norm diffusion theory, Acharya's critique is part of a theoretical approach to norm diffusion that emphasizes the "evolutionary" (Zwingel, 2012: 115), fluid and dynamic character of norms (Krook and True, 2012, Van Kersbergen and Verbeek, 2007). Recognizing that norms are given different content depending on contextual factors, these works tend to reflect a more discursive approach to norm diffusion as they pay attention to processes that "shape and reshape" the norms (see e.g. Krook and True, 2012: 108). These theories pay more attention to processes of reinterpretation; a perspective on social change which, as described by Olivier de Sardan, acknowledges that messages aimed at social change are recomposed and translated, not only by those who are working as development agents or mediators (2005: 170 ff.) but also by the "addressee and final user" (2005: 101).

1.7.2 Reinterpretation perspectives

Neither Olivier de Sardan nor the norm-diffusion theorists mentioned above, explicitly refer to translation theory. The reinterpretation perspectives they present do, however, clearly resonate with contemporary trends within translation theory which have emphasized the dynamic, fluid and transformative nature of texts, ideas and language. In contrast to conventional translation theories that "privilege

equivalence” (Venuti, 2000: 122) between the original text and the translated version, translation is, within contemporary translation theory, not perceived to be about producing correct and accurate copies of an original superior text, nor is translation seen as a mere process of communication.¹⁷ While conventional translation theories have tended to consider translation as a “one-way process” (Bassnett and Trivedi, 1999: 5) of communication aimed at transmitting or “ferrying” a certain message or text across a divide (Gentzler, 2012), contemporary translation theories are characterized by their focus on the multi-directional and dialogic nature of translation. Translations are considered to be much more than “merely a copy” (Bassnett and Trivedi, 1999: 2) and are acknowledged as living and autonomous texts that are influenced by the particular historical and social contexts in which they are situated. They are “ever-renewed” (Walter, 2000: 17), have “status in [their] own right” (Venuti, 2000: 11; see also Walter, 2000) and always produce new meanings and representations “different from those at the point of origin” (Said, 1983: 157). Octavia Paz’s goes even further and argues that translation is not limited to interpretation of texts and languages. It is a primary activity and the means by which we make sense of the world. The world we live in is, according to Paz constituted of growing piles of texts that each are

(...) slightly different from the one that came before it: translations of translations of translations. Each text is unique, yet at the same time it is the translation of another text. No text can be completely original because language itself, in its very essence, is already a translation – first from the nonverbal world, and then, because each sign and each phrase is a translation of another sign, another phrase”. (1992: 154)

Paz’s conceptualization of translation opens up the translational space in terms of actors, as translation becomes as an everyday act of human life. As Olivier de Sardan argues, a reinterpretation perspective acknowledges that actors have the ability to “act and react” and to “transform to their own liking the proposals that are made to them” (2005: 101). This does not, however, mean that the translations occur in a vacuum at an individual level. All actors are exposed to economic, social, cultural and political

constraints and their interpretations involve social interactions, something which produces rather unpredictable outcomes (Olivier de Sardan, 2005: 101).

2. Objectives

2.1 Overall aim of the thesis

The overall aim of this study is to generate knowledge about what happens when gender equality, a widely recognized global norm, and its associated policies, travel between diverse localities and among actors who in one way or another are situated in “a terrain where development institutions are active” (Olivier de Sardan, 2005: 14). The particular focus is on the relationship between Norwegian gender and aid policies and gender and development-related initiatives in Ethiopia. Theoretically inspired by, yet not limited to the entangled social logics approach and translation theory the study combines analysis of practices, policies and conceptions. It aims to explore how differently situated actors conceptualize and translate the concept gender equality, how they relate to, are influenced by and use gender policies, and how they strategically maneuver and navigate their way through the complex landscape that constitutes development as social practice. As part of this, the study pays due attention to situating these conceptions and practices within a historical, economic, cultural and political context.

2.2 Specific objectives

To explore the shifting meanings of the concept ‘gender equality’ and how the meanings are influenced and shaped by historical, political, economic and cultural factors (papers I and IV).

To explore the interactions between various actors in development through a scrutinization of gender equality policies and practices (papers II, III and IV).

To contribute to the emerging scholarship on religion and development by exploring and discussing the role and the use of faith-based/religious institutions in development (papers II and III).

3. METHODOLOGY

In this chapter I present the methodological approach and describe and discuss the research processes of this study. A reflection on selected methodological issues is included as part of chapter five (discussion).

This is a qualitative study in which findings from a multi-sited research project conducted from 2010-12 constitutes the core of the empirical material. The study also draws on a conventional long-term ethnographic fieldwork conducted during 2005-6 among the Arsi Oromo, a predominantly Muslim ethnic group in southeast Ethiopia. From 1999-2003, I was moreover engaged as a development practitioner in the same area. Since the latter serves as an important backdrop for my research engagement and helps situate me as a researcher vis-à-vis ‘the field’ I start this chapter with a brief overview of this early engagement. Next follows a description of the fieldwork that I carried out in 2005-6, followed by an introduction to multi-sited ethnography and a more detailed overview of how the current project was designed and carried out. An overview of my work and research activities in Ethiopia between 1999-2006 and of the 2010-12 multi-sited project is provided in tables 1 and 2 respectively.

3.1 Development work and long-term ethnographic fieldwork (1999 -2006)

...“Spend lots and lots of time in studying a culture, learn the language, hang out, do all the everyday things that everyone else does (...) and stay aware of what’s really going on”. This is how H. Russel Bernard (2006: 345) summarizes participant observation in his acclaimed book on research methods in anthropology. To some extent, this not only describes my first field work conducted among the Arsi Oromo in Bale Zone of the Oromia Regional State in Ethiopia in 2005-6, it is also applicable to my earlier engagement as a development worker in the same area (although I later will explain why this does not qualify as ethnography).¹⁸ From 1999-2003 I was, with my husband, involved in development and relief activities implemented by the

Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY), funded by Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) and the Norwegian Lutheran Mission (NLM) respectively. Prior to our involvement in this work, a year was set aside to learn the language and culture. We attended a few months of formal language studies in Addis Ababa where we were introduced to the basics of *afaan Oromo*, before we moved to Robe town, the capital of Bale Zone. In Robe we hired a high school teacher as our language instructor. As he was a Muslim and a native Arsi Oromo, our daily lessons with him were not only invaluable in terms of language learning, they were also important as an introduction to local history, culture, politics and religious life. During the years we lived in Robe, we rented a house in the middle of a densely settled neighborhood. We had plenty of time to make friends and just ‘hang out’.

Timeframe	Geographical location	Type of engagement	Organizational affiliation
August 1999- March 2000	Addis Ababa and Robe town, Bale Zone	Language studies	Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY)/ Norwegian Lutheran Mission (NLM)
March – July 2000	Meda Welabu district, Bale Zone	Coordinator for emergency relief program	EECMY/Norwegian Church Aid (NCA)
August 2000 – May 03	Robe town and Raytu district, Bale Zone	Language studies Preliminary assessment for a community development project, coordinator of pilot literacy program	EECMY / NLM
January 2005- December 06	Raytu district, Bale Zone	Part time advisor in a community development project Research: Participant observation and qualitative interviews with grassroots in Raytu district	EECMY/NLM

Table 1: Overview of my work and research engagement in Ethiopia from 1999-2006

Our work during these years (1999-2003) required that we travelled to other areas of Bale Zone, as we were responsible for conducting preliminary assessments for new development interventions in the area. In Raytu, a rather peripheral district on the border to the Somali Region (see appendix 2 for map), we started up a small literacy program. We rented two rooms in the administrative center of the district, in Dhadhacha Bala’a village/town, where we stayed for shorter periods of time. While we spent most of the days travelling to rural villages where we would talk to people

and conduct participatory rural appraisals and surveys, we spent the evenings socializing with people in the small town.

The assessments we conducted during this period eventually led to the establishment of a larger community development project, run by the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY), but funded by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), through the Norwegian Lutheran Mission (NLM). After 1½ years in Norway, we moved to Raytu on a permanent basis in 2005. At this point I combined my role as part-time project advisor in the newly established project with ethnographic fieldwork for my MPhil thesis in International Health at the University of Bergen. The fact that I had been involved in the preliminary assessments and the pilot literacy program earlier, by then knew *Afaan Oromo* quite well, and had some basic knowledge of Oromo culture, made it relatively easy to enter the field in my new role as a researcher.

A small note on the significance attached to my modification of dress is interesting in this connection: When I first came to Raytu in 2001 I wore long jeans-skirts and wide, loose t-shirts, quite confident that I was decently dressed. After having stayed in the area for approximately a year, I bought the kind of dress used by most of the women in Raytu; a long, wide shapeless cotton dress (*diria*) and an underskirt (*gogora*). The purchase was not done consciously in an attempt to be more culturally appropriate. I bought it simply because it seemed practical in the hot, but dusty dry weather. As I stepped out in the village in my new dress, I was therefore unprepared for the reactions it created. For the first time, I was greeted and actively approached by women. I passed by houses and compounds and women were shouting to me from afar, commenting on the beauty of my new dress. This made me realize that my previous way of dressing had created greater distance than I had been able to grasp. From this day, I dressed like the women in Raytu; except for covering my hair. In Raytu, all married women cover their hair with a scarf (*guufta*).

After some time some of the women started encouraging me to cover my hair as well. When they first raised the issue, I did not totally reject the idea. In fact, I bought the

scarf, and the women willingly and enthusiastically offered me their assistance to arrange it. But I felt stupid and uncomfortable and decided not to use it. When I returned to the area in 2005 I had changed my mind. On the day of our return I was dressed just like the other married women in the area, including a scarf to cover my hair. It was met with overwhelmingly positive comments, both from men and women.

While my earlier engagement, my knowledge of the local language and culture, in many ways were key factors that facilitated access to the field, my affiliation with, and my involvement in the community development project, did however, complicate my role as a researcher. Although I would make it clear that I now also was a researcher, it is likely that many of my informants first and foremost associated me with the project, and viewed me as a person with whom a good relationship could be beneficial. This indeed actualizes questions about the relationship between research, inequality and economic resources. In addition, the establishment of a more permanent development project in the district included the construction of a project base. When we returned to Raytu in 2005 we moved into a newly constructed house, situated in a fenced project compound, on the outskirts of the small town/village. This made it more challenging to be part of the ongoing social life in the village. We were no longer part of a neighborhood and it was not as easy for people to drop by for a chat.

People from the town and the villages soon learned, however, that our house was always open to visitors, and our earlier involvement in the area made it relatively easy to build up a network of key informants. Knowing that both my husband and I had a great interest in learning about local culture, religion and history, religious and traditional leaders (*hayyuu*), as well as some of the most respected women in the area became frequent visitors to our home. As much as possible I also strove to be involved in people's daily lives. I was often invited to weddings; I attended funerals and blessing ceremonies related to childbirth and enjoyed being invited to participate in breaking the fast during Ramadan. Almost every afternoon, I would go for a walk in the village, and this always generated invitations to sit down in the shade in

people's compounds. While these arbitrary visits were invaluable in terms of getting to know what was going on in the village, I also used these times to acquire information about specific topics systematically. My research was, during this time, guided by an interest in exploring local culture as a potential resource in HIV/ AIDS prevention. A local concept, *wayyuu* (see Østebø, 2010), soon emerged as central in terms of regulating sexuality, and exploring the multiple meanings and practical implications of this concept eventually became my main focus.

The nature of my work also allowed me to have close interactions with people in the town and rural villages, particularly the women. As a health professional (nurse) I was involved in the training of traditional birth attendants (TBAs) and I spent considerable time with TBAs, both during the workshops organized as part of the project's activities, but also socializing with them while visiting the villages. In addition, my work as an advisor for the project required me to travel to follow up activities and community development workers in the rural villages. The time I spent travelling provided great opportunities for the collection of data. As transportation opportunities in the district were very limited, there were always people who wanted a lift. I made it a rule to fill up the car for every journey and this became an important space for my ethnographic fieldwork. The informal conversations in the car and during my daily, social interaction with people in the area were invaluable, as people appeared to associate these times less with my work in the project. Compared to the 37 formal unstructured interviews I conducted during this period, these informal talks seemed to provide me with far more reliable information.

These periods of development work and ethnographic research imply that I was not starting from scratch when I embarked on my multi-sited research project in 2010.

3.2 Multi-sited ethnography – a brief introduction

In contrast to conventional ethnography, which has often been associated with in-depth, preferably long-term, participant observation in a single bounded site, multi-

sited ethnography involves fieldwork in multiple social and geographical sites. The approach was first described by George E. Marcus in 1995, who rather than inventing a new approach, labeled and framed an emerging research trend (Candea, 2007: 168, Marcus, 1995: 95). He proposed multi-sited ethnography as an alternative “mode” of ethnographic research that would better capture the complex global and transnational processes that characterize the contemporary world system (1995). The approach has been much debated and criticized (Friedman, 2002, Hage, 2005), but has, in the years following Marcus’ acclaimed publication, become more or less established as a part of conventional anthropological practice (Candea, 2007: 169). Since it is a methodological approach which is considered to be useful for studying transnational institutions, processes and networks (Markowitz, 2001, Hovland, 2005, Hannerz, 2003), it has been applied in a number of studies of development aid (see e.g. Crewe and Harrison, 1998, Mosse, 2005).

What constitutes a field site? And what is the meaning of space and place? These are some of the questions that have increasingly been debated within anthropology and other social sciences and which have partly been triggered by the emergence of multi-sited ethnography (Horst, 2009: 120). In conventional ethnography, ‘the field’ has often been perceived of as “a geographical place waiting to be entered” (Horst, 2009: 122). A key postulation in multi-sited ethnography is that the object of study or the field site “cannot be found somewhere out there” (Nadai and Maeder, 2005: 4); it is a “conceptual space whose boundaries are constantly negotiated and constructed” by the researcher (Horst, 2009: 122). Using the metaphors “tracking and following” Marcus has described different modes through which the researcher constructs the site; namely by following or tracking people, things, metaphors, plots, life stories or conflicts (1995: 106 ff.). Using these strategies or modes of inquiry across multiple sites will, according to Marcus, allow the researcher to explore the circulation of meanings and the interconnectedness between objects and identities (1995: 96). In the next section I provide an overview of how ‘the field’ was constructed in this study.

3.3 Constructing the field

In order to track translations of Norwegian gender equality policies from their formulation at policy level in Norway to Norwegian-funded development projects in Ethiopia, the aid chains of two projects were initially selected as ‘field-sites’ or ‘objects of study’ (see figure 1). The aid chain can be defined as “the series of links through which aid flows on its way from donors to recipients” (Bornstein, 2003: 396). The selection of these projects and their respective aid chains was based on the following criteria:

1. The projects should receive funding from the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) (through Norwegian intermediate organizations)
2. The projects should have a focus on women’s rights, gender equality and violence against women
3. The projects should be geographically located in the Oromia Regional State of Ethiopia

While the first two criteria were derived from the overall aim of the larger research project of which this study is a part, the third was informed by my earlier work and research experience in the area. By selecting projects located in this area, I would be able to draw on my existing knowledge and networks. These criteria guided a web-based search for potential projects, which led to the selection of two development projects and their respective aid chains. One was the project in Raytu district mentioned above. The other was a project implemented by a local NGO named the African Development Aid Association (ADAA).¹⁹ The object of study as it was constructed prior to fieldwork is presented in figure one and consists of three ‘units’ which I have termed: 1) Norwegian state policies on gender and aid, 2) the Digni aid chain and 3) the Norwegian Church Aid aid chain.²⁰ In the next section I first provide a brief description of the different actors and the levels that constitute these three units. This is followed by a brief overview of the research process.

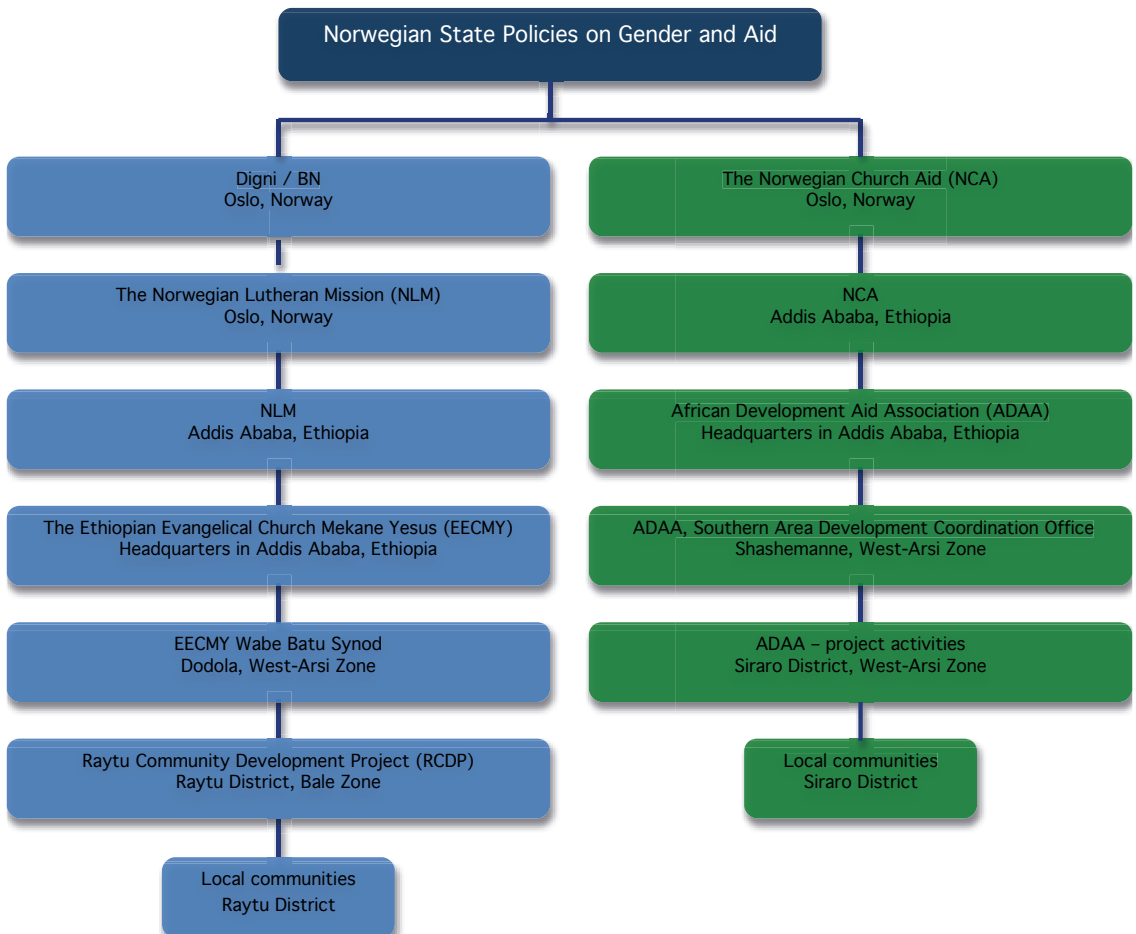


Figure 1: The 'object of study'

3.3.1 Norwegian state policies on gender and aid

Textual analysis of two selected policy documents was the main research strategy employed to explore Norwegian official policies on gender and aid. These policies were 1) the Action Plan *Women's Rights and Gender Equality in Development Cooperation*²¹ which was first launched for the period 2007-2009 and later extended to 2013, and 2) the White Paper *“On Equal Terms: Women's Rights and Gender*

Equality in Development”²² (author’s translation) which in 2008 was presented to the parliament where it gained cross-party support. The documents were chosen because they outline current political objectives, prioritizations and strategies pertaining to gender and aid. For comparative perspectives we also reviewed the 1997-2005 gender strategy (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1997), and action plans and policy documents of other international donors, such as the UK Department for International Development (DFID) (2007, 2009) and the World Bank (2011, 2006). The analysis of these documents started during the first phase of the research process and resulted in paper I.

3.3.2 The Digni aid chain

Digni (previously Bistandsnemnda (BN) / the Norwegian Missions in Development) is an umbrella organization for 18 churches and mission societies in Norway. In terms of official development assistance from NORAD, the organization is the second largest.²³ Digni is responsible for the allocation of funds to its member organizations and for the coordination and follow up of their development projects. The Norwegian Lutheran Mission (NLM) is one of Digni’s largest members. The organization has been involved in mission and development work in Ethiopia since 1948, and has a local branch office in Addis Ababa. NLM’s cooperative partner in Ethiopia is the Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY), the largest protestant church in the country. The church is divided into synods, with each synod having a development wing, responsible for implementation of humanitarian interventions and development projects in their respective geographical areas. The Raytu Community Development Project, which belongs under the Wabe Batu synod of the EECMY, is located in Raytu district, 600 km southeast of Addis Ababa, on the border to the Somali region (see appendix 2 for map).

Raytu covers an estimated area of 6,139 square kilometers and with an altitude ranging from 400 m to 1700 m above sea level the district is considered a lowland area. Erratic rainfall, high temperatures and low humidity characterize the climate. There are no perennial water sources in the area and water shortage is a major

problem. The district is chronically food-insecure, and a high proportion of the population depends on relief aid. The people are semi-pastoralists, and livestock, such as goats, cattle and camels, constitute a central part of people's livelihood. Teff, maize and sorghum are also cultivated in the area, but the erratic rainfall often results in failed harvests. The majority of the population in Raytu district is Muslim and belong to the Arsi subgroup of the Oromo, the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia.

3.3.3 The Norwegian Church Aid aid chain

Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) defines itself as “an ecumenical diaconal organization for global justice”.²⁴ The organization is the largest receiver of official development assistance from the Norwegian government.²⁵ NCA has been described as an “organization rooted in a Christian tradition and in the churches, but one in which processes aiming for liberation from oppression in its many forms are the core of its activities, not the recruitment of new followers of Christianity” (Haugen, 2007: 165). Compared to Digni's member organizations, whose partners in the global south are churches and Christian organizations, NCA cooperates also with secular NGOs or with organizations “embedded in other religions” (Haugen, 2007: 165). NCA's engagement in Ethiopia dates back to the famine in 1974. In addition to partnering major religious institutions in the country, such as the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY), the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) and the Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council/Ethiopian Muslims Development Agency (EIASC/EMDA), the organization work with the Ethiopian Federal Ministry of Federal Affairs and a number of secular organizations.²⁶ In 2010 the African Development Aid Association (ADAA), a secular local NGO was one of NCA's partners, implementing activities aimed at strengthening women's rights and gender equality in Siraro district.

Siraro covers an estimated area of 674 square km with an altitude ranging from 1500 to 2750 meters above sea level. Siraro is geographically located in West-Arsi zone of the Oromia regional state, approximately 250 km from Addis Ababa (see appendix 2 for map). The district is characterized by a mixed crop/livestock farming system

(Amenu et al., 2013). The population in the district is predominately rural but the area is densely populated (Chinigò, 2011: 166). There are few perennial water sources in Siraro district and similarly to Raytu, the population in the area experiences frequent food insecurity and is dependent on relief aid. In addition to teff, maize and sorghum, horse beans, haricot beans, potatoes and other crops are cultivated in the district. The majority of the population in Sirao belongs to the Arsi Oromo ethnic group and are Muslims.

3.4 The research process

The research design and the field as outlined above mirror Marcus' description of how multi-sited projects are often "designed around chains, paths, threads, conjunctions (...) in which the ethnographer establishes some form of literal, physical presence, with an explicit, posited logic of association or connection among sites" (1995: 105). Ester Gallo (2009: 89) has described this as a "formal understanding of multi-sited ethnography [which] emerges from the objective of following a 'known conventional process' – this being a person, object or idea" (or as is the case with the aid chain, - an organizational structure). She does, however argue that: "in my experience what was (partially) known became almost 'unknown' as I had to locate my initial interest within a set of emerging, unexpected relations and research possibilities" (2009: 89). The tension between what Gallo describes as the 'partially known', the a priori selected sites, and the construction of the object of study through the course of the research process as much more of an unknown entity, resonates with my own experiences. I will describe this in the next section, which outlines how the process of 'following' evolved in this particular study. The field research for the multi-sited project was conducted in five phases. Table 2 provides an overview of when and where each phase was conducted.

Timeframe	Geographical location	Type of engagement	Organizations
Phase one: February – June 2010	NORWAY: Oslo, Stavanger	Qualitative interviews, participant observation in Digni and in the WEGE program	Digni, NLM, the Norwegian Mission Society (NMS) Norway, NORAD, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Phase two: November – December 2010	ETHIOPIA: Addis Ababa, Gimbi (West Wellega Zone) Siraro NORWAY: Oslo	Participant observation in WEGE seminars and workshops in Ethiopia and Norway, observation of project activities, initial field visit to Siraro district, qualitative interviews with informants in the organizations	Digni, NLM -Ethiopia, NMS - Ethiopia, EECMY, African Development Aid Association (ADAA)
Phase three: March-April 2011	ETHIOPIA: Addis Ababa, Raytu district	Qualitative interviews in the organizations and with government officials and grassroots informants in Raytu district, observation of project activities in Raytu, participant observation in Raytu town	NCA, EECMY, ADAA
Phase four: June – August 2011	ETHIOPIA: Addis Ababa, Robe town, Raytu and Siraro district	Qualitative interviews in the organizations, with government officials, representatives from the juridical system, and religious leaders in Addis Ababa. Participant observation and qualitative interviews in Raytu and Siraro district	EECMY, NCA, Women of Faith, Evangelical Church Fellowship of Ethiopia, KMG, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), British Council, the Lutheran World Federation (LWF)
Phase five: October – November 2012	ETHIOPIA: Addis Ababa, Siraro district	Qualitative interviews in the organizations, qualitative interviews in Siraro district	HUNDEE, EGLDAM, Population Media Center, EECMY, Save the Children Norway, NCA

Table 2: Overview of the multi-sited research project carried out from 2010-2012

3.4.1 Following aid chains

With the intention of tracking ideas and practices related to Norwegian gender and aid policies, I started the fieldwork in the Digni aid chain in spring 2010. I followed this chain quite rigorously, from the top in Digni's office in Norway, through the intermediate organizations and all the way down to project level in Raytu district.

The research process became, however, much more complex than the original research design had suggested. Research topics and questions emerged that required me to step out of the aid chain. Informants and 'sites' outside the pre-identified organizational chain were identified and added. This happened partly because, early in the research process, I realized the centrality of the Women Empowerment and Gender Equality (WEGE) program to the organizations' gender and development work and therefore decided to track the thinking around and the implementation of this program. The WEGE program, which is described thoroughly in paper II, was a

three-year program initiated by Digni following an earmarked grant from NORAD in 2007. The program involved three of Digni's member organizations, four of their respective partners in the global south and six development projects in four countries in Latin America and Africa. To pay particular attention to this program made sense, since one of the projects initially selected to be a part of this study, the project in Raytu, had been invited to be involved in the WEGE program. The decision to follow WEGE did, however, imply that the 'object of study' was expanded. In addition to the inclusion of one of the other Digni member organizations, the Norwegian Mission Society (NMS), the fieldwork was extended to include participation in transnational seminars and workshops that were part of the overall WEGE program. I attended a regional WEGE workshop in Ethiopia, which, in addition to participants from two development projects within the country, included representatives from Digni's secretariat in Oslo, from two of the member organizations and from the WEGE initiative in Madagascar. I also participated at the final WEGE annual seminar in Norway, where representatives from all the six WEGE projects were present. Empirical findings based on the research in the Digni chain resulted in paper II, and have partially informed papers III and IV.

While the research related to the Digni aid chain started at the top of this organizational structure, the first encounter with informants in the Norwegian Church Aid chain happened at a lower level, in Siraro district and in one of African Development Aid Association's (ADAA) local branch offices. During a short field visit (which I carried out between participating in different events related to the WEGE program during the second phase of the field-work) I gained important insights, which, combined with the experiences I had gained from following the Digni aid chain, influenced how I proceeded with the fieldwork in the NCA aid chain.

While following the organizational structure proved to be an important mode of inquiry in terms of sorting out certain relations between the different organizational levels in the Digni aid chain, and crucial in terms of identifying the organizational deviations that came into play as part of the implementation of the WEGE program, I realized that it was much more problematic to track particular Norwegian gender

equality ideas through the two selected aid chains. It was problematic for three reasons. First, the idea of tracking ideas through the aid chains was based on the assumption that ideas are moving through and trickle down through this organizational structure, as if it is a more or less closed, hierarchical unit. Second, the initial idea of tracking the influence of Norwegian ideas and policies all the way down to a project in a remote area of Ethiopia did not take into account that development projects operate in a context where other actors are also involved. In Ethiopia, both the government and other NGOs put considerable effort into promoting gender equality and women's rights. This was something that had not been considered sufficiently in the research design. In fact, the original research proposal did not include a focus on the Ethiopian government at all. Recognizing the increased co-optation of civil society by the Ethiopian state, a stronger focus on the role of government-affiliated actors became inevitable. Third, I realized that local organizations in Ethiopia often rely on funding from multiple donors who might have diverging agendas and priorities, and whose commitment to partnership with local NGOs may vary depending on the organization's capacity to prove its success. This was the case for the African Development Aid Association (ADAA). In fact, I not only discovered that the organization was funded by multiple international NGOs: during the third fieldwork phase I also learnt that NCA had ended its partnership with ADAA.

These were some of the factors that led me to reconsider and partly redefine the research related to the predefined NCA chain. Although I ended up conducting research among most of the actors and the 'sites' that had initially been identified as part of the NCA chain, I did not explore the organizational relationships between the different actors in the same manner as I did in the Digni aid chain. Instead, I decided to focus on one particular topic and not limit this part of my research to the actors in the NCA aid chain. Interviews with key informants at NCA's office in Addis Ababa revealed early on that the organization's gender and development work was dominated by a focus on FGM/C. The organization was, in particular, working with religious leaders as a strategy in relation to FGM/C. Since this topic had also surfaced

as an issue in the Digni aid chain, it caught my attention. I was interested in exploring whether the strategy of involving religious leaders mirrored the religious identity of these organizations, or whether it was part of a more general strategy adopted by secular organizations as well. I therefore decided to approach other organizations and projects that worked on FGM. I met with and interviewed representatives from organizations such as Women of Faith (WoF), Evangelical Church Fellowship of Ethiopia (ECFE), Ye Ethiopia Goji Limadawi Dirigitoch Aswogay Mahiber (EGLDAM – also known as the National Committee on Traditional Practices in Ethiopia), Lutheran World Federation (LWF), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), British Council, Kembatti Mentii Gezzima – better known as KMG-Ethiopia, the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), Hundee, Population Media Center, Save the Children Norway/Ethiopia (SCN/E) and Dan Church Aid. A number of these organizations, such as EGLDAM, Population Media Center, KMG, UNFPA and SCN/E are, along with NCA, major actors in terms of anti-FGM interventions in Ethiopia. I also interviewed members of different churches and formal and informal leaders of the Muslim community, in Addis Ababa, in Bale Zone and in West-Arsi Zone. I visited projects that particularly addressed FGM and observed their activities. As with the research conducted in the Digni-chain, the field was expanded.

The research among grassroots in Raytu and Siraro district became less focused on tracking the extent to which Norwegian policies had trickled down and influenced development practice on the ground. Realizing that this was a rather naïve notion in this context, I decided to explore discourses on gender equality in these two districts more generally. The role of government actors, particularly the Women's and Children Affairs offices, rather than that of a particular NGO or project, thus became part of the focus. The interviews in these rural districts focused on conceptualizations of gender equality in general and on FGM in particular, and have informed papers III and IV.

3.5 Multi-sited ethnography – a discussion

Before providing a description of the methods employed in this project, I shall briefly discuss my experiences and some of the challenges that are associated with multi-sited ethnography. Let me first share a few reflections on the relationship between the initial research design and the ‘field’ as it turned out to be. One may argue that the changes described above are neither unusual nor particular. Within anthropology it is, as pointed out by Candea, rather common to perceive initial research plans as “anything but a binding document”, and for students to hear that “no one ends up working on what they set out to work on in the first place” (2009: 33). Still, I will argue, that there was an inherent contradiction between my choice of multi-sited ethnography as a research strategy and the initial research design,²⁷ as the latter assumed a rather bounded, ‘known’ and predetermined ‘object of study’, constituted of purposely selected organizations, actors and sites in a hierarchical structure. One of the main characteristics of a multi-sited approach is, however, as has been outlined above, that the object of study is constructed through processes of following or tracking. This makes it impossible to determine “what these sites eventually turn out to be” (Gallo, 2009: 89) and the research design and the field site is therefore, as Candea has argued, “designed a posteriori” (Candea, 2007: 170).

On the other hand one could say that the selections and choices reflected in the original design were a way of bounding the site; an issue that multi-sited ethnography has often failed to address, but which is crucial for any ethnographer to undergo in order to “reduce the initial indeterminacy of field experience into a meaningful account” (Candea, 2007: 169). This bounding was, however, not without challenges. I found myself struggling, caught between my intention to follow gender equality policies/ideas and practices within the boundaries of the predefined aid chains, while at the same time encountering challenges, questions and research topics that pushed me out of these boundaries. To make choices, to prioritize some topics over other, to decide where to spend time, where to go, when and for how long, to decide on which threads and questions to follow and which to let go, created constant uncertainties and a feeling of being under the “tyranny of choice” (Salecl cited in Candea, 2009: 34).

One could certainly question, to what extent “being there,and there, ...and there” (Hannerz, 2003: 201), affects the depth than one so often strives for in anthropology, a point which has been voiced by scholars who have criticized the approach (see e.g. Friedman, 2002: 23, Wogan, 2004: 130). The multi-sited ethnography that I ended up doing, certainly did not allow for the slow-pace kind of fieldwork I had conducted from 2005-6. However, my earlier long-term engagement and familiarity with what came to be the object of study made up for some of this. Another point made by Cindy Horst, and which also applies to this study is that “the purpose of multi-sited fieldwork is not a ‘full’, located understanding of ‘culture’, but rather one which targets transnational networks and flows” (Horst, 2009: 126).

A related question pertains to whether it was too ambitious to focus on two aid chains in the first place. The selection of two chains was based on the assumption that this would provide comparative perspectives. As the research process evolved, and I was caught up in the Digni aid chain much more than I had originally planned, it became clear that it was practically impossible, within the timeframe, to follow the NCA chain in an equally rigorous and systematic manner. This is not to say that a focus on two aid chains was not useful. I would, for example, probably not have realized the increased focus on religious leaders as a strategy in development in general and in anti-FGM interventions in particular had it not been for my engagement with both aid chains.

3.6 Methods

In terms of methodological tools, multi-sited ethnography is associated with great freedom (Candea, 2007). Scholars have used terms such as “methodological bricolage” (Marcus, 2009: 181) or “polymorphous engagements” (Hannerz, 2003: 212) to describe the research practices inherent in the approach. The researcher is viewed as a “bricoleur” or a “quilt maker”; - one who uses “whatever strategies, methods and empirical materials that are at hand” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005: 4). Although participant observation is considered an important research strategy in

multi-sited studies, Hannerz concludes that, due to the fact that the researcher often has to handle more places within the same time-frame that “classical field work would devote to one” (2003: 211), there is a tendency to rely more on interviews than on participant observation in multi-sited studies. This also applies to this study.

The fieldwork conducted from 2010-12 did, only to a limited extent, involve the kind of participant observation I had conducted earlier. When I was conducting fieldwork in Raytu and Siraro districts, I stayed with local families and did have some time to just ‘hang out’. But compared to the earlier fieldwork, there was limited time for a low-pace kind of ethnography. The fieldwork in these two districts, moreover, included visits to and observations of different development activities and projects. I attended community meetings that addressed issues related to health, women’s rights and gender equality, visited a local ‘women’s empowerment and gender equality club’ and joined meetings with credit and saving cooperatives.

Participant observation was also conducted as part of the fieldwork in the organizations, particularly for the research in the Digni chain. I was, among others, offered an office space at Digni’s office in Oslo where I stayed during the two weeks when I was conducting interviews. This, along with participation in workshops and seminars, proved to be a valuable venue in terms of access to informants and building rapport.

The most important research approaches used during the five periods of fieldwork were semi-structured interviews and informal conversations. A total of 103 semi-structured interviews were conducted as part of this study (see appendix 4 for an overview). Before describing the interviews, I provide a brief overview of the informants and how they were selected.

3.6.1 The informants

Prior to the first fieldwork in Norway I had identified a limited number of key informants within each of the organizations; mainly persons I assumed would be relevant because of their involvement in gender and development work. As fieldwork

progressed the list of people ‘you should talk to’ grew, and the selection of informants turned into a snowball sampling, where the snowball kept on rolling. This led, among others, to the inclusion of informants at the higher level of the organizational hierarchies. For example, individuals in leadership positions, who were not directly involved in the organizations’ gender and development work, but who were, nevertheless, perceived to be key actors were included. In Digni, I ended up interviewing all the current employees of the secretariat, former employees and former and current members of the organization’s board.

The recruitment of informants in the civil society organizations in Ethiopia was similar to that in Norway, but perhaps more arbitrary. To set up appointments with informants beforehand is not always easy in Ethiopia, so my first encounter with an organization or a government office was often a first, unannounced visit. After introducing myself and my objective to a secretary I would typically be directed to the organization’s director, a deputy or a section head for gender and development. Sometimes these initial visits resulted in one or even two interviews or informal conversations; other times they functioned as a chance to introduce myself, and to set up appointment for an interview another day. The majority of the informants who were in administrative positions in the civil society organizations in Ethiopia were well educated; some with higher degrees from universities in Europe or the US and all were fluent speakers of English. This was not the case for employees at project level, who were often 12th grade graduates.

My approach to informants within the government structure in Ethiopia, which I limited to the Women’s and Children’s Affairs ‘machinery’ was similar to that of the civil society organizations in terms of the way I approached them. During my first encounter with these government-affiliated organizations, be it at central level in Addis Ababa, at zone or at district level, I always aimed to gain a meeting with a chief executive first. Some of these higher officials had long experience working with gender-related issues; others had recently been employed and had been appointed for political reasons, rather than for their expertise within the field. The majority of the informants I met with and whom I interviewed at the district levels were in lower

positions; they were so-called ‘gender experts’. The individuals I talked to in this category of informants tended to be very young, and many of them had recently graduated from one of the Teacher Training Colleges in the country. They often reported having no special training in gender prior to their employment.

The informants at grassroots level were mainly peasants. In Raytu district, where I already had a well-established network of informants, I mainly relied on informal conversations with married women and men between the ages 18-60. While some of them were traditional birth attendants and traditional or religious leaders, others were just ‘ordinary’ men and women whom I knew well and with whom I had developed relationships of trust and friendship. The majority of the informants in this category were illiterate. In Siraro district I relied much more on semi-structured interviews than in Raytu. This was, as shown in the table in appendix 4, particularly the case with women. Also here, the majority of the informants were peasants; men and women whose level of formal education was very low. Some of the women were selected because they had a position as head of the women’s affairs in their village, and, as in Raytu, some of the men were also selected because they were considered to be influential individuals in their communities. The majority of the informants in Siraro were purposely selected from within the social networks of two research assistants (see below for rationale).

3.6.2 The interviews

Most of the semi-structured interviews conducted in Norway took place in the office of the interviewee, were undisturbed and lasted between 50 – 90 minutes.²⁸ All the interviews conducted in Norway were recorded, and the majority of them were later transcribed. While some of the interviews in Ethiopia were conducted in the interviewee’s workplace, many of the informants affiliated with the civil society organizations would suggest that we meet elsewhere; most commonly in a café or a restaurant, or in the informant’s home. This appeared to provide better privacy than the work place where it is common for three or four people to share a relatively small office space. Many of the talks in Ethiopia ended up as informal conversations, rather

than interviews as such. Some of the interviews at organizational level in Addis carried out during the first fieldwork in Ethiopia were recorded, but as I became aware of the political tension and increased government control, I decided to stop recording. Although I meticulously took notes during the interviews, and spent the evenings transcribing them, the interviews that were not recorded lack the richness and the detail that characterize the interviews I conducted in Norway.

To conduct interviews in privacy among the grassroots informants in Raytu and Siraro was more challenging. The majority of the interviews were conducted in the shade of a tree. I often started the interview with one informant, but the situation soon attracted other people who also would join in. A few times, I would politely explain to the newcomer that I wished to talk to the person alone. I found this problematic, however, so often I would say nothing and let the talk go on in a slightly adjusted manner. Some people would just sit down in the grass and listen to the interview, but very often the newcomers would join in, transforming the interview to a group conversation or an ad hoc focus group discussion. This particularly tended to happen when I interviewed men. When interviewing women I found myself to be stricter in terms of protecting the interviews from ‘intruders’. The interviews with the women were also more constrained in terms of time; I could often feel the informant’s distress knowing that she was on her way to the market, to the mill or had to tend to other chores. When I had the chance I therefore preferred to sit down with the women while they were preparing food or doing other types of work. I would, for example, help them peel beans or onions while chatting informally. These occasions were much less stressful and provided invaluable data.

Prior to the very first fieldwork, interview guides were developed for each level or ‘site’, including the grassroots. While some of the questions in these initial interview guides remained central throughout the interviews at all levels, the interview guides were constantly changed and revised. One of my research assistants helped me develop an interview guide in *Afaan Oromo*, which was used for the initial set of interviews that were conducted in Siraro district (see appendix 5).

The interviews conducted during the first three phases of the research process tended to address a relatively broad set of topics. They typically started with a general question. When interviewing informants in civil society organizations in both Norway and Ethiopia, I started with a question about the organization's involvement in issues related to gender and development and the informant's level of engagement in this work. This was a very open-ended and 'non-sensitive' question which was very effective in terms of getting "the interviewees talking" (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006: 316). With informants at the grassroots level I used a similar approach, starting the interviews with a question about what kind of particular responsibilities they had in their communities.

Other questions that were asked to the majority of the informants at an organizational level were: Do you think it is important to focus on gender issues?²⁹ If yes, why? What do you think is important to emphasize? How do the different stakeholders respond to the various gender initiatives? What are the challenges? The questions to the informants at the grassroots level were tailored to explore local conceptualizations of gender roles, the gendered division of labor and control over resources. In addition, the question guide included questions on two local concepts (*wayyuu* and *safuu*), which, on the basis of earlier research, I assumed were important in terms of regulating gender relations.

In almost all the interviews I asked a question about the meaning of gender equality. This turned out to be a rather tricky and challenging question. In the interview guides developed for informants in the civil society organizations the question was formulated as, "How do you understand the concept gender equality?" I often raised this question in the middle of, or towards the end of the interview. While most of the informants gave extensive and unconstrained responses to other questions, this question often silenced them. It created responses such as "huh... this is difficult..." and when the interviewees finally answered, their responses tended to have a diffuse and undetermined character. One may argue that the definitional character of the question created certain self-expectations and self-censorship among the informants, as the interviewees became focused on delivering the 'correct' definition. The

silencing could also be read as an indication of how diffuse and complex gender equality as a concept is.

Realizing that concrete questions about the meaning of gender equality created silence and hesitation (and in the rural districts in Ethiopia some of the informants were not familiar with the concept at all), I approached the grassroots informants with a question that was less ‘definitional’. The initial question I often asked was, “Have you heard about gender equality? If yes, what have you heard?” This was followed by questions aiming to reveal the interviewees’ perceptions of the idea. Since I also knew that many of the informants had attended workshops and training conducted by the government and NGOs, I also inquired into what they had heard during these meetings. As the issue of FGM and religious leaders emerged as a topic, questions that aimed to explore the informants’ perceptions and ideas about this issue were also included in the interviews.

Some of the interviewees, particularly those in the civil society organizations, were ‘self-going’, and rather than structuring the interviews around the pre-formulated questions in the interview guides, I would often just let the informants talk. Towards the end of the interview, I would go through the question guide and inquire into the topics that had not emerged naturally during the interview. During the interviews I encouraged and stimulated the informants to elaborate on particular issues using different types of probes, including leading questions. As the research process progressed and I realized the strong focus on work in the local gender discourse in Ethiopia I would, for example, ask a question like, “I have heard that when the government (*motumma*) talks about gender equality, they often talk about work. Have you heard this?” While some researchers cautions against using such probes (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006: 316), Bernard argues that they may often “produce more information than the informant would otherwise have provided” (2006: 220). It is therefore, “perfectly legitimate to use the information you’ve already collected to focus your subsequent interviews” (Bernard, 2006: 221). Another technique that I also used was “phased assertion” or “baiting”. This is type of probing which has been described “as a means of drawing out and convincing

informants that the field researcher is already an insider” (Collings, 2009: 134). It implies that

“(…) you act like you already know something in order to get people to open up. (…) As you learn a piece of a puzzle from one informant, you use it with the next informant to get more information (…) The more you seem to know, the more comfortable people feel about talking to you, and the less people feel they are actually divulging anything”. (Bernard, 2006: 222)

I found that phased assertion was particularly useful for getting information about issues of a sensitive nature. I would, for example, ask questions like, “I have been told by people in other areas, that religious leaders and others who participate in community meetings or workshops just pretend that they agree to stop practicing FGM. They don’t really mean it, and are still practicing. What do you think about this?” In my experience, this was an extremely useful way of getting access to what James C. Scott has termed hidden transcripts; to the “backstage” (1990: 4) discourse. It is, however, also a technique which has been regarded as unethical (Collings, 2009: 134), and I therefore used it carefully. The references to ‘people’ and to ‘other areas’ in the question were used deliberately to avoid association with particular informants.

3.6.3 Access, research assistance and trust

To get access to NGOs is considered to be challenging, as these organizations are known for their lack of openness and transparency (Wallace et al., 2006: 9). However, my experience was that access to the informants in the civil society organizations was relatively unproblematic. This was partly due to my previous engagement in this organizational landscape, which to some extent gave me status as an insider. I will return to some of the dilemmas and challenges related to this status in the discussion in chapter five.

My previous engagement in Raytu district and the fact that I had a well-established network of informants also made access to this part of the field relatively easy. The shift in the political climate in the country did, however, impact on my access to information. When I returned to Ethiopia for the first fieldwork in 2010, I was struck by the change. In 2006 political jokes still flourished and people would more or less

openly share their critical views on the situation in the country. This was not the case when I returned in 2010. Even people whom I knew well were, at this point, much more reluctant to share their ideas. In terms of freedom of speech the situation had, indeed, changed dramatically and continued to deteriorate through the course of my research. People suspected spies (*gurra* – ears) to be everywhere. The political climate particularly affected my access to religious leaders. I wished to interview them in relation to the role they played in the many anti-FGM interventions conducted by the government and the NGOs. Some of these interventions, such as the one we describe in paper III, were politically loaded, and this probably made them even more reluctant to talk. During the third fieldwork period, carried out during the summer of 2011, both my husband (who also has long-term experience conducting research among Muslims in Ethiopia) and I, made several attempts to approach religious leaders with whom we were well acquainted, but only one of them showed up for an appointment. A new attempt to get access to religious leaders was made in October 2012, when I returned for the last fieldwork. The political situation, and particularly the increased tensions between the Muslim population and the Ethiopian government during 2012 (see e.g. Østebø, 2013), made it even more difficult to get such access. In fact, due to the politically sensitive situation, I was advised by some of my key informants not to approach them at all.

While I was familiar with the field in Raytu, I was new to Siraro when I arrived for the first fieldwork in 2010. There were, however, many similarities between the two districts, and I was familiar with the overall culture and the language. A good friend in Norway, Wako Roba who originally is from Siraro, put me in touch with two of his relatives, Safewo Shako and Kediro Dima. These two young men played an invaluable role as gatekeepers, introducing me to the area, to their friends and families and to key informants. I was warmly welcomed and invited to stay in the homes of their relatives during my fieldwork in Siraro. Access to their social network proved to be key in terms of data gathering. The few interviews conducted with people with whom they did not have a close relationship were not very productive. The informants were suspicious, provided diffuse answers and it was clear that they did not want to share their ideas openly.

Safao and Kediro also became my research assistants in Siraro. They were both attending higher education and were functioning as translators during many of the interviews. In addition they were important key informants and discussion partners. Using a question guide that we together developed in *Afaan Oromo*, Safao also conducted an initial set of interviews before I joined him in the field. He transcribed the interviews into *Afaan Oromo* and provided a rough English translation of the interviews, that I later revised.

The importance of language for my ability to establish a relatively close and rapid rapport with many of the informants, both at organizational level in Ethiopia as well as in the rural districts, can probably not be overestimated. While engaging with a new informant, be it in civil society organizations or in government offices, I always introduced myself, either in *Amharic*³⁰ or in *Afaan Oromo*. This often raised amusement and questions about my background, and was extremely effective as an icebreaker. The large majority of the interviews or informal conversations conducted among the NGOs were conducted in English. As the level of knowledge of the English language was very low among informants in the government offices, even at regional level in Oromia, my communication with these informants was mostly in *Afaan Oromo*. Not only being able to communicate in *Amharic*, but also in *Afaan Oromo* was key to establishing rapport with informants, both in government offices and among the grassroots in the two rural districts.

On some occasions, particularly when conducting semi-structured interviews with new informants at the grassroots level, I preferred to use a translator, (which explains my use of translators and research assistants during the field work conducted in Siraro district). When interacting with informants I knew well, I found it more convenient to be on my own. There are obviously pros and cons associated with conducting research with and without assistants. On some occasions, I struggled to understand what was said, and there is no doubt that meanings were 'lost in translation'. In many situations, however, the fact that I was on my own, forced me to pick up and explore the meaning of new terms, and led me to explore words with rich connotative and symbolic meanings (as was the case with the concept of *wayyyuu*,

which I touch upon in paper four). Continuous language learning has, in itself, been an important part of the research strategy.

3.6.4 Field notes, analysis and data management

While I stated above that Bernard's description of ethnography also could be applied to my earliest work as a development practitioner (1999-2003), there are two fundamental factors that caution me to term it ethnography. The first is my lack of systematic observation, exploration and continuous analysis of particular phenomena. The second is my failure to record observations and conversations in field notes. The immense importance of field notes was something that truly struck me when I started my fieldwork in 2005. When I had lived in the area from 2000-3, I had participated in people's daily lives, observed a wide range of activities, attended weddings, funerals etc. While this was important in terms of developing tacit knowledge of social norms and cultural phenomena, I never processed my observations and experiences through the use of field notes or a diary. I was a rather 'unconscious' observer, who did not pay much attention to and did not engage in further exploration of the different cultural phenomena that I encountered. When I started my fieldwork in 2005, the immense importance of field notes, also beyond the recording aspect, really struck me. I realized that working with the field notes leads to a process of reflection, analysis and engaged learning. As I was writing up the field notes after an eventful day, I would suddenly discover and remember other things I had observed, but which I had not paid attention to while in the situation. New topics and questions would emerge that were crucial in terms of advancing the research. Since then I have valued field notes highly. When I have been in the field, I have always kept a note pad where I have jotted down keywords. These keywords have been invaluable in terms of triggering my memory for writing up the field notes. I have, except for on a few occasions, been able to write up the field notes the same day. In addition to descriptive notes of observations and conversations, the field notes also contain methodological and analytical notes (Bernard, 2006: 395 ff.).

A structured methodology or a predefined protocol has not been used in the analysis of the data. Instead a rather “informal” (Peräkylä, 2005: 870) or “general inductive approach” (Thomas, 2006: 238) has been employed. The aim of an inductive approach is to allow the researcher to identify emerging themes through careful reading and rereading of the empirical data, “without the restraints imposed by structured methodologies” (Thomas, 2006: 239). In projects using qualitative methods, there is no clear division between data collection and analysis. The preliminary analysis starts the moment one enters the field and is a continuous process, “undertaken every time data is collected” (Grbich, 2013: 21). This was also the case in this study, where, as described above, the daily writing up of field notes formed the basis of preliminary and continuous analysis. This allowed me to identify emerging themes and areas that needed follow up.

After each period of fieldwork a more rigorous analysis process was conducted. I first read thoroughly through all the field notes and the interviews. This generated a list of preliminary codes. The majority of the interviews that were conducted in the Digni aid chain were imported into the N-Vivo software program where the data was coded and dominant themes organized. While the program made it easier to search for fragments of texts about particular issues, I did not make the effort needed to learn the program properly so the analysis was a frustrating process. Feeling that my engagement with the text on paper was qualitatively different from working with the texts in N-Vivo, I often ended up analyzing the interviews and the field notes again using pen, paper and colored highlighters. Drawing flow charts (which in my experience is a rather messy process) in order to visualize ideas and relationships between emerging issues was also much easier to do on paper. While acknowledging the usefulness of software programs for data analysis, it became evident, as Bernard has argued that “(...) in the end, *you* do the analysis; *you* make the connections and formulate hypotheses to test; *you* draw conclusions and point them out to your reader” (Bernhard, 2006: 519-20). Selected interviews or smaller samples from interviews or the field notes, which were thematically relevant for each of the papers,

were also read and analyzed by the co-authors. This facilitated fruitful analytical discussions and multiple interpretation of the empirical material.

3.7 Ethical considerations

In Norway, the Data Protection Official for Research (NSD) was notified about the research project in fall 2009. The project was approved by NSD prior to the first fieldwork in March 2010 (reference number 23548/ 2/ LMR, see appendix 6).

In Ethiopia a research permit was granted by the Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, in the Faculty of Social Sciences at the Addis Ababa University (reference number CAOR/LT -195/2010, see appendix 7). I was provided with a letter of introduction in Amharic (reference number SOCI/DM/2010-2011/39, see appendix 8), and in English (appendix 9) that I always presented to official representatives from relevant governmental bodies and from civil society organizations as part of introducing myself and my research project. I did not present the letter to my informants at the community level, partly because a relatively large number of these informants were illiterate. Presenting a letter would reveal their illiteracy and would therefore be ethically more problematic. While a written consent was obtained from most of the informants in Norway, this was for the same reason, not obtained from research participants in Ethiopia. Where written consent was not obtained, the informants gave their oral consent. All informants who agreed to an interview were informed about the overall aim of the research project, anonymity issues and about their right to withdraw. However, since part of the data was collected through participant observation and informal conversations, I cannot claim that all participants have been informed, although I strove to make it clear that my participation and engagement in the different localities were research related. Such dilemmas pertaining to consent are well-known ethical challenges associated with conducting ethnography.

4. RESULTS – SYNOPSIS OF THE PAPERS

4.1 Paper I

Gender Equality in International Aid: What has Norwegian Gender Politics Got to Do With It?

In Norwegian aid policies on gender as well as in various official statements the image of Norway as a ‘world champion’ on gender equality is boldly spelled out and it is often emphasized that key lessons can be learnt from ‘the Norwegian model’, and from the country’s experiences on how to achieve gender equality. But what is the Norwegian model? To what extent are the issues that have been important in Norwegian domestic gender equality policies reflected in the country’s aid policies? And are the Norwegian experiences at all relevant for aid-receiving countries? These are the key questions addressed in this paper.

The paper consists of two parts. The first part, which is based on a literature review of Norwegian gender equality history illustrates that it is not possible to treat the Norwegian model as one constant entity. On the contrary, different models have dominated during different historical periods, but have also partly overlapped. While maternal rights and social policies aimed at strengthening motherhood and informal care characterized the policies in the early part of the 20th century, recent policies are characterized by a strong focus on strengthening the role of fathers as caregivers. The different models that have been at play in Norway are well captured in what Nancy Fraser has termed the *caregiver parity model*, the *universal breadwinner model* and the *universal caregiver model*. These models represent different ways in which welfare policies can be used to address the relationship between care and breadwinning.

In the second part of the article, which is based on a discursive analysis of current gender and aid policy documents, we examine to what extent these models have made an imprint on Norway's current gender and aid policies. While a relatively strong focus on the importance of women's increased engagement in the formal labor market may suggest that the policies reflect the universal breadwinner model, there are few traces of the welfare schemes and child care arrangements that have been crucial for increasing women's involvement in the labor market in Norway. We therefore conclude that the quintessence of Norwegian domestic gender equality politics – social policies that address the relationship between care and breadwinning - is largely silenced in Norway's aid policies. With a particular focus on the African context, we discuss the relevance of the various models for countries in the global south. While we question whether a specific model can be exported, we suggest that the Norwegian experiences may provide valuable policy inputs. Since Norwegian aid policies tend to reflect dominant international aid discourse rather than the specifically Norwegian experience, our analysis seems to have relevance beyond the particular Norwegian case. We argue that social policies addressing issues such as care, motherhood and fatherhood, should be located at the heart of the Norwegian and international gender and development policies.

4.2 Paper II

Strong State Policies on Gender and Aid: Threats and Opportunities for Norwegian Faith-based Organizations

This paper presents a case study of how Bistandsnemnda (BN)/ (now Digni), an umbrella organization for Norwegian mission organizations and churches, responded to increased pressure from the Norwegian state to focus on gender equality and women's rights as part of their development aid work. BN initiated a special program called Women Empowerment & Gender Equality (WEGE) in which the organization displayed an unusually strong involvement. The involvement implied that the

umbrella organization exceeded its given mandate, creating tensions and reactions among the organization's member organizations in Norway and among their respective partner organizations in the global south. In this paper we discuss this strong involvement. The paper is based on semi-structured interviews and participant observation in BN and in the member and partner organizations linked to the implementation of the WEGE program in projects in Ethiopia.

We explain BN's unusual engagement in this particular case with reference to both external and internal factors. First, our study revealed that BN, under the Stoltenberg government, experienced increased pressure to conform to what the Norwegian state defines as crosscutting issues, including gender equality. The pressure to comply with Norwegian state policies is generally high among civil society organizations in Norway since they receive more than 90 % of their funding from the state. Additionally, there has been political ambivalence with regards to the legitimacy of faith-based organizations receiving state funding, something that has been further fuelled by the presence of rather conservative gender policies in a number of BN's member organizations. This led to strong pressure on BN/Digni and its member organizations. A strong focus on gender equality on the part of BN was deemed to reduce the pressure and the questions related to BN's legitimacy as a faith-based organization. A one-sided focus on the external political pressure does not, however, provide sufficient explanation for what took place in this particular case. We argue that BN's strong involvement was simultaneously driven by a commitment to gender equality among actors within the concerned organizations. The increased political pressure to conform to Norwegian policies on gender equality gave actors within BN and the involved member organizations an opportunity to push for changes related to gender policy within an organizational landscape where there are elements of resistance to the dominant gender equality discourse.

While the strong involvement in and commitment to gender, revealed through this study, sheds light on how financial dependency on the state might influence NGOs, the case also illustrates how state policies can offer strategic opportunities for civil

society organizations. The common and generalized portrayal of religion and gender equality as antagonistic is also challenged in this paper. The WEGE case indicates that perceptions of gender equality and women's rights among faith-based organizations are complex. More research on the role of these organizations within the field of gender and development is needed to draw further conclusions.

4.3 Paper III

Religious Leaders—a Magic Bullet when addressing Gender Sensitive Issues? The case of Muslim Leaders and ‘Female Genital Mutilation’ in Ethiopia

In this paper, we discuss the increased use of religious leaders as a strategy in development practice in general, and in relation to gender-related issues in particular. In the Ethiopian context, the use of religious leaders has become an important part of the strategy to eradicate ‘Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C)’. According to reports from NGOs and UN-bodies operating in the country, the inclusion of religious leaders in the interventions has contributed to the abandonment of the practice in a number of areas. Many reports claim that whole communities and districts have collectively denounced FGM.

The paper provides examples of how NGOs are using and targeting religious leaders in anti-FGM interventions in Ethiopia. While our discussion and analysis largely revolve around one particular intervention conducted by a local NGO in a lowland district in the southeastern part of the country, the paper also gives an overview of Norwegian Church Aid's efforts to target and involve the top leadership of the major religious institutions in the country. The article sheds light on a number of challenges associated with these interventions, and illustrates that the realities on the ground are often far more complex than NGO reports indicate. We argue that many of these interventions reflect an instrumental approach to religious leaders, informed by narrow and static assumptions of power. For religious leaders to be actors of social

change, there has to be recognition that their power, and people's confidence in them, depends greatly on their performance and relations to other constituencies. The findings stress the importance of a critical discussion of the implications and limitations of instrumentalist approaches to religion and religious leaders within development practice. We contend that such a discussion is particularly important in a context where structures and discourses of a monological character dominate and influence the interventions, the local responses to the interventions, and the legitimacy of the religious leaders.

While the authoritative character of the Ethiopian government and the top-down approaches might be interpreted as examples of how power is congruent to and exercised through formal hierarchical structures, the paper also illustrates the dynamic and relational aspects of power, and how it is constantly negotiated. We suggest that the pretended acceptance and compliance, which we describe in the paper, and what one of our informants described as 'the laughing behind the backs of the NGOs', represent a way in which the grassroots navigate around policies and exercise power. This can be both by restricting the power of the dominant discourse, but also by exploiting the potential that pretended acceptance may have in terms of access to resources and benefits.

4.4 Paper IV

Rethinking Vernacularization: Translations of Gender Equality among rural Arsi Oromo in Ethiopia

How are global policies on women's rights and gender equality translated into local contexts, and who are the translators in this process? In an attempt to theorize these translation processes, the legal anthropologist Sally Engle Merry has introduced the concept 'vernacularization'. In this paper, which combines empirical data from the long-term ethnographic fieldwork conducted in 2006-2007 with data collected

through qualitative semi-structured interviews conducted in Raytu district of Bale Zone and Siraro district of West-Arsi Zone in 2011-2012, I critically discuss and challenge some of the assumptions that underpin Merry's thinking about vernacularization.

Whereas the majority of studies that have dealt with translations of gender equality and women's rights have concentrated on the role of transnational networks or local women's organizations, this paper focuses on the meanings that grassroots men and women attach to the concept 'gender equality'. In rural areas of Oromia, where the research was conducted, there was one particular topic which dominated the gender equality discourses; namely the issue of labor. The discourses can be roughly divided into two 'strands': The first, predominantly voiced by gender experts and government officials at the lower administrative levels (*worreda/district and kebele/village*), emphasized the importance of changing the gendered division of labor; while the second, mainly articulated by local men and women, accentuated the importance of collaborative work and mutual agreement through conjugal dialogue. Although these two discourses appear similar in terms of their focus on labor, they represent fundamentally different visions of gender equality; the former reflecting a vision of equality as sameness, the latter a vision of equality as gender complementarity.

In this paper, I attempt to situate these discourses within a broader cultural and political framework, and discuss them in light of Merry's vernacularization concept. I argue that Merry's theoritization rests on certain normative assumptions of what translation in general and translation of gender equality in particular, is and should be. This leads to a one-sided focus on the role of experts, activists, NGO workers etc. (so-called "vernacularizers"), and to a parallel lack of recognition and exclusion of the grassroots as actors in the translation process.

Rather than presenting either one or both of the discourses as examples of resistance, misinterpretations or limitations of vernacularization (which would have to be the case if one were to follow Merry's approach to the concept), I argue for the need to rethink and expand the concept of vernacularization. I suggest an approach to

vernacularization that builds on an understanding of translation as a transformative and dynamic process based on the premise that norms are not fixed but context dependent. This provides a less normative point of departure for analyzing processes of translation. It also opens up the translational space, as translation is not only limited to the 'vernacularizers'. Local men and women do not just assimilate the gender equality ideas that the development 'brokers' promote, but are actively engaged in a dialogue with the discourses in which they are situated; translating and recreating meanings of gender equality that resonate with local values, needs and priorities.

5. DISCUSSION

In this chapter I first reflect on and discuss selected methodological and ethical issues and challenges. This section is followed by a reflection on some of the main research findings of the thesis.

5.1 Reflexivity and the challenge of being an insider

The length restrictions of the thesis do not allow for a thorough discussion of all the methodological challenges associated with this research project. After a brief introduction to reflexivity I shall provide a short presentation of my theoretical positioning within anthropology of development. This is followed by a discussion of some of the challenges related to my status as an ‘insider’ in the development world in general and in the Digni aid chain in particular, and of some of the ethical dilemmas that are involved in managing shifting identities; both presumed/assumed and self-presented (Tewksbury and Gagné, 1997). My reason for focusing on the latter, and for not engaging in a more thorough discussion of ethical dilemmas associated with fieldwork at grassroots level in Ethiopia, is that ethical and methodological issues related to organizational research and “studying up”, a term which has been used to describe research conducted among elites and in powerful organizations (see e.g. Gusterson, 1997, Priyadharshini, 2003, Nader, 1972), is considered to be much more under-examined compared to studying the powerless, or “studying down” (Edwards, 2007: 561, Frühstück, 2007: 609).

5.1.1 Reflexivity

During the last few decades, reflexivity has been established as a central concept within qualitative research. The “reflexive turn” in social sciences emerged as a reaction to the idea of “objective methodologies” (Foley, 2002: 470), and as a result of increased recognition that knowledge is historically situated and “constructed, rather than discovered” (Alvesson et al., 2008: 480). Research within this tradition is

not simply seen as collection of value-free data. As argued by Nina Lykke, “there is no ‘outside’, no comfortably distant position, from which the world can be analyzed” (Lykke, 2010: 5). Processes of data collection as well as interpretation of data can not be separated from the researcher (Alvesson and Skjöldberg, 2000: 1). The researcher’s personal characteristics, biography and social, historical and cultural location is acknowledged as an inevitable part of the research process. To adapt a reflexive approach to research includes recognition of the role of the researcher in the production of knowledge. Reflexivity has been emphasized as an important part of multi-sited ethnography (Marcus, 1995: 112 ff.). Marcus argues that self-reflexivity becomes particularly important in multi-sited research projects as the researcher will find herself “with all sorts of crosscutting and contradictory personal commitments” (1995: 113) and is guaranteed to come across “discourses that overlap with his or her own” (1995: 115). He argues for conducting multi-sited fieldwork with a keen attentiveness to the landscape in which one is situated. As the landscape changes across sites, renegotiation of the researcher’s identity is required (1995: 113). I will return to the issue of shifting and renegotiation of identities below.

Much has been written about reflexivity, and various reflective ideological positions and practices have been identified (Marcus, 1994, Alvesson et al., 2008). Reflexivity has often been associated with critical explorations of “the self-other relationships of field work” (Foley, 2002: 473). Such practices have tended to produce highly subjective and autobiographical accounts. Some ethnographers, such as Geertz and Bourdieu, have dismissed these practices as a “self-indulgent (...) ‘diary disease’” (Geertz cited in Foley, 2002: 475) or as examples of “narcissistic self-criticism” (Bourdieu cited in Marcus, 1994: 393). This study draws inspiration from what Alvesson (2003) has termed a “reflexive pragmatic approach”, an approach which is of particular relevance to this study, as it specifically relates to conducting interviews in organizations. While Alvesson’s work also “offers fuel for a ‘researcher/self-focused’ type of reflexivity” (2003: 19) his approach goes beyond the subjective and autobiographical. His focus is on the interview situation, the interviewee, and the accounts produced, suggesting eight metaphors that may assist in the interpretations

of interviews. While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to present this framework in detail,³¹ his main argument is that accounts that are produced in an interview situation are often colored by a number of factors. This may be related to the interview situation itself and to the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee, to the identity position of the interviewee including an interest in legitimizing oneself and one's group through moral storytelling (in order to give a good impression of oneself and the organization) as well as the normative pressure to adopt certain talk. Informants often respond to the pressure from dominant discourses and their statements may be politically motivated. Reflexivity in this sense implies working with multiple interpretations and avoiding prioritizing a single, favored angle and vocabulary (Alvesson, 2003: 25).

A brief note about the pragmatic element of Alvesson's concept is needed. The pragmatism in his approach refers to the willingness of the researcher to bracket or postpone doubt and self-critique at times, and use the material for the achievements of results. As Alvesson argues, it implies "an adaptation to the constraints and a willingness to compromise between reflexive ideals and the need to 'deliver knowledge'" (2003: 25). This does not mean that self-reflexivity has been downplayed in this project. In fact, in line with Tvedt (2006a: 678) I contend that self-reflection and clarification of one's positioning is of the utmost importance when conducting research on development in general and on the role of NGOs in particular. This is especially important in the Norwegian context, where the boundaries between the research community, civil society organizations and the Norwegian state often are narrow and fluid. Self-reflexivity and analysis of the researchers' interpretations have therefore been a continual process. In the process of writing up this thesis, I have tried to make my biography and social, historical and cultural positioning explicit vis-à-vis the object of study. This is particularly reflected in chapter three, where I have spelled out my background and relationship to the field. I have attempted "to explore rather than conceal the personal connections and affinities that tie me to the field of study" (Mosse, 2005: 11). In the following I will try to make my theoretical positioning within anthropology of development more explicit. As will be illustrated

below, my engagement with anthropology has been shifting. Presenting this journey also facilitates a discussion of some of the ethical dilemmas that surfaced during the course of my research.

5.1.2 From ideological populism to methodological deconstructivism

My mode of anthropological engagement during my first years as a development practitioner can be described as what, in the introductory chapter, was termed *ideological populism*. Influenced by the development thinker, Robert Chambers, my interest in culture during these years had all the ingredients that Mosse and Lewis (2006: 3) attribute to this mode: a focus on bottom-up, participatory techniques and approaches, and on indigenous knowledge as a resource for development.

Through the years, and particularly from 2005 when, parallel to my engagement as a development worker, I conducted field-research, my engagement with anthropology became less normative and more critically oriented. This was partly because of my realization of the rather wide gap between development discourse and practice (see e.g. Olivier de Sardan, 2005: 4). Additionally, my engagement with local men and women in a predominantly Muslim pastoralist area, made me revise some of the presuppositions that had underpinned my earlier thinking and approaches to development. The assumptions I had about the role and situation of women were particularly challenged, as my research allowed me to realize that the one-sided and generalized image of the oppressed and victimized African woman, that I had uncritically adopted as a young development practitioner, was a highly problematic representation. My MPhil thesis mirrored a shift in my engagement with anthropology, as I moved away from focusing solely on applied aspects of culture in relation to HIV/AIDS prevention. The MPhil thesis ended up as an ethnographic account about women's respect and customary rights among the Arsi Oromo, and included a critical discussion of the relationship between culture and the global human rights discourse.

At the outset of the current multi-sited research project (in 2009), I found myself close to development thinkers in *ideological deconstructivism*; with theoretical strands which view international development as a predominantly top-down Western enterprise. However, during the course of the project, I realized that a one-sided ‘power-over’ perspective on development does not encompass the complexities and the negotiations that are played out between the different actors in development. As David Lewis and David Mosse have argued, such a perspective “overlooks the collaborative complicity (or duplicity) of marginal actors/institutions in development” (2006: 4). This theoretical shift affected my analyses, which gradually became more actor-oriented.

My personal journey through this anthropological landscape, and my shifting theoretical positioning, also serve to illustrate some of the ethical dilemmas I faced as a consequence of my position as a perceived ‘insider’. My previous experience with and engagement in the organizational landscape that constitutes part of the object of study, and my familiarity with the ‘ideoscape’ (Appadurai, 1990) of international development aid in general and with the politics of civil society and the state in Ethiopia in particular, was an important resource, crucial in terms of access to the field and a prerequisite for embarking on a rather complex research project. As Mosse has argued “the social processes of organizations are better understood from within. Certainly for outsiders access to the workings of development agencies is difficult” (2005: 11-2). On the other hand, my position in this landscape implied a constant renegotiation of my identity vis-à-vis ‘the field’: a renegotiation that was only partly conscious. This was particularly evident in the way I presented myself to different informants. While this constant renegotiation and shifting of identity became important in terms of gaining access to the field, it also involved ambivalence and created ethical dilemmas. With my background as a development practitioner (which I typically included as part of my self-presentation) I often found that informants assumed that I was more of an ‘insider’ than I really was. I believe that the informants in the faith-based organizations where I had previously worked, assumed to an even greater extent that they knew my positioning; that they thought my theoretical, epistemological, political and, not least, religious positioning was close to

their own. There is no doubt that this presumed identity created a situation of trust and rapport. While I do not claim that the informants shared their views unconditionally, the majority of the interviewees in the organizations in both Norway and Ethiopia shared their opinions, including critical ones, willingly. I had, on the other hand, and as described above, to a considerable extent, moved away from a normative, instrumental positioning. To what extent was I, as a researcher, obliged to correct my informants when I suspected that their assumptions about my identity were 'wrong'? Should I have revealed my shift in positioning and identity to these informants?

Revealing one's 'true' identity, or "one's preferred self-image" (Priyadharshini, 2003: 426) is much more tricky than may be presumed. Firstly, a person's identity is not something fixed or stable (Visweswaran, 1994: 60 ff., Priyadharshini, 2003). In my experience, conducting fieldwork implied a constant shifting and managing of not one, but multiple identities. I often found myself being able to identify with very differently situated informants. I had no problems identifying with enthusiastic informants who advocated the importance of gender equality, or who passionately shared their strong engagement in ending FGM. At the same time, I also found myself looking at these issues from 'the outside', from alternative and more critical angles. This created emotional uncertainties and I often experienced ambivalence when listening to an informant who passionately and willingly shared his or her ideas, knowing that the information and their viewpoints would feed into an ethnographical account of a more critical character. Was this ambivalence a sign of unethical research behavior?

Without doubt, as David Mosse has argued, it is challenging to conduct insider research in development organizations. What he terms "the exit into ethnographic writing" is particularly difficult as it involves "epistemological, ethical, and emotional dilemmas (...) every bit as complex as the negotiation of access to policy worlds" (2011: 52). It challenges and even "ruptures (...) professional and personal relations" (2011: 51-52). The difficulties in critical anthropological writing when "studying up", has also been discussed by Hugh Gusterson (1997). He points out that

“our subjects are powerful and literate” and “will read and argue with what is written about them” (1997: 117). A good example of this can be found in Mosse’s study of a development project in India. He describes how his insider accounts of the project created objections, complaints and accusations, particularly from program managers and his international consultant colleagues who attempted to stop his work from being published (2011, 2005). He was accused of being inaccurate and disrespectful. Some of his informants, whom he terms “powerful actors in the realm of international development (...) appealed to codes of research ethics” and used “ethical rules and procedures (...) to evade social science scrutiny, resist critical analysis, gain control over research and protect reputations and public images of success” (2011: 51).

Although I did not experience as much as Mosse describes, I did face similar criticism and arguments against my research following the publication of paper II (article about the WEGE program). Despite the fact that I “defended the soundness of my research methods, the accuracy of my data and the validity of the interpretations” (Mosse, 2011: 50) the criticism nevertheless created emotional ambiguity and questions: Had I misused my role as an insider, as was suggested in the reaction from one of the organizations that was a subject of the research? Should I have managed my identities in a different way, made my critical positioning clearer?

In addition to the point I have made above, about the researcher having multiple, shifting, and dynamic identities, rather than one stable and fixed identity, there are other factors that, in this particular context, made it difficult to make a particular position explicit. Firstly, if I were to wear “the badge of a critical researcher” (Priyadharshini, 2003: 426) presenting myself as an *ideological deconstructivist* (which was, as I have clarified earlier, my theoretical positioning at the start of the fieldwork), and voice ideas about development as an example of a Western hegemonic enterprise, I would most probably have jeopardized my access to the field. Taking into consideration the fact that gaining access is considered to be a major challenge when studying up (Gusterson, 1997: 114, Ortner, 2010, Priyadharshini, 2003) Esther Priyadharshini has in fact argued that the researcher is required “(...) to adapt to the context, to take on different stances, practices, and identities” (2003:

427). In other words, one may argue that whether or not I considered myself to be an insider, the difficulties in gaining and maintaining access may justify the fact that I did not clearly voice my subject position(s). A discussion about whether this is ethical or not is certainly legitimate. Acknowledging this as one of the ethical dilemmas associated with studying up, Priyadharshini nevertheless suggests that adopting “a strategic role in negotiating the terms of the research” and being “less attached to one’s preferred self-image” (2003: 426) may in fact be what is needed when doing qualitative research among powerful actors. The question is, “how far one can go in doing this without compromising one’s values” (Priyadharshini, 2003: 426). I would, however, be cautious of making this into purely a question of the researcher’s individual values. It is, for example, important to discuss, whether “the same ethics (...) developed for studying the private, and even ethics developed for studying in foreign cultures (where we are guests)” should apply to “the study of institutions, organizations, bureaucracies that have broad public impact” (Nader, 1972: 304-305).

While being perceived as an insider was crucial for gaining access to the field, it was also important for me as a researcher to maintain a certain distance. Balancing this relationship was essential in terms of generating independent research, something, that has been reported as lacking in development research in general, and in research on Norwegian development assistance in particular (Rosenberg et al., 2011). My earlier involvement in this organizational landscape, combined with attempts by some of the informants to control and influence my research, made me even more determined to produce independent accounts. Adapting a more fluid subject position did, as Priyadharshini has suggested, provide me with a sense of “flexibility of achieving both critical intimacy with and critical distance from researched subjects” (2003: 427).

5.2 Discussion of the main findings

In the discussion of the main findings of this project I have chosen to focus on two major themes; the multiple meanings and translations of gender equality that surfaced

in this study (here I mainly draw on the findings from papers I and IV), and on the relationship between strong gender policies and actors' strategies and responses (papers II and III).

5.2.1 Gender equality – multiple meanings and translations

Paper I illustrates how the meaning of 'gender equality' has shifted and been reshaped in the Norwegian context. Our literature analysis of what is often referred to as 'the Norwegian model,' shows how Norwegian domestic gender policies, at different historical times, have been informed by diverse and partly contradictory meanings of gender equality reflecting the tension between equality as 'sameness' or 'difference'. A number of studies have investigated how the meaning of gender equality in the Nordic context has been framed and shaped by political and historical factors (Melby et al., 2009: 1, Magnusson et al., 2008: 13). The relatively late move to a universal breadwinner model in Norway, compared to Sweden, has, for example, been explained with reference to Norway's slower transition from an agrarian to an industrialized society (Kabeer, 2008: 251). The relatively strong 'housewife ideology' and rhetoric of gender difference in Norway has furthermore been ascribed to the strong roots and roles of religious civil society organizations in the country (Kabeer, 2008: 251, Sainsbury, 2001: 119).

Different and coexisting visions of gender equality, once again fuelling the sameness-difference dilemma, also surface in paper IV. Based on research conducted in two rural districts in Ethiopia, the paper pays attention to the gender equality discourses that circulated in these localities during fieldwork conducted in 2011. The different meanings of gender equality that emerged in these localities reflected a strong emphasis on the issue of labor. Two radically different translations surfaced. On the one hand, gender experts associated with the governmental Women's and Children's Affairs offices stressed the importance of changing the gendered division of labor and voiced opinions that emerged as conceptions of gender equality as sameness. Grassroots informants, on the other hand, accentuated the importance of collaborative work and mutual agreement through conjugal dialogue. In this paper, I argue that the

grassroots' translation of gender equality reflects ideals of gender difference and gender complementarity, rooted in an Oromo worldview and in local gendered norms and practices. The paper pays particular attention to analyzing the grassroots' articulation of gender equality as working together, and seeks to illustrate how this translation seems to reflect a merging of contemporary political and economic discourses and local cultural norms and values. The cultural, economic and political embeddedness of the meaning of gender equality is, in other words, clearly illustrated in this paper.

As described in chapter one, Lombardo et.al (2009) have proposed shrinking, stretching, bending and fixing as analytical concepts useful for studying changes in meanings of gender equality. Two of these concepts, shrinking and bending, appear to be particularly relevant for paper I and paper IV. One of the questions we explore in paper I concerns the extent to which Norway's domestic gender policies have influenced the country's aid policies. As we show in paper I, current Norwegian gender and aid policies are largely consistent with dominant 'global' policies. Four thematic areas (women's political empowerment, women's economic empowerment, sexual and reproductive health and rights and violence against women) are emphasized in the policies, which, with the exception of some aspects of what is written about sexual and reproductive rights,³² all find their equivalence in the Beijing declaration's critical areas of concern.³³ In addition to the thematic areas, the policies focus on mainstreaming gender into other areas of development such as education, environment, peace building and good governance – other issues prioritized by the UN. The policies thus address a wide range of topics. We will, nevertheless, argue that the conceptualization of gender equality in Norwegian development policies is shrunk and bent when compared to Norwegian domestic gender policies as well as in relation to the ambitions inherent in the GAD framework.

In the first part of paper I, we show how social policies, aimed at bridging the relationship between reproduction and production, have been a core feature of Norwegian domestic gender policies. When we compared Norway's gender and aid

policies as formulated in key policy documents, with the so-called Norwegian model(s) and experiences, we found that there are few imprints of these lessons in the country's aid policies. The discursive rhetoric in the development policies underlines women's equal participation with men in the public sphere, and generally reflects a liberal conceptualization of equality as sameness. Although women's role in the informal economy is occasionally mentioned, it is their participation in the formal economy that is emphasized and favored. Such a relatively narrow "labor market perspective" is, according to Lomardo et.al "a typical example" (2009: 4) of a shrinking of the gender equality concept. The underlying assumption in Norwegian gender and development policies appears to be "that women's empowerment or emancipation (...) lies in their incorporation in the paid workforce" (Pearson, 2007: 202). Taking into account the strong Norwegian emphasis on the export value of the 'Norwegian model' and experiences, the total silencing of social policies that address the complex challenges related to reproduction and production, aspects which have been key features of Norwegian domestic policies, is however surprising. This peculiar absence suggests that in Norway's gender and aid policies the meaning of gender equality has been shrunk when compared to Norwegian domestic policies.

The meaning of gender equality in Norwegian aid policies has not only been shrunk when compared to domestic policies; it has also been shrunk when compared to visions found in the GAD framework. One of the main critiques of WID was, as outlined in chapter one, its neglect of welfare concerns (Pearson, 2007: 202 ff.), and of measures that could bridge women's reproductive and productive roles (Razavi and Miller, 1995a: 9 ff.). GAD was developed as an alternative framework, that aimed at "taking into account all aspects of women's lives" (Benería and Sen, 1981: 282) including the relationship between production and reproduction. The marginal attention that this issue has received, not only in Norwegian policies, but also in global gender policies, reflects a shrinking of the ideals that GAD sought to promote, and may indicate, as Rai has suggested, that "the GAD framework has not been able to influence development planning" (2011: 32).

I shall also suggest that a bending towards economic growth and an instrumental conceptualization of gender equality also is discernable in Norwegian gender and aid policies. In the policies, there are certainly statements that underscore the promotion of gender equality as a value in its own right. However, we also find a clear emphasis on gender equality as a key tool to achieve economic growth and poverty reduction. In the White Paper from 2008 it is stated quite bluntly that gender equality is good economics (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2008). This argument coincides with the overall argument in the World Bank's gender equality action plan from 2006 *Gender equality as Smart economics* (The World Bank, 2006). The underlying message in these policies is that women are an untapped resource and key to economic achievement and progress. The focus on women as instruments for development and on gender equality as smart economics has been critically discussed by scholars within the gender and development field (Elson, 2009, Roberts and Soederberg, 2012).

Strong indications of the 'gender as smart economics rhetoric', and a bending of gender equality towards economic growth also emerge in paper IV. This is illustrated in the way references to global buzzwords such as 'poverty reduction', 'development' and 'economic growth' surface as part of the gender equality discourse in the two rural districts in Ethiopia where my studies were carried out. A focus on women as key instruments in development and economic growth is, moreover, a central part of Ethiopia's current national policies. The Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP), launched in 2010, identified women's empowerment as one of nine pillar strategies. The plan aims for Ethiopia to achieve broad-based, accelerated and sustained economic growth, and to maintain annual GDP growth rates of at least 11 per cent so that the country can be categorized as a middle-income country. In this endeavor, the importance of increasing women's participation in agricultural activities and in the economy in general is strongly emphasized. This is reflected in the following statement: "Unleashing the power of girls and women will have a profound effect on the speed, equity and sustainability of Ethiopia's growth and development" (Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (MoFED), 2010: 12). One may conclude that

papers I and IV both show that the GAD framework have had limited impact and that the thinking and ideas from the WID paradigm still surface in both Norwegian and Ethiopian gender policies.

Whilst the four notions introduced by Lombardo et.al may be useful in order to compare and analyze different meanings of gender equality, the use of these concepts also presupposes the existence of a given gender equality norm. In order to determine whether a certain meaning of gender equality is stretched, bent, shrunk or fixed a certain standard is required for comparison. Lombardo et.al are aware of this and state:

“This means that we carry our own, implicit and explicit, normative assumptions about the criteria to assess the shaping of the meaning of gender equality, and thus see some interpretations of gender equality as more limited than others, compared with our own more or less explicitly defined concept of gender equality, which we think might produce better outcomes”. (2009: 8)

They therefore point to the importance of continuous reflection on one’s own values and attitudes towards gender equality. I will argue that the concepts of stretching, bending, shrinking and fixing are useful when comparing policies against a certain norm that has been given a relatively fixed meaning, for example, global policies, or as Lombardo et.al themselves formulate it “between two moments through which the meaning of gender equality changes” (2009: 3). These concepts make us reflect on the kinds of processes that a key concept such as gender equality is up against when put into use. They do, however, not assist us in grasping the fundamental tensions that are inherent in the concept of gender equality, such as the difference / sameness dilemma that we have seen in paper I and paper IV.

5.2.2 Translation vs. diffusion

The diverging, shifting and context-dependent meanings of gender equality that have emerged in this study, suggest that the apparent widespread international support for gender equality should not be interpreted as an example of a ‘successful’ diffusion of

gender equality as a unison global norm. I argue, in line with Lombardo et.al (2009: 2), that the reason why gender equality has been so widely diffused, and has travelled so well, is its open and contested character. It seems reasonable to conclude that gender equality is an “open signifier” (Bacchi, 2009: 29). As an open signifier the concept is translated and transformed in diverse and even contradictory ways, not only by experts situated in the interface between the global and the local, by what Sally Engle Merry terms “people in the middle” (2006c), but by actors at all levels, including at the grassroots.

How are we to understand and deal with these multiple meanings? Do they represent a threat to gender justice? Should the existence of contradictory and competing meanings of gender equality, as Cecilia Sardenberg appears to suggest, be regarded as “distortions”, “detours”, or as “semantic slippages” resulting from the “bumpy rides on their journeys (...) across territorial borders” (2007: 48-49)? Or do the circulation of multiple and competing voices and meanings have the potential of enriching the gender and development discourse? In the following I briefly discuss these questions in the light of the theories of diffusion and interpretation introduced in chapter one.

A diffusionist perspective, does, as we have seen, have much in common with conventional translation theories, which are based on the premise that a given, fixed and authoritative norm, message or text is to be transmitted or ferried across a divide (Gentzler, 2012). Applied to gender equality, this means that a certain evaluative meaning or standard that postulates what gender equality is and ought to be, has been established. A feminist liberal conception of gender equality and the socialist feminist inspired GAD framework both represent examples of such normative standards. Lombardo et.al argue that both scholars and activists who are engaged in and work with gender equality “often seem[s] to suggest that there is a standard way to define the concept, a standard representing the norm to be followed” (2009: 7). A logical consequence of such a normative position, is that meanings of gender equality that diverge from what is perceived to be the standard, are considered as problematic; as resistance or as “a form of ‘corruption’ of the meaning we strive to assert” (Sardenberg, 2007: 60).

Contrary to a diffusionist approach, a reinterpretation perspective does not assume or give priority to a fixed norm. The presupposition in a reinterpretation perspective is that texts, norms and concepts, such as, gender equality, do not have fixed meanings. Words that are used to describe a phenomenon or an object are always generated and uttered in a historical, social and cultural context. They are part of what the Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) has termed a “dialogic process” of meaning creation; a process that involves multiple and contradictory discourses. The new meaning created through the dialogical process is not considered to be a ‘threat’ or a problem, but its intrinsic value is recognized. Theories that envision translation and meaning creation as a dialogic process, moreover acknowledge that both ‘senders’ and ‘receivers’, are transforming ideas, norms and concepts. Bakhtin in fact argues that the primacy, to some extent, belongs to the listener’s response rather than to the speech or uttered word. The response is the “activating principle” as it “creates (...) and prepares the ground for (...) engaged understanding” (1981: 281). This is a perspective which has informed paper IV where I argue that the so-called ‘receivers’ also have to be recognized as translators.

In contrast to a diffusionist perspective, which tends to provide rather limited room for alternative visions of gender equality, a reinterpretation perspective facilitates and allows for contestations, creating space for “non-hegemonic ways of framing the issue of gender equality that result from different feminist positions” (Lombardo et al., 2009: 9). It also allows us to “draw upon a wide variety of women’s perspectives and experiences”, and has the potential to reduce the adoption of “taken-for-granted cultural and/or class-based presuppositions” (Bacchi, 2009: 29). A reinterpretation perspective can facilitate a fruitful dialogue between diverging and contradictory visions of gender equality. This position also provides space for exploring gender complementarity and its relationship to women’s empowerment and gender justice. Rather than compartmentalizing gender complementarity in a particular, conservative, religious or political camp, and assuming that gender complementarity is contrary to gender equality, the concept and its practical implications needs, in the same vein as gender equality, to be contextually explored and situated.

From a political and activist point of view, one may argue that the reinterpretation perspective is problematic since it is void of a specific normative standard. The openness embedded in approaches that acknowledge translation as a multidirectional and dialogic process, and which have as a grounding principle that gender equality is a contested concept, may be viewed as depriving the feminist project of its political and transformative agenda. One may also argue that certain normative standards are a prerequisite for meaningful engagement, and that in order for a translation to occur, a standard or a 'text' is a necessity; it is impossible to translate something from nothing. The question is, however, to what extent it is either possible or desirable to set a standard for what gender equality is or should be. Who should have the interpretative power to define a normative basis for gender equality and to decide what is more or less important, what the good or the bad solutions are? Who is to decide when a translation is legitimate and when it is not? The diversity of theoretical and political stances among both feminist activists and academics suggests that the establishment of a normative meaning of gender equality is a highly problematic endeavor.

A vital question in this context is whether one has to restrict oneself to either a diffusionist or a reinterpretation perspective. Is it possible to envisage an approach to gender equality that combines diverse views; that recognizes the value of the norms, visions and ideals inherent in something like the GAD framework, but which at the same time is dynamic and open to new and alternative translations? This appears to be the position that Lombardo et.al suggest. While they acknowledge that a number of strategies and tools, such as GAD, play a role in producing results, they contend that this does not mean that such "fixed achievements [that] cannot be challenged (...)". These achievements may reflect "specific ways of labeling gender equality in a particular moment" but they are also "subject to ongoing change due to the dynamics of the gender struggle itself and the continuous emergence of challenging positions" (2009: 7).

5.3 Actors' strategies and responses to strong gender policies

Despite the volatile nature of gender equality, and the fact that the concept is being translated differently depending on the actors involved and the context in which they are embedded, this study also sheds light on gender equality and gender related policies as an example of what Dinah Rajak and Jock Stirrat have termed a “transnational, transcultural set of truths” (2011: 165); truths that are being pushed by different actors such as donors, transnational organizations and national governments. Two examples of what we may term ‘strong policies’ are put under scrutiny in this study; in paper II exemplified by the increased political pressure on Norway’s cooperative partners to focus on gender equality, and in paper III, represented by the global movement against FGM/C and by various efforts to end the practice in Ethiopia.

In paper II we show how increased pressure from the Norwegian government to focus on gender equality played out in relation to faith-based organizations in Norway. The Norwegian policies contain clear messages of conditionality and require that Norway’s cooperative partners take gender equality seriously. Failure to do so “will have consequences for cooperation in the long term” (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2007: 7). In the Norwegian context, where civil society organizations are heavily dependent on funding from the government, these are not empty threats, particularly for faith-based organizations. The Women Empowerment and Gender Equality (WEGE) program presented in paper II, sheds light on how the external political pressure to conform to government policies contributed to a set of rather peculiar organizational behaviors.

One of our arguments in paper II is constructed around the vulnerability of Norwegian faith-based organizations as receivers of state funding. A one-sided focus on political pressure, (what I have earlier termed a ‘power-over’ perspective) from the side of the Norwegian government vis-à-vis Digni and its associated member

organizations, would, however, not have provided sufficient explanation for what happened in this particular case. The case exemplifies one of the key postulations in Olivier de Sardan's entangled social logic approach, as it illustrates how actors in the organizations used different strategies "according to the room for maneuver available to them" (2005: 24) when relating to these policies. The organizational 'twists' that characterized the implementation of the WEGE program, could be seen as an example of a maneuvering strategy that Digni used, either unintentionally or intentionally, in order to, get 'a strong hand on the wheel' as one of the informants put it. In the article we suggest that this was important in terms of access to narratives from the ground; to stories that are crucial in terms of what David Mosse has called "social production of success" (2005: 17). Such stories would not only strengthen the organizations' legitimacy vis-à-vis NORAD, but also prevent further scrutiny of the organizations' standpoints on controversial issues related to reproductive and sexual rights.

The paper also illustrates how actors within the organizations used the gender and aid policies strategically to promote changes in the organizations' internal gender policies. Although we argue that the pressure from the Norwegian government to do something on gender played an important role in the way the WEGE program was implemented, there was, at the same time, an internal organizational commitment to work for the improvement of gender equality and women's empowerment, not only in the organizations' development aid work, but also at organizational level in Norway. The strong focus on gender equality and women's empowerment in the Norwegian state's gender and aid policies provided these actors with an opportunity to push for changes within an organizational landscape where gender-related issues are highly contested.

Paper III, with its focus on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C) and religious leaders also provides an example of strong policies. The international pressure on national governments and civil society organizations in Africa to be involved in eradicating FGM has been intensified in recent years. As we point out in paper III,

the adoption of anti-FGM legislations in Africa is a result of considerable international pressure, and some donors have conditioned their aid support on the existence of national anti-FGM policies (Boyle and Sharon, 2000). The reports from the NGOs and UN bodies working in Ethiopia emphasize public declarations and particularly the role of religious leaders as examples of successful interventions. Many of the organizations are running informal education programs and claim that their initiatives are embedded in a human rights approach to development, characterized by its focus on methods that are participatory, ‘bottom-up’ and aimed at generating change ‘from within’. The findings in paper III suggest a more nuanced reading of these interventions, as it provide examples of top-down approaches and even coercion in terms of public participation and abandonment of the practice in the Ethiopian context.

While the international pressure to focus on FGM, the criminalization of the practice and the rather top-down approaches that surface in paper III, in combination with the authoritative nature of the current Ethiopian regime, represent a set of very strong policies, our findings also illustrate how grassroots actors strategically negotiate these ‘truths’. The elbowroom that actors in this historical and political context have is probably much more limited than is the case for the actors in the Digni aid chain. Still, the paper illustrates, that in spite of powerful structural elements, grassroots actors are negotiating these policies using different strategies. One strategy appears to be pretended acceptance or compliance, something we suggest to a certain extent actualizes what James C. Scott has termed public and hidden transcripts (1990: 4); the public transcripts being “the subordinate discourse in the presence of the dominant” while the hidden transcript represent the discourse they are voicing backstage “beyond direct observation by power holders”. While these two concepts appear relevant in the Ethiopian context, we do, also problematize Scott’s distinction between the powerful and the powerless. It fails to recognize the agency role of the grassroots. We therefore argue that the pretended acceptance and the ‘laughing behind the backs’ of the NGOs that one of our informants describes, should not only be seen as an expression of what Scott has termed everyday forms of resistance

(Scott, 1985), but could also be interpreted as a negotiating strategy through which the grassroots exercise power.

6. CONCLUSION

This PhD project has explored how norms and ideas inherent in the global gender equality discourse come into play with development practice and actors. With a particular focus on the relationship between Norwegian gender and aid policies and gender and development-related initiatives in Ethiopia and inspired by the entangled social logics approach, the study has combined an analysis of practices, policies and conceptions. The focus has been on investigating development as a complex social phenomenon, with due attention to the interactions between different actors and the historical, political, socio-economic and religious context in which they are situated. The study has explored how differently situated actors conceptualize and translate the concept of gender equality, how they relate to, are influenced by and use gender policies, and how they strategically maneuver and navigate their way through the complex landscape that constitutes development as social practice.

By applying an actor and context-specific approach to the analysis of gender equality in development, this study has revealed diverging meanings of gender equality. Despite its status as a global norm, the concept gender equality has been shown to be influenced by historical, cultural, political, economic and religious factors in a given locality at a particular time. The contested nature of gender equality and the many meanings that the concept can encompass suggest that the apparent widespread international support for gender equality should not be interpreted as an example of a ‘successful’ diffusion of gender equality. The reason that gender equality has been so widely diffused, and has travelled so well, is its open and contested character. This leads to multiple and contradictory translations of the concept. Moreover, this study shows that processes of translation are not limited to experts situated in the interface between the global and the local. Ordinary men and women at the grassroots level are also actively engaged in a dialogue with the discourses in which they are situated; negotiating, translating and recreating meanings of gender equality that resonate with local values, needs and priorities.

Despite the contested nature of gender equality, this study has illustrated that gender equality and gender policies nonetheless represent examples of ‘strong policies’, both in Norway and Ethiopia. Differently situated actors relate to and negotiate with these policies in different ways; what some actors might see as constraints and unnecessary/unwanted pressure, is seen by others as an opportunity. Despite the presence of strong and directive policies, there is room for actors to maneuver strategically and negotiate.

7. LIMITATIONS AND AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Taking into consideration the diverse and relatively broad number of topics that has emerged as part of this research project, there are obviously issues that could have been discussed more in-depth.

The relationship between religion, development and gender surface in both paper II and paper III, and there are a number of issues related to this field that could have been explored further. The conceptualization of gender equality among informants in faith-based organizations in both Norway and Ethiopia could have been critically analyzed. While many of my faith-based informants were influenced by the global gender equality discourse, these actors simultaneously made frequent references to ‘equal worth’ and theological arguments. With the increased attention on faith-based organizations in development practice, it is important to explore how religious values and theology influence the way gender equality is translated and negotiated among faith-based development actors.

Compared to the many interventions and initiatives that focus on religious leaders and FGM in Africa in general and in Ethiopia in particular, the empirical basis for paper III is rather limited. Further investigation of the current methodological global trends with regards to FGM interventions is, I believe, of immense importance. I suggest that comparative studies, that critically analyze interventions in the light of historical, political, cultural and religious contexts, are needed. Considering the strong emphasis put by UN agencies and NGOs on public declarations and the role of religious leaders in these declarations, critical and independent studies of the unintended and intended impacts of these strategies should be further explored.

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ENDNOTES

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³ We are well aware of the controversies that surround the use of these terms (although cutting represents an attempt to neutralize the global anti-FGM discourse). As an alternative to both "cutting" and "mutilation" Dorothy Hodgson (2011) uses the term "Female Genital Modification". We agree with Hodgson in her argument that this latter term is a more politically neutral term. We have however chosen to use the term 'female genital mutilation/cutting' because this is the most widely used term globally

⁴ Only a brief overview is given here. For more thorough overviews of the countries' gender equality policies and histories, see paper 1 (Norway) and paper 4 (Ethiopia)

⁵ There are several Gender Indexes, all of which have their limitations and shortcomings. Norway appears at the top on all of these indexes. For instance, over the last few years Norway has been ranked number one or two on the World Economic Forums' Global Gender Gap Index. <http://www.weforum.org/pdf/gendergap/rankings2008.pdf>, last visited October 6, 2010.

⁶ Norway is, for example, one of the main contributors to UN Women. The country was on the top in a ranking of UN Women's 20 donors for 2012. See <http://www.unwomen.org/about-us/governance/executive-board/annual-session-2013/> Last accessed July 12, 2013

⁷ A new Action Plan was launched in August 2013. See http://www.regjeringen.no/en/dep/ud/whats-new/Speeches-and-articles/e_speeches/2013/forord_likestilling.html?id=733099 Last accessed September 26, 2013

⁸ See <http://www.norad.no/en/countries/africa/ethiopia> Last accessed July 12, 2013

⁹ See <http://widgets.weforum.org/gender-gap-index/> Last accessed July 12, 2013

¹⁰ CEDAW, DEVAW, International conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for action, the Millenium Development Goals.

¹¹ 'The Royal Norwegian Embassy, Save the Children Norway-Ethiopia and Norwegian Church Aid-Ethiopia launch the second phase Five Year Strategic Partnership Programme for the abandonment of female genital mutilation (FGM)' See:http://www.norway.org.et/News_and_events/DevelopmentCooperation/humanitarian/Norwegian-funded-anti-FGM-programme-launched/ Last accessed September 10, 2013.

¹² See also Newspaper article by Mathlary, J.H. "Avhengighet skaper lett servilitet". Aftenposten, October 2nd 2009.

¹³ From NOK 204 million in 1981 to NOK 2.374 billion in 2002.

¹⁴ While the focus on bottom-up and participatory methods initially was part of an alternative approach to development, the ideas and language of this paradigm was by the end of the 1990s well established as part of mainstream development discourse.

¹⁵ Olivier de Sardan tends to use innovation rather than social change. While innovation is often associated with the introduction of new technology, he explicitly points out that innovation is a term that may be used about any kind of social change. In the following I have however chosen to use the term social change rather than innovation.

¹⁶ I present and discuss vernacularization in paper four.

¹⁷ For a description of translation as a process of communication see Levý, J. (1967) "Translation as a Decision Process." In *To Honor Roman Jakobson II*, The Hague: Mouton, pp. 1171-82

¹⁸ It should also be mentioned that I spent ten years of my childhood in Ethiopia

¹⁹ The Oromia Regional state is the largest region in Ethiopia. It covers vast areas from the west, to the east and to the south of the country. For pragmatic reasons it was considered to be important to select projects that were relatively close to each other

²⁰ I have chosen to label these chains based on their funding, rather than by the name of the projects or the implementing organizations

²¹ This and other Norwegian action plans on gender can be found at the following site:
http://www.gender.no/Policies_tools/Strategies_Action_plans Last accessed July 3, 2013

²² See <http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/ud/dok/regpubl/stmeld/2007-2008/stmeld-nr-11-2007-2008-.html?id=497062> Last accessed July 3, 2013

²³ In 2012 the organization received NOK 159 million (26 million USD). See <http://www.norad.no/no/tilskudd/tildelinger/frivillige-organisasjoner-fikk-1-3-milliarder-i-2012> Last accessed July 2nd 2013

²⁴ See <http://www.kirkensnodhjelp.no/en/About-NCA/About-NCA/> Last accessed July 2 2013

²⁵ The organization received NOK 206 million (33 million USD) from Norad in 2012. See <http://www.norad.no/no/tilskudd/tildelinger/frivillige-organisasjoner-fikk-1-3-milliarder-i-2012> Last accessed July 2nd 2013

²⁶ See <http://www.kirkensnodhjelp.no/en/What-we-do/Where-we-work/Eastern-Africa/ethiopia/> Last accessed July 3, 2013

²⁷ I will argue, that this is also inherent in Marcus' emphasis on the construction of the site through various "following" strategies, freedom and expansion on the one hand - which could obviously lead one in many directions - and at the same time, his exemplification of project design around chains, paths etc. which indicates a certain boundedness and interconnectedness. Marcus has been criticized for an implicit holism (see Canda 2007, 2009).

²⁸ Three of the interviews were conducted on the telephone, two were done using Skype and one via email. Email was also used for follow-up questions.

²⁹ The question was deliberately formulated as a rhetorical question, with the why follow-up question being the central one.

³⁰ Amharic has status as the working language of the Federal Government of Ethiopia.

³¹ For a full overview of Alvesson's eight metaphors see Alvesson (2003). *Beyond Neopositivist, Romanticism and Localists: A Reflexive Approach to Interviews in Organizational Research*. The Academy of Management Review, 28 (21) pp.13-33.

³² With regards to sexual and reproductive health, the Norwegian policies reflect a clear and liberal stand on issues such as abortion and the rights of sexual minorities.

³³ See http://www.un.org/womenwatch/directory/critical_areas_of_concern_30.htm Last accessed September 12, 2013

