



Universität Bielefeld

Fakultät für Soziologie

**Forschungsschwerpunkt  
Entwicklungssoziologie**

**Sociology of Development  
Research Centre**

Universität Bielefeld - Postfach 100131 - 33501 Bielefeld, Germany / Telefon (0521) 106-4650/4221, Fax (0521) 106-2980  
<http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/sdrc>, E-Mail: [sdrc@uni-bielefeld.de](mailto:sdrc@uni-bielefeld.de)

Programme Women in Developing Countries

## **Working Paper N° 331**

### **Methodology of Gender Research and Local Development Concepts**

Report on Workshop

11-12 November 1999

Ruth Klein-Hessling

Bielefeld 2000

ISSN 0936-3408



This report presents papers and discussions from the workshop "*Methodology of Gender Research and Local Development Concepts*", which took place on November 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> 1999. The workshop was organised by the Gender Division of the Sociology of Development Research Centre at the University of Bielefeld on the occasion of a visit by two members of the Ahfad University for Women, Omdurman, Sudan, and was attended by around 30 participants. Experiences from empirical fieldwork in Sudan, Kenya, Rwanda, West Africa and South Asia made up the basis for discussions on methodological problems of gender research. Presentations were given by staff members and doctoral students at the research centre, guests from the Ahfad University for Women, Omdurman/ Sudan and staff members Faculty of Agriculture of the Humboldt University, Berlin, who signed a cooperation with the Ahfad University in 1998.<sup>1</sup>

General remarks on the methodology of gender research and local development concepts were made in the introductory paper held by **Gudrun Lachenmann**. She emphasised that gender research is a paradigm that does not only provide the means to examine gender relations but also offers a framework with which to analyse transformation processes that go along with socio-economic change and processes of globalisation in general. It links the gender category to society and state. Regarding gender as a relational concept, the methodology is relational too. An important dimension of gender research is the meaning of gender as a concept of power which is always being negotiated, and changes over time. Gender research investigates power structures and links them to all levels of society.

It was underlined that gender research should not be limited to focusing on women as a specific group for certain development concepts. Although the aspect of mainstreaming gender is important for women's empowerment, gender research goes a step further. It aims to take up all theoretical and methodological issues relating to development concepts as well as to economic sociology, institutional economics and debates on poverty and thus to engender general research. The gendered structure of economy for example is considered as the most important key to explaining the present transformations going on in quite a lot of spheres. Moreover it aims to overcome the somewhat marginalised position of gender researchers by establishing a dialogue with general research.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation supported the sojourn of Dr. Balghis Badri and Dr. Samya El Nagar (both Ahfad University) in Germany and the workshop has made been possible with the assistance of the women's research network in North Rhine-Westphalia.

There is also the demand to link gender research to local development concepts. As with the relational gender approach, local concepts are not understood as traditional ones but as they are negotiated in local and national arenas within the context of social and economic change.

In the presentation three aspects of methodology - the epistemological approach, the qualitative approach and participation and local development concepts were discussed in detail. The *epistemological approach* stresses the construction of social reality, which indicates that the object of research has always been interpreted by the actors. Significant elements of the *qualitative approach* are the design, the use of theory and the validation of data. The design is the starting point of the research. A central part of the design is the way how the research focus has been developed and how the field has been approached. With reference to grounded theory, Lachenmann pointed out that research issues should come out of the material. Therefore theory is not applied as prefabricated theory that is verified in the field but with regard to its explanatory power. The validation of data is a crucial topic in empirical qualitative research. There are various techniques for validation, for example by making the process of research transparent and thereby showing to the research community how the results have been obtained. Another form of validation is the contextualisation of the research data. The design also comprises the use of diverse methods like biographical interviews, triangulation or network analysis. Validity increases when different methods are mixed. The dynamic approach is a further method to control validity by regarding reality not as static and normative but as being changed and negotiated. The analysis of situations and borders and the use of concepts like the arena draw the attention to interface situations, and help to understand these dynamics. Using core concepts on the basis of emic perceptions is another way to guarantee validity. Again the way the concepts are developed should be made clear.

Lachenmann emphasised the relation of the methodology of gender research and *participation and local development concepts*. Standardised methods in development research have often been accused of being inefficient, of not being interpretative or of having a 'tar road bias'. With the concept of participation that has been implemented in particular in the participatory rural appraisal, women became a target group in the development discourse. But for example in poverty reports women are still regarded as the vulnerable group. Poverty reports neither contextualise the data nor is there an overall analysis. To gain more insight into the living conditions of women it was suggested that issues like livelihood and social security be examined. Lachenmann pointed out that qualitative research in general has in any case to be

participatory, by taking over the perspective of those who construct the reality. Nevertheless one has to take into consideration what happens, who talks and who is asked. Therefore reflective distance on the one hand and relation of the data with the context on the other hand are both elements of qualitative research. Lachenmann concluded that gender research should be understood as a middle range theory that links all levels of society. She emphasised that with the complex analytical approach described above, the problem of the division between agency and structures might be overcome.

**Balghis Badri** is Professor of Sociology at the Ahfad University for Women in Omdurman, Sudan. The topic of her presentation was the challenge of teaching gender studies in a Muslim society. The Ahfad University established a Master's degree programme in gender and development studies in 1997. This programme takes into consideration the framework of state policies in Sudan leading to the process of Islamisation, which determines the way of life, the political, the legal and the educational system. The programme deliberates concepts of feminism, emancipation and issues of gender equality. The main question for the initiators of the programme was how to discuss feminist discourses within a context that might advocate something completely different and even contradictory. Taking these aspects into consideration the curriculum attempts to teach feminism without kindling some form of conflict among the students. According to Badri, the introduction of the programme was a challenge for all: the teachers, the students and the institution. Its tense nature became obvious in the ambivalent reactions of students and staff members: some teachers and students were unwilling to participate, some hesitated at first and some supported the programme. Nevertheless teachers and students agreed on a 'contract' that confirmed an open debate, taking into account that different theories of feminism as well as the study of Islam from different perspectives are preconditions for teaching gender and Islam..

The programme started with a discussion on Islam, Muslim women and Muslim societies. For each of these three categories, certain types were developed. Islam for example was differentiated as follows:

- Islam as stated in the Koran and the Sunna,
- Islam as it was interpreted by male scholars and law schools (madhabs) in the early period of Islamic history,
- Islam as it has been interpreted by recent scholars (male and female) within the conflicts of society and with special regard to reform movements. In particular Muslim women have

made their own interpretations, aiming to 'engenderise' Islam, since the middle of the 20th century.

The students examined aspects of feminism on the basis of these three types and discussed possible contradictions and differences as well as congruities with Islam.

Likewise Muslim women and women's movements in Muslim societies were classified and defined by the students in the following three groups:

- Islamist women's groups (labelled as conservative),
- Feminist women's groups (the self-labelling of these groups as struggling for change and emancipation was taken over; the most popular Muslim feminists among them are Nawal al Sadawi, Fatima Mernissi and others), and
- Islamist feminist groups (labelled as feminist Islamists who struggle for a new interpretation of Islam from within Islamic teaching)

Furthermore the programme stresses the importance of a comparison of different Muslim societies in order to explore certain types of states and how they deal with feminism and emancipation.

The different types of feminism and feminist theory and their acceptance were discussed with regard to the students' social context. According to Badri, the most acceptable type among the students seemed to be that of a so called liberal feminism in the sense of emancipation and equality in law, work and family, whereas feminist discourses on liberal sexual rights met with little approval. The analysis of exploitation according to Marxist feminism was considered insufficient. The students objected that the role of men in terms of socialisation or men as supporters was not taken into consideration adequately. The theory of postmodernism was blamed for expressing neither solidarity nor agency. It was announced that postmodernism determines the issue of difference but neglects problems that were identified as substantial for women all over the world, for example sexism. Analysing feminism as part of the global agenda, the students maintained that feminism in global terms still claims a type of equality that is adjusted to Western models only. The Islamic globalisation that urges one to follow the 'true Islamic path' was identified as an alternative to these Western models.

An important element of the gender and development studies is field research, which is conducted either in urban or in rural areas. However the students face many problems from policy makers as well as from relatives. They argue that the students might become 'demoralised' when conducting fieldwork away from their homes and unaccompanied by a male relative.

In her conclusion Badri stated that the programme encourages the students' understanding for differentiation and reflection. Items that were taken for granted are now questioned. Social problems of one's own society like domestic violence, sexuality and body politics, the distance between women's movement and the reality, as well as the discussion on empowerment have come to be of considerable importance for the students. As a positive aspect of the programme she stated that it makes the students more interested in religious questions and the useful knowledge of religion. But the programme also influences the life planning of the students with regard to their own career and job perspectives, since gender studies are not recognised as a qualification at the labour market.

In the discussion which followed, it was stressed that the emphasis of the programme on the Sudanese context is a kind of "Sudanisation" of gender issues and can be considered as a successful strategy to teach feminist discourses without using a typology that is often blamed for being too Western oriented. A participant suggested that such a strategy might be supported by the positive gender segregation in Muslim societies that leads partly to more openness towards gender studies.

Another discussion point considered the educational background of the staff members who developed the programme. Badri pointed out that most of the staff members are Western educated and familiar with Western gender approaches. In this sense, they are in a privileged situation and the ones who put the relevant issues on the agenda. It is their aim to bring gender issues into all spheres of society, addressing areas such as law, poverty, health and so on. It was also emphasised that though there is a tendency to mainstream certain issues in order to accumulate a knowledge of a particular kind, there is still enough space left for creativity and openness with regard to the students' research interests.

In addition, it was pointed out that the discourse on empowerment includes discussions on the students' own perspectives too, since for them a Master's degree in gender and development studies presents a kind of uncertainty with regard to their career plans. Students fear that gender studies will not qualify them enough since the diploma is not recognised on the labour market. Attention is also paid to the students' position at the university. Some of them can be regarded as genuinely disempowered and for this reason they are encouraged to participate in the classes and to raise their voices.

Taking into account that qualitative methodology is an important element of research, issues like research design are discussed extensively in the classes, for example with respect to the field approach and the students' attitude towards the people. Their mode of dress during field

research or their use of language, e.g. using English phrases, is critically commented on. Apparently the students enjoy qualitative research, which is largely participatory.

**Samya El Nagar** (Ahfad University for Women, Omdurman, Sudan) outlined experiences in and results of her field research, which focused on women's reproductive health in Northern Sudan. Among the Middle Eastern states, Sudan and Yemen have the highest maternal mortality rate. Medical causes are in particular haemorrhage and problems during obstetric labours. Assuming that women's life is shaped by culture and that perceptions of health and illness are thus not only medically evident, the research focused on women's perception of health and illness. It examines how women think about their health, when they think that they are healthy or sick and which factors influence their seeking health care.

Research was conducted in a small village in rural Sudan. El Nagar was supported by a young female assistant from the village. Having in mind the gap between researcher and villagers, the assistant was able to facilitate El Nagar's introduction to the village and the researcher's process of identification. El Nagar stated that being a Sudanese was the only thing that she had in common with the villagers; yet not being from the same area and having a different status and educational background only served to underline the disparity. Time was an important factor in reducing this gap, not least because of the sensitive research topic. The assistant also informed the people about the research. It was planned to conduct unstructured interviews and group discussions with women of different ages and marital status. However, married women refused to discuss issues such as sexual relationships, pregnancy and experiences of giving birth with the unmarried research assistant. Therefore the work was divided between the two researchers according to their marital status. The research design took into consideration the various concepts that were developed during research and discussed again with the women interviewed.

Besides the research design, El Nagar also presented some of the outcomes of her study. She emphasised that women have very vivid memories relating to their state of health. They record experiences of pregnancies and deliveries as well as experiences of illness in detail. It became obvious during the interviews that women emphasised their memories of pregnancy and childbirth as incidences that shape women's lifeworld and that are socially highly valued. Other circumstances however are treated with secrecy, in particular problems in the sexual relationship after marriage. Using the key word "culture of silence", El Nagar explained how the lifeworld of women, their perception of reproductive health and their health seeking

behaviour are determined by this culture of silence. Many of the sexual relationship problems result from female circumcision. However, since these problems directly affect the construction of manhood and their husbands' sexuality, these incidences are neither discussed with the women's families nor with the husbands' families. And though women seek advice from doctors, they do not do so in the immediate vicinity of their village. Instead, they consult doctors outside the area. The culture of silence also determines the health perception and attitude of young unmarried women who suffer from reproductive problems, mainly as a result of circumcision. Though information is exchanged among girls from a peer group, El Nagar found that their knowledge was very limited. She analysed the culture of silence as a product of restriction based on a patriarchal system that regulates what women talk about.

Another issue that came out during field research concerned the health-seeking practices of women as affected by their contact with health providers. The women are very conscious about the hierarchies between them and the health providers, and they reflect on the positive qualities of a male doctor (e.g. with regard to the respect he pays to a female patient) as well negative qualities (e.g. treating a woman as ignorant due to her illiteracy). In this dynamic of dominance between health providers and village women a new type of dominance has been observed recently. This new type is embodied by midwives, nurses and female health providers and shapes female-female relationships. More than their male colleagues, these health workers treat their patients as ignorant. The women's health-seeking behaviour is greatly affected by the attitude of the female health providers and nurses who are known to be tough and intolerant. These gender relations among women are an important field which needs to be studied in gender studies.

In the subsequent discussion it was pointed out that the social boundary between women and girls is determined by their marital status. Girls are supposed to be without knowledge of certain issues concerning sexuality regardless of their educational background. The social boundary is shaped by knowledge and experience. However, boundaries are not only defined by the marital status but are related to trust and closeness. Therefore reproductive issues are discussed with particular persons only, like female friends, close neighbours and so on.

Another point of discussion concerned the subject of female circumcision and strategies to deal with it within Sudanese society as well as in the Western world. El Nagar pointed out that she and her colleagues have been working against Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) since the 1970s. They identify FGM as violence against women. However, governmental campaigns or campaigns organised by scientific associations were almost entirely without success. There is



only very little progress, mainly in the urban educated milieu, where there is a decrease of about 10 percent, but in the villages the rate is still more or less 100 percent. Nevertheless there are strategies used by women to avoid female circumcision in the villages as well. Thus some women simulate the circumcision by performing the ritual as a social event on the surface, inviting women, serving food and drinks and hence accomplishing their social obligations, yet do not in fact carry out the operation. This strategy is only possible with the consent of the midwife. But this strategy is used only by a small minority and even those women who decide not to circumcise their daughters are not empowered enough to convince other women to stop the operation. Instead they prefer to employ this kind of silent strategy. Taking into consideration El Nagar's participation in the field, it was suggested that researchers like her, being from the same society on the one hand, but also being partly a stranger to the community on the other hand would serve to operate as ideal brokers in questions of reproductive health.

El Nagar stressed the importance of Western support in combating FGM, though it aims at organisations rather than at women in the villages. Besides there is a need to integrate economic discourses in the debate, since FGM is deeply interwoven with the economic or social status of women, e.g. in cases of infertility.

In the controversy on female circumcision the role of men was also discussed. Men usually stay passive, arguing that FGM is "women's business". This attitude should not only be interpreted as an example how men show their dominance in many aspects of women's lives but as a result of a lack of sex education of both men and women.

In their struggle against FGM, El Nagar emphasised the importance of fighting all types of female circumcision. She clearly dissociates herself from other campaigns that she regards of misconceiving circumcision. Instead of fighting all types of FGM, these campaigns aim to stop Pharaonic circumcision (infibulation) and endorse the so-called milder type, known as Sunna. These campaigns introduce a religious aspect to the discussion, since the Sunna type is also mentioned in the Koran.

A crucial point in the discussion on FGM is the role of midwives and grandmothers. It is often said that midwives counteract the campaigns because they are economically dependent on the practice. So a lot of projects initiated by the government are targeting midwives with the aim of reducing poverty and giving them alternative economic resources. However these kinds of projects have only limited success since promising alternatives like putting the distribution of family planning methods in the hands of midwives as a source of income are not allowed. But

what underlines the relationship between grandmothers and grandchildren, since the grandmothers do not have any financial interest in circumcision? In this context the power of grandmothers was discussed. Balghis Badri referred to the institution of the grandmother and emphasised the need to analyse it outside the context of FGM. Several studies that focus on nutrition, education and care explain the structures of the intergenerational relationship. As an important figure in the extended families, grandmothers pass on their knowledge with regard to lactation and nutrition as well as their perception of the child's health. In the early years of the child they are often the most important persons in the socialisation process. Moreover a grandmother provides valuable services to her sons and daughters by taking care of the grandchildren and so on. Badri stated that the supposed 'power' of the grandmother is often overestimated. She suggested analysing the role of a grandmother also with regard to the notion "source of love" that she represents for the grandchildren instead of transmitting the image of the "cruel grandmother who circumcises her granddaughters".

The changing role of the institution of the grandmother is also evident in the context of AIDS, especially in East Africa. Here the transformation of society puts a lot of pressure on the ambivalent role of grandmothers. On the one hand grandmothers become more important and on the other hand they have less financial support from their children and grandchildren, less land and other resources.

**Ulrike Schultz** (Humboldt University Berlin, Faculty of Agriculture) presented her research design on women and finance in Sudan. She conducted a first short-term period of field research in Khartoum in Summer 1999. Her research interest focuses in particular on micro-credit systems and their meaning for women. She made the criticism that micro-credit projects are often thought of in terms of empowerment but measured only by the repayment rate of women who are involved. Though many studies deal with micro-credit, there is no information about the household or the whereabouts of the money. In contrast to these studies, Schultz' research project explores what happens with the women when they get the credit, how men enter the micro-credit system, how gender identities are constructed and whether micro-credits change these gender identities.

In her presentation Schultz introduced some theoretical and methodological considerations on women and finance with special regard to feminist research, concepts of power and gender. Schultz stated that in micro-credit projects women are often seen as the better in using money in a socially responsible manner. It is assumed that credit means empowerment in the

household, even if the husband and not the woman is in fact using the credit. But then, as Schultz stated, women have to work even harder because they have the risk and the responsibility for repayment. Better clothing, access to health services or the better situation of the household is only one way to look at empowerment. Schultz suggested, with reference to Naila Kabeer, looking at agency - the ways one can influence the important things in one's life and analyse the strategic points.

Taking the household as an important analytical category, different modules shape the research approach: bargaining for example is an important aspect of household economy, one which means both, cooperation and conflict and which depends on the alternatives that are there. A crucial point in the analysis of households is also the question what the interest of women is and what their own perceptions are. How do they regard their contributions and why are their contributions often devalued? A hypothesis in this context is that micro-credits might change the devaluation. The criticism was made that the bargaining model in feminist economy focuses mainly on the household, whereas the market gets little attention. Moreover other dimensions like moral economy, women's spaces and so on should be taken into consideration.

Besides micro-credit projects, there are other savings schemes in Sudan, like *al-Sandug* (the box), a type of rotating credit system, or recently established groups that run through peer monitoring. The women in these groups use their interlinked relations to assure repayment. Often the different money systems are intermingled. So women's groups have easier access to credit and group savings often serve for repayment instead being used for the household. In this context the group pressure plays an important role. Many micro-credit projects follow the model of the Grameen bank, although the system is modified and adjusted to the Sudanese situation. But Islamic modes of financing will also be reflected in this research, for example with regard to repayment. Here the question is whether an Islamic mode of finance might indicate less pressure for re-payment.

**Sana El Batal** (Bielefeld/ Khartoum University) illustrated the situation as a field researcher in her own society. In her dissertation project on "Endogenous Organisations of Development: The Nubian Case" she analyses identity politics and development concepts of Nubians in Sudan with special regard to the interaction of co-operatives and associations. Applying a mobile research design, field research has been conducted in different Nubian areas in Khartoum, North and Eastern Sudan as well as in migrant communities in Saudi Arabia. The mobile research approach follows in particular the relationships and interaction, either on a

familiar or organisational level, with regard to translocality. So there are many Nubian associations that start in the villages but also address the Nubians in Khartoum and in Saudi Arabia. These translocal and transnational relations are interpreted as a very modern element in the process of identity construction. The negotiations on how a Nubian should be also included the researcher's disposition. In particular migrants living in Saudi Arabia criticised the researcher for not practising a Nubian lifestyle inasmuch as she lives in Germany, is married to a Non-Nubian and so on.

El Batal emphasised that she benefited very much from personal contacts and family ties during field research. For example, visits of relatives, neighbours and colleagues to the family's house were used for interviews in a relaxed atmosphere. Being Nubian, she explained, opened many doors to internal and external circles. However being Nubian also led to misguided assumptions about the research topic and some people supposed that her research was intended as a contribution to the 'Nubian heritage', a field that had been established in social science as well as in the political discourse with the Nubian re-settlement during the High Dam construction in the 1960s.

In the discussion it was mentioned that there are already numerous studies on ethnic groups including Nubians written by social anthropologists. The suggestion was made that a comparative study would show the characteristics of the Nubians or patterns that they share with other ethnic groups. However, El Batal argued that the case of the Nubians is not taken as an isolated case study but is analysed within the context identity building processes. The interface approach enables her to elaborate on different actors and different arenas in which ethnicity is negotiated. So it is neither a study of folklore nor of the so called Nubian heritage but a study that considers the interaction of organisations and individuals in the process of globalisation.

**Hanadi Ali Taha** (Bielefeld/ Ahfad University) presented issues from her research on the career patterns of Sudanese women. Her research topic has changed in the course of time from the upward mobility of women in the public sphere to career patterns. Instead of focusing on the advantages and disadvantages provided by the law, she became interested in the daily activities and interaction of her informants as a means to explore how women choose their profession and what factors influence their choice. Interview partners were academics, medical professionals, lawyers and administrators. The contacts to the informants were based mainly on already existing personal relations. Field research has been experienced as being mainly

influenced by two aspects: on the one hand "being one of them", on the other hand the need "to keep a reflexive distance". In order to increase the trust between researcher and interview partners and in order to become familiar with the interview partners and their living conditions, she visited them many times in their houses and if possible at their working places. During these meetings she became aware that women face a lot of problems related to their choice of career or the situation at the working place. She stressed that the ways of coping with problems either at the family level or in the working situation are relational and developed within the context. With regard to this experience the knowledge of the daily life and the women's interaction was essential for understanding their struggles and the ways they strategise and network. Apparently these strategies are not clearly articulated but developed through interaction.

**Elke Grawert** (University of Bremen) presented some outcomes of field research in Darfur, Western Sudan. Her study has been published under the title „Making a Living in Rural Sudan. Production of Women, Labour Migration of Men, and Policies for Peasant's Need“ (London, Macmillan 1998). She analysed social security systems and the impact of male migration on women left behind. The mixed research approach consisted of quantified data and qualitative methods. Interviews were conducted with women of different class, age and marital status and different economic background in the city of Kutum and some villages in the area. With regard to the different activities (agriculture, animals, market etc.), different livelihood sectors were identified. However these sectors are also linked in livelihood networks. Moreover there are some specific female livelihood security activities including food supply, collecting wood or the integration in social networks and social obligations. The gender relations are determined by the gender-specific division of labour and gender-specific entitlements. In the livelihood networks non-household members participate in the form of working parties, migrants' networks etc. With regard to the importance of these networks for the peasant society Grawert suggested analysing the community rather than single households. By identifying different livelihood models and setting them in relation the relevance of options becomes obvious. This relevance of options is specially important in times of economic crisis or drought, when access to resources is changed. It was also mentioned that the concept of livelihood still lacks a theoretical basis. Therefore concepts of livelihood should be linked to models of social security and the idea of destabilisation.

The contextualisation of empirical data was discussed by the author of this report (**Ruth Klein-Hessling**). My research focuses on the negotiation of the gender order in Northern Sudan with special regard to the process of Islamisation. The discourse on Muslim identity is embedded in the context of modernity and globalisation. In social anthropology a village is often considered as a manageable place for field research where many facets of social life happen. Yet a village in Northern Sudan is seldom an isolated place, people come and go, there are migrants from Saudi Arabia, students from the university, city dwellers who pay visits to the relatives in their village of origin, and conversely villagers, both men and women, who move to town by utilising the urban-rural networks. This mobility also influenced the research design. This meant that I met several interview partners again in the capital in an other surroundings, while others left for a time period, for example during the pilgrimage month to Saudi Arabia, and came back with new impressions in their mind.

My first contacts were determined by the members of the family with whom I lived, in particular with the women of the household. Later on I extended the radius, being aware that the family represented only one faction of the village, namely that of the old established elite. Becoming acquainted with many villagers of different social and economic background, gave me an impression of the heterogeneity of the village community and how religious practices were employed as distinctive markers. For example the wife of the leader of a local religious group had followed a lifestyle that maintained religious consciousness and devotion. This lifestyle was also considered as competing with that of other social groups, like my host family or families who followed a rather 'traditional' lifestyle.

Taped interviews were an important source of information, yet of equal importance were the talks and events which came about at unexpected intervals and not through a schedule created by myself. I learned many things in improvised occasions and in informal settings: in the kitchen where we prepared the meals and discussed the events of the day or on walks where there was enough time to discuss certain issues without being interrupted. My writing down of memos and the diary was often commented upon and information was added by my host lady or her daughters. A continuous exchange about my findings with the people often prevented me from making false assumptions and provided the basis for interesting discussions. But also the (un-)predictable events that happen during a one year stay opened my eyes and taught me a lot about the social world of the people and their attitudes. In my analysis I considered these social events as arenas in which different systems of knowledge are negotiated and in which the reconstruction of gender relations could be observed in all its many facets, including family

loyalties, discourses on education and modernity and the meaning of a rather globalised Islamic discourse.

Social interaction is determined by the setting. The various settings provide the means by which women and men themselves act in front of another, how class and gender difference is staged, how forms of obedience and disobedience are performed. Thus, instead of recording the normative systems of gender segregation, seclusion and different concepts of local and orthodox Islam, I was interested in the interactions and the ways in which the normative systems are shaped and experienced in every day life. For example, despite the rules of segregation, space is re-structured with reference to modern Islamic practices. Younger women are starting to attend the Friday prayer in the mosque, using religiosity as a strategy to enter new spaces regardless of the anger of the old women who consider the mosque an appropriate place for older women only. As in the above mentioned case study of Samya El Nagar, the gender relation among women is an important dimension of my analysis. Here again, different systems of knowledge compete with each other. Thus young educated women in particular establish new religious groups and meet to read the Koran, are active in social welfare work and create new public spaces. The discourse on the "proper Islamic way of living" changes social practices and widens women's room for manoeuvre, for example when a woman makes it a precondition that her fiancé accepts her wearing a *higab*. The criterion that the future husband should be a relative is sometimes now replaced by the criterion of his moral/ religious attitude. With the emergence of religious groups women create new networks that are not based on kinship (though this is often the case) but are established by shared interests. In particular with regard to the religious groups, the interface of state authority on the one hand and village community on the other hand can be analysed.

**Petra Dannecker** presented issues and methodological approaches to fieldwork in Bangladesh. The original aim of her study was to find out whether garment workers, mainly women, are organised and which possible collective actions and strategies of resistance they use. Although there was the opportunity to visit some factories, these visits remained unsatisfactory, talks with workers were impossible there, the workers looked very critically upon the researcher and the management staff tried to keep the researcher away from interaction with the women. Apparently, there was a need to modify the research approach. From talking with different people and collecting data about the sector it became clear that understanding the daily activities and life realities of women rather than focusing on

organisational structures is the path to take in order to find out how garment workers in Bangladesh are organised. Therefore, visits to the workers' locations outside the factories (e.g. the Women's Union) became of greater importance and interviews were undertaken in the workers' hostels or at home.

The narrative interviews were carried out with a local assistant. Usually they started with an open question about the working and living situation. In most of the cases the women touched on topics like childhood and migration, family and living situation and their work. After each interview the roles were changed and the floor was open for the interviewed person to ask the researchers. Often this led to interesting discussions about marriage, children and even sexuality. Apparently, speaking to a foreigner made it easier for the women to articulate their experiences and opinions, especially concerning so-called delicate topics. On the other hand, they seemed to be much more hesitant in their statements about working conditions or the role of foreign buyers.

The interviews took place in different settings which made it possible to build up a picture of women's lives and widens the perspective. Often women were visited several times and since their colleagues, neighbours and family members were also known, the whole surroundings became part of the research. The interviews were translated in the field so that there was always the possibility of returning and adding questions.

Additionally representatives of formal unions, factory owners and NGO representatives were interviewed for the contextualisation of empirical data.

Afterwards Dannecker presented some analytical categories used for the interpretation of data. The research approach makes it clear that the different social worlds of women cannot be analysed separately. For example, women focused in their narratives very much on their personal life stories and the interpretation of the past, both of which show how much the different spheres of social life are interwoven.

In the analysis typical ways of behaving were constructed as well as typical patterns of underlying motives and rationalities, especially with regard to the systems of relevance of female agency in the different spheres of social life. The interviews also reveal different migration biographies which show the heterogeneity of migration in contrast to structural approaches. The types share certain characteristics which influence migration, the negotiation process and strategies chosen by the workers. These aspects also influence the ways they perceive the work they perform as well as their room for manoeuvre. Some important outcomes were that in the majority of cases the participation in the work force was planned on



a long term basis and did not include cost-benefit calculations or purely economic reasons. Non-economic motives played as important a role as economic ones. Furthermore although in cases of migration patrilocal networks were important, nevertheless these networks are replaced by new, mainly women centred networks in the new environment and are often used by other female members of a family or village for migration. The new networks are based on the new work relations or neighbourhood and are also important for the organisation of jobs and new forms of social security. These new informal networks are neither exclusively work based nor so-called private ones but another example of how the women workers' different and often diversely structured social worlds are combined.

Resistance inside the factories is not deliberate activism growing from full-fledged political consciousness, but can only be understood in the context of the above mentioned framework which also structures the logic of actions inside the factories. One strategy by which the new spaces in the factory are developed is the de-sexualisation by using fictive kinship terms and so dealing with the male and female working relations.

New spaces in the factories as well as in the new living arrangements are actively used by the workers, who try to structure them according to their logic of action. Informal strategies and networking play a significant role here. Dannecker emphasised that these strategies can only be explored and understood by concentrating on the women's narratives and by their contextualisation.

**Mirjam Laaser** spoke about the process of research on local concepts of economy in Nairobi, Kenya. Her aim was to analyse the organisation of economic activities of women in an urban environment and to see how the existing modes of interconnection are used to create a space of manoeuvre in the urban context. As a starting point she took the concept of the embeddedness of economy in society, meaning that the economic action follows socially defined rules. Therefore the research has to consider the existing relations of economic activity and the local social environment. A specific gender view of the economy indicates the importance of the independence of the economic activities with household, husbands, social networks, subsistence production and so on. Another point of interest is the interconnection of economic activities of women with the market and the state.

The first step in her fieldwork was guided by two questions: who should be interviewed and how should the entrepreneurship of businesswomen be conceptualised. Laaser followed the self-description of the businesswomen as "*mfany biashara*" and therefore avoided

dichotomies that distinguish the economic sphere in an informal and a formal sector or a traditional and a modern one. Though particularly interested in the process of upgrading business, she did not only interview successful women. Laaser stated that also those who failed in their economic activities can tell a lot about their perceptions of why they failed. The conceptualisation of economic activities was also guided by the idea of looking for any topics of importance to the women and the kind of discussions, situations or relations that make the women think they are successful.

Through the information that came out of the interviews certain types of businesswomen were constructed and their activities were linked to the surrounding fields. Laaser elaborated several modules for a concept of economy used by the entrepreneurs:

The interconnection of the actual business activities with former employments of the women is such a module. So when women decided to leave their jobs and go into self-employment they used old relationships intensively, for example former colleagues became customers and so on. The shadow economy is another module of economy. It occurs in different versions in all interviews and varies from bribery, having many parallel jobs at the same time, to nepotism or smuggling of goods.

Looking for new opportunities is a further strategy of women. In recent years a new type of import activity has started. Nowadays many women travel to the Gulf States and Asia, importing cheap goods to Kenya. They do so by going in groups and learning from each other and using each other's networks. Local knowledge about trends is essential, otherwise the goods cannot be sold for a long period. Another new option is the business with Swissgarde. In this business precise knowledge about the social network around the businesswoman is needed in order to avoid a big economic loss.

The analysis of the gender relations is another important element of the study. Many women start their initial business with the capital of their husband and normally pay it back after a while. Though there is a strong separation of budgets, the husband is used as a regular source of money when additional investments are planned. In these cases a woman depends very much on the husband's opinion; he decides what to do and what not. Often the husband is employed and thus in a secure situation; in many cases he is the owner of the house and the land. In particular not having a land title makes it impossible for women to get a loan from the bank. Here Laaser asked whether men instrumentalise women from their secure situation in order to make them earn additional incomes in business.

Urban rural connections are a further module which most of the women use. Most of them are migrants and still have the extended family staying "at home". There seems to be a strong correlation with economic activities. Agricultural production is often a parallel source of income and the main aim of many women is the investment in a plot and the construction of a small house, either to rent it out or for the use of family members and later on to live in in old age.

Laaser concluded that women arrange their economic actions along the different modules. The utilisation of the modules is described as a process of social mobility in order to be successful. With regard to the aspects of security, women have secure investments (treasury bonds), the husbands' employment, several parallel businesses, and agricultural production. But they also try out various rather insecure activities (e.g. speculating on the stock market) which might turn out very successful. However, what success means cannot be measured in terms of a materialistic definition of success but in terms of social or symbolic capital like the embeddedness in the family structures or the ability to have other priorities of investment such as education, land, or house construction.

The topic of **Christine Müller's** research is change and continuity of knowledge systems in Ghana. Taking up a gender perspective on women's knowledge, two dimensions were emphasised as essential: the knowledge transfer across the generations and knowledge transfer through networks, especially women's organisations, which work on different levels - local, national and global. Müller's methodological approach follows the actor oriented sociology of knowledge that takes into consideration the lifeworld of the actors and determines everyday life experiences and their interpretations by men and women. Therefore knowledge as part of social processes is not analysed as an isolated category but within the context of society.

Fieldwork was conducted in the Brong-Ahafo Region near the border to Ivory Coast. Already existing contacts to German development projects facilitated the access to the village. Knowledge of the Twi language was necessary for communication with the local people. Furthermore research was supported by a male assistant and informant who was born in the village. This co-operation was described by Müller as very productive: in talks with him as well as with his family she was able to enlarge her context knowledge. In this co-operation the role division was defined by the knowledge gap: the researcher took over the role of a student whereas the local assistant maintained the role as a teacher.

The instruments of the survey were interviews, participant observation, oral history, discourse analysis and group discussions. Since the data were already analysed during field research, new dimensions of the research questions could be developed and unclear points could be discussed again.

The social order of the Akan is based on a political parallel system of men and women. The chief is the main political representative of the men, whereas the female side is represented by the queen mother. Beside the stock of knowledge that she shares with other women, she has a certain knowledge that is characteristic for her role as a queen mother. Systems of knowledge that are transferred over generations are of course modified in course of time. These changes, in particular with regard to the women's room for manoeuvre, were reconstructed in the interviews that started with a question about the past. The interviews show that especially older women have a remarkable stock of knowledge, namely in issues of health, nature, management of resources and so on. Women get their knowledge mainly from their maternal grandmother, whereas men's knowledge is transferred through different sources like the father, the mother, or the maternal grandparents. The formal education system and school curricula seem to play only a minor role in the transfer of knowledge. Radio however is of remarkable importance. Particularly for the youth, it represents a medium by which to increase knowledge. The programmes of the local stations are a way to handle everyday life problems and deal with topics like agriculture, youth and alcohol, family planning and health care. The programmes are developed by experts who refer not only to so-called modern knowledge but also to the traditional knowledge of the older generation. For the youth the radio is becoming more and more a source that increases their knowledge and enables them to cope with their everyday life problems.

**Michael Schöpf's** research interest is the interaction and intervention in forced migration with a particular stress on self-organisation. He conducted field research in East Africa where he focused on Rwandan refugees in Tanzania and on Sudanese refugees in Northern Uganda. He presented a broad-based approach that takes into account the perspectives of different actors like refugees, UN/ UNHCR personnel and aid workers, the host country and the country of origin. Instead of taking over a refugee-centred model, Schöpf exposes an arena of interaction and intervention and identifies different interests competing with each other. At the same time the interests are also bound to a perspective that is heavily influenced by the locality where the

actor is actually situated. The analysis of the discourses that emerge in different localities opens up very different perspectives on the same arena and are sketched out as follows:

In the discourse of the *UN* system and particularly the *UNHCR* at the international level the efficient and cheap/cost-effective aid is central. Consequently repatriation as soon as possible is a main aim. Characteristic are also the marginalisation of protection and the specialisation in the management of humanitarian aid. Regional stability and security and the policy agenda of Western powers are also taken into consideration. Since the UN personnel depends on security guidelines that are decided upon in New York, there is only limited field access. To a large extent, local discourses are excluded.

For the *host country* the discourse on security takes up another perspective. With the refugees, security deteriorates and threatens travel and trade. Central is also the infrastructure and the livelihood of the local people. Here the question is who profits most from the camps and how the host country gets compensation for its efforts to protect refugees.

In the *country of origin* the re-establishment of a reliable administration and government is central. In particular in the Rwandan case the discourse is determined by the question of how to treat the offenders and victims of the genocide and which kind of justice can be applied.

The *refugee camp* is a special arena because this is where a locality most apparently shapes the discourses. Here the UNHCR acts as the mandated agency. It stands for care and maintenance but also promotes repatriation. The churches intend to make the camp as a temporary home. New sources of employment are created with external donor money, solid houses are constructed and land use is made available. The camps also provide the means for the reinforcement of ethnic solidarity or polarisation.

Schöpf emphasised that taking these different discourses into consideration prevents an intervention that views refugees as a problem to be isolated and dealt with.

At the end of the workshop all participants agreed that there was still a lot to be discussed as regards concrete methods and procedures in the field and the contribution to empowerment of women respectively in order to understand overall social change.