Introduction

The Lifeworlds and Trajectories of NGOs in Africa

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Introduction

The premises of the grassroots non-governmental organization (NGO) *Zaabre Vênem* lie right in front of the tallest baobab tree in Zorgho, the capital of Ganzourgou province in Burkina Faso. The entrance is not visible from the main street, but there is a hand-painted sign pointing in its direction. Those who follow the sign take a bumpy path pass a small rubbish dump right beneath the baobab tree, where donkeys go looking for food. Right behind it is a turquoise-coloured gate guarding the plot of land on which the office is situated. The entrance is usually open so that pedestrians can look inside and enter the organization's premises. At the back of the plot of land is the main house with three offices and a spacious foyer, its walls covered in a rich collection of pictures depicting past initiatives. In front of the house is a small terrace, a shaded parking area, two toilet blocks and a granary. Usually, there are several motorbikes scattered around, as if their riders had just left them behind in a hurry. In the late afternoon, the chances are high of meeting the five founders of *Zaabre Vênem* sitting outside the office: a Catholic teacher, a Muslim farmer, a Catholic pharmacist, the son of a Muslim chief in Zorgho and the Protestant president of the organization. The five men have known each other for decades, some of them having grown up together. There is a noticeable familiarity in the way they balance provocation, mutual

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respect and care in interacting with each other. Their links with one another appear to be distinctive, challenging and harmonious at the same time, reminding the observer of his or her own lifelong friends and the pleasant lightness underlying the relationship.

As soon as outsiders pass by the centre, the founders' familiarity becomes even more evident. For example, every couple of days a woman with a basket of fruit visits the centre for a chat. However, she rarely manages to complete a sentence, as the men tend to make sarcastic remarks that the woman reacts to with pointed questions that provoke laughter. Still, before she leaves, the men buy a banana or some oranges, as they know she struggles to make a livelihood. On another day, two chiefs came to talk to the president of *Zaabre Vênem*, trying to negotiate extra aid for their community. Having known the president for decades, they decided to approach him directly to request 'special treatment' in the form of extra materials with which to plough their fields or similar benefits. However, the president had to decline, despite being visibly torn between his social obligations and the programme's regulations. At that time, *Zaabre Vênem* was already working as the implementing partner of an NGO in Switzerland, which is fully in control of the projects *Zaabre Vênem* implements and the resources it distributes. The president's acquaintances, who do not necessarily know about the partnership's structural funding conditions, reacted with an uncomfortable, disappointed silence and reluctant expressions of agreement. Before they left, however, the president managed to appease them with some jokes and handshakes.

Apart from the familiarity and the laid-back flair of such social interactions, the (hi)stories of the people who come to knock on *Zaabre Vênem*'s door are usually more distressing and urgent. Very often people approach the organization with existential problems. On any given day, a farmer might report that someone has stolen three of the goats he had planned to sell in order to pay for an operation for his eldest daughter; a mother might pass by to ask for financial support to buy medicine for her sick son. Indeed, both men and women often seek the support of the African NGOs in their communities. However, it would not be appropriate to explain this only with reference to social relations between NGO actors and their fellow humans, which would have to fall back solely on the alleged existence of patron–client and similar subsidiary relationships. The fact that African grassroots NGOs often represent the only contact point for marginalized groups in case of urgent needs and daily livelihood challenges tends to be neglected. Often confronted with the lack of health insurance, the lack of free education and the arbitrariness of political institutions, NGOs in Africa can be understood as multiform proxies. Apart from their

'Janus-faced' nature (Dodworth 2014) and 'inherent messiness' (Lewis and Schuller 2017: 634), beyond their embeddedness in global configurations of power (Bernal 2017; Schuller 2017) and their tendency to professionalize (Baillie Smith and Laurie 2011; Bernal and Grewal 2014; Craig and Porter 2006; Lewis 2016), we argue that they retain their relevance as melting pots, both permeating and being permeated by lifeworlds.

Relocating Terminologies: On Development and Civil Society Narratives

This 'backyard story' of *Zaabre Vênem* in Burkina Faso provides a glimpse into the everyday world of NGO actors in Africa. These ordinary situations are part of everyday lifeworlds and mirror the relationality of NGO work: how identities and personalities, and tensions and histories, emerge and evolve behind the dusty brick walls of NGOs in Africa. As these organizations constantly interact with people and occupy public spaces in communities, being assembled through spatial proximity and social relations, they are torn not only between institutional schemes and laudable agendas but also between their own and other people's everyday cultural embeddedness. In this regard, NGOs should indeed be investigated as an 'open-ended process' (Hilhorst 2003: 4), as non-static and flexible, as shifting between and adapting to intersecting interests, rules and expectations (Opoku-Mensah, Lewis and Tvedt 2007). However, while this volume builds on this insight, it also proposes to use the concept of the lifeworld as a lens through which to study the situated, transformative and mutually constitutive nature of NGOs in Africa and beyond.

The study of NGOs has become increasingly popular in the social sciences, eliciting either sharp criticism or exuberant praise. In the 1990s, it was mostly political scientists and sociologists who elaborated on the potentials and risks of the so-called 'NGO boom' (Alvarez 1999). Anthropologists, by contrast, took a while longer to pay attention to the inner and outer worlds of NGOs. Instead, they contributed more to debates on either development or civil society, two fields closely related to the NGO phenomenon but in very different ways.

Where development is concerned, quite simply, from the 1970s, NGOs entered the field of development when the failures of structural adjustment programmes were transformed into more and more apparent and induced processes of 'aid decentralization' (Bierschenk, Chaveau and Olivier de Sardan 2002: 7). Yet, apart from good-governance narratives and bottom-up approaches, it still took anthropologists a while to look more deeply into the associated global 'landscapes of power' (Bernal

2018: 38) that caused NGOs to continue to become the solid 'partners' of state ministries and to rely increasingly on donor money (see below). This new role also becomes evident in the contributions to this volume, as they touch upon issues and historical accounts of development with regard to NGO work in Africa. It is against this background that we view the anthropology of development (Herzfeld 2001) and post-development approaches (Ziai 2007b, 2012) as being of great importance to this volume, the former critically reflecting on power structures and development practice; the latter problematizing the neocolonial discursive continuities in the field of NGOs in Africa. At the same time, it is important to note that development-related studies in particular are being criticized for co-producing powerful development narratives that are quickly transformed into new paradigmatic trends and discourses (Crush 1995; Ziai 2016).

While the NGO phenomena grew into the development industry, its roots lie rather in the concept of civil society, which in turn draws on a dominant strand in the intellectual history of the European bourgeoisie in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Baillie Smith and Laurie 2011; Comaroff and Comaroff 1999; Hann and Dunn 1996; Hemment 2014; Randeria 2002). As a consequence, the debates on civil society are often highly Eurocentric and pose a significant epistemological challenge to scholars working on civil society in Africa or other world regions. The risk of losing oneself in conceptual and ideological discussions over which formations fall under the umbrella of civil society and which do not are consequently high, particularly for anthropologists. At the same time, the question of what civil society *is* or *is not* remains an empirical one, creating both a desire for a decolonized and dynamic definition of civil society and doubts about it. While this definition already carries the risk of wallowing in cultural relativism (Lewis 2002: 580), it still points to the non-fixed and complex nature of civil engagements worldwide (Obadare 2016). A broader definition of civil society (or NGOs) is obsolete, not least because the transformative power of civil society is grounded in its power to bring about transformation. How can we give such a phenomenon a definite framework? Whether anti-state or co-opted by the state, and thus being elitist and at the same time antithetic to hegemonic orders, any form of human organization that fits the civil society framework is not only historically shaped, it is also a smaller or larger marvel of a strategic and spontaneous metamorphosis.

Thereafter debates and discourses shifted. The multiplicity of forms belonging to the notion of civil society moved closer to the world of NGOs, which had very similar epistemological discomforts and inherent contradictions. However, this time anthropologists set about tackling this haunting ghost by trying to make the conceptual dilemma over NGOs

less uncomfortable and also more fruitful by pointing to the 'productive instability' of the concept (Lewis and Schuller 2017). Recently, some authors have framed NGO actors as 'do-gooders' (ibid.: 647) who belong to *Cultures of Doing Good* (Lashaw, Vannier and Sampson 2017), a title reflecting the ambiguity that sticks to NGO work. This ambiguity is also mirrored in the 'hegemonic cookbook definition' introduced by Steven Sampson in the introduction to *Cultures of Doing Good*, namely that NGOs are 'voluntary, not for profit, autonomous from government, and judicially corporate' (2017: 11). At the same time, current research stresses NGO work as dominated by cash flow, undermined by neoliberal principles and increasingly dependent on the downward drip-drip of state-led funding streams (Aziz and Kapoor 2013; Bernal and Grewal 2014; Craig and Porter 2006; Davidov 2016). Sampson's 'hegemonic cookbook definition' therefore points out the ideals and imaginations connected with NGO work, like altruism and self-determination, more than the current economic and political ambiguities the NGOs continue to face. As long as this definition is understood as ideational, it serves the critical investigation of 'NGO-ing' for two reasons (Hilhorst 2003). On the one hand, it triggers critical reflection on how the intellectual history of European occidental philosophy informs the norms and values that prevail in the NGO world today, as well as the antithetical processes just mentioned that have been taking place in the field for the last two decades. On the other hand, the definition tends to suggest the normative similarities that affect a wide spectrum of civil engagements, ranging from one-man endeavours and collective efforts to INGOs and grassroots organizations, thereby overcoming the formal disparities in the study of NGOs.

Loose Ends and Three Ambitions

Sampson's definition, then, even though taking this Eurocentric, hegemonic angle as its starting point, serves our epistemological duty to use a definition that does not exclude the multiple forms and agendas of NGOs in Africa and beyond. Sampson's definition means acknowledging that certain norms dominate a vast field of ambitions and practices with a charitable idea, while at the same time leaving room for the different experiences, organizational formats, practices and social realities that take place within the NGO shell. This is why most authors in this volume use the term NGOs, even though the organizations they refer to have different legal statuses, formats and structures.

This leads us to the *first* of three ambitions we have in this volume. We intend to question certain rhetorical habits in academic discourses on

Africa, especially to dissolve dichotomies like 'local' and 'global', which anthropologists have much criticized but nevertheless inscribe into the language and epistemological thinking behind our academic writing. This volume aims to reach beyond entrenched binary categories like 'Global South' and 'Global North' (e.g. Burawoy 2001; Crush 1995; Herzfeld 2001; Kees 2004; Moore 2004; Tsing 2005) or 'the West and the Rest' (Gieben and Hall 1992: 187; Ziai 2007a). Although some such notions might be heuristically useful in describing larger correlations, we think that there is still an obligation to look for ways in which knowledge production 'can be twisted, removed or turned upside down' (see Schultz, this volume). This also means adopting a more 'horizontal topography' (Ferguson 2006) with respect to the spatial aspects of our analysis, which we do by arguing that the transnational scope of African grassroots organizations is no less evident than that of INGOs, and that a British NGO worker is no less bound to his or her 'local' space than an NGO worker in Burundi.

Another major challenge, we suggest, is the revision and application of the European corpus of literature on NGOs, as well as its critical elaboration and transformation. There is a growing call to 'break from the process of recycling knowledge in the upper stratum of global power' (comment by Manzurul Mannan in Lewis and Schuller 2017: 646). After years of repeatedly (and rightly!) pillorying the silencing of 'non-Western' thought and epistemologies in academic knowledge production, it is time to breach the auto-poetic and self-referential but vicious cycle of criticism (Shivji 2018). Instead of pointing to their absence, therefore, we draw attention to dialogues with European and African colleagues, as well as between scholars and practitioners working in the NGO field. The *second* aim of this volume is therefore to enter a transdisciplinary, boundary-crossing exchange and thus connect practical to academic knowledge. In this volume, accordingly, there are contributions from NGO founders, like Sylvestre Ouédraogo from Burkina Faso; researchers in history, anthropology, political science and sociology; and academics who prepare students for NGO work in their home countries or who used to work in the NGO field themselves. We bring together perspectives on NGOs from Nigeria, Denmark, Togo, Germany, Sweden, Burkina Faso, Hungary, Austria and France, together with all the challenges, language barriers and epistemological opportunities, inspirations and doubts we came across as the editors of this book. The reader might also notice that a large proportion of the chapters focus on Burkina Faso, because the editors of this volume have been conducting research in the country for more than a decade.

However, beyond the different styles of telling stories and the plurality of topics and viewpoints, our contributors share an important com-

monality: they all aim to point out how NGOs and their actors impinge on politics, education, knowledge and people's everyday life, as well as how the latter find their own path out of this impinging. It is against this background, *thirdly*, that this volume aims to enter the field of NGOs from an actor-centred angle. While much attention is currently being paid to sector-specific NGO fields like religion, gender or the environment, the trajectories of NGO actors in Africa are largely unknown, as qualitative studies rarely put the actors at the centre of their inquiries. Even though recent studies of NGOs do cite the actors behind the formal shell of their organizations and take into account their challenges, it is still the organization itself that 'acts', 'engages with' and 'promotes' agendas. This might be one reason for Erica Bornstein noting that NGOs can be the 'object, a locus, a research field or a verb' (comment by Erica Bornstein in Lewis and Schuller 2017: 639). However, even in studies in which it is NGOs that serve as the empirical field itself, thorough examinations of the everyday work of NGO actors behind the scenes – of their social realities, biographies and working conditions – remain rare.[1] We know little about situations, interactions and negotiations behind the walls of NGO offices, or about the actors, who come from very different social backgrounds and certainly do not fit into a homogenous category (Mouftah 2017: 124). As a consequence, we know little about how the lives of NGO employees, recipients and communities in Africa are shaped through their NGO work or vice versa. How do people enter this field? What are the challenges involved in doing development in one's own community? Under what social and economic conditions do NGO actors work? What are the future imaginations and ideas of NGO actors in Africa? How do those who grew up in an environment in which NGO activities were part of the everyday evaluate NGOs? And how does NGO work influence how people perceive the state?

The Usefulness of the Lifeworld Concept in Studying NGOs

The most important commonality underlying these questions is the suggestion that NGO work is part of the everyday lifeworlds of men and women in Africa, regardless of how concrete their relationship is to the field. Our questions are therefore profoundly empirical and require examining in the most unbiased manner possible. This is why we propose the concept of lifeworlds in which 'microcosms and macrocosms' (Jackson 2012: xiv) deserve equal attention. Both the experience of individuals with regard to the NGO field and the ramifications of the decade-long salience of development projects in society, as well as their

interrelations, find a place in this perspective (Jackson 1989). Originating in phenomenological theory, the lifeworld approach assumes that the frictions and correspondences between a person's world (*Eigenwelt*) and the worlds of others (*Mitwelt*) is bidirectional (Husserl 1973 [1910/1911]). In this view, the biography and experiences of an NGO founder in Morocco (see Brun, this volume) are as insightful as the culture, humanity and history of political institutions. In Hannah Arendt's words, we are interested in the 'subjective in-between' (Arendt 1982), the 'in-between' of the subjective and universal, the local, the national and the global, without any traceable limits or tangible boundaries. Therein everything is in motion and unpredictable; cultural, political and social phenomena are neither static nor separable from each other. This is why Jackson describes lifeworlds as a a 'force field (*Kraftfeld*)' that is 'charged with vitality and animated by struggle' (2012: 7; referring to Husserl 1970 [1936]). This struggle can take place between the nation state and the transnational donor policies with which it may collide, while depending on and thus craving the donors' resources (see Sissao, this volume). Other struggles take place within NGOs. Routines of communication and work, of social norms and ideas in African countries, intersect with normative orders and global paradigms, leading to conflict and undermining but also synergies and transformation. African NGO actors must manoeuvre their way through the 'close meshed' structural conditions and rules of the state and donors (De Certeau 1988: 24). They improvise and work out hidden tricks but also face confrontation, if necessary, while believing, ridiculing or criticizing the often contradictory requirements donors expect them to fulfil. NGO policies and project-based planning not only impinges on the day-to-day work of NGO actors in Africa and the everyday of their fellow humans, it also belongs to their social worlds in an inseparable manner.

Against this background, the contributions in this volume look more closely at mutually constituting situations to focus on the relationships of NGOs and NGO actors in a transdisciplinary manner (Jackson 2012: 22). Practices and concepts within NGO partnerships in Africa unfold complex meanings everywhere they seek validation and influence. It is important to acknowledge that these interactions and intersections unfold a social life of their own that co-shapes individual relationships and personal encounters (see Lauterbach, this volume). In the day-to-day of NGO workers, personal viewpoints and project planning may depart massively from one another without causing the project to fail, as actors may want to maintain good relations or secure resources. At another moment, NGO actors may resist certain requirements openly and accept the losses that may ensue. Hence, in the study of NGOs in Africa, in which power asym-

metries unquestionably exist, it makes no sense to overemphasize either structural conditions or people's agency (Ortner 2006).

We therefore argue that in projects and programmes too, in meeting rooms and campaigning, there are still constant dialogical, physical and introspective exchanges at work. Even though dominant norms and forms of knowledge circulate to, from and within NGOs, they still circulate in a particular place and at a particular time. On the basis of our research, we have come to the conclusion that, from a situated perspective, the cards of power and hegemony are reshuffled every day, while powerful formations unfold heterogeneous connections on-site, whose patterns and meanings require a more radical empirical stance (Jackson 1989). The lifeworld concept therefore helps us to render empirically disputable the more dominant narrative of the paramount donor, whose power is indeed enshrined in international ethical codes, in the norms of development programmes and in ideas of economic progress. For example, as Beate Paragi (this volume) emphasizes, the asymmetric basis of giving and receiving between NGO partners is not as evident as it may seem. Exerting power needs continuous work and effort to maintain its force in people's lives, particularly in spatially distant places. We understand powerful orders as the 'work of mankind', as Heinrich Popitz (1992 [1986]) claims empathically. Consequently, practice and narrative strengthen and weaken, transform and shape power structures (see Engels, this volume). Everyone who therefore deftly plays the game of adaption and flexible navigation through NGO worlds can reach his or her goals, like re-creating one's own social status or accumulating the wealth and opportunities that open up a path of upward social mobility for the future (see Sundberg, this volume).

Yet the lifeworld approach not only lends our understanding of NGOs, donor relations and everyday work in development more depth, it also points to the fact that the social life of NGO work in Africa is deeply embedded in the everyday lives of African citizens. Whether people are active in this field of work or not, many of them hoard experiences and memories with(in) these organizations, while NGO projects shape and disrupt the everyday lives of people in different ways. Communities are familiar with the formal visits of donors; for example, to celebrate the opening of new buildings. They have seen more than once how foreigners arrive in shiny jeeps to sit under temporary tents and shake hands and give speeches. Many members in cities and communities have experience of development-related activities and can easily remember the problems related to the construction of a school building five years earlier and why it still lies idle today. They know stories of why an NGO – whose name still decorates a crumbling, abandoned house on the main street – had to

stop its activities or can at least point out somebody who remembers the organization's history (see Brun, this volume).

However, after decades of intervention, people not only have memories, they have also developed elaborate opinions and conclusions on NGOs and related projects. This applies to citizens but even more to (former) NGO actors in Africa. They have memories of foreign donors' names and their procedural and normative peculiarities. Sometimes NGO workers can even recall the different habits and cultures of donors from different countries, as well as explain the respective advantages and disadvantages of working with them. Many narratives are about the continuities and discontinuities they have experienced within NGOs. These stories not only derive from the course of their engagement in the field; sometimes they connect with memories when they were younger (see Büschel and Hahn, this volume). Here it is crucial to take into account the fact that aid activities and NGO work can be an ordinary, though often volatile part of everyday life. A lot of today's NGO actors were born and grew up in the target destinations of NGOs projects, sat in classrooms built with development funding, profited from donated school materials and used newly constructed sanitation facilities. They themselves may have experienced how their parents engaged in protests against large-scale mining (LSM) (see Engels, this volume) and how their mothers and sisters marched for more political rights on Women's Day every 8th of March. An unknown number encountered what development jargon calls 'poverty'. Biographies collected during the research in Zorgho (Burkina Faso) show that they often also experienced hunger, had to drop out of school because of financial problems and suffered physical restrictions. Indeed, some of today's NGO actors in Africa might even have used the donor-funded infirmary or participated in work in community-based agricultural fields themselves when they were young.

Understanding these correlations and paying attention to the biographies of African NGO actors leads to a simple, though rarely acknowledged insight: the latter's experiences with development in Africa not only evolve during their career paths or derive from billboard images: NGOs and their development projects *belong* to the lifeworlds many of these workers grew up in. How do they relate to the fact that they had to implement project procedures, norms and rules, and how do they feel about shifting from benefiting from aid to distributing it? We also know little about how citizens in Africa perceive their neighbours, friends and relatives who become active in this field. Working in NGOs leads them to fulfil certain meanings and functions in terms of social cohabitation, but how does this affect their own everyday lives, and what conflictual situations arise from this ambiguous position?

Proximity and Distance as a Lens for NGOs in Africa

To answer these questions, we shall elaborate on the pivotal engagements that determine the everyday lives of those who work in NGO-related contexts. Therefore, we need to recognize that in spatial, temporal and social respects the endeavours, challenges and work routines of NGO activities in Africa demonstrate significant differences from the day-to-day work of European or US-American NGO employees. Although this may seem obvious, it is not. In academic discourse there is almost no reflection on the contact zones between NGO actors, target groups and other parties that might be involved in the process. Take German NGOs, which are active in Africa and well known for their activities, as an example. Only a few Germans will be able to tell you where to find the offices of the headquarters of *Brot für die Welt* or *Kindernothilfe*, not in which city, let alone which street, tower, building or floor. NGOs in Germany mainly occupy public spaces through commercials, posters and flyers, reminding citizens of their moral obligation to help those who have less and who suffer from constraints like malnutrition, a lack of education or unequal opportunities.

Admittedly, if one travels to the capitals of African countries, these German NGOs have a little more visibility and presence, some occupying tiny destination boards in the city's streets and hanging up a more prominent sign outside their own premises. However, even in their so-called country offices the gates are usually high enough to obscure the view inside and are protected by a guard, who checks visitors before letting them pass. German NGO offices nevertheless tend to be spatially distant from project sites, often situated outside the capitals or nowadays being managed by African 'counterparts', to borrow an expression of Eric Burton (this volume). This is how scales of spatial proximity and distance shift significantly: NGOs in Africa are increasingly becoming the implementation partners of foreign NGOs, prolonging the intervals between field visits from the fund-giving side. There are practical reasons for this that we will leave aside here, such as security and cost: what is important here is that it changes the roles of African NGO actors.

Comparing the everyday work of a German NGO worker with, for example, a Malian NGO employee stresses how spatially restricted the offices of the latter are in comparison to the offices of the former. NGOs in Africa, even those implementing the administratively extensive programmes of transnational donors, are usually based in a city district or a small village and are active in the very same area. Consequently, the spatial proximity of African NGO actors to target groups and communities

is very noticeable. No matter how technically equipped and professional grassroots organizations may become, they still form social spaces anyone can enter. Cultural traits, normative expectations, individual ideas, moral claims, conflicts and social linkages all merge in these spaces all the time. Project campaigns and reunions take place on the properties of NGO offices, and development projects can be reached in a five-minute motor-bike ride. The offices have no material or immaterial barriers, like glass doors and elevators, doorbells and email blacklists. Instead, streets in Africa are loaded with metal notices and signs promoting the locations of NGO offices from various countries and cultures.

The same social connectivity exists the other way around. To many NGO actors in Africa, projects are not abstract imaginaries of planning and impact models but significantly concrete and tangible events and occurrences. NGO activities therefore have a personal and social dimension because they proceed in the surroundings where NGO actors live and work. Their targeted recipients are flesh and blood people living next door. This means that beneficiaries and employees, gatekeepers and project managers, may be relatives, old friends, neighbours or former employees. Being physically and socially close, at any moment in time a member of a target group can pass by the office and ask for a favour or offer his or her thoughts and ideas. Information, criticism and dispute, as well as the consequences of decision-making and rigid planning, strike African NGO actors in a direct and unfiltered manner. They know a lot more about the controversies and antagonisms that may arise out of NGO activities than their foreign counterparts but are usually reluctant to share their knowledge because they fear for their jobs, thus contributing to the 'intentional amnesia' (see Hahn, this volume) of development. In other words, African NGO actors hold back information before the institutional memory of development can even start to sort out the critical knowledge that threatens its existence (Douglas 1986; Kalfelis 2020).

Spatial proximity also means that those affected by projects, campaigns and measures can hold African NGO actors to account. The existence of distinct hierarchies of communication leaves no virtual gaps through which uncomfortable or qualitative information on what is happening 'on the ground' can be filtered. If a foreign NGO declines financial support to a mother to buy medicine for her child and the daughter dies, the on-site counterpart who takes that decision or passes it on will have to face the discredit alone. This may sound like a harsh example, but some cases do force international NGO workers to take decisions deciding matters of life and death. While foreign NGOs may lack the knowledge about details on-site or about the consequences of their decisions, it is almost impossible for African NGO actors to turn away from the 'intended or unin-

tended' consequences (Grewal 2017: 114) of harmful decisions. In most cases, African counterparts serve as passive messengers with almost no decision-making authority, which is related to the manner in which international actors tend to outsource the management of their programmes (see Sundberg, this volume). Usually, when foreign donors subcontract an African partner, they only hand over executive branches of their programmes, not any decision-making leadership. Another complication of such asymmetric relationships is that internationally active NGOs may themselves lose control of their projects, as they are increasingly being forced to apply for programme mandates with planning procedures, contents and accountability rhythms already set by states, ministries, foundations and/or supranational organizations (see below).

An example from the field illustrates the repercussions resulting from the fact that NGO actors in Africa represent and administer the decisions of foreigners, not their own. Back in Zorgho, Burkina Faso, a community-based NGO representative of the national branch of a French NGO had put a lot of effort in gaining the trust of two *marabouts* in his community to help him promote improvements to *talibé* children's[2] living conditions. In exchange for the *marabouts'* cooperation, the NGO had promised to dig new wells close to their mosques. However, when the project cycle ended, the French NGO employees did not return to the community, nor did they keep their promise. Instead, they left the NGO representative behind, someone who had lived in Zorgho all his life. He urged his employers to keep their promise and contacted the person responsible for this promise repeatedly without success, while the *marabouts* held him accountable for the deception. Later on, he explained that he would not be able to return to their property.

Thus, while foreign decision-makers in NGOs can just pull out of projects, the African actors on-site run the risk of losing face in their own communities. This means that NGO actors in Africa working on projects on-site are even more at risk of being harmed, thus widening the scope of the 'do-no-harm' principle more than previously assumed. These actors not only take on the position of a broker, using their skills of negotiation and translation to mediate between communities and international donors (Bierschenk, Chaveau and Olivier de Sardan 2002; Lewis and Mosse 2006), they themselves come to bear the responsibility locally for foreign interventions.

This example also stresses that it is not only spatial but also social proximities that need to be taken into account when cooperating with or studying NGOs in Africa. The incident just described is a perfect example of the destructive effect of development on social structures, and it illustrates how easily personal closeness can be transformed into social

distancing through foreign interference. Researchers and development practitioners speak of 'local experts' and their familiarity with 'local' cultures, norms and conditions. However, they rarely reflect on what this idealized social embeddedness means for the African NGO actors' own standing in society. Carrying out and managing NGO interventions with people you personally know is a sensitive endeavour in its own right, one that needs a great deal more reflection before one starts a 'partnership'. Of course, many NGO actors have profited from upward social mobility and become part of a new middle class living in air-conditioned apartments in urban areas, far away from the project site. However, a substantial number do live side by side with those they are aiming to help, seeing, smelling, feeling, hearing and hence interactively experiencing the same social realities and sharing the same language, heritage, symbols and environments. In short, they share lifeworlds.

African NGOs, African Experiences, African History

The proximity–distance contrast helps us move beyond certain analytical boundaries when discussing NGO fields. Even though the two notions may form a binary opposition, they also help describe the relationality of cultural interaction, the negotiation of norms, social practice and social reality. In this way, it becomes evident that African NGO actors are indeed 'experts' who have what we call 'situated knowledge', though in a much broader sense than these terms imply, and in a less biased fashion than one might think. Their knowledge is intersubjective and thus inseparable from their own, experience-based trajectories. In this perspective, researchers should consider and examine NGOs and civil society in Africa as a phenomenon in its own right. As long as twenty years ago, Comaroff and Comaroff stated that '… there has been little parallel effort to disinter the cultural seedbeds and historical sources of anything that might be regarded as an analogue of civil society in Africa' (1999: 22–23). Nonetheless, with some exceptions (Ekeh 1975, 1994; Kabore 2002; Little 1957, 1965), knowledge of precolonial practices and forms of organization that show relationships with today's NGO field is still lacking (Lewis 2002). It might therefore still be worthwhile researching the traces of social protection and altruism in Africa through biographies, memories, tales and myths (Devereux and Getu 2013), quite apart from popular African concepts like *Ubuntu*[3] (Praeg 2014).

We suggest that there are several reasons for this gap in knowledge. First of all, written sources are lacking that might reveal evidence of forms of resistance and political engagement in African empires like the

Yatenga or Ashanti kingdom (Fuller 2012 [1921]; Izard 1985). Secondly, new methodologies, epistemologies and approaches might contribute to research on precolonial phenomena and 'African' schemes without people having to immerse themselves in traditionalizing, essentializing or romanticizing knowledge production. A third barrier is the dominance of a contradictory yet Eurocentric understanding (see Adesoji in this volume) of what civil society is, what it should be and from where it derives (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999: 23). The idea that European theory has a unique selling point when it comes to social welfare is quite entrenched. Even though twentieth-century philosophers did not agree on the role of civil society,[4] its dogmatic affinity with democratic and non-violent principles is nevertheless valid, despite continuing to be challenged (Bruhns and Gosewinkel 2005; Gosewinkel and Reichhardt 2004). David Lewis (2002) thoroughly examines this juncture and carves out four different academic narratives of the connections between the concept of European civil society and politics in Africa. While one of these narratives draws on idealized, policy-related claims calling civil society the 'missing key' (Haberson 1994: 1–2) for political change on the continent, another postulate is that the concept is inapplicable to regions outside Europe (Maina 1998), while a third, arguing for a more nuanced, historical understanding of what the term entails, stresses the existence of African associations and cooperatives representing 'local' variations of civil society (Hann and Dunn 1996; Mamdani 1996).

The latter line of argument is the starting point for the contributions of Alain Sissao, Kokou Hetcheli and Abimbola Adesoji in this volume, which provide glimpses into the roles played by NGOs in Burkina Faso (Sissao) and Togo (Hetcheli), while Adesoji offers an alternative historical reading of NGOs in Nigeria. By introducing the term 'proto-NGO', he highlights early forms of resistance to colonial rule and self-organized activities by churches and other movements initiated in Africa. Their aim was not only to improve people's lives but also to offer alternatives to the normative and political. The anti-colonial yet perhaps less democratic culture of the colonial history of civil society in Africa is revealed in Adesoji's chapter.

In the last decade, historians have provided more nuanced views of the colonial histories of NGOs in Africa as well as, more broadly speaking, the history of development (Burton 2016; Büschel and Speich 2009; Easterly 2014; Hodge 2015, 2016). As Hubertus Büschel (2014) explains with reference to his research on Cameroon, Togo and Tanzania between 1960 and 1975, many African leaders expelled so-called experts from their territory after gaining independence. To maintain power relations and political influence after decolonization, a strategic move of great

importance during the Cold War, NGOs served as a new, seemingly untainted framework (ibid.: 195–97). Eric Burton's research on counterpart relations between German and Tanzanian development actors in this volume adds to this argument. By taking an actor-centred perspective focused on the African side of this relationship, he argues that on the surface apparently new NGO formats often grew out of, complemented or even replaced existing state-led programmes. In line with Büschel's observations about colonial experts, the career trajectories of Tanzanian development professionals show that NGOs too strove to keep control of material resource flows and therefore of power. Hence, the NGO framework became a Trojan horse not only for experts from the former colonial regime but also for an African elite that feared for their advantageous position in the new postcolonial era.

Büschel's and Burton's findings are evidence of the multilayered histories of NGOs in Africa, with their trajectories and expressions of social work in different regions of the world that deserve greater analytical attention. For example, in West Africa, a popular example of *civilitas* would be Mande hunter associations, whose history goes back to the thirteenth century, when they had central roles in the provision of medicine, hunting and security (Hagberg 2019: 177). Yet, many scholars would probably hesitate to acknowledge hunters as a form of civil society because they had key functions in the private and public, economic and political spheres and used physical violence against fellow human beings. Another example of African expressions of social work has left linguistic traces of former associational dynamics in Burkina Faso. Recent research has revealed two different ideas related to civil engagement in the Mooré language, *lagem-n-tar-sulli* ('federation' (*lagem*), 'have' (*tare*), 'group' (*sulli*)), translated as 'group joining forces'; and *song-taab-sulli* ('mutual help' (*song taaba*) 'group' (*sulli*)) – that is, a 'mutual help group'. In contrast to *lagem-n-tar sulli*, whose purpose was human cooperation for the sake of greater safety and a better harvest, *song-taab-sulli* describes people coming together to support the weakest members of the community. These expressions, one describing 'endogenous' support for group members, the other 'exogenous' support for the needy in the community, seem more accurate to describe today's civil engagement in West Africa (Kalfelis 2020).

Concerning social movements, Elísio Macamo (2011) makes a similar argument by pointing out a lack of the proper conceptual tools to describe forms of protest and political engagement in Africa. In general, just lately, authors show growing efforts to find conceptually more nuanced approaches to describe social movements in Africa (Daniel and Neubert 2019). To study African forms of self-organization, altruism and

political action is therefore not a romanticist request to recover the cultural memory that dissolves through the generations but a critique of the ability of our epistemological and conceptual toolbox to describe events, actions, engagements and correlations on the African continent. In the words of Haythem Guesmi on the online blog 'Africa is a Country',[5] we need to reflect more conceptually and theoretically on the 'gentrification' of African studies and search for ways to produce knowledge beyond the binary thinking of our own education (Jackson 2012: 22–23). How can we give African phenomena, thought and history a serious place in the departments of social anthropology in Europe and the USA (Rettová 2016)? Again, the example above shows us that in some regions of Africa civil society engaged in the provision of security and justice. However, it was a kind of civil society that used forms of regulated violence to secure established orders and punish fellow human beings who had broken moral codes. Maybe there were different variations in civil engagement, with particular social agendas that did not exclude economic profit-seeking. Maybe the altruistic segment of civil society was hijacked in the formation of what Peter P. Ekeh (1975) calls the 'two publics' (also Osaghae 2006), which differentiate between the native 'primordial public', rooted in moral obligations, and the 'civic public', the realm of the state derived from colonial political infrastructures. Albeit romanticized, the idea that there are 'two publics' emphasizes the neocolonial pattern of the postcolonial state in Africa.

Transnational Encounters of NGOs: Disseminating, Mediating, Working

We have more questions than answers in this regard. What is certain is that the organizations we call NGOs have various pasts, presents and futures, and in addition they not only have project-based impacts but belong to and shape structures. NGOs create memories and future imaginations (Appadurai 2013), unfolding their own 'after-lives' (Schler and Gez 2018). They launch activities and discourses that are inscribed in the histories of states, of urban and rural areas, and in people's biographies and lifeworlds. In this context, the question of whether NGOs collaborate with the state or contest it, and how, becomes fairly opaque. It is more urgent to ask who and what processes are active in shifting NGOs' relations with the state and how these actors do or do not find success while trying (Thelen, Vetters and von Benda-Beckmann 2018). Whose interests do they represent, and whose do they actually support? The same questions are relevant with regard to both communities and NGOs.

Hence, the contributors to this volume examine the multiplicity of meanings, the 'sturdiness of neoliberal hegemony' (Lashaw and Vannier 2017: 234) and assumptions about power in NGO fields, as well as in the lifeworlds of NGO actors in Africa. For example, Bettina Engels (this volume) tackles the ambiguous role of NGOs in Burkina Faso. They belong to an 'ensemble' that, against all expectations, shapes narratives to the detriment of communities. NGOs may therefore act like wolves in sheep's clothing by breaking with the normative expectations that are directed at them. Beata Paragi (this volume), on the other hand, shows how NGOs and their donors need beneficiaries and proof of suffering in order to legitimize their activities and raise funds. She frames this as the 'aid for pain, pain for aid' syndrome in today's global NGO world and emphasizes that dependencies are mutual and not as one-sided as they might seem.

Even though donors seem omnipotent in the everyday of NGO actors in Africa at the first or even the third glance, it is important to study empirically the situations and interactions at hand. Buzzwords, concepts and knowledge of the World Bank do circulate behind the walls of grassroots NGOs in Senegal or Kenya, but this does not necessarily mean that they give meaning to the NGO actors' activities on-site. These notions function much more as a parallel language, as artificial tools that NGO actors worldwide use in the right manner and at the right moment (Chambers 2012). Apart from this 'NGO-speak' (Synková 2017: 79), the material and practical power of donors can also be overwhelming. We highlighted the social embeddedness and spatial proximity of *Zaabre Vênem* at the beginning of this introduction. What we left out is what one finds upon entering the organization's offices, namely various brochures issued by their Swiss partner containing colourful pictures and some carefully formulated, explicit programme targets that are easily 'up-scaled'. There is also information on awareness-raising campaigns to accompany *Zaabre Vênem*'s agricultural activities, as well as literacy courses and surveys. The pressure of time is constant, as project cycles and accountability loops always seem to be coming to an end very soon.

There is a simultaneity of engagement and endeavour at work in the everyday of NGOs in Africa, the actors and practices of which are socially and transnationally embedded, not in a top-down manner but in a multi-edged, entangled way. NGOs in Africa mark crossroads, empirical fields in which transnational policies, social realities, administrations and cultures intersect. To follow their activities reveals these organizations as involuntary circulators of bureaucratic principles and legal-rational orders (Weber 2005 [1922]). However, paradoxically, the discourses that have pushed NGOs worldwide into this role can be traced back to an

antagonistic argument. From the 1990s onwards, NGOs were celebrated as the new hope in voicing the needs of the marginalized (Chambers et al. 2000), needs that can 'challenge mainstream orthodoxies with alternative ideas and practices' (Lewis and Schuller 2017: 636). It is against this background that the international call to integrate NGOs into global summits and to let them take part in decision-making procedures became louder and boosted the transnationalization of development, as well as the neo-liberalization of the NGO sector (Craig and Porter 2006). Not much later, after the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005), the international community introduced the Accra Agenda for Action (2008)[6] and the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (2012),[7] which turned NGOs into legitimate partners for state-led development cooperation. Today, they serve as legitimate and legitimizing partners, thereby showing parallels to the role and function they had in the early period of decolonization, as highlighted by historians like Hubertus Büschel (2014; see above).

It would lead us too far to trace the various structural changes that resulted from the strategic papers mentioned above. However, it is crucial to understand that these political shifts have gradually dispossessed African NGOs of their autonomy by favouring them as implementation partners for foreign donors, who themselves increasingly have to channel and delegate what 'primary donors' determine (Dia et al. 2011: 77–78). 'Primary donors' are not active in development themselves but are the major contributors to Official Development Assistance (ODA), consisting, for example, of states and ministries, foundations and private companies. In parallel to this, there are also growing investments in 'host-country expertise' (see Sundberg, this volume), this being a main factor in the acceleration of bureaucratization processes within NGOs in Africa. Even in the most remote areas, one can find administrative systems and meticulous planning being inflated in the tiniest organizational structures in Africa today, transferring strict guidelines and conditions of participation to every single member of a community. Project recipients are thus increasingly being obliged to adapt to the rhythms and planning transferred to them in project designs so as to account for the project's support and provide evidence of their own motivation by contributing small amounts of money to it (Kalfelis 2020).

Against this background, to follow the day-to-day work of NGOs reveals how African NGO actors accept, adapt, contest and reinterpret the rules and timetables, knowledge and models, of the projects they implement. They develop a certain, more multifaceted 'expertise' that is interpersonal, strategic, technical and situated in nature and has a different genealogy than development expertise (see Büschel, this volume, also

Easterly 2014 for a historical genealogy of development expertise). They have so-called 'local knowledge', which they 'sell' to donors. In most cases, they also have the cultural sensitivity and language skills to mediate between the project recipients and the donors' expectations, or at least they quickly learn with whom to speak in order to pour oil on troubled waters. However, their expertise also entails knowing about donor expectations and attitudes to work (e.g. punctuality). Many men and women in Africa have learned how to present themselves as 'successful' partners and how to deal with the gaps between project planning and the social realities of actual communities.

Balancing out the multiple temporalities, concerns and practices that overlap in NGO projects is only one of the most challenging tasks in the day-to-day work of NGOs in Africa. Other obstacles affect the working conditions and neglected social realities of African NGO actors, which Benedetta Rossi (2017) highlights as constituting a particular relationship between employees and employers. She argues that African NGO actors might be beneficiaries at one time and place and the reverse at others and uses this insight to reflect on the social consequences of development. Rossi points out that both actors and recipients work in development projects, and she wonders what this implies for the power (im)balance between them (ibid.: 17–19; see above). Our own research in Burkina Faso leads us to agree with this insightful analysis. Most NGO actors in Burkina Faso themselves grew up in marginalized conditions, started to engage with and work for NGOs, then just fell back down the ladder again (Krishna 2007, 2017) to face the margins of so-called 'poverty'. To work in an NGO in Africa therefore means to achieve a rare privilege in society, even though such actors are severely underpaid. Yet since compared to the recipients' side only a small group of individuals can enter the NGO field, the competition for these positions is high enough to make people accept low salaries and bad working conditions. Development, in this regard, (re)creates social structures and hierarchies by drawing lines in society between collaborators in management and 'poor' recipients, or between those who are 'poor' and those who are 'doing good' (Lashaw, Vannier and Sampson 2017). This also recalls our previous argument about the antagonistic, dual role of African citizens engaging in NGOs, leaving little doubt about how ambiguous the effects of development are when it comes to social cohesion (Smith 2008). This is also the main argument of Alain Sissao in this volume: NGOs create employment while introducing social divisions in line with the reasoning of global development.

Belonging to Lifeworlds: NGOs as Multiple Institutional Proxies

Indeed, NGOs are one of the few employment alternatives to public service in many African countries, especially those that have a poorly developed private sector and high unemployment rates. However, *working* in an NGO in Africa has various implications. Many African NGOs struggle to establish their financial independence, which is why they try to move from one donor contract to another. This often leads to periods in which the resources to run the organization, including salaries, are lacking. Other NGO actors in Africa avoid partnerships with transnational donors and try to generate money through collective activities instead. In any case, many men and women engage in NGOs without earning a salary for shorter or longer periods. Some of them hope that the NGO will find a donor later on; for others, the work gives their lives meaning and kills time while waiting for other opportunities to come along (Honwana 2014). Against this background, African NGO actors often have multiple income-generating activities and come from a variety of social backgrounds. Some of them work as civil servants, while others constantly struggle with unemployment or try to make progress as students. Not a few NGO actors in Africa start their career path into development accidently, at least if they cannot afford to pay for their education in the development industry. Over the years, they accumulate knowledge of the field in domestic, small grassroots NGOs and educate themselves before applying for higher positions in national or international NGOs. As Molly Sundberg (this volume) demonstrates for Tanzania, NGOs nevertheless provide many of these actors with a temporary post before they attempt to join public aid agencies, where jobs are usually better paid and more secure.[8] However, Sundberg also argues that, due to structural inequalities between national and posted staff and very limited room for manoeuvre on the part of African counterparts, career goals have started shifting again, this time towards private development consultancies (Stirrat 2000).

The growing significance of NGOs in bi- and multilateral partnerships influences the number and quality of job offers in the field of development in Africa. However, using NGOs as channels for state-led development programmes, budgets and agendas also increases the range of functions they can fulfil, particularly in the more remote parts of Africa. In many African countries, NGOs are responsible for the construction of streets, maternity wards, hospitals and schools. For a while, they were the only providers of kindergartens and night schools where adults could earn their primary school certificates. They also often provide peasants

with an education through literacy and maths courses. NGOs offer health insurance and medication to those who cannot afford to pay a regular doctor. Some of these NGOs even specialize in particular medical areas, like malaria, eye diseases and prosthesis, as well as supplying the core funding for related medical centres. NGOs distribute school materials, agricultural tools and seeds, as well as clothing. They are involved in water sanitation systems and electricity supply; they maintain gardens, forests and fields and offer new technologies and sector-specific expertise.

As employers and the suppliers of various services, NGOs also impinge massively on educational structures in Africa. The presence of development activities and the competition for the few jobs available feeds the future aspirations of young men and women and their hopes of succeeding in entering the world of development (Appadurai 2013). People know that development experts earn salaries and see some of them move up into the middle class. In addition, study programmes, private schools and training offers in African countries are often financed by development and orient the curricula towards it. Often, they are not only highly biased but perpetuate the assumptions of modernization theory, which Ulrike Schultz (this volume) reflects on sensitively. In her chapter she discusses how training in development practice creates ambiguities in the identities and self-understandings of students from countries that are labelled 'developing'. For the students, she argues, development is not simply the object of study but is linked to experiences and phenomena in their own lifeworlds. From another perspective, Matthieu Brun (this volume) stresses how such development structures also disseminate a particular kind of sectoral thinking that does not match the experiences and views of NGO actors in Africa when it comes to the challenges in their own areas.

What would NGOs mean to our own lifeworlds if they had such a massive number of social, economic, educational and infrastructural tasks in society? What value would we attribute to them in our everyday? With these questions in mind, it becomes quite difficult to ignore NGOs when trying to understand the social and economic realities of many African citizens. Based on such examples, the distinctions between public, private and the third sector again prove not to be the appropriate way to describe the structural conditions of states in Africa (and elsewhere). Nearly everywhere where development programmes and projects are a part of everyday life, development is like a glue holding the public, the private and the third sector together. African and international NGOs both fulfil or support the tasks of the state, functioning as non-profit distributors of goods and products and providing social protection. They are involved in education, sanitation, health and the private economy. Against this back-

ground, authors rightly see (African) NGOs as parastate organizations that weaken the state's monopoly, or even render the state a 'chimera' (Zimmermann 2013), thereby relieving governments from having to fulfil their public duties (Klute and von Trotha 2001; Mann 2015; Marcussen 1996; Vetta 2012). Possibly, it is exactly such narratives that contribute to the transnationalization of development aid mentioned earlier and the already completed integration of (African) NGOs into multilateral orders of cooperation. Today, as arms of domestic and foreign governments, and supranational organizations and private donors, the parastate role of African NGOs becomes more complicated and no less evident than the foreign parastate regime. Certainly, NGOs today continue to pull aid resources away from the state, but if they do, they do it as 'partners'. In other words, they are increasingly being funded *through* the channels of the state,[9] as foreign donors have to align themselves with the recipient government's development strategy, as this fulfils the paradigmatic dogma of 'alignment' in the Paris Declaration (2005).

Against the background of these global shifts, 'NGO forms' (Bernal and Grewal 2014) in Africa continue to evolve as heterogeneous processes (Hilhorst 2003) and prove to be very resilient as long as they show transformative competences. NGO actors in Togo can be expert partners in the water sector while also presenting themselves as grassroots organizations so they can receive subsidies from the state. Maybe it is not enough to describe these organizations as 'changing' or 'shifting' because this would imply that they had had a certain shape earlier. Instead, NGOs have multiple forms and agendas simultaneously. If we understand NGOs to be processual in nature, as traits rather than as states, we may have to accept that the term 'NGO' is most useful as a heuristic device with which to describe this multiplicity and transformability. We argue that it is more fruitful to look closely at the actors behind the terminology, at those who (re)act and make decisions in response to donor expectations, paradigmatic bases, national politics, responsibilities in communities, social relations and unpredictable events, as with the recent deterioration of the national security situation in the Sahel (see Hagberg, this volume). In this view, NGOs both mirror and produce political, economic and legal changes, as well as moral shifts and social connections. This is how they end up being multiform proxies for institutions, services and tasks while also remaining social spaces in which people laugh, chat and worry, fight and support each other, contest and create.

About This Book

This volume is arranged in three thematic parts, each containing one additional contribution with a special focus to broaden the perspective of the respective part. The first part, entitled 'Engagements and Encounters', brings together self-reflective and autoethnographic perspectives. Partly written as first-person narratives, the contributions mirror the many ways in which NGO work is embedded in lifeworlds. Projects, paradigms and discourses, as well as decisions and interventions, permeate, shape and change the way NGO employees and beneficiaries live and perceive social reality, something that becomes particularly evident in this part of the book. With this part, the authors pay tribute to the fact that people share personal stories with the 'NGO world' (Stirrat and Henkel 1997) that are deeply inscribed in their own biographies. This personal account fills a gap that is often left out by academic research. Friendships, biographies and encounters resulting from NGO involvement leave traces beyond partnerships, funding periods and programmes, thereby allowing the temporalities and spaces of development activities to endure. These traces appear on both sides of the relationship and decisively influence career pathways, creating a degree of personal involvement that goes beyond merely analytical approaches. While this obviously applies to NGO actors, it is also true for scholars, who, for example, take on the roles of trainers of future development workers or are employed by an NGO at some point in their academic careers. This is why methods used in this part of the book are more personal than solely academic, including autobiography, biographical narratives, auto-ethnography and self-reflection. Practitioners as well as scholars remember, critically reflect and immerse themselves in their own histories and experiences with NGOs, giving this disciplinarily diverse volume the perfect entry point into the endless array and vast expanse of a whole global industry.

In his chapter, Sylvestre Ouédraogo, founder of an NGO himself, provides insights into his personal trajectory. He is not just occupied with NGO activities but is someone who creates and defines NGO work. Narrating his biography, he explains how he came to be the founder and director of his own NGO, an organization teaching ICT skills in Burkina Faso. It being quite exceptional in this context for an NGO to exist for more than twenty years, Ouédraogo analyses the reasons for this longevity and the conditions that favoured it. In his view, donors and the state are relevant but also partly ambivalent points of reference for his work. But what is most crucial from his point of view is the inner motivation and attitude of the founder and the NGO's employees. To focus on resil-

ience and to know one's own priorities, instead of chasing to keep up with paradigmatic trends and project funding, is what Ouédraogo indicates are the main reasons for his success.

Behind the walls of NGO offices worldwide, it is people who decide, act and negotiate. Against this background, Karen Lauterbach argues that development has to be understood as a relationship that deserves more analytical attention. She tells how, as a young Master's graduate, she found her first job in a Danish NGO. Her employer sent her to Burkina Faso to inform the partner NGO that their cooperation had to come to an end and would not be prolonged. This crucial moment reveals some of the main characteristics of such cooperation and highlights the role and significance of personal and social relations in NGO partnerships, whose main characteristics relate to reciprocity, agency and dependency. Lauterbach shows vividly how these relationships may flip over when it comes to personal encounters between individuals of different ages and coming from different societies. In fact, the daily negotiations and interactions of workers in NGO partnerships are mainly overlooked in the literature on NGOs.

The place of NGOs as potential employers of future development experts is also the topic of Ulrike Schultz's chapter, in which she focuses on the question of what such education should ideally entail and how existing knowledge structures can be challenged. She describes a 'paradoxical situation' in a studies programme at the University of Friedensau in Germany, where she teaches students from all over the world to become development experts. In doing so, she not only reflects on her own positionality as a German professor teaching development to students who come from countries where development is implemented and is often part of everyday experience; she also discusses how differently her students relate to development in comparison to herself on both epistemological and habitual grounds. It is against this background that Schultz asks how we can decolonize the production of development knowledge. Thus, the question is what future development actors in Africa and beyond actually need to learn and internalize in order to be the competent partners and counterparts of international donors. How can they be empowered, even though their empowerment would not necessarily be congruent with the structural and paradigmatic constitution of their potential future employers?

In an additional contribution, 'On Opportunities', Sten Hagberg turns this perspective around by carving out alternatives to professional pathways into NGOs. Given his many years of experience of West Africa, he is well acquainted with how difficult it is for African academics to find suitable employment. NGOs, Hagberg argues first, are often the only

significant employers of university graduates, if not the only ones the private sector has to offer. Whether full time or part time, or open-ended or temporary contracts, the NGO and development industry offers one of the few career opportunities for which African university degrees are of value. Against this background, he decries the profound lack of alternatives. Hagberg's second argument points right at the heart of global knowledge production: instead of only managing and operating NGO projects as 'local' experts, university graduates should become part of the process of knowledge production themselves. One possibility for achieving this is the promotion of more academic team research. Mixed teams of senior and junior and national and international researchers working together, Hagberg concludes, provide different benefits, like the facilitation of comparative qualitative research and the guided training of young African academics in policy advice and qualitative research. The data such teams produce and interpret ideally flow back into NGO strategies and contribute to the slow process of decolonizing global forms of knowledge. In the face of huge security issues in the Sahel region, Hagberg also promotes team research as an opportunity to continue conducting research in these countries at all.

Another emphasis of this volume is the manifold ways in which 'Politics and Donors' (Part II) influence individual pathways, politics and partnerships. Through methods like participant observation, semi-structured individual and (focus) group interviews, in-depth interviews, questionnaire surveys, discourse analysis and grounded theory, the contributions in this part trace the tensions between adaptation and contention within NGOs. The contributions are thought-provoking in so far as they stimulate critical reflection about the position of African NGO actors in relation to their donors. The various contributions pay attention to the different predicaments and challenges that have partly been caused by the general set-up of national politics and the character of the nation state, as well as how NGO actors encounter them in Africa. One crucial aspect this part highlights is that donors' directives (re-)create and strengthen inequalities of power to the disadvantage of NGOs in Africa by controlling the conditions under which NGO actors have to work. Nevertheless, while the structural inequalities in the NGO business are evident, the chapters in this part do not deny NGO actors in Africa agency and power. In fact, the studies presented here vividly show how NGO actors on-site are aware of their own capacities and how they follow their own priorities, career paths and goals through a jungle of structural constraints and narrow corridors of agenda-setting, contracts and rules.

Molly Sundberg's chapter provides a comparison of working conditions of both 'posted' and national aid workers in Tanzania. She sheds

light on existing inequalities in salary levels and social and geographical mobility that are inherent in these two different terms of employment. By revealing examples of career trajectories and professional aspirations, her chapter provides insights into the advantages and disadvantages of different aid agencies and the job conditions they offer to Tanzanians in national NGOs, public organizations and the private sector. She also highlights the role of national aid workers as a bridge between incoming and outgoing professionals, as bearers of institutional memory, and as a resource because of their context-specific knowledge of development. They themselves lament the fact that they have very limited autonomy and authority, which explains a trend Sundberg emphasizes: NGO actors increasingly pursue aspirations to work in the private sector as consultants. This means that, in the end, international NGOs risk losing the expertise of their national workers by maintaining structures that perpetuate inequalities.

Burkina Faso represents a typical case of a very diverse NGO landscape. Alain J. Sissao provides a detailed and mainly quantitative analysis of its status quo. He reveals in actual figures how much money the NGO sector receives and how it is spent in the different areas of intervention. Sissao raises the question of how Burkinabe NGOs contribute to the country's development and what challenges they encounter in the process, such as a lack of finance. In addition, Sissao claims that donors often distrust NGOs and tend to implement their own projects instead of those of the African partners. He recognizes that NGOs complement the state's development activities, while simultaneously pointing out its deficits and incapacities. The state's competition with civil society in the context of its sovereignty is a persistent topic that intersects with several chapters in this volume. However, one undeniable effect of the existence of NGOs is the creation of employment in very different ways. This is especially important for young people in Africa, who are generally affected by enormous levels of unemployment, one of the factors that is said to give rise to conflict and jihadism in, for example, the Sahel region.

By taking a close look at the legitimization strategies of governments and international development organizations with regard to large-scale mining (LSM) and artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) in Burkina Faso, Bettina Engels highlights the ambivalent role of Burkinabe NGOs. Driven by the need to mobilize funding, NGOs explain the emergence of protests by communities and artisanal miners with reference to inadequate communication by state agencies and a lack of knowledge on the part of the population. This opens up room for manoeuvre for NGOs to promote themselves as necessary mediators who can educate those concerned properly. By obscuring the root causes of such conflicts, NGOs

unwittingly sustain a dominant discourse that presents LSM as a 'win-win' solution for development. In so doing, they discursively demonize ASM, though the latter is important for the livelihoods of many people in the affected communities. This is a very impressive example of a situation that is becoming a reality for numerous NGOs worldwide. It demonstrates the extent to which NGOs' room for manoeuvre waxes and wanes in accordance with the political dynamics of state agencies and the economic interests of huge international enterprises.

In an additional contribution 'On Reciprocity', Beata Paragi gives us a glimpse of NGOs beyond the African continent. Her case study in Palestine is a strong example of an attempt to reduce NGOs' political engagement. At the same time, Paragi's contribution clearly shows that the relationship between donors and recipients is not a one-way street and that donors urgently need recipients to achieve their goals. She analyses the relationship between aid donors and recipients within the scope of gift-giving and reciprocity, following the well-known theories of Marcel Mauss (2002 [1925]). This is a thought-provoking perspective from which the asymmetries and dependencies in the interplay of international aid become visible, a perspective that can fruitfully be transferred to other regional settings. Paragi shows that even at the basis of transnational cooperation the lines between giver and recipient are blurred, their roles being interchangeable to some extent. While this insight ascribes Palestinian NGO workers the capacity to wield power, they are at the same time restricted in what they can do by the highly problematic political situation in the region. The high price these workers pay for the aid they receive is the abandonment and exclusion of certain political claims like self-determination, independence and related political agendas.

The final part of the volume, 'Memories and History', contains chapters that focus on how actors remember their pasts, construct their biographical narratives in relation to NGOs and acquire individual experiences and trajectories. This part highlights the strong influence of development programmes on specific regions and social and political power structures but also on today's perceptions and the sense-making of actors. For many parts of the world, and for Africa in particular, development programmes and NGO-related activities play a crucial role, as they continue to shape national, regional and individual histories in decisive ways. Although the idea of development is embedded in Africa's heterogeneous histories, the perception to date easily underestimates the extent to which development has not only influenced national histories but also collective and individual (life) stories. Using the perspective on history, the authors in this part relate to aspects of the historiography of nations, institutions, regions and groups. They refer to the ways in which these

larger entities narrate collective (his)stories and explain their coming into existence and their current status. Of course, the personal and collective dimensions of NGO work in Africa are interdependent, but this actor-centred perspective is helpful in bringing lifeworlds to the fore on many different levels, where both dimensions overlap to a large extent. Participant observation, different interview methods, the reputational method, archival research and source analysis are prior methodological approaches in this part.

Abimbola O. Adesoji's chapter is an appropriate starting point in this regard, as he challenges the European claim that they are the origin of NGOs. Adesoji contributes to the historical deconstruction of NGOs in Africa by investigating the secession of African churches from an 'over-Europeanized' Christianity at the end of the nineteenth century, and thus shows how they occupied a vacuum that a dysfunctional state had created in the process of delimitation. Challenging governmental structures, demanding accountability and mobilizing actions considered detrimental to the state are, Adesoji argues, a historical, African legacy rooted in the colonial period and not in development. By introducing the term 'proto-NGO', Adesoji unmasks the presumptuous attitude behind the assertion that the charitable and mediating agenda of NGOs was born in the age of enlightenment in Europe, thus pushing the debate on NGOs in Africa towards a question that is rarely asked: which, possibly different roots do NGOs have, and which cultural forms of organization and understanding relate to them?

Interpersonal relations are at the heart of Eric Burton's chapter. He sheds light on what he calls 'counterpart relations' in Tanzania between the 1970s and the 1990s, a period of socialism that was also the heyday of the concept of *ujamaa*. While counterparts in Africa are often spatially labelled 'local' or national workers in the development literature, Burton locates them in a complex arena pervaded by asymmetries, inequalities and interdependencies. At the same time, he manages to reveal the room for manoeuvre and agency that counterparts may have (Ortner 2006) by highlighting their roles and functions as brokers and thus as central figures who negotiate and translate between communities and international donors. Two aspects Burton stresses are particularly relevant, as they resonate in other chapters. First, he emphasizes the world of NGOs as one in which career opportunities can lead to upward mobility and professional advancement. Sundberg and Brun also address this topic in their chapters. Secondly, Burton questions the myths and realities of the 'local' expert, which deny development actors in Africa their expertise beyond a situated form of knowledge, an aspect also evident in Paragi's and Schultz's chapters.

Like Adesoji, Kokou F.L. Hetcheli offers a very broad and far-reaching insight in another national context. His research concentrates on Togo from the 1990s until today and tackles the essential question of the role civil society actors play in strengthening democracy. Through a document analysis and interviews with civil society actors and other members of society, he takes stock of the current situation by identifying central achievements such as the decline of violence during elections, a strengthening of basic rights and a general loosening of state control. He completes the picture by referring to the deficits that culminate in a lack of efficiency on the part of the respective civil society organizations, which he attributes to internal weaknesses, as well as to the national political environment. Hetcheli thereby emphasizes a structural and personal commingling of civil society and politics that cultivates the continuing politicization of Togolese civil society.

Individual trajectories of NGO workers are the focus of Matthieu Brun's chapter. One important asset he emphasizes is the meaning of personal memory with regard to NGO-related activities in rural Morocco. By tracing the emergence of new types of political leadership and elitism, he shows how actors use their memories of development projects to position and legitimize themselves in regional policymaking. Like Hahn in the following contribution, Brun reflects on the usefulness and profitability of memory as a mainly personal resource. Terms such as 'local' knowledge and 'expert' are ultimately attributed to those who understand the donors and know how to read them. Hence, the requisite skills require a profound knowledge not only of the region, its people and needs but also of the way in which donors function and reason. Working with NGOs is yet again presented as one way, among others, for individuals with a special set of skills and competences to become part of an elite group striving to achieve social mobility.

Hans P. Hahn's contribution 'On Institutions' provides something of a contrast to the emphasis on memory. Hahn highlights the 'intentional amnesia' of developmental state agencies that prevents conscious reflection on past interventions. Mainly focusing on his personal experiences during his long-term fieldwork between 1993 and 2003 in Burkina Faso, he poses the far-reaching question of how far development activities impinge on cultures on-site. In other words, he asks, 'what does development do to societies?' As a result, he places collective memory and the influence of development on social identities and their history at the centre. He also puts forward a social history of development that is ironically foiled by the 'intentional amnesia' of big state agencies such as the German Corporation for International Cooperation (*Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit*, GIZ). However, he man-

ages to bridge both aspects, namely the collective memories of socie-
ties and the individual memories of NGO actors. In agreement with
Burton and Brun, he highlights the individual experiences, perceptions
and emotions that shape the identities of NGO actors in Africa. The
often disregarded fact that development can be a burden, obligation and
responsibility is one of Hahn's arguments on which Paragi also expands
in her chapter.

The afterword by Hubertus Büschel uses the case of a failed German
development project in Togo to introduce yet another type of NGO,
the 'ad hoc NGO'. Besides earlier 'proto-NGOs' (Adesoji) and recently
emerging professionalized NGOs (Schultz, Sundberg), the 'ad hoc NGO'
has a less formal organization that is created temporarily in order to
implement a specific project and disappears as soon as the project fund-
ing dries up. Büschel discusses in combination two aspects that are also
crucial to many of the previous chapter: the influence of individual
memories of development interventions on biographical narratives, and
the implications of NGO work for social hierarchies in the societies con-
cerned. He in turn balances the idea of memory with the concept of
agnotology, which he uses as a heuristic tool to frame the silence of those
affected by development projects. This silence, Büschel argues, serves as
a practice or a coping mechanism with which to handle the often nega-
tive experiences and failures that accompany such interventions. Finally,
consistent with the chapters by Schultz, Sundberg, Burton and Brun, he
points to the social divisions that may emerge from development pro-
grammes and stresses that in a majority of cases only a few profit from
NGO activities, leaving the already marginalized even more disadvan-
taged than before. He thus questions popular narratives that emphasize
the positive effects of development by stressing the puzzling, frustrat-
ing and even traumatizing effects of internationally led and NGO-based
development projects.

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Notes

1. Of course, there are exceptions: see, for example, Bierschenk 2008; Bierschenk, Chaveau and Olivier de Sardan 2002; Kalfelis 2015, 2020; Michael 2004; Neubert 1995; Yarrow 2008, and, with a less actor-centred approach but still focused on working conditions in development, Rossi 2017. Other authors have paid some attention to expatriates in development (Fechter 2007, 2012; Mosse 2011).
2. *Talibé* children are pupils of Koranic schools who often live in harsh economic and social conditions and are quite visible as beggars in public spaces in Africa.
3. The concept *Ubuntu* is a widely discussed concept of African philosophy that, in the words of Praeg (2014: 91), describes 'interdependence' in the sense of a 'shared humanity'.
4. It would take us too far to discuss definitions of European civil society by Hegel (1991 [1820]), De Tocqueville (1994 [1835]) or Habermas (1996 [1992]), but it is their theoretical ideas that underlie a major part of intellectual thinking on civil society today. Particularly interesting is Antonio Gramsci's (1981 [1926–1937]) ambiguous, Marxist understanding of the term, which stood out at the time. He developed his ideas while in prison in Italy under Mussolini's fascist regime. For Gramsci, civil society is torn between revolution and suppression and is thus always a part of the hegemonic order (Brighenti 2016).
5. See https://africasacountry.com/2018/12/the-gentrification-of-african-studies (accessed 8 August 2019).
6. See https://www.oecd.org/dac/effectiveness/parisdeclarationandaccraagendaforaction. htm (accessed 8 August 2019).
7. See https://www.oecd.org/dac/effectiveness/busanpartnership.htm (accessed 8 December 2019).
8. For a complementary discussion of the significance of volunteerism in Africa, see Prince and Brown 2016.
9. See http://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-topics/Aid-for-CSOs-2019.pdf (accessed 22 September 2019).

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