

Empowerment beyond patronizing notions of 'saving' Muslim women?

Empowerment in NGO working methods examined through case studies of two NGOs
working with empowerment and Muslim women in Cameroon and Greece

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Master Thesis Islamic Studies

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Word count: 23.962

May 2019

Acknowledgements

This thesis is the outcome of one-and-a-half-years of field research on empowerment and NGO working methods. I travelled across three land borders to try to find answers to my research question. The journey that this search has brought forth has had unanticipated outcomes, yet I am proud to share with you the findings of this inspiring journey.

I want to thank my family for providing me with all the possibilities that enabled me to complete this master. Thank you for your unconditional support and always believing in me. Sophie, thank you for revising this thesis and your moral support during our library sessions. Petrie, Jeroen, Susan, Derk, Antonia and Peter, thank you for your interest and sympathy. And most of all, thank you for offering me a home away from home.

To all my friends in the Netherlands, Germany and abroad; I am grateful for having you in my life. Your critical reflection, sense of humour, unconditional support and evenings of distractions during this thesis process have enabled me to bring out the best in myself.

Special thanks goes out to my supervisor, Dr. Karin van Nieuwkerk, for the great support and guidance during the process of writing this thesis.

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Statement of Independent Work

Hereby I, Emmeline Koopmans, declare and assure that I have composed the present thesis with the title: *Empowerment beyond patronizing notions of 'saving' Muslim women? Empowerment in NGO working methods examined through case studies of two NGOs working with empowerment and Muslim women in Cameroon and Greece*, independently, that I did not use any other sources or tools other than indicated and that I marked those parts of the text derived from the literal content or meaning of other Works - digital media included - by making them known as such by indicating their source(s).

Berlin, May 2019

Introduction

“Could we only free Afghan women to be “like us,” or might we have to recognize that even after “liberation” from the Taliban, they might want different things than we would want for them? What would be the implications of this realization?”¹

In December 2018, the United Nations (UN) published a report on female empowerment and gender equality in which António Guterres, the current Secretary-General of the UN, states that gender inequalities and disempowerment of women prevent global economic development.² In order to reach for global gender equality in 2030, the UN wants to invest an amount of \$2 to 3 trillion per year in women’s empowerment.³

This extensive investment in empowerment programmes makes it seem like empowerment is a sort of ‘magic elixir’ to reach for prosperity, wealth and gender equality on a global scale.⁴ In economic, social and organisational circles, empowerment training is used to train individuals to master their lives. Also, in the development sector, empowerment programmes are widely implemented to train women to become free and independent individuals.

However, in academia, the concept of empowerment is controversial. Debates on empowerment are ambivalent and scholars disagree on the meaning of empowerment.⁵ The lack of definitions makes it hard to work with the concept of empowerment.⁶ Nevertheless, non-governmental organisations (hereafter: NGOs) use empowerment in so-called ‘empowerment programmes’ to try to optimize the lives of their target groups to the fullest extent. This is done for example, by giving out loans to women to start their own businesses, skills training or providing education to disadvantaged women.

¹ Abu-Lughod, Lila. *Do Muslim women need saving?* Harvard University Press, 2013: 43.

² United Nations. *“Turning Promises into Action: Gender Equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,”* 2018, accessed on April 16 2019, <http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2018/sdg-report-gender-equality-in-the-2030-agenda-for-sustainable-development-2018-en.pdf?la=en&vs=4332>.

³ *Ibid.*, 245-246.

⁴ Cornwall, Andrea, and Althea-Maria Rivas. "From ‘gender equality and ‘women’s empowerment’ to global justice: reclaiming a transformative agenda for gender and development." *Third World Quarterly* 36.2 (2015), 404-405.

⁵ Malhotra, Anju, Sidney Ruth Schuler, and Carol Boender. "Measuring women’s empowerment as a variable in international development." *background paper prepared for the World Bank Workshop on Poverty and Gender: New Perspectives*. 2002.

⁶ Hennink, Monique, et al. "Defining empowerment: perspectives from international development organisations." *Development in Practice* 22.2 (2012), 203-205.

Some scholars argue that the indistinctness of the concept of empowerment is what helps NGOs to empower women.⁷ Other scholars argue that this indistinctness makes it impossible for NGOs to reach their goals.⁸ These critics claim that empowerment programmes are framed as serving the interests of women. However, in fact the high profit made from these programmes actually contributes to the empowerment of NGOs or other donors.

There is more; several scholars accuse the development sector of portraying the women they work with as victims.⁹ These scholars state that there is a patronizing notion attached to empowerment programmes. This is especially the case in the context of Western actors working with Muslim women. Western interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, that placed the focal point on Muslim women, have exposed the Western superior attitude towards Muslim women.¹⁰ These interventions aimed to 'liberate' Muslim women, yet these missions did not 'free' Muslim women at all. Therefore, these scholars asked: "Do Women Need Saving?" This question turned into a paradigm to critically admonish Western actors about the portrayal of Muslim women.

Moreover, these scholars also stated that these Western interventions had a disempowering effect on Muslim women. If the development sector indeed intends to save women, which actually has the consequence of disempowering rather than empowering women, then what is the sense of the extensive investments in women's empowerment programmes? And more importantly, to what extent do Muslim women want to be empowered themselves by Western actors?¹¹

⁷ Kabeer, Naila. "Resources, agency, achievements: Reflections on the measurement of women's empowerment." *Development and change* 30.3 (1999): 435-464.

⁸ Phillips, Ruth. "How 'empowerment' may miss its mark: gender equality policies and how they are understood in women's NGOs." *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Non-profit Organizations* 26.4 (2015): 1122-1142.

⁹ Khalid, Maryam. "Gender, Orientalism and Representations of the 'Other' in the War on Terror." *Global Change, Peace & Security* 23.1 (2011): 15-29.

¹⁰ Abu-Lughod, Lila. "Do Muslim women really need saving? Anthropological reflections on cultural relativism and its others." *American anthropologist* 104.3 (2002): 783-790.

¹¹ Abu-Lughod, Lila. *Do Muslim women need saving?*. Harvard University Press, 2013.

Research problem and question

With this thesis, I want to clarify the conceptualization of empowerment. More specifically, I want to elaborate on a possible relationship between empowerment, Muslim women and the 'Do Women Need Saving' paradigm. On a broader level, I want to connect these concepts with empowerment programmes used by NGOs in order to define the place of NGOs in the transnational development sector. Defining this is necessary to identify the extent to which widely-implemented empowerment programmes lead to sustainable social change. Subsequently, this will also clarify whether or not these programmes contribute to the wellbeing of Muslim women.

In order to provide clarification on the above outlined research problem, I have undertaken fieldwork periods during three internships at the NGOs of Hope Foundation Berlin, Hope Foundation Cameroon¹² (hereafter: HF), and Because We Carry Lesvos (hereafter: BWC), from April to November 2018. Both NGOs work with Muslim women and empowerment methods. Out of these internships, I have constructed two case studies that will serve as the practical analysis of empowerment.

The three-fold research question that will be addressed is:

- 1) *How can empowerment be conceptualized and to what extent is the concept of female empowerment related to the 'Do Women Need Saving' paradigm?;*
- 2) *What approaches are used by NGOs to work towards female empowerment?;*
- 3) *What concepts and approaches towards empowerment and the 'Do Women Need Saving' paradigm can be traced on a practical level at NGOs like Hope Foundation and Because We Carry?*

This research question is structured according to three levels: part 1) of this question is a theoretical analysis of empowerment and elaborates on concepts of empowerment in academia; part 2) of the research question is an organisational analysis of how NGOs work towards

¹² The Hope Foundation Berlin and the Hope Foundation Cameroon is one and the same organisation. However, the organisation has its main office located in Cameroon and the organisation runs another department in Bertoua, Cameroon. The office in Berlin designs and executes projects that are implemented in Cameroon, but the two offices are two separated departments that both have different working methods and are both run by a different HF staff team. I, therefore, refer to HF Berlin and HF Cameroon as two separate entities.

empowerment; part 3) refers to a practical analysis of empowerment in which I will analyse empowerment through the case studies of HF and BWC.

Each chapter of this thesis will elaborate on one part of this research question in a chronological manner.

Research design

Castellan argues that qualitative research aims to portray peoples lived realities.¹³ Because this research is focused on analysing manifestations of empowerment in Muslim women's lives, this research follows qualitative research methods. The literature study in this thesis is supplemented with a multiple case study approach.¹⁴ Baxter and Jack argue that the multiple case study approach is suitable for research in which comparisons need to be drawn both "within and between cases".¹⁵ The purpose of this type of research is to investigate if a certain pattern can be found after examination of different case studies.¹⁶ This type of research is especially relevant for phenomena that cannot be understood without their contexts,¹⁷ empowerment is such a phenomenon that is influenced by different social and political fields. I used this type of research because this allowed me to analyse how different NGOs work towards empowerment and what approaches they use in order to try to achieve empowerment with their target group.

Baxter and Jack argue that, within qualitative research, it is important that the researcher uses a coherent framework for analysis in order to make sure that the analysis of the case studies is undertaken coherently and is verifiable.¹⁸ I have designed a framework in the literature study to make sure that the analysis of the case studies is constructive. I will apply this framework to both case studies. The framework that I designed is constructed according to three levels, which I will explain below.

Firstly, I assembled an academic database out of multiple data sources such as; academic articles, archival records of HF and BWC, written documents from fieldwork and observations. After

¹³ Castellan, Catherine M. "Quantitative and qualitative research: A view for clarity." *International journal of education* 2.2 (2010): 1.

¹⁴ Baxter, Pamela, and Susan Jack. "Qualitative case study methodology: Study design and implementation for novice researchers." *The qualitative report* 13.4 (2008): 544-559.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 548.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 550-51.

¹⁷ Noor, Khairul Baharein Mohd. "Case study: A strategic research methodology." *American journal of applied sciences* 5.11 (2008): 1602-1604.

¹⁸ Baxter, Pamela, and Susan Jack. "Qualitative case study methodology: Study design and implementation for novice researchers." *The qualitative report* 13.4 (2008): 544-559.

sorting and examining the sources based on importance, relevance and adequacy, I divided all the sources into four categories; individual; social; organisational and political empowerment. I placed all the data sources in the category that resonated most with the essence discussed in the source. This structure is the first level of the analytical framework and forms the core body of this thesis because I have applied this four-level structure in each chapter.

The second level that I have applied to the analytical framework are eight elements of empowerment that I use as analytical tools to identify empowerment within NGO work. On each particular above-mentioned level, I have researched reoccurring concepts, themes and patterns that emerged in the literature. Out of this analysis, I have made a list of the most often reoccurring concepts and sorted them based on importance, relevance for my analysis, demarcation and verifiability. Due to the limited scope of this thesis, I can only elaborate on a limited number of concepts. Therefore, I have chosen to discuss only eight elements of empowerment in-depth. I will present these eight elements in chapter one.

The third level of the analytical framework comprises the four NGO approaches towards empowerment that I have identified in the literature. I will use these four approaches to discuss the work of NGOs that work towards empowerment in chapter two. Because the work of NGOs is very extensive and varies greatly, I have chosen to only elaborate on four approaches that work towards empowerment.

I will elaborate on the case studies using the second and the third level of the framework, that refer to the eight elements of empowerment and the NGO approaches of empowerment. I will do this by giving an individual, social, organisational and political analysis of both case studies, as explained in level one of the analytical framework.

Between April and November 2018, I conducted three internships in Germany, Cameroon and Greece at HF Berlin, HF Cameroon and BWC Lesvos. Out of these three fieldwork periods, I retrieved the two case studies, which I will discuss in chapter three.

The method that I used to retrieve the case studies is participant-observation.¹⁹ This allowed me to actively take part in the activities of the NGOs and to see with my own eyes how the activities were perceived by the target group. Moreover, the personal interaction that was fostered

¹⁹ Noor, Khairul Baharein Mohd. "Case study: A strategic research methodology." *American journal of applied sciences* 5.11 (2008): 1602-1604.

through these observations was important to collect a realistic account of the outcomes of the NGO projects on the ground.²⁰

I used multiple data sources to collect the secondary data. The most important ones are documentation, archival records of both organisations that were researched, written statements and websites. Another secondary source that I used is the Research Report of my internships at both organisations, which I have enclosed in appendix A. This report offers an additional analysis of HF and BWC. This thesis focuses on empowerment in relation to the NGOs' working methods and the 'Do Women Need Saving' paradigm. The Research Report elaborates on empowerment from other angles; therefore, this report could supplement this thesis.²¹

After constructing the case studies, I used a cross-case analysis method to analyse the data of the case studies.²² This method allowed me to investigate if certain differences or similarities could be determined, both within and across the case studies.²³ Because I applied the coherent analytical framework, as explained above, to both the case studies, I was able to verify to what extent the case studies showed differences or similarities. The goal of this kind of analysis was to identify if a certain "pattern to the theory"²⁴ would emerge in the case studies that could determine something about the essence and conceptualization of empowerment. If this was the case, I could be able to identify a certain re-emerging key pattern of empowerment that could be used as a blueprint for theoretical and practical project development of NGO empowerment programmes. Identifying these key factors will ultimately also benefit the wellbeing of Muslim women and could bring us one step closer to meeting the needs of women worldwide.

²⁰ Ibid., 1604.

²¹ The Research Report also elaborates on the findings of my internship in Berlin. Here, I only elaborate on my internship in Cameroon because this is most relevant. Nevertheless, my internship in Berlin is still relevant as I needed this experience to get to know the Hope Foundation in order to write this thesis. This thesis is focused on how NGOs implement empowerment theories in the international development field. Therefore, the analysis of how HF works in Cameroon is most relevant. I wrote the Research Report independent from this thesis, but both documents can complement each other. Taken together, both documents offer a comprehensive analysis on the work of NGOs and empowerment programmes.

²² Khan, Samia, and Robert VanWynsberghe. "Cultivating the under-mined: Cross-case analysis as knowledge mobilization." *Forum qualitative Sozialforschung/forum: Qualitative social research*. Vol. 9. No. 1. 2008.

²³ Ibid., 2-3.

²⁴ Castellan 2010, 7.

Academic and social relevance

This thesis is relevant for academic debates on empowerment because I will address the conceptualization of empowerment, which is now often still missing in the discussion.²⁵ Empowerment within the development sector is a relatively new concept and, despite the wide use of the concept, not much research is done on empowerment programmes used by NGOs.

Previous research on Western interventions and Muslim women mainly focusses on Western interventions in the previous decade,²⁶ which makes the research outdated. Moreover, this research could contribute to the academic debate about the role of NGOs in (dis)empowering women.²⁷

Furthermore, this thesis has academic relevance because it discusses empowerment in relation to Muslim women from a sociological, anthropological and religious angle. Therefore, this thesis could add value to both empowerment discussions as well as academic discussions on Muslim women.

Moreover, this thesis also has social relevance because it is connected to social debates on gender (in)equality, human rights, post-modernism and the effects of transnational development work. Because empowerment is to a wide extent connected to agency, the concept of agency will also be discussed.

The large investments in empowerment show that there are economic interests in empowerment programmes. Despite the wide implementation of these programmes, not much research is done on the effects of empowerment programmes in practice.

Because case study one will address the question of refugee empowerment, this thesis will also elaborate on the refugee crisis in Greece. As this case study shows positive results in terms of refugee empowerment, this thesis also has value to all actors concerned with working with refugees. It is crucial, in this sense, to define how to provide assistance to refugees that profits

²⁵ Hennink, Monique, et al. "Defining empowerment: perspectives from international development organisations." *Development in Practice* 22.2 (2012): 202-215.

²⁶ Hyndman, Jennifer. "Beyond either/or: a feminist analysis of September 11th." (2003): 1-13.

²⁷ Nagar, Richa, and Saraswati Raju. "Women, NGOs and the contradictions of empowerment and disempowerment: A conversation." *Antipode* 35.1 (2003): 1-13.

both refugees and host states. The examples given in case study one could begin to provide an answer to this question.

Another reason why this thesis is relevant on a social level is because this thesis addresses the growing gap between Western societies and the rest of the world. Growing tensions in the world and the ongoing influx of refugees in Europe show that it is necessary to address these inequalities and continue to strive for a more just world.

In debates about Islam in Europe, the stereotyping of Muslim women is often addressed as problematic.²⁸ These stereotypes reinforce violent language on Radicalization, Islamophobia and Xenophobia.²⁹ These tendencies are to a wide extent built on ignorance and fear of the 'Other'.³⁰ New research on Muslim women and empowerment could help in combatting stereotypes that prevent us from overcoming our differences. This is important for both social discussions on the place of Islam in Europe as well as academic debates on Islamic culture and Muslim women.

Thesis structure

This thesis is structured as following: after this introduction, I will present the theoretical framework in which I will conceptualize empowerment and eight characteristics of empowerment that are important in order to understand empowerment debates (Chapter 1). Thereafter, I will elaborate on four approaches towards empowerment within NGO work (Chapter 2). In the following chapter I will present the analysis and results of the case studies in which I apply the theoretical framework and the approaches discussed in chapter two on the case studies (Chapter 3). Finally, I will present the conclusions and recommendations for follow-up research (Chapter 4).

²⁸ Mohanty, Chandra. "Under Western eyes: Feminist scholarship and colonial discourses." *Feminist review* 30.1 (1988): 61-88.

²⁹ Nayak, Meghana. "Orientalism and 'saving' US state identity after 9/11." *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 8.1 (2006): 42-61.

³⁰ Khalid, Maryam. "Gender, Orientalism and Representations of the 'Other' in the War on Terror." *Global Change, Peace & Security* 23.1 (2011): 15-29.

1. Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, I will examine how empowerment is conceptualized in the academic literature. I will conceptualize eight characteristics that are connected to empowerment, namely: 1) agency; 2) education; 3) capacity for self-empowerment; 4) financial sustainability; 5) women's participation; 6) women's inclusion; 7) power inequalities and; 8) political interests. In the last two sections, I will discuss empowerment in relation to the 'Do Women Need Saving' paradigm. But first I will give a brief historical account of the concept of empowerment.

A brief history of Empowerment

The historical roots of empowerment date back many centuries in European history.³¹ The concept was used to promote the European Reformation but was also a commonly used concept in other emancipation discourses in North-America. Empowerment was integrated in religious revolutions like 'Quakerism' and 'Jefferson democracy'. Moreover, also 'early capitalism' was influenced by empowerment. Later black feminists used the concept to claim more rights.³²

The term was integrated in Western liberal thought after the 1950s. Suddenly empowerment became connected to Western discourses that promoted Western values like equality, participation and education. In the 1970s, the development discourse also started to address empowerment in relation to gender equality because of the common use of empowerment in relation to gender equality in the West.³³

Until the 1990s, empowerment was considered a collective process as it mainly promoted the rights of marginalized groups. This changed when empowerment underwent a political transformation after the 1990s. Western societies transformed empowerment into 'an individualistic process' by highlighting the responsibilities of individuals to master their own lives. The collective character of empowerment was detached from the concept. It was now the individuals' responsibility to break free of repressive barriers that were holding a person back. This thought aligned with Western liberal ideologies and Western capitalism, which make individuals responsible for their own lives. Through this development, empowerment became

³¹ Batliwala, Srilatha. "Taking the power out of empowerment—an experiential account." *Development in practice* 17.4-5 (2007), 557-558.

³² *Ibid.*, 558.

³³ McIlwaine, Cathy, and Kavita Datta. "From feminising to engendering development." *Gender, Place and Culture* 10.4 (2003), 369-371.

“mainstreamed” in economic sectors.³⁴ After the 1990s, empowerment no longer had references to collective struggles of marginalized groups.³⁵

Empowerment and its eight characteristics

Most scholars define empowerment as an ongoing process in which women are able to overcome oppressive structures and develop personal and professional abilities to master the course of their lives.³⁶ Nagar and Raju argue that, in this process, empowerment is highly contextual. This means there is no start to analyse empowerment from because empowerment evolves in non-chronological processes that could lead to ambivalent outcomes.³⁷

Other scholars define empowerment as a process and an end station in itself.³⁸ The “fuzziness” of the concept is in this sense useful.³⁹ This opens up freedom and ways for NGOs to work with empowerment without being limited by its narrow definitions.⁴⁰ Kabeer states that empowerment comes down to ‘a process of change’ in which the disempowered gain ‘the ability to make choices’. Empowerment is thus the transformation from a disempowered to an empowered state.⁴¹ This suggests that empowerment is an individual process and that the individual is responsible for whether or not he or she is empowered.

In contrast, other scholars state that empowerment needs to be defined as a political and social transformation.⁴² The individual can thus not (only) be made responsible for his or her empowerment. The structures surrounding an individual need to give the individual the opportunity to become empowered.⁴³ They argue that a person’s agency is limited by these structures. Disempowerment will continue if these repressive social and political structures are

³⁴ Batliwala, Srilatha. "Taking the power out of empowerment—an experiential account." *Development in practice* 17.4-5 (2007), 557-563.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 557-559.

³⁶ Kamal, 2011; Cornwall & Rivas, 2015; Kabeer, 1998; Hanmer & Klugman, 2016; Batliwala, 2007.

³⁷ Nagar & Raju, 'Women, NGOs and the Contradictions of Empowerment and Disempowerment: A Conversation,' *Antipode*, 2003: 1-13.

³⁸ Kabeer, Naila. "Resources, agency, achievements: Reflections on the measurement of women's empowerment." *Development and change* 30.3 (1999): 435-464.

³⁹ Batliwala, Srilatha. "Taking the power out of empowerment—an experiential account." *Development in practice* 17.4-5 (2007): 557-565.

⁴⁰ Kabeer, Naila. "Resources, agency, achievements: Reflections on the measurement of women's empowerment." *Development and change* 30.3 (1999): 435-464.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 436-437.

⁴² Hickel, Jason. "The 'girl effect': Liberalism, empowerment and the contradictions of development." *Third World Quarterly* 35.8 (2014): 1355-1373.

⁴³ Batliwala, Srilatha. "Taking the power out of empowerment—an experiential account." *Development in practice* 17.4-5 (2007): 557-565.

not tackled. They state that empowerment is thus a matter of social and political circumstances.⁴⁴ This raises the question of how agency should be defined?

Agency

Hanmer & Klugman define the concept of agency as the utilization of choice.⁴⁵ A person who has agency, is able to set priorities and act on those priorities. They state that agency is connected to self-awareness and personal autonomy. One needs to possess these capacities to make choices. Agency transgresses multiple domains in life and manifests itself in different forms; a person can have agency in one sphere of life and lack agency in another domain. They argue that agency is a precondition for forms of empowerment manifestations.⁴⁶

Hennink *et al.* state that individual empowerment is dependent on individual agency.⁴⁷ Individual agency is defined by a person's positive self-image; a person's decision-making capacity; and 'their ability to effect change'.⁴⁸ In this sense agency is about one's sense of identity. It implies that the ability for self-confidence and belief in one self defines the extent to which one is capable of making a change in one's life.

Kabeer has defined agency in terms of three dimensions: 1) resources (preconditions); 2) agency (process); 3) achievements (outcomes).⁴⁹ With resources, Kabeer means the amount of access to opportunities a person has to make life decisions. Agency is in this sense defined as the 'decision-making process' of an individual. A form of resources is education, which I will explain below. Malhotra, Schuler & Boender argue that resources are essential for women's empowerment, however, women's own "ability to recognize and utilize resources in their own interests" is much more important for women's empowerment.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ Hickel, 2014; Batliwala, 2007.

⁴⁵ Hanmer, Lucia, and Jeni Klugman. "Exploring Women's agency and empowerment in developing countries: where do we stand?" *Feminist Economics* 22.1 (2016), 240.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 237-241.

⁴⁷ Hennink *et al.* 2012, 206.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 206.

⁴⁹ Kabeer, Naila. "Resources, agency, achievements: Reflections on the measurement of women's empowerment." *Development and change* 30.3 (1999): 435-464.

⁵⁰ Malhotra, Anju, Sidney Ruth Schuler, and Carol Boender. "Measuring women's empowerment as a variable in international development." *background paper prepared for the World Bank Workshop on Poverty and Gender: New Perspectives*. 2002, 8-10.

This indicates that women's empowerment is much more dependent on notions as self-confidence and self-determination.⁵¹ Kabeer underlines that the process of developing self-awareness and the realisation that one has a choice are both important drivers of agency. All the prerequisites for empowerment could be present in a woman's life, yet if she does not realise herself that she has the power to change her life for the better, she will likely not feel empowered. Kabeer thus states that empowerment is about the transformation of an individual realising that she can transform her situation. Hence, she states that empowerment comprises the process of moving from a disempowered to an empowered position as a consequence of the choices a person makes. According to Kabeer disempowerment is a prerequisite for agency.⁵² In chapter three, I will examine the applicability of this in relation to refugees. Next, I will explain education as a resource that facilitates ways of empowerment.

Education

In the academic literature on empowerment, education is often mentioned as an important facilitator for empowerment. Yet, there are ambivalences in debates on education in relation to empowerment. Two important scholarly debates in terms of empowerment and education can be distinguished. The first one states that there is no causal relationship between education and empowerment.⁵³ The other stance claims that education paves the way for empowerment.⁵⁴

Greig & Koopman argue that it is a misconception that education paves the way for economic, social and political empowerment of marginalized women.⁵⁵ Empowerment is much more a psychological process. In this process, women need to understand and transform their submissive perceptions of their identities. The authors did research on the relationship between (education on) condom use and female empowerment. They found that education did not play an important role in the promotion of female empowerment.⁵⁶ Instead, they found that women's decision-making power on household and national levels was much more important for women to 'protect themselves'.⁵⁷

⁵¹ Ibid., 9-10.

⁵² Ibid., 435-442.

⁵³ Greig, Fiona E., and Cheryl Koopman. "Multilevel analysis of women's empowerment and HIV prevention: quantitative survey results from a preliminary study in Botswana." *AIDS and Behaviour* 7.2 (2003): 195-208.

⁵⁴ UN Women, 2006; Straubhaar & Davis, 2018; Maruatona, 1999; Grabska, 2011.

⁵⁵ Handy & Kassam, 2006; Greig & Koopman, 2003.

⁵⁶ Greig & Koopmans 2003, 198-204.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 204-207.

Subsequently, also Handy & Kassam state that education alone will not be able to transform the web of social and cultural understandings that are connected with perceptions of identities. The authors argue that education could facilitate forms of empowerment. However, these forms can be downplayed by other structural problems like poverty.⁵⁸

In contrast, Straubhaar & Davis argue that education leads to empowerment. Interestingly, they also state that empowerment is a matter of identity perception. However, they state this is reached through education.⁵⁹ In their research on empowerment and Afro-Brazilian identity perceptions, they state that empowerment starts with appreciation for different identities. This is done through positive emphasis on self-esteem and self-confidence and the practice of music. The emphasis on participation, community building and the personal learning process leads, according to the authors, to community empowerment.

This also has positive results for the individual. According to the authors, education serves as a necessary tool to raise awareness with marginalized people that they are disempowered. The authors state that, as a consequence of their awareness, they are able to change their situation.⁶⁰

They emphasize the transformative character of empowerment, which they call “transformative empowerment”.⁶¹ The concept of transformative empowerment is two-fold. On the one hand it is about providing resources in the form of channels to education for disempowered people, so they can expand their capabilities; on the other hand, it is about the self-reflective nature of organisations and their abilities to form constructive feedback for their participants and themselves. Transformative empowerment is reached through the use of skill training provided by NGOs.⁶² As I will illustrate in chapter two and three, many NGOs give skill training to their target group based on participation strategies. In order to understand what they mean by participation, I will elaborate on the concept of women’s participation below.

⁵⁸ Handy & Kassam 2006, 9-10.

⁵⁹ Straubhaar, Joe, and Stuart Davis. "Drumming and digital inclusion: music, identity formation, and transformative empowerment in Afro-Brazilian community development NGOs." *Development in Practice* 28.3 (2018): 374-387.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 374-376.

⁶¹ Ibid., 377.

⁶² Ibid., 375-376.

Women's participation

Some scholars state that participation leads to empowerment.⁶³ Olivius discusses: "To have refugees 'participate' means to encourage them to perceive themselves as active subjects responsible for their own lives and communities; to mobilize them to facilitate the effective implementation of humanitarian programmes; and to solicit their opinions and experiences as resources for humanitarian planning and evaluation".⁶⁴ This means that participation has the goal of educating refugees on how to behave responsibly in accordance with humanitarian norms. Moreover, it means helping refugees to see that they are, through their participation, actively taking part in all facets of the refugee camp.⁶⁵

Olivius argues that the high investments of wealthy donors in the sector cause ambiguities in humanitarian projects. In her opinion, large international donors often act deliberately against the interests of small NGOs in order to delegitimize them. Olivius claims that, as a consequence, the hierarchical humanitarian system often limits refugees' 'control over services in the camp'.⁶⁶

In Olivius view, humanitarian actors do not want to actively involve refugees because they believe that the masculine character of refugee communities will overrule women's participation.⁶⁷ Thus, on the one hand the projects are aimed at empowering refugees through participation, whilst simultaneously their participation is deliberately restricted.

Olivius outlines that refugees' agency and participation is only welcomed when these are in line with humanitarian goals. Humanitarian actors see it as a negative development when refugees develop agency and their own opinions.⁶⁸ This could be an important reason why refugees are denied a voice in some projects. When refugees develop a strong opinion and have too much

⁶³ Mackenzie, Catriona, Christopher McDowell, and Eileen Pittaway. "Beyond 'do no harm': The challenge of constructing ethical relationships in refugee research." *Journal of Refugee studies* 20.2 (2007): 299-319.

⁶⁴ Olivius, Elisabeth. "(Un) governable subjects: The limits of refugee participation in the promotion of gender equality in humanitarian aid." *Journal of Refugee Studies* 27.1 (2013): 42-61.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 57-58.

self-determination, they will likely stand up for themselves and act against the interests of the Western internationalized humanitarian system.⁶⁹

The ambivalences also become clear in women's projects. Women are often the central focal point of refugee participation projects. Investing in women is perceived to be more 'sustainable' as women are seen as being more likely than men to put the interests of the family first.⁷⁰ On the one hand, the emancipation of women is a good thing. However, this emancipation is attempted through focussing on stereotypical household tasks. Additionally, this also makes women responsible for the sustainable development of refugee communities. According to Olivius, this works in the end rather disempowering to women.⁷¹

I will illustrate in chapter three what kind of participation methods are used by BWC and HF.

Participation projects, thus, do not always lead to inclusion of women. I will, therefore, return to the conceptualization of women's inclusion below.

Women's inclusion

The previous section outlined that women's participation is used to promote refugee agency. Because these projects can also serve other actors' interests, it is important to ask how NGOs ensure that women are genuinely included in NGO projects.

Cornwall & Rivas state that the meaning of inclusion comes down to 'giving everyone a voice'.⁷² This means more than letting marginalized people speak.⁷³ Inclusion is about creating new possibilities and circumstances that are embedded in respectful mutual relations. These relations give people a voice and most of all let people 'be heard'.⁷⁴ This aligns with Olivius' statement in the previous section that refugee women are left out of the decision-making process. Hence, women's inclusion is about actively involving women on organisational levels and designing projects in cooperation with women themselves.⁷⁵

⁶⁹ Ibid., 51-54.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 49-50.

⁷¹ Ibid., 49-52.

⁷² Cornwall, Andrea, and Althea-Maria Rivas. "From 'gender equality and 'women's empowerment' to global justice: reclaiming a transformative agenda for gender and development." *Third World Quarterly* 36.2 (2015): 396-415.

⁷³ Ibid., 409.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 409.

⁷⁵ Cornwall & Rivas, 2015; Olivius, 2012.

Oditi & Odera agree on the point that women need to be actively represented on decision-making levels. They state that women are now obstructed from leading positions in the development sector. This is the case, according to the authors, because women are discriminated based on their gender.⁷⁶ Stereotypes about women's incompetence's lead, according to the authors, to missed job opportunities for women. An important reason why these stereotypes keep on persisting is, according to them, because masculine power has interests in excluding women from important positions.⁷⁷

In contrast, other scholars argue that the inclusion of women is only reached when men are also involved in the picture.⁷⁸ This change in social attitudes will lead to greater possibilities for women. This is only accomplished when men are educated about the value of women and their economic input.⁷⁹ In this view, it is decisive that programmes are not only targeted at women. Programmes must have a gender-neutral character which also speaks to men. To do this, empowerment programmes need to start at the early stages of the upbringing of young boys.⁸⁰

Scholars that argue that social inequalities need to be changed in order to achieve female empowerment, often refer to power inequalities as obstacle for social change.⁸¹ Therefore, I will discuss two characteristics of political empowerment below. But first I will discuss capacity to self-empowerment and financial sustainability as two characteristics of organisational empowerment because organisational empowerment is influenced by political structures.

⁷⁶ Onditi, Francis, and Josephine Odera. "Gender equality as a means to women empowerment? Consensus, challenges and prospects for post-2015 development agenda in Africa." *African Geographical Review* 36.2 (2017): 146-167.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 149-160.

⁷⁸ Chant & Sweetman 2012, Fonjong, 2008; Grabska, 2011.

⁷⁹ Fonjong, Lotsmart N. "Gender roles and practices in natural resource management in the North West Province of Cameroon." *Local Environment* 13.5 (2008): 461-475.

⁸⁰ Chant, Sylvia, and Caroline Sweetman. "Fixing women or fixing the world? Smart economics', efficiency approaches, and gender equality in development." *Gender & Development* 20.3 (2012): 517-529.

⁸¹ Batliwala, 2007; Hickel, 2014; Kabeer, 1999; Philips, 2015.

Capacity to self-empowerment

Handy & Kassam argue that NGOs need to empower themselves first, before they are capable of empowering their target groups.⁸² One way of doing this is hiring staff that is, on all levels, 'more empowered' than the target group in order to make sure the NGO has 'credibility'.⁸³

Pigg also agrees on this point, yet also underlines the importance of 'leadership education' in reaching for empowerment.⁸⁴ According to Pigg, power dynamics, personal efficacy and self-empowerment will lead to empowerment.⁸⁵ The above scholars agree that actors' capacity for self-empowerment is crucial for achieving empowerment with others.

In contrast, Eade argues that the success of an organisation is dependent on the capability of self-reflection of an organisation.⁸⁶ She states that many NGOs fail to take their responsibility of addressing their own role in the project. NGOs undermine their influence sphere because they lack responsibility on national and global levels. Without this self-reflection, NGOs are unable to build up capacity within their organisations. This has far-reaching consequences for the target group of the NGO. NGOs cannot build up the capacity of individuals, if NGOs do not first developed their own capacity.⁸⁷ She claims that self-reflection of NGOs is a decisive factor in the effect of capacity building because: [...] if you can't learn, you can't teach either'.⁸⁸

In the case studies, I will examine the capacity for self-empowerment of both NGOs.

(Financial) Sustainability

The literature on organisational empowerment agrees that NGOs need to have sustainable livelihood to foster empowerment.⁸⁹

⁸² Handy, Femida, and Meenaz Kassam. "Practice what you preach? The role of rural NGOs in women's empowerment." *Journal of Community Practice* 14.3 (2006): 69-91.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁸⁴ Pigg, Kenneth E. "Three faces of empowerment: Expanding the theory of empowerment in community development." *Community Development* 33.1 (2002): 107-123.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 112-120.

⁸⁶ Eade, Deborah. "Capacity building: who builds whose capacity?." *Development in practice* 17.4-5 (2007): 630-639.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 636-637.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 637.

⁸⁹ Pearson, Jenny. "Integrating learning into organisational capacity development of Cambodian NGOs." *Development in Practice* 21.8 (2011): 1037-1049.

Also, for a healthy organisational structure, self-reflection of an organisation (this includes all employees) is important for the productivity and success of an organisation.⁹⁰ Pearson identifies three levels of organisational sustainability:

- **Organisational management** - “legal basis of governance; values; culture; strategic planning; leadership; management and decision-making; staff capacity and management; administration and finance”.⁹¹
- **Project management** - “project design and planning; implementation; reporting and documentation; monitoring and evaluation; learning and adaptation; gender mainstreaming”.⁹²
- **Strategic relationships** - “strategic relationships and advocacy; and resource development”.⁹³

I will analyse organisational structures of the NGOs in chapter three by using these facets. This definition states that NGOs need to solve any problems that they might have from within their organisational structure. I will examine in chapter three to what extent BWC and HF are capable of maintaining a strong organisational structure.⁹⁴

Above, I have outlined two characteristics of organisational empowerment. Because NGOs do not operate outside of powerful social and political fields, it is important to also define two concepts of empowerment related to NGO empowerment programmes that refer to the political level. Therefore, I will explain the concept power inequalities and political interests below.

Power inequalities

Scholars that discuss empowerment in terms of power inequalities, often criticize the view that empowerment is an individual process.⁹⁵ They state that individual empowerment does not take power inequalities into account.⁹⁶ Analysing empowerment only as an individual process, ignores power structures that could prevent an individual from becoming empowered.⁹⁷ In other

⁹⁰ Ibid., 1040.

⁹¹ Ibid., 1040-1041.

⁹² Ibid., 1040-1041.

⁹³ Ibid., 1040-1041.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 1047.

⁹⁵ Batliwala, 2007; Hickel, 2014.

⁹⁶ Batliwala, 2007; Hickel, 2014.

⁹⁷ Batliwala, 2007; Hickel, 2014.

words, these scholars claim that empowerment is only possible if 'ideological and institutional change' is created on a political level. This can only be done by redistribution of power, money and resources.⁹⁸

Rowlands notes that the concept of power itself is controversial as many social narratives do not address how power is divided within social settings.⁹⁹ Rowlands addresses the concept of "power over" to refer to hierarchical power of institutions, patriarchal systems or social and political structures that try to dominate women. In this framework, the dominant entity gains power at the expense of the power of the individuals involved. However, empowerment relates to another domain, which Rowlands calls "power to".¹⁰⁰ In this process, women gain courage, agency and self-confidence which develops their "abilit[ies] to resist and challenge "power over"". ¹⁰¹ Rowlands notes that "power to" is an increasement in women's personal belief about how much power women personally can exercise. This type of power does, therefore, not decrease other individuals' empowerment.

According to Rowlands, the process of empowerment involves bringing women into the "decision-making process".¹⁰² In Rowlands view, this asks for a transformation on both individual as also political levels: 1) new possibilities need to be created that facilitate women's involvement in "decision-making processes" on economic, social and political levels; 2) women need to gain confidence that they are strong enough and are capable of being "agents of change" and change structures from "within" through their active involvement.¹⁰³ An important transformation that refers to the latter point is, according to Rowlands, the growing awareness that women need to gain in understanding "their own interests and how those relate to those of others, in order both to participate from a position of greater strength in decision-making and actually influence such decisions".¹⁰⁴

Thus, in Rowlands view, understanding the dynamics of both self-interests as the interests other parties might have in empowering women is important. Also, other scholars that discuss power

⁹⁸ Batliwala, 2007; Hickel, 2014; Philips, 2015.

⁹⁹ Rowlands, Jo. "Empowerment examined." *Development in practice* 5.2 (1995): 101-107.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 101-102.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 102.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 102.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 102-103.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 102.

inequalities often refer to NGOs having other interests than helping women.¹⁰⁵ These scholars state that the liberal market and prominent development agencies have interests in keeping the system as it is, a point which I will elaborate on in chapter two. According to them, the current design of the system is profitable and allows some NGOs to shirk responsibility for their actions.¹⁰⁶ This means that political interests are served in empowerment programs. I will, therefore, explain political interests below.

Political interests

Several scholars argue that NGOs have, in many cases, a double agenda in promoting empowerment, or are influenced by political structures that serve other interests.¹⁰⁷ Hickel states that freedom and individuality are defining concepts on which Western societies are built. Western societies perceive the free and liberated individual as the highest good. The idea behind this is that, when a political system invests in creating individuals according to these values, liberal markets will be 'effective' and 'profitable'.¹⁰⁸ Key concepts determining empowerment are 'authenticity', 'individualism' and 'self-mastery'. The same concepts on which the Western liberal market is built.¹⁰⁹ Hickel states that the structure of current empowerment programmes is maintained because the design of these programmes serve the interest of 'market consumerism'. In Hickel's argument, the interest of economic institutions lies with empowering women in order to make them individual consumers of the market state. In Hickel's view, the underlying interests in empowerment have an economic nature.¹¹⁰ Through the use of political strategies, economic goals are sought. The means to reach this are empowerment projects in which marginalized women are used as bait. As a consequence, women descend into more severely disempowered positions and their political empowerment is narrowed to the widest extent.¹¹¹

In contrast to Hickel, there is another group of scholars that discuss the political interests of NGOs from a less economic perspective.¹¹² Helms argues that the role of women in politics is

¹⁰⁵ Hickel, Jason. "The 'girl effect': Liberalism, empowerment and the contradictions of development." *Third World Quarterly* 35.8 (2014): 1355-1373.

¹⁰⁶ Hickel 2014; Batliwala, 2007.

¹⁰⁷ Cornwall, Harrison & Whitehead, 2007; Chant & Sweetman, 2012; Hunt, 2002.

¹⁰⁸ Hickel 2014, 1359-1360.

¹⁰⁹ Hickel 2014, 1361.

¹¹⁰ Hickel 2014, 1358-1369.

¹¹¹ Hickel 2014, 1369-1370.

¹¹² Narayanaswamy, 2014; Batliwala, 2007.

ambivalent.¹¹³ On the one hand, women are encouraged to play leading roles in peace-building related projects. Women are perceived as better peacebuilders than men. In this way women are encouraged to go into politics. Moreover, women's peaceful nature is emphasized in political spheres. At the same time, the emphasis on women's peaceful character prevents women from being taken seriously in politics. This denies women political legitimacy and their political power is limited.¹¹⁴ The reproduction of women's stereotypes and the narrowing of women's political influence is, according to Helms, done deliberately to keep women out of the masculine political sphere and to reinforce masculine power.¹¹⁵

There are also scholars who state that talking about women and their agency in terms of their subordinate status to the masculine political sphere is problematic. This places women in victim positions,¹¹⁶ a point which I will return to below. Narayanaswamy states that the real problem lies with the highly politicized arena of the development sector itself.¹¹⁷ In this arena, new categories are constructed that should give a voice to women and "empower the grassroots" of the South, like concepts such as 'Southern Women' and 'Southern NGOs'.¹¹⁸ Narayanaswamy argues that these categories are in themselves problematic. They lack clear definition and deny differences between women. Narayanaswamy pleads for a mutual dialogue in the development sector that is not based on binaries between superior Western actors versus inferior Southern others.¹¹⁹ We will see that BWC, on a micro scale, succeeds in starting this dialogue.

The above authors have different views on political interests. However, all three agree that women's voices are not heard by NGOs. For what reasons women are silenced, remains to be discussed. However, the arguments of the scholars above find resonance with larger debates about Muslim women. In these public debates, Muslim women are denied a voice. An often-heard argument in these debates is that Muslim women's agency is restricted because Western actors tend to speak on behalf of Muslim women.¹²⁰ These scholars argue that the pitying of Muslim women places them in victim positions, which is disempowering to Muslim women. These statements can be placed in the so-called 'Do Women Need Saving' paradigm, in which

¹¹³ Helms, Elissa. "Women as agents of ethnic reconciliation? Women's NGOs and international intervention in post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina." *Women's Studies International Forum*. 26,1 (2003): 15-33.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 16-17.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 24-29.

¹¹⁶ Narayanaswamy, 2014; Abu-Lughod, 2015.

¹¹⁷ Narayanaswamy 2014, 576-585.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 576-577.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 585-586.

¹²⁰ Abu-Lughod, Lila. "Do Muslim women really need saving? Anthropological reflections on cultural relativism and its others." *American anthropologist* 104.3 (2002): 783-790.

scholars critical of Western literature about Muslim women point out that the often-negative narratives about Muslim women are actually a consequence of Western narrow perceptions about Islamic culture.

'Do Women Need Saving?'¹²¹

Scholars that are critical of humanitarian interventions claim that Western actors want to 'rescue' women. They state that these interventions are often aimed at emancipating women according to Western standards, which is, according to them, actually more harmful and disempowering to women.¹²²

The 'Do Women Need Saving' paradigm arose as a critical statement of scholars who pointed out that Western feminist scholars and Western actors often portray Muslim women as inferior to the West. By this they meant that Western thought, literature and humanitarian interventions alongside societal discussions often is generated through the lens of seeing Muslim women as subordinate and poor victims that need help.¹²³ The core drivers of this tendency are binaries of a superior Western entity versus a subaltern "Other".¹²⁴

As a reaction to the pitying of women, Lila Abu-Lughod wrote a critique on this line of Western thought. In her work, she outlined that the War on Terror has placed the focal point and blame for terrorism on Islamic culture and rituals. This allows the US to not have to address its own role in terrorism and colonial history.¹²⁵ The Islamic religion is framed as being the sole breeding ground for terrorism, while at the same time the US' own role in terrorism and violent conflicts is ignored.¹²⁶

Moreover, Abu-Lughod states that the denial of Western accountabilities in political and colonial narratives is harmful. The West places blame on Middle-Eastern societies for treating their women badly. However, gender inequality and gender violence in the West is also still relevant. The author states that Western interventions, in many cases, serve double agendas.¹²⁷

Abu-Lughod states that we need to change the meaning that we have attached to Western perceptions of women's clothing. From a Western point of view, women's freedom is measured

¹²¹ Abu-Lughod, Lila. "Do Muslim women really need saving? Anthropological reflections on cultural relativism and its others." *American anthropologist* 104.3 (2002): 783-790.

¹²² Mohanty, 1988; Abu-Lughod, 2002; Abu-Lughod, 2015; Hunt, 2002; Hyndman, 2003; Khalid, 2011; Ho, 2010; Nayak, 2006.

¹²³ Abu-Lughod, 2002; Abu-Lughod, 2014.

¹²⁴ Hyndman, Jennifer. "Beyond either/or: a feminist analysis of September 11th." (2003): 1-12.

¹²⁵ Abu-Lughod 2002, 783-785.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 784-785.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 785.

through her body clothing.¹²⁸ A woman that is fully covered is generally considered less free than a woman that is wearing less clothing.¹²⁹ Two other problems arise out of this misconception. Firstly, a veiled woman is, according to many Western feminists, seen as 'lacking agency'.¹³⁰ Thus, she is labelled as less capable of making her own life choices, whereas it can be a woman's own choice to be veiled. Secondly, the one-sided discussion of talking about Muslim women only in terms of her body covering denies forms of diversity amongst Muslim women.¹³¹

The urge of wanting to 'save' women from other cultures is, according to Abu-Lughod, in the first place a problem of 'Western attitude'.¹³² She states that we need to accept that there can be more ways of liberation, emancipation and feminism other than the Western way. Moreover, we need to accept that Muslim women want forms of equality and emancipation that are Islamic and thus might be in conflict with Western forms of equality and liberation. In contrast to what Western feminists think, many Islamic women want to emancipate themselves according to Islamic standards and in line with Islamic values.¹³³

The previously mentioned perceptions of body clothing illustrate a relevant example of how, according to Abu-Lughod, Western ideas about women's clothing do not align with Muslim women's own cultural values. The burqa is commonly perceived in Western thought as a religious symbol that oppresses women. The common opinion in regard to the burqa is that a burqa prevents Muslim women from being free and liberated. However, from the perspective of many Muslim women, the burqa is seen as a "portable seclusion".¹³⁴ Many Muslim women see wearing the burqa as a moral way of dressing. In Islamic culture, veiling reflects women's piety and bodily integrity. The burqa draws a border between Islamic feminine and masculine spheres. These are considered strictly separate in Islamic societies. Wearing a burqa gives women the possibility to move in and out of the masculine sphere without losing her integrity or piety. Hence, from the point of view of many Muslim women, the burqa is a sign of freedom.¹³⁵ In the eyes of many Muslim women, throwing off their burqa is not only unethical, but many Muslim women do not want to unveil because they will lose their freedom by doing this. The Western

¹²⁸ Cooke, Miriam. "The Muslimwoman." *Contemporary Islam* 1 (2007): 139-154.

¹²⁹ Brown in: Abu-Lughod 2015, 19.

¹³⁰ Abu-Lughod, 2014; Bilge, 2009; Cooke.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 785-788.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 788-789.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 785-788; Mahmood, 2006.

¹³⁴ Abu-Lughod 2002, 785.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 785-786.

quest for unveiling Muslim women is thus, in the eyes of Muslim women themselves, highly illogical and unwanted.¹³⁶

'Wanting to save women' implies that the problem lies with the women that need to be saved. Abu-Lughod states that the root cause of this problem lies with Western actors refusing to accept worldviews different from Western perceptions on culture. Breaking with the thought of assuming that we know best for Muslim women and realising that there are more worldviews than only Western ones can remand the 'rhetoric of salvation'. This rhetoric is, according to Abu-Lughod, a violent rhetoric: "When you save someone, you imply you are saving her from something. You are also saving her *to* something" (her emphasis).¹³⁷ This position is, according to her, a deep reflection of Western "arrogance".¹³⁸

Hence, she underlines that Western societies have equal responsibilities with other countries. The West is just as much part of the world as any other actor. Thus, the West has an equal task in reflecting on its own responsibility in terms of Western attitudes towards other countries. This critical self-reflection is now missing in Western societies, but the saving rhetoric will only change through self-criticism. Subsequently, the West needs to develop more respect towards cultural differences by stopping condemnation of other societies as 'alien' to the West. Finally, Western societies need to stop portraying Muslim women as 'victims'. Instead, they need to approach women as active agents that have just as much agency as everybody else.

Lila Abu-Lughod's critique on the 'Do Women Need Saving' paradigm dates back to 2002 and was renewed in a book version in 2013. Other scholars have also criticized the paradigm on similar accounts to Abu-Lughod's critiques.¹³⁹ Scholars have stated that interventions by Western NGOs have been influenced by the 'Do Women Need Saving' paradigm. These interventions have a tendency of "wanting to save" people. In these interventions, women are approached as victims.¹⁴⁰

Because the 'Do Women Need Saving' paradigm does not address the lived realities of Muslim women correctly, some scholars argue that this kind of thinking makes it impossible for Western

¹³⁶ Ibid., 785-786.

¹³⁷ Abu-Lughod 2002, 788.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 789.

¹³⁹ Nayak, 2006; Ho, 2010; Khalid, 2011; Hyndman, 2003; Mohanty, 1988; Hunt, 2002.

¹⁴⁰ Olivius, Elisabeth. "Constructing humanitarian selves and refugee others: gender equality and the global governance of refugees." *International feminist journal of politics* 18.2 (2016): 270-290.

NGOs to adequately understand the real problems of Muslim women.¹⁴¹ As these NGOs are not in direct contact with women, they do not listen to women. As a consequence, NGOs design empowerment projects for women that do not match with what Muslim women want and need in their lives.¹⁴²

Does this mean all development work falls victim to this 'saving' tendency and development projects are useless? I will illustrate in chapter three that some methods, that align with this paradigm, can also have positive implications.

Finally, what we need is a more inclusive empowerment theory that works towards sustainable social change. A theory is needed that contributes to women themselves and that does not only profit other involved parties. The real question is thus: how do we work towards an empowerment theory that is inclusive and that moves away from a 'salvation rhetoric'?

An empowerment theory beyond the 'Do Women Need Saving' paradigm?

Out of this theoretical framework, some concluding remarks can be drawn on the conceptualization of empowerment that play a vital role in working towards a more inclusive empowerment theory that moves away from the 'Do Women Need Saving' paradigm.

I used eight characteristics of empowerment to conceptualize the essence of empowerment on an individual, social, organisational and political level.¹⁴³ Out of the eight characteristics, that I have discussed, two concepts are related to each level, which I have discussed in a chronological manner. The discussed concepts serve to illustrate that on each particular level, obstacles arise that could obstruct women from becoming empowered. For example, the social exclusion of women in the social sphere obstructs women's participation, this will most likely also limit women's political voices. The characteristics of empowerment are thus interdependent. Improvement in one or two spheres can lead to empowerment. Yet, this does not automatically mean that empowerment is fostered. This means that empowerment needs to be understood within social and political structures. The question that this brings forth is: Are all spheres

¹⁴¹ Narayanaswamy, Lata. "NGOs and Feminisms in Development: Interrogating the 'Southern Women's NGO'." *Geography Compass* 8.8 (2014): 576-589.

¹⁴² Grabska, Katarzyna. "Constructing 'modern gendered civilised' women and men: gender-mainstreaming in refugee camps." *Gender & Development* 19.1 (2011): 81-93.

¹⁴³ Needless to say, that empowerment comprises much more than the eight elements that I have explained in this framework.

equally important or does empowerment happen if one or the other sphere is more stimulated than others? I will investigate this by applying the above discussed characteristics to the case studies in order to test which characteristics appear to be dominant in the case of HF and BWC.

Another important issue, that arises out of this framework, is related to the question if empowerment is an individual or a more socio-political process. This question relates to the matter of whose responsibility empowerment really is. Are individuals responsible for their own life and thus also their own empowerment? Or is it the responsibility of the state to provide individuals access to resources, opportunities and equal chances that will help individuals to become empowered? If empowerment turns out to be a socio-political process, then why do many NGOs focus their programmes on individual empowerment through capacity training of individuals? In this way they implicitly make individuals responsible for their own empowerment and success in life, without addressing the structural problems that might obstruct these individuals from becoming empowered in the first place. This would make the programmes ineffective as these programmes do not address the social circumstances that could hold women back.

This theoretical framework also outlined that there is a wide discussion on the Western portrayal of Muslim women as “victims that need to be rescued by Western actors”.¹⁴⁴ Empowerment projects that were formulated in the War on Terror era and which were connected to moral debates on Muslim women’s rights and the quest for Muslim women’s liberation, are a striking example of how underlying political and social structures influence concepts like empowerment and can turn a concept into a powerful political tool that is turned against the interests of women.

An example of such a strong political force is the narrative about non-western women, in which these women are referred to as subordinate and backward in contrast to modern European women. The development sector is a field that does not exist outside of these kinds of narratives and is also influenced by these discourses. One of the main reasons why the ‘Do Women Need Saving’ paradigm is still relevant is because derogatory stereotypes about Muslim women are still reproduced.

¹⁴⁴ Abu-Lughod, 2002.

As this theoretical framework has outlined, one of the most important reasons for persisting stereotypes about Muslim women is the unwillingness (may it be consciously or unconsciously) of NGOs and other involved Western actors to listen to women themselves. Instead, these actors fill in the gaps and claim to talk about important issues on women's behalf. This is done through, for example, empowerment projects, that are in some (but not all) cases, more disempowering than empowering to women. This only silences women and limits women's agency.

The social and political structures about the concept of empowerment made empowerment "a buzzword".¹⁴⁵ The wide use of the concept no longer captures women's lived realities. We need to start developing new language to measure women's empowerment and that does no longer exclude women.¹⁴⁶ Moreover, this new set of tools needs to go beyond paternalizing notions that resonate with the 'saving' rhetoric.

However, before I will discuss new characteristics for more inclusive empowerment programmes, I will discuss how empowerment is implemented by NGOs by explaining four approaches towards empowerment in the next chapter.

¹⁴⁵ Batliwala 2007, 557-559.

¹⁴⁶ Grabska 2011, 92; Batliwala 2007, 564.

2. Empowerment in NGO working methods: four approaches towards empowerment

Below, I will outline the four perspectives of empowerment that I have based on my previous literature review. Within each perspective, I will outline one approach that is used in NGO work in order to try to achieve empowerment. First, I will discuss the capacity-building approach to reach for individual empowerment. Thereafter, I will outline the gender approach to social empowerment. On the organisational level, I will elaborate on how some NGOs create mutual benefits for both refugees as well as NGOs themselves, as a way to reach for organisational empowerment. The human rights approach is discussed from the political perspective. Finally, I will elaborate on the connections between the different approaches.

Individual Empowerment

Examples of how NGOs reach for individual empowerment of their target groups are: 1) micro-credits; 2) capacity-building and 3) self-help groups. Due to the limited scope of this thesis, I will only discuss the capacity-building approach below as this is most relevant for the case study analysis in chapter three.

The Capacity-Building Approach to Empowerment

Capacity-building is widely discussed in terms of empowerment.¹⁴⁷ NGOs use different strategies to reach for capacity-building with their target group. Awona *et al.* found in their research on capacity-building amongst female entrepreneurs in Cameroon, who worked with trade commodities, that these women earned more money after undertaken capacity training.¹⁴⁸ The training consisted of e.g. financial skill training, 'marketing management' and technical skill training.¹⁴⁹

A more social approach to capacity-building is researched by Jayalaxshmi Mistry *et al.*, as they found that communities in Guyana, that worked with natural resources, significantly improved

¹⁴⁷ Low, Will, and Eileen Davenport. "NGO capacity building and sustainability in the Pacific." *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 43.3 (2002): 367-379.

¹⁴⁸ Awono, Ndoye & Preece, "Empowering Women's Capacity for Improved Livelihoods in Non-Timber Forest Product Trade in Cameroon," *International Journal of Social Forestry*, 2010, 3(2): 151-163.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 152-155.

their problem-solving skills after undertaking 'problem-based learning capacity training'.¹⁵⁰ This training consisted of two parts. First, the participants underwent a 'community course' in which they had to analyse everyday problems they faced. These problems were e.g. natural disasters, 'over-harvesting' and crop failure. Second, the participants underwent an 'institutional level course' in which their 'adaptive management skills' were developed. These skills consisted of 'systematic thinking', 'crisis management' and 'group working'. Utilizing these skills helped the participants to deal with problems they faced during their work. The authors found that the courses were highly successful, and, after completion, the participants were better able to anticipate potential problems they came across during their work.¹⁵¹

In these two studies, both authors connect capacity-building to empowerment. Awona *et al.* argue that, after the capacity training, women were over all better able to lift themselves out of poverty as a consequence of their higher wages. Moreover, the higher wage allowed them to invest in their families and this also contributed to the prosperity of their families.¹⁵² Jayalaxshmi Mistry *et al.* also state that the capacity training, that the participants in their research underwent, led to empowerment of the participants. In the problems they faced, they were now capable of choosing how to react to these situations as they now had different skills to deal with the problems. This also led to active and engaging participants in the courses because the participants could feel the changes in their everyday lives.¹⁵³

Critics

The concept of capacity-building in academia is controversial. According to Eade, the popularity of the term has actually "crushed" capacities instead of creating new ones.¹⁵⁴ Capacity-building has thus, just like empowerment, also become a "buzz word".

Another critique recognises the social environments in which capacity-building programmes are formulated. This critique outlines that these programmes do not automatically lead to forms of women's empowerment. The building of capacity and access to resources is not enough to combat structural problems that are keeping women in disempowered positions.¹⁵⁵ Eade is

¹⁵⁰ Jayalaxshmi et al., 'Capacity building for adaptive management: a problem-based learning approach,' *Development in Practice*, 2011, 21(2): 190-204.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 193-202.

¹⁵² Awono et al. 2010, 160-161.

¹⁵³ Jayalaxshmi et al. 2011, 199-200.

¹⁵⁴ Eade 2007, 630-631.

¹⁵⁵ Hickel, 2014; Cornwall & Rivas, 2015; Eade, 2007.

sceptical on capacity-building. She states that the reification of capacity-building into training does not address the social web of inequalities that influence poor peoples' lives.¹⁵⁶ Moreover, it focusses the attention on 'things' and not on 'people', which is what capacity is actually about.¹⁵⁷ Eade states that NGOs often ignore power dynamics which is harmful to participants of capacity training.¹⁵⁸

Hickel agrees with Eade on this part that empowerment programmes could be harmful to women. He is one of the scholars who criticize empowerment programmes that are focused on individual empowerment, like capacity-building and microcredit programmes. In his research, Hickel investigates the relationship between the development sector, empowerment and women. He found that these kinds of empowerment programmes are disempowering to women. Hickel mentions eight critiques on individual empowerment programmes, of which I will outline four points that are relevant for the case studies; 1) he states that economic investment in women brings forth new structures of inequality that development agencies fail to recognize. Empowerment and microcredit are harmful to women because they ignore the violent social atmospheres in which many women live. Microcredits could be more harmful to women because the improvement of women's economic positions within violent families could disrupt patriarchal structures of families; 2) these patriarchal structures conflict with ideas of empowerment. Empowerment is based on values like individualism and authenticity that are incompatible with the values of the South. Collectivism and 'local kinship' serve as the defining pillars on which Southern societies are built; 3) empowerment projects are framed by development organisations as catalysts for social change. This grants these organisations power and 'moral legitimacy'. At the same time the disempowering role these organisations have in development contexts is ignored. The economic empowerment of women places only more 'burden' on women's responsibilities. This lets them sink into more severe forms of disempowerment. Women now also have to earn money whilst their caring tasks at home stay the same. In this way development organisations claim to create solutions to problems that they have created themselves; 4) empowerment only works on a national level; if empowerment is applied on a global scale then global wealth and global political power need to be redistributed. Wealthy states are the only ones that currently profit from global political power. Hickel states that the development sector does not criticize dominant Western attitudes in developing

¹⁵⁶ Eade 2007, 631-635.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 2007.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 632.

countries. He concludes that this power structure is the real reason why power inequalities are kept in place.¹⁵⁹

I will outline in chapter three that both case studies resonate to parts of Hickel's argument. The power inequalities that become visible out of these case studies could indicate that Hickel has a point when he criticizes empowerment as an individual concept. But first I will elaborate on the gender equality approach for social empowerment.

Social Empowerment

Social empowerment means individuals are included in social institutions.¹⁶⁰ Scholars who argue empowerment is about social inclusion often link empowerment with gender equality. They state that gender equality is a prerequisite for social empowerment.

The Gender Equality Approach to Empowerment

Empowerment aims are often mentioned in one breath which 'gender equality' within the development sector.¹⁶¹ This assumes there is a causal relationship between both notions.¹⁶²

In the 1970s, Western feminists targeted the development field because they wanted gender to have a central place in development projects. This resulted in three dominant frameworks that have influenced the development field over the past forty years.¹⁶³ These frameworks are called Women in Development Framework (WID); Women and Development Framework (WAD); and the Gender in Development Framework (GAD). Until then, gender had been almost completely absent from the development sector.¹⁶⁴

The WID framework, that rose out of this successful feminist battle, placed women as the central focal point in development studies. However, in this framework, women were merely implanted into already-existing projects that had been designed in the time when gender was still absent from the development field. Moreover, the framework put the emphasis on women as a collective category rather than unique individuals. This led to the emphasis of women as a

¹⁵⁹ Hickel 2014, 1369-1370.

¹⁶⁰ Oditi & Odera, 2016.

¹⁶¹ Oditi & Odera 2016, 148-150.

¹⁶² Cornwall, Harrison and Whitehead 2007, 5-7.

¹⁶³ McIwaine & Datta, 2003.

¹⁶⁴ McIwaine & Datta, 2003.

homogeneous group that were defined by their sex. The problems regarding women were seen as “women’s issues”. This focus on women’s needs had a hierarchical character that aligned with the WID top-down policies. On the other hand, there have been NGOs that have taken a bottom-up approach and implemented programmes focussing on women’s “interests” instead of “issues” and it has been proven that they were more successful in combatting gender inequalities.¹⁶⁵

The WAD framework was in many ways similar to the WID’s, as it had the same previously mentioned focal points. The difference to the WID framework, is that the WAD framework placed more emphasis on women’s personal and class diversity. However, within this framework, the female sex category still formed the focal point.¹⁶⁶

This changed when the GAD framework was introduced in the 1980s. For the first time in history, gender instead of sex was the central focal point of the development agenda. According to McLwaine & Datta, the GAD framework had two improvements. Firstly, the GAD framework now criticized the development agenda for its liberal and capitalist roots, which until then, had been praised for its good work in improving women’s lives. Thus, the GAD framework brought a revolutionary shift in thinking. Now, social workers started to recognize that the effects of capitalism, industrialisation and globalisation impacted poor women in the developing world in a negative way. Therefore, the development agenda, that was shaped by these structures, did not have only positive results. However, there was still a shared opinion that development projects targeted at women could combat gender inequalities. Secondly, the framework was seen to be an improvement because gender was now seen as a fluid and hybrid term that recognised women for their diversity. For the first time, structural inequalities between men and women were the central focal point of the development agenda. The aim of this struggle was to ‘redistribute’ power inequalities. As a consequence, empowerment and participation became key notions in this framework.¹⁶⁷

However, the GAD framework itself is highly criticized in development work. The approach has in practice reached the opposite of what it intended: as a consequence of integrating the approach into practice, the political and feminist basis of the approach has been lost. As a result, the framework did not reach any noticeable social or political change. In other words, even

¹⁶⁵ Ibid. 2003, 369-371.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 2003.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid. 2003, 369-371.

though the GAD framework was critical of development studies, these critiques did not lead to results in development practice that substantially benefitted women.¹⁶⁸

As a consequence, McLwaine & Datta state that the GAD framework was improved on three levels. Firstly, more emphasis was placed on the diversity amongst women to avoid stereotypes and “essentialisms”. Secondly, this created a shift in the needs-based approach of development projects to a human-rights approach (I will explain this from the political perspective below). Thirdly, men and masculinities were also involved in the GAD framework.¹⁶⁹

To show how the gender approach was implemented by NGOs, I will briefly illustrate an example of a gender-based approach in refugee settings below. I will discuss the critics to this approach in more depth in the next section.

In the 1980s, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the largest European organisation responsible for refugee protection, started to work with gender sensitive programmes to protect refugee women.¹⁷⁰ At first, when the WID and WAD framework were still relevant in development work, the UNHCR only focused on women’s protection in refugee camps. At the beginning of the new millennium, when the GAD framework became dominant, gender-based programmes were introduced.¹⁷¹ These programmes were no longer implemented from above and were more focussed on women’s involvement.¹⁷² Grabska describes how the UNHCR implemented a gender approach in the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya. Gender programmes in the Kakuma camp were structured according to four areas; 1) the focus on women’s and girls’ security in the camp and the implementation of policies needed in order to prevent sexual violence in the camp; 2) providing education to women and girls; 3) focus on women’s economic input, women’s “economic empowerment” and “women’s leadership” through skill workshops and microcredit programmes; 4) focus on human rights and gender equality through “awareness raising workshops”.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. 2003, 369-371.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. 2003, 369-373.

¹⁷⁰ Freedman, Jane. "Mainstreaming gender in refugee protection." *Cambridge review of international affairs* 23.4 (2010): 589-607.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 593.

¹⁷² Grabska, Katarzyna. "Constructing 'modern gendered civilised' women and men: gender-mainstreaming in refugee camps." *Gender & Development* 19.1 (2011): 81-93.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 84-87.

Freedman and Grabska are critical on gender approaches that are used by UNHCR; therefore, I will outline their critiques to this approach below.

Critics

Generally, there are five key points on which Grabska and Freedman criticize gender approaches used by UNHCR.

First, they state that the effectiveness of gender approaches is obstructed by power inequalities. Power inequalities become directly visible in UNHCR's project implementation, as the organisation is the main facilitator of assistance and holds power over other NGOs and refugees.¹⁷⁴

Second, gender approaches overlook the complexities that are attached to gender inequalities. These inequalities are often explained as simple binaries in which women are approached as "victims" versus "survivors" and men as "perpetrators" or "violators".¹⁷⁵ Moreover, Cornwall & Rivas state that the use of terms such as "empowerment" and "gender equality" itself is problematic.¹⁷⁶ They argue that the terms have a universal character which encapsulate empowerment as a "one-size-fits-all". This is done through the use of sentences like "empowering women and girls" and "engaging boys and men", which are formulated too simplistically.¹⁷⁷ Subsequently, they critique the top-down nature of the UN millennium development goals (MDGs). This is mainly due to the limited focus of the development goals. The goals are designed in a way to let the women work for the projects, and not the other way around. Women are exploited for the success of the projects, whereas the projects should help women to foster their own equality and empowerment.¹⁷⁸

Third, many NGOs lack implemented organisational gender policies and therefore lack knowledge and experience to implement gender policies in their projects. An important reason for this is that project executives do not fully understand what gender means. Often gender equality approaches are based on integrating women into existing policies, whereas gender is to a great extent about exposing power relationships.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁴ Grabska 2011, 91; Freedman 2010, 597.

¹⁷⁵ Freedman 2010, 600-604; Grabska 2011, 91.

¹⁷⁶ Cornwall & Rivas 2015, 397-381.

¹⁷⁷ UN, 2018; Cornwall & Rivas 2015, 397.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 396-405.

¹⁷⁹ Freedman 2010, 590-595.

Four, approaching gender equality only according to Western standards remains a challenge in NGO working methods. An important reason for the persistence of dominant Western views is the pressure that NGOs feel in sustaining their livelihood. The NGO market has become a donor dependent market. This means that many Western donors invest in NGO programmes and, in return, expect NGOs to realise their interests. Many NGOs face a crisis between working independently but risking bankruptcy and maintaining a healthy financial structure whilst looking after donor interest.¹⁸⁰

Lastly, both Freedman and Grabska state that the gender approach has achieved little for women themselves and has had, in many cases, even unintended opposite effects.¹⁸¹ Cornwall & Rivas also confirm this point. They state that trying to achieve gender equality by investing in women and improving their economic and personal positions is not as transformative as has been claimed. Gender inequalities are ingrained in social structures. Investing in women is merely trying to treat the symptoms of gender inequality. The root cause of gender inequality is the construction of social institutions and social norms.¹⁸² The authors highlight that investment in women's economic positions and gender are important steps towards growth and empowerment. However, what previous development policies have mostly outlined is that the complexities surrounding gender equality and empowerment are ignored and oversimplified. The use of terms like 'gender equality' and 'empowerment' without clearly addressing its meaning, have invigorated stereotypes of women as "needing saving".¹⁸³ The authors underline that there should be more critique on these concepts. Speaking of gender equality without a framework reinforces stereotypes and thus obstructs empowerment. These labels only reinforce the narrow understanding of power inequalities surrounding gender and empowerment that dominate the development field.¹⁸⁴

Freedman notes that the reinforcement of saving notions is also present in UNHCR gender projects. She states that the bureaucratic structure of UNHCR is itself one part of the problem. The "institutional power" that UNHCR has, decreases forms of agency and leaves out women's voices in the projects.¹⁸⁵ She argues that the portrayal of refugees as inferior is intrinsically

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 596-597.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 600-604; Grabska 2010,

¹⁸² Cornwall & Rivas 2015, 396-400.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 2015.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 400.

¹⁸⁵ Freedman 2010, 604.

present in the development sector. Moreover, the “patron-client relationship” that UNHCR maintains with refugees is in itself “deeply unequal”.¹⁸⁶

The question is then: how could NGO working methods avoid patronizing notions in their approaches and include women’s voices in their projects? Will the organisational approach towards empowerment, that I will outline below, be capable of moving away from “saving” notions?

Organisational Empowerment

Generally, NGOs apply two main working approaches in their projects: a top-down approach or a bottom-up approach, which I will briefly outline below. Next, I will outline a ‘reciprocal benefits’ method based on participation strategies. Finally, I will discuss some critics of this approach.

Bottom-up versus top-down approaches

Working methods of NGOs can be implemented by a top-down or a bottom-up approach.¹⁸⁷ In a top-down approach, there is a wide distance between the organisation and the target group. The organisation mainly designs projects from an organisational level without consultation with the target group. In a bottom-up approach, the organisation builds up its projects from on the ground by looking at what the target group needs.¹⁸⁸ The literature argues that projects based on a top-down approach mainly benefit NGOs. They do not have an advantage to the target group. Whereas, projects based on a bottom-up approach are more likely to create benefits for both NGOs and their target groups.¹⁸⁹ Below, I will outline a bottom-up approach that intends to work towards refugee empowerment.

The ‘Reciprocal benefits’ method towards empowerment

Helms states that NGOs that use top-down policies lack clear and reciprocal communication channels.¹⁹⁰ This disadvantages women. In their research on the relationships between

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 599-601.

¹⁸⁷ McIwaine & Datta, 2003.

¹⁸⁸ Onditi & Odera 2016, 154-155.

¹⁸⁹ Helms, 2003; Malhotra, Schuler & Boender, 2002.

¹⁹⁰ Helms, “Women as Agents of Ethnic Reconciliation? Women’s NGOs and International Intervention in Post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina,” *Women’s Studies International Forum*, 2003, 26(1): 15-33.

researchers and refugees in refugee camps, MacKenzie, McDowell & Pittaway make a similar point as they state that 'reciprocal benefits' need to be the basis on which relationships between researchers and refugees are built. What they mean by this is that researchers should invest time in fostering respectful ways of communicating with refugees. By offering refugees something in return for their cooperation, they could play an important role in supporting refugees to regain feelings of agency. Offering benefits to refugees will, according to the authors, help refugees to "re-build capacity".¹⁹¹ According to the authors, this approach is a way to move away from pitying refugees.¹⁹²

They argue that it is vital that refugee projects are constructed in correspondence with the interests and needs of refugees. By this they mean that refugees need to get offered instruments to deal with adversity and that help them to create solutions to their problems.¹⁹³ Especially the stimulation of refugees' self-esteem and self-worth is important because they state that this will lead to the expansion of refugees' autonomy and capacities. They believe that benefits created through bottom-up approaches are the only way to refugee empowerment.¹⁹⁴

An example of a method that is based on mutual advantages is the participatory approach. The idea behind refugee participation is that actively involving refugees in programmes will lead to better humanitarian assistance. This will create less 'dependency' for refugees as their feelings of confidence and self-determination are stimulated.¹⁹⁵ The earlier mentioned UNHCR, adopted participation as a strategy in the 1990s to avoid refugees becoming too dependent on humanitarian aid. Participation projects were implemented to avoid this so-called 'dependency syndrome'.¹⁹⁶ Ways in which NGOs involve participants in their projects are focus groups, possibilities in which refugees are involved in project management and opportunities in which refugees are offered chances to influence NGO project management. I will examine in chapter three to what extent BWC and HF create these kinds of reciprocal benefits for their target groups. But first I will outline some critiques to this approach.

¹⁹¹ McKenzie, McDowell & Pittaway 2007, 299-301.

¹⁹² Ibid., 309-310.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 310-311.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 309-316.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 42-43.

¹⁹⁶ Olivius, Elisabeth. "(Un) governable subjects: The limits of refugee participation in the promotion of gender equality in humanitarian aid." *Journal of Refugee Studies* 27.1 (2013): 42-61.

Critics

MacKenzie, McDowell & Pittaway note that, in a reciprocal benefits approach, it is crucial that the actors involved secure the trust of refugees by making them feel safe. In their research on researchers and refugee relationships, they found that researchers often undertook their research and conducted interviews with refugees and, thereafter, left without ever contacting the refugees again, thus making the refugees feel “exploited” and their trust violated. Next to offering advantages, the actors involved thus also need to guarantee safety and consider the traumatic history many refugees have.¹⁹⁷

Even though participation is one step forward in making refugees active agents of their lives, Olivius notes that, within participation projects, many refugees do not have “decision-making power”.¹⁹⁸ Many refugees are made submissive to the system and are denied “control over camp life”.¹⁹⁹ Participation can thus not change anything about the hopeless situation many refugees find themselves in. Moreover, when refugees participate in e.g. focus groups, they are unable to hold NGOs responsible for possible actions that they have undertaken based on the information that refugees have provided to them.²⁰⁰ Many participation projects are criticized by scholars because NGOs do not seriously listen to their target group.

In order to have a closer look at if NGOs are better capable of listening to their target group by using a human-rights based approach, I will now turn to the political perspective below.

Political Empowerment

Sen & Mukherjee state that gender equality and empowerment will only be achieved through a human-rights based approach.²⁰¹ The (financial) support for women’s NGOs is decisive for promoting a human-rights based approach. These organisations play a vital role in putting women’s rights on the development agenda.²⁰² The authors criticize the former UN millennium development goals (MDG’s) for lacking both a human-rights approach and not supporting

¹⁹⁷ MacKenzie, McDowell & Pittaway 2007, 312-313.

¹⁹⁸ Olivius 2013, 51.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 53.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 51.

²⁰¹ Sen & Mukherjee 2014, 188-190.

²⁰² Ibid., 194-195.

women's organisations.²⁰³ They state that the absence of such an approach is an important reason why the MDGs relating to gender equality and empowerment have not been achieved.²⁰⁴

²⁰³ Ibid., 189.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 197-198.

The human-rights approach to empowerment

A human-rights based approach focusses on women's empowerment through promoting women's rights on all levels of society.²⁰⁵ In this approach, empowerment is contextual but shares universal values. On a more structural level, this means women's awareness on these issues needs to be increased. Suppressive "structures", that do not value women's rights, need to be changed. The authors argue that, in a society in which human rights are respected, women have 'economic', 'political', 'cultural', 'reproductive' and 'sexual' control over their lives. This also includes 'autonomy' and 'bodily integrity'.²⁰⁶

The authors mention two reasons why the framework of the MDGs failed to achieve empowerment and gender equality: 1) the MDG framework was not designed according to a human-rights approach; 2) women NGOs do not sufficiently adhere to and protect a human-rights based approach, but they are the organisations capable of implementing sustainable change.²⁰⁷ The authors state that the MDGs were designed by a small group of wealthy states, who have prioritized economic targets over women's rights and gender equality. Development targets like diminishing education disparity were integrated in the MDGs, however, the authors state that, even though such goals are important, targets like education did not tackle inequalities like 'discrimination'. According to the authors, such inequalities are only combatted by adequately implementing a human-rights based approach.²⁰⁸ The same is true for reaching empowerment and gender equality, which were target goals the previous MDGs; the authors state that the presence of human rights are a prerequisite for achieving equality and empowerment. Institutionalized discrimination will maintain gender biases, as long as development goals only focus on creating new opportunities for women, like providing channels of education. No sustainable change is created because gender inequalities, which are often deeply politically embedded, are not changed. According to the authors, it is, therefore, the UN's current framework that is undermining gender equality and empowerment.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 2014.

²⁰⁶ Sen & Mukherjee 2014, 188-191.

²⁰⁷ I relate to the UN millennium development goals (MDG's) in the past sense because the goals have been replaced by the sustainable development goals (SDG's). However, Sen & Mukherjee's article was published at the time that the MDG's were still relevant. Nevertheless, the critique that they target at the framework, that the UN used to design their development goals from, is still relevant for empowerment debates today because the UN still works according to this framework and a lot of NGOs, like HF, design their project based on the development framework of the UN. For more information on the UN's sustainable development goals, please see: <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals.html>.

²⁰⁸ Sen & Mukherjee 2014, 191-192.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 197-198.

The authors argue that, a sustainable implementation of a human-rights based approach is based on a people and needs based approach. This means that women's 'legal empowerment' needs to be fostered and women need to have "political participation and voice[s] at multiple levels" which also includes "access to and control over economic resources". The latter one needs to be realised according to a balance in paid and unpaid work for women. Moreover, 'development' needs to be focused on human needs, like safely accessible drinking water, food, healthcare policies and awareness raising. This also entails "social protection against risks and vulnerabilities" for women. But, maybe more importantly, the authors underline the focus on 'self-determination' and 'autonomy' on which a human-rights based approach needs to be built. Vital for the effectiveness of this approach will be "to what extent" women "will shape" the agenda.²¹⁰

Critics

Sen & Mukherjee state that the whole political construct of Western capitalist markets increases power and gender inequalities. Global power struggles over economic goals undermine women's rights and narrow the effects of a human-rights based approach. According to the authors, only prominent institutions that hold global power, like the UN does, are capable of changing their approach towards a people centred strategy that will benefit women. The UN claims to be on the side of women, yet the authors argue that the UN insufficiently takes up its responsibility of protecting women against political and economic interests of other involved actors.

Sen & Mukherjee state that also women NGOs have an important task to fulfil in combatting corporate economic interests; they will need to work harder to promote and protect women's rights. In order to accomplish this, women NGOs need to be financially supported by donors without hidden agendas because at the moment their financial security is at risk.

Other scholars state that we should be wary of a human-rights based approach in humanitarian interventions.²¹¹ The framework can be abused to legitimise and promote 'Western imperialism and interventions'.²¹² While Skegg recognises that a human-rights approach can be considered

²¹⁰ Ibid., 196-199.

²¹¹ Skegg, 2005; Hunt, 2002.

²¹² Skegg, 2005; Hunt, 2002.

as more advanced compared to a needs-based approach, she states that the context in which the approach is implemented defines its outcome.

Moreover, the human rights based approach is more neutral compared to the social-justice (needs based) approach, which is rather paternalizing and judgemental.²¹³ However, it remains difficult to balance respect for cultural diversity with local cultural values and promoting a system of universal human rights at the same time.²¹⁴ The false implementation of a human-rights based system in social work could become another form of 'Western domination'. This is only empowering to the Western hegemony in the field of development.²¹⁵

Hunt claims that the women's rights approach has been misused by Western actors to justify Western interventions and use of violence in the Middle East.²¹⁶ She states that the approach is, for example, used by both the Taliban and the US to scapegoat each other. Moreover, it is used to gain popular support for war. These wars are framed as serving the interests of women. Hunt claims women suffer the most injustices in war and thus Western interventions do not serve women's interests.²¹⁷

Discussion

This chapter and the previous chapter have laid out the framework for analysis of the case studies in the next chapter. This framework entails the eight characteristics of empowerment, that I have discussed in the previous chapter, and the four NGO approaches, that I have discussed above. In the next chapter, I will apply this framework to the case studies. Before I turn to the analysis and results of the case studies, four important discussion points need to be drawn on the relationships between the different NGO approaches. I will outline in chapter three that the presence (or absence) of these discussion points have a direct result on the effects of the projects implemented by BWC and HF.

The most important point comes down to what I call "you cannot give what you do not have". Eade states that NGOs cannot train people, if they themselves do not have the capacity.²¹⁸

²¹³ Skegg 2005, 667-671.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 668-671.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 671.

²¹⁶ Hunt 2002, 116-120.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 120.

²¹⁸ Eade, Deborah. "Capacity building: who builds whose capacity?." *Development in practice* 17.4-5 (2007): 630-639.

However, we can apply this statement to all the above discussed approaches. If NGOs do not have political power, they are unable to provide political empowerment to their target group. The same is true for social empowerment; if NGOs do not follow a gender approach themselves, they cannot possibly implement successful gender projects.²¹⁹ This indicates that empowerment starts with the self-empowerment of NGOs.

Secondly, the above analysis shows that all perspectives are interdependent. Manifestations of empowerment in one perspective can have a ripple effect to other domains of empowerment. I have shown that, for example, empowerment is to a certain extent connected to a human-rights based approach; a lack of human rights obstructs ways of empowerment. However, lack of women's participation in the social sphere can also obstruct political forms of empowerment. What this shows is that all the levels of empowerment are connected and that no single approach towards empowerment achieves empowerment on all levels.

Third, this analysis has outlined that there is a clear responsibility on the part of NGOs to carefully investigate their own negative and positive inputs in projects. The extent to which NGOs show forms of self-reflection is a defining factor for empowerment. Moreover, the effectiveness of NGO projects depends on whether or not NGOs are willing to listen to their target group. The way in which NGOs engage their target group in their projects also defines the extent to which NGOs victimize their target group. The more NGOs actively involve their target group in the decision-making process, the less likely NGO methods are influenced by patronizing notions of pitying women.

Fourth, it seems like many NGOs lack a clear vision for where they want to go with empowerment programmes. This undermines their working methods and affects the results of the programmes. There is no global co-operation network between NGOs to combine strengths, share knowledge or reflect on the pros and cons of already implemented projects. NGOs mainly work along parallel lines, which causes ineffectiveness and lets valuable information get lost. This stagnates the development of empowerment projects.

Finally, the goal of this chapter was to outline what different approaches NGOs use to work towards empowerment. In the next chapter, I will investigate what approaches BWC and HF use

²¹⁹ Freedman, Jane. "Mainstreaming gender in refugee protection." *Cambridge review of international affairs* 23.4 (2010): 589-607.

to try to implement empowerment. I will test the effectiveness of their projects by applying the previously laid out framework to their projects. I want to analyse how adequately their projects are implemented; do we see the same problems arise in their projects as the problems that I have outlined above? What contradictions arise out of their project management and to what extent does that relate to the contradictions outlined in this and the previous chapter? Can we identify one or multiple concepts or approaches that are dominant in BWC and HF's working methods? And more importantly: To what extent are BWC and HF capable of fostering ways of empowerment for their target group?

3. Empowerment in Praxis: ‘Power to the people’?²²⁰

In this chapter, I will present the analysis of the case studies of HF and BWC. The eight characteristics, that I have presented in chapter one, form the lens through which I analyze the case studies. I will analyze how both organizations use the concept of empowerment in their work by examining three projects of each organization. I will also examine to what extent both organizations apply the approaches, that I have discussed in chapter two, in praxis. Finally, I will present seven essential elements of empowerment and argue that, based on these case studies, effective empowerment training must include at least these seven elements.

Case Study 1: Because We Carry

The Dutch-originated Because We Carry (BWC) was established after the refugee crisis started on the Greek island of Lesbos in 2015.²²¹ The original goal of the four female founders was to come to Lesbos to distribute baby carriers to newly-arrived refugee mothers and their newborns.²²² The enormous pressure on the Greek humanitarian system and the lack of available resources on the island encouraged the four women from Amsterdam to provide urgent humanitarian assistance. Immediately after their arrival, they decided to support the rescue services on the island in saving refugees that had been castaway on the Mediterranean Sea for hours, often in leaking dinghies. As permanent humanitarian assistance on the island remained absent, the women decided to stay on Lesbos and founded BWC as an official humanitarian organisation.

BWC is now, after three-and-a-half-years of activities on the island, one of the leading organisations on Kara Tepe CampUs, the second biggest refugee camp in Lesbos. The main task of BWC is the provision of breakfast for 1240 people every morning. Furthermore, BWC is responsible for the daily activity programmes in the camp. As BWC deliberately refers to ‘residents’ instead of ‘refugees’, as a means to value refugees’ presence, this thesis will also name BWC’s participants as ‘residents’.

²²⁰ John Lennon. “Power to the People”. Original version published in March 1971, published online on November 19th 2014, accessed at May 19th 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YnFoAm3YvGk>.

²²¹ Because We Carry, last accessed at April 12, 2019, <https://www.becausewecarry.org/en/>.

²²² Ibid., 2018.

I was a volunteer at BWC in October 2018 for two weeks. During this period, I collected the data for this case study.

Working method

The organisation's goal is to focus on safety, security, connection and trust in order to 'restore faith in humanity' in dark times such as these.²²³ The question that defines BWC's organisational structure is: "How can I help you?" This question is acted upon by asking this question to residents at all times. BWC creates its projects through asking their target group what they want and need. Projects are thus not already designed, but they are constructed along the way and in accordance with the feedback of the target group. This reflects a bottom-up approach.²²⁴

According to BWC, it is important to create possibilities and opportunities for residents that enable them to regain their feelings of self-confidence and self-determination. Therefore, the projects are focused on making residents indispensable. BWC's philosophy is based on the belief that "everyone wants to fulfil the highest, truest expression of yourself as a human being".²²⁵ They underline that refugees are people searching for safety, who will work as hard as possible to create better circumstances for themselves. Denying residents the right to work and participate in projects is thus a waste of human capital and talent. According to BWC, it is vital to support residents in rediscovering their identities and raising awareness amongst the Dutch population that refugees are like everyone else.²²⁶

Moreover, BWC's philosophy is based on the belief that participation leads to "trauma healing". As the Greek authorities do not pursue such a method and just let refugees await the long asylum procedures, this healing process would be absent if BWC did not take up this responsibility. According to BWC, it is important to offer residents structure and routine through intercultural exchange, as this fosters integration and brings back feelings of happiness and joy in residents' lives.²²⁷

²²³ Because We Carry Beleidsplan, 2018, accessed at December 15 2018, <https://www.becausewecarry.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Because-We-Carry-Beleidsplan-2018.pdf>.

²²⁴ McIlwaine, Cathy, and Kavita Datta. "From feminising to engendering development." *Gender, Place and Culture* 10.4 (2003), 369-371.

²²⁵ Because We Carry Beleidsplan, 2018, accessed at December 15 2018, <https://www.becausewecarry.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Because-We-Carry-Beleidsplan-2018.pdf>.

²²⁶ Ibid., 2018.

²²⁷ Ibid., 2018.

BWC uses the working method of “empowerment through action”.²²⁸ BWC utilizes the slogan of “Niet Lullen Maar Poetsen” (“Less Talk More Action”). Refugee participation forms the basis of this method. BWC has a solid team of approximately sixty residents that co-operate in BWC’s projects. BWC carefully matches the projects with the skills and abilities of their participants. The aim of refugee participation is focused on expanding participants’ self-reliance in the poor and difficult living circumstances of Kara Tepe. BWC believes that when residents are given as much work as possible and are valued as human beings in a respectful manner, empowerment is stimulated. BWC’s projects thus serve as a means to foster residents’ autonomy and self-determination. Moreover, in their projects, BWC tries to match the participants former profession with one of BWC’ projects. If this cannot be accomplished, BWC provides training to participants in order to educate them and expand their professional skills.

This opens up possibilities for residents to have a goal in the harsh conditions of refugee life. Subsequently, engaging residents in projects and focussing on their personal development, allows refugees to feel worthy again, as refugees are often stuck in a repressive and degrading asylum system that, in the case of Lesvos, deprives them of human rights and basic needs.²²⁹ As a consequence, BWC’s participants show a strong work ethic and good motivation as they appreciate the work BWC does for them. This translates in a lot of manpower that fuels the projects’ success. The free labour the residents provide is in the advantage of BWC. However, the great enthusiasm of the residents also contributes to a pleasant work atmosphere and creates a positive vibe amongst participants of the projects.

Another defining factor in BWC’s working method is the co-operation with at least seven Dutch volunteers who come to Greece every week. BWC manages a booking system through which Dutch residents can sign up for a volunteer week all year round. BWC’s office in Amsterdam makes sure that the volunteer weeks are managed and booked. This is clearly successful because, in October 2018, the volunteer weeks were booked out until March 2019. The seven weekly volunteers from the Netherlands support the sixty residents living in the camp. The projects are thus run by residents themselves, the Dutch team is mainly there to support the residents team and to supervise, as the residents are not allowed to be in charge.²³⁰ The intercultural exchange

²²⁸ Ibid., 2018.

²²⁹ The New York Times. “ ‘Better to Drown’: A Greek Refugee Camps’ Epidemic of Misery”. Published on October 2nd 2018, Accessed at December 15 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/02/world/europe/greece-lesbos-moria-refugees.html>.

²³⁰ This might sound ambivalent as this case study elaborates on refugee empowerment. The procedures surrounding the current refugee crisis in Greece is beyond the scope of this thesis, however, in this context

that is established out of this method is a great advantage for all parties as it creates mutual understanding. Moreover, it enables residents to tell their stories and this raises awareness for the Dutch volunteers. Furthermore, the residents feel seen and appreciated by the Dutch volunteer team which contributes to their feelings of self-confidence.

Project overview

The **Chai House Project** distributes free chai tea to all residents of the camp in order to keep them warm. The residents are in charge of the project, being responsible for opening- and closing the house and cooking chai.

The **Laugh and Learn Programme** is targeted at giving back a piece of childhood to children living on Kara Tepe CampUs. Every Monday, Wednesday and Friday the amphitheatre opens up for children that are not allowed to go to school. In the amphitheatre, space is created to play games, paint, colour and sing together.

As a consequence of the astronomic waste problem in Camp Moria,²³¹ BWC has implemented **Team Clean** in order to clean the camp every Wednesday from 3 until 5 pm. The Dutch volunteer team is divided over a residents team of fifteen men living in Camp Moria and together they fill garbage bags with waste. Many of the men share the opinion that the project helps them get through the week as this is their only appointment in the week and the only thing they look forward to.²³²

it is important to note that it is not common for refugees to be in charge of projects. Usually, refugees are expected to obey European laws and regulations, and, in most cases, they simply have to wait for their asylum procedure, which can take up to several years. The concept that BWC has introduced, whereby refugees can actively assist in projects, is, at least in Greece, a unique concept. Nevertheless, it is against the European asylum rules to let refugees be in charge of projects in refugee camps and therefore refugees are expected to comply with the BWC regulations and the asylum procedures more generally. It is for this reason that a Dutch volunteer team is needed to be in charge of the projects run by refugees themselves. For more information on the refugee crisis in Greece and asylum procedures please see: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/67712>.

²³¹ Camp Moria is the largest refugee camp in Greece and is the registration centre for refugees arriving in Europe. Most refugees will have to go through Camp Moria in order to register for asylum in Europe. However, Camp Moria is known for its horrible living conditions. The camp has a capacity for 3,100 people, however, in 2018, around 5,000 people were living inside the camp and another 2,000 people were illegally camping in the so-called 'Olive Grove' next to the camp, due to the over crowdedness in Camp Moria and the ongoing influx of new arrivals in Greece. For more information on Camp Moria, please see Appendix A, page 97-99, or consult Oxfam Novib's latest report on the situation in Camp Moria: https://www-cdn.oxfam.org/s3fs-public/file_attachments/2019-01_greece_media_briefing_final.pdf.

²³² See Appendix A, page 98-99, for a more extensive elaboration on BWC's projects.

Below, I will analyse BWC's **Breakfast Project**, **Sewing Circle Project** and **Barbershop Project** in-depth.

Breakfast project

The Breakfast project is the main responsibility of BWC and consists of providing breakfast to all 1240 residents in the camp. Every morning at 7.30am, family bags are filled with fresh fruit, vegetables and bread. This is done by fifteen residents supported by the Dutch volunteer team. The resident team is made up of mainly men, but approximately three to four women join every morning as well. From 9 until 10 am, the breakfast is distributed door-to-door along the family containers in the camp with carts. The residents know the distribution order by heart and take responsibility for the distribution, the Dutch volunteers assist and keep track with a clipboard. Other tasks included in the project are (un)loading the carts and organizing food supplies in the food truck, stocking the fridge, preparing 1240 bananas in the carts, cleaning up and making coffee and tea for the team.

The breakfast project only has place for up to fifteen residents to participate. However, there is a long waiting list of residents wanting to participate. BWC sees residents that participate in their projects as members of the BWC family and participants are treated on an equal basis with the Dutch BWC volunteers. A BWC resident membership gives special privileges to residents with participants being given a BWC key cord and being allowed to rent BWC bikes at the **Bike Shop Project** for free. Moreover, participating residents are invited to join the monthly BWC dinner as a means for BWC to show appreciation for the effort residents put into BWC's projects.

Sewing Circle Project

The sewing circle is a three-hour registration round at the Amphitheatre where women can sign up for receiving a sewing kit. The sewing kit is put together with donations that BWC receives from BWC volunteers. Most packages are made from regularly brought in donations like yarn and bobbins, zippers, buttons and fabric patches. When BWC receives enough knitting packages, knitting kits are handed out. The goal of the project is to distribute supplies that women can use to sew clothes. The project is evidently popular as during my fieldwork, over 170 women signed up in one week. BWC volunteers prepare the sewing packages and distribute the packages to women's doors.

Barbershop Project

The barbershop started as an improvised project in the Amphitheatre through the use of portable barber equipment. However, the project is now officially established in a converted shipping container and is professionalized with donated barbershop equipment. Before the implementation of the shipping container, the barbershop could only be organised every other week, now BWC is able to offer haircuts from Monday to Friday from 12pm until 4 pm. Residents are now able to make appointments in the appointment book, and they do not have to wait hours in line for a haircut. When the barbershop in the newly renovated container opened, a line of over forty men waited outside to get an appointment. For appointments, a registration book is handled by BWC volunteers that make sure men get handed out appointment cards with their name and appointment date on it. The project opened during my fieldwork; within two days I had filled all the appointments for the upcoming two weeks.

Individual Empowerment

In the Breakfast project and Barbershop project (but to a much lesser extent in the Sewing Circle), BWC creates individual empowerment on four points: 1) positive stimulation of residents' self-image which fosters their agency; 2) BWC provides education options that lead to capacity building of residents; 3) BWC gives a 'real job' and therefore provides a positive identity to residents to challenge their (negative) refugee identity; 4) through their projects, BWC gives back a piece of humanity to people that have lost everything. I will discuss these four points in more depth below.²³³

Residents show their agency in making the choice to participate and distribute breakfast every day. Women participating in the Sewing Circle show agency as it is their choice to sign up for the project.²³⁴ The barbershop enables both the barbers and customers to use their agency because the project offers them a set of choices.²³⁵ Suddenly, customers are able to let their hair be cut, shave their beard or get a wellness treatment. Moreover, the project allows them to make an appointment according to their own wish. The barbers now have to work four days a week from 12pm until 4pm. Moreover, they are given the responsibilities of opening, closing and

²³³ Kabeer, Naila. "Resources, agency, achievements: Reflections on the measurement of women's empowerment." *Development and change* 30.3 (1999): 435-464.

²³⁴ Hanmer, Lucia, and Jeni Klugman. "Exploring Women's agency and empowerment in developing countries: where do we stand?." *Feminist Economics* 22.1 (2016), 240.

²³⁵ Hanmer & Klugman, 2015.

cleaning the barbershop. Before the opening of the barbershop in the container, the barbers had to cut in the Amphitheatre, which has a rather impersonal atmosphere. Now the barbers have a real workplace to go to which looks like a professional shop. This indicates that the project can be transformative.²³⁶ This affects the men's positive self-image.²³⁷ However, the greatest advantage is for the barbers as they gain the most profit out of this project. For the customers, their agency remains limited to the set of options regarding the appointment of the haircut.

However, this is still a set of options the residents would otherwise not have. Thus, agency is expanded for all parties in this project. Nevertheless, the breakfast project and the barbershop create greater forms of empowerment than the Sewing circle, as this is not an interactive project. The women are distributed sewing kits to their house and are not offered the option of participating in a daily routine or made to feel needed by BWC. Therefore, it is likely women cannot utilize their autonomous agency and their feelings of autonomy are limited.²³⁸

The barbershop project forms a good example of how BWC uses education as a pillar to expand skills and open up new possibilities for residents.²³⁹ The barbers working in the barbershop are trained by a professional barber team from the Netherlands. Next to adequate training some barbers have also received the teacher training certificate which allows them to train other barbers. The project creates possibilities for men who have never learned the profession to become a barber. Barbers that already learned the profession in their home country are provided with the teacher training course. As most men never had such training before, the project creates space for men to expand their social, professional and interpersonal skills. The expansion of the skills of barbers is in this sense the "core driver of progress".²⁴⁰ However, it is important to note here that the barbershop project is an investment in 'people', and does not use microcredit or any other form of 'reification' which Eade criticises as being an obstacle for capacity-building and empowerment. In this respect, the project can be described as a success because it approaches residents as human beings and not as targets that need to be economically empowerment.²⁴¹

²³⁶ Kabeer, 1999.

²³⁷ Hennink *et al.*, 2012.

²³⁸ MacKenzie, McDowell & Pittaway, 2007.

²³⁹ Low and Davenport 2002, 368.

²⁴⁰ Low and Davenport 2002, 368.

²⁴¹ Eade 2007, 631-635.

In the barbershop project and the breakfast project, the residents are given a purpose in life. The residents of the breakfast team perceive their seven-day work shift as a 'real job' because their membership entitles them to privileges and gives them a higher status in the camp. Through the membership of the breakfast team, residents are given another identity next to their refugee status. The identity of 'worker' contributes to their feelings of self-determination as they are needed in the team, and they are made partly responsible for controlling the breakfast in the camp. This creates options for residents to feel like they could gain a piece of control over their lives again. Through the barbershop project, barbers are uplifted in their sense of identity as they are not only 'refugee' anymore, but also 'barber'. This contributes to their feelings of self-confidence and independence. Being a barber is a privilege because there are limited spots and there is a long waiting list, therefore barbers feel special and 'chosen'.

All three projects are a direct translation of the wishes of residents. This shows that the projects meet the needs of BWC's target group. The main reason for this is that extreme boredom plagues residents. Residents sometimes have to await their asylum procedure for multiple years whilst being given nothing to do. The barbershop illustrates this point best; the project gives men something to look forward to and a simple service like a haircut offers a little beauty moment to men who feel like everything has been taken from them. A beauty treatment makes them feel special again and lets them regain a piece of humanity. Moreover, with this free service BWC listened to the complaint in the camp that residents are unable to get haircuts as haircuts in the city are too expensive for them.

Social Empowerment

There are two main reasons why BWC creates social empowerment for residents; 1) BWC has a clear vision and working method that leads to empowerment through action; 2) the social component of BWC's projects bring forth social interaction and cultural exchange. However, even though the sewing project does not create visible forms of social empowerment, the project answers the wishes of women themselves.

It is in the barbershop project and the breakfast project that the "empowerment through participation" method is most visible. In both projects, BWC has a clear vision of what they want to achieve with the project. The projects' goals are possible to execute within the limited sphere of Kara Tepe CampUs, which makes the projects feasible. This makes BWC's working method and theories consistent and bridges any possible gaps between theory and praxis. However, the barbers are trained by a Western barber team and in accordance with Western values. This

implies that barbers are trained to comply with Western rules.²⁴² In contrast to Olivius' statement, barbers do get to have control over the managing of the barbershop.²⁴³ This indicates that BWC, on the one side is able to keep in mind its humanitarian goals and operates in line with the humanitarian agenda, whilst at the same time answers the wishes of residents of wanting to have a haircut.²⁴⁴

The breakfast project has a high social component to it because it creates a place where different cultures and nationalities intermingle and exchange stories. This raises cultural awareness for all parties involved. Moreover, the project offers the possibility for participating residents to have a "hang out spot" where they can talk or blow off steam after a cold and wet night in their container.²⁴⁵ The barbershop also has a high social component because it gives barbers a job and thus a privileged social status.

In the sewing project, the ambivalence of women's projects as argued by Olivius becomes clear.²⁴⁶ This project distributes sewing kits only so women can sew clothes for their families and thus confirms the women's stereotype as caretaker of the family.²⁴⁷ Men are excluded from the project, whereas sewing can be a man's job as well. The dressing of the family is made the women's responsibility through this project, even though Kara Tepe CampUs also has a clothes shop that provides families every other month with clothes. It is a voluntary choice of BWC to reinforce this stereotype as it is not a necessity in Kara Tepe CampUs that women should sew their family's clothes. As the women carry out this project mainly in their own homes, this project also has no significant social component.

The sewing project does not involve women in any level of the project, which makes it a project designed "for women and not with them". It is thus a project designed from a top-down level.²⁴⁸ Women are not included in this project because they are not "given a voice" and there is no option for them to be heard.²⁴⁹ Because there is no mutual dialogue in this project, it is unlikely this project achieves forms of social empowerment.²⁵⁰ However, the project is a direct wish of women themselves as they had told BWC that they wanted to take up sewing activities again.

²⁴² Olivius, 2012.

²⁴³ Olivius, 2012.

²⁴⁴ Olivius, 2012.

²⁴⁵ BWC's participants live in co-called 'Iso-boxes' which are portable containers.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 49-50.

²⁴⁷ Olivius, 2012.

²⁴⁸ Oditi & Odera, 2016.

²⁴⁹ Cornwall & Rivas, 2015; Olivius, 2012.

²⁵⁰ Oditi & Odera, 2016.

Hence, even though this project does not create any visible forms of social empowerment, the needs of the women themselves are answered in this project.

Organisational Empowerment

There are three main points in which BWC achieves organisational empowerment, namely: 1) BWC has a successful financial structure; 2) BWC uses a method of mutual feedback showing the organisation has self-reflection; 3) BWC creates reciprocal benefits which contribute to the success of the projects.

BWC has a strong organisational strategy. The provision of breakfast costs BWC €1.000 a day, €28.000 on a monthly basis. BWC covers these expenses by obligating every weekly volunteer team to fundraise €8.000 before they come to Greece. In this way, BWC receives a regular monthly income of €32.000. This means BWC is able to cover the costs of the breakfast project and save €4.000 monthly to cover unforeseen costs or support other projects. I would therefore argue that the financial strategy of BWC is sustainable.²⁵¹ Hence, BWC has strong “strategic relationships”.²⁵²

BWC shows strong “project management” because it uses a strategy of “learning and adaption” to improve the project and its own organisation by taking the feedback of the residents seriously.²⁵³ This is done by daily meetings for all projects (except the sewing project) in which residents get a chance to express their voice and based on this feedback, the projects are improved. This shows that BWC is willing to learn from its target group.²⁵⁴ BWC’s policy plan and updated balance sheets can be found on the website, which is an example of BWC’s self-reflective ability.²⁵⁵

What the BWC projects indicate is that they are built on mutual respect and that reciprocal benefits are created.²⁵⁶ On the one hand, BWC gains an advantage by the participation of residents in the project because this provides them free manpower and makes a more efficient project; on the other hand, the residents also profit from the projects as they give them daily

²⁵¹ Hennink *et al.*, 2012.

²⁵² Pearson, 2011.

²⁵³ Pearson, 2011.

²⁵⁴ Pearson, 2011; Handy & Kassam, 2006.

²⁵⁵ Because We Carry. “Stichting Because We Carry.” Accessed at May 22nd 2019,

<https://www.becausewecarry.org/wie-zijn-wij/de-stichting/>.

²⁵⁶ McKenzie, McDowell & Pittaway, 2007.

structure, provide them an identity as 'employee'. This makes them feel needed again and offers them a possibility for social interaction.

Political Empowerment

There are two main ways in which BWC is unable to give political empowerment to residents, namely; 1) BWC has no political empowerment themselves and is thus unable to give political empowerment to others; 2) the analysis shows that empowerment is, in the case of residents, a matter of human rights. However, there is one defining point in which BWC's projects are a success: within the projects, BWC has created a micro economy in which it has given residents decision-making power and thus a "political voice". This is done by listening to the residents and through asking: "How Can I Help You?" Interestingly, this question precisely resonates with the critiques posed in the 'Do Women Need Saving' paradigm.

An important reason why BWC's sphere of influence on Lesbos is large, is likely because the organisation complies with the rules and norms of the Greek authorities and the Greek asylum system. To maintain this sphere of influence, BWC has to stay out of politics because otherwise it is likely the organisation would be put out of power by the Greek authorities. This means that the Greek political system dominates BWC and BWC is forced to play a neutral role when it comes to politics. Hence, BWC has no political empowerment itself and thus it is unable to give their target group any form of political empowerment.

According to Human Rights Watch, the target group of BWC faces human rights violations on a daily basis because the Greek authorities fail to provide basic services to the refugees living on Lesbos.²⁵⁷ The lack of human rights and the absence of these basic services cause a lot of distress amongst refugees. Amnesty International states that, as many women's rights are not respected, many women have to deal with the consequences of these violations that leave women trapped in unsafe and harmful conditions.²⁵⁸ In this sense, the execution of women's rights in Greek refugee camps will make a difference in the lives of these women because it will decide if these women can live in safety or not.

²⁵⁷ Human Rights Watch. "Greece: Inhumane Conditions at Land Border." Published on July 27th 2018, accessed at March 18th 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/07/27/greece-inhumane-conditions-land-border>.

²⁵⁸ Amnesty International. "I Want to Decide About My Future" Uprooted Women in Greece Speak Out. Published in July 2018, accessed at May 15th 2019, <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/EUR2590712018ENGLISH.PDF>.

The core question on which BWC bases its “empowerment through action” method is “How Can I Help You?” This question precisely resonates with the critiques posed in the ‘Do Women Need Saving’ paradigm.²⁵⁹ By asking this question, BWC structures its work in accordance with notions of the ‘saving’ rhetoric because BWC tries to rescue refugees from their deprived situations and improve their living standards, just like the actors criticized by the ‘Do Women Need Saving’ paradigm try to do. However, the difference here is that BWC tries to help refugees by asking them what they want and need, something the actors criticized by the ‘Do Women Need Saving’ paradigm fail to do. The defining difference in this comparison is thus that BWC listens to its target group whereas some Western actors silence their target group by speaking for them.²⁶⁰ Letting the target group speak has, in BWC’s case, positive effects, even though BWC carries out a question that mirrors critiques of the ‘Do Women Need Saving’ paradigm. This could indicate that giving a voice and basing projects on their opinions, like BWC does, is a defining factor for the political empowerment of deprived people.²⁶¹

BWC does not try to “save” the residents but does take on an active role in the improvement of the lives of the residents. BWC’s working method of “How Can I Help You?” resonates with critiques of the ‘Do Women Need Saving’ paradigm, but this has mainly positive results for the barbers and men in the camp. This also shows that Western development organisations can take up an important role in the improvement of the situation of non-Western people. On the one hand, BWC confirms the Western hegemony in development work, yet also the men gain advantages because of BWC’s leading position.²⁶² A defining factor in the positive results of the barbershop project is that BWC listens to the barbers and lets them have decision-making power in the project, a factor which is, on many levels, often absent in regular development work.

Moreover, if this is indeed the case, this could imply that the ‘Do Women Need Saving’ paradigm does not have only negative implications. If Western actors keeps in mind the interests of their target group and act upon these interests by continually asking its target group “how can I help you?”, like BWC does, the ‘saving’ rhetoric might actually work in favour of

²⁵⁹ Abu-Lughod, 2015.

²⁶⁰ Abu-Lughod, 2002; Abu-Lughod, 2014.

²⁶¹ Mohanty, 1988; Abu-Lughod, 2002; Abu-Lughod, 2015; Hunt, 2002; Hyndman, 2003; Khalid, 2011; Ho, 2010; Nayak, 2006.

²⁶² BWC’s target group consists of mainly men, therefore, I argue that BWC’s projects offer advantages to mainly men and not women. I will come back to this point in the comparison analysis below. Please see Appendix A, page 108-111 and 121-129, for a more extensive elaboration on why BWC possibly involves more men than women into their projects and some critiques to this approach.

women because in this way the method serves as a channel to offer genuine help to people and to improve their living standards for the better.

Case Study 2: Hope Foundation

The Cameroonian-German originated NGO Hope Foundation (HF), was founded in 2001 by a Cameroonian that, together with a few young and enthusiastic volunteers, wanted to aim for a better life for communities in Cameroon.²⁶³ HF wants to strive for better livelihoods in Cameroon by focussing on structural problems like poverty and healthcare. HF has their headquarters in Berlin and has another office located in Bertoua, Cameroon. The office in Berlin is staffed with approximately seven volunteers, three of them doing voluntary internships and the other staff members working part-time or full-time on a voluntary basis. The focus of the organisation lays with improving the living conditions in Cameroon, but to a lesser extent the organisation is also active in Berlin by providing awareness projects on global problems and living conditions in Cameroon.

I started my internship at HF Berlin in April 2018, working at the headquarters for three months. Thereafter, I undertook a fieldwork period in Cameroon for another three weeks.

Working method

HF states it dedicates itself to “issues of poverty, health and social work in rural areas of Africa”.²⁶⁴ This is based on the following statement: “We hope for the betterment of people, communities and groups where self-help, intelligence, love and creativity bring a positive change!”.²⁶⁵ HF prescribes to four values: 1) Active engagement; 2) Education; 3) Empowerment; 4) Fostering social change.²⁶⁶

During the internship in Berlin, I worked on projects that were running in Cameroon. My impression of HF was very positive during this internship because the working atmosphere at the office was very positive and employees were given options for personal development.²⁶⁷ Moreover, the extensive amount of time and energy that was invested by the personnel of HF Berlin in the projects, that were running in Cameroon, convinced me good work was being undertaken in Cameroon. The hardworking and warm personalities of the HF management team led me to conclude after the three-month internship that the HF was a legitimate organisation

²⁶³ Hope Foundation. Accessed at December 5th 2018, <https://www.hope-found.org/index.php>.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 2018.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 2018.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 2018.

²⁶⁷ For more elaboration on this point, please see Appendix A, page 118-121.

that was creating social change in Cameroon. As the office in Berlin was run by a thorough structure based on daily morning meetings, a scrum-method in which interns had to carefully plan their activities for the month, and monthly feedback meetings in which the HF staff team expressed constructive feedback in order to improve the working method of the HF Berlin office, I was assured that the HF Cameroon office was running on a similar sort of structure and was operating at the same speed as the HF Berlin office was.

However, once I arrived in Cameroon, I was struck by the condition the HF Cameroon office was in. During my internship in Berlin, I was repeatedly told that a staff team was working on the ground to implement the projects (that I had been working on in Berlin) in Cameroon. Moreover, during this internship, I was under the impression a private office was maintained in Cameroon. Once in Cameroon, there appeared to be no private office nor a staff team working on the ground. HF Cameroon shared a desk in a police station in Bertoua that served as the office, but during my time in Cameroon no one was in the office. Moreover, the Malaria Free Cameroon and the Rising Education project (which I had been told were running in Cameroon) were suspended until further notice. Furthermore, there was no physical evidence of any other projects, like the Dental Hygiene and the Shoe Aid project (again: I had been working on these projects in Berlin). I found this to be a rather odd observation for an organisation that claims to have been active in Cameroon for over seventeen years. The only active staff member of the HF was the founder himself, who had been born and raised in Cameroon and the city of Bertoua, in which HF is active. All the work he did in Cameroon (he had been there already for over eight months by the time I arrived in Cameroon in October 2018),²⁶⁸ he did from his mother's home.

Moreover, the internships of my co-workers in Cameroon, who had arrived two months before me, had been cancelled due to setbacks in the Rising Education project, which I will explain below. The HF knew upfront that these internships had to be cancelled and no alternative could be offered but decided to let the interns travel to Cameroon anyway and only gave them notice of this once they had already arrived in Cameroon. As the HF was unable to offer them an alternative (likely due to a lack of running projects), the interns had to look for teaching opportunities in Bertoua themselves, which was against their wishes as they had explicitly asked for construction internships.

²⁶⁸ The founder of HF travels back and forth from Berlin to Cameroon every year in order to work on the projects in Cameroon and assist the staff team in Cameroon.

HF states its working method is based on the starting point of ‘working towards a better life for the people of Cameroon’,²⁶⁹ yet after four months of work experience at the HF, I am unable to define in what way HF acts out this method. They state that their mission is “empowering communities in Cameroon”, but there seems to be no clearly thought through plan of what steps need to be taken to reach this goal.

Project overview

Football 4 Life – HF organizes a football project in Cameroon to raise money and awareness on healthcare issues like HIV-AIDS and Malaria diseases.

Water and Sanitation Projects – Through water projects, HF seeks to provide safe and clean drinking water to communities.

The Shoe Aid Project – Old shoes and clothes from Germany are given a second life in Cameroon through this project.

Dental Hygiene Project – Through education, awareness raising and handing out dental products to children, HF wants to improve the dental health of children in Cameroon.²⁷⁰

Below, I will analyse HF’s **Malaria Free Cameroon Project**, **Rising Education Project** and **Bridging Cultures Project** in-depth.

Malaria Free Cameroon

HF implemented the Malaria Free Cameroon project (hereafter: MFC) to decrease malaria infections in Cameroon.²⁷¹ A core part of this project consists of providing education and malaria prevention utensils to the communities in Bertoua.

In October 2018, the project was suspended until further notice, however HF’s founder was creating a new staff team for the project for 2019. It was unclear when the project would be

²⁶⁹ Hope Foundation. Accessed at December 5th 2018, <https://www.hope-found.org/index.php>.

²⁷⁰ For a more extensive elaboration on HF’s projects, please see Appendix A, page 99-100.

²⁷¹ Ibid., 2018.

continued. During our time in Cameroon, my co-workers and I taught some malaria prevention lessons in schools in Bertoua.

Providing malaria prevention lessons in Cameroon is extremely difficult because there is a lack of knowledge among people in Cameroon about malaria. Many people do not know where the disease comes from or how it is spread. This makes it necessary to provide awareness, but the lack of knowledge also makes it difficult to implement change because people's perception of the disease cannot be changed overnight. Based on my fieldwork, I have determined two other obstacles for the MFC project. Firstly, there is a deficit of adequate teachers. As a result, the number of students runs up to 80 students per class, which makes teaching difficult. Secondly, there was a high illiteracy rate amongst pupils in the schools where I taught.²⁷²

Rising Education

As many families in Cameroon cannot afford to send their children to school, HF is building an adult education centre. The original design for the school was developed in 2014. In this first design, the school was expected to have a capacity of 250 pupils and had 50 places for a bilingual kindergarten for 0 to 6-year olds. Later, the HF enlarged the project by expanding the capacity of the school to 500 pupils.

The school was supposed to open in September 2015; however, this opening was cancelled as HF faced construction problems.²⁷³ More planned opening dates had to be postponed due to financial problems, including the last planned opening in September 2018. In October 2018, the project was inactive, the construction site was deserted and there was no team on the ground.

Bridging Cultures

HF carries out the Bridging Cultures project to raise awareness amongst the population in Berlin about global problems like poverty, human rights violations, gender violence etc. Every year, HF picks different topics for the project that are based on themes addressed in the sustainable

²⁷² According to World Atlas, Cameroon has an overall literacy rate of 71% which places the country place 156 of the list of 'most literate countries in the world'. In contrast, most Western countries know a literacy rate of 100%, please see: <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/the-highest-literacy-rates-in-the-world.html>.

²⁷³ Hope Foundation, 2018.

development agenda of the UN. Based on these topics, HF designs a set of workshops that are taught by teachers that originate from the Global South. The project runs several times each year and multiple schools in Berlin participate in the project.

The goal of the project is to teach pupils in Berlin the value of cultural differences and to raise awareness on global responsibilities in terms of climate change and pollution. Moreover, the project aims to promote intercultural exchange and dialogue in order to foster mutual understanding. This project seems to be largely successful and I will expand on this below.

Individual Empowerment

A striking finding of my fieldwork is that in both projects in Cameroon, which are HF's core projects (namely the MFC & RE project), HF's target group does not experience empowerment. I base this on two grounds: 1) the inactive status of the projects obstructs the target groups' expansion of agency; 2) in HF's case, even though education options are provided, structural problems like illiteracy and budget shortages prevent the sphere of influence of the projects. However, in the BC project in Berlin, which is not HF's core project, individual empowerment is created on two main points: 1) agency and intercultural exchange of pupils in Berlin is stimulated; 2) the project offers education channels that are not obstructed by structural problems.

Unfortunately, inactive projects do not provide much opportunity for analysis. Both the MFC and RE project hold great promises for future forms of empowerment to happen. However, due to the standstill of both projects in October 2018, when I conducted my fieldwork in Cameroon, I was unable to determine any visible forms of empowerment.

However, in the BC project in Berlin, visible forms of empowerment can be analysed. In the project's workshops, children are confronted with different views on life. Moreover, intercultural dialogue is fostered as the workshops are taught by teachers from different continents. Subsequently, the workshops address different religious practices around the world, and it is likely this fosters religious conceptualization and mutual understanding. This could contribute to combatting ignorance about religion.²⁷⁴

²⁷⁴ Bilge, 2009.

Education forms the main component of all three projects. What is striking about the BC project is that this project in Berlin is implemented correctly and does not face significant obstacles. In contrast, the MFC and the RE project in Cameroon, do not reach their goals as many outside obstacles are faced. The RE project is supposed to tackle the illiteracy problems. However, the RE project is obstructed by budget shortages. In this way, the illiteracy rate amongst HF's target group is not tackled and the persistence of illiteracy amongst the target group likely also erodes the effect of the MFC workshops as the target group does not comprehend the workshops sufficiently. In terms of MFC and RE, these structural problems probably need to be addressed first before these projects can foster sustainable change in Bertoua.²⁷⁵

It is noteworthy that HF's projects in Berlin are, according to my observations based on four months internship at HF, better executed than projects in Cameroon. This could be considered rather odd, as HF focal point is centred at the projects in Cameroon. I will pose some possible explanations for why the projects in Berlin are more effective than the projects in Cameroon in the next section.

Social Empowerment

There are two reasons why the BC project creates social empowerment, namely: 1) the project fosters social interaction and intercultural exchange; 2) this project encourages participation and actively engages people. However, the MFC and RE project does not bring forth any visible form of empowerment because: 1) the inactive status of the projects obstructs individuals' participation in these projects; 2) no reciprocal dialogue is maintained between HF and their target group.

In terms of the MFC & RE project, the lack of individual empowerment causes a ripple effect in the social sphere as well. As no visible forms of individual empowerment were detected, also no social component could be analysed in the projects. This underlines the interdependence of the empowerment spheres.²⁷⁶

HF does not give a voice to the participants that HF involves in the RE and MFC project because the target group is not involved in the decision-making process of the projects.²⁷⁷ This creates

²⁷⁵ Hickel, 2014; Cornwall & Rivas, 2015; Eade, 2007.

²⁷⁶ Hennink *et al.*, 2012.

²⁷⁷ McIlwaine & Datta, 2003.

the risk that women's needs are not sufficiently captured in HF's projects.²⁷⁸ I will further elaborate on this point in the political perspective below.

In contrast, BC has a clear social component because it fosters social exchange. The social awareness and intercultural dialogue created through this project are important steps towards social empowerment.

Organisational Empowerment

HF achieves organisational empowerment in the BC project on two main grounds: 1) in this project, HF shows self-reflection; 2) this project creates reciprocal benefits. In terms of the MFC and RE project, the projects' goals are larger than HF's current capacity, which make the executing of the projects ineffective.

HF's financial strategy is on all levels dependent on outside donors. This means HF makes its "project management" and "organisational management" dependent on its "strategic relationships" with donors.²⁷⁹ What happens as a consequence, is that the executing of the projects is dependent on whether or not this money is raised. If HF's "strategic relationships" are weak, like in 2018, the whole project collapses.²⁸⁰ In contrast, BWC has made its volunteers responsible for BWC's income, as volunteers are obliged to fundraise €8.000 before they can come to Greece to volunteer.

The last annual report of HF dates back to 2011.²⁸¹ In this report, the MFC & RE project are not discussed. On the website, there are no other publications made available to access information on the status' of these projects. This shows that, in terms of these two projects, HF shows little self-reflection. Another example of why HF shows little self-reflection in these projects, is HF's leadership management. A striking finding is that HF has the capacity to reach out to both the Cameroonian community in Berlin and also the Cameroonian community in Bertoua. The founder of HF has Cameroonian roots and has close connections in Bertoua. This gives him credibility to implement projects in Bertoua. As the founder has lived in Germany for over

²⁷⁸ Helms, "Women as Agents of Ethnic Reconciliation? Women's NGOs and International Intervention in Post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina," *Women's Studies International Forum*, 2003, 26(1): 15-33.

²⁷⁹ Eade, 2007.

²⁸⁰ Please see Appendix A, page 113-118, for more elaboration on HF's financial structure.

²⁸¹ Hope Foundation. "Publications" Accessed at May 14th 2019, <https://www.hope-found.org/en/about-us/publications>.

seventeen years, he has built up close connections to the Cameroonian community in Germany as well. This gives him the capacity to utilize these connections in order to make his mission heard. With these privileges, he has much more credibility and capacity than BWC has. However, BWC is much more successful in their projects. Hence, HF has all the capacity (cultural knowledge, background, legitimacy) it possibly can have in order to make the projects a success, yet, somehow, does not utilize all of them.

However, there are no available updated reports on both the MFC and RE projects available. Balance sheets of previous years also do not appear on HF's website. HF does not publish any written statements online on how HF has invested the money in the project. The only available published updates on the projects are informal newsletters and social media pictures.²⁸²

Moreover, although the annual Malaria Week, that HF organizes to fundraise money for the MFC project, is an indication that HF is working hard to make the MFC project a success, a visit to Cameroon immediately raises questions of HF's interests in terms of this project. Why is there, for example, no solid staff team in office in Cameroon to work on the MFC project despite it running since 2007?

The opening of the school has already been delayed for almost four years. The project keeps being delayed due to ongoing financial problems. This indicates that HF's aims in terms of the RE project are higher than its own capacity. It seems like the goal for this project is greater than the capacity that HF has. This is an important reason why organisational empowerment for HF is hindered in this project.²⁸³ Why would you extend a project if the original version of the project, a school for 250 pupils, cannot even be completed in the first place? A school for even ten or fifty pupils (which certainly could have been built by HF with the money that has been

²⁸² The latest HF newsletter on the RE project dates back to December 14, 2018 and refers to a website page about the latest updates on the RE project. However, this page refers to the last construction phase of the school, being May 2016. The text on the page only briefly mentions that, in the next phases, the school will be completed. Nothing is mentioned on why the school, three years after the last construction phase, is still not finished. Moreover, on this page, *Die Baupiloten*, a group of Technical University (TU) students in Berlin, that helped HF to construct the school, are still mentioned as HF's partner. Whereas, during my internship period in Berlin, *Die Baupiloten* had already backed out of the project, for several reasons, for several years (see Appendix A, page 113-118, for more elaboration). These two examples illustrate that HF does not give adequate and updated information on their projects. For the full text on HF's website, please see: <https://www.hope-found.org/de/unsere-arbeit/unsere-projekte/13> (full text is accessible in German only).

²⁸³ Eade, 2007.

invested so far), would have been better than the abandoned construction site they have now left behind in Bertoua.

Based on both examples above, I argue that HF could improve their ability for self-reflection to a great extent in terms of both the MFC and RE projects. I argue that Eade has made a vital point on self-reflection as a prerequisite for self-empowerment.²⁸⁴

In the MFC and RE projects, no reciprocal benefits are created. All the projects of HF are designed on a theoretical level in Berlin and then implemented in Cameroon (assuming the projects run at some point in time), which is a typical strategy for an organisation working with a top-down approach. As a consequence, a reciprocal dialogue between HF and its target group is absent. The lack of effect of these projects underline the claim that reciprocal benefits lead to more effective projects.²⁸⁵

In contrast, in the BC project, HF modifies future workshops based on previous successes. This strategy shows that HF is self-reflective in this project.²⁸⁶ As HF has developed the capacity for self-reflection itself first, it is also capable of teaching others.²⁸⁷ Moreover, the BC project creates awareness and intercultural exchange. This leads to benefits for both pupils and HF.²⁸⁸

From the side of HF's Berlin office, the image that the project's show is rather positive and makes it look like HF is executing all projects effectively. However, from the other side in Cameroon, a different view of the projects can be established because, currently, little is going on in Cameroon. The ambivalences between the projects in Berlin and Cameroon are, likely, to a great extent due to the differences in infrastructure between Germany and Cameroon.²⁸⁹ However, HF is to some extent responsible for the execution of their projects. In both the MFC and RE project, HF' own role in the project resonates with current social debates on the (in)effectiveness of transnational development work.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁴ Eade, 2007.

²⁸⁵ MacKenzie, McDowell & Pittaway, 2007.

²⁸⁶ Pigg, 2002; Eade, 2007.

²⁸⁷ Eade, 2007.

²⁸⁸ MacKenzie, McDowell & Pittaway, 2007.

²⁸⁹ World Bank. "Cameroon's Infrastructure: A Continental Perspective." Published in June 2011, Accessed on May 21st 2019,

http://siteresources.worldbank.org/ru/idm.oclc.org/CAMEROONEXTN/Resources/AICD-Cameroon_Country_Report.pdf.

²⁹⁰ NRC. "O nee hè, weer een Westerse vrijwilliger". Published on April 10th 2019, accessed at May 15th 2019, <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2019/04/10/o-nee-he-weer-een-westerse-vrijwilliger-a3956406>;

Political Empowerment

There is one defining point why HF is unable to politically empower their target group, namely: 1) HF has no political power itself. Another striking finding why HF's success in terms of the MFC and RE project is limited is; 2) HF does not actively involve their target group on decision-making levels. This is linked to the finding that; 3) HF does not give a voice to their target group, which causes gaps between theories and praxis in Cameroon.

What is striking about the HF case study is that HF founder has African roots. Although the HF has its headquarters in Berlin, it is thus not an entirely Western organisation. This makes a possible 'Do Women Need' paradigm not completely applicable to the HF case because the founder's roots transform this relationship. The HF is not a case of a Western organisation trying to save people in the South because the founder comes from the South himself. Therefore, we cannot speak of a Western entity trying to "save" a subaltern "Other".²⁹¹

Remarkably, the question of 'Do Women Need Saving' does not apply in the BC project. It seems strange to ask this question when we speak of a project that is executed in the West and only involves Western students. The target group of BC is not in a disadvantaged position, they are actually advantaged compared to other children in the world. This shifts the dynamic of the 'saving rhetoric'. Does this mean the literature on the 'Do Women Need Saving' paradigm has a valid point when it states there is always a power play at work when Western actors intervene in Southern countries?²⁹² Because BC happens in a Western country, this could indicate that this power play is not applicable because the project happens within the Western hegemony. This project underlines the power dynamic that is criticized in the 'Do Women Need Saving' paradigm because this project educates Western students about problems that non-Western people face. This project would probably lose its relevancy if implemented in Cameroon as teaching pupils in Cameroon about the problems of Western students seems rather strange.

Algemeen Dagblad. " 'Afrikaanse Weeshuizen zijn goudmijntjes voor Westerse uitbaters' ". Published on February 26th 2019, accessed at May 15th 2019, <https://www.ad.nl/buitenland/afrikaanse-weeshuizen-zijn-goudmijntjes-voor-westerse-uitbaters-a42a9cbf/> (Both articles Dutch only).

²⁹¹ Mohanty, 1988; Abu-Lughod, 2002; Abu-Lughod, 2015; Hunt, 2002; Hyndman, 2003; Khalid, 2011; Ho, 2010; Nayak, 2006.

²⁹² Mohanty, 1988; Abu-Lughod, 2002; Abu-Lughod, 2015; Hunt, 2002; Hyndman, 2003; Khalid, 2011; Ho, 2010; Nayak, 2006.

Analysis: towards an inclusive empowerment programme?

Based on the analysis of the two case studies, I have identified seven aspects that need to be present in NGO programmes in order to strengthen diverse forms of empowerment:²⁹³

Firstly, empowerment programmes depend on the extent to which an NGO is able to maintain **a reciprocal dialogue with its target group that is based on participatory involvement of the target group**. The literature states it is vital that humanitarian actors succeed as participating subjects in their project by maintaining equal and respectful relationships.²⁹⁴ BWC proves it maintains such a dialogue and this has visible effects on their projects outcomes. HF only proves within the context of the BC project that it maintains such a dialogue. The absence of this dialogue in other projects has negative implications.

Secondly, I observed that **NGOs, who promote ways of empowerment, need to have a stable core group that represents the interests of the target group**. The literature states that empowerment misses its goal because it is influenced by political and social interests that do not represent the interests of women.²⁹⁵ The BWC case study shows that the success of BWC is mainly accomplished because BWC has **a stable core group** that supports the organisation. This core group exists of Dutch volunteers that come to support BWC in Greece all year round and an extensive number of donors that support BWC. Through this stable livelihood, BWC can sustain their projects. In contrast, the HF case study shows that this stable core group is weak. HF struggles to make ends meet every month and the donor streams of HF are insecure. As a consequence, HF projects are at risk.

Thirdly, NGOs need to have **a clear and transparent connection between the different offices to maintain a reciprocal and clear communication channel between their different departments**. Both BWC and HF work overseas. They both have their headquarters located in a Western country, but the execution of projects is, in both cases, done by another office that works with non-Western women. In BWC's case, the communication between both offices is strong. BWC works with an organized and clear working method and both offices work according to the same structure. As a result, BWC's projects are organized and effective. In HF's case, the communication between both offices is less strong. Both offices do not work according

²⁹³ Needless to say, these characteristics are incomplete and need to be complemented with local needs.

²⁹⁴ McKenzie, McDowell & Pittaway, 2007.

²⁹⁵ Hickel, 2014; Batliwala, 2007; Helms, 2003; Sharma, 2006.

to the same structure. This is mainly due to the inactive status of the HF Cameroon office. As a consequence, HF does not create empowerment in Cameroon.

Fourthly, the case studies of BWC and HF show much more can be done to include women in their projects and make them active agents of their lives. **NGOs can make a start to shift inequalities by paying closer attention to actively including female participants on all levels in their projects.**²⁹⁶ However, the outcomes of this thesis underline that the social (in)equalities in a woman's life define her (dis)empowerment. NGOs cannot generate women's empowerment by themselves. The society a woman lives in fosters or obstructs a woman's empowerment. Women's empowerment can only happen if societies face their roles and responsibilities in terms of the (dis)empowerment of women.²⁹⁷

Fifth, both case studies underline that **NGOs need to have cultural knowledge and background in order to make their projects a success.** The literature states that the 'Do Women Need Saving' paradigm persists because Western actors fail to capture the lived realities of Muslim women.²⁹⁸ BWC disproves this claim because it positively uses methods criticized by this paradigm to listen to their target group. The defining factor in this paradigm is the failure of Western entities to seriously addressing the needs of Muslim women. BWC's case study illustrates that NGO working methods can be in line with this paradigm and still be successful, albeit their success will be dependent on whether or not NGOs listen to their target group. The lack of decision-making power that HF's target group has, substantiates this claim.

Six, what becomes clear through the case studies is that **it is vital that NGOs meet the needs of the people they work with.** The BWC case study shows their success is a direct consequence of their ability to listen to their target group and ability to translate the needs of their target group in hands-on projects. In contrast, the HF case study shows that the inactive status of their projects in Cameroon is in a great part due to HF's inability to listen to their target group.

Seven, I have established that the success of BWC's project is mainly a result of the informal and personal strategy BWC uses. Through respectful relationships and the focus on residents' positive self-image, residents are supported in their participation. The literature claims that refugee participation will only happen when positive and respectful relationships are maintained

²⁹⁶ Chant & Sweetman, 2012; Abu-Lughod, 2015; Moghadam & Senftova, 2005; Fonjong, 2002.

²⁹⁷ Hickel, 2014.

²⁹⁸ Abu-Lughod, 2014.

by humanitarian actors.²⁹⁹ The presence of these relationships in BWC's case study and the absence of these relationships in HF's case study shows that this point is accurate. Therefore, I argue that **personalized empowerment programmes based on participants' development of positive self-images and expansion of personal competencies** will have effect when they are based on the wishes and needs of the target group.

²⁹⁹ MacKenzie, McDowell & Pittaway, 2007.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

In the next section below, I will answer the research question of this thesis. Thereafter, I will outline a few limitations of this research project. Finally, I will pose some recommendations for follow-up research.

Answering the research question

This thesis addressed the following research question:

- 1) *How can empowerment be conceptualized and to what extent is the concept of female empowerment related to the 'Do Women Need Saving' paradigm?; 2) What approaches are used by NGOs to work towards female empowerment?; 3) What concepts and approaches towards empowerment and the 'Do Women Need Saving' paradigm can be traced on a practical level at NGOs like Hope Foundation and Because We Carry?*

Chapter one elaborated on part one of this question and in this chapter, I have identified eight important characteristics of empowerment, namely: 1) agency; 2) education; 3) participation; 4) inclusion; 5) capacity for self-empowerment; 6) financial sustainability; 7) power inequalities and 8) political interests. As chapter three has illustrated, in an environment where participants are heard; agency, positive self-image and decision-making power turn out to be paramount for empowerment. Important in this sense is the extent to which both NGOs and individuals have the ability for self-empowerment. On the one hand, it is very difficult for NGOs to build capacity in others if they do not have these capacities themselves, and on the other hand, individuals need to become aware of their possible disempowered position first before they can start to empower themselves. Interestingly, another concept appeared to be crucial for empowerment that was not identified in the first place; this analysis showed that the ability for self-reflection, of both NGOs and individuals, turned out to be important for empowerment. Could empowerment in this sense be determined as the ability for self-empowerment and the capacity for self-reflection?

In chapter two, I have identified four approaches that NGOs use to work towards empowerment. On an individual level, NGOs use the capacity-building approach to expand individuals' capacities. Positive research results on this approach shows that training individuals' capacities could help them deal with everyday problems and could expand women's individual capacities.

This could lead to higher incomes, which ultimately also benefits women's families. However, critics of this approach state that this approach ignores repressive social and political structures that keep women in disempowered positions.

The gender equality approach was identified as a way to foster social empowerment. In this approach, development actors try to achieve different forms of women's empowerment by focussing their projects on gender equality. In practice, this approach often does not adequately address power inequalities which turn out to obstruct empowerment. The lack of knowledge about the concept of gender and the insufficient conceptualization of both gender and empowerment within development projects, are also problems that are faced by actors using this approach. Implemented wrongly, the gender equality approach could reinforce gender inequalities and patronizing tendencies about Muslim women by Western actors.

NGOs also can use a reciprocal benefit approach to offer advantages to the target group and simultaneously create benefits for themselves. In this approach, NGOs create mutual benefits for themselves as well as for the target group by letting individuals participate and giving them a voice in projects. This approach is also criticized as actors often do not respect individuals' wishes. Moreover, critics state that participation ultimately does not empower if the target group are refugees, as refugees' agency is expected to comply with humanitarian goals.

On a political level, NGOs use a human-rights based approach in order to expand the rights of their target group. This approach is two-fold: on the one hand it is centred at changing political and social structures that suppress women's rights; on the other hand, women's awareness about their own positions is increased in order to make them realise that they can be agents of their lives. However, critics of this approach argue that, implemented wrongly, the approach can be misused by actors claiming to strive for women's rights whilst having other political interests.

Chapter two has also outlined that the different levels of empowerment, that were identified, could have a ripple effect; deficiencies or affluences on one level could also lead to deficiencies or affluences in other levels of empowerment. The complexity of the topic and the intertwinement of the discussed empowerment levels show that all levels are intermingled. We need a multi-dimensional approach in order to understand empowerment. This indicates that empowerment happens in stages and does not occur as a linear process.

Chapter three addressed the third part of the research question. In BWC's case, refugees' self-determination was stimulated which expanded their agency. In HF's case, only the agency of participants in Berlin was analysed as the projects in Cameroon were inactive. In both case studies, education turned out to be an important driver for empowerment. However, in HF's case, social problems like money shortages eroded the effectiveness of the projects. Both NGOs used participation as a strategy for empowerment. However, BWC used this strategy by actively involving the target group in their projects, whereas HF mainly designed the projects for their target group without giving them a voice in the decision-making process. The extent to which participants were included in the projects was, in terms of the case studies, crucial for the effectiveness of the projects. Also, the extent to which both NGOs were capable of empowering themselves by using healthy financial strategies and strong leadership qualities was also crucial. On a political level, political interests turned out to be less relevant, more important was the extent to which NGOs had political power. Both BWC and HF were unable to give their target group political power as they did not have political power themselves.

In their projects, BWC mainly uses a capacity-building approach in order to expand residents' skills. Even though political forms of empowerment for residents remain suppressed due to the repressive character of the asylum system, individual and social forms of empowerment are stimulated. The defining key factor in this sense is that BWC combines individual approaches with organisational approaches like "reciprocal benefits" and "participation" strategies. This strengthens BWC's organisational structure, which causes a spill-over effect in other areas; due to the strong organisational structure, BWC is capable of strengthening other forms of empowerment as well. In BWC's case, it could be said that facilitating individual empowerment through programmes like capacity-building does have positive effects. However, the comparative analysis of HF's projects in Berlin and Cameroon show different results even though their projects are also mainly built on an individual capacity-building approach. HF's project in Berlin shows positive results for empowerment, whereas inconsistent project management in Cameroon causes inconsistencies in the projects as well. The lack of insight of HF's own role in the projects in Cameroon obstruct innovative project progress. In HF's case, it could be argued that programmes based on individual empowerment approaches do not sufficiently foster ways of empowerment because, in HF's case, other organisational, social and political structures turn out to be paramount. The observation that HF's project in Berlin is more effective than the analysed projects in Cameroon, despite the projects in Cameroon being HF's focal point, raises questions on HF's working method and political interests.

On a theoretical level, I have researched if there is a possible relationship between empowerment and the 'Do Women Need Saving' paradigm. Empowerment is not an isolated concept and is influenced by social and political structures; the development sector was to some extent influenced by these kinds of tendencies. In some cases, this has led to empowerment programmes in which humanitarian actors tried to "save" deprived others. In this framework, empowerment and "saving" notions constantly influence each other which causes a vicious circle. In order to break with the circle, reciprocal dialogues between NGOs and Muslim women need to be maintained.

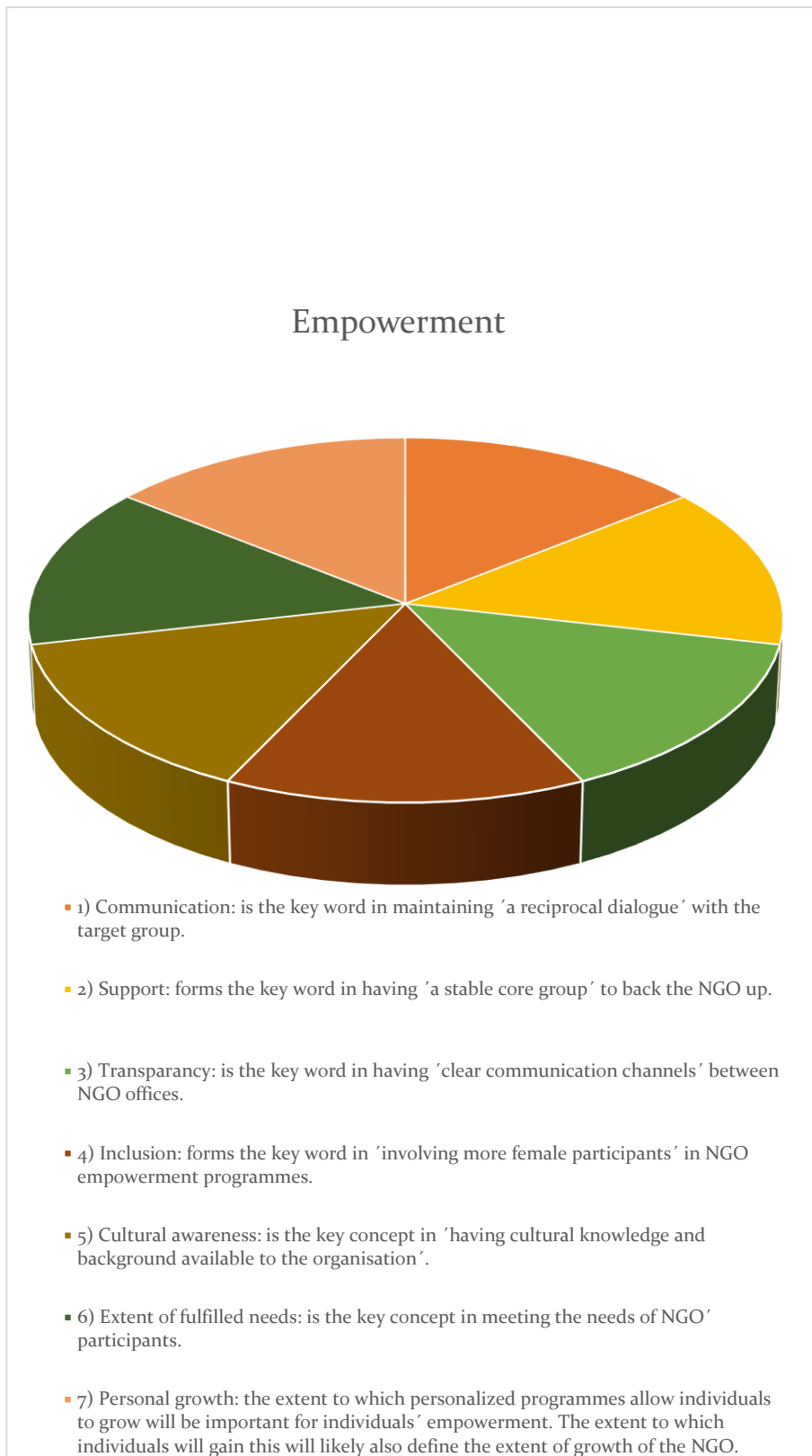
On a practical level, there are two interesting observations in terms of the empowerment projects of BWC and HF and the 'Do Women Need Saving' paradigm. Firstly, in BWC's case, their core working method was based on the question of "How Can I Help You?", which resonates with the "saving" rhetoric. However, the difference is that BWC uses this question to transform the needs of their target group into hand-on projects, whereas more generally the "saving" rhetoric is implemented without consultation with the individuals involved. BWC's case shows that helping others does not have to be patronizing, as long as actors give a voice to the people they work with.

Secondly, in HF's case, the 'Do Women Need Saving' paradigm became less relevant as the founder of HF has African roots. Moreover, the paradigm became completely irrelevant in terms of the BC project because this project happens in the West. The HF case illustrates that the 'Do Women Need Saving' paradigm is ultimately an issue of superior entities acting out power over deprived others.

Finally, the seven aspects for strengthening diverse forms of empowerment, that I outlined at the end of the previous chapter, could also be translated into general keywords that could serve as a blueprint for building more inclusive organisational strategies that work towards the empowerment of NGOs more generally (see graphic 1).

Ultimately, the extent to which organisations will give a voice to individuals involved in their organisation, will define the extent to which empowerment is achieved.

Graphic 1: General key words³⁰⁰ for working towards empowerment of NGOs³⁰¹



Source: Own design.

³⁰⁰ I have identified these key words on the basis of key aspects for more inclusive empowerment programmes, that I have outlined in the last section of the previous chapter. To give a little recap, these aspects are: 1) the extent to which an NGO is able to maintain a reciprocal dialogue with its target group that is based on participatory involvement of the target group; 2) NGOs that promote ways of empowerment need to have a stable core group that represents the interests of the target group; 3) a clear and transparent connection between the different offices to maintain a reciprocal and clear

Research limitations

First of all, this research had a limited scope and has only examined the working methods of two NGOs. Therefore, it is not representative research for general working methods of NGOs on a global level. Moreover, this research has only elaborated on empowerment theories that are relevant for the transnational development sector. Empowerment debates overlap many fields of studies and thus this research is not applicable for debates of empowerment outside of NGO empowerment debates.

I admit that this research does not consider the perspectives of Muslim women themselves as I did not conduct any interviews with Muslim women. The original aim of this research was to give a voice to women by letting them be heard through interviews and several focus groups. However, just like all things in life, sometimes things do not work out the way you planned. Unfortunately, for security reasons, I had to interrupt my fieldwork period in Cameroon earlier than planned. I had to return home before I was able to conduct the interviews. Therefore, I decided to adjust the research design to the current form. I regret that this research was unable to give a stage to Muslim women themselves. This would have added more value to the topic as the 'Do Women Need Saving' paradigm precisely proclaims that Muslim women's voices are not correctly heard.

The same above security reasons caused me to have negative experiences during my fieldwork in Cameroon. This has undoubtedly had an impact on the analysis of the HF case study. I tried to decrease my bias as much as possible by making sure the analysis was as objective as can be. Yet in this final version, I have decided to leave a lot of the criticism on HF in there because I believe it is my academic responsibility to give a realistic account of situations on the ground.

communication channel between the different departments; 4) NGOs need to make a start to shift inequalities by paying closer attention to actively include female participants on all levels in their projects; 5) NGOs need to have cultural knowledge and background in order to make their projects a success; 6) it is vital that NGOs meet the needs of the people they work with; 7) personalized empowerment programmes based on participants' development of positive self-images and expansion of personal competences will have effect when they are based on the wishes and needs of the target group.

³⁰¹ This graphic illustrates a possible blueprint for an empowerment strategy, on which an empowerment programme could be built. The key words can be used to improve organisational structures of NGOs or other organisations. The graphic only shows an example of important key values that turned out to be defining in this research project. Needless to say, this graphic does not entail a complete picture of empowerment, as empowerment comprises much more than only these seven elements. However, these key concepts could serve as building blocks from which organisations can further develop their own strategies and theories, in order to achieve all sorts of empowerment for their organisations, their employees or the target groups they work with.

The situation being that the projects were simply not running. Whether positive or negative, both accounts can make important contributions to debates on empowerment and NGO work on both national and international levels.

Recommendations for follow-up research

Firstly, interesting follow-up research could comprise the analysis of working methods of NGOs other than BWC and HF. Expanding the research on NGO working methods and extending the scope of this research to NGOs with wider spheres of influence could tell us more about the impact and effects of working methods of other NGOs. A follow-up research question could be: To what extent do working methods of larger NGOs resonate with the 'Do Women Need Saving' paradigm?

Secondly, more research could be done on refugee empowerment in order to construct effective refugee empowerment projects. It would be interesting to research if BWC's working method is also applicable to other NGOs that work with refugees. If this is the case then the claim that empowerment cannot be implemented as a general programme could be disproved again.

Third, the current ineffective status of HF's projects in Cameroon also raise questions on the effects of projects implemented by other NGOs working in Africa. To what extent do their projects achieve any visible forms of empowerment for the women they work with? This research could also be expanded to broader levels of the effects of NGO work in general.

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Summary

This thesis addresses the conceptualization of empowerment, possible approaches that non-governmental organisations (NGOs) use to work towards empowerment of Muslim women and the extent to which empowerment programmes, that serve to empower Muslim women, are related to the so-called 'Do Women Need Saving' paradigm, in which the portrayal of Muslim women as victims is criticized. I have investigated this by undertaking three fieldwork periods at two NGOs in Cameroon, Germany and Greece that work with empowerment methods. In order to answer my research question, I designed a framework in which I identified empowerment on an individual, social, organisational and political level. The concepts that comprise this analysis are: 1) agency; 2) education; 3) participation; 4) inclusion; 5) capacity for self-empowerment; 6) financial sustainability; 7) power inequalities and; 8) political interests. I also identified four approaches that NGOs use to work towards empowerment, namely: the capacity-building approach; the gender equality approach; the reciprocal benefits approach and the human-rights based approach. The case studies show that the ability for self-empowerment and self-reflection, of both NGOs and individuals, are paramount for empowerment. Moreover, combining different approaches to working towards empowerment creates better results. Crucial in this sense is the extent to which the target group is consulted on a decision-making level. My findings show that the 'Do Women Need Saving' paradigm, in terms of empowerment programmes, is disempowering to women because women are often denied a voice in projects. However, the case studies illustrate that the "saving" rhetoric does not have to be disempowering to women, as long as NGOs actively involve their target group on a decision-making level, by listening to their needs.

Appendix A: Research Report BWC & HF

This appendix comprises the Research Report of my three internships at HF Berlin, HF Cameroon and BWC Lesvos between April and October 2018. This report also elaborates on the arguments that have been put forward in this thesis. However, this report elaborates in more depth on the undertaken internship periods and elaborates more extensively on some of the findings that were retrieved out of the internships.

Project Framework

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) use the concept of female empowerment to a wide extent in their projects and methods in order to aim for success and transformations of social and gender relations (Malhotra, Schuler & Boender, 2002). The extensive use of the concept of empowerment in the development sector, has given the term a highly popular status and has turned empowerment into a “buzz word” (Kabeer 1999, 1-7). Yet, discussions on the definition and essence of empowerment remain vague and unclear (Nagar & Raju, 2003; Townsend *et al.*, 2004). The contradictions in the academic empowerment debates make it hard to grasp the real essence of female empowerment (Malhotra, Schuler & Boender, 2002).

The ‘abuse’ of empowerment and the lack of clarification on the concept, could lead to mis-implementation of empowerment projects by NGOs (Philips, 2015). As a consequence, empowerment projects, implemented by NGOs, could be ineffective and the question if empowerment projects change anything at all is accurate (Ibid., 2015). However, a lot of NGOs continue to use the term empowerment to gain acknowledgement for their transnational development work; do these organisations have a clear and thought-through working method of empowerment or are the effects of their empowerment projects also missing their aims as a result of unclear definitions and working methods?

Moreover, the concept of empowerment is tangled up with dynamics of power, Orientalism, gender inequalities, feminism and women’s subordinate status (Skegg, 2005; Hickel, 2014; Kabeer, 1999), that need clear addressing before applying empowerment theories and projects to certain contexts (Chant & Sweetman, 2012). Visions on Islamic women from a Western perspective are susceptible to colonial structures that undermine addressing women’s issues in a realistic and adequate manner (Mohanty, 1988). Western NGOs risk the danger of being influenced by these paternalistic notions if they do not clearly address their motives and reasons

for wanting to empowerment women (Nagar & Raju, 2003). More importantly, many projects are designed to emancipate Islamic women but do not properly include women's voices in them. Therefore, this makes the projects function as top-down policies rather than bottom-up approaches, that are constructed from and function on the level of women themselves, making it more likely that the projects will correspond with the desires of women. It is questionable if NGOs critically examine their own motives and working methods (Eade, 2007). Especially the extent to which women's voices are considered could be decisive for the success of empowerment trainings (Abu-Lughod, 2002). A lack of critical self-reflection could lead to gaps in the working methods of NGOs and may have a disempowering effect on the lives of Islamic women.

This research report aims to define the effect of the work of transnational development organisations working with the concept of female empowerment like organisations as Hope Foundation and Because We Carry, in order to make a valuable contribution to the empowerment debate. The content of this research report is based on the findings of my internship periods at the Hope Foundation Berlin/Cameroon (hereafter: HF) and Because We Carry Lesvos (hereafter: BWC) which I have undertaken between April and October 2018. During these internships, I have extensively researched the use of female empowerment in the theories and working methods of these two organisations in order to research how these NGOs work with the concept of empowerment in their projects and to analyse the empowerment debates for my thesis on female empowerment and the working methods of NGOs. The ambiguity of the empowerment debate makes new research on the essence of empowerment essential (Nagar & Raju, 2003). To make sense of where we stand in terms of the empowerment debate, more research is needed that is able to bridge theoretical debates with practical experiences. The research on empowerment seems to move around in circles because the main focus of analysis sticks to a theoretical level. The empowerment debate will only move forward if the discussion on empowerment is complemented with interdisciplinary research analysis discussed from theoretical, organizational and practical levels.

By offering this kind of multi-layered analysis including the use of two practical case studies, this research wants to bridge these gaps and could hold important implications on future empowerment debates. In this research, theories and methodology on empowerment are connected to broader discussions on the sense of empowerment training and programmes implemented by (women's) organisations and financial institutions, as also structural problems on women's issues and refugee empowerment will be addressed. Moreover, the theoretical 'Do

Women Need Saving' paradigm will be connected to societal discussions on women's agency and self-determination. The discussion of empowerment from both theoretical and societal vantage points makes this research layered and comprehensive and serves as an important contribution to both academic and societal discussions on the (non)sense of female empowerment.

Academic Relevance

Despite the fact that empowerment now makes up an important part of the international development agenda (Moghadam & Senftova, 2005; Hickel, 2014), academic discussions on empowerment remain contradictory on the essence of empowerment (Hennink et al., 2012). Most scholars agree on the vision that empowerment is a process that can take up many different forms (Malhotra et al., 2002; Kamal, 2011; Hanmer & Klugman, 2016). However, one stance of scholarly debate focuses on empowerment as a catalyst for positive social change like the transformation of gender relations, poverty reduction and capacity building (Hanmer & Klugman, 2016; Malhotra et al., 2002). Another stance of scientists argues in another direction by claiming that empowerment lacks clear definition and essence and state that the effects of empowerment processes are overrated (Hickel, 2014; Chant & Sweetman, 2012). Some scholars even go further by stating that empowerment has become a convenient 'tool' that is utilized for objectives of the 'liberal market project' (Hickel, 2014; Sharma, 2006).

Subsequently, over the last few decades, empowerment projects have become connected with gender liberation quests and women's rights (Abu-Lughod, 2015; Kamal, 2011; Ho, 2010). Especially in Islamic contexts, empowerment has been fused together with debates on women's liberation, the veil and Muslim women's rights, and has, therefore, become a precarious and controversial discussion (Abu-Lughod, 2015; Nayak, 2006). The discussion on Islamic women's rights and the Western 'moral crusade' of wanting to liberate Islamic women 'from oppressing cultures' is what later became to be known as the 'Do Women Need Saving' paradigm.

In this paradigm, scholarly debates critique social and feminist scholars that are analyse discussions about Muslim women from a 'victim/oppressor' vantage point. They state that, in these discussions, women's voices, agency and perspectives are underacknowledged. These critical scholars argue, that the urge of wanting to liberate and empower Islamic women is embedded in this kind of framework and is thus a dangerous development in the history of Islamic women rights and liberation (Ibid., 2015; Mohanty, 1988; Cooke, 2002). This brings forth

the question if Muslim women want themselves to be “saved” by other cultures? And if they do, do they want to be empowered in the way that ‘we’ want to empower them? (Abu-Lughod, 2015).

In this research report, the following research question will be addressed: To what extent is the concept of female empowerment related to the ‘Do Women Need Saving’ paradigm; how are both notions defined and constructed in an international development context and what manifestations of both notions can be analysed on a practical level at non-governmental organisations like Hope Foundation and Because We Carry? By posing this research question, I want to connect my fieldwork at two NGO’s with the theoretical debates on the essence of female empowerment in order to make sense of the ways in which the theories correspond or conflict with the manifestations of empowerment that I have come across during my fieldwork. In this research report, only my practical findings will be discussed in relation to academic theories on empowerment. For the complete discussion of the research question in relation to the theories and findings on female empowerment, I refer to the additional thesis document.

Social Relevance

The reach for empowerment and gender equality made up target goal number 3 of the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDG’s), that strived to tackle the long-term consequences of gender inequalities and economic disempowerment of women (UN, 2018). In 2009, a trust fund was set up that was called “Adolescent Girls Initiative”, in which leading organisations like Nike foundation and The World Bank donated \$20 Million to ‘empower’ young women in eight low-income countries by helping them ‘build skills that match market demands’ and eventually ‘find job placements” (Hickel, 2014). The underlying idea was that funding young girls’ education would lead to more economic prosperity and, as a side effect of this, the families and the societies of these girls would take advantage of this growth as well (Ibid., 2014). Research on gender progress shows that the wellbeing of women exceeds generations (Moghadam, 2009). Educated women have better future prospects than uneducated and unemployed mothers (Ibid., 2009).

For women living under the circumstances of protracted conflict or economic hardships, the improvement of their living conditions can be obstructed by a lack of possibilities, poverty or the existence of psychological trauma due to the consequences of living under everyday conflict circumstances. The literature claims that for these women ‘female empowerment training’ could provide a possibility to improve their living conditions (Sharma, 2006). The aim of this training is to help improve the lives of women living in conflict areas. Through the use of workshops,

training, education and therapy is strived for an improvement of the living conditions of these women. The reason behind the training is based upon the idea that women who are living under difficult circumstances like violent conflict, are better capable of mastering the course of their one lives when they are armed with tools that enable them to achieve personal development, gain financial independency and have the capacity to adopt a resilient attitude towards the circumstances of violent conflict, domestic violence or a psychological (war-) trauma.

However, even though these empowerment programmes are being widely implemented in communities facing such hardships, more critical sounds come to the foreground stating that empowerment programmes do not deliver upon their promises because ‘structural violence’s’ are underexposed (Hickel, 2014). Implementing empowerment programs in regions where disempowering problems predominate is thus like trying to empty the ocean with a thimble (Ibid., 2014).

Furthermore, the use of female empowerment by NGOs that are working in an Islamic context, brings forth the question if these women want to be empowered themselves by outside actors. Projects designed and framed in a Western context, that are afterwards applied to an Islamic context, risk missing their goal as a consequence of lack of cultural and context specific addressing. In this respect, critical questions need to be asked to what extent the interests of women themselves are taken into account; or to what extent these empowerment projects are in line with the critiques posed in the ‘Do Women Need Saving’ paradigm, in which the “saving” rhetoric is executed as a means to confirm a white Western identity over the inferior ‘Third World Women’ stereotype (Mohanty, 1988).

Research Goals

The most important internal research goal was to set up my own research project and gain practical work experience by undertaking several internships. Furthermore, I focused my research on female empowerment because I want to provide more clarity on academic empowerment debates. By researching the notion of empowerment, I want to learn more on how to define the essence of empowerment; what intrinsic notions and implications are fused together within the process of empowerment?; what consequences and outcomes might that possibly entail?; and what do these findings mean for a possible relationship between female empowerment, Muslim women and the international development sector?

The external research goals of this report aim to clarify the notion of female empowerment and the manifestations of female empowerment that become visible in the working methods of HF & BWC. Furthermore, this report aims to expose broader connections on how empowerment is intertwined with academic discussions on development work and structural societal problems and inequalities; to what extent can these appearances be placed in broader discussions on women's rights and the 'Do Women Need Saving' paradigm? Subsequently, placing this research in a development studies research framework, this report wants to elaborate on the effect of female empowerment analysed from the NGO's organisational level as well as the projects' effects analysed from the perspective of the target group of the researched NGO's.

Data Collection & Analysis

The research method of this research report consists of a literature study supplemented with two case studies that are retrieved from the findings of the undertaken research periods. The debates around female empowerment in the literature study are the starting point of analysis of this research report and the additional case studies aim to substantiate or disprove existing theories on the use of female empowerment within the development sector. The findings of the case studies and the comparison between the literature and the case studies comprise the core part of this research report because, in this section, the scope and appearance of empowerment is discussed.

Between September and December 2018, the bibliography for this report was assembled and constructed. The articles discussed in this report, were carefully sorted and examined on the basis of relevance, publication date, scope and in-depthness. In order to make this report as nuanced and comprehensive as possible, the articles were also sorted on the basis of their vantage point of analysis, in order to make sure that as many perspectives and arguments on female empowerment were considered.

In terms of the case studies, a brief overview of the projects of HF and BWC is presented, and in both case studies, three projects are analysed and discussed in more depth. Only three projects were discussed because, otherwise, this report would become too extensive. Furthermore, the projects, working methods and organisational structure of HF and BWC are analysed from an organisational, individual, social and economic level. For the case studies, As many people of the target groups as possible, as also professionals working with empowerment, were asked their

opinions and experiences on empowerment to make the case studies as extensive as possible. Moreover, notes on my own experiences and views were taken on a daily basis and carefully transcribed into my diary. The collection of notes and stories of these case studies were accurately measured against the findings of the literature study and the outcomes of both findings were critically examined.

Scientific Accountability

The topic of female empowerment as a research object has been a personal choice. I have chosen to combine the study on female empowerment with NGO work because I wanted to gain work experience at different NGOs. Moreover, I wanted to find out what the effects are of female empowerment programmes on a practical level. Subsequently, I wanted to graduate my master studies on the basis of my own research project. Further, content choices were overall defined on the basis of time shortage and in terms of demarcation. A master's research project asks for a limited and specified research topic that only covers a limited scope. In order to make this research as inclusive as possible, I have chosen to focus the methodological research question on the theoretical, organisational and practical level of female empowerment in the development sector.

The fact that only two NGOs were examined is definitely a shortcoming of this research report. The outcomes and findings of this report do not endorse generalities about female empowerment on a global scale, the conclusions and discussion points of this report relate only to the discussed literature and case studies. My lack of experience on the part of field research within the context of the non-governmental sector have undoubtedly had a negative impact on the findings of this research. Subsequently, I argue that more and extensive research is needed on this topic in order to complement this research and to push the empowerment debate forward.

Based on an ethical viewpoint, I have doubted if I was doing the right thing by writing a critical analysis on the Hope Foundation Cameroon, which I have done in the end. Unfortunately, my experiences with the Hope Foundation Cameroon have not been good and writing a destructive report on their work in Cameroon felt like I was denouncing them or that I might, unintentionally, seek revenge for personal reasons. I have critically examined the grounds of my analysis of the Hope Foundation Cameroon and I have established this is not the case. I argue that it is my responsibility as a researcher to write down my findings as objective as possible in

order to bring forth realistic and accurate findings of field research, which is exactly what I have done, in both the analysis of BWC and HF. Furthermore, I state that it is also a task of researchers to publish critical or negative results on research topics because these negative results could hold important implications on research paradigms. On a personal account, ethical questions came to mind on the critical analysis of the Hope Foundation. However, I have decided to focus on my scientific responsibilities and publish the analysis in the current form because the outcomes of the analysis hold valuable information that is worth sharing with the academic community.

Research Findings

Because We Carry (BWC) is a Dutch NGO that was founded right after the refugee influx manifested on Lesbos, Greece, in spring 2015 (Because We Carry, 2018). The organisation started as a group of four young women coming from Amsterdam to Lesbos to hand out baby carriers to refugee mothers with new-borns (Because We Carry, 2018). Due to the absence of sufficient rescue teams on the island to help the castaway refugees, the women from Amsterdam put aside the idea of handing out baby carriers in order to help assist the Greek coastguard to rescue people from the Mediterranean Sea. Together with the also Dutch-originated Movement on the Ground (MOTG), the women established the first improvised refugee shelter on the island, on a parking spot, alongside the coastline of Molyvos, a small town in Lesbos. Camp Oxy, which was built out of festival tents on the car park of the nightclub that is housed next to the car park, housed at its highest point more than 2,000 refugees that were taken care of by BWC, amongst others. As a result of lack of space and the growing numbers of arrivals, the refugees at camp Oxy were relocated and taken in by other camps that were located at the other end of the island. Nowadays, BWC is active at Kara Tepe CampUs, a refugee shelter for 1240 people, mostly vulnerable families and unaccompanied minors.

Three and a half years after the start of the refugee influx on Lesbos, BWC shares (equal) responsibilities with UN funded United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), International Rescue Committee (IRC) and the Dutch NGO Movement on the Ground (MOTG) in refugee camp Kara Tepe. The responsibilities covered by BWC, consist of the acquisition and distribution of breakfast for 1240 residents of the camp and the activities programme that takes place in the camp on a daily basis. BWC chooses to call refugees 'residents' in order to make them feel more appreciated, therefore, the target group of BWC will also be notified as residents in this analysis.

The projects that BWC organizes, are focused on expanding feelings of security, contribute to notions as connection, lead to more equal relationships and should enlarge feelings of happiness (Because We Carry Beleidspan, 2018). Most projects take place on Kara Tepe, but BWC has expanded the **Barbershop** and **Beauty Salon Project** also to Camp Moria and hosts these projects every other week in Section B (The Unaccompanied Minors Section) and Section C (The Single Travelling Adult Women Section) in Moria Camp. As the projects are gender separated, a male and a female version of the project is created. This is done by carrying portable beauty equipment into Camp Moria and the transformation of a classroom into a Barbershop or a Beauty Salon by the use of donated barber chairs. Every other week, thirty cards are handed out to refugees, living in Section B or Section C, with a number written down on the card. A queue of thirty people lines up in front of the improvised Beauty Salon or Barbershop in order to get a haircut or a wellness treatment. Both projects last for three hours and the provided services attracts great enthusiasm from the participants.

The Chai House Project is a BWC run project that provides the residents of Kara Tepe Camp with all-day free accessible chai tea to complement their suppers and breakfasts with. The Chai House is run and managed by residents and is opened seven days a week from 9 am until 9 pm. The operational manager of the Chai house is a resident of the camp and is assisted by a team of eleven resident volunteers that work six days a week in the Chai House.

The motto of the **Laugh and Learn Program** is ‘allowing kids to be kids again’. This is done by singing songs, playing games, colouring and painting. The kids activities take place five times a week, during Monday, Wednesday and Friday (for the kids that do not go to school) and on the weekend (accessible for all kids).

The **Sports Program** is also a gender segregated program. For men, a sports program takes place every day for one hour at the Amphitheatre. For women, there is a women’s yoga programme which takes place three times a week. The men’s sport programme is guided by a resident volunteer who leads the programme independently. The yoga program is guided by a BWC team coordinator and BWC volunteers.

A newly opened **Barbershop** is housed in a converted port container and is equipped with three professional barber chairs and barber equipment. A professional barber team from the Netherlands has come to Lesbos to train residents as barber. Subsequently, the barbers

underwent a teacher training course as a means to be able to train other barbers in the future as well. The barbershop is opened five days a week from Monday to Friday from 12am until 4pm.

The **BWC Beauty Salon**, also a converted port container, is created for the women in Kara Tepe and houses two professional barber chairs and a beauty chair for nail polishing and facial treatments. The previously mentioned barber team has also trained female barbers and beauty specialists. The manager of the beauty salon is a former refugee from Eastern Europe but lives in Greece already for over seventeen years. The beauty salon is opened five days a week from Monday to Friday from 11am until 13pm.

Team Clean is a project that runs since January 2018 in Camp Moria and is created to tackle the huge stream of waste that plaques the camp. In corporation with a resident's volunteer team living in Camp Moria, the BWC volunteer team cleans up the Olive Grove (a campsite housing 2.000 refugees next to Camp Moria) by picking garbage for two hours every Wednesday afternoon. The refugee residents team exists of fifteen refugees, most of them living in the camp for more than a year, and are a part of Team Clean for approximately six months already. Many of the men participating in Team Clean have told me that they look forward to the event the whole week as the Team Clean hours are their only structure and routine to look forward in their furthermore empty week planning.

The Hope Foundation (HF) is a German NGO that focuses on capacity-building, education, cultural awareness and empowerment of communities in Cameroon (Hope Foundation, 2018). The office headquarters are located in Berlin and the organisation holds another administrative office in Bertoua, Cameroon. The organisation was founded in 2001 as a result of the enthusiasm of a group of change makers that want to tackle protracted poverty, support community education and growth, and increase literary and prosperity on the countryside of Cameroon (Hope Foundation, 2018). Hence, the centre of gravity of the organisation lays with improving the lives of the of communities in Cameroon. To a lesser extent, projects of HF are also implemented in the Berlin-Brandenburg region of Germany in order to raise cultural awareness in relation to structural health care and education backlogs in Cameroon.

The main activities of HF focus on providing humanitarian aid to less fortunate civilians of Cameroon and increasing their daily living standards. The sectors on which HF focusses its reach are e.g. healthcare, education systems, accessible drinking water, youth development, female empowerment, child mortality, midwife projects and international law. Furthermore, the

organisation strives to commit itself to reaching out to disabled and deprived individuals (Hope Foundation, 2018). As the organisation is registered as a charity, the organisation has around seven regular employees and another two to three varying employees in high season, all of them working on a voluntary basis.

Football 4 Life – This project aims to prevent HIV-AIDS- malaria and other drug related infections by giving education to (amateur) football players and their coaches and organizing football games throughout Cameroon.

Water and Sanitation Projects – Many water sources in Cameroon are deprecated and lead to diseases and mortality amongst Cameroonians. HF designs and constructs new water pumping systems and builds water towers that provide clean and safe drinking water.

The Shoe Aid Project – This project collects and recycles used shoes and other clothes from Germany and ships them to Africa to hand out the donations to the less fortunate in Africa. According to HF, many people in Africa cannot afford footwear and are forced to walk barefoot. With this project, HF wants to tackle this problem and improve the living standards of poor Cameroonians.

Dental Hygiene Project – Due to bad dental hygiene and lack of dental education and health insurances, many infants have rotten teeth. HF provides dental education and distributes dental supplies to children that have never used a toothbrush before.

BWC: Breakfast Project

The Breakfast project comprises the main activity and goal of BWC: distributing breakfast bags to all residents living in Kara Tepe. Every week, a different team of seven Dutch volunteers come to Greece to assist a local residents team on Kara Tepe with the distribution of the breakfast. The breakfast project hosts space for up to fifteen residents to help carry, pack and distribute the breakfast bags to the other residents in the camp. The breakfast shift starts at 7.30 am and ends at 10 am. The refugee team consists of approximately five women and ten men, but not all persons show up every morning. The core part of the refugee team, that is every morning present to assist with the breakfast, consists of ten to twelve people, most of them men.

The refugee team is there to assist the Dutch volunteer team. This Dutch team consists of seven different people every week, that take on an one-week shift that lasts from Sunday morning until the next week Sunday morning. As the refugee team lives in Kara Tepe for a permanent time period, lasting from several months until several years, the refugee team comprises a fixed group of people that are aware of their tasks and responsibilities. The tasks consist of unloading food supplies from the truck, defining 1240 bananas in carts every morning, filling bags with fresh vegetables, cheese and herbs and preparing the carts for distribution. Subsequently, the breakfast is handed out by a door-to-door distribution in which the volunteer team serves as observer of the refugee team, who is responsible for handing out the breakfast.

The right of participation in the project is made official by the provision of a personal BWC batch and gives access to special privileges, like the costless rent of a bike at the BWC bike shop or the invitation to the monthly BWC dinner that is held in order to thank all the refugee volunteers for their effort and positive working attitude.

Sewing circle

The Sewing Circle consists of a three-hour open registration round at the Amphitheatre for all women interested in sewing and knitting. After registration on the Sewing circle list, a sewing kit will be distributed to the women. The sewing kit consists of different materials every week, depending on the donations BWC has received in that week. Recurring sewing packages consists of yarn and bobbins, pins, brooches, zippers, buttons and fabric patches (descending from old bedding that volunteers take with them to Greece) and also knitting packages consisting of wool and knitting needles. The sewing and knitting packages enable the women to sew and knit their own clothes and clothes for their family or can be used as interior decoration. The sewing and knitting materials are donated and brought to Greece by volunteers or are bought from donated money. In one week more than 170 women signed up for the packages, indicating the popularity of the activity. Once the packages are made by volunteers, they are door-to-door distributed to the women.

The number of women signing up for the packages and the high-distribution rate of the sewing packages (up to 170 packages on a weekly basis), indicates that this project has a lot of potential. Although the packages provide women living on Kara Tepe the possibility to sew and knit and, hence, are giving women more space for independence in terms of making their own clothes, empowerment and self-determination effects of this project are little as women are made

dependent to the distribution of the packages and do not have control over the products they receive. The dependency is most noticeable during the door-to-door distribution of the packages, when women gather around the carts and stumble over each other in order to try to receive the best package as possible. Due to a lack of money, the women rely on the packages each week and due to the distribution of the packages, an expectation is created that women deserve to receive a package to their door.

Moreover, the name 'sewing circle' indicates that the project consists of an activity in which women come together to sew and exchange ideas. The provision of sewing packages is a nice gesture. However, the project keeps women locked in their houses and makes them even more reliable on humanitarian aid than they already are. I argue that the Sewing Circle fosters positive effects because the project is created out of the wishes of the women, who have asked for sewing kits to keep themselves occupied and provide clothes for their families, in this sense the project delivers upon the needs and wishes of the women and could therefore be considered as a hands-on project that has empowering effects. However, I am not convinced this is entirely true because many women depended on the sewing kits and waited for it to come for days. I noticed that the project kept them small and reliable and I did not notice any expansion of women's abilities as a consequence of the project. Needless to say, the context of a refugee camp constrains projects to a wide extent. Yet, I believe a different set up of the Sewing Circle, like a real circle in the Amphitheatre where women come to sew every week, would have a greater sphere of influence and might have more empowering effects on women.

Barbershop

The barbershop was created in an improvisatory form by putting up chairs in the Amphitheatre and making use of portable barber bags with barber utilities in it. Cards with numbers on it were handed out to the men that lined up in front of the Amphitheatre, in the same way as is done for the barbershop project in Camp Moria. Due to a port container, donation from a Dutch company, and the investment of €10.000, BWC was able to realise a real barbershop including the make-over of the container and training possibilities for refugees that have interest in becoming a barber.

The opening of the new barbershop, with opening hours expanded from 3 to 20 hours a week, has created more space and possibilities for both (newly trained) barbers and men coming into the barbershop to get a haircut. The barbers have suddenly a real job with real responsibilities

as they have to be present before opening hours to open up the shop. Thus, they have a four-day working routine (barbers get one day off in a five days' workweek). This is a huge improvement for the barbers, as the barbershop has granted them a new identity as a barber.

Subsequently, the relocation of the barbershop from the Amphitheatre, which is a general and common place, to a physical barbershop equipped with professional barber accessories, has visible effect on the appearance and work attitude of the barbers. Next to the fact that the barbers have a real workspace to go to, an impossible reality for many refugee men, grants the barbershop the barbers a status above their refugee status (because they are the only ones allowed to cut hair), that leads to improvement of confidence and independence. As the status of barber is a special status, the barbers take on their responsibilities serious and carry proud in their daily activities as a barber, much more than they did when practicing their skills in the Amphitheatre. Also, the barbers are approached by customers as a person with special rights as the barbers are allowed to practice their skills where the customers are not.

The opening of the new barbershop has been welcomed with great positivism and enthusiasm by the other residents of the camp. On the first day of the opening of the barbershop, a queue over forty men lined up in front of the barbershop. Men that wanted to have a haircut had to make an appointment by stating their name and house number in the registration book of the barbershop. Within two days, all appointment openings for the upcoming one and a half week were filled in, indicating the popularity of the project. The project was designed to offer men, mostly wasting away their days in boredom whilst awaiting their asylum process, a basic service like free haircuts in order to give them back a bit of human dignity and giving them a special moment for themselves in a barber chair. The constant inflow of new appointments, that I had to make during the two weeks that I was there, made me conclude that the barbershop project meets the needs of the residents and is very well-received. BWC has listened carefully to the wishes of the residents and has successfully tried to implement these wishes within the limited possibilities of Kara Tepe.

The barbers are offered a purpose in life by joining the barbershop project. The project offers new-to-be barbers a chance to undergo training to become a barber and learn a new profession, thereby making the most of their time in Kara Tepe and undergoing personal and professional development by expanding their skills. Former barbers are offered the chance to undertake a teacher-training course as a means to train other men to become a barber in the future. This training course is something that almost all of them are unfamiliar with and opens up ways for

them as well to work on social, professional and personal skills. Not only the barbers gain advantage of the barbershop, also for the other residents the barbershop offers a space where men can walk in to have a chat, exchange stories, feel heard and seen and walk out having a new hair coupe.

However, the barbershop also brings forth tensions and feelings of cultural differences as different nationalities and ethnic groups are living in Kara Tepe and are confronted with each other in a place like the barbershop. The barber team exists mainly of Kurds, Arabs and Afghan men and, during the time that I was there, tensions could be felt in the room as the barbershop had opened up in that week and power play between the barbers was at work. The manager of the barbershop was an Arab from Syria, as he had had his own barbershop in Syria, this leading to frustration of some other barbers that just had received their first barber training. At some times, the barbers would get into an argument with each other over who was in charge, whilst other customers were waiting for the barbers to continue with their haircut. Another form of power play was present in the dynamic between the barbers and other customers. Some customers did not want to get served by someone of another nationality. Or some of the customers complained about the skills of one of the barbers in order to realise their wish to get a haircut by someone of the same nationality. Another often heard complained was the fact that most of the barbers spoke barely English, making it impossible for the customers of other nationalities to explain their wishes to them.

These dynamics were hard to address as the barbershop was run under supervision of one of the volunteers, that did not have adequate training to deal with such power dynamics. Even if these skills were required, it was hard to transfer the message as knowledge of the English language was absent with most of the barbers, leaving BWC no other choice than to work with residents' translators. As good as this only available solution might be, messages get lost in translation, which makes the essence of the message susceptible to misinterpretation. The language barrier serves as a blockage to feelings of empowerment for both the barbers and the customers and is a factor that prevents barbers from realising their full potential as a barber.

Showing up for appointments was difficult for most customers during the time that I was there. Some of them forgot the time of their appointment, some showed up twenty minutes late or more and a lot of them did not show up at all. It is likely that most customers will get used to the appointment system over time, although the question remains if men, that do not speak English and have never been familiar with such kind of system, will be able to enjoin the

advantages of the barbershop. A solution is offered for this by a guideline placard on the window which indicates the rules in several languages like Arabic, French and Farsi. I have noticed some customers are not able to read, how does one include them in the project as well? Asking one of the barbers to serve as a translator has proven to be a solution, however, I have noticed that translated appointments into one's own mother tongue still leaves space for misinterpretation as several appointments were accidentally mistranslated.

Furthermore, the long waiting list for the barber training are a blockage to possible ways of empowerment for costumers interested in getting barber training. With four fixed barbers as employees and three barber chairs, the barbershop projects remains a project for the chosen ones with a small sphere of influence. It is hard to say to what extent the barbershop project is leading to empowerment for the barbers, the barbershop project leads without a doubt to positive results in terms of feelings of independence, self-determination and agency, albeit that those feelings are achieved at the expense of the feelings of empowerment of those that also want to have a chance of becoming a barber, but are now not able to. The empowerment of one group seems to be created over the disempowerment of the other, creating unequal relationships and enviousness. If BWC wants to address the barbershop project on more equal terms, the inclusiveness of all men, that want to participate in the project, would possibly lead to more positive effect of the project.

Empowerment at an organizational level

BWC has focused its mission on safety, security, connection and trust and states that one needs to rebuild 'faith in humanity' within these hazardous times (Because We Carry Beleidsplan, 2018). BWC carries out their mission by asking the central question "How Can I Help You?" every step of the way (Ibid., 2018). This indicates that their approach is based upon a bottom-up policy in which the needs and aspirations of the target group are seriously addressed. According to BWC, this is done by creating opportunities for refugees to feel strong and needed again and by giving back a piece of independency and self-determination. According to their own statement: "Everyone wants to fulfil the highest, truest expression of yourself as a human being" (Ibid., 2018). In terms of the BWC philosophy, this is accomplished by reminding people of who they are and creating awareness amongst volunteers and other persons involved in the Netherlands that refugees are people like everyone else (Ibid., 2018).

The method of the organisation is based on the idea of empowerment through action. The slogan of the organisation is “Niet Lullen Maar Poetsen” which could be roughly translated into “Less Talk More Action” (Ibid., 2018). The means to implement empowerment through action is executed through refugee volunteer participation. BWC works with a team of sixty residents living in refugee camps on the island, that cooperate in the different projects, according to their skills and wishes. The refugee volunteer participation is targeted at giving back a piece of self-support and self-reliance within the restricted and constrained context of the living conditions on Kara Tepe CampUs.

The core method of BWC is based on the belief that empowerment is created by letting the residents do as much work as possible. By letting the residents participate in all the projects, BWC tries to let them regain a part of their autonomy and self-determination. Moreover, the organisation seeks to meet the skills and capabilities, that the refugees bring along with them, with the needs and skills that are needed to carry out the projects. If possible, the former profession of a resident is matched with a compatible project. In this way, former barbers can practice their barber profession again in the barbershop; a beauty stylist can practice her skills in the beauty salon and; a former body builder, or a sports teacher can engage in the sports lessons that are held every day at the Amphitheatre. Providing channels for residents to be able to carry out their former profession or learn new skills, opens up space for the residents to have a goal and life purpose in the sometimes-unbearable conditions in the camp.

Moreover, giving a piece of worthiness back to people that are trapped in a stateless existence also creates possibilities and value to the organisation itself as a lot of work and energy is put into labour by the residents. Not only is the free manpower of great profit, the residents bring a lot of energy and a positive mindset onto the workspace which has a positive effect on the team atmosphere of the volunteer team. Subsequently, the extra help let the activities to run smoothly. Furthermore, the intercultural exchange, that takes place as a result of the mixture of different nationalities within the breakfast team, creates valuable personal exchanges and personal contact that otherwise would not have been established. The close cooperation with the volunteer team from the Netherlands gives the residents volunteers a chance to share their stories and makes them feel seen by the volunteer team, that on their part is eager to learn about the residents and are very willing to listen to their stories.

According to BWC, active residents participation, by engaging people in the projects, creates space for trauma healing processes that would otherwise have been withheld. Offering residents a daily routine by letting them interact with other cultures, speeds up the integration process and brings back pleasure and joy in daily lives of refugees (Because We Carry, 2018).

Another strong point of the organisation is the positive and uplifting team atmosphere of the BWC staff. With great enthusiasm and passion for the cause, they are able to motivate both the residents and the weekly volunteer team. The effort that, the staff members put into the activities and atmosphere of BWC, translates into space for development, creativity and external input possibilities by other volunteers. The young and dynamic team goes about handling the sometimes harsh and sorrowful realities, trying to balance compassion, love, respect, creativity, empathy and humour, and thereby transforming the working environment of BWC a pleasurable and productive atmosphere.

Empowerment at an economic level

The general income of BWC is determined at €8.000 per week as every volunteer team from the Netherlands is obligated to bring with them a donation fund of this amount. The donations are fundraised through fundraising events and sponsorship of the volunteers' personal network.

According to the BWC accountancy, each week €6500 is spent on breakfast for 1240 people on a daily basis. The other €1500 is invested in the activities and maintenance, that BWC undertakes in both Kara Tepe CampUs as well as Camp Moria. Overall, BWC spends €50.000 a month providing humanitarian assistance to refugees on Lesvos. BWC claims to have up to five months of liquid funds on its bank account to cover any unforeseen costs (Because We Carry Beleidsplan, 2018).

The BWC accountancy is clear and transparent, also the documents on the website are up to date. Documents on paper can be inconsistent in comparison to the practical reality. However, the earnings of BWC are transparent and used where they are meant for. An example of this could be found in the BWC warehouse, where all the foreign material donations are brought in and distributed. The warehouse stores cartons of breastfeeding milk, strollers, bikes, new-born necessities and clothes donations. In the warehouse BWC, carry bags are produced for new-born babies and their mothers. For every new-born, a carry bag is made consisting of baby-clothes,

diapers, a baby-carrier, a bottle, etc. For the new-borns mothers, another bag is produced that contains maternity dressing, breastfeeding equipment, etc. All the bags are produced mainly from donations of international companies. The bags are distributed to the hospital of Lesvos, that distributes the carry bags on their account to the new-borns and their mothers.

The production of the carry-bags shows that donations are received in good order and are distributed to the people that need them most. For every donation, BWC considers the interest and needs of the people that they are meant for. If there is not enough of one specific donation, the item will be stored until BWC collects enough donations to distribute it to all parties involved. If a donation seems out of place, like a dozen of cocktail shakers, that BWC received a few months ago, the donation will not be distributed. Instead, another organisation is sought that receives the donation. In case of the cocktail shakers, the cafes, where BWC holds its weekly meetings, received the cocktail shakers. Another example are children's bike donations; as BWC does not need children's bikes for their projects, they donate the bikes to another NGO that does use them in their projects, like UNICEF.

Empowerment at an individual level

In terms of the projects of BWC, it can be stated that the organisation succeeded in establishing a high participation rate amongst refugees to volunteer in their projects. By letting the refugees participate, they get offered daily structure and routine, which allows them to have grip on protracted challenges and hard living conditions. All the residents, participating in the breakfast team, underlined that the hours preparing breakfast made their day and distracted them from distress and worries about their future prospects. As the residents team knows their tasks and a new team from the Netherlands joins in every week, the residents have to explain some duties to the volunteer team and assist them on the first day by handing out the breakfast. The residents team is able to carry out their duties independently and barely needs external support or coaching from team members of BWC. The two breakfast hours a day provide a daily routine for the residents team, that allows them to feel needed and important as the distribution of the breakfast is not possible without them. The residents team members know all the residents houses by heart and, as a result of this, the residents team members have to assist the team captains in finding their way around in the camp.

The breakfast shift is seen by the residents as a real 'job', that grants them a different status compared to the other residents in the camp, and allows them to enjoy other privileges as well.

This increased status translates into a different identity for the residents, which they hold next to their refugee identity. Before participating in the breakfast team, there were 'only' refugees awaiting their asylum procedure, now they can also identify themselves as 'worker' or 'volunteer', which allows the residents to regain a piece of directing their own lives. Allowing the residents to participate in all the projects makes them feel important again. Regaining of a piece of autonomy and self-confidence could open ways for the residents to feel like they stand in their strength again.

However, as the BWC refugee team is a gender mixed team, the predominant gender is masculine. This means that when team members of the BWC refugee team are put in their strength, we are mainly talking about masculine empowerment as men take up the dominant part of the team. Female empowerment is present as well, but accounts only for a few female individuals that have joined the breakfast team.

This leads us also to the next problematic finding: providing volunteer options for residents living in Kara Tepe has, according to my findings, positive results and should be praised because of the outstanding performances and work that is made possible by the effort of the residents team. However, the flip side of the coin is that only *some*, 60 in total, of the residents living on Kara Tepe are allowed to actively participate as volunteers with BWC. This rules out the great part of the 1180 other residents living in the camp. The resident volunteers provide and distribute the breakfast for all the other residents in the camp, making the other residents in the camp dependent on the distribution of the breakfast by the residents volunteers. With very few options for also participating in the residents team for distributing breakfast, due to long waiting lists, and few possibilities of making the breakfast themselves due to lack of money, the residents of Kara Tepe CampUs are forced to rely on BWC and the residents team. The increased empowerment of the residents team is created at the expense of the empowerment of the other residents of Kara Tepe CampUs as they are left empty-handed and made subject to the daily breakfast routine.

This should not be mainly be understood as a critique to BWC itself because the organisation works hard to create the best circumstances as possible. The organisation has nor the means nor the capacities to engage 1240 people in their projects. Volunteer participation of 1240 people in all the projects is not a realistic or a desired aim. This would ask for a different approach, done by a greater organisation with increasingly more manpower, capacities and cash flows. However, if BWC want to expand the empowerment of more people in the camp, it is necessary to address

the power dynamic established through the provision of special rights to certain residents of the camp.

Empowerment at a social level

This leads us to the following question: is it correct to speak of empowerment within the context of a refugee camp? Do the narrow and repressive living conditions of a refugee camp allow the residents to meet their basic needs and thus allow them to feel empowered? In order to feel empowered, one need to fulfil ones basic needs like water and food provision first before one can start working on personal development and feelings of empowerment. These last two notions are placed on top of the hierarchy of basic living arrangements. In a place like a refugee camp, were food and water are not in abundance, a lot of refugees struggle on a daily basis to meet those daily needs.

The poor and degrading living conditions, that a lot of refugees are finding themselves in, have a burdensome and negative effect on their health, physical and mental conditions, which makes empowerment a difficult to achieve goal. Moreover, exactly these restrictive and hard circumstances are the reason why empowerment is beyond reach, as the context of the refugee camp and the protracted stateless existence of a lot of refugees gives them little chance for empowering themselves. If empowerment is indeed about breaking with chains and patterns, that are holding one back from standing in one's own strength, then applying this definition to the context of a refugee camp seems rather unfair. A refugee cannot beat the asylum system, the very system that is holding back the refugee from creating new possibilities and standing in his or her strength. The empowerment of refugees seems from this point of view an unachievable goal.

I wonder if it would be more appropriate to rename forms of possible empowerment by using a different term like empowerment. The external factors at work in the surroundings of a refugee camp are so oppressive and undermining, the same external factors that empowerment should overcome, that the meaning and essence of empowerment loses its value when applied to this certain context, in the form of an empowerment program.

Thus, I argue in the case of BWC that a new spectrum of notions and definitions is at place to define the process of giving back feelings of safety and independency to residents of refugee camps like BWC is doing. We should ask ourselves if it is time to come up with new terms and

definitions that work more inclusive and are applicable to refugee camps as well. Can empowerment be mentioned in one breath with development programmes and social work, without thinking through the applicable meaning for empowerment in a certain context? Is empowerment not a highly popularized term and often presented as “a-one-size-fits-all”? (Hennink et al., 2012).

What stands out is that BWC makes use of a bottom-up policy, by constantly listening to the residents and implementing their feedback into their projects, in order to make sure that the voices of the residents are heard. The active refugee participation in the projects leads to projects that are designed *with* the target group and not *for* the target group, making the result highly more effective and positive. However, the bottom-up approach is applied to the extreme complex and constrained context of the refugee crisis in Greece. In this context, dominated by a minefield of international politics, international laws, and stakeholders with different interest, top-down policies overrule, as a consequence of European laws. As good as bottom-up approaches may be, if the Greek authorities, and in a larger context the European Union, do(es) not approve with it, a hands-on approach will not be implemented. Thus, the effects of BWC’s work is only visible in the sphere of influence of the involved residents of the Kara Tepe CampUs.

HF: Malaria Free Cameroon

Malaria continues to be a great risk to the population of Africa, with a mortality rate between 1.5 and 2.7 million African people every year. The Malaria Free Cameroon (MFC) project is designed to combat malaria infections in Cameroon and provide education and healthcare assistance to communities in Cameroon (Hope Foundation, 2018). This is done by offering workshops to people in Cameroon about the risk of malaria and ways of prevention.

The MFC project was not active during my fieldwork period in Cameroon. It was unclear when the project had last run and a new team for the project was sought for 2019, but it was also not determined when the project would start again. Together with other interns, we started giving malaria prevention lessons on an individual basis and in line with the thought of the HF’s MFC project, by using some of their lesson material that was made available to us.

During these lessons, I have noticed that a lot of children do not know that malaria is transmitted by a mosquito bite. For many of them, malaria is the same as a mosquito and the other way around. This indicates that knowledge about the disease is needed. However, during the malaria

prevention lessons, I taught in schools in Cameroon and during these lessons I noticed that some of the children had a low cognitive level, for several reasons. Classes in Cameroon are combined due to lack of teachers, as a result 10 to 16 years olds share one class together. In this class, even some of the older children still could not define what malaria is.

Moreover, the lack of knowledge made the lessons slow and full of recurrence because otherwise the pupils did not comprehend the teachers notes. For example, the lesson of the previous week needed, for a great extent, to be repeated in the next lesson because the children had not understood what had been said the week before. As a result, one malaria prevention lesson plan (intended for one lesson in a series of a whole curriculum), took up weeks in order for the teacher to come to the point of teaching the children how to prevent themselves from malaria infections. Knowledge transfer difficulties were a constructive problem during my time in Cameroon because, also on other points, knowledge barriers were detected. For example, malaria prevention workshops were hard to comprehend for illiterate people.

Rising Education

In 2014, HF started a cooperation with students from the Technical University in Berlin to build a primary school in Bertoua, Cameroon. The future school would serve as a multiple purpose objective, as it aims to provide education for over 250 children, and would house a bilingual preschool for three to six-year-old infants. Later, the project got expanded into a more extensive form, in which the building would be turned into a school for 500 children, and would also serve as an adult education centre in the evening hours. According to the HF website, the first opening for the school was planned for September 2015, however, this opening was cancelled due to construction setbacks. More later openings were cancelled due to money problems, including the partial opening of September 2018. Despite extensive budget planning, still €250.000 was missing for the last phase of the construction work. This was during the time of my internship in Berlin, between April and July 2018. During my fieldwork in Cameroon, the project was inactive, and no team was working on the ground to work on the construction of the school. The other three interns, that were my co-workers in Cameroon, had planned to undertake their internships in construction work of the school. However, by the time they arrived in Cameroon, they were told that their internships were cancelled as a consequence of lack of money and manpower on the ground. Ultimately, they had to find new internships by themselves as they did not get offered any alternatives by HF. The inactive status of the project made it impossible

for me to analyse the project and its effects. Yet, as we will see in the analysis below, the inactive status of the project does have consequences for the general proceedings of HF.

Bridging Cultures

The Bridging Cultures project is a series of workshops about problems taking place in non-Western countries; like discrimination, pollution and human rights. The workshops are designed to stimulate intercultural connections and cultural awareness in Berlin. Every year, different topics are addressed by elaborating on the sustainable development goals (SDG's) of the UN. Depending on the chosen topics, a teacher, from a Southern continent, is hired to teach school children about cultural differences and raise awareness about global problems. The long-term goal of the project is to challenge pupils to analyse problems from different perspectives and to come up with creative answers to problems on a global level. The project is received by the schools and pupils, that participate, with great enthusiasm and raises awareness about structural world problems in the area of Berlin.

Empowerment at an organizational level

HF focuses its mission on 'issues of poverty, health and social work in rural areas of Africa' (Hope Foundation, 2018). HF carries out its mission by focussing on the following statement: "We hope for the betterment of people, communities and groups where self-help, intelligence, love and creativity would bring a positive change!" (Ibid., 2018). During my fieldwork period at the HF, of almost four months in total, I have not come across an indication that the HF is working in cooperation with their target group, communities in Cameroon, nor have I found evidence that the needs and aspirations of this target group were considered. By all means, this could have been done by the HF on previous accounts, however, the fact that no reciprocal dialogue has been detected during my fieldwork period indicates that there is no constant and dynamic dialogue maintained between HF and its target group. This making me conclude that HF works from a top-down approach, in which projects are mainly designed from a theoretical level.

Values of HF are constructed around the four 'E's': 1) Engaging by treating individuals with kindness and respect; 2) Education by focussing on awareness and discrimination; 3) Empowerment through involves people with disabilities and supporting them in mastering their own lives and working for a better future; 4) Enhancement by supporting sustainability, promoting civil society and individual action and raising cultural awareness (Hope Foundation,

2018). The slogan that HF uses to act upon its values is: "Engaging, educating and empowering communities to create a better future."

The working method of HF is, after four months field research, still not clear to me as I have found no consistency in HF's organisational structure. An explanation for this could be found in the observation that HF leaves up a lot of space for new interns to structure existing projects to their own wish, by letting them bring their own skills and expertise to the table. Despite the fact that this leads to great extents of creativity, freedom and responsibility on the side of the interns and has positive results on the productivity rate of the HF Berlin office, the HF is susceptible of missing their goal by not working with a clear method.

The lack of a standing and structured method, visible in most of their projects, creates a chaotic and incoherent implementation of the overall organizational structure. The lack of a considered method, apart from 'working towards a better live for the people of Cameroon', which sounds rather vague and unclear, that is related to the target group and in constant negotiation with the relevant target group, can lead to inconsistencies between the goals of the organisation and the actual result of the undertaken actions. In other words, coming up with a clear working method of *how* one is going to empower communities in Cameroon and as a consequence according all the projects with this specific method, would lead to greater achievements for HF. In this respect, much can be gained from actively involving the target group in Cameroon in the projects. In my observations, the target group is now mainly involved on the level of education by the provision of workshops and other educational forms. This could be improved by involving the target group on the operational level of the projects, by giving them a voice in the projects.

The organisational structure of the HF office in Berlin is strong and enjoys a great extent of connection between employees. The working environment of the HF office in Berlin is pleasant and relaxed and there is a lot of space for questions, dialogue, creativity and new ideas. For interns, HF leaves open a lot of space for own input and personal development as HF grants a lot of responsibility to their interns and treats them as full-fledged employees. Next to this, a lot of support is given by managers of HF to make sure the interns feel supported and reached out to, if necessary. Also, in respect of HF Berlin, it can be said that the working environment of the HF office is a pleasant one as all the team members of HF have a positive and vibrant working attitude, which is contributing to a productive and uplifting team atmosphere, in which there is a lot of space for creativity, dynamic, humour, empathy, compassion and respect.

The strong and connected organisational structure stands in stark contrast to the weak solidarity and lack of organizational structure found in Cameroon. This is mainly due the lack of a private office in Cameroon and the lack of a team that works in Cameroon in close cooperation with the team from Berlin to support the projects. Surprisingly, during my field trip in Cameroon, I have found no physical evidence of a Cameroonian department located in Bertoua. A strange observation for an organisation that has been running for seventeen years. A shared HF office was located in the local police station of Bertoua, however, during the time I was there, nobody was in office. The main administration was done from the founder's mothers house in Bertoua. Needless to say, business could be done from out of house. Nevertheless, during my three months internship in Berlin, the impression was raised that a private office was maintained in Cameroon, including a staff team. I have also found no physical presence of a staff team in Cameroon, apart from one volunteer working remotely from Yaoundé.

Another strange and striking point is that, during my fieldwork period at the office in Berlin, the vision was upheld that both previously mentioned necessities were up and running in Cameroon, thereby making me conclude, on the basis of my fieldwork in Berlin, that the organisational structure from the Cameroonian side was also a strong and connected one.

Another argument, that leads me to the conclusion the HF Cameroonian department has a weak organisational structure, is due to the fact that I have found no running projects in Cameroon during the time that I was there. The Malaria Free Cameroon project was supposed to be an all-year-running project in Cameroon, however, I have found no evidence of this during my fieldwork. The malaria nets that we bought from the proceeds of the Malaria week in Spring had been, in November, either already distributed or were still on its way to Cameroon (this was not clear). Also, no evidence was found of a structural planning for the project or an adequately trained staff team present at the location. These were all work in progress, despite the running of the project since 2012.

This brings me to my next observation, the disconnection, that I have experienced during my internship in Berlin, in relation to the projects in Berlin and the team in Cameroon. Apart from the communication between the two managers of both Berlin and Cameroon, there was little dialogue between staff members of Berlin and staff members in Cameroon. The absence of a team in Cameroon would explain this disconnection. However, based on what other interns have told me and my own experiences, also a disconnection from the work in Berlin in relation to the

projects in Cameroon was experienced by both myself and other interns. This was due to the fact that, except for the Malaria week and the Bridging Cultures project, all the projects took place in Cameroon, except apparently were not executed at all times. There was few reflection or exchange between the HF Berlin department and the HF Cameroon department, making it sometimes hard for the interns to stay motivated and productive as the results and effects of their work was not clear to them.

Empowerment at an economic level

The income stream of HF depends on donation funds, fundraising events and individual sponsorship. In addition, the HF holds an annual Malaria week to fundraise money for combating malaria in Cameroon. During this week, two activities in the form of a marathon and a techno party are organised, of which the proceeds flow directly into the Malaria Free Cameroon project. Several times a year, the HF appeals to individual and governmental supported funds in order to finance existing and new projects. Moreover, HF tries to reduce labour costs by offering unpaid internships to international students. Subsequently, HF provides labour spaces on the basis of a so-called *Bundesfreiwilligendienst*, this is a paid voluntary service provided by the German government, as a means to support the social development sector.

However, due to a lack of regular income of money and the absence of regular donors and sponsorship, HF struggles all year round to make ends meet. HF undertakes multiple actions in order to connect the organisation to regular donors by publishing a newsletter at least four times a year, by spreading flyers at local events in Berlin and by updating their Facebook page several times a week. Despite the active participation, it is noticeable that HF is not able to gather a core group of donors that supports the activities on a constant basis. An example of this is the spread of the HF newsletter, which had over 250 subscribers before the new privacy declaration was introduced, and was decreased under 50 subscribers after the new legislation went into effect. This core support group is necessary for the development and success of the organisation because the core support group functions as the spine of a healthy organisation. In the absence of such a support system, organisations find themselves in the position of having to struggle in order to make ends meet in every aspect of entrepreneurship. As a result, the success of the organisation on a financial level is undermined.

Administrative statements on cash flows of the HF are overall not always addressed clearly because proper legitimisation of expenses is lacking in some cases. The most recent annual

report on the HF website dates back to 2011. The information given about the justification of the general expenses is mediocre as no detailed description is given on the cash expenses. Only two annual reports (2011 and 2010) are mentioned on HF website, although these statements seem to be more like a storytelling than an annual report. However, also during my internship at the HF office, the accountancy of the organisation was disorganized and not up to date. The labour of accountancy was given to employees officially not trained for the job. Surprisingly, the interns were given accountancy tasks on a regular basis, which makes me conclude that they are open about accounting and do not have anything to hide.

However, the Rising Education project raises questions on HF' budget planning abilities. The opening of the school was planned for September 2015 (Hope Foundation, 2018), but was cancelled due to major financial setbacks. New partly openings were planned for 2016 and 2017, but also had to be cancelled due to money problems. Consequently, the partly opening of the school planned for September 2018 was postponed due to a hole in the budget of €250.000. After asking several times about the grounds of this astronomical miscalculation, no clear answer was given to me. Also, for unclear reasons, the TU architects in the Rising Education project had backed out of the project. How is it possible that the opening of the school was cancelled so many times? And why is there so much money missing despite the fact that the budget planning was done in a professional and consistent manner?

Subsequently, an organisation, that runs two departments in two different countries, has considerably more responsibilities in terms of making sure that the two departments consult and connect in such a manner that the organisation makes progress and is not hindered by possible miscommunication and lack of clarity on one or both sides of the organisation. Regardless of the operation field, this is a challenge for every organisation operation on an international level. As employees in Germany work all-year round to fundraise funds and money for projects in Cameroon, it is a necessity to give a reflection to employees on the money that is spent. For example, interns of HF starting their internship in Spring will focus their main activities on fundraising money for Malaria Free Cameroon and will focus their attention on the preparations for Malaria Week Cameroon, which takes place in April on an annual basis. The whole internship of these three interns evolves around fundraising activities and the organisation of the Malaria Week activities, that were held to raise money for Malaria in Cameroon. Apart from a two-hour debriefing at the end of this week and a few Facebook posts with updates, no real reflection is given to interns or other employees on how HF has spent this

money. This does not benefit the productivity and motivation of the interns and does not have a positive effect on the working atmosphere.

Another striking point is the absence of material goods or a warehouse in Cameroon. The absence of a private office space, as previously mentioned, has also consequences for the pattern of expenditure of the organisation as orders are now done informally or from the Berlin office whilst lacking accurate data of the required needs. After all, large publications on behalf of an organisation or orders of goods are undertaken from an office. Moreover, it is highly unlikely that a successful organisation can flourish if it does not have a solid office or a team of employees in the country where it has its focused centre of gravity.

Empowerment at an individual level

On an individual level, it can be stated that the work of HF Berlin has great effect. To a great extent, this is due to the fact that HF Berlin provides jobs to people in the social sector and, thus, is offering these people an opportunity to grow. For example, the previously mentioned *Bundesfreiwilligendienst*, that could be undertaken at the HF, provides a workspace for people that would have otherwise been jobless as the service targets unemployed people. The opportunity of working at the HF in the young and dynamic team of HF, brings structure and joy to the lives of the so-called *Ehrenamtlichen* (volunteers that joined the *Bundesfreiwilligendienst*). In this way, HF is able to offer these people a new form of identity next to their identity of 'being unemployed'.

Furthermore, the provision of internships to international students is for students also an opportunity to expand their horizons, work on their professional and intercommunicative skills and, in case of a study-focused internship, it will contribute to the graduation of a student. Moreover, the HF office Berlin offers an international working environment and it is a place to meet other cultures and make friends. Hence, the office is proving a space for personal and social development.

According to my findings, HF Berlin also succeeds to a great extent in creating cultural awareness amongst citizens of Berlin. During my internship, I have created a campaign in cooperation with teachers of a private school in Berlin called "Schools for Schools". The campaign was aimed at educating the pupils of the private school about the situation in Cameroon and the work of HF in Cameroon. In terms of this campaign, I have designed a lesson

kit that the teachers could use in their class to prepare the pupils for the fundraise event that they were going to undertake later that year in order to raise money for the HF Rising Education project. After this school kit was used by the teachers and before the fundraise event had even taken place, an amount of €800 was donated into the Rising Education project by the school and the parents of the pupils. This example indicates that the HF succeeds in raising awareness amongst civilians of Berlin.

Another example of the fact that HF Berlin succeeds in raising awareness is based on the finding that one event of the Malaria week, the marathon, every year has many (between 200 and 300, which is much for a small organisation like HF) entries. Many people participate on an annual basis, others join while it is for a good cause. The fact that people keep coming back shows that they are aware of the underlying goal of the event, eradicating malaria. The organised techno party during my internship was a fiasco because very few people did attend the party and much more manpower was invested in organising the party in comparison to the money that was raised by the event. Therefore, I have found no indication that this party has had effect on the awareness of people in Berlin.

On account of an absent office and team in Cameroon, I have to conclude that I have found no indication of forms of individual empowerment of people involved with HF in Cameroon. Perhaps these forms have ever been there, yet, there was no such evidence to be found at the time that I was in Cameroon. Based on the observation that no project was running in Cameroon in the time that I was there, I cannot say anything on the effects of the projects on the personal lives of the people involved in the projects in Cameroon.

Finally, my findings state that the most personal development was gained by the people working for HF in Berlin. Putting people in their strength, as is done by HF Berlin, one could state that the most effect of the organisation was determined at the office in Berlin as this department better succeeds in reaching out to people and involves more people in their projects than the HF Cameroon is currently capable of doing.

Empowerment at a social level

This is leading me to my next question: if the effect of HF can only be detected in Berlin, how are they able to close the distance between Berlin and Cameroon? Furthermore, how are they able to create social change and work towards empowerment from such a distance? The

disconnection of the HF Berlin department and HF Cameroon department seems an unbridgeable one. Therefore, I state that the organisations operate as two different organisations on a parallel level. As HF Cameroon is, at this moment in time, lacking sufficient means to work towards empowerment and social change, it can be stated that, even though HF is an organisation that targets communities in Cameroon, the reached target group is actually civilians living in Berlin.

One explanation for this is that the executed activities of HF Berlin only take place in Berlin. Another reason for this can be found in the absence of a connection between members of HF and the target group of HF in Cameroon. Cameroon is a faraway country that not many people seem concerned with. However, Berlin enjoys a large community of Cameroonians living in exile, but over the years the community has not shown much interested in activities of HF. The HF does not succeed in finding a supportive community that HF can use for their cause. The absence of a strong connection between HF Berlin and HF Cameroon, the lack of a social support system and the insufficient bond between civilians of Berlin and Cameroon are undermining the social effect of HF.

According to my findings, an organisation working with a top-down approach, like HF seems to act out, is less likely to succeed in their goals because a top-down approach is rather working against the interests of the target group. This is also a reason why I argue that empowerment is not created from above. Empowerment cannot be imposed on an individual; it has to come from within, otherwise we cannot speak of empowerment. For this reason, I find it irrelevant to speak of empowerment in relation to HF activities in Cameroon. During my field research, I have determined that empowerment occurs because individuals have been given space to conquer existing blockages and have been enabled to overcome themselves in order to become the best version of themselves. I argue that this can only happen if projects are designed in close cooperation with the people who the projects are targeted at. If projects are designed in one country and implemented in another, like in the case of HF, I believe it is very unlikely empowerment will happen because change happens on the ground and is only created by those willing to engage in it.

In this respect, also in the HF case, new terms and notions are necessary to honour the value of the projects that the HF is working on in Berlin. HF uses the concept of empowerment without adequately addressing its meaning or thinking about how the context of Cameroon is going to influence future empowerment projects. For example, during my internship, I was asked to

design a project plan for a future empowerment project. Asking about what exactly they meant by empowerment or elaborating on their vision for a future empowerment project, I got the answer to ‘come up with a plan myself first’. It shows freedom and creativity that an intern is giving this kind of opportunity, yet, it made me question if there was a clear vision for the method of a future empowerment programme.

Also, in terms of the HF case, it must be stated that the context is very specific and defining for the outcomes of the projects. This context is not adequately addressed in HF projects, mainly because the target group is not properly engaged in the projects. The values and aims are developed from an organisational level and a reflection is missing on to what extent the values and aims correspond with the Cameroonian context. In term of empowerment, the HF seems to have no definitions or methods to base such an empowerment programme on. Also, in this case it can be said that the use of empowerment as a “one-size-fits-all” is creating false expectations and makes it likely that, also in this case, an empowerment programme could have unintended opposite outcomes.

Comparison between BWC and HF: Empowerment at all stages?

One of my most striking findings is that BWC works meticulously together with its target group on Lesvos, based on the enthusiasm, motivation and respect, that the residents show for BWC and their projects. Based on the literature of Chua et al. (2000); Davis (2008) and Cooke (2007), in which the critique is stated that women’s voices are not seriously heard, I argue that this close cooperation is having positive effect on the success of BWC’s projects. This is mainly due to the fact that BWC listens to the residents by maintaining a constant reciprocal dialogue between managers on the organisational level and residents on the executive level. This manifestation is in line with Abu-Lughod’s (2015) work in which she underlines the importance of listening to women themselves.

The needs on the ground are directly translated into hands-on projects, which would be a positive development according to Helms (2003), who argues that reciprocal dialogues between women’s organisations and target groups are insufficient. For example, the Barbershop and the Beauty Salon of BWC are direct results of outspoken desires of residents claiming their basic needs were not met in the refugee camp, and access to a haircut would make them feel more human. The same goes for Team Clean, a project which was designed as a consequence of a

major waste problem into a solution-oriented and productive activity. Moreover, this project is also addressing social interactions because residents from Camp Moria have addressed feelings of loneliness and social disconnection to BWC.

In comparison, I have seen an absence of this dynamic at HF, as there was little reciprocal dialogue between HF and its target group, both in Berlin and Cameroon. This underlines Helms claim (2003) that NGOs insufficiently are capable of establishing reciprocal communication channels and fulfilling local needs (2003, 21-29). The most significant difference is that BWC constructs its projects on-the-ground in Lesvos, whereas HF constructs its projects in Berlin and implements them in Cameroon afterwards, thereby creating the risk of misapplying the project by unbridgeable gaps in theory versus praxis.

Philips (2015) argues that the ambiguity of empowerment theory versus praxis causes empowerment projects to fail, which is a risk that HF also faces. For example, the Malaria Free Cameroon project, just like other projects, hold great promise. Yet, due to insufficient insight, manpower and knowledge on the ground, the project is not running. When in Cameroon, I noticed the supplies for the project, malaria nets and malaria tests for the education workshop were not there and sufficient knowledge on how to teach these workshops was not available. Furthermore, no stated reflection or data was available on the outcomes of the project of previous years, indicating that no reciprocal dialogue was maintained between HF and the target group. Based on these case studies, I argue that the **reciprocal dialogue between the organisation and the target group** and the execution of the projects on the ground by constantly reshaping and translating the needs of the target group into the project is essential for the effect of non-governmental work (Chant & Sweetman, 2012; Helms, 2003; Chua et al., 2000; Abu-Lughod, 2015).

During my fieldwork, I have noticed that the involvement of participants are mainly men, to a much lesser extent women are involved in the projects of BWC and HF. For example, at the projects of BWC, I noticed that almost only men participated in the breakfast team, even though this project is a gender mixed project. This could have cultural reasons, still, many women were on the waiting list for becoming volunteers at the breakfast team. During my internship, the management of HF defined reaching out to women as an important obstacle in their work because many Muslim women in Cameroon live inside the fences of their house and do not have much contact with the outside world. They stated that this makes it difficult to involve women in the projects. In both cases, **the focus on (more) female participants and ways and means**

to accomplish this needs closer attention (Chant & Sweetman, 2012; Abu-Lughod, 2015; Moghadam & Senftova, 2005; Fonjong, 2002).

Another finding that is having a visible result, is the presence of a **stable core group**, as is the case with BWC. The organisation manages to connect with a larger audience by spreading its messages through mainly social media. For example, in November 2018, volunteer weeks for BWC were fully booked until March 2019. HF is to a much lesser extent capable of connecting with a larger audience because the Cameroonian cause seems to find connection only on a regional scale with people that have a personal connection with HF or Cameroon. For example, HF struggles to attract regular donors and has issues with grant allocations, which indicates that there is less interest in the Cameroonian case in the region that HF is active in, mainly Berlin. BWC manages to attract a large audience because the refugee crisis takes place on a global scale and many people are concerned with the cause and want to help. This is also helping BWC to find an audience from other places than Lesvos and the Netherlands. The case studies show that a stable core group is important for spreading the message of the organisation, finding regular sponsorship in order to keep the financial streams of the organisation healthy and to find volunteers on a steady basis that form the heart of the organisation. I could not find clear evidence of the importance of a core group in the literature. Yet, Townend *et al.* (2004), Sharma (2006); Nagar & Raju (2003); and Hickel (2014) state that background donors of NGOs play a decisive role in the motives of NGOs and, therefore, the motives of these donors need to be researched carefully in order to find out whose interest are served in the work of NGOs. Thus, I conclude that the core group can manifest itself in many forms and plays a vital role in the livelihood of an NGO.

Moreover, at BWC, there seems to be a close relationship between the office in the Netherlands and Lesvos because all projects need to be approved by the Dutch administrative office. HF does not have this kind of system as only the head of the organisation decides on the projects, getting permission for decisions in an informal manner from the other office. This lack of control on the executive level could lead to unilateral decisions and is affecting the connection between the headquarters and the executive office in the other country. As a result, the connection becomes blurry and the work of the organisation is undermined. For organisations that have executive offices in other countries, like BWC and HF do, it is important to have **a clear and transparent connection between the different offices to maintain a reciprocal and clear communication channel between the offices.**

According to Abu-Lughod, a broad problem in terms of Western intervention in the Middle East and Africa is the lack of cultural knowledge of a foreign country, which could cause gaps in Western intervention methods (2015). Striking is that HF has close connections with Cameroon because the founder of HF was born and raised in Cameroon, this making **cultural knowledge and background available to the organisation** and making the organisation compatible with the operating development field in Cameroon. Moreover, the founder founded HF in Berlin over seventeen years ago and has close connections to the German-Cameroonian community as well. Having the resources and channels to reach out to both the Cameroonian and the German-Cameroonian community, it arouses astonishment in terms of why he is not utilizing these channels to expand HF's sphere of influence. I see great possible opportunities in terms what the HF could reach for. Yet, I have (not yet any) good answers for why they do not utilize all of these opportunities.

BWC has no cultural connection with the target group, making cultural knowledge and background limited to the organisation. However, BWC solves this problem by making residents 'managers' of their projects and by closely interacting with residents in order to make sure that the organisation operates in line with the wishes of the residents. If an organisation lacks constructive cultural knowledge, there are, thus, creative ways to solve the knowledge gaps.

Notable is also that, in both cases, the context is defining for the effects and success of the organisation (Kabeer, 2001; Malhotra et al., 2002). BWC works within the limiting boundaries of Kara Tepe CampUs, by shaping their projects in line with the possibilities that the contexts allow. Both the projects of the NGOs are constructed based on the problems of their target group. Moreover, the contexts that created these problems, also have a limiting effect on both NGOs because repressive external factors have an undermining effect on the projects. For example, at BWC, the language barrier is affecting the projects because most residents cannot speak English, thereby originating translating problems. At HF, the Malaria Free Cameroon project is hard to implement because the target group that HF works with struggles with illiteracy. As a consequence of this, education about malaria finds, in many cases, little response. BWC finds solutions with context-specific problems by finding residents translators for example, whereas the illiteracy problems, that HF faces, are much more difficult to combat. These contexts specific problems need to be addressed and need to constantly be redefined, in order to make sure that NGOs can find possible ways to work in line with these problems and not against them (Hickel, 2014; Helms, 2003; Kabeer, 2001).

The idea for the foundation of HF was coined in Berlin and after the establishment of the organisation, the organisation was also established in Cameroon. The founders of BWC had originally not planned to establish an organisation but just wanted to offer helping hands in Greece. However, after noticing the humanitarian aid assistance that was needed on the island, they decided to found BWC. The starting point for founding the organisations in both cases is very different. Nevertheless, I have established that BWC is, to a much greater extent, able to **meet the needs of the people on the ground** (Philips, 2015), than HF is because BWC was established after the needs of refugees in Greece were defined. This makes me question if the starting point and aims of founding an organisation are defining for the outcomes of an organisation? Did HF have different motives when they founded their organisation in Berlin and then expanded it to Cameroon in comparison to BWC, when they founded their organisation in Lesbos? To what extent is it defining that an organisation arises out of bottom-up problems happening on the ground (BWC), or can problems first be defined on a theoretical level in another country and then be brought to field (HF)? Which implications and effects does this have for the outcomes of the projects? In other words, does non-governmental work make more sense when an organisation is created out of a problem like the refugee crisis in Greece, than when an organisation is founded beforehand and, thereafter, possible problems and the target group are defined? What implications does this have for corresponding theoretical problems with on-the-ground praxis?

The findings of the case studies make me conclude that empowerment is not a linear or holistic process (Kabeer, 1999), because the process manifests itself in stages. The reviewed literature states that empowerment is a consequence of overcoming disempowering structures (Malhotra et al., 2002; Kamal, 2011; Kabeer, 1999). My findings correspond with this argument because, in the case of BWC, the refugee volunteers have overcome their positions of helpless refugees and have expanded their agency, to a great extent, by supporting BWC in their projects. The volunteer positions, offered by BWC, lead to feelings of self-determination and autonomy on the part of the refugees and, in this respect, I think it is fair to state BWC managed to expand manifestations of empowerment in Kara Tepe CampUs. (Malhotra et al., 2001; Kabeer, 2001).

However, I argue it is problematic to speak of the "ability to make strategic life choices" as the refugee volunteers are made subordinate to the asylum system and the refugee camps are restricting their freedom and autonomy. As a consequence, it is impossible for refugees to make conscious life choices (Malhotra et al. 2001, 27-29), because their future is in the hands of the

Greek authorities. Moreover, in the case of HF, I state that it is inapplicable to speak of empowerment when it comes to making life choices, a defining component of empowerment (Kabeer, 2001). Kabeer argues that three key components of empowerment constitute of 'resources', 'agency' and 'achievements' (2001, 3-4). In the case of BWC, there is no delivery upon resources and achievements because the context of the refugee camp will not allow it, making it impossible for refugees to become fully empowerment. However, I have noticed progress in terms of agency and self-determination, on this part I believe BWC succeeded in creating manifestations of empowerment. This is also the reason why I state that empowerment comes in different stages and all undermining contexts, that could have a disempowering effect, need to be addressed.

Unfortunately, I have found no indication of manifestations of empowerment in the case of HF Cameroon, due to the absence of staff members and running projects on the ground. On this part, I agree with Philips (2015), that empowerment programmes are ineffective, in some cases, because, in the case of HF, I argue that the theoretical working methods do not correspond with the daily praxis in Cameroon. The most accurate example of this conflicting situation is that the image of the Cameroonian department from the perspective of HF Berlin is very different from the reality I have experienced in Cameroon. Therefore, I agree with Nagar and Raju (2003) and Skegg (2005), on the part that empowerment needs a clear framework before applying, something that is missing in case of HF.

BWC uses a clear strategy that is defined as 'empowerment through action', which is to some extent empowering residents by giving them back a piece of control and self-determination over their daily choices. HF does not work with a clear empowerment theory and, therefore, I argue that the Cameroonian context, in which HF is operating, has too many restrictive factors, like illiteracy, poverty, rights violation, health care problems etc., that need to be addressed first before an empowerment program would have effect. I agree with Hickel (2014), that structural problems could undermine effects of empowerment projects. However, if such a program would be implemented, I reckon it will be striking to, firstly, address personal needs of participants. The extent to which a participant of this kind of programme feels seen and personal approached, will be defining for the outcome of the programme. This would mean that small and personalized programmes need to be tailor-made, based on someone's personal needs. If empowerment is indeed connected with feelings of independence, self-determination and self-confidence, which are all factors that one will need for breaking existing barriers, then empowerment is, to a great extent, a question of identity. More precisely, then empowerment

would be a question of how one perceives one's own identity and to what extent one is able to act upon this self-image. At BWC, I have seen the hard work and motivation residents showed because they felt heard and seen by BWC. In case of the barbers and beauty stylists, BWC was able to give them back an identity that they had lost, or, maybe, never had before. Moreover, BWC chooses to offer training to residents and allows them to train other people as well, making it more likely that people will undergo training, as this is giving by acquaintances, family or friends that speak their own language. The projects made them feel important and valued as a human being and distracted them from the everyday hardships of the refugee camp. Hence, **personalized empowerment programmes, based on development of positive self-image and expansion of personal competences**, will have an effect, when based on the wishes and needs of the target group.

Another interesting note can be made on the slogan of BWC, namely: 'How Can I Help You?' which fits exactly aligns with critiques that are put forward by the 'Do Women Need Saving' paradigm (Abu-Lughod, 2015). Interestingly, the slogan of BWC comprises exactly what Abu-Lughod stated to be a negative development, as she outlines that women's own opinions are ignored. However, by turning the 'Do Women Need Saving' paradigm into a question and approaching refugees with this kind of question has, in the case of BWC, led to positive outcomes in terms of their projects. This raises questions on the part of the 'Do Women Need Saving' paradigm; maybe the urge of wanting to help people from other cultures, even though one might not have the right cultural knowledge, does not have to be a negative development, as long as the one, who wants to help, is willing to ask the people about what they want and is willing to work with them in order to achieve this. As long as voices are heard and questions are asked in a reciprocal dialogue between the different parties involved, the 'Do Women Need Saving' paradigm could, in some cases, have positive effects. Nevertheless, this appearance is, up until today, ignored by other scientists.

In conclusion, my most striking finding comes down to the argument that female empowerment starts with empowering men. Fonjong (2002) and Chant & Sweetman (2012) argue that female empowerment is not only feminine business because, in order to reach for social change, men need to be included in the process as well (Fonjong 2002, 124-126). If men's attitudes towards women do not change, women's economic tasks and responsibilities will only increase, which has an oppressive effect on women as cultural and personal perspectives on women's positions are left unchanged (Chant & Sweetman 2002, 526-527). The projects of BWC include mostly men, which, at first, made me think would have a negative effect on female empowerment. On second

thought, I conclude that the involvement of men in BWC's projects have a positive effect on female empowerment because the projects are a way of educating men about women's positions. For example, the managing team of BWC is mainly led by young Western women. The masculine refugee volunteers have to get approval of these women for everything they do and the men respect their opinions, as they know that the women are leading BWC and are there to help them. This is a small start of teaching these men to appreciate and value women in leading positions. Therefore, I argue female empowerment has the most sustainable effect when integrated in the upbringing of young boys (Chant & Sweetman, 2012). Education young boys about the value of women will plant the seeds for real forms of female empowerment for future generations to come.

Conclusion & Discussion

This research report was focused on the question: To what extent is the concept of female empowerment related to the 'Do Women Need Saving' paradigm, how are both notions defined and constructed in an international development context and what manifestations of both notions can be analysed on a practical level at non-governmental organisations like Hope Foundation and Because We Carry? According to my findings, female empowerment is indeed to some extent connected to the 'Do Women Need Saving' paradigm because paternalistic notions and Orientalist stereotypes are very hard to ignore in unequal power relations, that are also present in the transnational development sector.

However, the case study of BWC shows how manifestations of empowerment can be made possible by listening to people on the ground and transforming their wishes into hand-on projects like the Barbershop and Beauty Salon project. These projects are able to give back a piece of humanity to people whom have lost everything. Moreover, I state that the high participation rate of residents in the project is a defining factor in the success of BWC. This is an important reason why the projects are received with great enthusiasm and support by the residents themselves. Wanting to "save" people from their deprived situations is not necessarily wrong, as long as the voices of the people are considered in the projects and the approach of the organisation is bottom-up, like in the case of BWC. Thus, I conclude that the 'Do Women Need Saving' paradigm could also have positive implications, unless organisations serve the interests of the target group. As this is, in many cases, not often the case, BWC is, unfortunately, a rather exceptional organisation.

Unfortunately, the case study of HF proved to be less successful and little manifestations of empowerment were found. In this case, the top-down approach and the lack of reciprocal dialogue between the target group and the organisation were defining factors for why little manifestations of empowerment were found. The absence of a solid organisation in Cameroon undermines all possible ways of empowerment that the organisation is trying to achieve. On the part of HF in Berlin, cultural awareness is raised and employees of the Berlin office are offered chances and ways of capacity-building, that could lead to their empowerment. Nevertheless, it remains sad that the aims the organisation tries to reach for, namely the empowerment of communities in Cameroon, are not achieved, at this moment, due to lack of running projects and staff members in Cameroon.

I agree with Hennink *et al.* (2012) on the part that empowerment is a vague and undefined concept that needs more clarification. I have tried to define the concept of empowerment by connecting theoretical debates with practical appearances of empowerment within transnational development work. However, it is impossible to clarify the concept of empowerment within the scope of this report and I was unable to identify the full extent of the concept. I conclude that empowerment is a non-chronological process that manifests itself in stages. It is, therefore, problematic to speak of empowerment as a holistic process or static term. In order to grasp the real essence of empowerment, it might be time to come up with a new spectrum of terms and definitions, that cover all the forms and manifestations of empowerment.

To push the discussion on empowerment forward, I argue that scholars need to place more focus on the key elements that are necessary to develop effective NGO empowerment programmes. In terms of HF and BWC, I argue that such a programme must at least include the following ingredients: 1) reciprocal dialogue between the NGO and the target group; 2) the focus on (more) female participants and ways and means to accomplish these needs, as well as the education of (young) boys about the value of women's rights and positions in society; 3) a stable core group; 4) a clear and transparent connection between the different offices in order to maintain a reciprocal and clear communication channel between the offices; 5) cultural knowledge and background available to the organisation; 6) active focus on meeting of the needs of the people on the ground and; 7) the design of personalized empowerment programmes that are based on the development of positive self-image and expansion of personal competences.

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