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Actor-network theory applied to female social entrepreneurship: the case of emerging female entrepreneurs in Ghana

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Résumé

Afin d'analyser les modalités d'innovation des nouveaux modes d'agir économiques de l'entrepreneuriat social féminin au Ghana, la sociologie de l'acteur-réseau est appliquée. Avec une perspective féministe est ainsi questionnée comment se développe une constellation spécifique d'acteur-réseaux de l'entrepreneuriat social qui reproduit ou s'émancipe des stéréotypes et discriminations de genre. L'article analyse 31 entretiens qualitatifs, deux discussions de focus-group (dont une comprenant un questionnaire réalisé avec 39 entrepreneures sociales).

Les résultats indiquent une forte promotion de l'entrepreneuriat social au Ghana par les acteurs du développement, à la fois acteurs institutionnels du Nord et acteurs intermédiaires locaux liés aux acteurs du Nord. Cette promotion transforme le système et mène certaines femmes à requalifier leur ONG en entreprise sociale, cependant les attentes commerciales apparaissent comme des freins forts, avec de nombreuses entreprises qui ne génèrent aucun revenu financier. D'autre part, les discours dominants mobilisent les qualificatifs de femmes battantes, novatrices et passionnées, ce qui est typifié par l'image de la "lionne d'Afrique", selon le nom d'un site web qui identifie et met en avant des femmes fortes qui changent les règles du jeu et contribuent au développement de leur continent.

Dans ce contexte de grand récit de l'entrepreneuriat social féminin comme facteur de développement, les femmes entrepreneures s'approprient le système de promotion de l'entrepreneuriat social et l'image de la lionne d'Afrique. Avec des entreprises souvent en attente, faute de temps ou d'argent, les prix des compétitions ainsi que la reconnaissance des divers acteurs constituent non seulement un capital financier, mais également un capital symbolique. Ainsi les femmes entrepreneures sociales émergentes au Ghana développent des formes de résistances au sein du marché, afin de développer une carrière leur permettant à la fois de subvenir à leurs besoins (parfois via un emploi dans un autre secteur) et de développer des solutions aux problèmes sociétaux et environnementaux.

Mots-clés : femme, entrepreneuriat, économie, développement, Ghana.

Abstract

This research applies sociological actor-network theory in order to analyse how new types of economic activity relating to female social entrepreneurship in Ghana are being innovated. The development of a specific constellation of actor-networks of social entrepreneurship that reproduces or overcomes gender stereotypes and discriminations is approached from a feminist perspective. The article analyses 31 qualitative interviews and two focus-group discussions (including a questionnaire administered to 39 social entrepreneurs).

The results indicate a strong promotion of social entrepreneurship in Ghana by development actors, both Western institutional actors and local intermediary actors linked to actors from the West. This promotion is transforming the system, leading some women to requalify their NGOs as social enterprises. However, commercial expectations appear as obstacles, with many companies failing to generate any financial income. On the other hand, the dominant discourse describes these women as driven, innovative and passionate, typified by the image of the "lioness of Africa", according to the name of a website that identifies and puts forward strong women as game-changers who contribute to their continent's development.

In this context of the great narrative of female social entrepreneurship as a factor of development, women entrepreneurs are taking ownership of the social entrepreneurship promotion system and the image of the lioness of Africa. With enterprises that are often on hold, due to a lack of time or money, competition prizes as well as recognition from various actors represent not only financial, but also symbolic capital. Emerging female entrepreneurs in Ghana are therefore developing forms of resistance within the market, in order to develop careers that allow them both to provide for themselves (sometimes through employment in another sector) and to develop solutions to societal and environmental problems.

Keywords: woman, entrepreneurship, economy, development, Ghana.

Actor-Network Theory Applied to Female Social Entrepreneurship: the case of emerging female entrepreneurs in Ghana

The concept of social entrepreneurship highlights the role that private companies can play in responding to environmental and societal problems, particularly in contexts of poverty (Seelos and Mair, 2005). Social entrepreneurs are described as combining social activities with commercial activities (Mair and Marti, 2006), prioritising social impacts, but needing to generate revenue in order to be sustainable (Thompson, Kiefer and York, 2011). With 38% of women and 35% of men currently starting up a business, Ghana is one of the only countries in the world where there are more female entrepreneurs than male ones (Herrington and Kelley, 2012). A study by the British Council (Richardson, 2018) estimated that there were 26 000 social enterprises in Ghana¹. These entrepreneurs are young (43% are between 25 and 43 years old), educated, and often the products of return migration. Social enterprises are a booming, recent sector in Ghana. As of 2018, 90% of them had begun their activities after 2004 and 47% after 2013. Social entrepreneurs in Ghana (men and women) are primarily to be found in the fields of education (36%), agriculture and fishing (33%), but also in health and social affairs (26%), the manufacturing sector (22%) and services (21%).

Social entrepreneurship is part of a new kind of economic activity which is not only based on social ties, but also contributes to reinforcing and transforming them. The different forms of the social and solidarity economy are characterised by reciprocal exchanges which contribute to "reasserting the value of reciprocity and caring behaviour towards others" (Guérin, 2003). Yet social entrepreneurship, like the care economy (care for children and families), represents a kind of work that can potentially restrict women to the fields of social reproduction, and to sacrifices for the good of their families. In line with feminist perspectives that call into question the empowerment potential of types of economic activity in the social and solidarity economy (Verschuur, 2017) and of social entrepreneurship (Seferiadis, 2019; Muntean & Ozkazanc-Pan, 2016; Ahl 2002), we wanted to analyse the types of economic activity that are being developed, on the basis of feminist economics (Elson, 1991).

Introduction

Gender discrimination and social entrepreneurship in Ghana

According to a study by the British Council (Richardson, 2018), social enterprises support women's empowerment in different ways: 1) by financing women's rights organisations, 2) by creating markets and products or services for women, 3) by providing women with opportunities for training or employment as employees, or 4) as entrepreneurs².

¹ This figure was obtained using the figures of the NGO "Social Welfare" and those of the "Registrar General's Department" concerning Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises, estimating the proportion of social enterprises in relation to the total figures by means of random sampling (Richardson, 2018).

² In terms of for-profit entrepreneurship, half of the enterprises are headed by women, but 80% of them are microenterprises and only 16.9% of small enterprises are headed by women. On the other hand, 39% of social enterprises are headed by women.

Nevertheless, a number of the characteristics of social entrepreneurship in Ghana indicated by this study appeared to reinforce gender stereotypes and discriminations.

Whilst human capital appears to be correlated to the success of women entrepreneurs in Ghana (Adom and Asare-Yeboah, 2016), the skills, knowledge and attitudes required to succeed as a female entrepreneur in Ghana are not primarily acquired through formal education, but rather through interpersonal skills and social knowledge (Buame et al, 2013). This would appear to be a sign of an institutional difficulty in terms of accessing resources. Kojo Saffu and Takyiwaa Manu (2004) showed that Ghanaian women entrepreneurs are faced with discrimination based on their gender. They generally find it harder to obtain financing from banks, but they compensate by cultivating social relationships and by using the social capital that stems from these relationships as a mechanism to mobilise resources. Women also tend to depend more on their social relationships for moral and emotional support during the first developmental stages of their enterprises. Mark Richardson (2018) showed that whilst female entrepreneurs in Ghana come up against the same obstacles as men (obtaining subsidies, capital, lack of access to support and consulting services, cash-flow problems, understanding/awareness of social enterprises by banks and support organisations, lack of technical skills), they also face gender discrimination: lack of ownership of land and capital (especially in the north of the country), prejudice and discrimination, more demanding family commitments, sexual harassment, and a greater fear of failure. However, only 27% of women declared being faced with obstacles because of their gender, leading the authors to suggest that women in Ghana perhaps have limited awareness of the obstacles that they are faced with as a result of their gender (Richardson, 2018).

In terms of employment, although social entrepreneurship does include women from disadvantaged backgrounds (the social enterprise sector employs a higher proportion of women than the private sector: 31% of full-time employees and 43% of part-time employees in social enterprises in Ghana are women, compared with 25% of women in full- or part-time employment in the private sector), these are jobs that are created in traditionally female-dominated sectors such as craftsmanship and textiles, which is justified in the study by the fact that these are sectors which women already feel capable and confident in.

Moreover, the majority of social enterprises do not pay their employees competitive salaries because the enterprises do not earn (enough) money, but the authors of the study noted that the directors and executives gain "greater rewards in terms of personal satisfaction" compared to the private sector. Indeed, women seemed to be motivated both by the desire to give back to their community (87% of women declared that their main objective when they started their social enterprise was to respond to a social or environmental issue), and to their families (50% mentioned having started their social enterprise purely to provide an income for their family, or in order to have a flexible job that could be carried out in parallel to their family responsibilities). Women noted an increase in confidence in themselves (68%) as well as financial independence (42%), but they also mentioned increased levels of financial insecurity and stress (34%).

These are therefore women who work autonomously and flexibly in order to reconcile their professional and family lives, as is the case with entrepreneurship. Women entrepreneurs in Ghana (Saffu and Manu, 2004) often work from home, being motivated both by the desire to meet their economic needs and to enjoy the flexibility provided by independent work.

Another study of women entrepreneurs in Ghana (Kuada, 2009) showed that women entrepreneurs tend to favour micro or small businesses more than men, and that although their main motivation is economic profit (like men), their secondary motivation is to reconcile their professional and family lives (unlike men whose secondary motivation is "personal accomplishment"). As explained by Susan Clark Muntean and Banu Ozkazanc-Pan (2016), the flexibility of an independent activity in contrast to paid employment can create an additional burden for women, who will earn less money and take on a greater share of traditional family responsibilities, thereby reinforcing the sexual division of domestic labour. Social entrepreneurship therefore seems to create spaces where gender roles are reproduced, as opposed to spaces of celebration where individuals engage in social innovations that change the world. Moreover, in the sector of social entrepreneurship, women start enterprises for their communities. As work by Blandine Destremau (2013) showed, social entrepreneurship is therefore an additional form of exploitation of women that takes place by means of their involvement in development projects.

Actor-network theory

Actor-network theory (Akrich, Callon and Latour, 2006) enables an analysis of how social innovations are developed through the interaction of actors and discourses. Steffen Korsgaard (2011) applied actor-network theory to the analysis of entrepreneurship, entrepreneurs and markets being seen as having been created through relational exchange. It is not only a question of analysing how networks and actors interact, but how a specific constellation of actor-networks develops. Actor-network theory therefore allows us to see where opportunities are created, at a point where multiple voices are still audible, and where there are still a multitude of possibilities.

A number of studies have analysed the social networks and social capital of entrepreneurs (for example Anderson and Jack, 2002; Granovetter, 1985), and of social entrepreneurs (Seferiadis, 2017; Maas 2014a, 2014b; Mair and Marti, 2007, 2009). Not only is women's contribution to social networks naturalised, social networks also reflect and reproduce power relationships within societies. As shown by research by Maxine Molyneux (2002), development programmes based on the reinforcement of women's social capital can contribute to the accentuation of gender discrimination.

Helene Ahl (2002) showed that discourses in research on entrepreneurship reinforce gender stereotypes. As well as being constructed in a masculine way, the concept of the entrepreneur also implies gender discrimination, and especially a sexual division of labour: the existence of the entrepreneur, described as determined, persistent, resolved, detached and egocentric, presupposes that a woman is carrying out the unpaid and reproductive work associated with the private sphere. Narratives about entrepreneurship built on gender stereotypes result in discrimination during the search for financing from banks. Moreover, Janice Byrne, Salma Fattoum and Maria Cristina Diaz Garcia (2019) have shown that the "role models" put forward with regard to female entrepreneurs mask racial, class and gender barriers, reproduce gender stereotypes, and normalise discriminatory treatment in the workplace, entrepreneurship being described as an alternative for mothers who work, since it gives them more "flexibility".

This study therefore took discourses on female social entrepreneurship as an object of analysis. Discourses are not neutral but active (Foucault, 1969), since language is the condition of possibility for what we can think, feel and imagine ourselves doing: it "characterises" our experiences (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). Discourses, which are rooted in power relationships, therefore have political consequences that contribute to perpetuating inequalities (Burr 1995). "The production of a discourse appears as a continual selection of possibilities that carves a pathway through networks of constraints" (Greimas & Courtés, 1982: 85).

Discourse analysis is a collective term for a number of scientific methods for semiotic analysis, that is, the ways in which meaning is created and communicated by means of written, verbal or gestural language. This study used critical discourse analysis, a type of discourse analysis that aims to "understand, expose and ultimately resist social inequalities" (Van Dijk, 2005: 352). Van Dijk highlighted the dialectical relationship between discourses and other elements of social practices. According to Norman Fairclough, networks of social practices make up the social order and "one aspect of this ordering is dominance: some ways of making meaning are dominant or mainstream in a particular order of discourse, others are marginal, or oppositional, or alternative" (Fairclough, 2012: 2).

Methodology

This article is based on data gathered between October 2018 and April 2019 in Ghana, over the course of three different missions, for a total of 6 weeks' research. The study consisted of 27 individual interviews, 4 collective interviews, 2 focus-group discussions with different members of the social entrepreneurship ecosystem in Ghana: government actors (2 women), intermediary actors (8 men, 4 women), and entrepreneurs (28 men and 29 women). These interviews were completed by an analysis of the websites of different intermediary organisations, and also by a number of informal discussions. As well as working for a government advisory research organisation, I was also hosted by a social entrepreneur, which enabled me to carry out a number of participant observations amongst his local network, made up of social entrepreneurs in Ghana, thereby enabling me to confirm my data.

The different respondents were recruited by means of the snow-ball sampling technique, using participants' social networks to access specific groups, starting with researchers and consultants, then government and intermediary actors, before finally gaining access to entrepreneurs. The study was based on 11 social enterprises headed by women (or including projects headed by women), as well as on data from a focus group carried out with 25 male and 14 female self-identified social entrepreneurs. This focus group included a participatively developed and administered questionnaire on the determinants of success for social enterprises. The interviews and focus group discussions were recorded and transcribed verbatim. All of the field data (transcripts, different documents, including for example a website for social entrepreneurship competitions) was encoded in an open manner, then categorised, and grouped according to concepts, following the grounded theory approach (Corbin and Strauss, 1990). The questionnaires were analysed using Excel.

Over the course of the study, we explored a variety of types of economic activity. For example, one enterprise bartered coconuts for solar panels, in connection with private partners. Another enterprise developed the production of Baobab oil, linked to microcredit groups. There was also a woman working to provide training for young homeless mothers by other young mothers who had already been trained to make bags from waste products. There was a woman who built mud houses for disadvantaged people, by means of a paid training programme for foreign students from the West. The one thing that all these initiatives had in common was having thought of a way of making a profit, enabling them to have a social or environmental impact. These examples allowed us to draw a portrait of Ghanaian female "ecopreneurs".

The social capital of female entrepreneurs in Ghana: a symbolic capital

Institutional promotion

The social entrepreneurship ecosystem in Ghana includes a certain number of support organisations in Accra, including incubators, accelerators, investors, non-profit organisations, NGOs, professional associations, higher education institutions, research institutions, forums and networks (Richardson, 2018).

My results showed that, with the support of private sector actors or international institutions, the different intermediary actors promoted social entrepreneurship by organising competitions, by identifying and showcasing role models (for example on their websites, or by inviting them to speak at conferences), and by supporting them financially (subsidies, action funds, loans). During "pitch days", entrepreneurs tried to "sell" their ideas to private companies, intermediary organisations or international institutions.

As an employee of an intermediary structure told us, she sometimes had to convince entrepreneurs that it was possible: it was "difficult to make them understand that they could do well and do good", because what was at stake was "proving the financial viability to sponsors". Indeed, different sponsors' expectations with regard to the model appear to have changed. It is expected, via the concept of sustainability, that NGOs be able to show that their model will be financially self-sufficient in the future in order to obtain subsidies. There is pressure from different actors to transform the NGO sector in line with the economic models of social entrepreneurship.

The female entrepreneur respondents all experienced difficulties in making a profit. This was even sometimes "the only challenge". For example, one entrepreneur explained that she had the skills to manage her business on the social side, consisting of teaching vulnerable people to make products from recycled materials, but that she lacked the commercial skills to sell the products that were made in this way. Another entrepreneur created one for-profit company and another social enterprise, which he saw as being distinct from each other. Social entrepreneurship is therefore a balance between different kinds of objectives, in particular between profit and social impact, and the means to achieve these objectives are sometimes thought of convergently.

For example, an entrepreneur explained that she made a profit by means of an activity with a social impact: "we are organising a paid workshop this summer for foreign students (during which) we will be building structures in disadvantaged communities".

Support and networking

Family support appears to be essential. A recurring point was the fact that families considered it to be more of a risk for their daughters to be entrepreneurs rather than employees, especially in male-dominated professions. Moreover, entrepreneurs developed support networks, with young entrepreneurs being especially focused on networking. For example, one entrepreneur from a modest background had strong social capital: several NGOs, her regional deputy, a teacher and the librarian from the campus she studied at, a contact at the American embassy... All of these actors helped her, particularly financially (by means of fellowships or employment), which enabled her to complete her studies and begin a career in the development sector. She was also selected three times for programmes aiming to help young Africans to become "actors of change" or to "develop their social enterprises". One of these programmes took her to the United States; another culminated in a competition to win a (monetary) prize. She was also part of a WhatsApp group made up of 20 people with whom she said it was "easy to discuss, because we have similar problems". Indeed, as illustrated by a focus group discussion, having a network of "like-minded people" was a determining factor in the success of social enterprises. Out of the 39 entrepreneur respondents, 11 women out of 14 declared having such a network, compared to 16 out of 25 men, suggesting a higher proportion of women than men for the questionnaire respondents in the study. These networks were helped along by unusual profiles: for one entrepreneur it was the fact that she played basketball, for others it was the fact that they held positions in male-dominated professions (agriculture, construction). A number of social businesses were founded by groups of students.

One of these social businesses won a competition. It was a project that was led by a woman, as part of an organisation made up of several students. These students had benefited from a number of university programmes that encouraged social enterprises: "a creativity group focused on human rights", "a volunteer programme"... The organisation was led by a young man who had entered several competitions and programmes: he was selected to take part in an academy based in Lomé to train young innovators in the energy sector, where he won a 3,000 euro prize, he took part in a competition in Nigeria on biomass gasification, he was part of a World Bank innovation centre based in Ghana where he was co-developing a project with the private sector for which he hoped to obtain a starting capital of 40,000 dollars... He explained that it was a female member of his organisation who won a competition for social entrepreneurship: "Efia was in charge of the project. We heard about the competition. So I shared the application and submitted five projects, and I put Efia's name on this project (...). Since then, I have applied again with someone else for this project, I put one of the technicians on the application."

The female social entrepreneurs that I interviewed were recommended to me by different channels. They had won competitions and been interviewed by journalists. One entrepreneur explained: "I've done television, radio and school interviews, I have another conference at the American embassy. I went to an association in the United States, I did a lot of networking, I have a strong network and good support, and the co-foundation is Dutch".

Another entrepreneur explained that as soon as they began to be recognised, they got lots of requests for interviews: "I went to a fashion salon (...) I am on the "Lionesses of Africa" website (...) I did an interview for CNN (...) unfortunately I wasn't ready for that (...) I didn't have the production capacity for that kind of market, I lost merchandise". Not only did most of the social enterprises that we interviewed have ties to international actors, some were founded by foreign students from Western countries or by returning migrants, or had been selected to take part in international programmes. These female social entrepreneurs were generally supported and identified by local, intermediary actors, whose aim was to promote social entrepreneurship, and who were themselves linked to international actors. "We examine the impact on people's lives, on the environment, we have accompanied 106 businesses, worked with the World Bank, USAID, the MasterCard Foundation, the British Council. The World Bank has heard about us: there is a lot of investment, but not enough enterprises are ready, so they examined our model to try to determine how they could support us: they hired us as consultants. The MasterCard Foundation had a programme for entrepreneurs and we submitted a letter of interest. The British Council is part of "Social Enterprise Ghana": we are co-founders so we were invited to take part in panels".

Some of these social entrepreneurs were identified by different development actors, thereby becoming development brokers: "I got a job in community development (...) essentially, you're developing your community: you're associated with NGOs or other governmental agencies, it's an intermediary organisation that takes up the challenges in communities and is organised to see how we can get support for communities. I did a lot of work with groups of rural women in the region that I come from. And you have to find them support in terms of economic development and entrepreneurial skills". On the basis of this experience as a development broker, she went on to develop her own social enterprise in order to respond to the needs of the communities.

Between independence and recognition

Entrepreneurs are foremost independent workers, and some expressed the fact that they had sought out this independence: "I don't think I could ever work for anybody. I like working for myself, it's in my nature". A woman who had put her social enterprise on hold due to a lack of time and energy, since she was also an employee, explained that her main motivations were profit and the ability to manage her own schedule. However, she also said that an important motivation was the ability to employ other people.

In their narratives, the women expressed the search for social recognition inscribed in their responsibility to contribute to their families and communities. An entrepreneur explained that she had won her family's recognition: "my brothers and sisters are proud (of my work). I like being able to show an example, the older ones are really proud and talk about me to the children (...). Jealousy is also there. I can provide for my family. People who are older than me can be jealous, because I am more respected than they are, since they cannot provide for their families. Sometimes it's frustrating, but that's life!". She also explained that she is recognised in her community: "sometimes, I go to the market and I walk around, some people call me Madame. I like that". There is also the recognition of an ability to overcome gender stereotypes. One social entrepreneur in the sector of agriculture, who received government training to drive a tractor, explained how proud she was to be seen driving: "I know how to drive a tractor, people were taking videos of me".

There was also an entrepreneur who described himself at the beginning of the interview as the breadwinner of the family, before explaining: "I had to depend on my mother, which I am always shy about admitting". Throughout the interview, he described himself as having had a social impact. For example, he said: "I brought people out of poverty", and when he received aid it was justified by reciprocity, since he gave first, even if it was to other people: "sometimes, the cosmic bank doesn't pay the same person. Nature returns to you what you give (...). I touched a lot of lives. And I gave gifts".

There is also the question of official recognition. With one exception, the social enterprises that I studied were all officially registered (or in the process of being registered) with the Registrar General's Department. For the biggest enterprises, there were also certifications (such as Fair Trade, or B Corp, "doing business for good"). Moreover, in social enterprises with several members, each member had an official role. Social enterprises exemplify this: there is the president, the project vice-president, the finance vice-president, the R&D vice-president, the communications vice-president, the partnership vice-president.... Each member therefore benefited from a title, conferring prestige and allowing for recognition. And although these different members had been friends since their university studies, they spoke of one another using these titles during our interviews. This officialisation is also enabling: over the course of an interview with three students who had started a social enterprise, they explained that they were in the process of registering officially, since this institutionalisation would enable them to have a bigger impact: "We want to be more institutionalised to have an impact (...) We're at the first stage of registering. It will help us to get funding that is reserved for 'non-profit' associations".

The image of the Lioness of Africa and other dominant narratives

Three dominant narratives involving female social entrepreneurs in Ghana were identified in the literature and in the data collected during the fieldwork in Ghana. These narratives use the images of innovative warrior women who are passionate about social causes, which is typified by the image of the "lionesses of Africa", the name of a website that identifies and promotes strong women.

Warrior women on hold

Studies on entrepreneurship narratives suggest that the entrepreneur is presented as a "hero" (Johnsen and Sørensen, 2017). John Ogbor applied discourse analysis to entrepreneurship and showed that "the discourse on entrepreneurship and its praxis (...) reinforces an expression of the patriarchy by producing and reproducing entrepreneurial ideas which give precedence to traditionally masculine values" (2000: 626). The narratives develop the myth of the heroic entrepreneur, celebrating masculine concepts of control, competition, rationality and dominance. A study based on a discourse analysis of a communications campaign in France on female social entrepreneurship, using female role models, showed that the voice of the "superwoman" that individualises female entrepreneurship was dominant (Byrne et al, 2019).

My research in Ghana showed that a number of narratives surrounding female social entrepreneurs promote the image of warrior women, or role models who "empower the next generation". The intermediary organisations that we interviewed all had consistent figures that showed that less women were applying for entrepreneurship training and competitions (roughly half the number of women than men³). The differences mentioned between men and women were typical: aversion to debt, female self-censorship, or women staying at the micro level. Different interviews with female entrepreneur respondents indicated that women created less social enterprises than men and that they were discriminated against, particularly being faced with frequent difficulties in establishing their authority as compared with men. These portraits of strong women were shared by all the female respondents. The female entrepreneur respondents all mentioned that they had started their activity during their childhood or adolescence. As one female respondent said, "it's normal to have an enterprise on the side, it's extra income", in Ghana "everyone" supplements their income, starting at a young age.

Through their stories, these women showed that they had had the strength to overcome difficulties. In particular, the female social entrepreneurs that we interviewed who were from disadvantaged backgrounds mentioned additional health difficulties which they had had to overcome. One entrepreneur who had her arm amputated as a child explained how the experience had influenced her choice to contribute to a social enterprise: "I was attracted to that because I too had been neglected. I had been physically handicapped. I found it hard to find a job because of it, so I felt that I could understand difficult situations". Another entrepreneur explained how she had been affected by a recurrent tumour and how she had battled with healthcare providers to be included in decisions concerning her illness: "I insisted every step of the way, they kept me informed and they said to my father: you have a daughter with a strong personality". There were also stories that showed persistence in the face of failure: "and when we came back, and made a loss (...) we had to continue, and we continued again and again (...) it's like trying and failing and trying and failing (...) the best you can do is be patient". Another entrepreneur who made buildings from natural materials told us that: "we bought plots of land outside of Accra and we started to experiment. We dug. We built walls, tore them down. We looked on the Internet to see how to do it. It took us two or three years to find the right mix, and then we finally built our first house".

They also described the strength that was needed, namely to fight against gender discriminations: "I do not see the discriminations, I don't care (...) I am constantly facing challenges, but I don't let them swallow me up". The female respondents explained that they took a stand by asking for no special treatment, because "I'm a woman so they want to facilitate things: I say no, so they make it really hard", or another example: "they have to see the efforts that we're making, or they devalue us, they say 'Oh, you're a woman'".

³A competition for social entrepreneurship received around 1500 applications from men and 700 from women each year; a training organisation for entrepreneurs declared that there is a "minority" of women with 36% of female entrepreneurs; an organisation in charge of building promising social enterprises, itself qualified as a social enterprise, indicated that in the sector of social entrepreneurship, there are 70% men and 30% women.

One entrepreneur explained that she had been the object of discrimination both because she was a woman and because she was physically handicapped, and that she had decided to stop trying to conform to social conventions, and to take a stand: "I have the double problem of being a woman and being physically handicapped (...) I wanted to please people, but then I became audacious and vocal (...) I just wanted to be me... It was going to be hard no matter what... So I said to myself, go ahead, be bossy! Have fun!".

Yet a number of social enterprises are on hold. For example, a young woman explained that her social enterprise was still in the "conceptual stages". Even though she had won a competition with the idea, and therefore obtained a start-up fund, and had begun to contact different partners four years ago, her social enterprise remains an idea for now, a project that is on hold.

Innovating out of necessity

Steffan Korsgaard (2011), who applied actor-network theory to entrepreneurship, developed the idea that entrepreneurship is not the discovery of an opportunity, but a creative process, created through interaction and operating translation processes. Ghanaian entrepreneurs do not generally innovate in any way: 86% of entrepreneurs in Ghana declared that there was nothing new about their products or services (Herrington and Kelley, 2012). Helene Ahl (2002) showed that narratives on entrepreneurship, which construct the concept as a positive thing, associated with innovation, growth and development, are part of the "grand narrative" of modernity where development is "progress". Pascal Dey and Chris Steyaert (2010) applied discourse analysis to social entrepreneurship. Their research showed that narratives on social entrepreneurship share a utopian rhetoric and an emphasis on novelty. The narratives often include a foundational intrigue which legitimates a necessary break with the past, as well as a discourse on performativity, rationality, progress, and individualism, which produces a depoliticisation of social change. The authors therefore highlighted the need to escape the grand narrative and to report on "little narratives" in order to explore the ambivalences and paradoxes inherent in social entrepreneurship. They suggested that the little narratives have the potential to make the power games and social hierarchies visible.

Social entrepreneurs are referred to in different ways, including with phrases that emphasise the concept of "innovation" ("innovative social enterprises", "social innovators", "visionaries"). They are "female entrepreneurs who change the rules of the game". Women tell stories that illustrate how they were able to seize opportunities. For an entrepreneur, it is a question of "getting out of a routine". These are stories of ambitious women: "I realised that it was not a big enough (project)". They are narratives based on discoveries: an entrepreneur discovered Baobab oil made in Africa during a trip to the United States: "I had no idea, because I had never seen people do things like that in Ghana". In contrast to the idea of entrepreneurship as an opportunity, they are also narratives that frame entrepreneurship as a necessity. Although Ghana is described as "the country with the greatest number of entrepreneurs", according to a recent MasterCard study referenced by a number of respondents, one might ask whether the image based on these "entrepreneurs" is not out of sync with local realities. A number of entrepreneurs are in fact people who have not been able to find paid employment and who are forced to make ends meet: they are therefore entrepreneurs by necessity. In the same way, female social entrepreneurs also explained the necessities that led them to these career paths: "people become more entrepreneurial because jobs do not pay well".

One entrepreneur explained that entrepreneurship is a form of security, and that women habitually practice it in Ghana: "by staying at work (as an employee), anything can happen: you can lose your job and the economy is unstable. It's a safety net, I suppose... (...) Women have been doing it for a long time, at least here in Ghana... On the market, most women are self-employed". Being an entrepreneur means working for oneself, and as a female entrepreneur and mother explained, it gives women time and flexibility. She explained that she began in order to have time for "my house and my baby". It is therefore an activity that enables women to conform to activities in the sphere of social reproduction, and therefore to gender roles.

Part-time passion

Susan Clark Muntean and Banu Ozkazanc-Pan (2016) analysed social entrepreneurship by means of several feminist perspectives, demonstrating that the term "social entrepreneurship" is subject to complex gender connotations: whilst the term "entrepreneur" is associated with masculine traits (heroism, ambition, strength, resourcefulness), the term "social" denotes female engagement (preoccupations linked to exclusion, marginalisation, and suffering, and creative activities, linked to empathy). The relative success of women in social entrepreneurship compared to traditional entrepreneurship, which appears at first glance to be a positive indicator, also appears to amplify the sex-specific dimensions in the domain of entrepreneurship. "The ways in which social entrepreneurship travels globally as a concept and a practice is riddled by problematic assumptions around "Third World" women's abilities and roles in the global economy. By demarcating the space in which particular women are legitimate entrepreneurial actors to microenterprise and social ventures, the field continues to exclude along gender lines, even if unintentionally. Such assumptions and practices can reproduce the ways in which women remain economically marginalised due to their confined legitimacy as founders and managers of 'less than' lucrative enterprises" (Clark Muntean and Ozkazanc-Pan, 2016: 223). Keith Hart (1970) had already described Ghanaian entrepreneurs as small-scale, part-time workers, for the most part employed in other professions. He had therefore already called into question the category of "businessmen" and suggested a qualification of the different activities of Ghanaian people, and therefore the use of the category of "enterprise".

Although a number of narratives highlighted the search for a "social impact" ("entrepreneurs involved in activities linked to social investment", "entrepreneurs who have a positive impact on their organisation, institution, community and country"), and others put forward economic models capable of generating a profit ("savvy business idea", "smart business idea"), these are also "hybrid" organisations, also referred to as "entrepreneurs operating at the bottom of the pyramid".

The women entrepreneur respondents described their objective as "a social impact". The women mentioned that they could not define their enterprise model in advance: the development of social enterprises took the form of cycles of iterations. These innovations require ideas and knowledge. Knowledge is incidentally a priority: as one entrepreneur mentioned, it is "the biggest challenge". Enterprises are based on local knowledge, and we were able to observe new forms of knowledge-generation: for example, several women explained how they had used YouTube or online classes. Another entrepreneur explained that her knowledge was drawn from groups of women with whom she had developed her social enterprise: "My women's groups give me all the advice that I need". Another entrepreneur explained that she had "searched for traditional knowledge", contacting elders for this purpose.

Entrepreneurs aim to have a project with a real impact from the point of view of the beneficiaries or the clients. What therefore emerges is a need for tools to assess this impact. One entrepreneur explained that she thought it was important for the beneficiaries themselves to be able to evaluate the impact. The impact is therefore seen as a form of capacity reinforcement, based on knowledge that is shared so that the beneficiaries can "make their own choice". One entrepreneur explained that she had adapted her technology so that it could be "mastered and reproduced locally". Knowledge is shared, made available and accessible. These social enterprises are part of an idea of sustainability: they are development models that aspire to be durable. As another entrepreneur explained: "We want to create a support chain (...) when we are gone, we know that they will be able to manage on their own".

The entrepreneurs had narratives that emphasised their "passion". Nevertheless, the entrepreneur respondents all had to balance different priorities and responsibilities. One entrepreneur explained that her social enterprise was characterised by slow periods and pauses, which enabled her to rethink the model according to her capabilities, and to adapt it according to her skills. Another entrepreneur explained that her main objective was to achieve a social impact for the women she was working with, and that if she did not have the capacity to invest herself, she preferred to put her social enterprise on hold, because she did not trust that someone else would have the same concern for the women: "I want to protect women, I worry that they don't sell at a good enough price. It needs to be win-win". This illustrates a certain kind of responsibility for her actions. What was expressed was an absence of compromise on the kind of social impact.

An intermediary organisation explained that the aim is to stimulate "viable enterprises so that (entrepreneurs) can finance themselves". However, the lack of profit in social enterprises means that most entrepreneurs have other jobs on the side. Whilst waiting to have the time and money, these entrepreneurs have different responsibilities. My results showed that women earned an average of 335 cedis per month and men an average of 363 cedis with their social enterprises, whereas their overall income was higher (an average of 1278 cedis per month for women and 1354 cedis for men), which illustrates that social entrepreneurs have other sources of income. Several female entrepreneurs explained that they were not paying themselves a salary yet, even though they had several employees.

The foreword for the study commissioned by the British Council was written by the Minister of Gender, Children and Social Protection, indicating that the Ghanaian government supports the sector of social enterprises. In her foreword, the Minister highlighted the government actions that could be linked to the promotion of social entrepreneurship and female empowerment (for example, systems of credit for small and medium enterprises, or for youth training). The Minister emphasised the opportunity represented by social entrepreneurship to gain access to employment, particularly for "vulnerable, poor and abused women", although this was balanced by a statement about "the challenges of lower financial rewards (...) compared to the private sector", which she felt were compensated for by "greater rewards in terms of personal satisfaction and causing a social change, to create a more equitable and just society with economic order" (Richardson, 2018). This narrative therefore appears to justify the consensual sacrifices made by women.

For example, one entrepreneur explained that she had needed to find a job to save money, but that since she had been employed, she had put her social enterprise on hold. She was apologetic about it, describing a pathway that she perceived as being opposed to the image of the entrepreneur, a warrior woman that nothing could stop: "Honestly... when I got the job, I stopped (the social enterprise) for a while...". Work on the side is also seen as a security that will enable women to continue to develop their social enterprises. Two women entrepreneurs explained that: "we wanted to be full-time employees because we knew that the project would run into problems". This illustrates the case of social enterprises that, for the time being, are not making any profit and are therefore more or less NGOs that depend on volunteering, and this absence of profit, or income, is perceived as limiting the enterprises' development.

Counter-discourse and appropriation

As one female respondent, who was a member of an intermediary organisation, explained, it can be "more effective to play with people's preconceived ideas than to go against the system". It then becomes a matter of staying in the feminine sphere so as not to call the structures of masculine dominance into question: "Women are not in competition with men, they do not challenge the status quo, they do not give themselves the power to change the status quo, and they ask other women to 'do these feminine things'", for example making baskets: "When you get rid of the profit, there is less risk, you only see the impact, it seems easier to achieve than a profit. But there is more emotional work, unfortunately women are more accustomed to that. It is easier to devote oneself to social causes (but) if I join the institution, I become part of a structure that oppresses me". Hence, social entrepreneurship based on female craftsmanship is interpreted as reproducing gender roles in two ways: both in the kind of task (basket-making by women), and in the economic model (focused on the social impact and not on economic profitability). Moreover, playing on gender roles can be used as an advantage: "I have no problem with partners or with clients, people are much more patient because I am a woman".

Yet some women consider that these gender "clichés" are a problem, and want to change the discourse: "In general, my main challenge is the fact that I am a woman. This has affected me. I think it is the fact that I am a woman and I am doing this (a social enterprise aimed at women). Sometimes, you introduce yourself and someone asks 'What do you do', 'I work with rural women'. And it seems like such a cliché that each woman should be working for women's empowerment. (...) The entrepreneurial spirit and the fact of being a woman is a cliché, each woman works for female empowerment". A representative of an organisation that trained entrepreneurs in the sector of technology, amongst others, explained that even though there were less women, "the women push back against the discourse of technology being led by men, a lot of the women do not use gendered discourses". This is because they do not want to be used as role models: "Do I have to be the poster child for women in business?".

Social entrepreneurship is promoted by the Ghanaian government, national organisations, and also by international institutions. For example, an intermediary actor said that: "The government has thrown its weight behind ideas of entrepreneurship". This change of model was driven by international development actors, as explained by another intermediary actor: "The foundations only give money if it's 'sustainable'".

This is a natural consequence of the focus on the model of sustainable development: it tweaks towards an autonomous model. The traditional economic model is going to change. Some will evolve towards social enterprises to respond to market changes: the sponsors will change their funding criteria, so part of the operating costs will be covered by social enterprises". This promotion of social entrepreneurship therefore seems to be changing the economic models that are adopted. One social entrepreneur who had taken part in a competition explained that if she had started to think of her social activity as a social enterprise, it was in response to the competition: "I sent the idea to the competition, I wasn't sure whether it was a good idea. I described it as an NGO. When I saw the programme, that was when I saw the idea of social entrepreneurship, that I could make a bit of money. But currently the 'NGO' aspect is going well, but I have difficulties with the 'social entrepreneurship'. So the resources are coming out of my pocket, I haven't got the time". She therefore continued to practice her activity as a charitable activity and has not, for the moment, made a profit. She finances her activity entirely with her own money, earned from her employment on the side.

My study showed that young Ghanaians have appropriated the model of social entrepreneurship, and particularly the model's promotional methods. An employee of an organisation that supports entrepreneurs explained that "after the private sector, working with NGOs is a way of giving back". She also mentioned that it was sometimes no more than a commercial strategy: "For some people, there's a difference between what is put forward and what happens behind the scenes. It can be a strategy for good public relations, but then they don't pay their employees. How much of it is authentic?". For some Ghanaians, it is a way of embellishing their CV: "You also need stories about impact to get you into university, and for example at the UN, they have specific opportunities for Africa and Asia and you can convince them to hire you". One social entrepreneur explained that it was effectively expected of employees that they have extracurricular experience, and volunteering is part of that: "To be employed, you need extracurricular experience, they look at what you have done: research, volunteering". Another entrepreneur explicitly said that she was looking to be noticed by international organisations: "I was looking for a partnership with an international organisation, but it hasn't happened yet (...) I am waiting for the moment when organisations such as the UNDP will find me". In Mark Richardson's study (2018), 43% of female social entrepreneurs in Ghana expressed the ambition to work for the government, a company or a major NGO. These women therefore saw social entrepreneurship as a means or gateway to other sectors.

Conclusions: the little narratives of female social entrepreneurs in Ghana

The results indicate a strong promotion of social entrepreneurship in Ghana by development actors, both Western institutional actors and local intermediary actors linked to Western actors. This promotion is transforming the system and leading certain women to requalify their NGOs as social enterprises. Nevertheless, commercial expectations remain a significant obstacle, with a number of enterprises failing to generate any profit. As research by Helene Ahl (2015) has shown, the discourses surrounding social entrepreneurship can reinforce gender discrimination, with women being confined to "entrepreneurial ghettos", to use the expression of Donald Bowen and Robert Hisrich (1986). The reasons suggested by researchers to explain this discrimination reinforce gender stereotypes: women lack confidence in themselves, they start on a small scale and stay on a small scale, they avoid innovation. Yet this ghettoisation of women can also be linked to the "stereotype threat" (Steel and Aronson, 1995). Stereotypes can be sources of anxiety, thereby weakening performance. The women respondents did not only feel constrained to the feminine sphere (it was a struggle, for example, to establish oneself in the masculine sector of tractor-driving). With their enterprises often on hold, due to a lack of time or money, these emerging female entrepreneurs also seemed to be victims of the "stereotype threat", or of discriminations in terms of financing.

Furthermore, the dominant discourses used qualifying terms of innovative, passionate warrior women, typified by the image of the "lioness of Africa", the name of a website that identifies and promotes strong women who change the rules of the game and contribute to their continent's development. In the context of this grand narrative of female social entrepreneurship as a factor of development, female entrepreneurs are appropriating the system for the promotion of social entrepreneurship and the image of the lioness of Africa. Competition prizes and recognition from various actors represent not only financial, but also symbolic capital. Emerging female social entrepreneurs in Ghana are therefore developing forms of resistance within the market, in order to develop careers that allow them both to provide for their families (sometimes by means of jobs in other sectors), and to develop solutions to societal and environmental problems.

Gina Porter (2003) analysed the ways in which ideas about poverty reduction circulated between local NGO personnel in Ghana and international NGOs in the West. Her results showed that local NGOs in Ghana were limited in their capacity to transmit socially-embedded knowledge on poverty. This was illustrated by the fact that they worked with groups (rather than individuals or families, as certain members of local NGOs tried to encourage), or by imposing "Asian" development approaches. The author of the study showed that "partnerships" between local NGOs and international Western NGOs were often based on relationships of dependency. Local NGOs were preoccupied with the search for money and donors. Gina Porter mentioned the work of Terje Tvedt that showed that the NGO system remained "a transmission belt for a powerful language and of Western concepts of development" (Tvedt, 1998: 75). Social entrepreneurship therefore appears to be a concept carried by Western development actors and mainly promoted locally by intermediary organisations.

Analysing the motivations of the social and solidarity economy in Africa, Abdou Salam Fall and Cheikh Guèye described the social and solidarity economy as "the place *par excellence* where new productive and redistributive values are invented", where the dominant economic model of modernity is not rejected, but "domesticated" (2003: 111). They particularly identified the contribution of entrepreneurs: "coming from a business tradition in unmonitored, unsubsidised

sectors (...) who build wealth by activating solidarity" (2003: 110), the aim being financial wealth, but also social recognition and cohesion. My research also focused on individuals whose aim is economic wealth and social recognition. Yet the motivations seem to be different: there is also domestication in my study, but it is a domestication of the formal system, and social enterprises are quickly officially registered, which adds to the symbolic capital.

My study showed the ways in which women fluctuate between resistance (mobilising counter-narratives) and appropriation (legitimising discourses and models). Eleanor Hamilton applied discourse and gender analysis to entrepreneurship and showed that in spite of a dominant "masculine" discourse on entrepreneurship, the identities are "more fractured, more open and contested than a simple male/female categorisation can allow" (2014: 707), identities being "contested and legitimised" at the same time. Eleanor Hamilton explained that: "individuals define themselves in relation to others and to the wider narratives at their disposal" (Hamilton, 2014: 707).

Inasmuch as "non-profit organisations are invited to lower their expectations in terms of financing for social activities through taxation, and to generate more self-financing for their activities", Adam Fowler examined how social entrepreneurship could provide a new framework for non-governmental development organisations and for development "beyond aid" (Fowler, 2000). He highlighted the potential contribution of "civic innovators", actors focusing on popular engagement rather than business, looking for solutions within the population, rather than on the market. My research showed that some women are in fact founders of NGOs that they try to rebrand as social enterprises, although commercial expectations seem to be a significant obstacle. They therefore turn away from their initiatives and put their energy into paid employment as part of a career. Whilst these women appropriate the dominant narratives on social entrepreneurship, we can also see that these narratives lead women to a certain form of resistance within the market: narratives that promote civic innovation seem to lead to different directions for women.

In this context it would appear that women uncompromisingly maintain their desire to positively impact society, and social entrepreneurship is one of the ways of meeting this objective, yet they also innovate within the market, subverting its rules. The very concept of social entrepreneurship is appropriated and subverted. Far from relying on traditional methods, this is a process of creative philanthropy. To date, there has been little analysis of new types of economic activity using the concept of social entrepreneurship in Africa. One exception is a comparative analysis of social entrepreneurs from 19 countries in sub-Saharan Africa, which indicates a correlation between high levels of poverty and traditional values and stronger rates of social entrepreneurship (Rivera-Santos et al, 2015). Although this study provides a contextual analysis of countries in the Global South, and particularly in Africa, it is based on stereotypes of traditional, community-based African societies, that have long been challenged (Marie, 1997). As Alan Fowler emphasised: "'African philanthropy', as opposed to 'philanthropy in Africa' remains seriously under-researched, poorly or prejudicially understood as 'traditional'" (2019: 1).

Far from altering the existing relationships of power and dependency between the West and the Global South, social entrepreneurship appears, on the contrary, to reproduce them. It is therefore important for researchers not to reproduce the domination of women through the production of knowledge, but to show diversity (Clark Muntean and Ozkazanc-Pan, 2016). The methodology used did not allow for the inclusion of entrepreneurs who are excluded from dominant networks, who are as yet unidentified, which calls methodological approaches to analysing the economic margins into question. This analysis has enabled us to show how models of social entrepreneurship that are based on innovations within the market are appropriated by subversions within the market by women

whose aim is to contribute to the development of their societies. It remains to be analysed how women innovate new economic models outside of the dominant networks. This will require new methodological approaches that will enable us to identify marginal economic models. We will need to analyse economic practices that, to paraphrase Pascal Dey and Chris Steyaert (2010), also enable a re-politicisation of social change.

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